



Revisiting Chhinlung: A search for the original home of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo

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Abstract

The Kuki-Chin-Mizo (KCM), that inhabited today's Chin State of Myanmar, the Indian States of Mizoram and Manipur, and parts of Chittagong Division of Bangladesh, all have a legend about their origin variously known as *Chhinlung*, *Sinlung*, *Khul*, etc. The legendary 'cave', its meaning and location, have been interpreted by scholars for years. But there have been no unanimity on their interpretations. This paper is yet another such investigation attempting to demystify *Chhinlung* and its connected issues.

Keywords

Chhinlung, Sinlung, Khul, cave, cave house, Yaodong, Kuki, Chin, Mizo, Ch'iang, origin, China, Tibet.

Introduction

The peoples known in history as Kuki-Chin-Lushai (KCL) inhabited today's Chin State of Myanmar (formerly Burma), the Indian State of Mizoram (formerly Lushai Hills, and later Mizo District), the Indian State of Manipur, and parts of Chittagong Division of Bangladesh. The KCL consists of tribes or nationalities such as Kuki, Lusei, Hmar, Paite, Ralte, Mara (Lakher), Lai (Pawi), etc. 'Kuki' is still used among the tribes of Manipur but some people prefer to use the term 'Thadou-Kuki'. 'Chin' is still officially applied to today's inhabitants of Chin State where the Paite and the Lai groups form the two largest ethnic nationalities. The term 'Lushai' (the British misspelling of Lusei, or Anglicized 'Lusei'), once used to refer to the inhabitants of the then Lushai Hills, is now being replaced by the term 'Mizo'. We now therefore use the term Kuki-Chin-Mizo (KCM) instead of the historical Kuki-Chin-Lushai appellation to broadly refer to the tribes of Manipur, Chin State, and Mizoram, popularly known as 'Zo hnahthlak' (Zo cognate tribes) in Mizoram and elsewhere.

This paper makes a humble attempt to trace the original home of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo, relying on both written and unwritten sources of information. The exercise is most daunting, to say the least.

A cave origin theory

The place of origin of the KCM is still unknown. One of the most popular theories regarding the origin of the KCM is 'Chhinlung' (chhin lung) origin. The theory holds that the first men of KCM came out of a cave, a rock, or an underground pit called 'Chhinlung'. The Chhinlung origin theory is most popular among the Luseis (Lushais/Mizos) of Mizoram¹ and Hmars of Manipur. While the Luseis call the place Chhinlung, the Hmars called it Sinlung (Zawla, 1964, 2011: 1-2; Shakespear, 1912, 1988: 93; Simon L. Infimate, 2020).

Chhinlung: *chhin* in Lusei means 'a cover, or a lid, a seal', or 'to cover, to close, to seal', *lung* means 'a stone', or a rock. *Chhinlung* therefore means 'a rock with a seal'. It then connotes a stone cave, or a hole, or a bowel of earth. *Sinlung*: *Sin* in Hmar is the same as Lusei 'chhin'; likewise, *lung* in Hmar is the same as Lusei *lung*. So, Chhinlung and Sinlung are one and the same.

While the Lusei (Lushai) and the Hmar legends specifically mention a cave as their origin, other tribes mentioned it slightly different. It was 'Khul', a hole in the earth for the Thadous. The Paites called it 'Ciimnuai', they also referred to a gourd falling from heaven that burst and emitted their ancestors, or their ancestors falling from the clouds. The Lais 'stepped out' of a Lailun Rock, or escaped from flood, or they escaped from the hole of the earth, or a flood drove out their ancestors into a hill.

All of these stories tell the same tale, the tale of a cave and a flood of water. The tale of dwelling in a cave, and the tale of drowning in a flood of water. The story of people living in a cave and later and escaping, the story of people drowning in water and then escaping from it.

The fact that all the major tribes of the KCM tribes has been keeping alive their oral tradition concerning their origin, and that all of them point to the common origin, is hugely significant. Besides the ones mentioned here, further investigation would definitely reveal similar stories from other tribes or groups within the KCM family.

They were once one in the past

As one delves into history, one finds more and more of commonalities among the various tribes of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo peoples. It looks increasingly certain that they all had lived together once in one geographical area in the recent past. It is therefore absolutely no surprising that these tribes have had a broadly similar myth of origin, pointing very clearly to a common place of origin. They were one once in the past, and still are one today.

Commenting specifically under the head 'Origin of the Chins', Carey & Tuck (1896, 2008: 2) are convinced, from the available evidences till then, that the Nagas, Chins, Lushais, and Kukis are originally one and the same people. Carey & Tuck says, "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 know as Tibet 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"--
italics mine.

Legends of underground origin

Let us now acquaint ourselves with myths of some of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo peoples regarding the perceived place (s) of origin. As we shall see, all the legends or myths surrounding their place of origin invariable is connected to the story of either a cave, an underground, or a flood (water), directly or indirectly.

Darkness ‘Thimzing’ and ‘Chhinlung’ Cave of the Luseis

K.Zawla (1964, 2011: 1-2), an early Mizo historian, writes about the mythical cave called ‘Chhinlung’, prevalent among the Luseis (Lushais) of Mizoram, India.

His account is paraphrased below.

Once upon a time, a great darkness called Thimzing fell upon the world. All men turned into animals as a result of which the world was empty of people, only animals, flora and fauna inhabited the earth. There was but one king who knew all this in advance, so he hid all his treasures in a hole of a huge rock. This is called Chhinlung. After some time, people were born inside the rock. When the owner of the rock, the king, opened the cover of the rock, various clans emerged, one couple from each clan. When a Ralte couple emerged, the king closed the cave as the couple were too noisy.

A similar story is also recounted by J. Shakespear.

Shakespear (1912, 1988: 93) writes: “The following is a translation of a Lushai account of the re-peopleing of the world and of a feast which is said to have taken place soon after”.

The place whence all people sprang is called Chhinglung (Chhinlung, author). All the clans came out of that place. The two Ralte came out together, and began at one chattering, and this made Pathian (the Supreme Being, author) think there were too many men, and so he shut down the stone .

‘Sinlung’ Cave of Hmars

The mythical cave theory of origin among the Hmar tribe living in Mizoram and Manipur is adapted from *Hmar History* by Simon L. Infimate (2020).

The Hmars trace their origin to *Sinlung*. Numerous poems, songs and tales about this place have been made and handed down from generation to generation. However, the exact location of *Sinlung* is still open to debate. Several theories and views regarding the origin and location has been put forward, China as the location of *Sinlung* being one popular idea among the Hmars.

It might have been a cave, and because it was sealed with a huge stone, it was called Sin (seal, close) Lung (stone, rock).

The Hmars eventually left Sinlung. Theories abound regarding why the Hmars left Sinlung. One view talks of the Hmars leaving Sinlung in search of greener pastures, while another ascribes it to the oppressive rule of the Chinese rulers and the Hmars' inability to repulse their enemies in Sinlung. One of their songs is highly suggestive:

*Khaw Sinlung ah
Kawt siel ang ka zuongsuok a;
Mi le nel lo tam a e,
Hriemi hrai a.*

Its English rendering is:

Out of city Sinlung
I jumped out like a gayal;
Innumerable were the encounters,
With the children of men

'Lailun' Cave of the Lais

There is a story of a mythical cave at Lailun (Lai lun). Lailun is a place near Falam, Chin State. The Lais claim this place as their origin.

Once upon a time, Pawi Chanchin (2011), a Mizoram state-funded publication on Lai (Pawi) history, says that there were two brothers, Suihluan and Hluansang. The two stayed initially in a huge cave called Lailun Cave (Lailun Puk). From there, they founded a village called Panlan. Suihluan became a chief there for which his younger brother should pay him one pig a year. To this Hluansang pretended to agree and only asked that he should be allowed to kill the animal while Sui Hluan held it. The pig was therefore produced, but as Sui Hluan stooped down to seize it, Hluan Sang stabbed him to death; and he made himself a chief. Hluansang had three sons: Thanghulh, Zathang, and Bawmlung. They then founded another village which they named 'Halkha'. Since people living in Haka and surrounding villages originated from the Lailun Cave, the people called themselves Lai ever since (Tribal Research Institute, 1988, 2011:4).

