

# LAMAS, PRINCES, AND BRIGANDS

Joseph Rock's Photographs of the Tibetan Borderlands of China





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Michael Aris

with the assistance of Patrick Booz  
and contributions by S.B. Sutton and Jeffrey Wagner

China House Gallery  
China Institute in America  
New York City  
1992



Front Cover Illustration [plate 6.27]:  
Detail, inside the main assembly hall of Choni.

Back cover Illustration [plate 1.7]:  
Detail, Joseph Rock in the traditional costume of Choni, southern  
Gansu province. 1928.

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བསྐྱེད་འདུལ་བ་ལགས་སོ།།

Dedicated to the memory of  
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche  
greatest of lamas

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# Preface

**I**t is our great pleasure to present the first public exhibition of the photographs of Joseph Rock, a self-trained botanist who developed a fascination with the peoples, cultures and geography of the frontier between Tibet and China proper. As part of China Institute's primary mission to create an awareness of Chinese history and culture among the American people, we have also promoted an understanding of the diversity of peoples both within and along China's borders. Rock's photographs of the monastic principalities of Muli, Choni and Yongning and of the nomadic tribes and peasants who lived near the mountain ranges of Amnye Machen and Minya Konka provide a rare and valuable record of several important local cultures which have all but disappeared in the last forty years. There is intrinsic beauty, strength and dignity in the faces he recorded. Through these images we catch glimpses of the eternal beauty of a majestic mountain region and the fleeting moments of a way of life destined to change in the modern world.

We thank the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., and the Harvard-Yenching Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for allowing us access to their archives and for providing the negatives for images in this catalogue.

China Institute is fortunate to have the distinguished scholar Michael Aris as curator of this exhibition. Currently on leave from the University of Oxford, Dr. Aris now holds the post of Visiting Professor of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Harvard University. Among his publications are *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*; *Views of Medieval Bhutan: The Diary and Drawings of Samuel Davis, 1783*; *Sources for the History of Bhutan*; and *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)*. A British national, Dr. Aris is married to the Burmese political leader Aung San Suu Kyi, recipient of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, with whom he co-edited *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*.

This catalogue and exhibition are the results of a successful collaboration of many talented people to whom China Institute is very grateful. John H.J. Guth provided the initial suggestion and continued his enthusiastic support throughout the project. The preliminary background work was done by Nancy Jervis, who also shaped the public programs related to this exhibition. Patrick Booz edited the book and coordinated the project as it progressed at Cambridge. J. May Lee, as Director of China House Gallery, supervised the project from New York and brought it to completion with the help of Michael Bless who edited the final version of the manuscript. The photographs for both the exhibition and the catalogue were printed by Bernard Handzel and Hillel Burger from negatives provided by the National Geographic Society and the Harvard-Yenching Library. We also thank our graphic designer Peter Lukic for turning the manuscript into an elegant book, our installation designer Carl Nardiello for the physical presentation of the photographs, Kevin Hall for mounting the prints, LeMar Terry for lighting the Gallery, our Gallery staff, Hai Weilan and Heidi Schulman, for their outstanding efforts in putting this exhibition together, and our support staff and volunteers for their patience and continued loyalty.

Together with the 1990 exhibition of the works of Sidney Gamble, this exhibition represents a new area of interest for China Institute's China House Gallery—the power of the camera lens as both artistic and documentary tool. In addition to documenting America's fascination with China and her neighbors, Joseph Rock's photographs remain invaluable as an anthropological record of the region. We are indebted to our Trustees and Gallery Sponsors for making this special exhibition a reality.

Charles P. Wang  
President  
China Institute in America



# Acknowledgements

**W**hen I was first approached by China Institute to serve as guest curator for an exhibition of Joseph Rock's photographs of the Tibetan borderlands, my enthusiasm for the project was at once tempered by the realization that the cultural and historical setting of these marvelous views formed a complex and neglected field deserving many years of study. I felt it would be impossible to do the subject anything like justice in a few months. Now that the project is completed, that feeling has, if anything, grown still stronger.

However, the very limited goals which were finally set may have been achieved. These were to make a representative selection of Rock's photographs illustrating key aspects of the secular and religious life of the region; to provide just enough documentation to evoke something of the context of these views; and to point to some of the resources which must be used by anyone inspired to tread in Rock's footsteps. The time is certainly ripe for that to happen.

The exhibition and catalogue are the result of a collaborative effort of several people more qualified than myself in this field. My role has simply been to supply the conceptual framework, coordinate their work, and provide something of a Tibetological perspective. The original idea for the project must certainly be credited to Mary Ellen Alonso, who has done much to preserve the surviving visual documentation of life in prerevolutionary China. Her awareness of the importance of Rock's photography and the basic research she had already completed on his scattered collections provided us with an essential starting point. I am most grateful for the wonderful generosity with which she shared all her labors with us. The same is true of Silvia Sutton, the author of a very successful biography of Rock, who not only helped us with many points of detail, but kindly agreed to revise an essay on Rock she had earlier published. By a stroke of good fortune we met Jeffrey Wagner just in time to exploit his specialized knowledge of Rock's botanical work. He quickly agreed to contribute a piece on this subject.

The fortuitous presence in the Boston area of our very willing collaborators has made the project much easier than it

would otherwise have been. But it has depended equally on the cooperation of many institutions and individuals elsewhere in the United States and Europe. We wish to record our gratitude to Joergen Birman and April Goebel of the Illustrations Library of the National Geographic Society; Susan Meinheit of the Library of Congress; Sheila Connor, Karen Kane, Carin Dohlman and Stephen Spongberg of the Arnold Arboretum, Boston; Raymond Lum of the Harvard-Yenching Library, Cambridge; Anita Karg of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Pittsburgh; Karl Ryavec of the Defense Mapping Agency, Washington, D. C.; Colin Will of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh; Anthony Jackson of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh; Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel and Hartmut Walravens of the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin; Paul Weissich, the retired director of the Honolulu Botanical Gardens, who is Joseph Rock's legal executor; and finally Michael Witzel and Ann Palmer of my own Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University, who both provided much kind support and practical help.

The one person without whose care and dedication the project would have floundered at an early stage is my assistant, Patrick Booz. Not only has he had very close acquaintance with several parts of Yunnan and Sichuan where Rock was active, but he has maintained a continuous interest in all aspects of Rock's work over many years. Apart from those unique qualifications, his meticulous attention to detail and total unflappability ensured the completion and success of our work. He bore the brunt of the project, and I stand very much in his debt. Both of us have in turn been ably assisted by Alison Groppe and by our cartographer, Herbert Heidt.

Finally, the staff of China Institute in America, organizer of the exhibition, is to be warmly thanked for its help and cooperation. It was the Institute's own patron, John Guth, who first approached me with the idea for the project. But for his constant support and encouragement in this and several other endeavors, nothing would have happened.

Michael Aris, Cambridge, December 1991



3.10

# The Tibetan Borderlands

Michael Aris

**T**he thousands of photographs taken by Joseph Rock during his adventurous travels in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands from 1922 to 1949 provide us with an important historical record of many social, political and religious institutions which have either disappeared or experienced radical change since the Chinese Communist revolution. Apart from their evocation of many lost traditions, and their undoubted aesthetic and human appeal, these pictures also serve to remind us most immediately of the long historical relationship between Tibet and China. The most integral and lasting contacts between the Tibetans and the Chinese did not develop from formal diplomatic relations in Lhasa or Beijing. They evolved naturally on the frontiers where the two peoples met in war, trade, and pilgrimage, in regions where the writ of their governments barely ran at all.

The idea of a frontier manifests itself in two ways. The inhabitants of a country or region look outwards from a center to a periphery, and from there to the dangers and promises which lie beyond. But those on the periphery conceive their territory itself as a center lying between two or more potentially threatening powers. Joseph Rock's photographs take us straight to the local perspective of those actually living on the periphery. Where the common notion of a frontier would lead one to expect a sense of marginality or alienation, so often one meets instead with a confident and ancient sense of centrality. This was fostered and expressed more than anything else by strong forms of local rule. Clan chieftains, local princes, and monastic prelates all stood at the center of their worlds. Their external relations involved them as much with each other as with the distant powers in Lhasa and Beijing.

If it is the frontier itself that we are seeking as a hard line drawn on paper, then it is likely always to elude us. The natural barriers provided by the rivers and mountains which separate the highlands of Tibet from the lowlands of China

are themselves disposed in too complex a manner to provide a natural watershed such as that found on the crest of the Himalayas. Moreover, the migrations of peoples across such natural barriers as do exist and their historical assimilation with neighboring peoples has served to complicate the ethnic and linguistic map very greatly indeed. The adoption of Tibetan Buddhism by some Mongol, Chinese, and Manchu groups in the past means that we cannot use the furthest geographical diffusion of Tibetan religious culture as a determinant of the Tibetan frontier. Finally, the ever-shifting political boundaries of Tibet and China in the past rarely, if ever, coincided neatly with any of the geographical, ethnic or cultural boundaries that can sometimes be perceived on the ground. The same certainly holds true today for the alignment of the provincial boundaries of the People's Republic of China. These have inevitably severed into many pieces all those peoples who can be classified broadly as Tibetan.

It seems best, then, to conceive of the frontier as a zone rather than a line, one in which all possible boundaries of geography, race, and culture cross and overlap to form a broad north-south transitional area of great complexity separating the Tibetan and Chinese states of the past. If our concept of a frontier has to be stretched in this way, it can at least be said to accommodate and coincide with ancient Chinese and Tibetan notions of their states being surrounded by zones of increasing barbarism, uncivilized regions awaiting subjugation. This traditional ethnocentrism conflicts with the fact that many districts within this zone developed very high levels of Tibetan culture in harmony with the confident expression of local ethnic identities. Nevertheless it is easy to see how the semi-independent tribes, states, and monastic principalities of the area served as an intransigent buffer zone protecting a militarily weak and thinly populated Tibet from the ascendant power of her populous eastern neighbor. China, too, was often content to have



nothing to do with these untameable peoples, counting on its more manageable dependencies to repulse them if necessary.

The only practical attempt to give legal expression to the concept of this frontier zone as a formal means of protecting the independence of Tibet was made by the British in 1914. In trying to achieve a compromise between the conflicting frontier claims of Tibet and China, it was proposed by the British at the Simla Convention that the longitudinal tract of the border zone should constitute Inner Tibet, on the model of Inner Mongolia, and that it should come under Chinese administration.

"Tibet proper," to be termed Outer Tibet, like Outer Mongolia, would manage its own affairs without the interference of either Britain or China. However, it would form part of a Chinese Commonwealth holding final suzerainty over the area. The actual frontier between Inner and Outer Tibet was to be the historical line laid down in 1727 between the realm of the Dalai Lama and the semi-independent states of eastern Tibet. This line

had been broken by Chinese incursions westward and pockets of Tibetan interest or partial control eastward. Final acceptance by China of this compromise solution to the problems of Tibet's status and frontiers was never given. Less than half a century later not only the nebulous frontier zone but the whole of Tibet proper was firmly incorporated into the People's Republic of China.

While the existence and general historical role of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands as a separately identifiable entity is beyond question, a proper "frontier history" of the region would be difficult to achieve in the present state of our knowl-

edge. An enormous amount of painstaking historical, anthropological and linguistic research still needs to be focused on the myriad local societies of the area before a unified treatment can even be considered. The situation differs considerably from the present state of Himalayan research, where the first opportunities for synthesis are already apparent. In the field of the equally important cultural and political divide between Tibet and China, little progress seems to have been made in scholarship since the time of Joseph Rock himself. However, a very useful survey and discussion of the information to be

gleaned from the secondary literature will be found in the forthcoming work by Geoffrey Samuel (see Selected Bibliography).

It must be admitted that Rock's contribution to an understanding of the border region does not seem very large when set against the great strides made in general Tibetan studies since 1959. He had many boasts but never included among these any real expertise in Tibetan matters, despite the many years he spent in the borderlands; he

seems always to have depended on translators and interpreters who knew Tibetan.<sup>1</sup> The information found in his many popular articles can often be found elsewhere and such information as he does provide is often overshadowed by constant claims to be first, heavy value judgments, and a preoccupation with morbidity.<sup>2</sup> There seems to have been a perpetual tension in Rock between the need for scholarly recognition and popular acclaim, and his efforts were uneasily split between attaining both at the same time.

Rock's real competence lay in the identification and collection of plants, the decipherment of the Naxi pic-



1.3



tographs, and the compilation of maps — visual skills requiring enormous mental determination and physical stamina. His photographs, too, often taken under very difficult circumstances, provide eloquent testimony to his drive for classifiable visual evidence. When we take into account his pioneering achievement in these areas, won in the face of endless encounters with bandits and warlords, it seems churlish to belittle the opportunities he lost in other areas.

Some of those opportunities may again be coming within reach. After many years during which the borderlands remained completely out of bounds, some areas have now been opened to foreign visitors. The duration and degree of access is limited and varies from region to region, but it seems likely that at least some of a growing number of specialists may be able to undertake serious research there in the years ahead. Meanwhile the tremendous spate of Tibetan publishing in the Indian subcontinent since 1959, matched to a lesser degree by a similar movement in China since the Cultural Revolution, has brought to light many key historical sources which were previously unavailable to modern scholarship. But it is difficult to connect this evidence to real peoples, places, and institutions of the past unless surviving traces can be properly explored on the ground.

Chinese and Tibetan scholars working in the region have an urgent responsibility to share in this important task.

The experience of recent travelers would suggest that far more of those traces have survived the various holocausts since Rock left the area than was once feared. But again there is wide disparity between districts. The traditional life of many isolated regions continues much as it always did in the past, particularly after the introduction of policies aimed at liberal-

izing the economy. Elsewhere it is clear that the decimation of local populations during waves of uprising, the destruction of all visible signs of religious life before and during the Cultural Revolution, and a conscious policy of settling Han peoples in some districts has radically altered the whole picture. One of the tools of comparison which will always be available to us in assessing the degree and nature of these changes can be found in the photographs of Joseph Rock, which preserve for all time the images of the past.



5.13

❁

We Golok are returning from up  
there, returning from Tibet.  
We overturn the command of  
Tibet's king of religion.  
We Golok put our trust in the sky.  
The blue sphere above is the trust  
of the Golok.

We Golok are returning from down  
there, returning from China.  
We overturn China's worldly laws.  
We Golok press down on those  
who press with the law.  
We are the law-pressers of Madza  
Thangshawa.

We Golok are returning from over  
there, returning from Hor.  
We overturn the soldiers of Hor  
Yameybuta.  
We meat-eating Golok like meat.  
We Golok are the guardians of the  
ones we like.<sup>3</sup>

This song, written down by a Tibetan lama from an oral recitation he heard on the border of Kham and Amdo in 1951, two years after Rock left China, seems to encapsulate the whole world view of the free marauding nomads of the far north. The Golok, most famous of the nomadic brigand tribes (see Map III), see themselves on a central pivot between the Tibetan land of religion on the one side and Chinese imperial rule on the other. Owing not the slightest allegiance to either power, they put themselves mid-

point on the latitudinal alignment which has Tibet "up" in the west and China "down" in the east. Their very name is a cognate of the common Tibetan term for rebel (*ngo-log*). The Hor peoples, various Turco-Mongols of the north, are brought in to form a triangle with the Golok in the center. They too are repulsed. From wanderings which bring them into contact with their inferior neighbors on all sides, the nomads always return to their position of centrality. The "sky," a word apparently used here as an ancient synonym for the pre-Buddhist heaven, is favored over the institutions of Buddhism. The abundant supply in nomadic society of meat, a universal symbol of power and violence, is linked and balanced in the next line with an allusion to the nomad's strict code of honor and hospitality. The song must be taken for what it is, a fierce assertion both of identity and independence. It claims the superiority of the nomadic way of life over the sedentary civilizations on all sides. The nomads stand in perpetual conflict with their great neighbors.

The song must also be seen as a statement of an ideal rather than reality. The Golok are in fact devout Buddhists who support flourishing monasteries, and in the past their chiefs often had to compromise with governments on both sides. When Rock was with them the nominal overlord of their eighteen sub-tribes was an incarnate lama who was away in Lhasa making his submission to the Lhasa government. Earlier in 1921 the so-called "queen" of the Golok, actually the chieftainess of the Ludey sub-tribe, had submitted to the Muslim warlord General Ma. Nevertheless, the Golok traditionally stood at the furthest limit of full nomadic autonomy.

Like all nomads their tribes were made up of encampments of varying size, together forming a loose confederacy ruled by a council of elders or by a chief recognized by all. Appointment as council member or chief could be secured by inheritance, election, rotation, or direct seizure. All tribes were to some degree involved in perpetual conflict with each other, but feuding and the settlement of feuds by negotiation took place according to carefully prescribed codes.

The many monasteries of the region played an important role in mediating these disputes, and indeed were integral to nomadic life, providing a fixed point where the nomads could store their goods and meet in annual festivals and fairs. Surplus from the nomadic economy in turn went to support

the monasteries. Some nomadic groups even came directly under the ascendant temporal authority of the monasteries. Probably the most important of these was the huge community of Labrang, which controlled several tribes including the partly nomadic and partly sedentary Mewu people.

It would be wrong to think of the Amdo region as inhabited solely by pastoralists, for there were substantial agricultural populations too, particularly on the eastern edge of the plateau. There the hereditary prince of Choni ruled over a settled group of forty-eight tribes or "banners". The Choni family claimed that one of its ancestors had settled here when he arrived as tax collector for a king of the early Tibetan dynasty of Yarlung (7th to 9th centuries). Many centuries later the head of the family was invested as a local ruler with the title of *tusi* by a Chinese emperor and appointed to control the neighboring peoples. Among them the recalcitrant Tebu tribe, in whose region Rock had some of his liveliest adventures, find mention in the standard chronicle of the Amdo monasteries as a people who had to be repeatedly subjugated by the Choni prince. The family not only supplied the princes of the state but also the abbots of Choni Monastery, a Gelugpa Buddhist community that gave its name to the state. After assuming a Chinese name and Chinese dress and habits, the family lost practically all trace of its original Tibetan character.

It was particularly at the edge of the plateau's northern reaches that the Tibetans of Amdo came into intimate contact with other populations, including the Hui (Chinese Muslims), the Salar (a Turkic people, also Muslims), the Tu (or Monggor, an Altaic people) and the Han Chinese. The interrelations of all these groups with the pastoral and agricultural Tibetans form a picture of extraordinary complexity and interest, of conflict and accommodation. It was of course in their trading ventures that the Tibetans had the closest dealings with these groups, the Han and Muslims acting as their intermediaries with the outside world.

The whole Amdo region had come under the nominal authority of the central government of China in the early seventeenth century. A Manchu representative known as the *amban* held office in the Chinese-built city of Xining and had formal administrative control of the province. However, he intruded with varying success into the affairs of the self-governing nomads, the settled farmers, and the politically



autonomous monasteries which owed primary allegiance to Lhasa. After the establishment of the Chinese Republic in 1912, the administration was divided between warring Chinese and Muslim factions. In the face of constant strife and killing there was a steady erosion of all forms of local autonomy, particularly along the ethnic frontiers, and this was brought to completion and extended over the entire region with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

The process of political incorporation mirrored the earlier development which in the preceding centuries had seen the steady Sinicization of many Tibetan villages by the sheer pressure of the Chinese population. The movement towards infiltration, dispossession and absorption was a natural one, supported in some areas by official policies of direct colonization both before and after the Communist revolution. The strong sense of belonging to cohesive, self-supporting communities, which is such a distinguishing mark of all Tibetan societies, had already been under seige for a very long time. At the same time one is struck by the ultimate resilience and capacity for survival of many far-flung, seemingly fragile groups. The Tibetan "autonomous" prefectures and counties which now fill the maps of Qinghai and Gansu give at least some symbolic expression to the whole drive for ethnic continuity.

In contrast to Amdo, which had insufficient agricultural land to produce revenue capable of supporting a major polity, the Tibetan province of Kham and the ethnically Tibetan areas further to the east were basically a mixed farming and herding region which could be easily taxed to support the

apparatus of a number of quasi-autonomous states. Most of these were ruled by hereditary "kings" (*gyalpo*), others by lay officials known as *pönpo* or *depa*. In addition there were five monastic principalities, the most important of these being Chamdo, Drayab and Riwoche, governed by reincarnate lamas. The "lama state" of Muli, now in the county of that name, was always governed by a monk of the ruling family. There also existed a number of small "pastoralist" states under their own lay rulers. All these stood in uneasy and shifting alliance with the central governments of Tibet and China.



