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Chio-ssu-lo (997—1065): A Tibetan Ally of the Sung

One of the most neglected aspects of Sino-Tibetan relations is the political history of the confederations that were formed in Eastern Tibet, primarily in the present day Chinghai and Kansu provinces, after the collapse of the Tibetan empire in 842 A.D. An analysis of the Sung shih⁵ reveals, however, that these confederations played an important role in the relations between the Sung dynasty and the Hsi Hsia empire, especially during the period from 1000 to 1065. Recently, an attempt at unraveling the political history of these confederations has been attempted by Tsutomu I was a kī¹ in the study of the career of Fan-lo-chih⁶ (died 1004), the leader of the Liu-ku⁶ confederation. Although Fan-lo-chih played an important role in defeating the founder of the Hsi Hsia empire, Li Chi-ch’ien⁴ (963—1003/4), he was not, as will be shown elsewhere², a very important figure and the confederation he controlled covered but a small portion of the Eastern Tibetan principalities. The unification of these principalities and the establishment of formal ties with the Sung occurred later under Chio-ssu-lo.

The origins of Chio-ssu-lo are by no means clear. According to the Sung shih he was from a country called Kao-ch’ang Mo-yu⁸ whereas the Lung-p’ing chi⁹ merely writes Mo-yu.⁹ On the other hand, the Lo-ch’üan-chi¹⁰ states that he was originally from a territory known as Wu-san-mi¹³. Although Kao-ch’ang is a well-known Chinese name for the Turfan area, none of these names can be identified with it⁴. Since the names do not occur in any of the geographical works of the Sung and Yüan dynasties, the best identification is still the hypothesis advanced by R. A.

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¹ A draft of the present article was presented at the Faculty Seminar on Traditional China, Columbia University, New York in February 1976. Research has been made possible by a grant from the American Philosophical Society.
³ See the author’s forthcoming The Uneasy Alliance. Eastern Tibet between Hsi Hsia and the Northern Sung.
⁴ Since 981, Turfan was known to the Chinese as Hsi-chou, SS, 490 : 5a.
Stein more than a decade ago. He considered that the Chinese historians misunderstood the term *stod-byain* and that they translated *stod* by *kao* and *byain* by *ch'ang*. This gives as the possible regions for Chio-ssu-lo's origins the Byain-thaṅ area or dMar-yul (Mo-yü), thus clearly Western Tibet. Although this does not explain the use of Wu-san-mi, it remains, unless new evidence becomes available, the most acceptable hypothesis and this for two principal reasons. First, all Chinese sources agree in stating that Chio-ssu-lo came from the Western Regions. Second, they are equally unanimous in describing him as a descendant of the former Tibetan imperial family.

Chio-ssu-lo's ascendancy can be directly tied to the state of anarchy that existed among the Eastern Tibetans after the death of Fan-lo-chih in 1004 and the collapse of his Liu-ku confederation. At about that time, a certain Ho-lang-yeh-hsien, merely identified as a Ch'i'ang from Hsiao-chou⁷, reported to have seen, in the West, a descendant from the Tibetan emperors, namely Chio-ssu-lo or, as he was then known *Khri-gNam-lde'i-dbon bcan-po. Based on this report, a certain Sung-ch'ang-ssu-chün, probably a local Ho-chou chieftain, went to fetch him and installed him in the town of I-kung-ch'eng⁸, apparently with the intention of having him govern the Ho-chou area⁹. However, he remained there but a very short time since he was soon captured by Li-li-tsun⁹, a monk from Tsung-ko¹⁰, (Tibetan : bChoṅ-kha), and by Wen-p'u-ko¹⁰, a chieftain from Miao-ch'üan¹¹. They briefly installed him in Kuo-chou¹² and finally established him in Tsung-ko-ch'eng¹³ where he was proclaimed chieftain¹⁴. At that time he adopted the name Chio-ssu-lo which is explained as representing, in the language of Ho-chou, the term “Son-of—Buddha” (Tibetan : rgyal-sras).