A more or less similar story of the Lais' (Pawi) origin is stated by Vumson who wrote thus:

From the plains of the Shan country, the Pawi settled down initially at Hmunli, where they found plum fruit. After eating the plums, they drank the water and found it sweet and decided to stay there. From Hmunli they moved to Lailun, where possibly they first dwelled in a cave. Lailun is near Sunthla, a village between Falam and Haka (Halka). From Sunthla the Pawi group expanded in all directions (Vumson, 1986: 48).

'Lailun' cave of the Lais (Tlaisun)

In his monumental work 'The Chin Hills', Volume-I, Carey and Tuck (1896, 2008: 142) narrates a short account of the mythical rock among the Tlaisuns of the Lai tribe, Chin Hills, Myanmar. They write:

The Tashons (Tlaisuns, author) also believe that their original parents stepped, not out of a barrow like Thados, but out of solid rock. At Shunkla (Sunthla, author) there is a large rock (most likely Lailun cave, author) and out of this the Tashons believe that a man and a woman came, who settling down close by became the parents of those who are now called the Shunkla tribe proper. The Tashons call themselves Shunkla after the name of the village which they believe their first parents started, building themselves the first house after emerging from the rock, and by this name they are known to all the southern tribes.

Flood of the Lais (Hakas)

The great linguist Grierson (1904, 1967:115) quotes Major Newland as saying, the Hakas "traditions trace them back to the time of the flood, when they sprung from the solitary couple who escaped the deluge of waters, by climbing to the top of the Rongklang range, which is above Haka. Ever since then they have gone on increasing and multiplying and sending art off- shoots who have founded all the surrounding tribes and villages. Hence by right of decent, the Hakas claim jurisdiction over all the rest.

Origin of the Lais (Haka, etc)

Carey & Tuck (1896, 2008: 152-3) also write about the myth of origin of the Lais of Haka, Klangklangs (Thlantlang), Thettas, and Kapis, etc., Chin State, Myanmar.

The tradition is that there was a village of huge size called Yoklang, which covered the hill upon which Kwarwa now stands, and that thence two brothers, Seo Hle (Sui Hluan, author) and Hlwa Sha (Hluan Sang, author), sons and grandsons of Chiefs, started south and eventually founded a village which they called Pailan, three miles north of Haka and just below where the Falam mule-track now runs. Seo Hle (Sui Hluan), the elder, asserted his right to be Chief of the newly formed village and insisted that Hwla Sha (Hluan Sang) should give him a pig once a year in token of his over-lordship. To this Hlwa Sha pretended to agree and only asked that he should be allowed to kill the animal while Seo Hle (Sui Hluan) held it. The pig was therefore produced, but as Seo Hle (Sui Hluan) stooped down to seize it, Hlwa Sha (Hluan Sang) stabbed him to the heart with the bamboo spike which had been prepared for killing the pig.

Hlwa Sha (Hluan Sang) was now in undisputed possession, but believing that the place where he had slain his brother would bring ill-fortune to his village, he removed to the hillside upon which Haka now stands, and allowed his people to build in scattered hamlets. Several generations after, Tan Hle (Thang Hulh, author), Yatang (Zathang, author), and Bom Long (Bom Lung, author), three brothers in direct descent from Hlwa Sha (Hluan Sang), began to collect the scattered people into villages, and about the same time two Chiefs of Yoklang, Mwel Lun and Ting Lon, founded Klangklang, while villages began to form at Yokwa,

Thetta, and Kapi, the three latter tracing their descent to a wild goat which conceived and gave birth to a man on the top of a precipice called Boi Hrum (the Chief's jungle) close by.

I am inclined to think that the Hakas, in their desire to upstage the Falam, deliberately skipped the initial part of the common mythology of the origin of the Lais, that is, the story of Lailun cave.

Cave and Flood of the Zopheis

Ceu Mang (1981: 12-19) writes a similar story of a flood among the Zopheis of the Lai tribe, Chin Hills, Myanmar.

Once upon a time, all the humankind in this world lived together in one village. In the middle of the village there was a huge stone, and underneath the stone was a cave that in turn was connected with the endless sea of water called Tipi-thuan-thum. In this cave dwelt a very large snake called Pari-bui or Limpi, which seized one of the village children every night and ate them. The villagers were in despair at the depredations committed by the snake, so they made a strong hook, tied it on the rope, impaled a dog on the hook and threw it to the snake, which swallowed the dog and with it the fish hook. The villagers then tried to pull out the snake, but with all their efforts they could not do so, and only succeeded in pulling out enough of the snake to go five times round the clock at the mouth of the hole, and then, as they could not pull out any more of the snake, they cut off the part that they pulled out, and the snake's tail and the rest of the body fell back into the deep cave with a fearful noise. From that night water came pouring out of the snake's hole and covered the whole village and destroyed the whole settlement of mankind. Since then people were scattered to every corner of the world and began to speak different languages. And it was this flood, which drove the ancestors of the Chin proper to take refuge to the Chin Hills.

Darkness 'Khazanghra' and Cave of the Maras

N.R. Parry (1932, 1976:4) mentions the mythical cave story that exists among the Maras, Mizoram, India. He writes:

Long ago, before the great darkness called Khazanghra fell upon the world, men all came out of the hole below the earth. As the founder of each Mara group called out, 'I am Tlongsai'; Zeuhngang called out, 'I am Zeuhngang'; Hawthai called out, 'I am Hawthai'; Sabeu called out, 'I am Sabe'; Heima called out, 'I am Heima'. Accordingly God thought that a very large number of Maras had come out and stopped the way. When the Lusheis came out of the hole, however, only the first one to come out called out, 'I am Lushai', and all the rest came out silently. God, only hearing the man announce his arrival, thought that only one Lushei had come out, and gave them a much longer time, during which Lushais were pouring out of the hole silently in great numbers. It is for this reason that Lusheis to this day are more numerous than Maras. After all men had come out of the hole in the earth God made their languages different, and they remain so to this day.

Darkness 'Thimzin' and 'Khul' Cave of the Thadous (Kukis)

A similar myth of 'Khul' Cave among the Thadou tribe of Manipur, India written by William Shaw (1929: 24-26), is reproduced here.

The story of their origin is that they used to live under the earth, or rather inside it. Noimangpa was the Chief of this subterranean region. One Chongthu, a relative of Noimangpa, went hunting porcupines in the jungle and discovered a large hole. He perceived through this that the upper earth was uninhabited and there was a great darkness. This darkness, which lasted for seven days and seven nights, is called "Thimzin" by the Thadous. Chongthu so rejoiced at his discovery that he gave up his hunt and went back to his house. He conjured up ideas of forming a village of his own on the earth and planned it accordingly. Just about then, Noimangpa, the chief of the under-world was performing the Chon festival which everyone had to attend including Chongja, elder brother of Chongthu. Noimangpa's son Chonkim was also present. During this fest Chongthu started waving his sharp sword about so vigorously that he injured some of the folks present, at which all became angered. This action of Chongthu was premeditated as he thought that by doing so he would be turned out from the under-world and thus have an excuse for going out to the upper-world and forming a village of his own. The news of Chongthu's behaviour became known to Noimangpa who said "Chongthu had better live in Heaven" meaning thereby that he had better be killed. Chongthu hearing of Noimangpa's wrath at once prepared to migrate out of the hole of the earth which he saw and which is spoken of as 'Khul' by the Thadous. So Chongja and Chongthua killed many pigs, fowls, etc. and feasted in preparation to their departure.