6.25

According to one attempt to classify these states in 1922, made by Eric Teichman, the British Consul in Tachienlu (Kangding), twenty-six came under Chinese protection and six under Tibetan protection. But external authority more often than not took the form of a dominant and aggressive local polity impinging directly onto its neighbors, rather than a long arm reaching out from Lhasa or Beijing. The best examples of this are seen in the successive histories

of the states of Ling, Derge, and Nyarong, which followed each other as major regional powers. The final ascendancy of Nyarong under the wild adventurer Gonpo Namgyal, who managed to defeat almost the whole of Kham, lasted only five years before he in turn was defeated by the central Tibetan government in 1865.

Just as the economy of Amdo depended both on long-distance trade and on the local barter of the pastoral and agricultural produce, so also in Kham were there ancient trading links which connected peoples far and near. Major trading centers were established in the towns of Tachienlu, Jyekundo,

and Chamdo. Of key importance was the vital transit trade in various grades of Chinese tea.

Though the area of Kham certainly came under some kind of central Tibetan authority both during the early empire and again when Tibet was reunited under the Fifth Dalai Lama in the mid-seventeenth century, it is not easy to assess the degree of actual Tibetan control in any period except when this was imposed as the result of short-lived military campaigns. The same is also true of Chinese expansion into the area, particularly after a new interventionist policy developed in 1905. A network of Chinese magistracies was established then with great violence by the notorious General Zhao Erfeng, who for a time succeeded in dismantling the administrative machinery of all the petty states. Formal Tibetan control was re-established in 1918 but lost again in the area east of the Yangzi River between 1930 and 1993. However, when Rock recorded his impressions in 1931, the Chinese were retaining a very tenuous hold on only nine of the original thirty-one magistracies imposed by Zhao, and their effective power was limited to a few of the major trade routes.

As a general rule the states which lay east of the upper Yangzi can be said to have managed their own affairs prior to the middle nineteenth century, while those to the west came under uneven Tibetan authority. All were to experience the brunt of the Chinese penetration of Tibet beginning in 1951, and were the first to revolt and be defeated. Since 1959, the states west of the Yangzi have formed part of the Tibet Autonomous Region while those to the east are incorporated into Sichuan. Kham itself has totally disappeared as the eastern Tibetan province and is now split into numerous administrative units in Sichuan and Yunnan. But many of the boundaries of the old states are today the boundaries of those units. As in the case of Amdo, therefore, there is some degree of formal continuity at the most local level. This also holds for the Tibetan or partially Tibetanized states and peoples further south in Yunnan. There, too, the old political structures have all disappeared, and with them many of the cultural and religious institutions they supported. However, the ethnic groups which produced those structures and institutions in the past can still be identified. Some are still flourishing, others declining or merging with their diverse neighbors. It remains to be seen how in the future each group will retain or lose its separate identity and the extent to which religion is allowed to form an integral part of that identity.

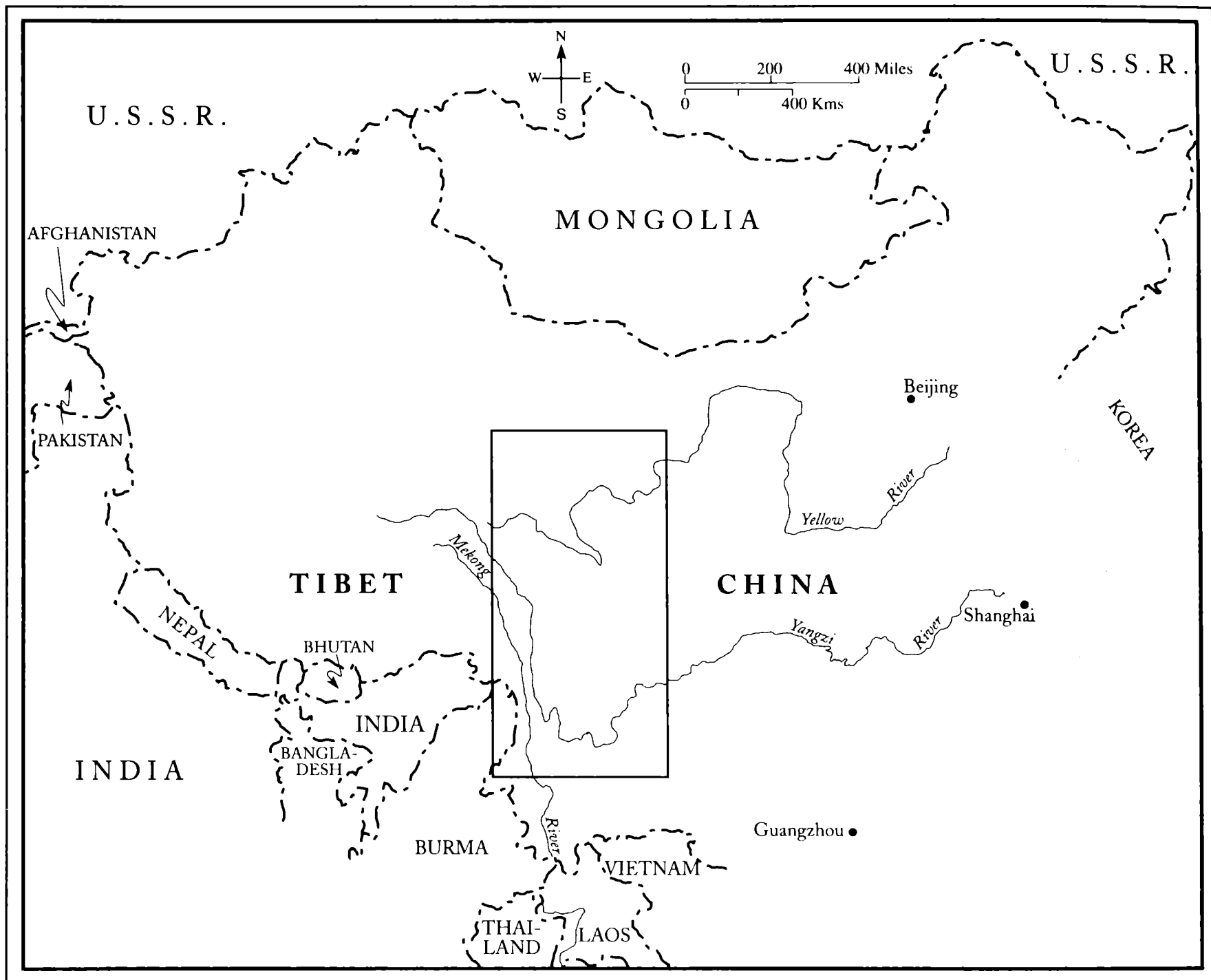
## NOTES

1. Rock's monograph on the Amnye Machen region failed to make use of any of the standard Tibetan sources, and his attempts to disclose the important historical links between the cult of the Naxi *tombas* and the Bon religion of the Tibetans seem muddled and unproven. He was never able to complete his studies of the principalities of Yongning, Choni, and Muli, one suspects because he could not handle the sources he had collected on their history.
2. These unhappy traits find their fullest expression in a quite unpublished manuscript recounting his adventures, kept in the archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Some of the chapter titles in this work reflect his typical approach: "Visit to one of the Dungeons [of Muli]," "Lolo Tribesmen Bury their Lepers Alive for the Sake of Face," "Inane Lamaist Practices of Ra-gya Monastery," among others.
3. From Namkhai Norbu, *Byang-'brog-gi lam-yig* (A journey into the culture of Tibetan nomads), Arcidosso, 1983, pp. 26-7. My translation.

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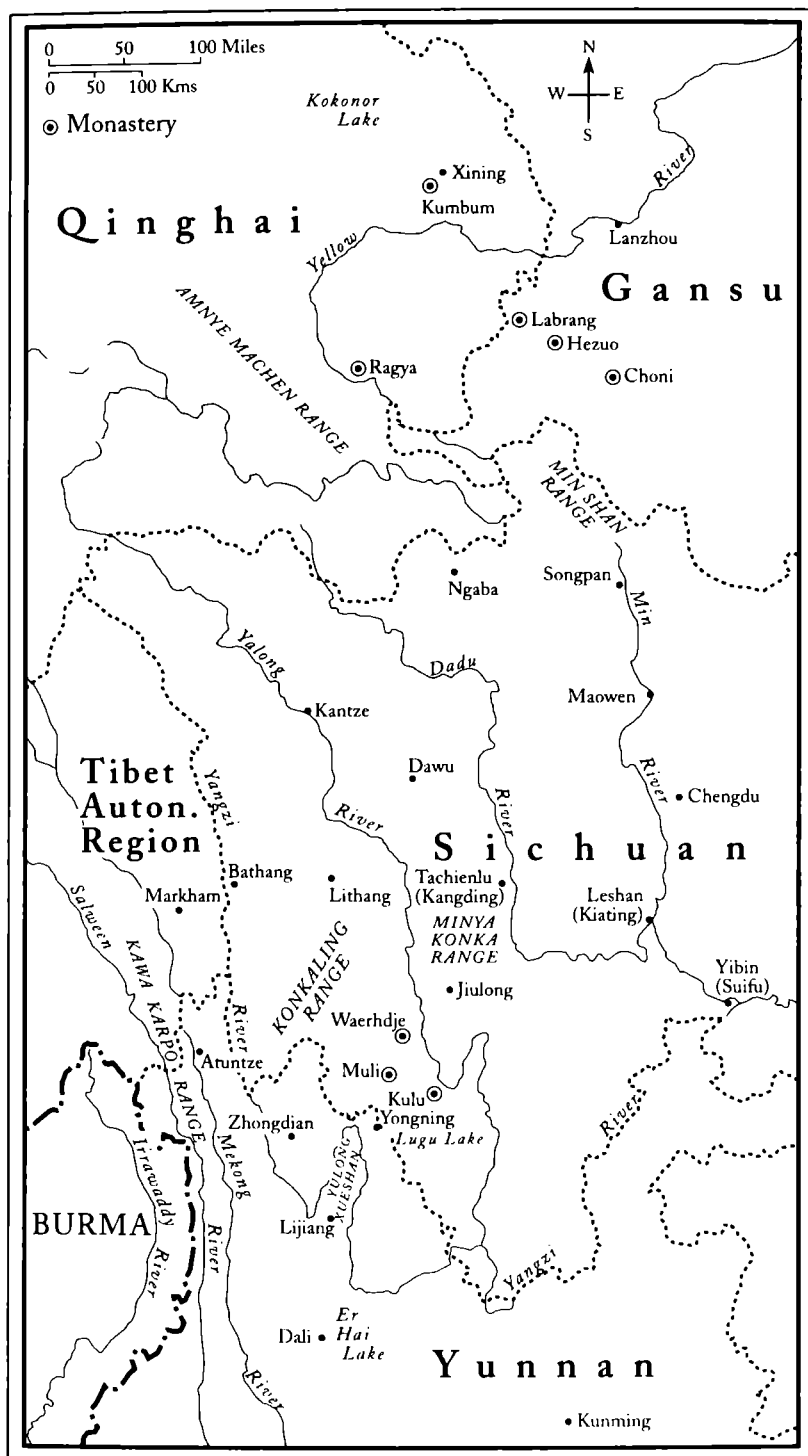


# CHINA AND TIBET



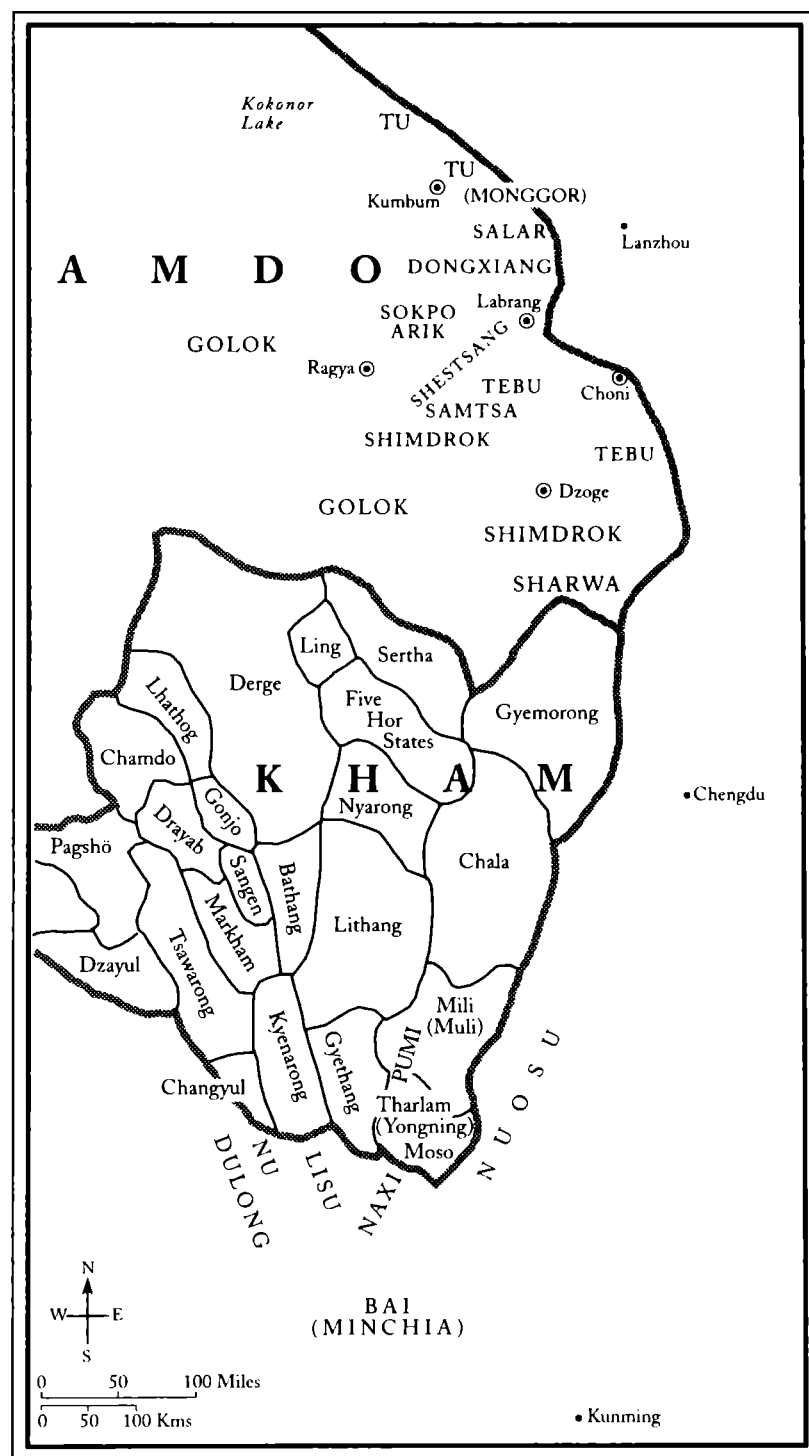
## II

### MODERN PROVINCES



## III

### PEOPLES AND PRINCIPALITIES



# Joseph Rock: Restless Spirit<sup>1</sup>

S. B. Sutton

Joseph F. Rock (1884-1962) arrived in western China in 1922 and spent most of the next twenty-seven years of his life there. He collected plants, hunted birds, took photographs, and explored the mountainous regions for various prestigious American institutions including the Department of Agriculture, the National Geographic Society, and the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Though he persisted in describing himself as a botanist — or sometimes, more expansively, as an explorer-botanist — he never published a single paper devoted to Chinese flora. And as time went by, his botanical activities became the means of supporting his passionate study of the Naxi people, among whom he lived.

There was little in Rock's family background to suggest a life of adventure in China. He was born in Vienna, the son of a dour manservant who determined that the boy would become a priest. His mother died when he was six, and Joseph developed into an introverted adolescent given to fantasies and unexcused absences from the classroom. He decided that he would travel, and he prepared himself by studying exotic languages under his bed covers at night when he was supposed to be sleeping. As soon as he graduated from the gymnasium, he defied his father and escaped Vienna to roam around Europe, supporting himself with menial jobs. One day, with no apparent forethought, he signed on as a cabin steward aboard a passenger ship bound for New York. There he arrived in 1905. He disembarked wearing his uniform underneath his street clothes and headed for the nearest pawnshop where he received some change for the outfit. Working as a dishwasher, and suffering attacks of tuberculosis, he made his way haphazardly to Hawaii where he landed penniless in 1907, despite having been warned by a physician that the sea air would kill him.

Thus far in Rock's peripatetic life he had evidenced only one talent: a gift for languages, of which it is said he already

knew nine or ten including Chinese and Arabic. Within a few weeks, however, he found a position teaching Latin and natural history in a secondary school in Honolulu. He had no university degree and, although his Latin was excellent, he had little experience and had demonstrated no special interest in natural history. Yet he appears to have never considered the possibility that he might not be capable of teaching the subject. He accepted the job confidently and performed well.

Rock's obligation to his natural history students forced him to investigate the flora and fauna of Hawaii. He was particularly drawn by the vegetation, and he discovered that he liked working alone outdoors more than listening to adolescents conjugate irregular verbs in the classroom. Furthermore, contrary to the doctor's gloomy prognosis, his health improved. So one day, according to legend (the story, though not documented, is consistent with Rock's character) he marched into the office of the Division of Forestry of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, informed the startled officer in charge that the Division needed an herbarium, claimed he was a botanist, and proposed himself as the man to do the job. Arrogance, charm, and the fact that no one checked his credentials carried the day for him. His proposal was accepted, though there was little money to spare and none at all budgeted for an herbarium.

Rock delivered much more than he had promised. In addition to gathering prodigious quantities of herbarium specimens, he gave botany his undivided attention for the next decade and became the unchallenged authority on the flora of the Hawaiian Islands. By 1911 he had joined the faculty of the College of Hawaii where he taught botany. He published five books and dozens of papers. At least two of his volumes are today considered classics of botanical literature.

Rock was still a wanderer. During the years he was based in Honolulu, he made several excursions to distant

shores to study vegetation, collect plants, and indulge his curiosity about strange places and peoples. In 1920 he became dissatisfied with certain administrative decisions at the college and left the Hawaiian Islands in a huff. Looking for a position on the mainland, he applied to the Gray Herbarium at Harvard which turned him away because it could not afford additions to its staff. His search ended in Washington, D.C., where the Department of Agriculture fulfilled his childhood dream by hiring him as an agricultural explorer and dispatching him to the Far East. In 1922, he made his entrance into China.

Rock lived in wild and troubled provinces in a chaotic nation. He witnessed civil wars, provincial wars, tribal wars, a world war, and a national revolution, not to mention the random savagery of ubiquitous bandits who plundered the Chinese countryside. He became fond of saying that the only constant in China was disorder. The border provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai where he traveled were little known in the Western world and even among Chinese intellectuals congregated in the eastern cities. During his most intense periods of exploration, between December 1924 and August 1929, Rock made three journeys to Choni, where he spent several months as a guest of the Prince (and posed in fur-hatted costume for a photograph that would become widely published); explored the Minshan range and Tebu valleys near the Amnye Machen range and ventured into the Kokonor region; visited the monasteries at Labrang and Ragya, and made three extended trips to Muli. The fruits of one single season's exploration, April to September 1928, serve as an example of Rock's accomplishments: during a journey from Lijiang through Yongning to Muli, into the

Konkaling range, and back to Lijiang, he amassed several thousand plant specimens, over 700 bird skins, 243 color plates, and 503 black-and-white photographs.

Rock traveled with a permanent entourage of Naxi assistants whom he often supplemented with local bearers and, when events warranted, a military escort. Even so he placed himself in great danger, of both natural and human origin: the precipitous mountain trail, the freak spring blizzard, the disease-bearing tick or flea, the murderous bandit, the suspicious tribesman. Rock meticulously recorded his hardships, complaining bitterly in his journals. Nevertheless he pushed on, fascinated by the almost unlimited possibilities for study — a dangerous temptation to dangle before a man of undisciplined energy and curiosity.

