

CHONE AND THEWU:  
TERRITORIALITY, LOCAL POWER, AND POLITICAL  
CONTROL ON THE SOUTHERN GANSU-TIBETAN FRONTIER,  
1880-1940

WIM VAN SPENGEN (UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM)

On March 14, 1927, Joseph Rock was rounding the hill at Pashitega<sup>1</sup> along the trail of the Pai shui river in upper Thewu. He was on his way out from the Chone prince's domain, when suddenly his caravan was attacked by some twenty Thewu robbers.<sup>2</sup> They were armed with rocks and huge iron cogwheel clubs, but were no match for Rock's rifle-armed party. As it later turned out, three of the attackers were killed.<sup>3</sup>

To explain this apparent lack of political authority in the outlying parts of the Chone principality, it is necessary to look at the geographical and historical interfaces of the events concerned. We must also inquire into the physical isolation of the Thewu habitat, its peripheral location over much of its history, and the degree of Thewu dependence on the Chone prince's jurisdiction as expressed in a hard-to-define political territory. We should also try to disclose the nature of the Chone prince's local forms of political control as set within the wider history of Chone and Thewu. This implies paying attention to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Pelshe Denkha, referring to the nearby gomba of the same name. See A. Gruschke 2001. *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: Amdo*. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, II, 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Rock Diaries VIII*. Cho-ni to Sung-pan via The-wu country, March 9, 1927 to April 22, 1927. Unpublished, Library of the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh, Scotland, U.K., 23. A copy of the Rock Diaries has kindly been made available to me by Jane Hutcheon of the same library. See also Walravens, H. 1992. J. F. Rock (1884-1962)—Sammler und Forscher. Eine übersicht. *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz* 29, 257; Walravens, H. (ed.) 2002. *Joseph Franz Rock (1884-1962). Berichte, Briefe und Dokumente des Botanikers, Sinologen und Nakhi-Forschers*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 37-39, 41, 257; Aris, M. 1992. *Lamas, Princes, and Brigands. Joseph Rock's Photographs of the Tibetan Borderlands of China*. New York: China House Gallery, China Institute in America, 25. The full photographic archive of Rock's botanical exploits of 1925-1927 can be accessed at <http://via.harvard.edu:748/html/VIA.html>. The manuscript maps and the gazetteers can be consulted at [www.arboretum.harvard.edu/library/tibet/map.html](http://www.arboretum.harvard.edu/library/tibet/map.html).

<sup>3</sup> *Rock Diaries VIII*: 26

effects of a growing military incorporation of the Chone domain into a centralising Chinese state after the Revolution of 1912, and the consequent erosion of traditional political authority. Inextricably linked is the question of the extent to which the Tibetans of Chone were able to guard their territoriality, in other words, how they succeeded in the persistent attachment to their specific territories against encroachments so diverse as Chone tax collectors, Christian missionaries, American explorers, Muslim warlords, and Chinese soldiers.

Although the history of northeastern Tibet, mainly on the basis of Tibetan and Chinese sources, is increasingly in the process of being unraveled, I propose here to highlight the contribution the older European literature, both published and unpublished,<sup>4</sup> can make to this attempt at historical interpretation. After all, travellers and missionaries had a chance to see and hear things, which, when put in their proper context, provide us with an additional perspective on the frontier history under review. The southern Gansu-Tibetan border region in particular deserves further elaboration, as the local history of Chone and Thewu is generally less well known than the historical vicissitudes of the neighboring monastic centers of Kumbum and Labrang.

#### TERRITORY AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY

The concept of *territory* in western social science generally refers to an undivided space over which a political power holder has full jurisdiction. Such a conceptualisation immediately runs into difficulties when interpreting the territorial regime of the Chone principality. It is quite impossible to map the Chone territory as a single spatial unit, because jurisdiction, especially in the outlying areas, was more over families

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished sources about Chone and Thewu are of two sorts: missionary and exploratory. The first category comprises mainly the records of the Christian & Missionary Alliance as to be found in the C&MA Archives, Colorado Springs, CO, USA. In this connection I should like to thank Brian Wiggins for sending me copies of archival materials, especially the unpublished *Christie Letters, May 1891 to October 1907*; the unpublished manuscript of the diary of Jamieson, M.H. *Kansu: Some Old Ways of China*; as well as several articles from *The Alliance Weekly*, which can now be accessed at <http://archives.cmalliance.org>. Related materials are to be found at the Billy Graham Centre Archives, Wheaton, Illinois, USA, access through the website [www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/](http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/), in particular the transcripts made from interviews held over the years with veteran missionaries (e.g. C.H. Carlson, R.D. Carlson, and R.B. Ekvall). For the second category of sources, the exploits of Joseph Rock, see note 2.

than over land.<sup>5</sup> Consequently political spheres of influence tended to intertwine and even to overlap, creating exclaves in adjacent territories.<sup>6</sup> In addition, loyalties in peripheral regions were often centered on kinship, and in physically isolated terrain on the lower scale level of village territories, rather than some vague and distant overlordship.<sup>7</sup> Jurisdiction in the Chone principality was no exception to this rule and despite the fact that theoretically the land belonged to the prince,<sup>8</sup> he had little authority over outlying clans and villages.<sup>9</sup> Inter-village feuding was common in the peripheral valleys but the prince could do little about it.<sup>10</sup> Village-based local order tended to gravitate around the many smaller monasteries,<sup>11</sup> but these too could not always keep the local population in check. In particular the villages in Upper Thewu were difficult to control.<sup>12</sup>

The Chone principality was set within the wider context of a long history of political relations between China and Tibet. Chone belonged to a class of Tibetan frontier states that, like Mili and Chala, recognised Chinese political overlordship, but internally managed their own

<sup>5</sup> Tafel, A. 1914. *Meine Tibetreise. Eine Studienfahrt durch das nordwestliche China und durch die innere Mongolei in das östliche Tibet*. Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, I, 159; *Rock Diaries V*, From Sining to Cho-ni via Shünhoa, Labrang, November 21, 1925 to April 22, 1926, 81; Farrer, A. 1926. *On the Eaves of the World*. London: Edward Arnold, I, 164.

<sup>6</sup> As was for example the case with the Tan Shang [Danchang] and Chago outlyers to the east and south of the main Chone domain. *Ibid.*: 194.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Clarke, G.E. 1996. Blood, territory and national identity in Himalayan states. In S. Tønneson and H. Antlöv (eds) *Asian Forms of the Nation*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 206, 211.

<sup>8</sup> Carrasco, P. 1959. *Land and Polity in Tibet*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Farrer 1926: 111, 164; Ekvall, R.B. 1938. *Gateway to Tibet. The Kansu-Tibetan Border*. Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 134; *Rock Diaries II*, Ch'eng-tu to Cho-ni, March 17, 1925 to May 23, 1925, 181; *Rock Diaries V*: 67; *Rock Diaries VII*, To West China and Tibet, August 24, 1926 to February 28, 1927, 8.

<sup>10</sup> See for example *Rock Diaries VII*: 17; cf. Karmay, S. and P. Sagant 1998. *Les Neuf Forces de l'Homme. Récits des Confins du Tibet*. Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, 140ff.

<sup>11</sup> Ekvall, R.B. 1939. *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 65; cf. Karmay, S. 1998. Amdo, one of the three traditional provinces in Tibet. In Karmay, S. (ed.) *The Arrow and the Spindle. Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*. Kathmandu: Mandala Bookpoint, 528; A list of monasteries in the Chone district may be culled from Joseph Rock's Gazetteer that goes together with his hand-drawn map VII, see note 2.