Somehow Chongja's party was delayed but Chongthu's party moved off followed by Chongthu himself. On reaching the 'Khul' the leaders found that a great snake called Gullheipi was in possession of it and when they made endeavours to pass it the snake killed them with his tail. Chongthu, on reaching the spot, was not to be thwarted in his ambitions so he tied his cloth around him and placed a phoipi, a thick cotton cloth, over his head and so attacked the great snake which was disputing the passage. He used the sword called "Joudichen" in this attack, was victorious and killed the snake which he cut into seven pieces. At the same time a lhoh, a lion, also attempted to retard Chongthu's egress but Chongthu got the better of the animal by saying "Are you not created by the Pathen (the Thadou name for the Creator) as the King of the animals? If so I have also been created as the King of men by Pathen and therefore we should be friends instead of enemies". So saying, the lion withdrew and Chongthu's party moved up to the 'Khul'. They found that it was covered with a stone and one of Chongthu's party called Vangalpa lifted it up. While he was able to do so only seven persons were able to get out and then the stone was dropped and all further attempts to raise it were in vain. The seven persons thus emerged were Chongthu, Vangalpa, the stone lifter, Khupngam, the keeper of the dog, and four others. The names of the other four are not known but are said to include the progenitors of the Manipuri, the Naga, the foreigner and the Burmese, however they are not definite about the last two although they are quiet emphatic about the number being seven.

Chongja's party, following on, found the stone blocking their passage out and after making many attempts gave up and returned to Noimangpa reporting the result.

Nemneh, wife of Chongja, cursed Chongthu and his party before they left the 'Khul' saying that they should suffer from all kinds of sickness, deaths, troubles, evil spirits and bad luck. These cursings were heard by Chongthu's party and they made sacrifices in an endeavour to avoid the curse which Thadous say still rests on them. So, in case of serious illness, etc., sacrifices are always made in the name of Nemneh, the wife of Chongja, in hopes of appeasing her wrath. When such sacrifices are made in thempu, i.e., the medicine man or sooth-sayer, always repeats the name of seven of the most important villages of Noimangpa under the earth in one of which Nemneh is sure to be in time, so that she may hear this solicitations. The names of those villages are: - 1. Noimang, 2. Kholoichal, 3. Khopalva, 4. Khothip, 5. Khomang, 6. Khokanglai and 7. Khokisupi.

On reaching the upper earth Chongthu, in his wanderings, found two persons called Lenthang and Lunkim who had survived the Thimzin by making a fire of the skulls and bones of all the game they had killed as they were great hunters. These two were captured by Chongthu and used as guides during his wanders on the earth. So to this day it will be found that those of the Lenthang and Lunkim tribe of Kukis are living in most of the Thadou villages and have no villages of their own, nor do they possess hereditary chiefs as the Thadous.

From Chongthu to Thadou, in the genealogical tree the persons are mythical and so when festivities entailing repetition of the genealogical tree of the Thadous take place the thempu starts from the Thadou and not from the Chongthu.

From Chongthu to Thadou there were no different languages; and animals and spirits as well as the mythical ancestors all lived together in peace.

The hole in the earth called "Khul" is said to be at the source of the 'Gun' river which I find to be definitely identified with the Imphal river in the Manipur State, 'Gun' being the Thadou for the 'Imphal' river. In all the old stories and legends of the Thadous the river 'Gun' is frequently mentioned and is of great fame.

'Ciimnuai' of the Suktes

Carey & Tuck (1896, 2008: 118) tells us the origin of the Suktes of the Paite tribe, Chin Hills.

The Soktes (Suktes, author) believed that their original progenitor commenced life at Chin Nwe (Ciimnuai, author) and they affirm that their tribal name of Sokte bears out this theory. 'Sok' or 'Shok' means 'to go down' or 'below' and 'te' is the plural affix applied to persons, and the tribal name is therefore Sokte, implying those who went south or below the parent village to settle. Molbem, which lies south of Chin Nwe, is, we know, the original capital of the Sokte tribe.

Ciimnuai, located nine miles from Tedim, still existed when the British appeared in the Chin Hills around 1890. The Paites claim that Ciimnuai was a large settlement, and very powerful centre of power that was akin to a city-state (Wikipedia, Ciimnuai, 2020).

Ciimnuai memorial stone

There is memorial stone 'at traditional site of Ciimnuai set up by local youth group'. The inscription on the stone reads:

Hih gamlei ah I Pu I Pate
AD 1420 kum kiim pawlin
Zongam ana tuncilna
Mun uh ahi hi

The English rendering is:

In this land our forefathers
Settled for the first time
In the year AD 1420

Origins of the Sizangs and Nguites

Quite similar to the mythical origins of the Suktes, the accounts of the mythical origins of Sizangs and Nguites of the Paite tribe of Chin Hills, Myanmar, are reproduced from Carey & Tuck (1896, 2008: 127, 140).

The Sizangs

Tradition states that a gourd fell from the heavens and, bursting with the fall, emitted a man and a woman; these became the Chin Adam and Eve, and their garden of Eden was Chin Nwe (Ciimnuai, author). This story is not peculiar to the Siyins (Sizangs, author), but is believed by all the tribes in the Northern Chin Hills (Carey & Tuck, 1896, 2008: 127).

Nguites

The Nwites (Nguites, author), in common with the Northern Chins, believed that they are the descendants of the man and woman who fell from the clouds on to the earth at Chin Nwe (Carey & Tuck, 1896, 2008:140).

'Khul' of the Paites

Apart from these, *Paite in Mizoram* (2011), a history of Paite in Mizoram, also refers to the mythical Chhinlung, called 'Khul' in Paite language, as a possible place of origin of the Paites (Tribal Research Institute, *Paite in Mizoram*, 2011: 4-5). The book contains the Cave theory of origin of all 'the Mizo Tribes' as found in the 'Chhinlung' story in Shakespear (1912, 1988). But this mythical Chhinlung appears to be a

later addition, we find no evidence in the Paite history from other, especially earlier, sources. And this book Paite in Mizoram does not give any source to the Chhinlung story contained the book.

Location of the Mythical Cave: China or Tibet

For those believing in the historical validity of the cave origin theory, or the underground origin theory, the question is about its geographical location. Some locate in China, some in Tibet, and some do so in Myanmar. For the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes could establish, more or less clearly, places of their ancestors' settlements in the Chin Hills of Myanmar, but beyond that they are so far unable to do so.

In other words, what must be the original homeland of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes? This question beckons both those who believe in the historical validity of the Mythical Cave and those who do not.

There are two opinions on the possible original home of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo, either Tibet or China.

Existing literature

Let us explore what some of the existing literature have to say on the possible origin of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo peoples.

Commenting specifically under the 'Origin of the Chins', Carey & Tuck (1896, 2008) are convinced, from the available evidences till then, that the Nagas, Chins, Lushais, and Kukis are originally one and the same people. They then recapitulate some of the literature concerning the common origin of the tribes in question.

Yule in 1855 described the Chins and the 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 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 (Carey & Tuck, 1896, 2008: 2).

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, Tibetians, Manchus, Japanese, Annamese, Siamese, Burmese, and the Turks. The evidence of language, so far 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"(Carey & Tuck, 1896, 2008: 2).

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 (Carey & Tuck, 1896, 2008: 2).

Carey & Tuck conclude, "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 know as Tibet 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"--italics mine (Carey & Tuck, 1896, 2008: 2).

Foreign scholars

Three earliest foreign scholars who have carried out extensive field works in Burma and published books based on their researches are Luce, Leach, and Lehman, and Than Tun (Than Tun is considered 'foreign' in the sense that he is a non-KCM writer). The three social scientists did not deal with the question of the origin of the KCM at length, but their observation on the possible origin of the tribes makes sense given their academic credentials and their comprehensive research engagements in Burma.

Mr. Gordon Hannington Luce (1889-1979) was a colonial scholar in Burma and an archaeologist. Mr. Edmund Ronald Leach (1910--1989) was a renowned British social anthropologist. Mr. F. K. Lehman (1924-2016) was a renowned anthropologist, linguist, and Asia scholar.