Having advanced so far under his own power, Rock was not disposed to recognize his limitations. Much of the area he traversed had never been explored, and the maps he bought had unnerving blank spaces. So Rock drew his own maps. He took compass bearings, measured altitudes, and noted the names of villages and landmarks. He transferred his findings to paper and sent sketches back to the National Geographic Society where his work was recognized by professional cartographers for what it was: the flawed product of a skilled ama-

teur. When the cartographers gently urged him to learn a few simple mapping techniques, Rock balked.

Such intellectual willfulness occasionally led him into sensational blunders. In 1929, still in the service of National Geographic, Rock made three journeys to Minya Konka, the highest mountain in China proper. Other travelers had seen the peak from afar but had never explored it. Rock made three tours around it at the base, using his imperfect methods



1.7



of measurement. Then he cabled society headquarters: "MINYA KONKA HIGHEST PEAK ON GLOBE 30250 FEET ROCK." The society's experts in Washington sensibly refused to take Rock literally and published the mountain's altitude at 25,600 feet. Accurate readings by more scientific methods eventually reduced Minya Konka to 24,900 feet — more than a mile below Rock's original estimate. Thereafter, whenever Minya Konka slipped into a conversation, Rock would hastily change the subject.

It may seem odd that a stubborn, petulant man who ignored expert advice he should have accepted could also be capable of exacting scholarship. But Rock was a man of many contradictions. "Eccentric," a word often used to describe him, is inadequate. Some people thought him mad, and Rock himself worried about his sanity — rightly so, judging from some of his journal entries.<sup>2</sup> Those writings reveal wildly fluctuating moods and reason sometimes so impaired that it is a wonder he survived in China.

Yet he not only survived, he survived in style. Edgar Snow traveled from Yunnanfu to Dali with Rock in 1930. "During the march, his tribal retainers divided into a vanguard and a rear guard," records Snow. "The advance party, led by a cook, an assistant cook, and a butler, would spot a sheltered place with a good view, unfold the table and chairs on a leopard skin rug, and lay out clean linen cloth, silver and napkins. By the time we arrived our meal would be almost ready. At night it was several courses ending with tea and liqueurs."<sup>3</sup> Rock taught his cooks to prepare proper Austrian dishes; he ate quite enough Chinese food when he was being entertained

by provincial governors or mountain potentates. He had his servants carry him into strange towns in a sedan chair so as to impress the inhabitants with his importance. Many astonished peasants believed him to be a foreign prince.

A superb photographer who used the camera sensitively, Rock created work on glass plates and film that remains one of the best visual documents of prerevolutionary western China. And, for all his imperfect methods, he contributed substantially to the geographical knowledge of the regions he explored. On top of all this, he produced a huge body of scholarship with his studies of the Naxi tribe of Yunnan.

Rock was perpetually restless. He never married or involved himself in emotional attachments that might restrict his movements. Whether his wanderlust was the cause or the effect of his solitude is a question for psychologists. In either case, the result was the same: Rock was lonely, but he was free. His life acquired an unconscious rhythm. He could endure about two years of the Chinese wilderness at one



1.5

stretch. Then he would develop some pretext — such as organizing an expedition, purchasing new equipment, or consulting a volume in a Parisian library — for returning to the West. He would gorge himself on operas, fancy hotels, haute cuisine, and social gatherings at which he was usually the star attraction. Yet he never really felt comfortable or quite sure of himself where no one mistook him for a foreign prince. After a few months, he would begin to complain about the "excesses of civilization"<sup>4</sup> and hasten back to what he liked to call the simple life. In China he spent much of his time on exploratory and botanical expeditions in the mountains, sometimes liv-

ing in a tent for months. If he had been asked where his home was, he would have replied that he had none.

But even Rock needed some fixed point, if nothing more than a mailing address and a place to stash his belongings. In 1922 he set up his headquarters near Lijiang in western Yunnan, in sight of the glittering Yulong Xueshan, the Jade Dragon Snow Range. A city of some fifty thousand, Lijiang was the commercial center of a fertile plain. Other botanical explorers before Rock had used it as a base location because of its convenient location at the junction of caravan routes leading to the northern mountains, Tibet, and Burma. The place did not impress Rock very much on first sight: "a conglomeration of mud huts and a marketplace,"<sup>5</sup> he noted glumly. Yet he kept returning to it until finally it was the only spot on the globe that could evoke in him a sentiment resembling homesickness.

The Lijiang plain was the home of the Naxi tribe, believed by some to have descended from the ancient Qiang tribe who once inhabited northeast Tibet. The Naxi had effectively ruled themselves under the reign of their own kings for sixteen centuries until 1723, when the Manchus, covetous of the fertile Lijiang plain, assumed political control. Naxi rulers were deposed, and Chinese officials were sent to Lijiang to administer the area on behalf of the emperor. The Chinese regarded the Naxi as "barbarians," a term they applied at random to all non-Han races. They treated the Naxi accordingly, and two hundred years of Chinese domination changed the tribe. Nevertheless, though they were considerably Sinicized by the time Rock arrived in Lijiang, the Naxi still retained vestiges of a separate cultural identity including a curious religion that seemed to combine elements of tribal shamanism with *Bon*, the heterodox religion of Tibet which claims historical priority over Buddhism.

Initially Rock did not pay much attention to the Naxi. He hired half a dozen tribesmen to help with his expedition and began to train them. Then one day in 1923, attracted by peculiar noises issuing from a neighboring house, he walked over to investigate:

"There were three wizards in full religious dress; in the courtyard they had erected what I would call a garden, twigs of *Abies* [fir] and oak trees stuck in the ground

surrounded by pine sticks dipped in yellow paint; on small, crude pine boards gods were painted, and they were stuck about near the *Abies* twigs. At the end of this square garden was a table full of wheat seed, old eggs and dry peas, and all kinds of figures made of dough. Yellow, white and purple flags were stuck about with prayers written on them. They had a regular menagerie made of flour dough, snakes drinking out of cups, goats, sheep, etc. The priests then danced around this, one using brass cymbals, the other a gong which he struck with a long sword. One was beating a drum, and to all this humdrum foolishness the sick woman looked on.<sup>6</sup>

Characteristically, Rock could not remain a passive bystander. He felt the woman's pulse, pressed a dose of castor oil upon her, and pronounced her cured.

Humdrum foolishness perhaps, but Rock was intrigued. The "wizards," whom the Naxi called *tombas*, chanted from strange manuscripts that stirred Rock's curiosity. His servants informed him that only the *tombas* could read the writing and that one generation of priests passed the knowledge along to the next. Rock hired the *tombas* he had seen to repeat their performance for him, and to explain in detail the ritual as well as the symbols of the manuscripts.

Thus began Rock's study of the Naxi tribe. He started by producing clumsy articles for the *National Geographic*, which the editors in Washington translated from his tortured syntax into National Geographic-ese, eliminating a good deal of the scholarly content in the process. Rock became progressively more captivated by his research, using the intervals between sponsored expeditions to dig deeper into Naxi culture and language. Unfortunately, whereas exploring paid handsomely, his obscure scholarship paid nothing, and he had to draw on the proceeds from the former to support the latter. As he grew older and less vigorous, there were fewer expeditions, so Rock lived off his savings and the sale of artifacts he had picked up during his travels.

By the mid-1930's Rock had graduated from popular articles for the *National Geographic* to proper academic dissertations. His work embraced the history of the Naxi tribe as well as the elucidation and translation of its religious cere-

monies. Before the decade ended, he had completed his manuscript on Naxi history, published several studies of religious ceremonies, and was well into his magnum opus, a Naxi-English encyclopedic dictionary.

When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, Rock exasperated American consular officials by refusing to evacuate Yunnan. With half of China occupied and Chiang Kai-Shek's government beleaguered in Chongqing, Rock stayed on in Lijiang calmly consulting his sorcerer, raising vegetables in his garden, and listening to war bulletins on his shortwave radio.

Despite occasional scares, the fighting never reached Lijiang. Rock's decision to leave China in early 1944 was prompted by his constitutional restlessness rather than by fear of the Japanese. When he turned up in Calcutta, the U.S. Army Map Service immediately sought his expertise. American pilots were flying military supplies into China over the treacherous "Hump," and — his imperfect mapping techniques notwithstanding — Rock's familiarity with the mountains was valuable. Military officers hustled him aboard a top-priority flight to Washington and promised to ship his voluminous belongings after him. Rock arrived safely, but his possessions became war casualties when a Japanese torpedo sank the vessel that carried them. Among the items that drifted to the floor of the Arabian Sea were Rock's translations of religious ceremonies and a rough draft of the encyclopedia.

When word of the disaster reached Rock he nearly collapsed; later he would confide in friends that he had seriously considered suicide. He could not reconstruct the lost work from memory and, having already invested around \$18,000 of his savings in research, he was perilously short of funds. At sixty, he was too old to lead expeditions.

Rock spent most of the year fulfilling his obligations to the Army Map Service while plotting his path back to China. He traveled to Cambridge in late 1944 and told his sad story to Serge Elisséeff, director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, who listened sympathetically. Elisséeff arranged for Harvard University Press to publish Rock's two volumes of Naxi history and considered financing his return to Yunnan to complete the dictionary. When Rock nearly bungled the opportunity by haggling over the terms, the diplomatic Harvard botanist Elmer D. Merrill interceded for his old friend and negotiated

arrangements that paid Rock's way back to China in September, 1946.

Except for one brief interruption, Rock remained in Yunnan for almost three years, laboring under the most difficult circumstances he had ever encountered: civil war and inflation had created economic and administrative chaos in China, and bandits took advantage of the disorder, plundering at will. Even worse, Rock suffered from excruciating facial neuralgia which he never mentioned in his letters to Elisséeff for fear of being ordered back to the United States. Only when the pain became so intolerable that he could no longer chew solid foods did he fly to Boston for surgery, returning immediately to Lijiang once the problem was solved. His single piece of luck during this period was that he found the most efficient *tomba* he had yet to work with and was therefore able to progress rapidly.

Rock spent his last few weeks in Lijiang under a communist regime. The Naxi priests vanished overnight, Rock's interpreter with them. Some went underground; others were apparently killed. Naxi men who had been Rock's servants for years were jeered in public and labeled "imperialist lackeys." Though no one laid a hand on Rock or his belongings, his was clearly an unwanted presence, and his work came to a halt. He packed, presented his servants with small gifts, and departed reluctantly in early August, 1949. Two weeks later, he wrote Merrill, "I will see how things go during the next year and if all is O.K. will go back to [Lijiang] to finish my work....I want to die among those beautiful mountains rather than in a bleak hospital bed all alone." But China had slammed its doors on him, and Rock died in 1962 in a private home in Honolulu.

The final years in China had been sufficient for Rock to make up for the materials lost in the war and to collect documents so that he could finish his encyclopedia when he returned to the West. He arranged for publication of the work by Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente in Rome and subsidized the publisher with his own monies acquired from the sale of books and manuscripts. The first volume appeared the year after his death, the second in 1972. It is an immense work, at once a dictionary of the pictographic language of the Naxi religious texts and a description of a culture on the verge of extinction.



## NOTES

1. Adapted by the author from her article, "Joseph Rock, 'Foreign Prince' of China's Western Provinces," *Harvard Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1982.
2. Joseph Rock's personal diaries are kept at the library of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Scotland.
3. Edgar Snow, *Journey to the Beginning* (1958; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 56.
4. Rock's personal diaries, Edinburgh.
5. Joseph Rock, "Land of the Yellow Lama," *National Geographic* 47 (1925): 451.
6. Rock to David Fairchild, April 22, 1923, The Joseph F. Rock Collection, Records Library, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.



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## Photography credits

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Plates 1.6, 3.3, 3.12, 4.3, 4.4, 4.9, 5.5, 5.6, 6.19, 6.21, 6.25, 7.2, 7.5, 7.8, 7.11, 8.1, 8.3, 8.12, 8.13.

# JOSEPH ROCK (1884-1962)

## BOTANIST, ADVENTURER, ETHNOLOGIST

A self-taught Austrian of humble birth and great ambition, Joseph Rock became an American citizen in 1913 at a time when he was emerging as the pioneer botanist of Hawaii. He first entered China in 1922 while leading an expedition for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. When he left China for the last time in 1949 his interests had long since shifted away from plants towards the ethnology of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. In particular, he was to become the foremost authority on the Naxi people of Yunnan and their unique form of pictographic writing. Rock's travels took him as far north as the Kokonor region, through a number of quasi-autonomous Tibetan enclaves and principalities nominally subject to Chinese rule.

During these years of great political instability in the borderlands, and despite his constant grumbling at the dangers and discomforts of travel, Rock did his best to play the role of the intrepid adventurer as glorified in the popular imagination of the period. The many thousands of superb photographs he took on his journeys were intended to illustrate both his articles for the mass readership of the *National Geographic Magazine* and his research monographs for the scholarly community. A flamboyant but lonely and irascible eccentric, Rock finally left China with the success of the Communist revolution. After further years of restless wandering, he settled again in Hawaii and died there in 1962.

1.1. Joseph Rock in northern Siam, shortly before entering China for the first time. Hue San Laos State, 1922

1.2. A stone gateway forming the border between Gansu province and northwestern Sichuan province. Rock, with military escort and sedan chair bearers, has just crossed into Gansu. 1925, alt. 4,700'

1.3. Rock with five outlaw escorts, highwaymen from the Konkaling range, on the southern slopes of Mount Jambyang. 1928, alt. 15,100' (see p. 14)

1.4. Rock with "mountain chair" and escort at the east gate of Chuxiong, halfway between Kunming and Dali in Yunnan province. 1932

1.5. Rock in his study at Kunming. The scroll behind him portrays Confucius. 1936 (see p. 24)

1.6. The *Kunming*, a Ford Tri-motor aircraft on arrival at the natural landing field north of Lijiang. Rock, hat in hand, chartered the airplane to take aerial photographs of the Yulong Xueshan range (in background) and the upper Yangzi gorges. It was the first airplane to reach Lijiang. 1936

1.7. Rock in the traditional costume of Choni, southern Gansu province. 1928 (see p. 23)

1.8. Rock's boat on the Yangzi River at Huangjiang, above Yibin (Suifu). 1925

1.9. Rock's camp in the Duron Kong Valley, situated in the western region of the Muli kingdom. Mount Jambyang (19,547'), a main peak of the Konkaling range, rises in the background. 1928, alt. 14,700'

1.10. Plant collectors, trained by Rock, change the driers of his plant specimens in the courtyard of his house at Nguluku on the Lijiang plain, northwestern Yunnan. 1922

1.11. Rock's combined bedroom, living room, and dining room at his home in Nguluku. Photographic negatives hang on a string to dry at left. 1927

1.12. Lunch in the field, beneath the Yulong Xueshan range, near Ngadza. 1923, alt. 10,600'

1.13. One of Rock's Naxi assistants in front of a flowering rhododendron in the Konka Longba Valley near the base of Minya Konka (24,900'). The monastery of Konka appears in the background. 1929, alt. 12,600'

1.14. Ropeway across the Yalong River near Baorong. The struggling mules are pulled to shore; the muleteers climb hand over hand after crossing most of the way on a wooden slider. 1929, alt. 7,000'



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# MINORITY PEOPLES OF SOUTHWEST CHINA

Joseph Rock lived for long periods in the remote northwestern area of Yunnan province, where China's greatest ethnic and linguistic diversity is found. The twenty-four non-Han peoples of the province, most of whom speak Tibeto-Burman languages, account today for nearly half of the country's officially recognized minorities. Rock focused his energies primarily on the Naxi, whose former matrilineal tendencies, high rate of "love-suicide," distinct popular religion, and pictographic script are still of great interest to historians and anthropologists alike. South of the Naxi live the Bai (Minchia) with their

center at Dali, the capital of the ancient independent kingdom of Nanzhao. To the west are found the Lisu, Dulong, and Nu along the upper reaches of the Salween; to the north, Tibetan frontier tribes; and to the east, various peoples including the Miao and Yi with their many sub-groups. Though much has changed since Rock's day, the interrelations of all these scattered, overlapping peoples, set against an uneven process of Tibetanization from the west and Sinicization from the east, still provide one of the most complex pictures of human settlement in Asia.

2.1. Bai (Minchia) men using shoulder boards and straps to carry heavy loads. Said to be descended from the original inhabitants of the Nanzhao Kingdom (7th-10th c.), the Bai population is centered on Dali to the south, but extends into many regions of northwestern Yunnan. They number about one million. 1923

2.2. Naxi swimmers with goatskin floats and raft at Daju on the upper Yangzi. The Naxi number about 250,000 and live primarily within the Yangzi's great loop in northern Yunnan. 1929

2.3. The market in Lijiang's main square; the vendors are Naxi women. 1923

2.4. Birch forest in the Ngunze Kong gorge, north of Baorong. The Ngunze Kong flows into the Yalong River. 1929, alt. 13,000'

2.5. Members of the Nu tribe on the banks of the upper Salween (Nu) River at Chonra. The man at center is a local chief. The Nu are a Tibeto-Burman group who now number around 20,000 and live near the Salween. 1923

2.6A & B. Nuosu villagers in their black capes in the Gtoh pine forest, three days north of Lijiang. The Nuosu are a branch of the Yi (formerly called Lolo). 1923

2.7. Farmers of Dzaon, north of Kulu in the Muli kingdom, in front of their stone-and-log houses. The men wear homespun garments of yak hair. 1929, alt. 10,900'

2.8. Two Naxi women in the village of Nguluku, north of Lijiang. The crossed white straps support sheepskin capes. 1923, alt. 9,400'

2.9. A Naxi girl of Baiyiuwa, a village north of Lijiang. 1924

2.10. A Nu with his crossbow on Mount Nisirengo, above the Salween in northwest Yunnan. 1923

2.11. A Moso farmer in his black woolen cape, at Wuqiao, southern Muli kingdom. 1928

2.12. A Moso woman from a wealthy Yongning family in her finest dress. The huge buttons and 'earrings,' suspended from the hair, are silver. The headdress is of amber, coral, and polished stones. 1928

2.13. A family of Bai Miao (White Miao), originally from Guizhou province, outside their home in the village of Ngadza, one day northeast of Lijiang. The mother is at her frame loom. The Miao are a diverse people who live throughout southwest China and parts of Southeast Asia. 1923

2.14. Two Moso boys displaying a fine specimen of the Boneless Pig. After being slaughtered, boned and salted, these huge pigs are used as mattresses for up to a dozen years before being eaten. This custom, originally a protection against famine, still exists today in Muli and Yongning. 1924