<sup>12</sup> Tafel II: 275, 276-83, 299; Carol S. Hammond Carlson, T1 Transcript, 3, see note 4; Carlson, C.E. 1939. A leper cleansed. *The Alliance Weekly* 74, 265; *Rock Diaries V*: 67; *Rock Diaries VII*: 21-22.

affairs.<sup>13</sup> This was done through the office of a so-called *t'ussu* or 'native chief', and the Chone prince undoubtedly was the most important native chief in Gansu.<sup>14</sup> Historically speaking, however, the princely state of Chone, which centuries earlier had wielded power over lands as far as the Kokonor region,<sup>15</sup> had politically become less important. At the beginning of the twentieth century it had considerably shrunk in power compared to former times and that power in turn was wielded within a much smaller domain.<sup>16</sup> In particular, after the establishment of the Republic in 1912, the *t'ussu*-ship, which was very much a Ch'ing instrument to keep its border marches under control, felt the increasing pressure of the new Chinese administration.<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking, the farther away from the Chinese provincial governor and his prefects, the less Chinese influence was felt,<sup>18</sup> yet in times of rebellion the imperial and later the republican Chinese arm could be surprisingly long, as was shown for example by a number of punitive expeditions along the full length of the Sino-Tibetan border, Chone and Thewu not excluded.<sup>19</sup> But these were intermittent affairs, separated by long years of Chinese

<sup>13</sup> Ekvall, D.P. 1907. *Outposts or Tibetan Border Sketches*. New York: Alliance Press, 124-125; cf. Nietupski Labrang, P.K. *A Tibetan Buddhist Monastery at the Crossroads of Four Civilizations*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 113 (note 75).

<sup>14</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 125; Teichman, E. 1921. *Travels of a Consular Officer in North-West China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 134; cf. Gruschke : II, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Yang Ho-chin 1969. *The Annals of Kokonor*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Though still "about as large as Scotland", see Kingdon Ward, F. 1910. *On the Road to Tibet*. Shanghai: The Shanghai Mercury, 55. This is too optimistic an estimate. Cf. Pereira, G. 1912. A visit to Labrang monastery, South-West Kan-su, North-West China *The Geographical Journal* 40(October), 420, who made it "about one-third the size of Scotland" which is nearer the truth. See also note 23.

<sup>17</sup> Snyder, C.F. 1929. Tibetan life. *The Alliance Weekly*, 64(May 4), 282; Ekvall 1939: 6; cf. Sørensen, A.B. 1951. *Ad Asiens Ukendte Veje. En Beretning om en Rejse fra Shanghai til Ege Nord for Lhasa og Tilbage Igen*. København: Gyldendal, 142 ["the Chinese also try to control the number of Living Buddhas", referring to the 1920s]. I should like to thank Rikke Mikkelsen, MA, for helping me with the translation from the Danish.

<sup>18</sup> Futterer, K. 1900. Land und Leute in Nordost Tibet. *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde* 35, 335.

<sup>19</sup> Shu-hui Wu 1995. *Die Eroberung von Qinghai unter Berücksichtigung von Tibet und Khams 1717-1727 anhand der Throneingaben des Grossfeldherrn Nian Gengyao*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 261-62 ['Pacification' of the Thewu under Yongzheng in 1724]; Tafel II: 286 [expedition against the Thewu involving 800 Chinese soldiers from Szechuan and 2200 from Gansu, summer 1907]; Farrer I: 287-88 [punitive expedition in early June 1914 against the Tibetans west of Siku]; Carlson, C.E. 1928. Our warlike Tibetan neighbors. *The Alliance Weekly* 63(March 24), 186 [summer 1914 Chinese expedition against the Thewu].

inaction. As a consequence, everyday life on the Gansu-Tibetan frontier had an autonomous quality,<sup>20</sup> though not always a quiet one.

We must now pay attention to the geographical setting of Chone as in times of conflict and rebellion geography becomes even more important than in times of peace. Chone territory is basically a transitional area between the undulating Gansu loess landscape and the mountainous Tibetan high plateau. In central Chone there is a lateral alpine uplift by the name of Min Shan that stretches from WNW to ESE, presenting a formidable barrier between the northern part of Chone and its southern Thewu dependencies. Only two passes of close to 4000 meters give access to the southern Thewu part. The central Min Shan of the Chone territory is flanked on its northern side by the Tao river and its tributaries, the most densely settled part of the Chone district. Higher up the valley, the terraced landscapes of the Tao ho give way to more eroded and wooded upper valleys that emerge near its headwaters on the treeless steppe plateau.<sup>21</sup> On the southern side of the Min Shan flows the Pai shui chiang, a far wilder river than the Tao ho, passing by some terrific gorges. Its middle reaches are quite forested, interspersed with fields and villages that become less in the more steeply eroded upper valley. To the north of the Tao ho the land rises again to the fringe of the Tibetan plateau, abutting in its northeastern Chone part in the Lienhua Shan.<sup>22</sup> South of the Pashui river are the convoluted mountain ranges of the Yangpu Shan the southern limit of Chone.

In this area, covering slightly over 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>,<sup>23</sup> lived at the time perhaps 65,000 people,<sup>24</sup> the majority of whom had a Tibetan cultural background. As far as I have been able to establish, there was no sharp cultural borderline in this Gansu-Tibetan frontier region in the early

<sup>20</sup> David-Néel, A. 1933. *Au Pays des Brigands Gentilshommes*. Paris: Plon, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Towards Shitshang gumpa, Gruschke II: 49; the latter author has confirmed by personal communication that Shitshang can almost certainly be identified with the Schin-se monastery. See Futterer, K. 1901. *Durch Asien. Erfahrungen, Forschungen und Sammlungen während der von Amtmann Dr Holderer unternommenen Reise, Band I—Geographische Charakter-Bilder*. Berlin: Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 404ff. See Plates.

<sup>22</sup> See Farrer II: 304, plate facing.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall, S.D. and S.T. Cooke 1997. *Tibet outside the TAR* [CD-ROM] Washington D.C.: The Alliance for Research in Tibet, 1361-62 [Chone + Diebu = 10,245 km<sup>2</sup>]; cf. Allwright, G., Y. Osada and K. Atsushi (eds) 2000. *Mapping the Tibetan World*. Reno: Kotan Publishing, 180-81.

<sup>24</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 125; Mannerheim, C.G. 1969 [1940]. *Across Asia from West to East in 1906-1908*. Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications, 578; Rock, J. 1933. The land of the Tebbus. *The Geographical Journal* 81 (February), 111.

twentieth century, rather Chinese population and culture faded into Tibetan ways of life as the mountains became higher.<sup>25</sup> To the west of Minchow, at the eastern Chone border, sedentary farming households dominated,<sup>26</sup> at least so in the middle reaches of the Tao ho. Their families were of mixed Chinese-Tibetan stock,<sup>27</sup> and subject to further Chinese immigration.<sup>28</sup> In the upper Tao valley region, as well as in the Pai-shui river gorges of upper Thewu, Tibetan<sup>29</sup> mixed farming households were frequent.<sup>30</sup> These in turn gave way to the nomads of the plateau. On the whole a tendency towards sedentary life by the fringe-dwelling nomads was noticeable.<sup>31</sup> I will now discuss in more detail the forms of political authority in the Chone principality.

