

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF CHINLAND

The Origins of Chin

Salai Kipp Kho Lian

The origins of the Chin people - a mongoloid stock - can be traced back to China and Tibet. They descended southwards and initially settled between Chindwin and Irrawady rivers of today's Burma before the 9th. century A.D. Since time immemorial they lived independently under their traditional rulers and throughout their history no part of Chinland has ever had been subjugated by any outside power until the British annexation in the late 19th. century. They have their own distinctive culture and language, related to that of the Sino - Tibetan.

The Political System of the Ancient Chin Society

In the ancient Chin society the village was an independent unit with its own government, and a chief functioned as administrator for the village. Hereditary chieftainships were common in the northern part of the country, with the exception of the Tlaisun area in today's Falam district. A number of those chiefs in Chinland ruled over several villages, stretching vast areas. In the Tlaisun area a political system comparable to democratic types of government in the West was practiced. The rulers in these areas were democratically elected council of elders. They may not necessarily be of aristocratic origins and could even be slaves or a conquered tribe. The council elders were elected every three years or more, depending on the duration of the harvest. H.N.C. Stevenson, an antropologist and British Government Officer working for many years in Chinland, called the council "Tlaisun Democratic Council" In the southern part the status of chieftainship was determined by merits : the people elected their leader once every three years or more depending on the duration of the shift cultivation practiced in each area. The candidate for the cheftainship should either be wealthy (having excessive surplus of harvest), or a victorious warrior or a highly skilled in hunter. In this sense the cheftainship in southern Chinland could be called a democratic headman system.

Encounter with the Outside World

With the arrival of the British, the Chins first encountered with the outside world. The first armed encounter between the British and the Chins took place in 1826 at the Paletwa area, Southern Chinland. The full swing aggressive wars were launched by the British in three stages: The first stage in 1872, the second in 1888 and the final one ended in 1895 and Chinland became part of the British Empire. Field Marshal Sir George White, Commander of the British Imperial Armed Forces and a veteran of Boer Wars in South Africa, remarked on the war against the Chins: "Enemy, in considerable numbers, using rifles and plenty ammunition. Most difficult enemy to see or hit I ever fought:" During the invasion of Chinland one British soldier was awarded the highest British War Medal - Victoria Cross. The Chins were finally subdued but only after decades of war of resistance against the intruders. Even after

Chinland had become a part of the British India the traditional rulers of Chinland still enjoyed a considerable autonomous power under the Chin Hills Regulations enacted in 1896. The British favored the hereditary chieftainship system and all the democratic systems in the south and the Tlaisun area were abolished and those elected elders at the time of the British annexation of Chinland were made hereditary chiefs. Separations of Chinland As a result of the separation of Burma from the British India according to the 1937 Burma([Myanmar](#)) Act, Chinland was divided into two parts without the consent of the Chins: the western part remained under the British India and the eastern part (now known as Chin State) was put under the British Burma. When the British India gained independence in 1947, and with the separation of Pakistan from India, West Chinland was once again divided into two parts: one part of it under East Pakistan (now in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh) and the other part (presently known as Mizoram State) remains in the Indian Union. Chin settlements can also be found in the Arakan State, Sagaing, Magwe, Pegu and Rangoon divisions inside Burma, and in Tripura, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland states in India respectively.

Geography

With an area of circa 36000 square kilometres, the present day Chin State - a mountainous landscape stretching along the present day Indo-Burma border - is slightly smaller than Switzerland. The population of the Chins inhabiting the Chin State is half a million. The total population of Chin in Mizoram and the surrounding areas, Bangladesh , Chin State and the lowland Burma is estimated to be two and a half millions. Chinland is rich in natural flora and fauna and alpine flora is very common in the country. Costly timbers such as teak, pine, oak, guava, willows, pyinkado and banyans are also abundant; it is also adorn with scented flowers, including great varieties of orchids. Nickel and chromite are found in a great quantity in the northern Chin State. Some of Chinland's wild animals are elephants, tigers, black bears, leopards, wild boars, monkeys, barking deers, mountain goats, porcupine, mythan and a great variety of birds. Religion: Roughly 60% are Christians and the rest are Buddhists or adherents of traditional religion in the present day Chin State. The National Bird and Flower Horn Bill is the national bird and the Rhododendron is the national flower of the Chin people. Hence the Rhododendron land is the poetic name of Chinland. The Treaty for Independence Opting for independence from the British colony the present day Chin State had joined the Union of Burma on equal status with the other national states, including the land of Burmans. The treaty which had given birth to this Union is known as the Panglong Agreement , signed on 12 February 1947, by the founding fathers of the Union - that is the representatives of Burma, Chinland, Kachinland, Shanland, etc. Among them was [General Aung San](#) , the Burman patriot and the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, most revered and loved by all nationalities because of his far-sightedness and sincerity . With the military take-over of the state power by the Burma Army in 1962 and its consequent abrogation of the said treaty the Union has infact been legally ceased to exist since then.

References:

- 1) Manuscript of the " The 50th. anniversarry of the Chin National Day" by Salai Lian Hmung Sakhong , General Secretary of the United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD).
- 2) Essay prepared by Salai Ke Lee Awm (Mindat) - Chin National Day Golden Jubilee Celebration Commitee in New Delhi
- 3) Zo History by Dr. Vum Son - 1986
- 4) " A brief historical sketch of Chinland" documented by Salai Kipp and Salai Thawm Hlei Mang for the Chin National Council (Europe) - 1997.
- 5) History of Zomi by Pu Gougin of the Zomi National Congress - 1984