As Chio-ssu-lo was still quite young, a mere eight years old, Li-li-tsun was appointed prime minister (Tibetan : blon-po). From 1007 until 1011, no information is available on either the career of Chio-ssu-lo or Li-li-tsun. In September 1011,

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6 LCC, 22: 20a.
7 The former Lan-chou. Present day Tao-ho-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 514.1; HTT, map 20,103°14’ E, 36°03’ N.
8 Unidentified.
9 SS, 492 : 6b; LPC, 20 : 9a.
10 Territory located in Amdo (mDo-smad) between the Yellow River and the Huang-shui. It is centered around the monastery of sKu-'bum. The present Chinese name for the district is Huang-chung. HTT, map 20,101° E, 36°.
11 Present day Lo-pu-hsien in Chinghai. TMTTT, p. 1325.1; HTT, map 20,102°33’ E, 36°29’ N.
12 Present day Pa-yen-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 1093.1; HTT, map 20, 102°18’ E, 36°05’ N.
13 East of present day Hsi-ning-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 449.2; HTT, map 20, 101°49’ E, 36°37’ N.
14 SS, 492 : 6b; LPC, 20 : 9a; LCC, 22 : 20b.
a mission from bChoṅ-kha arrived at the Sung court and offered to assist Uiyur tribute missions through their country so as to permit the latter to avoid the hazardous travel through Hsi Hsia territory. It is not, however, until 1013 that the name Chio-ssu-lo is mentioned again. At that time, in return for the assistance given to the Uiyur, Chio-ssu-lo requested an Uiyur princess in marriage. This was refused, however, and this refusal resulted in Chio-ssu-lo preventing, for a short time at least, that Uiyur tribute and trade missions crossed his territory.

The information on Chio-ssu-lo’s rise to power is rather scanty. Nevertheless, two items are clear. First, he was considered the official ruler of the bChoṅ-kha area. This was confirmed by Ts’ao Wei (973—1030) who reported that he carried the old Tibetan title of bcan-po which he defined as being similar to the turkish qayan. Second, some time after 1013, a power struggle involving Chio-ssu-lo, Li-li-tsun and Wen-p’u-ko erupted in bChoṅ-kha and Chio-ssu-lo emerged as the victor even though his authority remained challenged for several more years.

Although from Ts’ao Wei’s reports it is clear that by 1016 Chio-ssu-lo was the most important chieftain in that area, it is equally clear that he was not in absolute control and that his authority was regularly challenged by some of the minor chieftains. In March 1017, there were reports of raids into the Ch’in-chou area by some minor clans from bChoṅ-kha. After having been defeated, these clans joined the forces of Hsi Hsia rather than return to bChoṅ-kha. On March 18 and May 25,1018, reports reached the Sung court about an unsuccessful rebellion against Chio-ssu-lo. The rebellion must have been quite serious since Ts’ao Wei reported the destruction of some 750 tents and also the fact that Chio-ssu-lo changed his residence to Miao-ch’üan. It is evident that the Sung court was aware of the ongoing struggle but, regretfully, not much information is presently available on it. Moreover, it appears that there was a deliberate attempt by the bChoṅ-kha chieftains to hide the existing difficulties through continuing the regular joint tribute missions to the Sung court.

Chio-ssu-lo’s rival for full control over the area was his prime minister Li-li-tsun. The apparent ill feeling between them broke out in the open in December 1022 when Li-li-tsun set himself up as an independent chieftain. For the next three years, the Sung court did not know exactly what was happening. Then, at the beginning of 1025, two missions arrived at the court. The first was the regular tribute mission

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15 HHSS, 9 : 12b-13a.
16 SS, 490 : 8b.
17 His biography is in SS, 258 : 5a-7b. See also the author’s forthcoming Ts’ao Wei (973—1030). The Career of a Sung Border Official.
18 SS, 258 : 5b.
19 Southwest of present day Fu-ch’iang-hsien in Kansu, TMTTTT, p. 744.2; HTT, map 26, 105°07” E, 34°46” N.
20 HCP, 91 : 6a.
21 HCP, 93 : 2b.
sent by Chio-ssu-lo and the second was a mission sent by Li-li-tsun who requested that the emoluments accompanying the Sung official ranks he had received earlier be paid. Pending clarification of the matter, the court ordered the Wei prefecture to honor this request.