2.15. Two wealthy Moso women of Yongning. 1924





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2.6 B





2.7





2.8



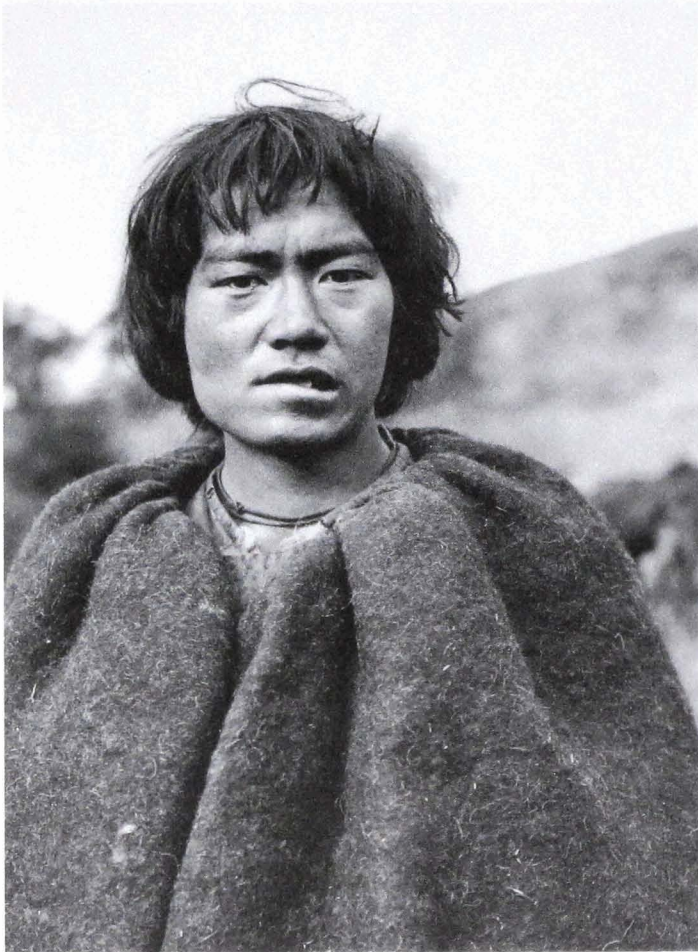
2.9



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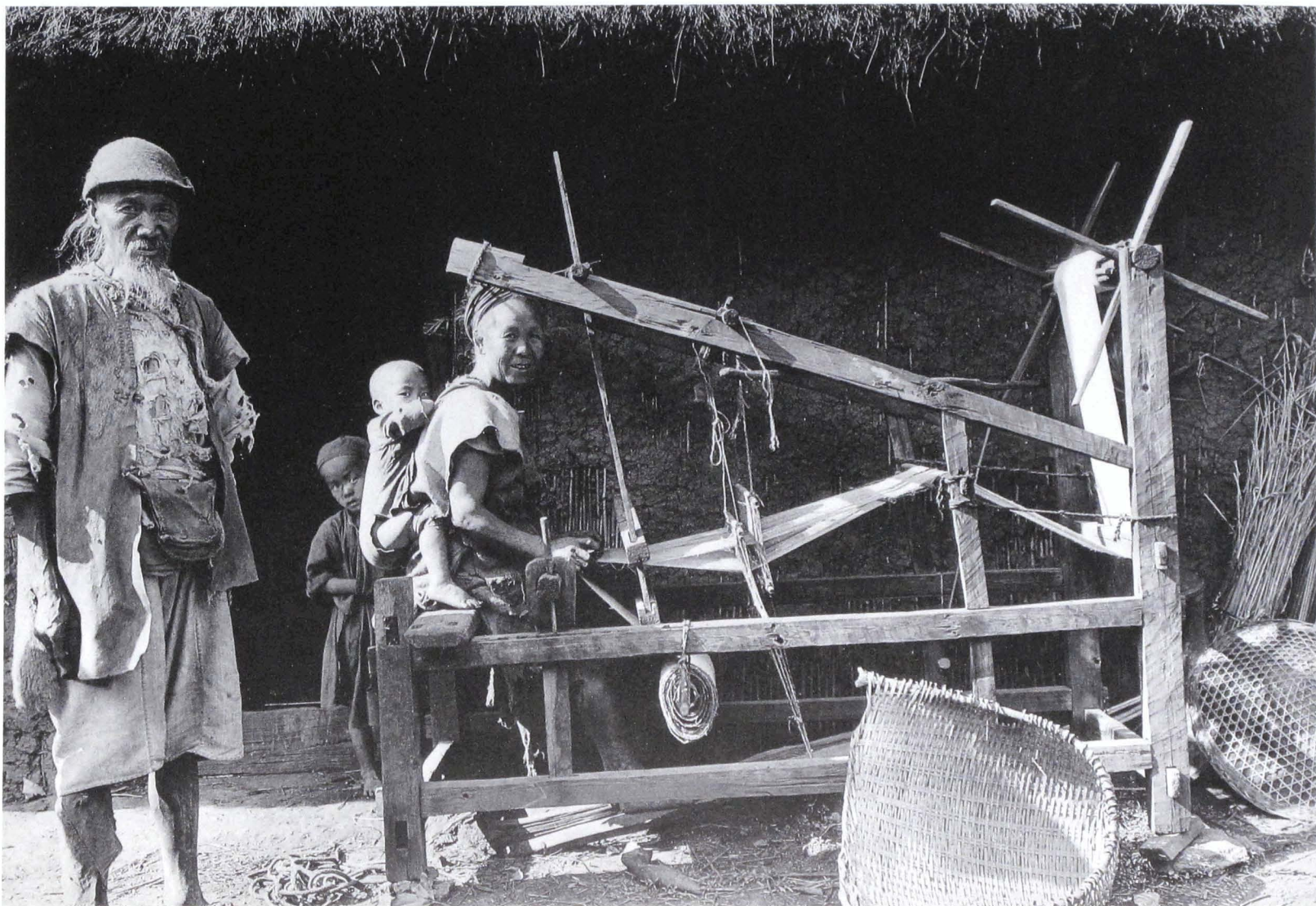


2.11



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2.15



# NOMADS, VILLAGERS, AND PILGRIMS

One of several factors besides language and religion which unite the astonishing number of separately identifiable Tibetan ethnic groups who live scattered along the border with China is their common division into two very different but mutually supportive lifestyles, the nomadic and the sedentary. While the same basic pattern of exchange and interdependence between the highlands and lowlands is found among both the pastoral and farming communities of central Tibet, in the borderlands the picture is more complex due to relations developed by both groups with neighboring Han, Muslim, Mongolian, and minority communities. Historical rivalries,

pressures of population, and direct intervention by successive Chinese dynasties — all were experienced more keenly on the frontiers than at the center. At the same time, the mutual benefits of trade and a tradition of long-distance pilgrimage often brought the Tibetan farmers and nomads in the frontier region into friendly contact not only with each other but also with their non-Tibetan neighbors to the east. Despite the natural balance between the two lifestyles, pastoralism was regarded by all groups as superior. The tough and dangerous life of the border nomads was envied by the farmers for its greater wealth, independence, and strict code of honor.

3.1. Tibetan boy with crossbow; the bolts are stuck in his cap. He comes from the village of Tsorating in Yunnan, on the banks of the upper Mekong. 1923

3.2. A nomad (*drokpa*) whirls a huge prayer wheel outside Baishikaihu Monastery, between Choni and Taozhou in Gansu. 1926

3.3. A nomad boy from the grasslands visiting the monastery of Choni. 1926 (frontispiece)

3.4. The son of a nomad chieftain, with the top of his sheepskins lowered in hot weather to show his rosary and silver amulet box. Kokonor region, 1925

3.5. A pilgrim en route to Kumbum Monastery covers the entire distance by prostrating himself full length on the ground. For some travelers, the pilgrimage took up to six months. Minshan range, Choni territory, 1925

3.6. A nomad woman of the high plateau, her hair pleated into 108 braids. East of Kokonor Lake, 1925

3.7. Two women at the monastery of Tsenga on a pilgrimage near the sacred Konkaling range of Muli. Their hair is greased, arranged in curls and decorated with large chunks of turquoise. 1928

3.8. Tibetan woman and encampment with prayer flag, on the Jianchuan Plain, between Lijiang and Dali in Yunnan. Tibetans come this far south to trade and visit the sacred Mount Jizu. 1923

3.9. Tibetan women outside Choni Monastery. The large decorative disks are made of silver, the earrings of silver and coral. 1926

3.10. A horseman halts in front of the glacial moraine of Mount Chanadorje, one of three holy peaks of the Konkaling range. 1928 (see p. 12)

3.11. A watchtower erected to guard the principality of the old Chala kings. Such towers are found in several regions of eastern Tibet. This one stands south of Jiulong in southwestern Sichuan and probably dates from the 17th century. 1929

3.12. Hunters of the high plateau display a giant bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*). Northeast of Kokonor Lake, 1925

3.13. Beggar-pilgrims at the monastery of Konka making small clay stupas from brass molds. Consecrated barley grains are inserted into the bases. 1929

3.14. Pilgrims on their ascent of the Doker La, a 15,000-foot pass that leads from Tibet into Yunnan province. They are circumambulating the Kawa Karpo range. 1923

3.15. The village of Adong, north of Atunze, northwestern Yunnan. The valley to the left leads to the large Tibetan town of Bathang. 1923

3.16. A nomad bride. North of Kokonor Lake, 1925



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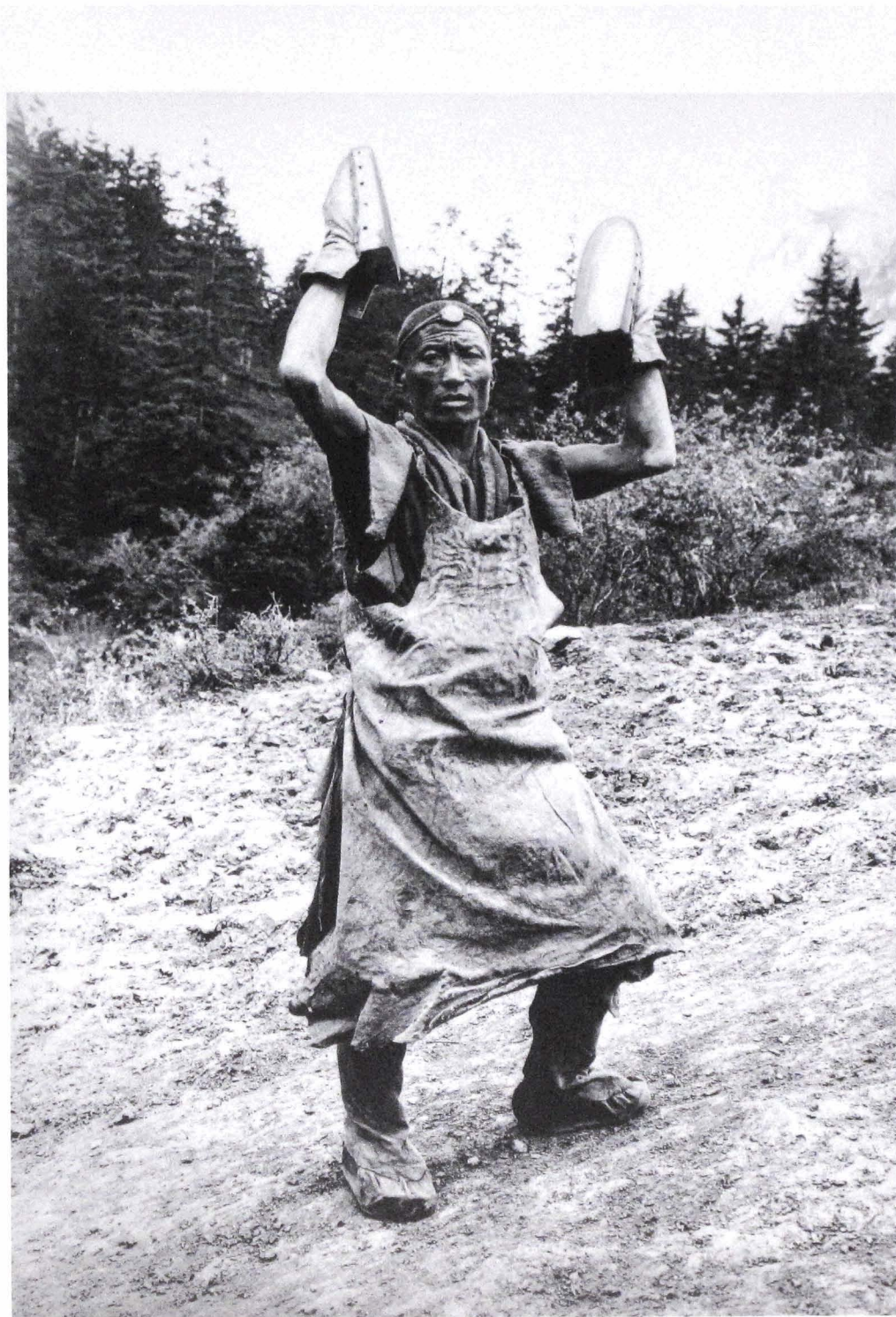


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# WARRIORS, BODYGUARDS, AND BRIGANDS

All the semi-independent Tibetan states, nomadic tribes, and monastic principalities occupying the border region prior to 1950 maintained irregular militias to protect their territories against the incursions of neighbors. Soldiers were conscripted from the lay subjects of local rulers, though monks also sometimes took part in fighting. The militia was easily disbanded when no longer required, leaving only a permanent bodyguard for duty at the court of the local ruler.

Endemic banditry and feuding, regulated by codes and conventions, were integral to the life of some nomadic groups. During the first half of the twentieth century the natural checks and balances which had in the past limited the effect of

violence in the traditional societies were swept away by external pressures. Extensive gun-running following major wars in Europe and Asia brought in rifles and machine guns to replace matchlocks. The aggressive policies of the locally powerful warlord General Zhao Erfeng from 1905-11, the renewed attempts at subjugation under the Chinese Republic, the incursions of Chinese Muslim warlords in the north — all these provoked an increase in lawlessness and wave upon wave of rebellion. It was left to the Communists to bring the entire region for the first time under the direct and unmediated control of a central Chinese government.

4.1. A Moso warrior of Yongning wearing ancient armor of pigskin cut into oblong strips and fastened together with rawhide. The headdress is made of iron sections on a wooden frame. 1929

4.2. Part of Joseph Rock's escort, with matchlock rifles. These men of the Yi tribe turned to banditry when not bought off to protect travelers. Southern Sichuan, 1928

4.3. The young abbot of a monastery belonging to the Bonpo school at Zuosuo, flanked by his personal bodyguards. Southern Sichuan, 1924

4.4. A royal guard of Yongning. Red lacquered pigskin armor such as this is thought to have been worn by warriors since the 13th century. 1929

4.5. Moso men of Yongning in battle dress. At center is a local prince. 1928

4.6. Two soldiers of the Muli king at Kulu Monastery, wearing uniforms trimmed with leopard's fur and hats of panda skin. The matchlock rifles, decorated with silver, have forks of antelope horn attached to serve as props and steady the aim while shooting. 1929

4.7. A soldier of Muli at the village of Djago. 1929

4.8. One of eight Tibetan soldiers who escorted Joseph Rock from the village of Adong, northwestern Yunnan, into more distant Tibetan territories. 1923

4.9. Five Tibetans, armed for defense and hunting, wearing only single tunic-like garments. They are from Pashetenga in the Tebu region of Gansu. 1926

4.10. Highway robbers who had killed two Naxi travelers near the Yangzi gorge below Yulo, only to be captured the next day. Three were executed shortly after this picture was taken; the old man's life was spared. All four are Chinese. 1923

4.11. Two Tibetan prisoners of the Tebu tribe, chained together at the ankles. 1925

4.12. A Nuosu murderer at the prison of Muli. Permanent iron clamps hold the boards of the cangue together; he will wear this for five years, should he live so long. His hands cannot reach his face, so he must be fed a ball of barley flour twice a day by a monk. 1928

4.13. The bodyguard of the king of Muli in front of the palace temple at Muli Monastery. The two lamas in the center are high military officials of the kingdom, an area of 8,000 square miles. 1924





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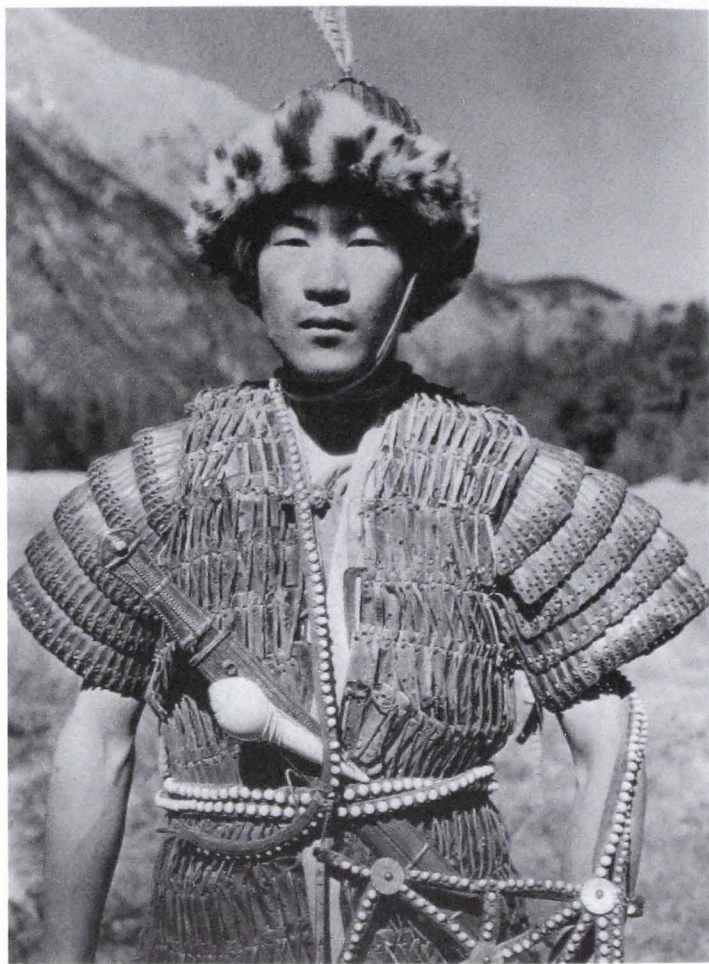


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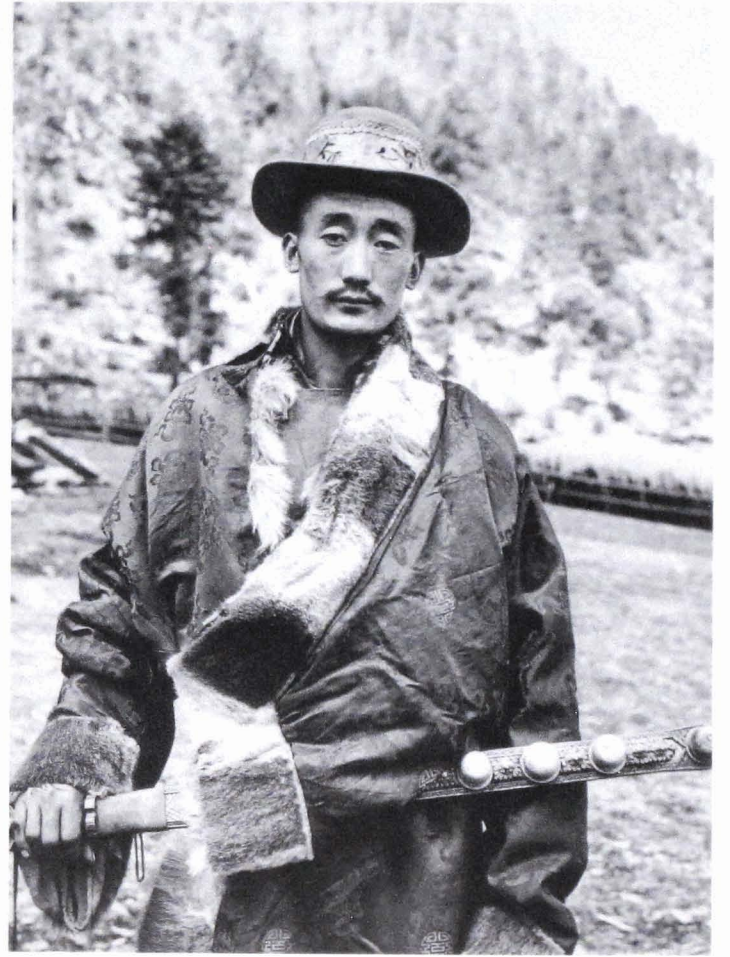