Chone and Thewu first appeared in detail on the mental map of European scientists from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. It is true, the toponyms of Chone and Thewu had been mentioned already in 1730 by Orazio della Penna di Billi,<sup>32</sup> were periodically excavated,<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Futterer 1900; Futterer 1901: 405; Futterer, K. 1903. *Geographische Skizze von Nordost-Tibet. Begleitworte zur Kartenaufnahmen des Reiseweges vom Kûke-nur über den oberen Hoang-ho und durchs Thao-Tal nach Min-tschôu, Ergänzungsheft 143 zu Petermanns Mitteilungen*. Gotha: Justus Pertes, 45-54; cf. Ekvall 1939: 30, 44-46.

<sup>26</sup> Futterer 1900: 316; Carey, W. 1902. *Travel and Adventure in Tibet. Including the Diary of Miss Annie R. Taylor's Remarkable Journey from Tau-chau to Ta-chien-lu Through the Heart of the Forbidden Land*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 174; Kingdon Ward: 53; Mannerheim: 574; Tafel II: 300, 309; *Rock Diaries II*: 142; Rock, J. 1928. Life among the lamas of Choni. *The National Geographic Magazine* 54(5) (November), 584, color plate III; Ekvall 1939: 29-47; Sørensen: 151; Stübel, H. 1958. *The Mewu Fantzu. A Tibetan Tribe of Kansu*. New Haven: HRAF Press, 4-6; see also Hermanns, M. 1949. *Die Nomaden von Tibet. Die sozial-wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Hirtenkulturen in Amdo und von Innerasien*. Wien: Verlag Herold 258-72.

<sup>27</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 15; McGillivray, M.C. 1915. The work at Choni station, Kansuh. *The Alliance Weekly* 44 (May 15), 105; Robert Dean Carlson T1 Transcript, 7, see also note 4; Baradiin, B.B. 1992 [1926] Buddiiskie monastery. *Orient Al'manakh* 1, 77; Ekvall 1939: 31, 39; Pereira, G. 1925. *Peking to Lhasa*. London: Constable, 91; Fletcher, J. 1979, M.E. Alonso (ed.). *A Brief History of the Chinese Northwestern Frontier in China's Inner Asian Frontier. Photographs of the Wulsin Expedition to Northwest China in 1923*. Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum; for the Wulsin expedition see also Cabot, M.H. 2003. *Vanished Kingdoms. A Woman Explorer in Tibet, China & Mongolia 1921-1925*. New York: Aperture Foundation, Boston: The Peabody Museum; but see Rock 1933: 118 ["The upper Tebbus...have kept from intermarrying with the Kansu Chinese"].

<sup>28</sup> Ekvall 1939: 36; Hermanns: 258; Karmay: 528.

<sup>29</sup> And, partly, tibetanised Mongolians. See Futterer 1903: 47; Tafel II: 298-99 (note); Ekvall 1939: 10.

<sup>30</sup> Stübel: 5; *Rock Diaries III*, Cho-ni to T'ie-pu and Lan-chou, May 26, 1925 to August 31, 1925, 27, 120, 145.

<sup>31</sup> Futterer 1900: 316, 322, 326; Hermanns: 29.

<sup>32</sup> Petech, L. 1953. *I missionari Italiani nel Tibet e nel Nepal*. Roma: La Libreria



known to a few missionaries and explorers by the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> but were only given currency to a wider public by Joseph Rock in his 1928 article for the *National Geographic*.<sup>35</sup> Chone town and monastery had already been visited by the Russian explorer Potanin and his party at the beginning of June 1885.<sup>36</sup> They were entertained by the then Yang *t'ussu* and his non-reigning father and brought back the first portrait of him.<sup>37</sup> From 1905 onwards, William Christie was the first missionary to live in Chone for a longer time,<sup>38</sup> and since then it became a stopover for many missionaries and travellers to and through the area, culminating in Rock's two-year stay from 1925 to 1927.<sup>39</sup> It is to these missionaries and explorers that we owe most of our European language based knowledge of Chone and Thewu for the period of 1900-1940.

Chone for the better part of those years was ruled by Yang Chiching,<sup>40</sup> a hereditary Tibetan chief that combined temporal rule with religious authority.<sup>41</sup> When Pereira met the Chone prince in May 1912, the latter was twenty-three years old and looked "more Chinese than Tibetan in his manners and descent".<sup>42</sup> Although supposed to represent the twenty-second generation of a long line of Tibetan ancestors,<sup>43</sup> the

della Stato, III, 52. [Cenisgiugnà (Chone gomba) and Tebò (Thewu)].

<sup>33</sup> By Georgi, A.A. 1887 [1762] *Alphabetum Tibetanum*. Köln: Editiones Una Voce, 424; Ritter, C. 1834. *Die Erdkunde im Verhältniss zur Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen*. Berlin: G. Reimer, IV, 217; Markham, C.R. 1971 [1879] *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*. New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 313.

<sup>34</sup> Futterer 1901: 435; D.P. Ekvall: 124-25, 127, 148; Kingdon Ward: 52-73; however, the first modern traveller to visit Chone was the Russian explorer Potanin who stayed there from May 29 to June 7, 1885. See Potanin, G.N. 1893. *Tangutsko-Tibetskaia okraina Kitaia i Tsentral'naia Mongoliia. Puteshestvie G.N. Potanina 1884-1886*. St. Petersburg: Izdanie Imperatorskago Russkago Geograficheskago Obshestva, I, 237; cf. Kiuner, N.V. 1907. *Geograficheskoe Opisanie Tibeta*. Vladivostok: Tipolitografia pri Vostochnom Institute, I, 70; Bretschneider, E. 1962 [1898] *History of European Botanical Discoveries in China*. Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der DDR, 1013.

<sup>35</sup> See note 26.

<sup>36</sup> Potanin: 237.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 242-44.

<sup>38</sup> Christie Letters from Chone (Nov.19, 1905, Oct.6, 1907). See note 4.

<sup>39</sup> Rock came to Chone monastery for the first time on April 23, 1925 and left Chone for good on March 10, 1927. See *Rock Diaries II*: 146 and *Rock Diaries VIII*: 7.

<sup>40</sup> Already referred to as Yang *t'ussu*, or simply prince Yang.

<sup>41</sup> *Rock Diaries II*: 147.

<sup>42</sup> Pereira 1912: 420.

<sup>43</sup> *Rock Diaries V*: 82; allegedly there was also Alashan Mongolian blood in his family.

prince admitted later to Rock that he was not of direct descent.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, his mother was Chinese.<sup>45</sup> Rock, who first met prince Yang when the latter was in his mid-thirties,<sup>46</sup> described him as “a tall, slender man with a little black mustache, a bit effeminate, and dressed in Chinese style”. At festivals he donned a stunning Tibetan costume,<sup>47</sup> but by October 1926 the political situation had deteriorated so far that he was obliged to wear a Chinese garb on such occasions.<sup>48</sup> He must have taken the throne around 1905,<sup>49</sup> when Christie first entered Chone. David Ekvall, in 1907, described him as a “for all practical purposes, independent [ruler], receiving taxes in money or kind from his people, without having to pay any tribute to the Chinese emperor”. Yet he himself was subject to squeezing and bleeding by the local mandarins.<sup>50</sup> Rock, twenty years later, portrayed him as “a feudal lord, cruel and rapacious, yet also hard pressed by the Chinese authorities”.<sup>51</sup> The prince was a moderate opium smoker,<sup>52</sup> but his son was a real addict.<sup>53</sup> He was friendly to missionaries and explorers alike.<sup>54</sup> Next to his offi-

<sup>44</sup> Rock 1928: 569.

<sup>45</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 188-89. That she had married a Tibetan was resented by the inhabitants of the town of her childhood, a thing that she rudely discovered when she returned to Titao around 1905 “for the purpose of marrying her daughter to the son of [D.P. Ekvall’s] well-to-do Chinese neighbors.... Her rather independent girl was called a ‘big footed half Tibetan’ and the marriage came to nothing”.