Then there are other scholars such as Mr. B. Lalthangliana, Mr. Lian H Sakhong, etc., whose recent works have thrown some light on the origin of the KCM. B. Lalthangliana is a historian from Mizoram, India, while Sakhong is a historian from the Chin State of Myanmar.

Views of Leach

E.R. Leach, a renowned anthropologist, while writing about the Kachins of Burma, observes that,

"The techniques and apparatus of weaving and iron-working and cultivating rice as well as a variety of household equipments ranging from fire-pistons to brass gongs are common; not only to all the hill peoples of Indo-China (Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos, author), Burma and Assam (that is, including today's Mizoram, Manipur, etc., since at the time of publication of Leach's book in 1954, Assam included Mizoram, Manipur, etc., author), but also to similarly situated tribes in western Szechuan (China, author), Formosa, the Philippines, Borneo and much of Indonesia" (Leach 1954,1968: 247).

"It has been argued, Leach continues, "that this distribution of traits reflects a pre-historic migration of 'Indonesian' people. But no plausible chronology could be fitted to such a theory. The only reasonable assumption is that these widely dispersed culture all originally borrowed them from the same source, namely China in the first millennium" (Leach 1954,1968: 247).

In other words, according to this theory advanced by Leach, the KCM have originated from China. And that the their ancestors lived in China during 1000 B.C. to A.D.1. This implies that the KCM, or the pre-KCM, and others had left China during the first century A.D. (that is, during A.D. 100).

Ch'iang people of China as ancestors of KCM

Than Tun and Gordon Luce, the two well known scholars on ancient Myanmar (Burma), say that the Ch'iang people of China were not just the ancestors of the Chins (KCM) but of the entire Tibeto-Burman group. The Ch'iang people lived in an area between eastern Tibet and western China on the Tibet-China borders. The Ch'iang people enjoyed a civilization as advanced as the Chinese, but the stronger Chinese (the Han Chinese, author) pushed them to the south (Than Tun 1988: 3). Luce says, "With the expansion of China, the Ch'iang had either the choice to be absorbed or to become nomads in the wilds. It was a hard choice, between liberty and civilization. Your ancestors chose liberty; and they must have gallantly maintained it. But the cost was heavy. It cost them 2000 years of progress. If the Ch'iang of 3000 B.C. were equals of the Chinese civilization, the Burmans of 700 A.D. were not nearly as advanced as the Chinese in 1300 B.C." (Cited in Than Tun, 1988: 4).

Thus, we can say that Than Tun and Luce conclude that the ancestors of the KCM were originally from (ancient) China.

Views of Than Tun

Under pressure from the dominant group in China called Han Chinese, the Burman or Bamar group of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family (Ch'iang) left their place located in the Tibetan Plateau, lying in today's Tibet-China border, in the early part of 8th century A.D., Than Tun claims. For their descent from China (strictly, Tibet-China border) to Burma, they chose a valley between Salween River and N'Mai River (that is, eastern Tibet and western China). Salween River is the longest river in Burma while N'Mai river is a tributary of the Irrawaddy River (Burma). They reached the Shan State of northern Burma before A.D. 713, Than Tun said. A powerful Nanchao Kingdom (Tai Kingdom) that was expanding its power deep into Burma from its seat in what is now Yunnan Province of China, temporarily halted the north-south migration of the Burmans. After the end of the 9th century A.D. however the Nanchao Kingdom collapsed. That paved the movement and settlement of the Burman further south into the plains of area. The Burmans therefore entered their present area of settlement by the end of the 9th century A.D. (Tun 1988, quoted in Sakhong, 2003: 11). This group of Burmans (also written as Bamar, pronounced Bama) are the dominant group we find in today's Myanmar. They are different from others such as Shans, Karens, Rakhines, Chins, etc. More of Than Tun's account on this can be read from B. Lalthangliana (Lalthangliana, 2001).

Views of Luce

Luce holds that the ancestors of the Chin, or the KCM most likely live first in China. His account of the Chins migration from China to Burma is summarized here.

The Chins, also under pressure from the Han Chinese, left their area in the eastern Tibet and western China. They took a different route of migration. They chose Hukong Valley when moving from Tibet-China towards south and south west. Hukong Valley is at the source of the Chindwin River, located in today's Rakhine State in northern most corner of Burma. Luce is of the opinion that the Chins, moving southward

from the Hukong Valley, settled in the Chindwin Valley between A.D. 300 and A.D. 750 (Luce 1959b, quoted in Sakhong, 2003: 11-12).

This means that the pre-Chins, or their forefathers, would have left China between A.D. 1 and A.D. 300.

Views of Lehman

Lehman begins by saying that "We cannot be sure when the Chin first entered the territory they now occupy (that is the present Chin State in 1963, author).....The apparent close linguistic relationship among the several Tibeto-Burman languages of Burma (to go no further afield) indicates clearly that in the not very distant past the ancestors of such different peoples as the Naga and the Chin formed a relatively unitary speech group. This group must have occupied some fairly restricted region" (in Southwest of China, author) (Lehman, 1963, 1980: 11-12). He also concurs with Luce's broad idea that the first few centuries A.D. were a period of the influx of Sino-Tibetan-speaking peoples, and in particular of the Tibeto-Burman speakers, into Southeast Asia, (from China, author) on account of the Chinese pressure (Lehman, 1963, 1980: 13).

Lehman continues to state that the Chin '*may*' have been in Burma, either north of their present range of occupation or somewhere within it, any time after the beginning of the Christian era. Quite possibly they completed the occupation of the whole of their present area well into the middle of the first millennium A.D." (Lehman, 1963, 1980: 13). Lehman's assertion that the Chins came to the 'their present area' as early as 500 AD, is confusing. The Chins could not have arrived in their present settlement in the Chin Hills as early as 500 AD. Lehman could have meant that the Chins completed their settlement in the upper Chindwin of Burma in 500 AD.

From another source, let us infer that the Chins according to Lehman, entered Burma between 300 AD and 800 AD, the dates Lehman arrived at in collaboration and consultation with his research associate Luce on the possible dates by which the Tibeto-Burman speaking people such as the Chins entered Burma (Cooler, 1995: 26-7).

Lehman and Luce have done extensive researches on the origin of the Chins in Burma, and the two have closely worked together on the matter as evidenced by Lehman's inferences (of the dates of the Chins' migration from China to Burma by) drawn from 'personal communication' he has had with Luce (Lehman, 1963, 1980:12-13).

Lehman also claims that "The ancestors of the Chin and of the Burmans must have been distinct from each other even before they first appeared in Burma....Chin history begins after A.D. 750, with the development of Burman civilization and the Chin interaction with it" (Lehman, 1963, 1980:22). In other words, the first group of ancestral Chin began to lead a separate social and ethnic existence in Burma by A.D. 750. Though most certainly a given name, the term 'Chin' as an appellation was being applied to the first batch of the ancestors of the LKC around A.D. 750, according to Lehman.

Lehman continues, "The earliest mention of the Chin in Burman inscriptions of the Pagan kingdom dates from the thirteenth century A.D. and refers to the Chin as 'allies' or 'comrades' (that being the meaning of the term 'Chin') in the lower valley of the Chindwin (literally, the 'hole of the Chin'). The places mentioned in old Burmese and the modern place names in the Chindwin Valley, however, suggest to Luce (1959b) that the Chin were left to themselves in the Upper Chindwin. No places above Monywa are mentioned in the inscriptions. By the twelfth century the Burmans had occupied the Yaw and Kyaw valleys abutting on the Southern Chin Hills where, to judge by more recent conditions, they could not have failed to be in contact with the Chin of the Southern Hills" (Lehman, 1963, 1980:12-13).