Although our sources are silent about any other Sung actions as a result of these two missions, it is almost certain that the court attempted, through espionage, to determine the real situation. By September 29, 1032, the Sung was apparently convinced that Chio-ssu-lo was the major chieftain in the bChoñ-kha area and that he was the one who would most likely form the strongest confederation. They were also convinced that he was the most likely candidate in their search for allies against Hsi Hsia and, consequently, a decision to support him was taken.

As a result of this open Sung support, armed conflict broke out between Chio-ssu-lo and Li-li-tsun. The Sung decided that, because of the threat posed by the new Hsi Hsia ruler Li Yüan-hao (1002—1048) who had proclaimed himself emperor in 1032, it would give Chio-ssu-lo military assistance. Sung forces were sent to the bChoñ-kha area and they defeated Li-li-tsun near a place called San-tu-ku. With the elimination of Li-li-tsun, Chio-ssu-lo appointed Wen-p’u-ko as his prime minister (Tibetan: blon-po). The latter apparently objected to Chio-ssu-lo’s support of the Sung against the powerful armies of Hsi Hsia and almost immediately began plotting a rebellion. Towards the end of 1032, however, Wen-p’u-ko was killed on orders of Chio-ssu-lo, before the rebellion really could develop. With Wen-p’u-ko’s untimely death Chio-ssu-lo became the undisputed master over the entire bChoñ-kha area and he established his new capital in the town of Ch’ing-tang. From there he was to govern until his authority was challenged by his own sons in the 1050’s.

Chio-ssu-lo’s rise to overlord of the bChoñ-kha area and his supreme control over the Eastern Tibetan principalities coincided with the accession to the throne in Hsi Hsia of the most ambitious of the Tang’ud rulers, Li Yüan-hao. The increasing power of Chio-ssu-lo, the honors bestowed upon him by the Sung court and, especially, his control over the trade routes between the Central Asian oasis states and China, induced Li Yüan-hao to make bChoñ-kha one of the first targets of his ambitions for territorial expansion. He sent a force of some 25,000 men, under the command of Sa-nu-erh, in an attempt to conquer the town of Li-niu. Southwest of present day Lung-hsi-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 911.1; HTT, map 20, 104°30’ E, 35°01’ N.

22 HCP, 103 : 1b.
24 HCP, 111 : 10b; SS, 485 : 6b. San-tu-ku is located west of present day Kan-ku-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 37.2; HTT, map 26, 105°07’ E, 34°46’ N.
25 Near present day Hsi-ning-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 570.3.
26 R. A. S t e i n, Les tribus anciennes des marches Sino-tibétaines, (Paris 1959), p. 41 identifies this place with the Tibetan name of the Yellow River. The place is not further identified and from the context of our sources it does not seem to refer to the Yellow River but to some unidentified crossing place.
-erh failed however and when Li Yüan-hao himself attempted the conquest of the
town three months later (October 26—November 24, 1033), he also did not meet
with success. After this initial skirmish an uneasy truce existed between Hsi Hsia and bChöṅ-kha. Early in January 1036 the situation seriously deteriorated and the Chinese commis-

sioner in charge of the transmission of the alerts on the border of the Ch’in prefecture informed the court that hostilities were imminent. The Sung did not want to get
involved, indirectly, in a war with Li Yüan-hao over the bChöṅ-kha area. Never-
thetless, it wanted to indicate to Chio-ssu-lo that it still supported him. Although
the latter, confident of the strength of his own armies, had not requested any as-

sistance or support, the Sung bestowed upon him high official rank and the accompanying emoluments. Li Yüan-hao’s decision to attack bChöṅ-kha seems to have been inspired by rumors of dissension between Chio-ssu-lo and his sons, a dissension that could have weakened his control over what was then a strategically and com-

mercially important area.

