

THE CHIN HILLS

Vol. I

By Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck



THE CHIN HILLS

**A History of the people, British dealings with them,
their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country**

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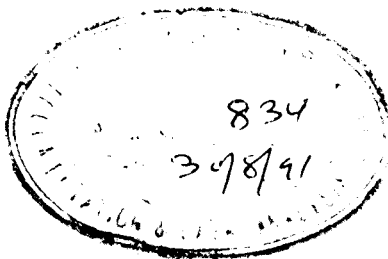
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THE CHIN HILLS.

A History of the People, our dealings with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE.

THE Himalayas from the north of Assam shoot out a chain of spurs, which, running due south, eventually dive into the Bay of Bengal. Captain Yule, who went as Secretary to the Envoy to the Court of Ava in 1855, thus described this chain and its inhabitants:—

“Still further westward in the Naga country, between longitude 93° and 95°, a great multiple mass of mountains starts southwards from the Assam chain. Enclosing first the level alluvial valley of Manipur, at a height of 2,500 feet above the sea, it then spreads out westward of Tipperah and the coast of Chittagong and Northern Arakan, a broad succession of unexplored and forest-covered spurs, inhabited by a vast variety of wild tribes of Indo-Chinese kindred known as Kukis, Nagas, Khyenes, and by many more specific names. Contracting to a more defined chain, or to us more defined, because we know it better, this meridian range still passes southward under the name of Arakan Yoma-doung, till 700 miles from its origin in the Naga wilds it sinks in the sea hard by Negrais, its last bluff crowned by the golden Pagoda of Modain, gleaming far to seaward, a Burmese Sunium. Fancy might trace the submarine prolongation of the range in the dotted line of the Preparis, the Cocos, the Andamans, the Nicobars, till it emerges again to traverse Sumatra and the vast chain of the Javanic Isles.”

From the southern borders of Assam and Manipur, latitude 24° approximately, these hills are now known to us as the Chin-Lushai tract and the inhabitants by the generic names of Chins and Lushais. This Chin-Lushai tract is bounded on the north by Assam and Manipur, on the south by Arakan, on the east by Burma, and on the west by Tipperah and the Chittagong hill tracts.

When Yule wrote the above description of the Chin-Lushai tract it was described on the maps as “undefined” and “unsurveyed.” Southern Lushai had not as yet been penetrated by Lewin; the Northern Lushais knew Assam only as a good raiding field; McCulloch had not gained his control over the Chins on the southern border of Manipur; the British Government had not yet assumed the direct administration of the Arakan Hill Tracts, which Colonel Phayre (Sir Arthur Phayre) eleven years later described as being as little known to the British Government as the tribes of Central Africa before the days of Burton, Speke, and Grant; the Government at Ava was indifferent to the ravages on the western border of Burma; and lastly the Rajah of Tipperah had to look to the British to check the forays of his trans-border men.

It is intended in this volume to write only about Chins, but the reader will find it convenient to understand something of the neighbouring tribes and their country as we now know them, and of their former history; he

will then recognize in the names of the existing tribes and clans those vague general and colloquial appellations by which the Chins have been classified in ancient records and in recent gazetteers.

Our closer connection with the Chins and Lushais during the last five years does not appear to have taught us anything more than we knew twenty years ago of the ethnology of the tribes. Yule in 1855 described the Chins and Lushais as "of Indo-Chinese kindred, known as Kukis, Nagas, Khyenes, and by many more specific names." Colonel Hannay identified the Chins with the Nagas of the Assam mountains and states that they must be closely allied to the Kukis. In 1866 Colonel Phayre classified the Chins living on the north of Arakan as Indo-Chinese. Mr. Taw Sein Kho, Burmese Lecturer at Cambridge, in a pamphlet on the Chins and Kachins bordering on Burma, wrote:—

"Ethnically these tribes belong to that vaguely defined and yet little understood stock, the Turanian, which includes among others the Chinese, Tibetans, Manchus, Japanese, Annamese, Siamese, Burmese, and the Turks. The evidence of language, so far as it has been studied, leaves little doubt that ages ago China exercised much influence on these Turanian races, whose habitat, it is said, included the whole of at least Northern India before its conquest by the Aryans."

Mr. McCabe of the Assam Commission, whose service has been spent amongst Nagas, Lushais, and the other hill tribes of the province of Assam, designates the Chin-Lushai family as Indo-Chinese. Captain Forbes calls the race Tibeto-Burman. Mr. B. Houghton, of the Burma Commission, in an essay on the language of the Southern (Sandoway) Chins and its affinities in 1891, writes—

"As a mere conjecture of the original habitat, &c., of these races the following may be hazarded. At first the stocks of the Dravidian, Chinese, Tibetan, and other races may have lived together in Tibet or perhaps a good distance to the west of it. The Dravidian hordes first started on the immigration, some entering India by the northern passes and some perhaps by the north-west. Some time after them the Chinese separated themselves and went to the east, occupying gradually their present country, this separation occurring at least 3,000 years ago, if the supposition may be trusted that about that time the Chinese altered the old pronunciation of their numerals. After the departure of the Chinese smaller hordes from time to time poured into India, the largest being the Burman one, which, perhaps by the pressure of the newly arrived Aryans, was forced into Burma. The hillmen of Arakan I would regard as rather later immigrations."