"Before this time", Lehman continues, "we can say nothing about possible contacts of Southern Chin with the Sak kingdom in Central Burma or on the Arakan side, or with the early Pyu or Mon Kingdoms. But the Chin were certainly in the present Southern Chin area for an indefinite time before the Burmans occupied the Yaw drainage" (Lehman 1963, 1980:20). Further, Lehman says, "There is no information on the relations between those pre-Burman civilization" (that is, The Mons and the Pyu that inhabited major river valleys of Burma before mid-9th century AD, author) "and any inhabitants of what are now the Chin Hills--or any peoples ancestral to the Chin" (Lehman 1963, 1980:12). This could be partly because the system of writing came in Burma only in the 11th century AD. The Chins must have long forgotten the art of writing called 'oracle bone' mastered by the Ch'iang of ancient China, ancestors of the Chins.

By way of information to the readers, it may be mentioned here that the earliest known inscriptions in the Burmese script date from the 11th century AD. The earliest evidence of the Old Burmese script is securely dated to 1035, while an 18th-century casting of an old Pagan era stone inscription points to 984. The earliest securely dated Burma Mon script is 1093 at Prome while two other "assigned" dates of Old Burma Mon are 1049 and 1086 (Aung-Thwin, 2005: 198).

Native scholars

Two historians who have spent considerable time in the Chin State of Myanmar, B.Lalthangliana and Lian H.Sakhong also believe that the Ch'iang were the most likely ancestors of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai group (Lalthangliana, 2001: 41-46; Sakhong, 2003: 8-9). Lalthangliana believes that the Chins must have been in the Chindwin Valley of Burma about A.D. 600 (Lalthangliana, 2001: 52). Sakhong seems to agree with the broad surmise of Luce, already noted in this book, i.e., 4th -8th centuries A.D., and Lalthangliana, i.e., 8th century A.D. as dates for the Chin's occupation of the Chindwin Valley (Sakhong, 2003: 11-12). Lalthangliana later revised the date of the Chin's occupation of the Chindwin Valley from A.D. 750 he used in his History of Mizo in Burma (1980: 37) to A.D. 600 in his later work (Lalthangliana, 2001: 52).

K. Zawla

K.Zawla, a Mizo historian, speculates that Mr. Chhinlung, the mythical ancestor of the Mizos, was a Chinese prince who lived in China about 200 B.C. He also offers another idea when he asserts that the ancestors of the Mizos escaped from the Great Wall of China during this time (BC 200) on account of the hardships they faced as forced labourers. To him, the horrendous experience of escape from the Great Wall was most likely the mythical cave, Chhinlung. A third idea Zawla offered was that upon arrival in Burma, the Burmans called the forefathers of Mizo 'Chinlu'. In course of time, that the Mizos later construe this as 'Chhinlung' (Zawl, 1964, 2011: 6-7).

Chhinlung as 'Chin lu', the Chin people

This observation by Zawla is extremely interesting and significant. In Burmese 'Chin-luu', or 'Chin-lu', means 'Chin people', or 'Chin person (s)' (Interview: K. Suiawr, 2020). 'luu' (pronounced loo) in Burmese means 'male, man, person, people in general' (Online dictionary, <https://www.wordhippo.com/>). In course of time, the Lusei tribe, and the Hmar tribe who also have this 'Chhinlung/Sinlung' mythology, must have associated this appellation 'Chin-lu' with the mythical cave since 'lung' in 'Chhinlung' literally means 'stone, rock, cave, seal', as a noun; and 'to cover, to seal' as a verb.

The mythology of origin from a cave or an underground is common to all the tribes of the Kuki-Lushai-Chin. But it does not have a specific mythical name. Giving a specific name, such as Chhinlung, to a perceived particular historical underground original habitation would have to be a later addition in the long tradition of oral story being told and retold countless times from generations to generations.

Bianca Son-Doerschel and Rema Chhakchhuak

Then we have two other native scholars Bianca Son (Bianca Son-Doerschel) and Rema Chhakchhuak who have recently done some researches on the same field.

Doerschel's (2013) interests in *The Man Shu*, a 9th c. AD work by a Chinese scholar Fan Ch'ò, and her (Bianca) assertion that the 'Zhou' rulers and the subjects referred to in the book, are the 'Zo' people, is noted later in this section.

Rema Chhakchhuak (2019), a Mizo linguist who spent twelve years (2003-2015) in China, firmly believes that the original home of the Mizos and their kindred tribes is China. Mounting historical, archaeological, linguistic and genetic evidences clearly establish that China (north-western /western China and eastern Tibet) is the cradle of the Tibeto-Burman language family in which the Mizos, Chins, Kukis, etc., all belong, says Chhakchhuak. He further says that the Chinese scholars themselves admit the Ch'iang, or the Di-Qiang are the ancestral of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The invasion of China by Mongol ruler Genghis Khan set off mass migrations of peoples from north to south, as a result of mass killings and

atrocities committed by the Mongol army, and by AD 1211 the forefathers of the Mizos must have left south China, Chhakchhuak concludes.

During his stay in China, he found neither any Mizo tribe nor the mythical Chhinlung.

Chhakchhuak debunks the 'Chhinlung origin theory' by Rev. Lalremliana who authored a book titled *Chhinlung Chhuak Zofate* (2018). In the book, Lalremliana wrote about his personal story of travelling to 'Chhinlung town' in Sichuan Province, China in March 2020. Lalremliana claimed that the place was the actual historical *Chhinlung* of the original place of the ancestors of the Mizos. However, Chhakchhuak says that Lalremliana's 'Chhinlung' is not a name of a place: village, or town. It is actually written as Xinlong, and not as Chhinlung. And Xinlong is the name of a Country, an administrative area, named by the Chinese government only in 1951. Chhakchhuak therefore says that Lalremliana's 'Chhinlung' origin theory is baseless and entirely fabricated, bearing no connection whatsoever with the actual historical origin of the Mizo and its kindred tribes (Chhakchhuak, 2019).

From linguistics studies (linguistic geography), speakers of ancestors of the Proto-Sino-Tibetan family that include Kuki-Chin-Mizo were believed to have originated from an area in NE Tibet (that is, NW China) where we have sources of great rivers such as Yellow River, Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Salween, and Irrawaddy. From this 'core' area, the cradle of the Tibeto-Burman family, the people left the area, following three likely migratory routes. The first route goes towards Tibet in the west, the second goes southward and then to NE India, the third goes southward passing through Yunnan (south China) and then enters Myanmar along the Chindwin river valley. It is this third migratory route the ancestors of the KCM were believed to have taken (Chhakchhuak, 2019: 27-27; personal communication with Chhakchhuak).

Man Shu: Book of the Southern Barbarians

There is a very interesting book called *Man Shu: Book of the Southern Barbarians* (1961) written by Fan Ch'o, a 9th century Chinese scholar. It details the existence of two kingdoms in the Chindwin Valley in 9th century. Some scholars are of the opinion that this is a direct reference to ancestors of the KCM people.

Fan Ch'o mentioned Mino-Chiang River in Burma (Fan Ch'o, 1961: 20). This is considered a reference to the Chindwin River. Fan Ch'o described the existence of two kingdoms called Mi-no kingdom and Mi-ch'en kingdom, 'bordering on the sea', in 9th century A.D. He writes, "They call their princes and chiefs Shou" Fan Ch'o further says that two kingdoms were destroyed in A.D. 835 by the Man (Nanchao, author) "who looted their gold and silver. They captured two or three thousand of their clansmen, and banished them to wash the gold of Li-Shui" (Fan Ch'o, 1961: 90).

Doerchel claims that the 'Shou' must have been the Zo (or the KCM people, author). 'Zo' transliterated sounds phonetically the same (Doerchel, 2013: 119). B.Lalthangliana on the other hand says Mi-no kingdom must mean Mizo or Chin kingdom (Lalthangliana, 2001: 52-54). These two scholars feel that the KCM must have established their rule in the Chindwin Valley in the 9th century Burma.

This is a very interesting aspect in the history of the KCM. Needless to say, further investigations are needed to establish a clear and direct link between the two kingdoms and its people with the KCM. If Mino-

Chiang River is the Chindwin River, Mi-no kingdom could be very well mean Mi-zo kingdom (Zo kingdom, as asserted by Doerchel) while Mi-ch'en kingdom could also mean Mi-Chin kingdom (Chin kingdom). It is true that the early men of the KCM tribes used 'Zo' as self-identification as forcefully argued by Bianca (2013). But to my knowledge, only one tribe called 'Zou' of Manipur today has adopted this Zo self-appellation as an ethnic name.