<sup>46</sup> Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni (no date), Series I, Unpublished writings, folder 9, p. 3. Manuscript held at the Arnold Arboretum Archives of Harvard University, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, USA. In this connection, I should like to thank Joseph Melanson of the same institute for sending me a copy.

<sup>47</sup> *Rock Diaries II*: 147; Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni, 3. For photographs of the prince see Rock, J. 1925. Experiences of a lone geographer. American agricultural explorer makes his way through brigand-infested Central China en route to the Amne Machin range, Tibet. *National Geographic* 48(3), 342; Rock 1928: 570; see also Aris: 78 (Plate 5.3), 81 (Plate 5.6).

<sup>48</sup> *Rock Diaries VII*: 137. By this time he had Chinese assistants too, *ibid.*: 138.

<sup>49</sup> As the young prince of Chone is said to have accompanied his widowed mother on her miscarried journey to Titao. See Ekvall: 189.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*: 125.

<sup>51</sup> Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni, 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Rock Diaries V*: 86.

<sup>53</sup> Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni, 3; cf. Sutton, S.B. 1974. *In China’s Border Provinces. The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer*. New York: Hastings House, 161.

<sup>54</sup> Carol Hammond Carlson T1 Transcript, 2; *Rock Diaries II*: 147; after Blanche Griebenow, *Reminiscences*, March 1953, T2 Transcript, side one, p. 12, taped in Nyack, NY, transcribed by Mei Griebenow, quoted by Nietupski, 50, 113-14, note 96.



cial *yamen* located within the precincts of the Chone monastery,<sup>55</sup> prince Yang had houses in Taochow New City<sup>56</sup>, the village of Poyü,<sup>57</sup> and the village of Zhega<sup>58</sup> and “wielded absolute power over every one of his subjects”.<sup>59</sup> Such autocratic rule was bound to generate opposition, and on February 3, 1926, posters were suddenly put up at Chone denouncing the prince.<sup>60</sup> The following year, he was shorn of his hereditary rights by the ‘Red General’ Feng Yu-hsiang<sup>61</sup> and when the Nationalists came to power in Gansu in 1928, was made into “a Defence Commissioner, liable to removal at the pleasure of the Chinese provincial authorities”.<sup>62</sup> The rise of the Chinese military in Gansu in the latter half of the 1920s, once again provoked Muslim power in the area. In November 1928, 25,000 Hui led by Ma Zhongying broke out of the Heichow plain, headed south into the Tao region, and sacked the Chone monastery.<sup>63</sup> This meant the loss of much symbolic power to the Chone Prince, but he hung on for a couple of years as warden of the Tao marches, before being murdered by his own servants in the early 1930s.<sup>64</sup> Some commentators considered the political future of Chone as an independent princely state to be at stake,<sup>65</sup> and it is true that the Chinese seized the opportunity to appoint a Magistrate of their own. But the Chone Tibetans protested, and the Chinese knew nothing better than to appoint Yang’s opium-addicted son.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Rock 1928: 569.

<sup>56</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 61 (a summer home across the Tao river near Chone).

<sup>58</sup> *Rock Diaries VII*: 48, Zhega in the lower Maya ku valley: “here the Choni prince has a house”; Farrer noticed that the prince was building a new palace in Tibetan territory across the Tao ho at a place called Bao u Go. See Farrer II: 139. Its location is shown on Farrer’s end map accompanying volume I.

<sup>59</sup> Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni, 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Rock Diaries V*: 83.

<sup>61</sup> Rock 1928: 569, note; cf. Sutton: 159-60. See also Sheridan. J.E. 1966. *Chinese Warlord. The Career of Feng Yü-Hsiang*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>62</sup> Snyder: 282; Nietupski: 92.

<sup>63</sup> Lipman, J.N. 1981. *The Border World of Gansu, 1895-1935*. Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, 265.

<sup>64</sup> Ekvall 1938: 167; Sutton: 160; Nietupski: 50.

<sup>65</sup> Ekvall 1938: 167.

<sup>66</sup> Sutton: 161; cf. Jagou, F. 2000. Le controle des marches sino-tibétaines à l’époque de la Chine républicaine. *Géographie et Cultures* 34, 5-24; these disturbances may be the same as those referred to by Chen Wenjian, one of the biographers of the 6th/9th Panchen Lama in his *Banchan da shi Dong lai shiwu nian dashiji* (Chongqing, 1943), 25: “On the 26th of February 1933, the 48 banners of Zhuoni in Gansu created

The Chone territory in these times was largely inhabited by Thewu Tibetans, a basket name that conceals differences in clan territories, habitats, dialects, and especially degrees of control by the Chone prince. Although not familiar with dichotomies such as “the wild and the tame” or “the raw and the cooked”, he told Rock that the Thewu on the southern side of the Min Shan were more or less lawless, but better behaved in the region he controlled.<sup>67</sup> In his royal residence he kept a painted wooden panel, featuring tribal types and a map of the Chone domain.<sup>68</sup> The literature repeatedly mentions that the prince ruled over forty-eight tribes,<sup>69</sup> yet the palace panel only featured some ten types, a number to which Rock stuck.<sup>70</sup> The crux of the matter seems to be that to know, or still better, to quantify your subjects is to control them,<sup>71</sup> in the case of the Thewu a brilliant illusion.

The prince does not seem to have been very well informed about his subjects.<sup>72</sup> Yet he was very much interested in what he could get from them. This brings up the question to what extent peasants were exploited by the local princely court and its henchmen. A tentative answer points first and foremost to the tax collection villagers had to face and the political structure through which the actual collection was made possible. As a member of the nobility, prince Yang Chi-ching had many

---

disturbances when the provincial government replaced the indigenous chiefs by revocable civil servants”. I am grateful to Fabienne Jagou for this reference and its translation from the Chinese.

<sup>67</sup> *Rock Diaries II*: 181.

<sup>68</sup> *Rock Diaries II*: 148; Rock 1928: 77, Plate.

<sup>69</sup> Tafel II: 305, “achtundvierzig Stämme”; Mannerheim: 580. Referring to the situation in 1908: “The prince reigns over 41 divisions (*shokhua*) of the tribe varying in size between 60 and 300 families. Each *shokhua* has its own chief and banner, under which it assembles to wage war”; Ekvall 1939: 6; Fletcher: 27, 48 wild tribes, after Wulsin.

<sup>70</sup> *Rock Diaries II*: 148, mentions eleven tribal names: “Those in the north are the Shang-chi, Shoukua (cf. Mannerheim’s *shokhua*), and Ta-la, those in the south are known as Tie-pa. Around Wu-tu or Kai-chou there is a tribe which comes under his rule, under the name of Heifan”; this may refer to one of the exclaves Farrer passed by. See Farrer II: 43, 60. “In Cho-ni proper are the Cho-ni-tzu [cf. Baradiin 1992: 77], the Shang and Hsia T’ie-pu and La-pu-shi .... There is also a small tribe called Chang-ye, that lives at Sho-wa near a lake northwest of Lien-hua Shan”; *Rock Diaries V*: 81 (“about ten different tribes”).

<sup>71</sup> Harrell, S. 1995. Civilizing projects and the reaction to them. In S. Harrell (ed.) *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*. Washington: University of Washington Press, 8-9 (after Edward Said).