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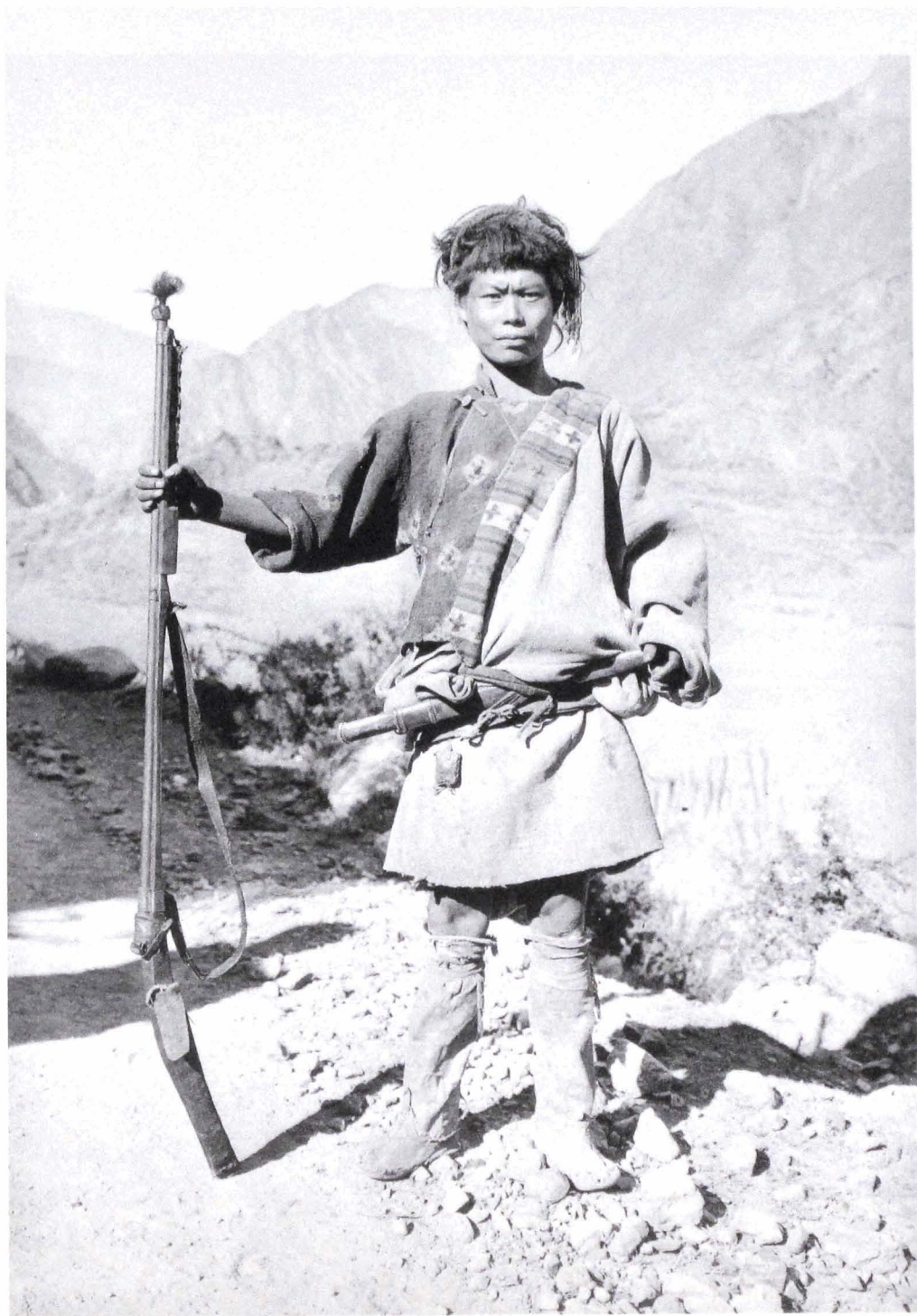




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# RULING FAMILIES

Joseph Rock went to some lengths to cultivate the acquaintance of the ruling families of the semi-independent states of Muli, Choni, and Yongning. Successive emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties had given them Chinese names and invested them as hereditary local officials. In return for regular expressions of loyalty and occasional missions to pacify their unruly neighbors, they were left in complete control of their territories, where they all served as important patrons of local branches of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. The “king” (*gyalpo*) of Muli was a monk whose court shifted annually among three large monasteries. The perpetuation of the

family lineage was left to his brothers. Similarly the Choni “chief” (*pönpo*), though a layman, united in his person both the lay and ecclesiastical government of his huge monastic principality, inhabited by a mixed population of Tibetans and Chinese. The “governor” (*zong guan*) of Yongning, whom Rock regarded as his best friend in China, had formerly been a monk of Ganden Monastery in Lhasa before returning to rule his subjects of the Moso tribe. Rock had less sustained contacts with some of the hereditary chieftains of nomadic tribes during his journeys to the north.

5.1. The *zong guan* (ruler) of Yongning on his horse in front of Yongning Monastery. He heads the Moso people along the Yunnan-Sichuan border. 1928

5.2. The queen of Nyorop’hu Island, secret wife of the *zong guan*. She holds his last son, an important incarnation of Yongning Monastery. 1928

5.3. The prince of Choni in front of his residence. 1925

5.4. The official residence of the prince of Choni, behind a decorated wall in the center of the village of the same name. The monastery is at the upper right. 1925, alt. 8,000'

5.5. A young aristocrat of Choni and his fourteen-year-old bride in their finest silk clothes and jewelry. The prince wears a fox fur hat and *chuba* trimmed with leopard fur. 1925

5.6. The ruling family of Choni posing for a formal portrait. The prince is at the table; his three favorite wives are seated. Although Tibetan, they adopted Chinese dress and style. 1926

5.7. The chief military official of Muli, who was the king’s brother-in-law, flanked by two bodyguards. Djago, 1929

5.8. The King of Muli enthroned in the palace reception room at Muli Monastery. Behind him is a mural of Hoshang, the Laughing Buddha of Chinese tradition. 1924

5.9. The King of Muli in front of his tent, en route from Muli Monastery to Kulu. 1928

5.10. The sister of the King of Muli, flanked by attendants. Djago, 1929

5.11. The last king of Muli photographed at the home of Joseph Rock in Kunming, capital of Yunnan. 1936

5.12. A copper-gilt reliquary stupa containing the remains of a former Muli king. The chorten is situated above the assembly hall of Kulu Monastery. 1928

5.13. Chief of the Butsang Golok tribe and his wife. Qinghai, 1929 (see p. 15)



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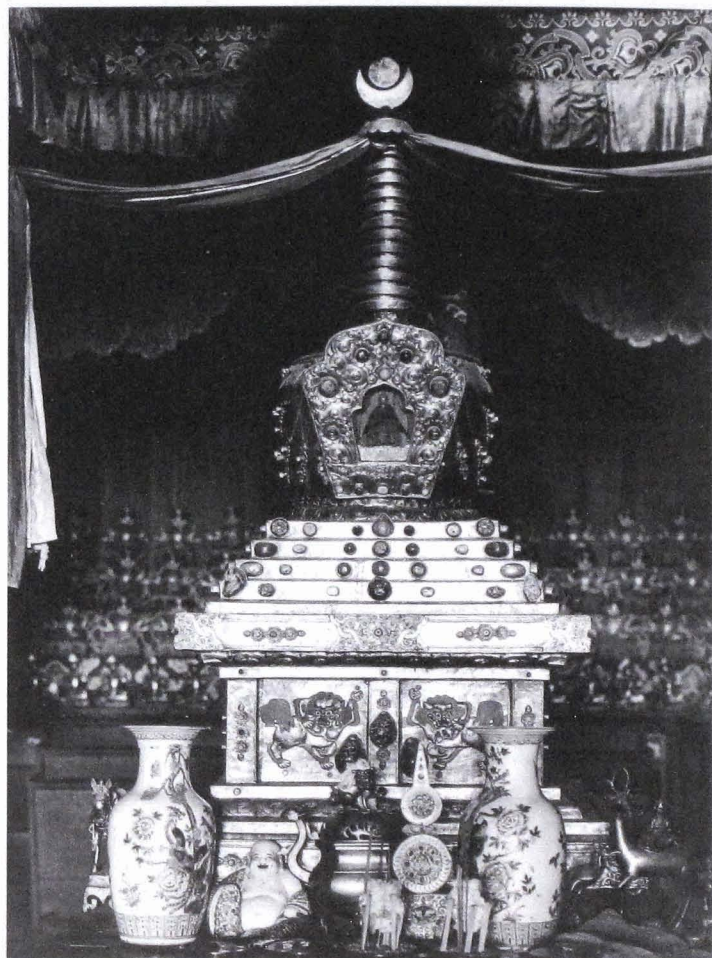


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# BUDDHIST MONKS AND MONASTERIES

Local traditions maintain that Buddhism was gradually introduced into the Sino-Tibetan frontier area from both central Tibet and China during the seventh and eighth centuries AD. In contrast to central Tibet, however, the faith on the eastern periphery never suffered an eclipse when the early Tibetan empire collapsed in the ninth century, so it has enjoyed a continuous history down to the present.

The same monastic schools which developed in central Tibet from the eleventh century, were implanted in eastern Tibet and the borderlands. Local branches of these so-called "unreformed" schools, including important pockets of the heterodox Bonpo who claim historical priority over Buddhism, continued to survive despite the rapid ascendancy and threat of the Gelugpa school founded by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419).

After the triumph of the Gelugpa under the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1642, the school was deliberately patronized by the Qing emperors as a means of controlling the frontier peoples. For this reason some of the largest Gelugpa monasteries

(Labrang, Kumbum, and Choni) were found in border areas where they were deeply involved in the government of the surrounding population just as they were in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. Missionary lamas of the Kagyupa (School of Oral Transmission) also continued to be active in later periods. Of special interest to Joseph Rock were the monasteries founded among the Naxi of Lijiang by the hierarchs of the Karmapa lineage of this school in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

It is clear from his writings that Rock was both attracted and repelled by what he took to be "sorcery" or "necromancy," vague terms he applied indiscriminately to the tantric rituals of monks, the mediumship of oracles, and the animism of tribal religions. His scholarly talents were best demonstrated in his unsurpassed labors on the Naxi pictographs rather than in his writings on the history and religion of the Tibetan borderlands. Nevertheless, his photographs of religious life on the frontier remain a valuable and enduring legacy.

6.1. The treasurer of Konka Monastery. The Tibetan text displayed on the wall is a eulogy of the sacred area surrounding the monastery. 1929

6.2. The chanting master (*umdze*) of Yongning Monastery. 1928

6.3. A lama in the robes and headgear of the Black Hat (*shanak*) dance holds a ritual dagger in his left hand and a ceremonial axe in his right. The dance is performed at the beginning and end of the festival dedicated to Tsongkhapa, at Choni. 1927

6.4. Three Naxi lamas of Kangpu Monastery in northwest Yunnan, with prayer wheels and rosaries in front of a way-side shrine. 1923

6.5. A lama of Zhongdian Monastery en route from Lijiang to his home. He sits in the attitude of blessing, holding a volume of religious writings, wrapped in cloth and bound between two boards. 1923

6.6. A huge appliqué *thangka* of Tsongkhapa displayed at Yongning Monastery to celebrate his festival, which commences on the 25th day of the 10th lunar month. 1928

6.7. Chanting monks, led by a lama on his throne, perform the last part of the Jinsek (Burnt offerings) ceremony at the monastery of Djago in southwestern Sichuan. 1928

6.8. At sunset some fifty monks gather in a circle below the monastery of Muli. Drums and trumpets accompany a ritual to appease the local spirits. 1924

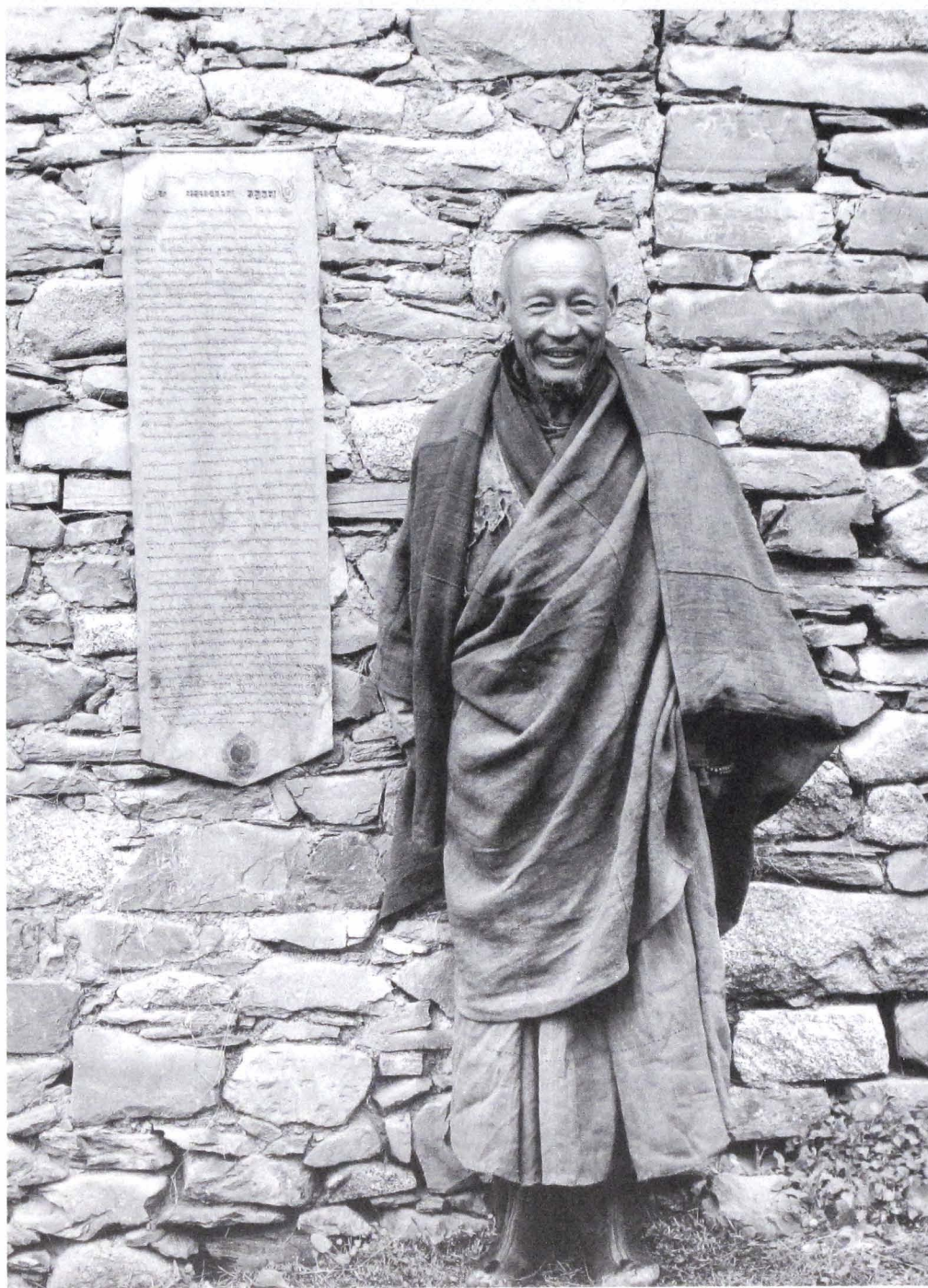
6.9. Monks with puttees and bare feet stand in front of the remote Champutong Monastery in the gorge of the Salween River, only ten miles from Burma. 1923

6.10. Monastic prefects (*dobdob*) keep order with clubs and swords during festivals at Choni Monastery. 1927

6.11. More than 350 monks gather on high, alpine slopes above the monastery of Ragya to celebrate the festival of Amnye Chungun, patron deity of the monastery. The celebration takes place on the 11th day of the 4th lunar month. 1926, alt. 11,500'



- 6.12. A monk on the banks of the upper Yellow River repeatedly raises and lowers a board on the surface of the water, each time "printing" the river with images of Buddhist deities which are carried away downstream. 1926
- 6.13. A monk of Tungchuling Monastery. Northwestern Yunnan, 1923
- 6.14. Konka Monastery lies at the head of the Konka Longba Valley, below the huge Minya glacier. The main building houses a fresco of Dorje Lodrö, mountain god of Minya Konka. 1929, alt. 13,300'
- 6.15. Northeast section of the great Labrang Monastery in Gansu, showing the vast extent of this monastic city. It housed nearly 3,000 monks. 1928
- 6.16. Fuguo Si (Chieh-t'o-ling), a monastery of the Kagyupa school on the southeastern slopes of the Yulong Xueshan range, was one of five main centers of this school in the Lijiang area. 1923
- 6.17. The monastery of Kopati (Totenling), a two-day walk east of Muli Monastery, stands amidst fruit, willow, and poplar trees. 1928
- 6.18. This main temple of Kumbum (Ta'er Si) Monastery in Qinghai Province has gilded roofs and contains a highly venerated image of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa school. 1925
- 6.19. Zhiyun Si, one of the five principal monasteries of Lijiang, situated southwest of the town in the village of Lashiba. It is now occupied by a middle school. 1923
- 6.20. The main assembly hall of Dorjedra Monastery, built of stone and decorated with great curtains of woven yak hair. Near Tachienlu (Kangding), an important trading town on the China-Tibet caravan route. 1929
- 6.21. The monastery of Ragya, on the banks of the Yellow River in Qinghai. Founded in 1708, Ragya had over 800 monks. 1928
- 6.22. A nine-story stone building at Hezuo (Hei-ts'o) Monastery, on the high grasslands between Labrang and Taozhou. The top floor holds the mummified body of a famous lama. Two monks are circumambulating the building on a narrow ledge below the roof as a means of accumulating merit. 1925
- 6.23. The monastery of Muli, capital of the kingdom of the same name, in southwestern Sichuan. The monastic town housed 700 monks. 1928, alt. 9,600'
- 6.24. The monastery of Yongning on a plain close to the Yunnan-Sichuan border. The large building is the main assembly hall; smaller houses are quarters for the monks. 1929, alt. 9,500'
- 6.25. A view within Choni Monastery in southern Gansu. Hills of the Tao valley rise in the background. 1925 (see p. 17)
- 6.26. The great multi-chapeled stupa at the western limit of Labrang Monastery. 1925
- 6.27. Inside the main assembly hall of Choni. Decorations and elaborate offerings of sculpted butter commemorate the death of Tsongkhapa. He is represented in the central appliqué hanging. 1925



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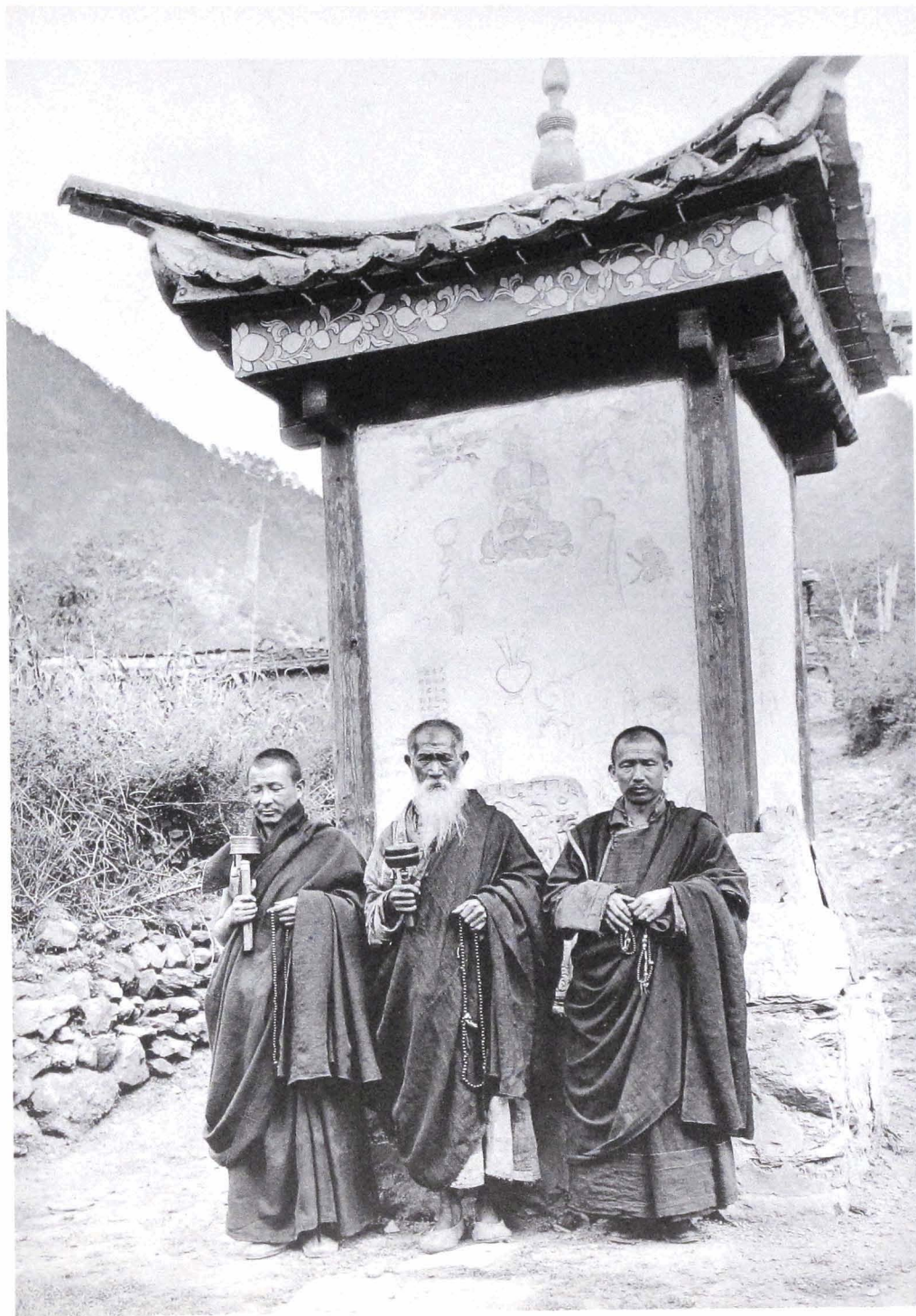