And lastly, The Encyclopaedia Britannica also records that the Chins, considered friends and companions by the Burmans, "lived with the Burmese on the South-Eastern slopes of Tibet and followed the Burmese on the long migration into Burma" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vo.12, 1974: 506). This means that the Burmese and the Chins once lived together in Tibet, and that they migrated together to Burma as well.

China-Tibet origin

It must be borne in mind that ancient Tibet, ancient Burma and ancient China shared common borders. The borders were entirely porous and were constantly changing throughout in the past. The people in the borders were also moving freely across the borders. The point is that, if the forefathers of KCM originated in Tibet, it would most likely be from areas in Tibetan bordering Yunnan or south China. In other words, the place of origin being either Tibet or China hardly makes a difference given the geographical and cultural affinities between Tibet and China in the past, especially between various non-Han ethnic minorities there. Today, the two states of Myanmar, Kachin State (in the east and north east), and Shan State (in the east), and Yunnan Province (the south-western most corner of China) meet Tibet in her south eastern tip. Even today, the north and north eastern borders of Myanmar and China's Yunnan Province witness large scale daily movements of goods and people across the porous border.

The whole point is that there have been movements of people from China to Myanmar, and in fact vice versa, through Yunnan area from unknown times till this very day. Thus it would be perfectly possible for the forefathers of the KCM to have migrated from China to Burma passing through today's Yunnan Province. And it is a historical fact now that the Kuki-Chin-Mizo peoples shared a common descent.

Recent developments in linguistic study

There have been tremendous developments in recent years on linguistic aspects on the origin of ethnic groups including the KCM. The new developments have supported and confirmed the previous ideas already accounted above.

Homeland and Timeline of Sino-Tibetan Language Family

Recent works by linguists have shed light on origins of tribes whose origins have been shrouded in mysteries for ages. Linguists are now able to establish probable places of origin, and probable dates of separation (read migration) of certain groups of people based on an in depth study of their languages. One such study is the one being done by the University of California at Berkeley. The University of California

website puts out the following vital information on '*Homeland and time-depth of Sino-Tibetan*', (available at <https://stedt.berkeley.edu/about-st>. Accessed June 6, 2020).

Sino-Tibetan languages, group of languages that include both the Chinese and the Tibeto-Burman languages. In terms of numbers of speakers, they constitute the world's second largest language family (after Indo-European), including more than 300 languages and major dialects.

The original homeland of speakers of this group, or the Proto-Sino-Tibetan (PST) homeland seems to have been somewhere on the Himalayan plateau, where the great rivers of East and Southeast Asia (including the Yellow River, Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Salween, and Irrawaddy) have their sources. The earliest speakers of this entire group were estimated to have lived here perhaps around 4000 B.C.

Initially, the two groups of people, that is, the ancestral Chinese or Han ethnic group (Proto-Han or the Proto-Chinese) and the ancestral Tibetan and Burman peoples (Proto-Tibeto-Burman) spoke more or less one language for about 4000 years.

Moving along these great rivers, the Tibeto-Burman speaking group (such as the Burmans, Tibetans, and the entire Kuki-Luhai-Chin, author) slowly got separated from the parent Sino-Tibetan group, in the middle of the first millennium, that is, A.D. 500 A.D. From around A.D 500 peoples from this TB group began moving from China into Peninsular South East Asia comprising countries such as Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

China as the most likely original home of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo

Most scholars thus agree that China is the most likely original home, the birth place of the ancestors of the KCM. Available evidences and literature, both oral and written, all point towards China as the KCM ancestors' homeland.

Disagreement on location of the mythical cave

While most KCM people, the general public and scholars alike, now think that China is indeed their original homeland, there is no consensus on the location of the legendary cave.

Some people such as K. Zawla thinks that it is located in China. He links what must be a terrifying and deadly escape from the construction of the Great Wall of China to the mythical cave, or 'Chhinlung' as he calls it (Zawl, 1964, 2011: 6-7). As noted already, the official website of the state government of Mizoram, on the origin of Mizos, reads: "It is possible that the Mizos came from Shinlung or Chhinlungsan located....in China." (About Mizoram, Chhinlung, 2020). The website cites no references. Lian H. Sakhong (2003) and T.S Gangte (1993) claim that the mythical cave is the Chindwin River. The Chindwin River (which literally means 'Hole of the Chins'), with its associated flood, is a perfect candidate for the mythical cave (Sakhong, 2003; and Gangte quoted in Sakhong, 2003).

The literal meaning of Chindwin as 'Hole of the Chins', often quoted by scholars such as Lehman (1963, 1980: 20), Sakong (2003: 11), and a host of others, is obviously the one first given by Luce (1985:77). Luce, for all his researches and works in Burma, is a colonial scholar, but not a linguist. So, the one offered by Matisoff, a distinguished linguist, as 'Wellspring of the Chins', is much more preferable. For a literal translation of Chindwin, Matisoff (1989:12) suggests that instead of 'Hole of Chins' a la Luce (1985:77), "*Wellspring of the Chins* may be a nicer turn of phrase". The author's interviews with people such as Mr. Suiawr, and others who are fluent in Burmese (Bamar) confirm the idea that 'dwin' (pronounced 'twin') in Burmese means something relating to water, and hence (Chin) river, despite the fact that 'dwin' also means 'a hole', specifically meaning a 'hole that is small'. 'dwin' in Burmese means 'wellspring, or well, or fountain, hole' (Interview: Mr. Suiawr, 2020).

Gin Za Thang (1973), on the other hand, claims that the mythical cave is in Tibet (quoted in Shakhong, 2003). So is Rema Chhakchhuak, who claimed that the ancestors of the Mizos, who must have lived originally in Tibet, must have moved southward to Yunnan Province of China. And that under pressure from the invading army of Gublai Khan, son of Genghiz Khan, they must have left China in the early 13th century A.D. (Chhakchhuak, 2019: 30). Chhakchhuak is a linguist who spent twelve years in China (2003-2015). During his years in China, he was unable to find any place called 'Chhinlung', or any Mizo there (Chhakchhuak, 2019).

Chungkhosei Baite (2016), who uses the term 'Kuki' to represent the entire the KCM, also observes: "Majority of indigenous historians, scholars and researchers had concluded that the Kukis are originally resided in China. They maintained that the mythological *khul*, *Chhinlung* and *Sinlung* are not a natural cave. Some scholar said *Khul* was Great Wall of China while other suggests *Chhinlung* is a name of ancient Chinese prince.....Most of indigenous historians, scholars and researchers have assumed that Kukis of Burma, northeast India and present Bangladesh are fled or escaped from Great Wall during the period 221-207 BC.....However by careful historical study or observation, it is not found people leaving or escaped from great Wall during its construction. History has mention about people hiding for fear of heavy work but does not mention anything about people escaped or leaving China during the course of construction of The Great Wall. Further, it is not available in the history about people leaving China during the reign of Emperor Qin Shih Huang".

Cave houses as 'Chhinlung', the real place of origin?

While there is thus an overwhelming perception among the KCM that their ancestral home must be in China, and that the mythical cave must surely have a direct historical link with their origin, the location and the identity of the mythical cave so far remains a mystery. This mystery, i think, is now going to be resolved with my chance 'discovery' of the *real* cave houses in China.

In the following pages, we shall read articles about the real cave houses or cave dwellings. It is the story about the '*legend of their underground origin*' (italics mine), as described rather appropriately by A.H. Keane in his brief accounts of the Chin in his infamous 'racist' voluminous book, *Man: Past and Present* (1920, 2011: 191). Yes it is indeed the legend of the underground origin of the KCM (Though cave houses could be both underground and over ground, the actual experience of living even in an over ground cave house could be like living in an underground home: mostly dark, humid, etc). Mr. Keane, the Irish linguist and ethnologist had got it right !