The attack on bChöṅ-kha, led by Li Yüan-hao personally, started in early Jan-

uary 1036. At the beginning of the war the Tibetans suffered serious reverses and casualties in the towns of Ching-t’ang and Hsing-ling were heavy. Towards the end of the month, the fortunes of war changed suddenly and after a serious defeat at the Huang and Ho rivers the Hsi Hsia forces were forced to withdraw. Although unable to obtain a military victory over Chio-ssu-lo, Li Yüan-hao was to continue his attempts at gaining control over bChöṅ-kha. These attempts, enticing the local population to rebel, were unsuccessful and thereafter Li Yüan-hao concentrated on the successful conquest of the Kan-chou and Sha-chou Uiyurs. As this gave him control over almost all the trade that passed through bChöṅ-kha, pressure on Chio-ssu-lo was reduced. Simultaneously, however, the revenues of the bChöṅ-kha area were drastically reduced whereas for the Sung it meant an important reduction in its supply of horses.

Li Yüan-hao had been able to expand the territory under his control consider-
ably but not at the expense of the Eastern Tibetans. His territorial expansion, how-
ever, posed serious threats to the Sung and the latter were searching for allies who could create a second front in case of a major conflict with Hsi Hsia. A conflict seemed inevitable after the Tangyüd leader had proclaimed himself emperor and adopted the same style as the Sung emperor. Although treaties existed between the Ch’i-tan and the Sung, the Ch’i-tan appeared to be supporting the Tangyüd ruler, if not directly at least tacitly. Therefore, the only possible allies were the Tibetans and Kucha and Chio-ssu-lo appeared as the most likely candidate. He had been the only leader who, so far, had been able to inflict a defeat upon the Tangyüd armies!

27 HHSS, II:12b-13a.
28 SS, 10:4b.
29 South of Hsi-ning-hsien in Kansu. TMTTT, p. 625.3.
30 This refers to the Yellow River and to the Huang-shui.
Chio-ssu-lo was well aware of Sung attitudes and also of the material benefits, necessary after the loss of the trade, he would be able to obtain from them. From 1037 until 1039, he sent several “tribute” missions to the Sung court and in January 1039, at the beginning of the second major Sung —Hsi Hsia war, he was granted the rank of imperial commissioner in command of Pao-shun-chŭn⁶, as well as a series of very expensive gifts. The Sung also granted two of his sons, Hsia-chan⁸ and Mo-chio-shan⁹, high official rank and emoluments³¹.

Chio-ssu-lo seems to have decided that by being only a token ally of the Sung, he would be able to exploit the apparent weakness of the Chinese to his own advantage without any major risks. It is clear that by 1040, he considered himself independent of and equal to the Sung. Not only did he stop sending his annual mission to the Chinese capital but he, deliberately, delayed all promised actions against Li Yuan-hao. Furthermore, rather than assisting the Inner Asian missions to China that managed to enter his domain, once a sanctuary against Hsi Hsia, he now intercepted and taxed them. His policies were successful and even though he had lost a major part of his revenues after the fall of the Uriyur to Li Yuan-hao, he was able to maintain an army of 60,000 to 70,000 men. This information induced the Sung to send Liu Huan⁴ (1000—1080), then an underdirector of the bureau of military colonies, to bChoň-kha with a formal request to aid the Sung against Hsi Hsia but, in essence, to obtain a first hand report on the strength and the intentions of the Tibetan leader. Chio-ssu-lo seems to have been rather reluctant to commit himself and Liu Huan reported that an alliance, based on the mutual defense of the town of Ching-t'ang appeared as the most feasible solution³². The Tibetan leader’s reluctance to commit himself would, under normal circumstances, have prevented any alliance but, because of an overall unfavorable military situation, the Sung had no choice but to accommodate itself with this unpleasant circumstance.

