

THE CHIN PEOPLE

A Selective History and
Anthropology of the Chin People

Chester U. Strait ThD

down her tiny multichromatic carpet of flowers, which are too many and too varied for description or listing. There are also daisies, roses, lilies, and flowering vines each in its own time, giving color and fragrance, especially during the rains when the skies are murky and low.

This galaxy of wildflowers and flowering shrubs, too numerous for naming, guarantees the bridle paths will indeed wind through nature's lovely gardens. And this heterogeneity of hue and beauty is intensified by clouds, sunrises, and sunsets, with the whole made gay and joyous by a medley of caws, chirps, and warbles of black, brown, blue, green, scarlet, yellow and mottled birds flitting and fluttering like flecks of sunlight spilled in the ether.

Hunting and Fishing

In comparison to the plains of Burma, sportsmen do not find the Chin Hills so ideal for hunting. The heavily matted jungle, added to the rugged surface of the land, almost forbids penetration into the haunts of wild game. The huntsman is confined mostly to the roads and trails. The Chin Hills are rather the retreat for the philosopher, the poet, the artist, and hopefully the naturalist—especially the last named, since neither the flora nor fauna have received the scrutinized attention of a botanist or zoologist.

The region is infested with tigers, ordinary leopards, the prized clouded leopard, and panthers that not only prey upon the wild life of the jungle but also ravage the domestic animals of the villagers. On rare occasions, one of the predators is trapped; but so far as to track an animal to its lair, it is quite beyond question because of dense jungle and precipitous mountain slopes.

The more inaccessible mountains abound with wild goats, while wild bear are found in almost every section. There are three varieties of deer that are fairly plentiful, but predatory animals constantly reduce their numbers considerably. The Asiatic bison is found in the thickly wooded hillsides, as is also the *tsine* or wild cow. Both the bison and wild cow fend well for themselves and their young against the tigers and leopards. Formerly, rhinoceroses, it is claimed, were fairly common but now inhabit only a few very remote and unapproachable mountain regions. There are also three species of bears. These are less ferocious than the tigers and panthers, but to the Chins they are just as annoying. Wild dogs also are pests to the villagers, and so are monkeys, the latter especially when crops are ripening.

The gibbon monkey is distinctive, not only because he has no tail and lives on fruit alone but also for the unbelievable noise he and his mate can make. They are the criers of danger in every basin and valley. The traveler

never spies one because of their furtive nature, yet the gibbon will herald one's approach as soon as one comes around a bend. Two of these creatures can so fill a valley with their resounding hoots that it would lead one to believe that there was hardly something less than an army making all the tumult.

Of small animals, there are rabbits, porcupines, squirrels, pine martens, skunks, rats, and other rodents. As to fish, in some of the larger streams, there is good fishing, but the native custom of poisoning the stream for a catch very much reduces this game because the small fish are killed in the process. The ten-, fifteen-, or twenty-pound Mahseer are the fisherman's prize that is caught in the deep river holes every year during the dry season.

As to birds, the crow is the most common. Large hawks are numerous. The Chinese Red-Billed Blue Magpie is in all parts as well as the gay minarets. Cuckoos of different varieties along with doves and pigeons are plentiful. The green pigeon adds color to the jungle, as well as being edible. For the fowler there are snipe, woodcock, silver pheasant, partridge, jungle fowl, with the richly plumed tragopan as a rare shot. It is rare to catch sight of hornbills except in secluded, lonely places, but they do not hold the awe for the Chins that, according to Mills, Nagas have toward them.¹¹

Reptiles abound, including an abundance of lizards of various sorts and a liberal supply of snakes. There are not, however, many poisonous snakes although the dreaded cobra is not altogether uncommon. The python is the king of this herpetological division of animals and is found in dense jungle toward the base of the hills, usually near a stream. The Chins venerate the python.