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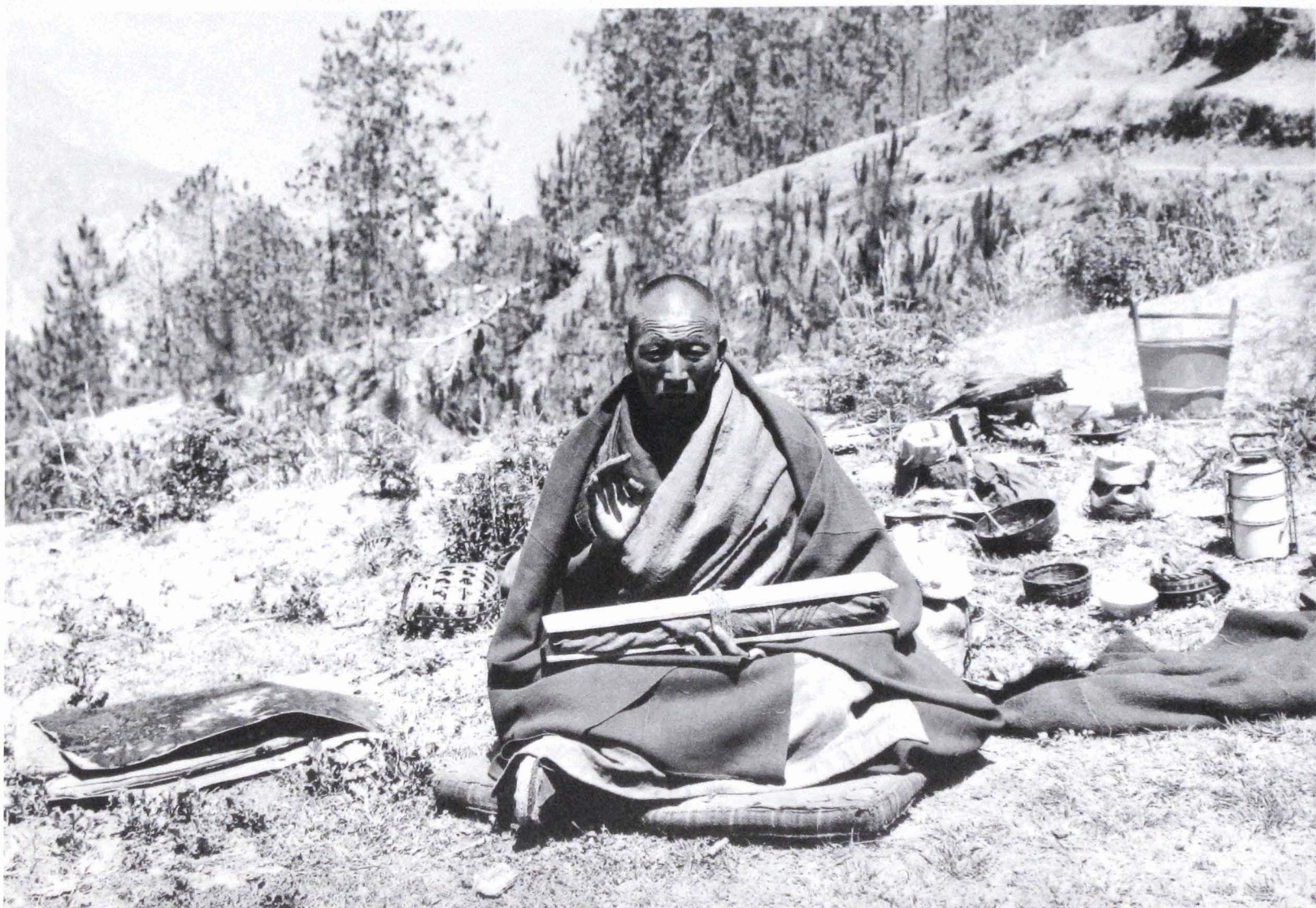
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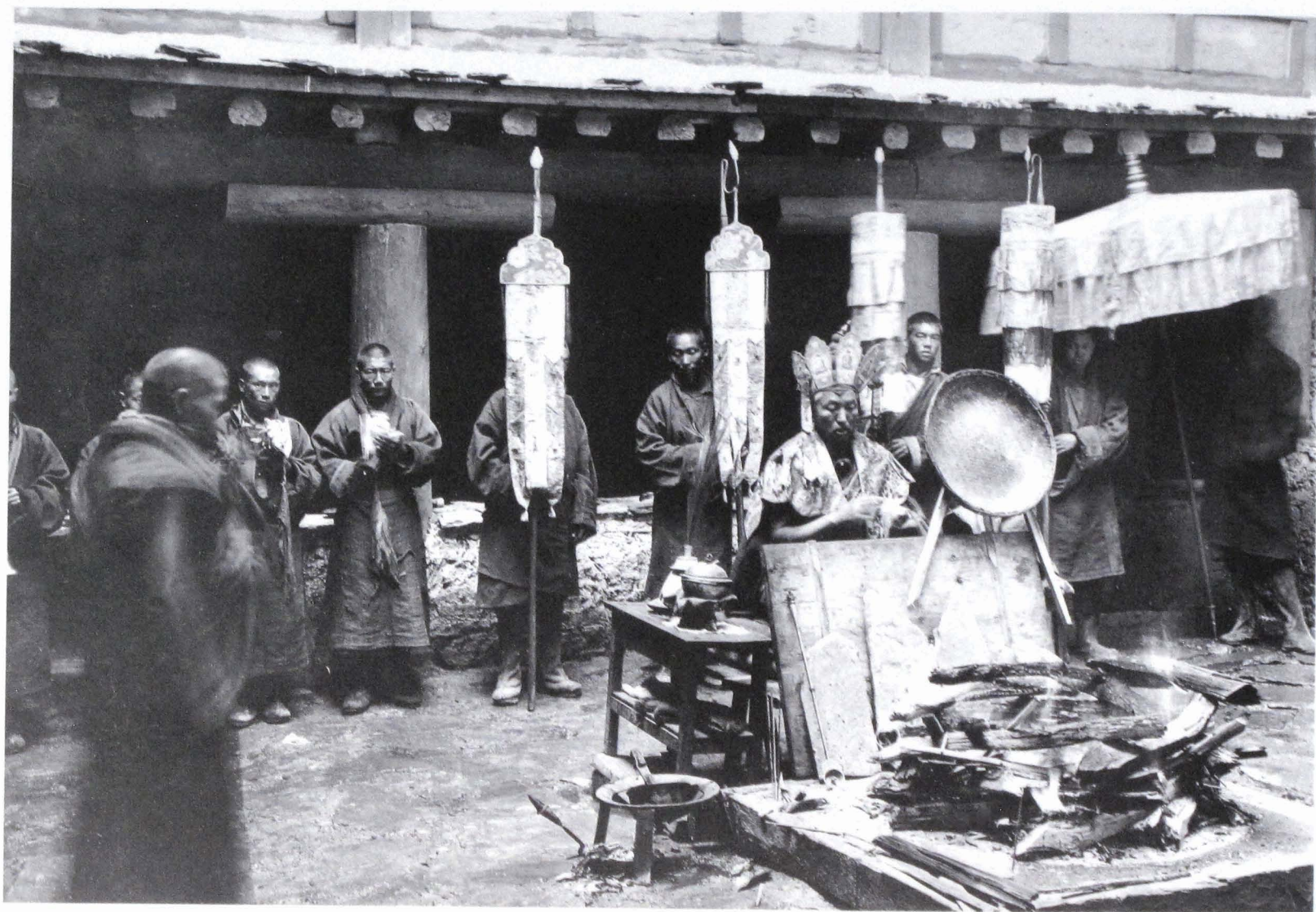
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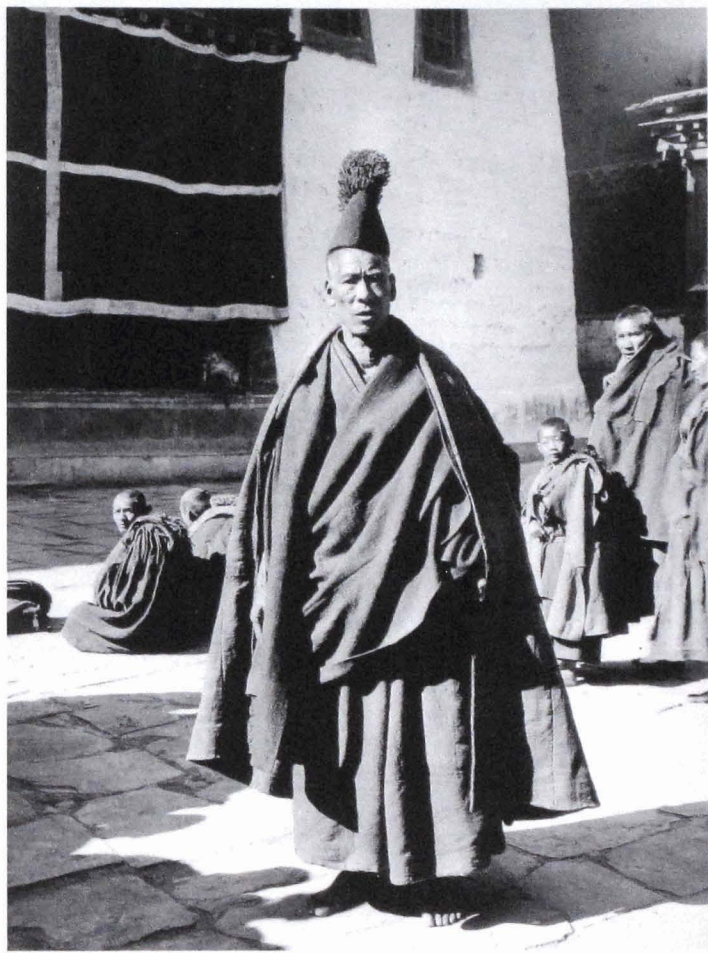


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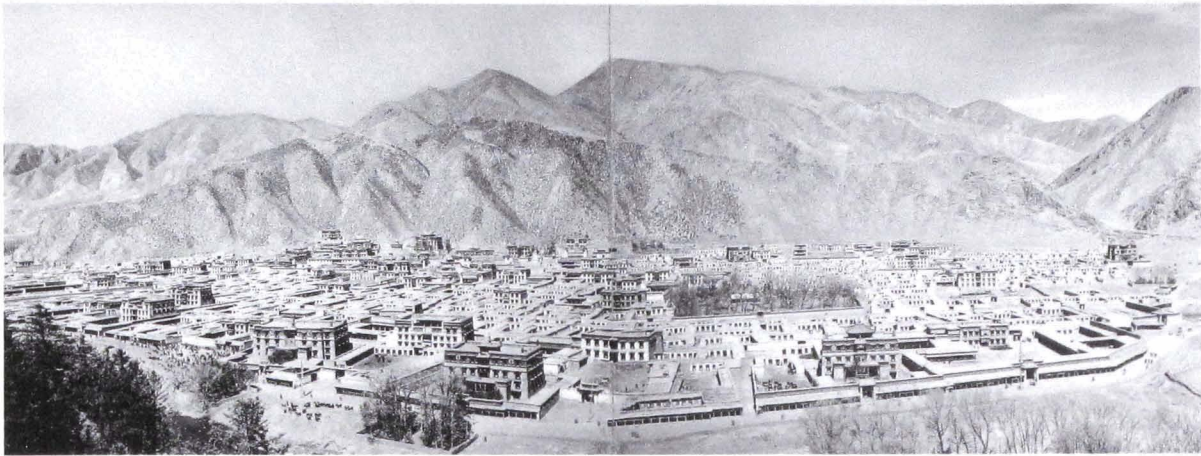
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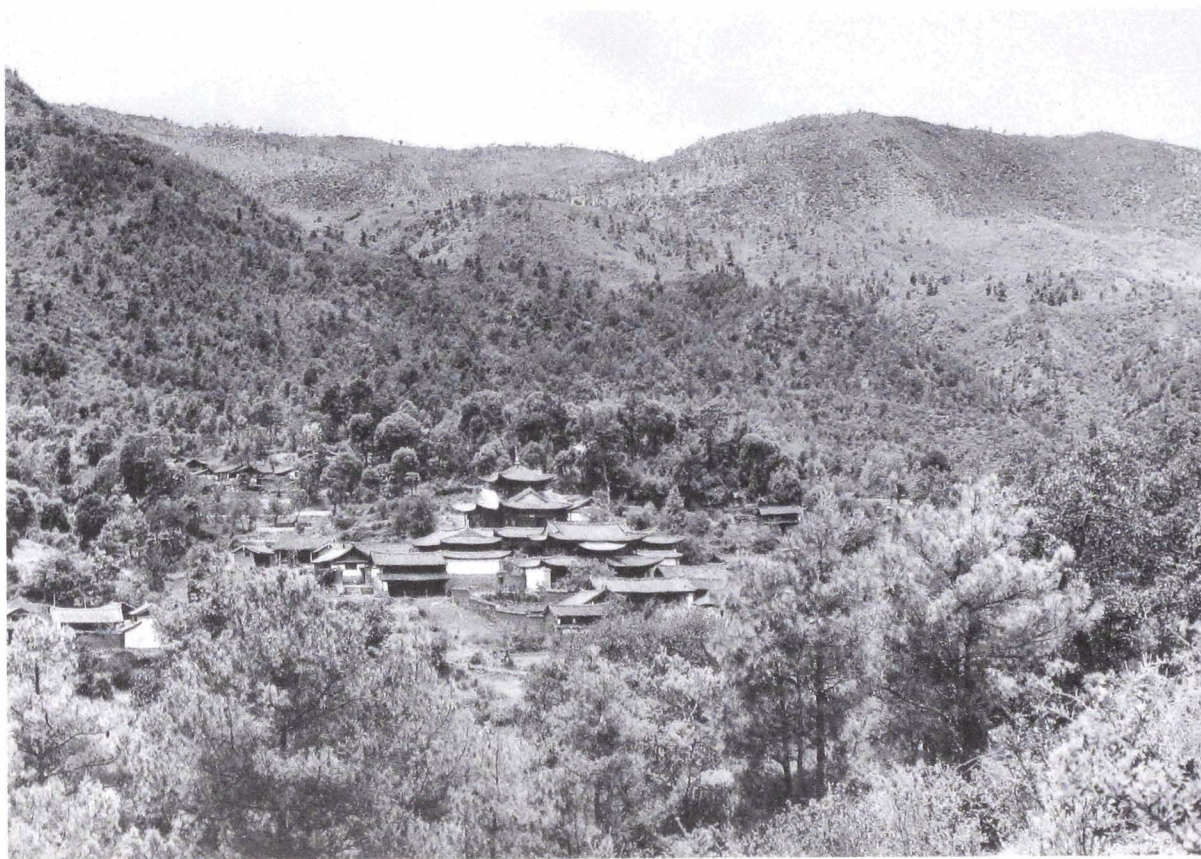


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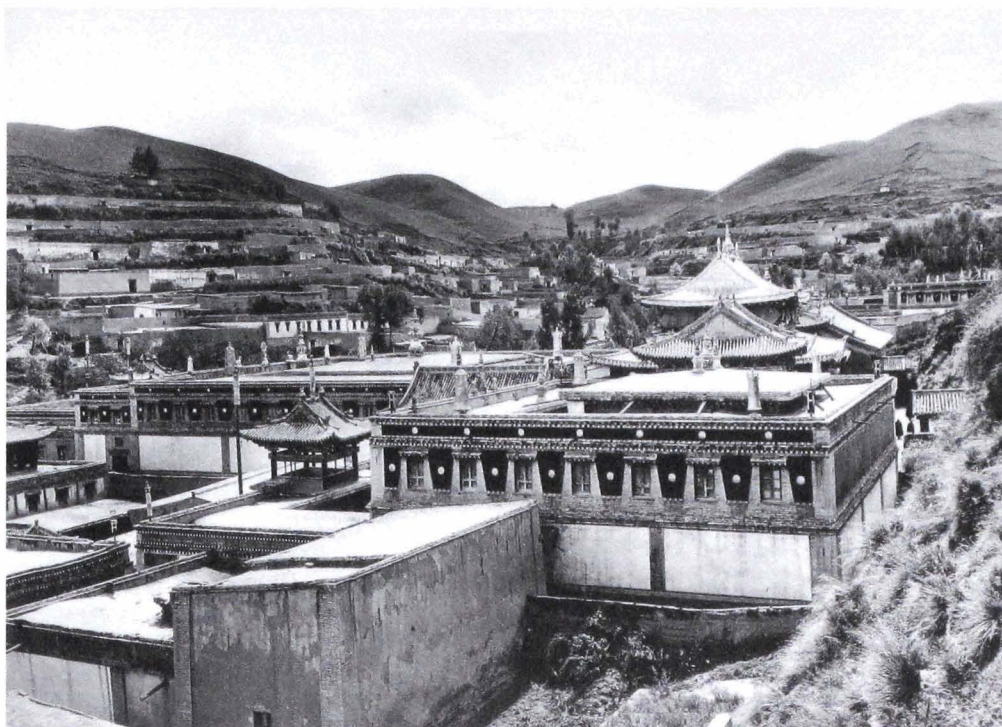
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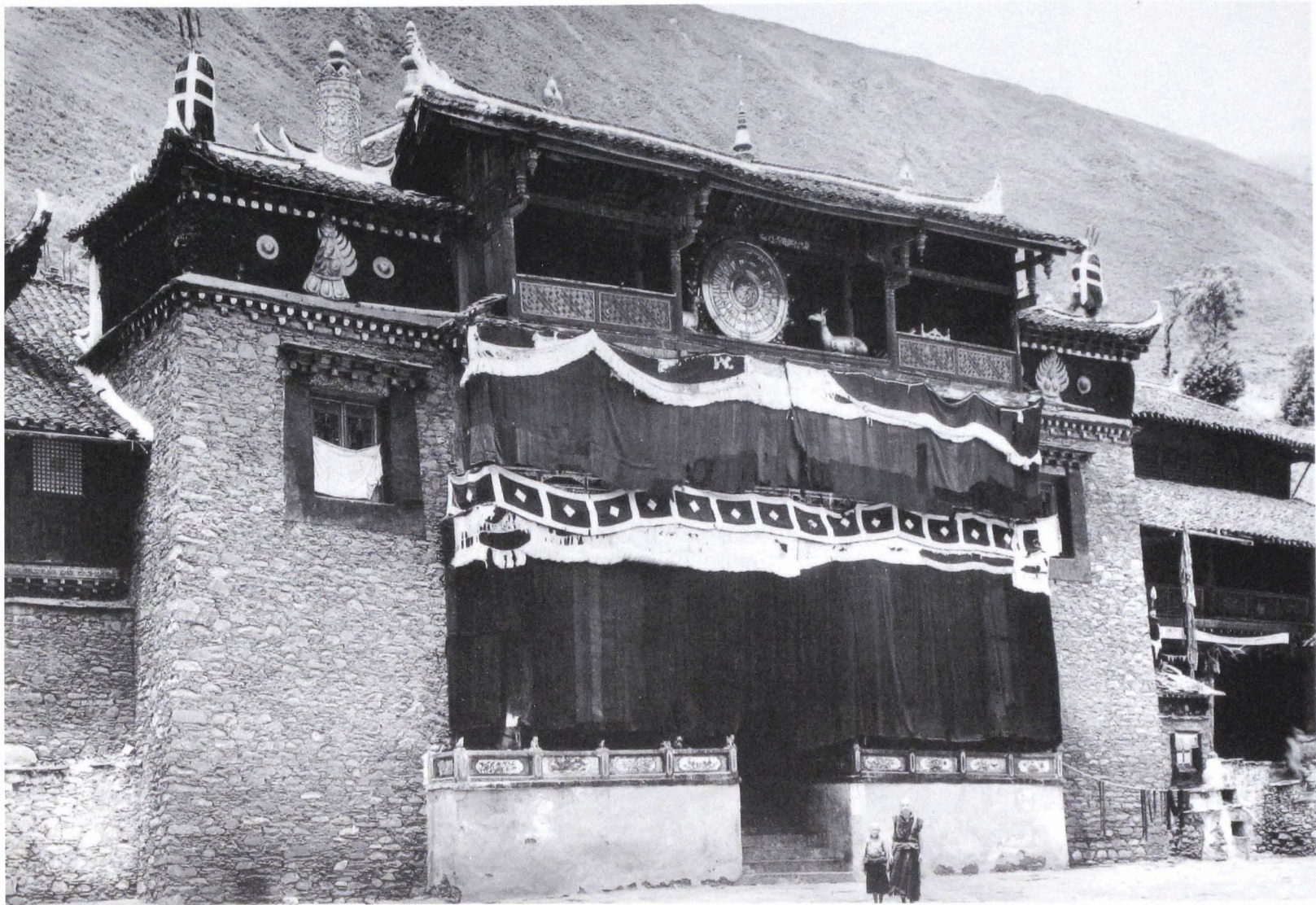