Although Sung policy did not prevent war with Li Yuan-hao and even though it was much less successful than had been anticipated, Chio-ssu-lo’s attitude probably did contribute to the cessation of the hostilities between Hsi Hsia and the Sung. Throughout the early months of 1042, there were several court deliberations on the advisibility of continuing the alliance with Chio-ssu-lo and it was decided to continue it, albeit reluctantly since the Eastern Tibetans benefitted more from it than the Chinese. The primary reason for this decision seems to have been that the Sung wanted to maintain the few trade routes that remained open between them and Kucha and, moreover, access to the horse markets in bChoň-kha. Any action, whether military or political, would bring these activities to a halt. By March 1042, the military situation had become more favorable for the Sung. Indeed, the failure to realize an alliance between the Ch'i-tan and Hsi Hsia as well as the un-

³¹ SS, 10 : 6a-6b; HCP, 120 : 18b, 122 : 7a; 122 : 5a-5b.
³² SS, 324 : 13a.
certainty about Chio-ssu-lo’s position had induced Li Yüan-hao to start peace negotiations with the Chinese and this in spite of the crushing defeats he had inflicted upon them and also in spite of the fact that the Sung armies had been completely unable to stop the Tangyud advance. These negotiations, which are outside the scope of the present article, mark the beginning of a twenty year uneasy truce between the Sung and Hsi Hsia.

There are three distinct phases in Chio-ssu-lo’s relationship with the Sung. The first phase, between 1013 and 1032, covers the period of the power struggle in bChö-kha. There are numerous reports of raids by Chio-ssu-lo and his troops on Chinese settlements as well as regular battles with the Chinese army.33 At the same time, different missions from each of the quarreling factions in bChö-kha arrived at the Sung court. From 1024 on, Chio-ssu-lo seriously attempted to gain recognition from the Sung, a recognition the latter granted him only in 1032 when he appeared the most likely ally against Li Yüan-hao.34 During the same period, Chio-ssu-lo had seized control over the main trade routes and was able to exploit the Sung’s desire to maintain relations with the Uigur and Kucha. It seems, therefore, that an essential characteristic of the first phase was Chio-ssu-lo’s desire for political recognition as well as his exploitation, for his own political ends, of Sung weaknesses in dealing with Hsi Hsia and the Ch’i-tan. This was emphasized by Chio-ssu-lo’s persistent refusal to engage wholeheartedly in warfare, of any type, against Hsi Hsia in return for the honors, and emoluments, bestowed upon him by the Sung.35

The second phase of Chio-ssu-lo’s relationship with the Sung coincides with the career of Li Yüan-hao, i.e. from 1032 to 1048. During most of that period, Chio-ssu-lo was an official, though not very active, ally of the Sung in its war with Hsi Hsia. The prime reason for this was the fact that the bChö-kha area had been one of Li Yüan-hao’s first targets and that it remained under a constant threat of invasion. The first Tibetan — Tangyud war occurred in 1033 and ended quite inconclusively. In 1036, major warfare erupted again and this war, which lasted nearly a year ended in the defeat of the Tangyud forces. Subsequently, Li Yüan-hao attacked and conquered the Kan-chou and Sha-chou Uigurs and began a war with the Sung which ended in a negotiated settlement in 1044. Throughout that period, Chio-ssu-lo assisted the Sung, albeit often reluctantly, by creating some diversionary tactics and maintaining the possibility of a second front to the rear of the Tangyud forces.

33 SS, 8 : 7a-7b; LCC, 22 : 21a.
34 SS, 9 : 2a; HCP, 102 : 19b.
35 HCP, 111 : 10b.
36 HCP, 99 : 6a.
37 HHSS, 11 : 12b-13a.
38 SS, 167 : 6a; HCP, 117 : 17a.
39 SS, 485 : 8a; HCP, 117 : 17b-18b.
Once peace was established between Hsi Hsia and the Sung, he systematically refused to take action primarily because Li Yüan-hao’s army, undefeated by the Sung, was too strong and the danger of an invasion of bChoň-kha was a serious and distinct possibility.

The third phase covers the period from 1048 until Chio-ssu-lo’s death in 1065. During this phase, Chio-ssu-lo was not too interested in an alliance with the Sung. However, several of his sons, in disagreement over his policies with regard to Hsi Hsia, rebelled against him. At that point, in 1058, Chio-ssu-lo attempted to revive his alliance with the Sung in order to protect his own position⁴⁰. The Sung acceded to his request because the political situation in Hsi Hsia appeared favorable to attempting a reconquest of lost territory. Moreover, if the rebellion was allowed to continue, a pro-Hsi Hsia faction would take control over bChoň-kha and thus complicate Sung policies. Indeed, although Li Yüan-hao had been succeeded by his son Li Liang-tzu⁴¹ (1047—1069), the latter was an infant and the country was ruled by a regency. The leading Tangyud clans in Hsi Hsia were quarreling over the course of the regency and the Sung hoped that Chio-ssu-lo, by participating in their war against Hsi Hsia, would facilitate the reconquest. Once the rebellion had been eliminated, however, Chio-ssu-lo, although always promising action, steadfastly refused to send troops into battle. In an attempt to bride Chio-ssu-lo into action, the Sung continued to present lavish gifts and high ranks to him⁴¹. Chio-ssu-lo continued to promise action until his death.