<sup>72</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 159 (“he knows nothing of his own territory”); *Rock Diaries V*: 81-82.

servants. Among them was a special class of *yamen* runners, the so-called *t'ou-mu*, prince's spies who reported everything to him.<sup>73</sup> To enforce payment of taxes, he sent out these men in the company of soldiers to squeeze the village headmen and the peasants. Although appointed by the prince, the headmen sometimes acted as a buffer between the tax collectors and the peasants. At other times, however, village headmen developed into 'district overseers', collaborating with the tax collectors, pressurising peasants into payment. It was the family households that were taxed, not the villages.<sup>74</sup> Although Robert Ekvall, a long-time resident in the area, was not convinced of the excessive nature of the tax burden,<sup>75</sup> Rock called this tax collection 'inward plunder', especially because there were no return services from the prince.<sup>76</sup> But in fact, the latter was thoroughly squeezed himself by Chinese magistrates and other officials.<sup>77</sup> At one time he paid 3,000 dollars to the Chinese Magistrate at Taichow New City.<sup>78</sup> If there was any reciprocity between the Chone prince and his peasant subjects, it was the idea that the prince could remain in power, which was preferred by the local population to Chinese rule, because the Chinese were hated even more than the autocratic prince. That is why in times of war, the prince, through the village banner system,<sup>79</sup> was able to mobilise the necessary militia, which tried to keep the Chone territory free from invaders.<sup>80</sup> But the price of the system was high. Princely high-handedness, injustice and cruelty were the order of the day.<sup>81</sup> Rock noted several servants with only one ear, the other said to have been cut off at the prince's order for not listening fast enough. He showed great cruelty too, to his wives and personal slaves.<sup>82</sup> In the end he had hundreds of

<sup>73</sup> Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni, 3; cf. Pollard, S. 1921. *In Unknown China*. London: Seeley, Service & Co., 137-45 (on the Yi of the Taliang Shan).

<sup>74</sup> Tafel II: 306.

<sup>75</sup> Ekvall 1939: 31.

<sup>76</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 159; *Rock Diaries VII*: 22, 26.

<sup>77</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 125; *Rock Diaries VII*: 26.

<sup>78</sup> *Rock Diaries V*: 84-85.

<sup>79</sup> Ekvall 1939: 31; cf. Carrasco: 156, 266 (note 83), who mentions as his source personal communication with Joseph Rock.

<sup>80</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 156 ("The prince of Cho-ni can call 2,000 men to serve as soldiers"); *Rock Diaries VIII*: ("Once he tried to subdue [the Ta-ra people] and fought them with 2,000 soldiers"); In the beginning of August 1926, the prince had three thousand soldiers in the field. *Rock Diaries VI*, Cho-ni to Radja and Jupar, April 23, 1926 to August 20, 1926, 285, 286.

<sup>81</sup> Pereira 1912: 420.

<sup>82</sup> *Rock Diaries V*: 83; Rock, J. The principality of Cho-ni, 3-4.

men shot or beheaded and their heads displayed in public places.<sup>83</sup> No wonder he was murdered in the 1930s by his own men.<sup>84</sup>

Under the prevailing rule of succession in Chone, the elder son of a reigning prince was to succeed his father, while the second would become abbot of the monastery. But as Yang had no brother he was made abbot as well.<sup>85</sup> However, since Yang was not an ordained monk, his religious duties were performed by an incumbent priest-official.<sup>86</sup> In this connection, the question arises to what extent were monks and monastic institutions able to counterbalance whatever political authority was lacking in the outlying districts? As monasteries often performed a key role in local society, we may expect a moderating influence. Whether this was also the case in the peripheral parts of Chone and Thewu remains to be seen. Northeast Tibet was dominated by the Gelukpa order and the Chone monastery was a Gelukpa establishment as well. Although Chone as one of the largest and oldest monastic institutions in the area<sup>87</sup> had a supra-regional importance,<sup>88</sup> its religious and political influence had waned since the eighteenth century, possibly as a result of the growing influence of neighbouring Labrang.<sup>89</sup> But within the Chone territory it remained the supreme hardware symbol of Gelukpa power, harboring from 500 to 700 monks,<sup>90</sup> sheltering five Living Buddhas, and celebrating two important religious festivals a year that were visited by thousands of spectators.<sup>91</sup> In addition, there

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Nietupski: 50, after Blanche Griebenow. See note 54. This was not entirely a new thing. In 1885 Potanin on his visit to Chone already noticed two cages standing near the gate in the wall surrounding the town, containing the heads of two "Tangutan Tebbu". See Potanin: 243-44.

<sup>84</sup> Sutton: 160-61.

<sup>85</sup> Farrer II: 83 ("No abbot in 1914"), 110-11; *Rock Diaries II*: 147-48; Rock 1928: 572.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*: 572.

<sup>87</sup> Gruschke 2001 II: 44-46. According to this author, Chone was founded as a Nyingma establishment, converted into a Sakya monastery and eventually drafted into a Geluk institution during Tsonkhapa's first reformist wave of activity in the fifteenth century. This may partly explain Rock's discovery of a Nyingma temple within the Chone precincts. See *Rock Diaries VII*: 200.

<sup>88</sup> Amongst other things because of its printing establishment, Rock 1928: 581, 602 (Plate).

<sup>89</sup> Nietupski 1999.

<sup>90</sup> Kingdon Ward: 55 ("five hundred resident priests"); Pereira 1912: 420 ("a large Tibetan monastery with five hundred monks"); Fletcher: 91 ("it has about 400 lamas", after Wulsin 1923), see also the photographs of Chone monastery (1923) in *ibid.*: 91, 92; Rock 1928: 576 ("now only 700 reside there").

<sup>91</sup> Rock 1928.

were other not inconsiderable monasteries, like Nalang,<sup>92</sup> later burned to the ground.<sup>93</sup> Then there was Chhöshe gomba, or Che pa kou hsin ssu, quite an imposing affair judging from the existing photographs.<sup>94</sup> For years there was bitter animosity between Chone and Che pa kou hsin ssu, on account of the former trying to get more temporal and spiritual influence in the latter.<sup>95</sup> Yet another example of a somewhat larger Gelukpa monastery is Rock's Pa shi gong ma<sup>96</sup> at Dengkha, where the Carlson missionary family lived for a couple of years before the mission station was burned to the ground in 1934.<sup>97</sup> Although the Gelukpa were the dominant order in the area, there were a few Nyingma and Shakya establishments too.<sup>98</sup> The total number of monasteries in Chone was perhaps forty,<sup>99</sup> however, many containing less than a hundred monks. In its southern Thewu parts, there were also a number of Bon monasteries, adjacent to the stronger Bon representation in the neighboring districts of Dzöge and Sharkhog.<sup>100</sup> Bon certainly had

<sup>92</sup> Seen by Farrer on July 11, 1914 and described by him as "a hitherto unsuspected abbey, a rich and flourishing place of many curling roofs, and well-painted handsome [chapels], and monastic buildings clean and white-washed". Farrer II: 140.

<sup>93</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 153.

<sup>94</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 48 photo facing, which may be the same as the monastery shown by Tafel I: 304, photo facing. On page 301, Tafel mentions this large Gelukpa monastery, which goes by the name of Gaser gomba, Gawo se or Gomba se. Rock's description of the place fits the photographs mentioned. See *Rock Diaries III*: 148. The one thing that does not fit this theory is that Tafel calls the river valley Wong tschü. Or did he simply mean Rong chu?

<sup>95</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 148-49; Tafel II: 301.

<sup>96</sup> *Rock Diaries VIII*: 24; cf. Gruschke's Pelshe Dengkha Gomba, Gruschke II: 50-51; Carlson 1928: 186; Carlson, C.E. 1930. Making our way among the Tebbus of Tibet. *The Alliance Weekly* 65 (34), 547-48.