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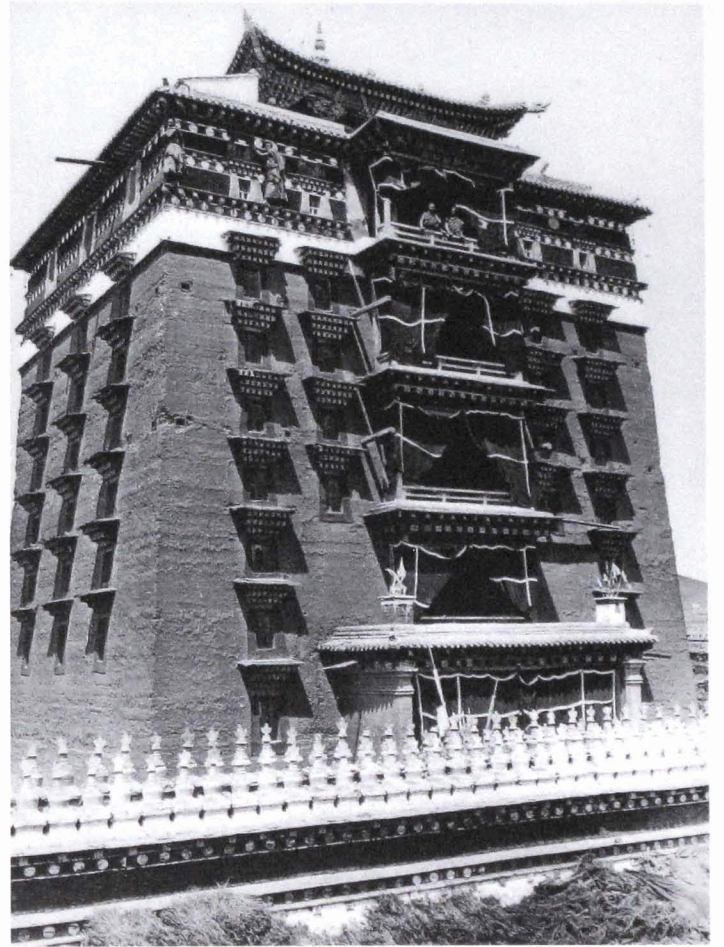


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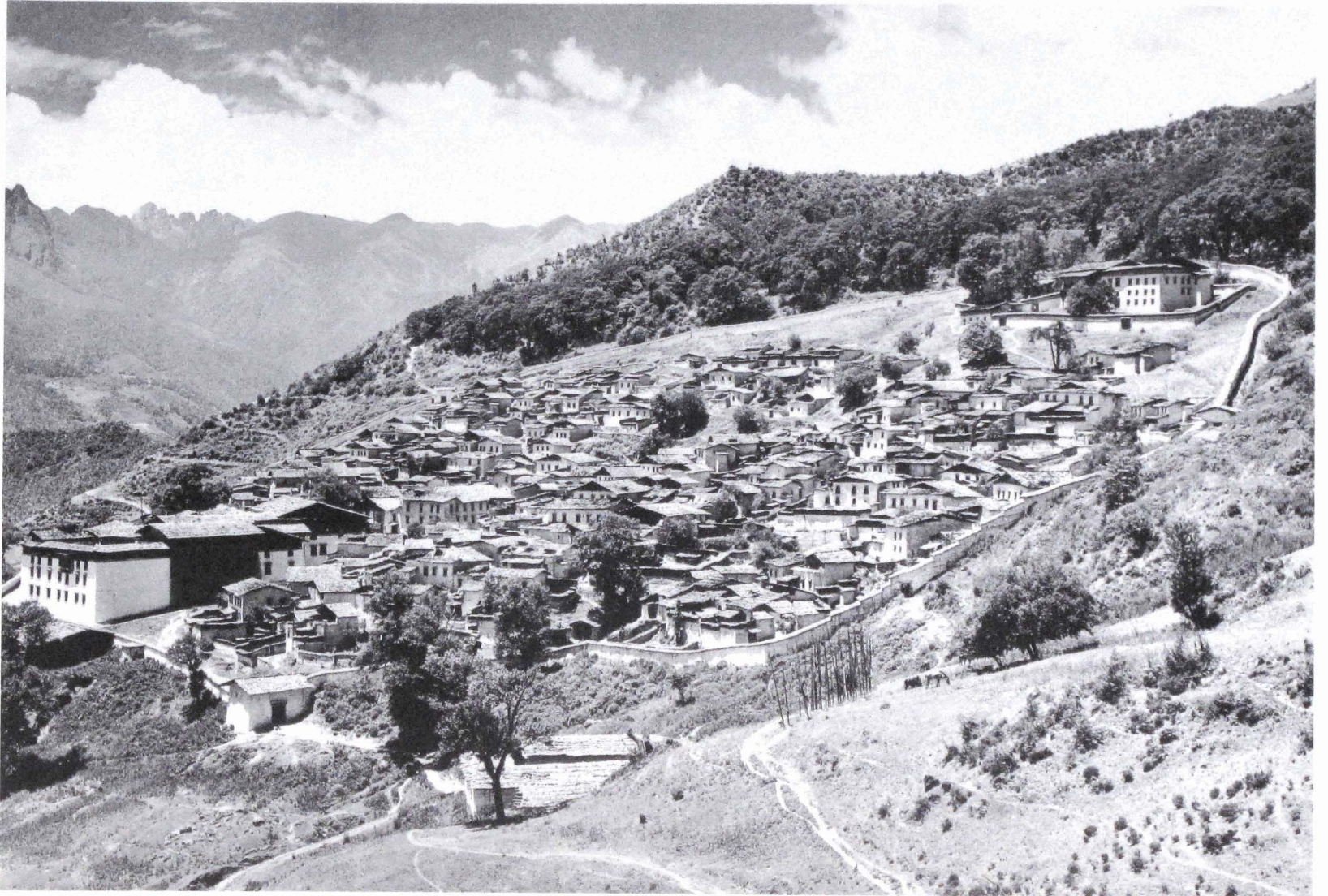


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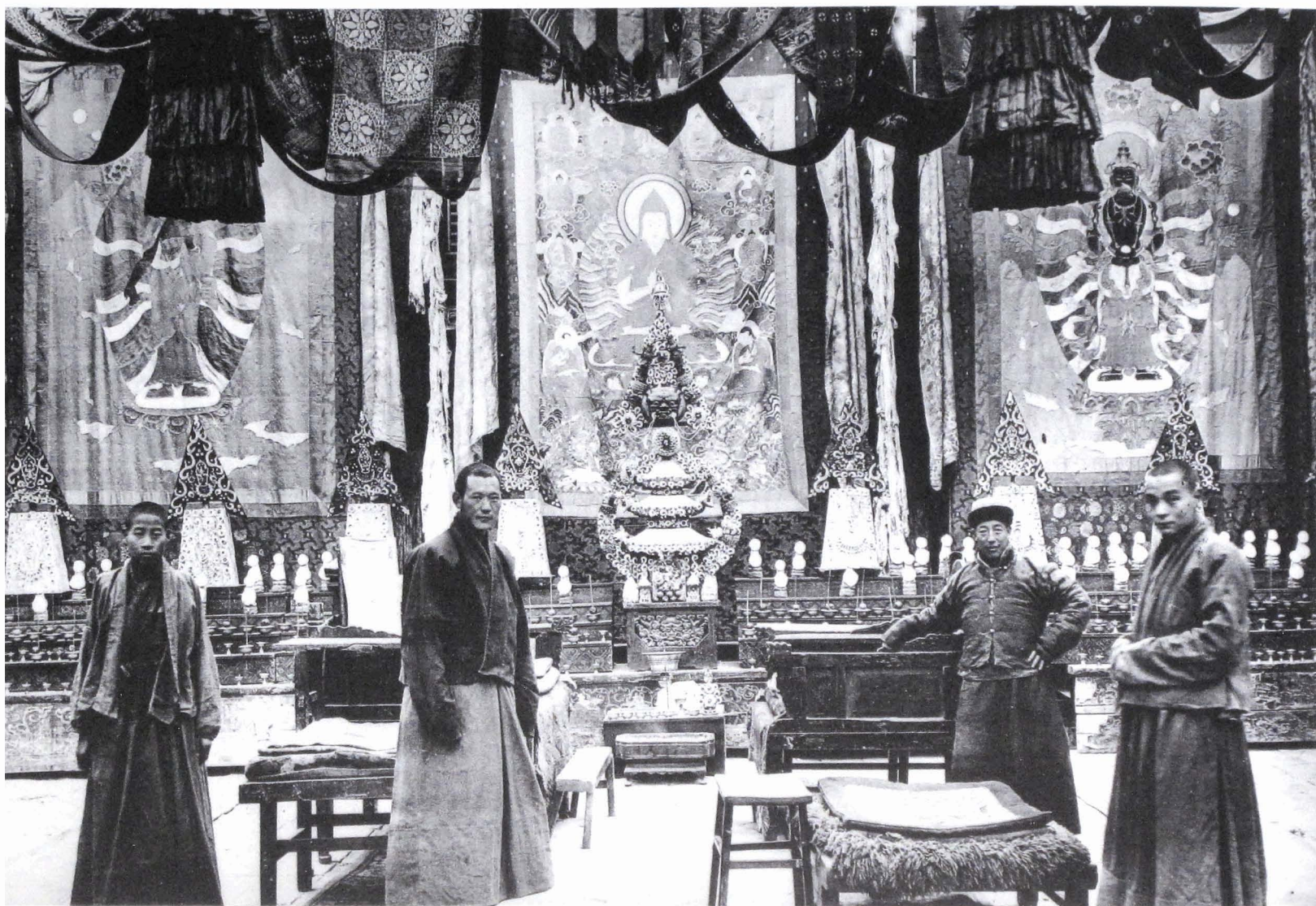


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# ORACLES, WIZARDS, AND VILLAGE PRIESTS

A variety of ritual specialists were to be found in the border region operating outside or on the fringe of monastic society. Their common task was to avert calamities by placating or coercing the malevolent spirits responsible for disease, famine and other disasters. Buddhist monks also played a similar defensive role, but it was often to the local specialist and his particular skills that communities turned. Loose fraternities of hereditary Tantric priests of the Nyingmapa and Bonpo schools operated at a halfway point between the monastery and the village, bridging the gap between them. Although the cult of the oracular mediums (*sungma*) was centered in the monasteries,

they were responsible for identifying the afflictions of lay society. The rituals of some specialist “wizards” (notably the *tomba* of the Naxi, who were of special interest to Rock) constituted highly developed ethnic religions. The apparently close relationship of their tradition with those of the Bonpo school is still the subject of inquiry. Many of these cults served to express and attempted to resolve the tensions and contradictions in society. Inevitably they sometimes ran counter to the scholarly and political concerns of formal monasticism. But just as often these different strands in the religious life of the region complemented each other in harmony.

7.1. The oracle (*sungma*) of Yongning. At the moment of possession, he shakes, trembles, rolls his eyes, barks, and sticks out his tongue. The metal mirror on his chest reveals the image of the approaching spirit, Dorje Drake. 1928

7.2. A Bonpo lama in a state of trance. In his left hand are trumpet, dagger, and bell; in his right are drum, chopper, and the hair of 100 dead and 100 living people. He is also said to carry blood from a black ass, earth from a black stupa, and black soil from the place where bodies are chopped up to be fed to vultures. Ragya Monastery, 1926

7.3. The oracle of the deity Dorje Drake stands on a tiger skin rug holding bow, noose, and sword. During his possession he conveys messages or instructions from the deity. Yongning, 1928

7.4. The oracle of the deity Balung Choje. A native of Zhongdian in northwest Yunnan, he is the son of a bandit chief. Possession takes place as soon as he dons

his costume, commencing with violent fits and convulsions. Yongning, 1928

7.5. A Bonpo priest on a visit to Choni Monastery to exorcize malevolent spirits. 1927

7.6. A young Bonpo priest from the region of Zuosuo, just north of Yongning, where the Bonpo school predominates. 1928

7.7. An itinerant priest of the Nyingmapa school, with bell and drum. 1929

7.8. A wizard (*tomba*) of the Naxi in trance, with a gong. Nguluku, 1931

7.9. Two *tomba* with painted faces, dressed in martial clothes, portray military generals. They are the guardians of Muan Llu Ndu A Sse, God of Heaven, depicted in the statue between them. Nguluku, 1924

7.10. *Tomba* in full regalia perform the Whirlwind Dance around the Naxi gods of heaven and hell. Nguluku, 1924

7.11. A *tomba* does battle with an effigy. Nguluku, 1924

7.12. A *tomba* performs a ritual dance wearing a diadem; each of the crown's five panels depicts a principal Naxi god. The warlike dance consists of half revolutions. Time is kept by throwing the sword into the air and letting it rhythmically strike the cymbal. Nguluku, 1926

7.13. *Nda-pa* priests (close cousins of the Naxi *tomba*) perform the Zhi-wua-gka (Burning of the demons) ceremony on the Yongning Plain. Like other *Nda-pa* ceremonies, the ritual ends with much drinking. 1928

7.14. Priests perform an apotropaic ritual high in the mountains above Waerhdje Monastery in the Kingdom of Muli. A votive offering of colored barley dough is at the center. Participants look on. 1928





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# INCARNATE LAMAS

The common Buddhist belief in the principle of rebirth gave rise to the uniquely Tibetan institution of the recognized reincarnation (*tulku*). Certain lamas who are deemed to be bodhisattvas, consciously deferring their own entry into nirvana until all sentient beings achieve enlightenment, are believed to reincarnate in a series of bodies. New incarnations are identified by a combination of prophecy, portent, and tests of recognition. It is clear that on one level the institution served as a means of perpetuating and reinforcing political power. The “boy gods,” as Rock termed them, were often discovered in the families of the nobility. All came to inherit the personal wealth

and spiritual traditions carefully preserved by those same disciples who had served them in previous lives. The powerful lineages thus formed ran parallel to the primary form of ecclesiastical succession which passed from master to pupil. In the older semi-celibate schools, a monastic throne could be handed down from father to son or from uncle to nephew. By far the greatest number of recognized reincarnations living in the border region belonged to the dominant Gelugpa school. Joseph Rock claimed Labrang Monastery had no fewer than fifty out of a community of three thousand monks.

8.1. A young incarnation (*tulku*) mounted on a decorative horse. 1928

8.2. The old *tulku* of Dzangar Monastery riding inside a horse-borne palanquin, below the Kemar Pass, Gansu. 1926, alt. 12,400'

8.3. Lakatsang, the 81-year-old incarnation of Dzangar Monastery, sits with a young *tulku* of the same monastery in front of his yurt temple on the grasslands of southern Gansu. 1926

8.4. Shangdza, chief *tulku* of Ragya Monastery, considered the incarnation of

the mother of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa school. 1926

8.5. The main incarnation of Muli, the son of a beggar family, at Waerhdje Monastery. 1928

8.6. The *tulku* of Tungchuling Monastery. Northwest Yunnan, 1923

8.7. Khenpo Sharon, abbot of Kumbum Monastery and an important incarnation. A prayer wheel and offerings of grain lie before him. 1925

8.8. The *tulku* of Yongning Monastery, whose lineage is traced back to the great monastery of Drepung, near Lhasa. 1928

8.9. Jamyang Shepa, highest incarnation of

Labrang Monastery, considered an incarnation of the bodhisattva Manjushri. 1925

8.10. This small boy was declared by the 13th Dalai Lama to be the Tsemoling incarnation, whose sect is in Lhasa. 1927

8.11. The six-year-old *tulku* of Guya Monastery, near Choni. 1927

8.12. Lu Zo, last son of the *zong guan* (ruler) of Yongning, declared by authorities in Lhasa to be the incarnation of a high lama of Drepung Monastery. His investiture took place in February, 1932. Lu Zo is flanked by his brother and sister. 1934

8.13. An unidentified *tulku*. 1925



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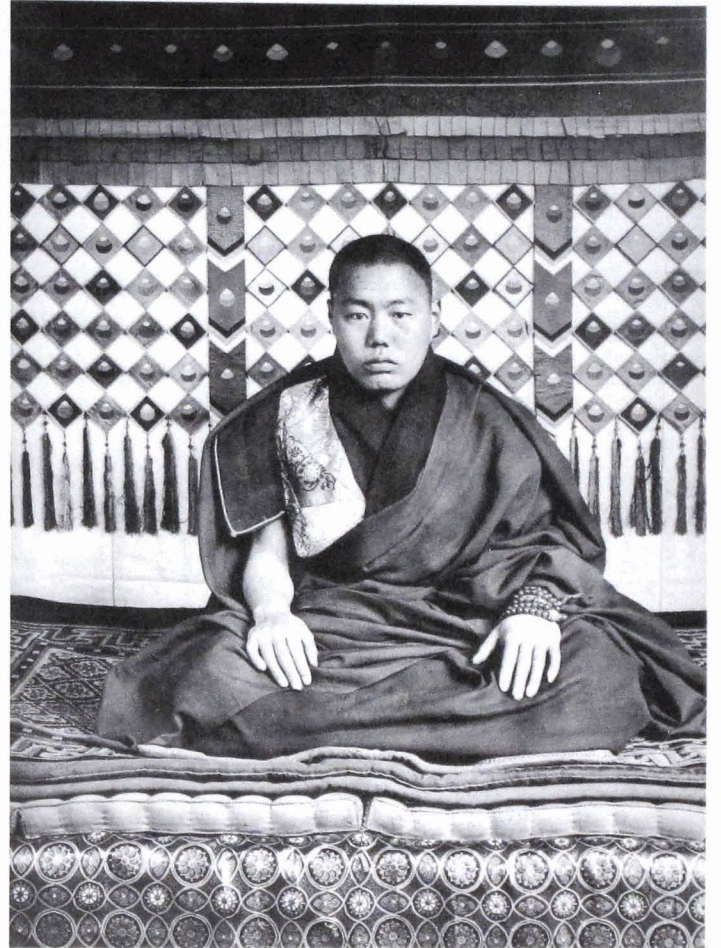


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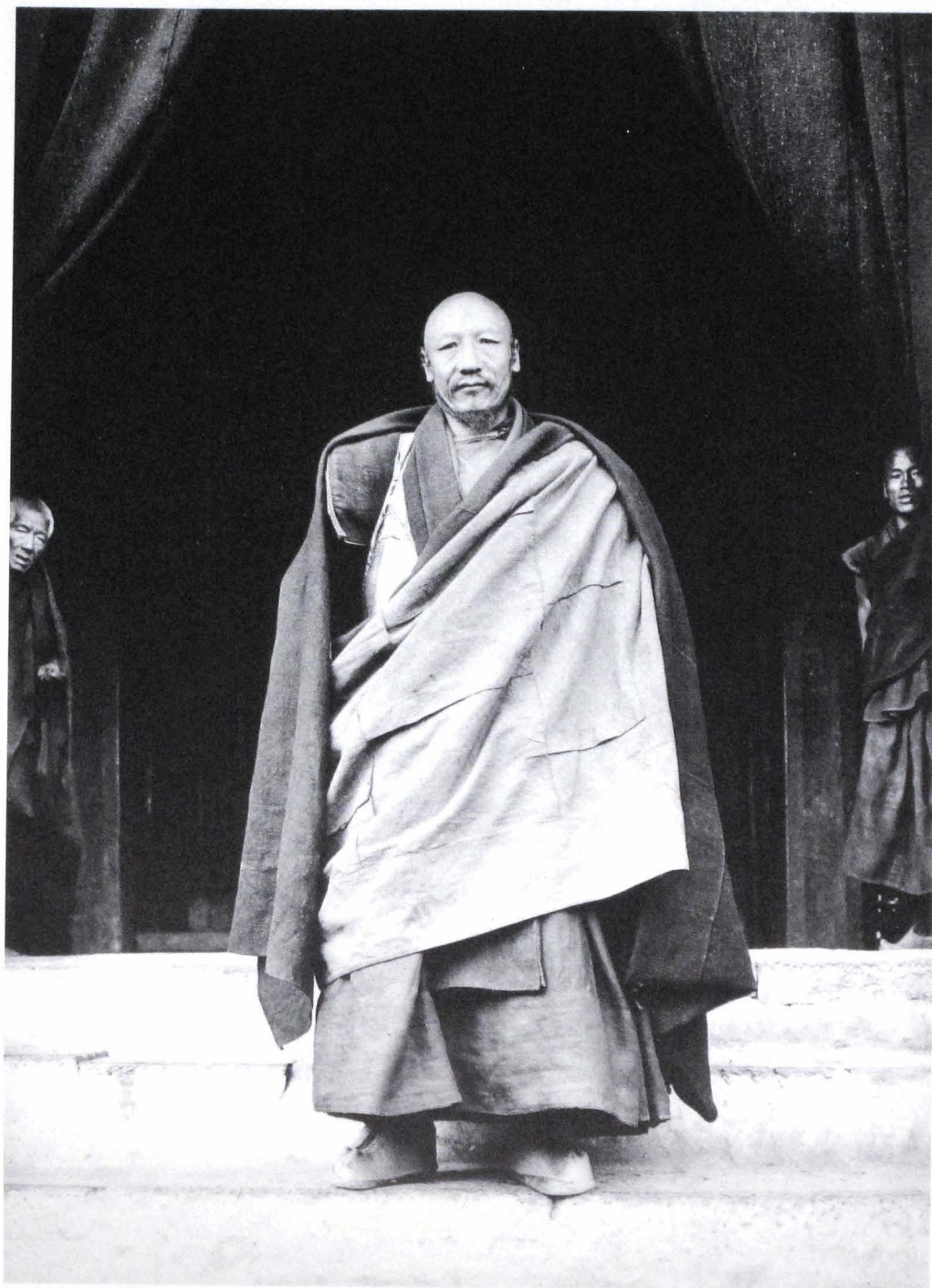


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## Appendix I.