To be sure, the Chin Hills, because of their very broken configuration, is not a choice hunting resort. Nonetheless, it teems with life and interest. As one's pony makes his slow ascent up the mountain paths, a kaleidoscopic montage of life and color is constantly before him. Gaudy chameleons dart down the bank or up a tree trunk only a moment later to shoot out their awkwardly shaped heads in a farewell glance. The chattering squirrels, the full-throated birds, the shrill call of the cicada, and the reverberations of the gibbon monkeys keep the passing scene one of intensity, both in sound and color.

The possible bounding across one's path of a deer or the more frequent bark of one alerts the moment. A pair of pine martens frisking on the path, a silver pheasant darting tantalizingly into the jungle before one has opportunity for full view, a multicolored jungle cock strutting about with his hen—all form the reward of the impeded progress. One is kept alert

¹¹ Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, pp. 14, 293, 296, 313.

by the awareness that there is the chance one might have a rare experience of encountering a drove of wild boar or chancing upon a bear or even the remote possibility, from the snort of his pony, of seeing a tiger. All these give zest to an already interesting setting and allow chance to rob it of monotony.

Here one meets a rugged jungle full of life, where the larger animals prey upon their weaker unwary fellows and the smaller game and feathered throng find ample sustenance in nuts, berries, seeds, tender shoots, and insects. The hot sun blazing on a multitude of hilltops, or on the clouds a thousand feet below in a hundred valleys, all give grandeur and immensity to an extraordinary situation.

The flora and fauna of the Chin Hills according to the *Chin Hills Gazetteer*, Vol. I, pp. 8, 9, 10, 11 are as follows:

Trees

Ash	Dalbergia
Oak (several varieties)	Iron Wood
Rhododendron	Laurel
Wood-oil (<i>Dipterocarpus</i>)	Tree ferns
Pine (<i>Pinus khasia</i>)	Bamboos (four varieties)
Peepul (<i>Ficus religiosa</i>)	Palms (varieties)
Eugenias	Cane
Sterculias	Cutch
Teak	Alder
Sal	Willow (<i>Salix</i>)
Hill silk-cotton tree	Sumbal (Indian name)
Rubber	Holly
Maple	Acacia

(The Hill silk-cotton tree seems to be the same as the tree from which kapok [*Ceiba pentandra*] is secured. Professor Dickason of Judson College, Rangoon, in 1938, found no less than five new varieties of bamboo in the Chin Hills. There is a question of whether one would find maple in these parts while, on the other hand, there is a plentiful amount of birch.)

Primula	Azalea
Daisy	Anemone
Marsh mallow	Morning Glory
Flags	Sunflower
Orchids	Blue larkspur
Forget-me-nots	Verbena
Orchids (over thirty varieties have been found)	

Animals

Elephant	Otter (two kinds)
Rhinoceros (<i>Sumatrensis</i>)	Malayan sun bear (<i>Ursus Malayensis</i>)
Rhinoceros (<i>Sondaicus</i>)	Himalayan black bear (<i>Ursus torquatus</i>)
Bison (<i>Gavaeus gaurus</i>)	Gyal (<i>Gavaeus frontalis</i>)
Wild dog (<i>Cuon rutilians</i>)	Tsine (<i>Gavaeus Sondaicus</i>)
Badger	Sambur (<i>Rusa Aristotelis</i>)
Porcupine	Thamin (<i>Rusernes Eldii</i>)
Armadillo (true name <i>manis</i>)	Barking deer (<i>Cervulus aureus</i>)
Hoolook (<i>Hylobates hoolock</i>)	Ghooral (<i>Nemrohaedus</i>)
Different species of <i>Macacus</i> (short-tailed monkeys)	Serow (<i>Nemorhaedus bubalina</i>)
Different species of <i>Semnopithecus</i> (long-tailed monkeys)	Hog deer (<i>Axis porcinus</i>)
Hare (very large)	Tiger (<i>Felis tigris</i>)
Flying squirrel	Panther (<i>Felis leopardus</i>)
Ordinary squirrel	Marbled tiger cat (<i>Felis marmorata</i>)
Rats, moles, and various rodents	Wild cat (<i>Felis chaus</i>)
Pig (<i>Sus cristatus</i>)	Civet cat, of varieties (<i>genus Viverra</i>)
	Toddy cat