<sup>97</sup> Rev. C.E. Carlson—Personal file—C&MA Archives, Colorado Springs, CO, USA. See note 4.

<sup>98</sup> Especially in the southern part of Chone. For example, Pai ku ssu, a small Sakya monastery, just before reaching the southern boundary of the Chone domain at the village of Yang pu, *Rock Diaries VIII*: 42; These few Sakya monasteries are remnants of an earlier Sakya fond dating from before the Tsonkhapa reforms. See also Gruschke II: 50-51; cf. Anon. 1994. Lamaism in Gansu. *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 26(3), 50, mentioning one Sakya monastery in Diebu, and two Nyingma ones in Chone, information dating from the early post-communist revolutionary period.

<sup>99</sup> The Gazetteer accompanying Rock's Arnold Arboretum held Chone and Thewu Map (see note 2) gives twenty nine monasteries. If we add the ten monasteries or so as to be found in the *Rock Diaries* that are not marked on Rock's map, we come to perhaps forty monasteries for the whole of the Chone domain, including its exclaves. Of course these are all, for various reasons, approximate figures.

<sup>100</sup> Futterer 1900: 337; *Rock Diaries V*: 120 ("Today, 24 March 1926, came into my courtyard a Bonbö sorcerer from the Samba valley"); *Rock Diaries VII*: 18 (the Bon

influenced the local population and although the people tried to be good Buddhists in everyday life, they also adhered to their mountain gods and earth spirits.<sup>101</sup> In particular the worship of local mountains ranked high on the annual festival calendar, because it was the root ritual in the cosmological relationship between man and his territory.<sup>102</sup> Powerful mountain gods in Thewu were Nike, name giver to the Nike Tewa crags in the central Min Shan,<sup>103</sup> and Tsarehshina near Tsarekika more to the east.<sup>104</sup> But in the more densely settled Tao ho valley Gelukpa power prevailed. Robert Ekvall was of the opinion that the sedentary Tibetan farmers were more completely under the domination of the monasteries than the nomads of the plateau,<sup>105</sup> and his father had already written that “the power even a common priest exercises over the laity can hardly be imagined”.<sup>106</sup> Let alone a Living Buddha! In the upper Tao valley centering on Chone and Taochow, there were a dozen of these incarnations, and the Chone *t’ussu*, prince Yang, had to reckon with effective opposition.<sup>107</sup> Farther away from the Chone monastery, the Living Buddhas were often the sole effective authorities,<sup>108</sup> but their number dwindled in more peripheral and sometimes Bon-oriented valleys. Yet we may conclude that monastic institutions and their monk populations had a generally mitigating influence on local village society,<sup>109</sup> yet they could be very conservative in their view of all things new and foreign.<sup>110</sup> For the Thewu lands south of the Min Shan this meant in particular that in absence of any regular political

---

lamasery of Sarang gomba), 18-19 (on his visit to the ‘black monastery’ called Chichhi gomba); altogether eight Bon monasteries were reported for Diebu [Thewu] in the 1950s [Anon.: 50]; see also Gruschke II: 184 (Map); cf. Karmay: 528.

<sup>101</sup> Ekvall 1939: 33-34.

<sup>102</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 141; cf. Karmay and Sagant: 59-79.

<sup>103</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 139-40.

<sup>104</sup> *Rock Diaries VII*: 98.

<sup>105</sup> Futterer 1900: 25; Ekvall 1939: 12, 65.

<sup>106</sup> D.P. Ekvall: 127.

<sup>107</sup> Ekvall 1939: 32.

<sup>108</sup> As was the great Living Buddha of Labrang in Rock’s time, who despite being banned from his home monastery, and temporarily living in Chone territory, was able to mobilise 70,000 Tibetan warriors in the summer of 1925. See *Rock Diaries III*: 9-10.

<sup>109</sup> For example, Farrer and Purdom were besieged at the Chone village exclave of Chago, 7 May, 1914. See Farrer I: 188 (“The monks told that they had come in peace, but that they had difficulties in controlling the villagers”); also when Rock on various occasions was helped by monks and Living Buddhas to achieve his ends without mishap (for example going to Amnye Machen).

<sup>110</sup> Nietupski: 50 (on Chone being more conservative than Labrang).



authority by the Chone prince, the monasteries had to keep order in the local villages. Order was difficult to keep. Inter-village feuding was rife, and robbery the order of the day. How to explain such chronic disorder?

#### THE OUTSIDE AND THE INSIDE

History and geography have intertwined sometimes to produce pockets of quite independent populations in isolated and inaccessible areas that because of a meager resource base and political pressure from outside have developed into hotbeds of resistance against territorial ambition. Such was the case with the upper Thewu of Chone on the southern side of the Min Shan, who were perceived by outsiders as thieves and robbers,<sup>111</sup> but in their semi-arid and drought-prone habitats could only sustain a meager mixed farming system liable to crop failure and animal loss in bad winters. They had a long-standing reputation of being brave, but given to highway robbing. It has been the singular bad luck of the upper Thewu to be caught in the swirl of the history of Nian Gengyao's eighteenth century campaigns of Manchu expansion into Northeast Tibet, in order to strengthen the empire's presence among the Amdo tribes.<sup>112</sup> According to Wu's 1995 study of the Manchu military advance into Amdo and Khams in the decade 1717-1727,<sup>113</sup> the four Thewu village federations of Salu, Chonglu, Zuolu and Le'ao were attacked in 1724<sup>114</sup> as part of a larger swoop to get rid of the robbers of the Gansu-Amdo mountain fringe.<sup>115</sup> As is the case with many of these historical place names, they are difficult to identify on the map. I think it may concern the upper Thewu region of Chone.<sup>116</sup> In the event, the

<sup>111</sup> See a.o. Carol S. Hammond Carlson, T1 Transcript, 3; Ekvall 1928: 104; Farrer I: 236; Farrer II: 120 ("their demoniac reputation"); Carlson 1928: 186 ("they did a great deal of thieving"). However, Jamieson: 79 expressed herself more cautiously: "the Tebus were thought to be wild and warlike".

<sup>112</sup> Fletcher: 38.

<sup>113</sup> Wu; see note 19.

<sup>114</sup> Under the Yung cheng Emperor (r. 1723-1735).

<sup>115</sup> Wu: 261.

<sup>116</sup> Chonglu may be the same as Rock's Changlo, a gorge with a hidden robber haunt near the passes of Tsarekikha in the eastern Min Shan. In fact the whole stretch of the trail between the lateral gorge of Dollo and Changlo were subject to robbery; cf. *Rock Diaries III*: 63. Salu may refer to Tsa-ru (or Ch'a lu kou), the main branch of the Pai-shui Chiang going in the direction of Takstang Lhamo. Zuolu may be the

Thewu suffered a two-pronged attack, one from Chinese soldiers from Hezhou, supported by an unknown number of *t'ussu* warriors,<sup>117</sup> and the other by Chinese soldiers from Sungpan.<sup>118</sup> Wu, on the basis of an analysis of imperial records, holds that within seven days of fighting 2,100 Tibetans were killed and 41 villages destroyed.<sup>119</sup> It turned out that there were only minor spoils to be gained from the Thewu villages, which testifies to their poverty.<sup>120</sup> The interesting point in this account is the participation of *t'ussu* soldiers. If they were from Chone, it looks as if its Gelukpa masters took this one-time chance of increasing their hold over the partly Bon-oriented Thewu, a scenario that was repeated in the two Gyarong or Chin-ch'uan wars later in the same century.<sup>121</sup> Be that as it may, Thewu society was probably thoroughly disrupted.