# The Botanical Legacy of Joseph Rock

Jeffrey Wagner

Joseph Rock's rich botanical legacy is especially impressive considering he was a self-taught botanist and already thirty-six years old at the time of his first expedition to Asia. He established his name in botanical circles through his work on the flora of the Hawaiian islands between 1910 and 1920. During twelve years there, he explored extensively and wrote several landmark works on Hawaiian plants. He almost single-handedly established Hawaii's first official herbarium collection with over twenty-nine thousand specimens, most of which he collected himself. This work prepared him well and set the stage for his next career as a botanical explorer and plant hunter in Asia.

The United States Department of Agriculture was Rock's first employer in this new role, and in 1919 sent him to India and Burma to locate and collect seed of the Chaulmoogra tree (*Taraktogenos kurzii* and related species) which provided a substance proven effective in the treatment of leprosy. Rock's expedition was a success and the seed he collected resulted in a plantation of several thousand trees in Hawaii.

The National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution were his first sponsors in China. From 1922 to 1924 Rock was based in Yunnan province and, as had the plant explorers before him, he began to discover the incredible diversity of China's montane deciduous and evergreen forests. This is a unique temperate flora, unusually rich in species and habitat variety due to the particular circumstances of southwest China's geography and geological past. The only other area of the world remotely similar is eastern North America, with its extensive yet comparatively homogenous forests dominated by oaks, hickories, ashes, maples, and a few other species. In western China, however, with some of the world's highest mountains and deepest river valleys and close proximi-

ty to tropical and subtropical evergreen forests and expanses of desolate uplands, the flora is correspondingly diverse. It is no surprise that Rock and his explorer colleagues collected and sent shipment after shipment of plants that held both botanists and horticulturalists in wonder.

Rock was late in the field, and since many before him had made their reputations on the discovery of countless plants new to science and horticulture, he was destined to follow in their footsteps and collect the discoveries of others. He did this with care and acumen, but never published a single book or article on China's flora. On the first Chinese expedition, Rock collected nearly eighty thousand plant specimens for the Smithsonian's herbarium, and seed of innumerable plants from the high alpine meadows of the Yulong Xueshan range and the immense montane forests covering the slopes and valleys of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. Among these plants were several horticulturally valuable forms of rhododendrons, from the fifty-foot *Rhododendron sinogrande* tree to the smaller alpine species that carpet the mountain meadows with small blue, violet, pink, white, or yellow flowers. Many of Rock's exceptionally handsome, hardy floriferous forms still grace the public and private botanical collections of Scotland, Wales, southern England, northern continental Europe, and America's Pacific Northwest.

After this first expedition, Rock became known for his meticulous, thorough collecting and well-prepared specimens in many duplicate sheets; these enabled herbaria to trade or distribute the extra sheets to allow other institutions ample material for their own study. Another valuable aspect of Rock's collecting was his passion for plant photography, illustrating a particular plant's habit and habitat, which supplements the pressed material and his field notes to make an invaluable botanical record of the rugged areas through which he trav-

eled. He is remembered as well for the quantity, quality, and purity of the seed he sent back from China.

On two more expeditions, one for Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum and another for the National Geographic Society, Rock explored areas farther to the north, all the way to the Minshan range, the upper reaches of the Yellow River, the Kokonor Lake, and beyond. These regions yielded fewer yet hardier plants, several still in cultivation and production as ornamentals.

One incomparable contribution by Rock was a stunningly beautiful copper birch (*Betula albo-sinensis* var. *septentrionalis*). This tree has a shimmering, dark, coppery red trunk due to a silky smooth paper-thin bark that peels away to reveal a waxy bloom underneath. Already known to grow well in cooler climates such as northern Europe, it reaches eighty feet or more. Rock's find was an exceptional horticulturally superior form. Another excellent plant that Rock collected is a tree peony that bears his name, *Paeonia suffruticosa* ssp. *rockii*. He found it growing inside Choni Monastery in Gansu province and, although he had never encountered it in the wild, thought sufficiently highly of this specimen to photograph it and collect seed. It is a remarkably hardy and attractive shrub, some four feet tall, with large white flowers having a single layer of petals, each stained deep purple at the inside base. It is a favored plant in Europe and America and with age becomes increasingly impressive, covering itself each spring with more and more blossoms. The original plant was destroyed in 1928 when Muslim soldiers attacked and burned Choni to the ground. No other example of this subspecies has been found since in China.

Farther to the north the country was very barren, owing to the climatic extremes, but again at a lamasery — this time the famous Kumbum Monastery — in the Yellow River's desolate loess plain, Rock collected seed from a venerable old lilac (*Syringa oblata*). It was, he claimed, the very tree that inspired Tsongkhapa, founder of Tibetan Buddhism's Gelugpa school. The fourteenth-century lama reputedly saw a thousand shining images of the Buddha in the leaves of this lilac.

The expedition for the Arnold Arboretum was a botanical and horticultural success. In addition to the birch, peony,

and lilac, Rock collected species of fir, spruce, juniper, rowan, linden, maple, poplar, rose, rhododendron, mock orange, and many other trees, shrubs and alpine species. These valuable herbarium specimens and propagation material were sent back to the arboretum and further distributed to other institutions in North America and Europe. His contributions today provide an excellent record of the flora of western China, now under great pressure from exploitation.

Rock's last expedition for the National Geographic Society to the Minya Konka region in Sichuan provided so great a volume of material that it has not yet been worked over completely by botanists. One of his best known yet least documented finds comes from this area, and there is irony in the fact that this plant, one of obvious ornamental quality, cannot be unequivocally attributed to Rock. It is an attractive rowan whose outstanding qualities include its emerald green, finely sculpted, and divided leaves that in autumn turn a fiery red in colorful contrast to its amber yellow fruit. It appeared as a chance seedling among Rock's collections at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. No record could be found of an herbarium specimen or field note, and some even believe it to be a hybrid; it is variously classified as such, or as a species form of other Chinese rowans. It goes by the name *Sorbus* 'Joseph Rock' and most likely will never be classified with absolute certainty.

Although Rock continued to do some collecting during his final years in China, mostly for the American Rhododendron Society, he did not return to botany with real zeal until the last years of his life, in Hawaii. During this time, while in his seventies, he would often dash up a volcano to collect a specimen of some nearly extinct plant for the botanists at the botanic gardens of Kew or Edinburgh, or elsewhere. Rock related to botanists at Kew that he was appalled at the besieged state of native Hawaiian plants. He was among the last botanists to see several now extinct plant species extant and growing in their native habitats.

The solid achievements of this self-taught botanist in the rugged and spectacular world of plant hunting in western China will long outlast the eccentricities of character and scholarship for which he is otherwise remembered.



## Appendix II

### The Expeditions of Joseph Rock, 1922-1949

- Feb. 1922 enters China for the first time, from Burma.
- May 1922 arrives in Lijiang and settles in the village of Nguluku.
- June 1922-Dec. 1923 uses Lijiang as a base to make local excursions and longer trips through the river gorge country and other parts of Yunnan.
- Jan. 1924 visits the Kingdom of Muli for the first time.
- Feb. 1924 visits Yongning, explores the east bank of the Upper Yangzi, returns to Lijiang.
- Dec. 1924-Apr. 1927 departs Kunming for Chengdu, start of a 28-month expedition to Tibetan areas of Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan. Arrives Choni (Apr. 1925); explores the Minshan range and Tebu valleys near the Amnye Machen range (May-Aug. 1925); explores Kokonor region (Sept.-Oct. 1925); in Choni (Dec. 1925-Apr. 1926); at Labrang and Ragya monasteries (May-July 1926); explores Tebu country (Aug.-Sept. 1926); long stay at Choni (Oct. 1926-Mar. 1927); through Tebu regions to Songpan and Chengdu (Mar.-Apr. 1927).
- Apr.-Sept. 1928 through Yongning to Muli; explores the Konkaling range; returns to Lijiang.
- Nov. 1928-Feb. 1929 to Muli again.
- Mar.-Aug. 1929 another trip to Muli; explores and photographs the Minya Konka range; returns to Lijiang via Muli and Yongning.
- Mar.-Apr. 1931 explores Naxi territory of Bber-dder, north of the Yangzi loop beyond Mt Haba.
- May 1931-Jan. 1936 periods in Lijiang and Yongning; extended trips to Kunming, Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong.
- Feb. 1936 charts airplane to land at Lijiang; first aerial survey of Yulong Xueshan range and upper Yangzi.
- Mar. 1936-July 1949 based in Lijiang; concentrates on Naxi studies; long periods in Kunming and Vietnam, with trips to Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, USA, and Europe.
- Aug. 1949 departs Lijiang and China.

## Appendix III

# The Collections of Joseph Rock

Over the years in China and Tibet, Rock amassed a prodigious collection of books, manuscripts, photographs, plant and animal specimens, and cultural artifacts. Throughout his life he also maintained a voluminous correspondence with individuals and institutions around the world and kept extensive diaries and notes. Below is a list of the major Rock holdings in the United States and Europe.

### FRANCE

#### Fondation Alexandra David-Neel, Digne

The center in Digne has a collection of Rock's letters to Alexandra David-Neel and other people, spanning nearly four decades.

### GERMANY

#### Staatsbibliothek, Berlin

The State Library has 1,118 Nazi *tomba* manuscripts, fifty-eight files of various notes and reports by Rock, seven boxes of maps, thirty-two volumes of black-and-white photographs, four envelopes with loose photographs, five reels of 16 mm film (original film and later copies), and miscellaneous correspondence.

### UNITED KINGDOM

#### Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

The collection contains a broad range of material, including some twenty volumes of diaries (China, Tibet, Burma; one early diary from 1913), numerous diary transcriptions, six

large notebooks with entries from 1926 to 1961, old diaries and notebooks from the 1890s, and miscellaneous notes and correspondence. There are also more than a dozen short papers and monographs (published and unpublished) on geographic and ethnographic subjects dealing with China and Tibet.

The photographic archive has over two thousand prints from Rock's travels in China and Tibet and a small collection of glass-plate negatives.

Botanical material includes photographs of Hawaiian trees and plants, plants collected by Rock, plant determinations, and the preliminary draft, typescript, photos, and legends for "Plant Geography of Northwest China."

#### Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Seven Tibetan thangkas (c.26 i-vii) in the Karma Gardri style portraying Buddhist hierarchs of the Kagyupa school. The set was almost certainly acquired by Rock in the Kagyupa monastery of Yufeng Si just north of Lijiang. One of the thangkas is illustrated in his *Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, Volume I, plate 63, where the central figure is incorrectly identified as the eighth Situ incarnation Chokyi Jungne (1700-74). That hierarch is in fact shown in c.26(ii), the only thangka in this set having a Tibetan inscription.



## UNITED STATES

### Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

#### *Arnold Arboretum*

The Arnold Arboretum at Jamaica Plain in Boston has a large collection of letters from Rock from the years 1924 to 1960, including 125 to Charles Sargent, letters to various people at Harvard University, copies of correspondence to the National Geographic and other contacts in Washington, D. C., and Rock's letters to his nephew, Robert Koc, in Vienna (1952-60). It also holds copies of diaries (1929, 1934, 1936) and other documents related to his expeditions.

Unpublished manuscripts and other materials, mostly handwritten, comprise a list of thirty-seven items. The Arboretum has a list of seed distribution from the 1924-27 Gansu-Qinghai expedition, printed material on rhododendrons, and newspaper clippings on Rock.

The photographic holdings are made up of approximately one thousand black-and-white prints, mounted and unmounted, most with short captions. These are primarily of geographic and botanical subjects in western China and northeastern Tibet. One drawer of negatives is from the Gansu-Qinghai expedition (1924-27), and three boxes of photographs and another drawer of negatives are from Rock's Burma expedition (1921-22). Smaller holdings exist for photographs of Hawaii, India, Siam, and France.

The Arboretum files kept at the Gray Herbarium are made up primarily of field notes. The main collections are from 1921 to 1924 (450 pages), from Rock's northern expedition of 1924 to 1927 (four bound notebooks) and from 1928 (photographs of field books). There are also extensive plant lists and approximately fifty letters from Rock dating back to 1910. The files also hold Rock's original hand-drawn maps of northeastern Tibet (Yellow River, Ragya, Labrang, Choni, etc; eighteen sheets) and the Tebu district (four sheets).

#### *Harvard-Yenching Library*

Harvard has a collection of photographs from Rock's expedi-

tions in western China and Tibet, 174 with negatives and 138 without.

The Rare Books Room holds twenty-three containers (598 manuscripts) of the Naxi pictographic *tomba* manuscripts. In addition, there are three funerary scrolls and a number of religious booklets.

### Bishop Museum, Honolulu

The small collection of Rock materials here consists of photographs and photo legends from 1922 to 1930, one diary (1921-1922), and some of Rock's correspondence with Charles Sargent of the Arnold Arboretum.

### University of Hawaii

The Hamilton Library has one diary (1927), a small number of photographs, and six reels of microfilm of Rock's papers and publications.

### Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

In 1964, the Hunt Botanical Library received a twenty-pound carton of correspondence from Rock's estate. It includes letters and documents (passports, visas, affidavits, address book, telegrams, etc.) from 1908 to 1962, mostly letters to Rock from botanists and Asian scholars.

The Institute has sixty-one photographs of Rock at different ages and in various ethnic apparel.

### University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

The bulk of Rock's private library is here in the Suzzullo Graduate Library.

The Instructional Media collection has three films made by Rock: Celebration of the Feast of Tsongkhapa, Na-khi

Dances, and Na-khi Har-la-llu Dance. All are 16 mm.

The University retains its correspondence with Joseph Rock. The East Asia Library has a valuable collection of approximately one thousand Qing dynasty gazetteers supplied by Rock, and the International Studies School has miscellaneous papers.

#### Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The Tibetan Collection acquired by Rock in 1928 contains a complete set of the Choni Kangyur and Tengyur scriptures. The entire Tengyur (209 volumes) and six volumes of the Kangyur have been microfilmed; copies of the Tengyur on microfiche can be purchased from the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religion, Carmel, New York. There are in addition eight bundles of Tibetan manuscripts, tied together between boards, acquired by Rock in Yunnan in 1924.

The Na-khi (Naxi) Collection, purchased from Rock in 1924, consists of 1,392 *tomba* manuscripts, one Chung-chia manuscript-scroll, Naxi funerary scrolls and numerous painted wooden boards used in *tomba* ceremonies.

The Prints and Photographs Division has a box with more than sixteen hundred black-and-white prints (6 1/2" x 4 1/2") of Joseph Rock's photographs. Nearly all the images are from western China and eastern and northeastern Tibet.

#### National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.

##### *Illustrations Library*

1. Autochromes: 599 unpublished and ninety-one published 5" x 7" color glass plates. The autochrome process was developed in 1907 in France and was the first practical color process commercially available. The unpublished autochromes have been transferred to a videodisc imaging system (Image Search System).

2. Black-and-white prints: 2,855 unpublished and 327 pub-

lished prints. Each is mounted on a board with a typed caption on the back. The unpublished prints are filed by geographic location, under the headings Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, and Tibet. There are also a number of unmounted sepia tone prints.

3. Black-and-white negatives: Approximately twenty-five hundred 5" x 7" copy negatives from various Rock expeditions.

4. Black-and-white photographic copies of 651 pages of a log of specimens collected in China. Title: "A Set of the Plants and Shrubs discovered and Seed imported to the U.S. Department of Agriculture by Joseph F. Rock on the National Geographic Society Sechuan (China) Expedition, 1921-1923."

##### *Records Library*

The Joseph Rock Collection consists of correspondence between Rock and the National Geographic Society from 1923 to 1931. The collection also contains the published and unpublished manuscripts generated for the *National Geographic Magazine*.

##### *Research Library*

The library contains twelve bound volumes of typed transcriptions of Joseph Rock's diaries. The earliest entry is December 30, 1921 and the latest is February 9, 1929, though not all years are represented.

The Audio-Visual Division of the Research Library has one piece of film (735 feet of 16 mm film, now transferred to video) taken by Rock. It shows the terrain and activities of an expedition, men and horses crossing rivers, and sequences of religious ceremonies.

#### Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The Smithsonian Archives has a collection of Rock's photographs from western China and eastern Tibet (1922-29), a



sizable correspondence, mostly from Rock to E. H. Walker, the Rock Specimen Catalogue, an account book, and original manuscript maps.

The Botany Branch Library of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries has three sets of field notes (1920-21, 1920-24, 1928-29), miscellaneous papers, and manuscript maps from Rock's travels between 1925 and 1927.

**U.S. Board on Geographic Names,  
Defense Mapping Agency, Washington, D.C.**

Joseph Rock submitted material to the BGN to assist it in recording and standardizing Tibetan place names. This includes approximately fifteen hundred hand-written cards providing the Tibetan spelling, designation, coordinates and known Chinese variants for places and natural features in Tibet. He also wrote a ten-page article, "Rules for the Transcription of Tibetan Place Names," and three glossaries.



Joseph Rock's botanical collections have ended up in many herbaria throughout the world. The major repositories are:

Harvard University Herbaria, Cambridge  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
Herbarium Pacificum, Honolulu  
Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew  
Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh  
Herbarium, British Museum, London

Many other sites have collections as well. For a complete listing see Stafleu, Frans A. and Richard S. Cowan, *Taxonomic Literature: A Selective Guide to Botanical Publications and Collections with Dates, Commentaries and Types*, vol. 4: P-Sak, 2nd edn., Utrecht/Antwerp and The Hague/Boston, 1983.





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