And perhaps you would wonder, like i do, how it could have ever escaped our attention all these years!

Cave Houses in China

People in China have been living in cave houses for more than 4,000 years. Called *Yaodong*, which is a Chinese for *house cave*, *Yaodong* is also known as Pit House, Cave House, and Cave Dwelling. An estimated 40 million or 4 crore people of Chinese people are still living in cave houses till this very day.

The Cave Houses are sights to wonder. The videos are available on YouTube, and the pictures are easily available on various internet websites. They speak volumes about the greatness of the Chinese civilization and, most amazingly, its continuity few other civilizations can ever boast of.

For more details, let me quote at length an article by Kaushik Patowa, published on Amusing Planet (2018), titled '*Yaodong: China's Pit Houses*' (Patowa, 2018), highlighted in italics.

For more than four thousand years, on the Loess Plateau in northern China, people have been residing in caves known as yaodong, which is Chinese for “house cave”. Some of these cave dwellings are carved out of the hillside, while others are dug vertically down to form a sunken courtyard from which rooms are excavated horizontally. The latter is the most unusual of which few equals exist in this world. The pit houses of Matmata in Tunisia come the closest.

The Loess Plateau, located around the Wei River valley in the provinces of Shaanxi and Shanxi, was enormously important to Chinese history as it formed one of the earliest cradles of Chinese civilization. The plateau was formed by the deposition of very fine particles of soil blown in by wind storms over millions of years. As a result, the soil here is very fine and loamy, and is highly fertile, easy to farm and dig, making cave dwelling a reasonable option.

The first yaodong appeared during the period of China's Xia Dynasty, some 4,000 years ago, although it wasn't until the Han dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD), that they began to be more popular. The yaodong's popularity reached its peak during the dynasties of Ming (1368 to 1644) and Qing (1644 to 1912). Even today, some 40 million people are believed to live in cave houses.

The most common type of yaodong are those which are dug on the faces and slopes of the plateau. These are located in regions on the edges of the Loess Plateau. In the interior of the plateau, where there are no hillsides and ravines, peasants dig a square pit on the ground and then dig the dwellings horizontally on the four walls to form a central, sunken courtyard. Entrance to these pit houses are usually through a ramp or an underground corridor.

A yaodong typically has a long vaulted room with a semicircular entrance covered with a wooden door or a quilt. The better caves protrude from the mountain and are reinforced with brick masonry. Often multiple dwellings are built adjacent to or on top of one another and connected together to make up a tiered village, often for a single clan or extended family.

These houses are very pleasant to live—cool in summers and warm in winters. When fitted with modern conveniences such as running water and electricity, a simple three-room cave with attached bathroom—totalling barely 750 square feet—can cost \$46,000 in the market. A simple one-room cave without plumbing rents for \$30 a month.

Subterranean Dwellings

Ronald G. Knapp, in his book *China's Old Dwellings* (2019) calls the cave houses 'Subterranean Dwellings'. He says, the term "yao" means "kiln", suggesting the beehive like structures used throughout China's countryside to fire bricks and tiles. "Dong" represents the recessed cavities or holes in the earth that most people would simply call "caves". So "yaodong" literally means "kiln-like caves". Knapp refers them as "earth sheltered housing" for their cooling effect in summer and warming effect in winter (Knapp, 2019: 192-3).

Knapp further asserts that environmental degradation necessitated the invention of cave houses in China. He writes, "Extensive deforestation resulted from accelerating firewood collection, charcoal-making, land reclamation, and brick-making. As the availability of timber declined and without the economic wherewithal to bring in building materials from outside the region, Chinese peasants for centuries came to dig into the soil to make their underground abodes just as the prehistoric peoples with much less technology had done earlier" (Knapp, 2019: 193).

Below is another article on Cave Houses titled 'Cave Dwellings (Discover a Special Living Experience)' by Chris Quan published on October 18, 2018. A part of the article (Quan, 2018) is reproduced here, highlighted in italics.

Geographical Distribution of the Cave Dwellings

Cave dwellings are widely distributed throughout China, ranging from Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Turpan and Kashgar) to Gansu Province (Lanzhou, Dunhuang, Pingliang, Qingyang, and Gannan) to Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Yinchuan and Guyuan) to Shaanxi Province (Mei County, Qian County, and Yan'an) to Shanxi Province (Linfen, Fushan, Pinglu, and Taiyuan) to Henan Province (Zhengzhou and

Luoyang) to Fujian Province (Longyan and Yongding), with Shaanxi cave dwellings being the most famous in China.

While most people live in cave houses artificially made by men, there are those that live inside natural caves. One such instance is reported by Bryan Denton for the New York Times. His article 'China's Last Cave Dwellers Fight to Keep Their Underground Homes' was published on May 13, 2018 in the The New York Times, U.S.A. A part of the article (Denton, 2018) is reproduce below, highlighted in italics.

When armed bandits prowled this remote, mountainous stretch of the south-western province of Guizhou in the chaotic years before the founding of modern China, the ethnic Miao villagers hid in the region's enormous caves.

And there they have remained, even after China was united under Communist rule, grinding out an existence of profound rural poverty and isolation.

Over the past 20 years, though, the caves have become less secluded because of a steadily increasing trickle of tourists, who come to experience what local media have described as the last continuously inhabited cave in China.

A cottage industry has popped up in which the cave dwellers earn extra money by renting out rooms in their homes, which over time have clustered within Zhong cave, a limestone cavern big enough to hold four American football fields. The hangar-like cave is so large that their wooden or bamboo-made residences form a small, subterranean village built along its undulating walls.

The pictures of these people inside a huge cave are available online. The people living there in the cave and the KCM people look so similar. One can clearly see their houses that resemble those of the KCM, their Mongoloid physical features, their drying and preservation of maize, etc., on the house walls, their meat smoking style of leaving them on top of fireplace, their storage of firewood by piling up near the house, and so on and so forth. These are all familiar to the practices of the KCM.

Further, there is a blog, written by Jeffery Hays, captioned Cave homes and ant people of China, last updated July 2015. A part of the blog (Hays, 2015) is again reproduced below, highlighted in italics. This piece would inform us that cave dwelling is so prevalent in China. The Architect of modern China, Mao Zedong, and the current (2020) President of China, Xi Jinping, both once lived in the cave house. That is not all, there is a huge chunk of population of its capital Beijing living underground, till this very day. Hays writes:

The caves have an important role in modern Chinese history. After the Long March, the famous retreat of the Communist Party in the 1930s, the Red Army reached Yanan, in northern Shanxi Province, where they dug and lived in cave dwellings. In "Red Star Over China," writer Edgar Snow described a Red Army university that "was probably the world's only seat of 'higher learning' whose classrooms were

bombproof caves, with chairs and desks of stone and brick, and blackboards and walls of limestone and clay." In his cave dwelling in Yan'an (located in the northern Shaanxi Province), Chairman Mao Zedong led the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945) and wrote many notable works, such as "On Practice" "Contradiction Theory" and "Talking about the Protracted War." Today these cave dwellings are tourist sights.

The current (2020) Chinese President Xi Jinping lived for seven years in a cave when he was exiled to Shaanxi Province during the Cultural Revolution. "The cave topology is one of the earliest human architectural forms; there are caves in France, in Spain, people still living in caves in India," said David Wang, an architecture professor at Washington State University in Spokane who has written widely on the subject. "What is unique to China is the ongoing history it has had over two millenniums."

Two types of cave: cave and cavern

Strictly speaking, caves are of two types, cave and cavern. If the hollow or the opening is on the surface of the earth then it is a cave whereas if it is under the ground then it is advisable to refer to it as a cavern. In spite of this basic difference between the two, a cavern is also commonly referred to as 'cave'.