Such political, military and religious shock therapy was not easily forgotten, and although European language sources are largely silent on the nineteenth-century predicament of the Thewu,<sup>122</sup> their reemergence in twentieth century accounts shows that the situation had not changed for the better. The Thewu were still seen as thieves and robbers,<sup>123</sup> and the Chone hold over them was slight. The Chinese government had occasionally sent troops a short distance into Thewu territory, but never with success.<sup>124</sup> When Tafel skirted the land of the Thewu in 1907, another 'Thewu war' was going on.<sup>125</sup> This time too, the Thewu were

---

neighbouring valley of Tso ru (or Tso lu kou), an upper branch of the Pai shui too. The latter two valleys were still in Rock's time qualified as notorious robber haunts, *Rock Diaries III*: 131. They were in fact regarded as 'no-man's land' that started on the southern slopes of Mt. Ban chu, comprised the two river valleys mentioned, and faded into largely unknown mountainous country towards the Szechuan border in the south. See *Rock Diaries III*: 49-51, *Rock Diaries VII*: 13. Le'ao remains unidentified.

<sup>117</sup> Can it have been Chone soldiers?

<sup>118</sup> Wu: 261.

<sup>119</sup> Whether these were all Thewu remains yet to be established.

<sup>120</sup> Wu: 262.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Mansier, P. 1990. La guerre du Jinchuan (rGyalrong): son contexte politico-religieux. In *Tibet: Civilisation et Société*. Paris: Éditions de la Fondation Singer-Polignac, 125-42; Martin, D. 1990 Bonpo canons and Jesuit cannons. On sectarian factors involved in the Ch'ienlung Emperor's second Goldstream expedition of 1771-1776 based primarily on some Tibetan sources. *The Tibet Journal* 15(2), 3-28.

<sup>122</sup> With the exception of Potanin: 243-44. See note 34.

<sup>123</sup> See note 108. There may be some hyperbole in this point of view. At times, the Thewu, or at least some of them, were seen as peaceful traders. See Ekvall, R.B. 1952. *Tibetan Sky Lines*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 128, photo facing.

<sup>124</sup> Kingdon Ward: 63.

<sup>125</sup> Tafel II: 275 ("Täwo Krieg"). Kingdon Ward: 63 refers to the same military expedition of 1907.

caught in a pincer, 800 soldiers approaching from Sungpan in Szechuan, and another 2,200 from Lanchow in Gansu.<sup>126</sup> The immediate cause of the expedition was the robbing of a Chinese Mohammedan trading caravan by the Thewu.<sup>127</sup> While the Sungpan soldiers quietly waited on the steppe plateau, those of Lanchow tried to enter the river gorge country of upper Thewu, but were ambushed with several men either killed or taken hostage. This brought summer-long negotiations in which several neighbouring chiefs and Bon po monks took part. By the beginning of September 1907 it was decided that the Thewu had to give up a hundred swords, fifty lances, and fifty gabled flintlocks. They were allowed to keep the 12,000 ounces of silver they had taken from the Mohammedan traders.<sup>128</sup> The role of the Chone *t'ussu* in this whole affair remains unclear. Tafel was not even sure whether the Chone prince had still much to say in upper Thewu.<sup>129</sup> This impression may have been due to the recent accession to the throne of the then still very young Yang *t'ussu*.

Disturbances came not only from the Thewu side of the Min Shan. The general convulsion of China after the revolution of 1911 produced regional warlords and social banditry that started to affect the middle Tao ho valley from 1914 onwards. In eastern Gansu an army of dislodged and wayward peasants under the command of Pailung,<sup>130</sup> reinforced with bandits from local secret societies,<sup>131</sup> went on the rampage in the years 1912-1914.<sup>132</sup> In May 1914, Pailung and his hordes appeared at Minchow,<sup>133</sup> east of Chone. The town was thoroughly looted before the bandit leader proceeded upstream. The Chone monastery due to

<sup>126</sup> Tafel II: 276.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*: 299; the wider context may have been the general forward policy by the Chinese, especially into Kham territory, following the Younghusband expedition to Central Tibet in 1904 and the Anglo-Chinese convention of 1906. See Epstein, L. (ed.) 2002. *Khams pa Histories. Visions of People, Place and Authority, PIATS 2000*. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>128</sup> Tafel II: 301.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*: 298 ("Der Dschoni Tu se der Oberherr des ganzen Täwo kiang ts'a-Gebietes ist oder war"), italics mine.

<sup>130</sup> Sometimes misnamed 'White Wolf'. See Lipman, J.N. 1997. *Familiar Strangers. A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 192, note 59.

<sup>131</sup> Hegel, C.B. 1959. The White Wolf. The Career of a Chinese Bandit, 1912-1914. unpublished M.A. thesis, Columbia University, New York, 24. For the workings of local secret societies in the area at the time, see Ekvall, D.P.: 102-12.

<sup>132</sup> Hegel 1959; Lipman 1981: 189-203 ("The White Wolf in Gansu").

<sup>133</sup> Jamieson: 128-29.

local opposition was passed by, but the Muslim enclave to the west of Chone, and especially the trading town of Taochow, bore the brunt of the final spasm of the Pailang movement. On May 25, 1914, the town was thoroughly sacked, and 7,000 or more of its inhabitants were killed.<sup>134</sup>

The Christian & Missionary Alliance workers from Minchow, Chone, and Taochow had fallen back on the former Tibetan monastery of Lupasi on the southern bank of the Tao,<sup>135</sup> which they had been able to buy from its Tibetan masters around 1905.<sup>136</sup> Originally called Da rge gomba,<sup>137</sup> the missionaries had smashed its icons, broken down the solidly built chanting hall, and sent the massive timbers floating down the Tao ho for the new church to be built at Titao.<sup>138</sup> Some of the carved wood ended up in Chicago's Field Museum through the agency of Dr. Berthold Laufer who happened to be in the area.<sup>139</sup> Over the years Lupasi had developed into a retreat for the missionaries, where they went on outings and withdrew in times of social and political turmoil.<sup>140</sup>

Less than three months after the Pailang atrocities, there materialised a new and quite unexpected threat, this time from across the Min Shan. In the middle of August 1914,<sup>141</sup> about an hour after midnight, the missionary station at Lupasi was being attacked by a band of Thewu, said to have numbered a couple of hundred.<sup>142</sup> By good chance a

<sup>134</sup> Plymire, D. 1959. *High Adventure in Tibet*. Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 41 ("seven thousand bodies"); Lipman 1981: 197-98 ("Between 8,000 and 15,000 people died in the sack of Taochow").

<sup>135</sup> Jamieson: 139.

<sup>136</sup> Ekvall 1938: 26-28, 58-59; *A Missionary Atlas. A Manual of the Foreign Work of the Christian & Missionary Alliance*. Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1950, 103; the missionaries knew the place already since 1895 when Ekvall and Christie retreated there shortly after their first arrival at Taochow to escape the threats of the Muslim rebellion of 1895-1896 (Christie Letters, July 2, 1895), see also note 4; cf. Ekvall: 33; for a photograph of Lupasi see Carlsen, W.D. 1985. *Tibet. In Search of a Miracle*. Nyack, NY: Nyack College, 39.

<sup>137</sup> Ekvall 1938: 155, 158.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Dean Carlson T2 Transcript, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Jamieson: 98. Incidentally, Laufer was greatly assisted in his Tibetan studies by a lady missionary by the name of Grace C. Agar.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Ekvall, D.P. 1912. Present conditions of foreigners in Kansu. *The Alliance Weekly* (March 23), 395.