The study of Chio-ssu-lo’s career provides insights which are important not only for the history of Tibet but also for the history of Sung — Hsi Hsia relations. First of all, it clearly indicates that the Eastern Tibetan federations were politically better organized than has so far been assumed and also that they played an important role in Sung foreign relations. Secondly, the study of the Eastern Tibetan confederation reveals the nature of Sung foreign policy and foreign policy decision making processes. It is clear that the Sung was not a militarily weak state but that its military problems were compounded by the fact that there were two hostile states on its borders and that there was the possibility that the Eastern Tibetan confederations could also become hostile. This problem was further aggravated by the distinct possibility of an anti-Sung alliance between these three political entities. Such an alliance, and several attempts at it were made, posed a very serious problem to Sung security. Faced with such a serious political and military threat, the Sung had to resort to what can be called “accommodative politics”⁴², with at least one barbarian state, the bChoň-kha confederation.

⁴⁰ LCC, 22 : 23a.
⁴¹ HCP, 190 : 22b; 191 : 5b.
⁴² James T. C. Liu, Accommodative Politics : Sung China and 1930’s in China, “Sung Studies Newsletter”, no 4, 1971, pp. 3—6. Although Prof. Liu’s brief article deals with the internal politics of the Southern Sung, it appears that its premises are equally applicable to the foreign policy of the Northern Sung.
Glossary of Chinese Terms

Chio-ssu-lo 嘉廬州
'Sung shih 紹興州
'Fan-lo-chih 剃麟支
'Liu-ku 呂州
'Li Chi-ch'ien 李繼遷
'Kao-ch'ang mo-yu 高昌麴
'Lung-p'ing-chi 隆平集
'Mo-yu 摩勒
'Lo-ch'üan chi 洛川集
'Wu-san-mi 武三峯
'Ho-lang-yeh-hsien 河州
'Ho-chou 河州
'Sung-ch'ang-ssu-chün 順昌
'I-kung-ch'eng 立遵
'Li-li-tsun 劉遵
'Tsung-ko 誠哥
'Wen-p'u-ko 温逋哥
'Miao-ch'üan 遠州
'Kuo-chou 廓州
'Tsung-ko-ch'eng 塔州
'Ts'ao Wei 塔州
'Ch'in-chou 朝州
'Wei-chou 魏州
'Li Yüan-hao 劉原浩
'San-tu-ku 桑都谷
'Ch'ing-t'ang 陵川
'Sa-nu-erh 塞努爾
'Hsing-ling 聲寧
'Kan-chou 賢州
'Sha-chou 沙州
'Pao-shun-chün 郭順春
'Hsia-chan 晉州
'Mo-chio-chan 摩池川
'Liu Huan 劉桓
'Li Liang-tzu 劉謐佐

Abbreviations used

HCP — Li T'ao, Hsü Tzu-chih-t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien, Chekiang shu-chü ed., 1881.
HHSS — Wu Kuan Chung-ch'eng, Hsi Hsia shu-shih, Hsiao-hsiien-shan fang ed., 1825.
HTT — Chung-hua min-kuo hsin-ti-t'u, Shanghai 1934.
LCC — Chang Fang-p'ing, Lo-ch'üan chi, Ssu-ku ed.
LPC — Tseng Kung, Lung-p'ing chi, Ch'i-yeh-tang ed., 1701.
SS — Sung shih, SPPY ed.
TMTT — Chung-kuo ku-chin ti-ming ta-tzu-tien, Shanghai 1931.