In the Burma Census Report of 1891 Chin ethnology is dismissed with the remark that the Chins or Kyins are a group of hill tribes, all talking various dialects of the same Tibeto-Burman speech and calling themselves by various names. Without pretending to speak with authority on the subject, we think we may reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam, and the Chins originally lived in what we now know as Thibet and are of one and the same stock; their form of government, method of cultivation, manners and customs, beliefs and traditions all point to one origin. As far as the Chins are concerned, we know from our own experience, as well as from the records of Manipur, that the drift of migration has changed and is now towards the north. The Nwitè, Vaipè, and Yo Chins, who within the memory of man resided in the Northern Chin Hills, have now almost entirely recrossed the northern border, either into the hills belonging to Manipur or to the south of Cachar, and their old village sites are now being occupied by the Kanhow clan of Sokte Chins, which also is steadily moving northwards.

From the available records it would seem that some authorities class the Nagas as nearly akin to the Kukis, but this is more than doubtful. The Government of the Naga tribes is distinctly democratic. Their chieftainships do not necessarily pass from father to son, but are practically dependent on the will of the tribesmen, and the Naga Chiefs are therefore without much individual power and their rule is based on the general approval of the clan. The Kuki Chiefs, on the other hand, invariably inherit their position by the right of birth and take the initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansmen, by whom they are respected and feared. Of course, even amongst the Kukis, it sometimes happens that a Chief fails to govern his clan with a firm hand or is so overbearing that he is deserted by his people, who fly to another village and to the protection of a more lenient ruler. The braves of a tribe, too, will not always forsake the excitement of the war-path at the command of a peace-loving Chief. It is true that the elders of the village, called "Waihaumte" in the north and "Boite" in the south and by the Lushai officers "Kharbari" and "Mantri," surround the person of the Chief, but although they all discuss questions together, they have no power to over-rule the decision of the Chief himself.

The Naga and Kuki methods of cultivation are totally different, for whereas the Naga takes the greatest care and pride in his elaborate system of terrace cultivation, the Kuki merely jhooms in a most untidy and wasteful manner. The dress of the Naga is invariably a cloth tied round the loins with the loose ends hanging down in front, while the Kuki either wears nothing but a blanket or else a "dhoti" wound round the loins passing between the legs from the front and fastened behind in the regular Indian way. In appearance the Nagas and Kukis differ; some Nagas cut their hair which the Kukis never do. The Naga features are more pronounced and in many other ways the light-hearted Naga is far apart from the solemn slow-speaking Kuki.

Those of the Kuki tribes which we designate as "Chins" do not recognize that name, which is said to be a Burmese corruption of the Chinese "Jin," or "Yen," meaning "man." The Northern Chins call themselves Yo, the Tashons, Haka, and more southern tribes Lai, while the Chins of Lower Burma give their name as Shu. Some of the Assam tribes have also been christened by names unknown to them; for instance, "Naga," the meaning of which is simply "naked," and the Arbors, who call themselves "Padam."

The Chins subordinate to Burma are not all contained in the tract administered from Falam, for besides the Chinbòks, Chinbòns, and Chinmès administered from Yawdwin, and the political charge of the Arakan Hill Tracts, the Deputy Commissioners of Minbu, Thayetmyo, Kyaukpyu, and Sandoway all have dealings with Chins who reside in their districts.

The separate tribes recognized in the tract controlled from Falam are the Soktes, Siyins, Tashons, Hakas, Klangklangs, and Yokwas. In the south there are independent villages belonging to none of these main tribes. Each of these independent villages has its own Chief; they have no tribal system.

The Thado, the Yo, the Nwitè, and the Vaipe tribes have almost disappeared from the Northern Chin Hills, and reference need only be made to