<sup>141</sup> Farrer II: 59 ("between the ninth and sixteenth of August").

<sup>142</sup> Robert Dean Carlson T2 Transcript, 3; Van Dyck, H. 1956. *William Christie. Apostle to Tibet*. Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 93 ("said to number 170"); Ekvall 1938: 67 ("seven hundred Tebus").

Chinese woman who could understand Tibetan<sup>143</sup> had forewarned the missionary community about the impending attack. In the event, they had armed themselves more than usual,<sup>144</sup> and when the attackers appeared had repelled them after a fierce fight, leaving three Thewu dead.<sup>145</sup> According to Robert Ekvall it was the largest raiding party of Tibetans that had ever come down into the border country.<sup>146</sup> In the aftermath of the attack, a punitive expedition from Lanchow was sent against the Thewu, in the course of which three of their villages were burned.<sup>147</sup> The Chinese general who led the expedition, seconded by the missionaries, secured a thirty-year truce, after which the Thewu caused no troubles again outside their homeland.<sup>148</sup> To understand why the missionaries had incurred the wrath and perhaps the greed of the Thewu will perhaps always remain a mystery. Robert Carlson thought that the chance of wiping out the whole mission group “at one fell swoop” may have played a role,<sup>149</sup> but there were also rumours of a large amount of silver buried somewhere on the monastery grounds. According to Carlson it was perhaps more the silver than anything else that may have lured the Thewu into an attack.<sup>150</sup>

After the Chinese punitive expedition and the negotiated truce, the Thewu retreated into their recesses. Again it is hard to judge the inside workings of their local village societies. For a start they were very much against others encroaching upon their territory.<sup>151</sup> That applied especially to a section of the upper Pai-shui chiang that Rock calls consistently Upper Thewu. Here we find the Tsa-ru and Tso-ru valleys, noted robber haunts in an acknowledged no-man’s land.<sup>152</sup> Adjacent to these is a stretch of land along the upper Pai-shui valley called Pa she

<sup>143</sup> Robert Dean Carlson T2 Transcript, 3.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*: 2; Van Dyck: 92, 94.

<sup>145</sup> Carlson 1928: 186; Ekvall 1938: 67-68; Van Dyck: 94-95.

<sup>146</sup> Ekvall 1938: 67; see also Farrer II: 159.

<sup>147</sup> Van Dyck: 97.

<sup>148</sup> Carlson 1928: 186.

<sup>149</sup> But *who* would have benefited from such a move, or even may have instigated the attack remains unclear.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Dean Carlson T2 Transcript, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Carol S. Hammond Carlson T1 Transcript, 3. At this point in the interview “there is a thirty-two minute blank space on the tape. Apparently Balmer—the interviewer—had accidentally taken the recorder out of the record mode”, T1 Transcript, 4. When the transcript resumes its course Balmer and Hammond Carlson are still talking about the Thewu.

<sup>152</sup> *Rock Diaries III*: 49-51, 131; cf. note 116.

te ka or Dengkha, where the inhabitants always carried guns and swords.<sup>153</sup> From 1931 to 1933, it became for a few years the place of a missionary station run by the Carlson family.<sup>154</sup> However, the local population destroyed the mission house in 1934 when the Carlson family was on leave.<sup>155</sup> Further downstream is located the Ta ra valley or Tara ku, a southern side valley of the Pai shui chiang. Its inhabitants had succeeded in remaining completely independent from the outside world. The Chone prince warned Rock not to go there, as the valley was supposed to be full of robbers.<sup>156</sup> As such, they seem to have formed a 'closed' community and although they were reckoned as subjects of the Chone prince, none of his headmen dared to enter the Tara ku. Consequently, the people of Ta ra paid no taxes and were "a law unto themselves".<sup>157</sup> It is interesting to note that in summertime they were relatively peaceful, but in wintertime came out of their hidden villages across the ice and terrorised the villagers of the lower Thewu region.<sup>158</sup> This may have been because of their poverty, but their victims were not much richer.<sup>159</sup> At one time, the Chone prince thought it opportune to subdue the Ta ra community once and for all. He mobilised 2,000 soldiers and tried to penetrate into the wild Ta ra valley. But the Thewu laid huge logs across the trail, and from behind kept up a constant fire. The Chone prince's expedition suffered severe casualties and as a result he had to abandon the expedition. Even at Rock's time in Chone, the Ta ra Thewu were still the masters of their own land, paid no taxes, and recognised no one as their overlord.<sup>160</sup>

Such stories tend perhaps to distort everyday reality of Thewu village life. Carlson was of the opinion that robbery was a sideline and not the main occupation of the people.<sup>161</sup> In line with his reasoning, it is far more likely that the inside workings of village life were primarily con-

<sup>153</sup> *Rock Diaries VII*: 16; *Rock Diaries VIII*: 31.

<sup>154</sup> Carlson 1928, 1930, 1939; Carol S. Hammond Carlson T1 Transcript, 3-4. According to Robert Carlson it was "pioneer evangelistic work", Robert Dean Carlson T1 Transcript, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Rev. C. Edwin Carlson – Personal File, see note 97; *Missionary Atlas*, 102; Robert Dean Carlson T1 Transcript, 4.

<sup>156</sup> *Rock Diaries VII*: 21.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*: 25.

<sup>158</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*: 26, 76.

<sup>160</sup> *Rock Diaries VIII*: 32.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Dean Carlson T2 Transcript, 2.



ditioned by ordinary concerns of local people over resources in a poverty-stricken environment.<sup>162</sup> The struggle for survival in a harsh mixed farming habitat,<sup>163</sup> in the relative absence of social cohesiveness, produced strife and discord. Inter- and intra-village feuding may have concerned quarrels over land and cattle, over debts, and over women. The stories of these quarrels lived on in clan and village memory, to which each generation added its share. The scale of these protracted fights can be learned from a terrible feud that broke out in the Dengkha area around 1925 and lasted for a couple of years. It occurred when members of one family clan started to argue with another clan federation bordering on its territory. The precise reason is unknown, but the situation deteriorated so badly that in the end even women and children were legitimate prey.<sup>164</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

If we come to characterise and assess the situation in Chone on the Gansu-Tibetan frontier for the period 1880-1940 in terms of territoriality, local power and political control, we first have to conclude that there was incomplete territorial jurisdiction by the Chone *t'ussu*, to the extent that there were clusters of villages in secluded Thewu valleys south of the Min Shan which could not be controlled in anyway except by the local monasteries. Local power in a few cases was in the hands of the villagers themselves, who did not bother to pay taxes to the Chone prince and lived a life somewhat apart from the Chone political-monastic nucleus. The Thewu living in these frontier lands occupied a niche in an outlying part of Tibetan civilisation that in a political sense had never pressed them too hard. Yet the Thewu realised that they also lived on the edge of the Chinese empire, not an enviable location, because when they tried to relieve themselves from their poverty either by harassing their clan enemies over local resources or robbing a caravan passing by, soldiers sometimes appeared on the horizon and burned their villages and punished their headmen.

If we finally have to decide on a characterisation of the Chone principality and its Thewu dependencies in the period under review, we

<sup>162</sup> *Rock Diaries VII*: 26; cf. Carlson 1939: 265.

<sup>163</sup> Given the prevailing level of technology.

<sup>164</sup> Carlson 1939: 265.

may point to its existential poverty, its internal exploitation by its prince, and its external territorial harassment by the Chinese. But we may also conclude that the historical *t'ussu*-ship, however eroded it may have been in the end, provided a mechanism for the relative independence of Chone and Thewu.