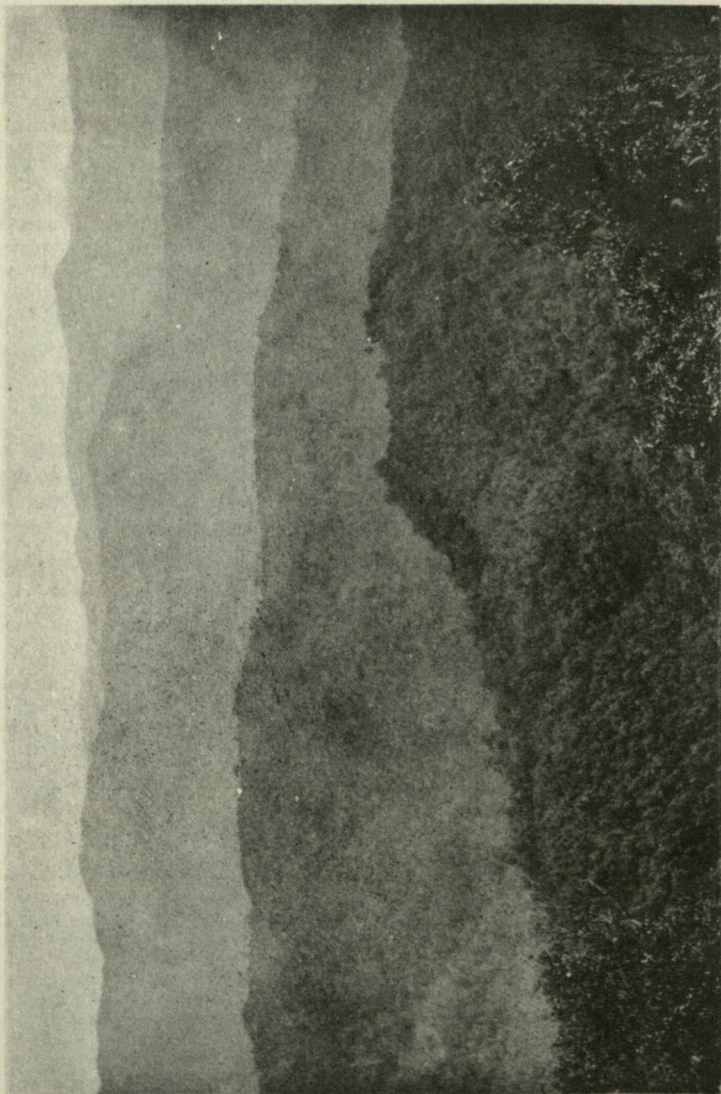


Photo sketch.

18. TYPICAL VIEW OF CHIN LAND.

Survey of India Office, Calcutta, November 1905.

The most thickly populated tract is that of the Tashons, whilst the Siyin and Kanhow tracts could easily support four times the present population. The only local transport is the cooly, and under the most favourable conditions one cooly from every house in a village is the utmost which can be expected. During the agricultural season the proportion obtainable is much less, as the people are scattered over the hillsides, working in the fields by day and sleeping in their cultivation huts at night.

The Chin Hills are administered by a Political Officer with headquarters at Falam; he has, besides a Senior Assistant, three System of administration. Assistants with headquarters at Tiddim, Falam, and Haka respectively, which places are strongly garrisoned, the former, with its line of communication, by a battalion of military police and the two latter by a regiment of Burma infantry.¹ The Siyins and Soktes are controlled from Tiddim, the Tashons and their tributaries from Falam, while the Hakas, Klangklangs, Yokwas and the Independent southern villages are dealt with from Haka.

(The tract administered from Falam is bounded on the north by Manipur ; Boundaries. on the west by a line drawn due south from Lunglen through the Buljang peak to the western edge of the lake north-east of Tattun, which is supposed to be the source of the Tyao river; thence the Tyao river to its junction with the Boinu or Koladyne; thence the Boinu to the most southerly point of its bend towards the north; thence a line drawn due south to the Arakan boundary; thence the Arakan boundary to a point due west of Tilin in the Pakókku district; on the south by a line drawn due west from this point to the boundary of the Pakókku district; on the east by the eastern foot of the hills which border the Kabaw, Kale, and Myittha valleys.²)

CHAPTER II.

GEOGRAPHY, NATURAL HISTORY, &C.

THE Chin Hills lie between latitude 24° in the north and $21^{\circ} 45'$ on the south and longitude $94^{\circ} 5'$ on the east and longitude $93^{\circ} 20'$ on the west. The tract, which forms a parallelogram, may be traversed from north to south in 250 miles of mountain path, while its breadth varies from 100 to 150 miles. It consists of a much broken and contorted mass of mountains, intersected by deep valleys, and is utterly devoid of plains and table-lands.

¹ While these pages were passing through the press the Chin Hills were declared by proclamation to be a part of the Province of Burma and constituted a scheduled district. Proposals for defining the law in force in this tract are now before the Government of India.

It is proposed at the end of the current year (1896) to replace the troops in the Southern Chin Hills by military police.

² These boundaries are not strictly defined. The question was discussed in Foreign Department letter No. 1391E., dated the 3rd July 1890, to the Chief Commissioner of Assam; Foreign Department letter No. 1396E., dated the 3rd July 1890, to the Government of Bengal, and in Burma Political Department letter No. 787-26-14, dated the 28th July 1893, to the Government of India in the Foreign Department. The boundary between the Chin Hills and Manipur was settled by a Commission in 1894.