World's largest cave: Zhijin Cave

The world's largest unsupported cavern called Zhijin Cave or Daji Cave in Guizhou Province in south west of China is 13.5 km in length and has a total area of seven sq.km. The cave is believed to possess the largest unsupported roof span of any cave worldwide. More than 120 different crystalline formations are found in the cave's interior along with stalactites and the "Silver Rain Tree" a 17 m (56 ft) tall rare flower-like transparent crystal (Eaves, 2019; Internet archive, Wayback machine, Zhijin Cave, 2020)

Huanghedong Cave, 6th longest cave in the world

Huanghedong or Huanghe Cave, is the longest cave in China, and in Asia, and the 6th longest in the world in 2018. It is located near the town of Wenquan in Suiyang County, Guizhou Province. The total length of the cave is a whopping 238 km and its deepest depth measures 1,529 ft. The cave contains numerous waterfalls, and at least three underground rivers, some of which contain cave shrimp, and big fish weighing several pounds (Eaves, 2019; Chinadaily, Shuanghe Cave, 2020).

The point here is that there are numerous huge caves in China, not just the two mentioned here. Those caves could house quite a large population.

The earlier popular assumptions that the mythical cave must be the Great Wall of China (Zawl, 1964, 2011), the Chindwin River, as 'Hole of Chin' (Sakhong, 2003), and that the mythical flood could be any one of these: Yellow River, Yangtze, Hong River or Red River (all originating in China), and Chindwin River (Burma), etc., though not established by any academic researches but being continually kept alive by popular

narratives among the KCM peoples, can now be put aside. Enter the 'real' cave of China, the cave of the underground origin.

Leaving cave houses, leaving China

One can detect two things common to most of the legends on origin of the KCM, they are, a cave or a hole, and a flood or water. The presence of water and a hole in the legends must be located within one single story, or one event; something they all had experienced together within a given time in their actual historical past. These two elements are found in the *yaodong*. Should we leave out the 'water' part in the stories, still the *yaodong* best fits in the mythology as a cave or hole, the underground origin, than say the Great Wall of China, or the Chindwin River, or any other river that they might have crossed during their historical migrations.

We also assume that like millions of people in China, some of the Ch'iang that included the ancestors of the KCM, would have actually lived in cave houses. Or that the some of the Ch'iang that included the ancestors of the KCM experienced living in cave houses (by way of hiding themselves from enemies, or being forced by enemies to live in cave houses).

So we have three possible 'origins', all related to actual caves or cave-like dwelling places.

First, the actual cave houses; second, caverns; third, natural caves. The first one is an artificial one constructed specifically for human dwelling, and as we know it now, millions of people live there for more than two thousand years in China. The other later two are natural, not made by men, but also used for human dwelling occasionally; people live there by necessity but not by choice.

There are several possible scenarios. The following is the reconstructed scenarios in which the actual ancestors, or the pre- ancestors of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo, could have left China. I have recreated the scenes keeping in mind the exodus from China took place on account of pressures from a stronger group, most likely the Han Chinese, although we cannot completely rule out inter-Ch'iang group rivalry. As we have already read, the Hans carried out extensive military and cultural campaigns against non-Chinese ethnic nations including the ancestors of the KCM, the Ch'iang, as vividly recorded by Warren W. Smith in his book *Tibetan Nation: A History Of Tibetan Nationalism And Sino-Tibetan Relations* (1996, 2019).

From Smith's accounts (1996, 2019), we can list five broad outcomes of the Han campaigns against the Ch'iang:

- (i) some were killed,
- (ii) some surrendered, and were assimilated in to Chinese culture and society,
- (iii) some were subjugated, enslaved, and assimilated in to Chinese culture and society,
- (iv) some were relocated, or exiled elsewhere,
- (v) some refused to be subjugated, and chose to leave China dominated by the Han Chinese.

Possible scenarios

First, the ancestors of the KCM could have actually lived in the cave houses, and after being defeated in a battle or a series of battles they have taken shelter in their underground dwellings. There could be frequent flooding of their houses during war times as they would not be able to maintain proper drainage system. Then one day they managed to escape, but all could not escape as the enemy shut the doors of the cave houses.

Second, whether the ancestors of the KCM actually lived in cave houses or not, after being subjugated by a stronger power, they could be imprisoned in those unused or abandoned cave houses, dirty and filled with water. Some of them escaped while some were left behind because the enemy shut the doors of the cave houses.

Third, fleeing from their enemies, they took shelter in caves or caverns, they were hounded and flushed out by their enemies, and many of them died. The remaining escaped and reached Myanmar.

Fourth, another scenario is that after being subjugated, they left their areas in fear. On their way from China to Myanmar, they often took shelter in *yaodong*, or caves, or caverns. Many of them must die along the way, the pursuing enemy killed them, or they died on account of illness, starvation, etc.

Fifth, the enemy could have stopped the exodus by shutting the doors of the cave houses, or the natural caves, and killed many of them in the process of stopping the exodus of people.

Sixth, at the same time, it is also perfectly possible that the weak, the injured, the old, and the young could not endure what could possibly be a long and treacherous journey, and so they either were left behind, or they simply died on the way. Not wanting to admit that some of their own people were left behind to possibly die, or to be enslaved, and hence to avoid embarrassment, those who eventually escaped made up the story of a door being shut on them while they were coming out of a hole in the earth.

Seventh, it is also possible, but most unlikely, that the stronger tribe (s) within the Ch'iang forced the KCM to leave China. The Hans often manipulated the Ch'iang to fight among themselves.

Eight, it is also quite possible that while some Ch'iang chose to join the more powerful and numerous Hans and thereby get assimilated, or Sinicized, others have chosen to remain free and to leave the area. This was the argument put forth by Than Tun. "With the expansion of China, the Ch'iang had either the choice to be absorbed or to become nomads in the wilds. It was a hard choice, between liberty and civilization. Your ancestors chose liberty; and they must have gallantly maintained it. But the cost was heavy. It cost them 2000 years of progress. If the Ch'iang of 3000 B.C. were equals of the Chinese civilization, the Burmans of 700 A.D. were not nearly as advanced as the Chinese in 1300 B.C." (Than Tun, 1988: 4).

Lastly, the cave houses could have just collapsed due to earthquakes, killing some dwellers while others escaped. This might have caused flooding in the cave houses. China's earthquakes in 1927 and 1556 caused collapse of thousands of cave houses and killed many dwellers.

The various possible escape or exodus scenes recreated here is obviously amplified and simplified. The actual population movements are normally gradual. But the likely first part of the very moment of departure from their 'original' home is being dramatised and re-enacted in order to match the legends of the mythical cave. Needless to say, there are a number of other possible scenarios, not just the ones being mentioned here.

Han Chinese and Northern Wei could have pushed ancestors of KCM out of China

The enemies of the Ch'iang, who jailed them in cave houses, or from whom the Ch'iang hid themselves in cave houses, could be initially the Hans (206 BC-AD 220), and later the Northern Wei (AD 386 - 534).

The accounts of the Ch'iang long and disastrous encounters with the Han Chinese and the Northern Wei have been elaborated in footnotes no. 2; and notes on the Ch'iang are provided in the foot notes no. 3.

Kuki-Chin-Mizo left China around 500 AD

There are mounting evidences to suggest that the KCM, or the ancestors of the KCM left China around 500 AD.

Qingying Chen, a Han Chinese scholar and a Tibetologist, in his *Tibetan History: Series of basic information of Tibet of China* (2003), offers insight into the timeline of Ch'iang migration. Chen has carried out extensive researches in Tibet. Though he obviously gives a Han Chinese perspective, we can draw some helpful conclusions from his writing.

He writes, " The Qiang tribe expanded eastward and joined the Han race in the course of historical development, while the other branch that travelled southward, crossed over the Hengduan Mountains, and entered the Yungui Plateau; some went even further, to Burma, forming series of ethnic groups of the Tibetan-Burmese language family. Even today, from linguistic similarities, we can see their relative relationship. With regard to the agricultural and nomadic tribes left on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, they formed the Tibetan race after the unification of the Tubo kingdom during the time of China's Tang Dynasty (Chen, 2003: 7).

Let us simplify Chen's short account of the Ch'iang.

The Qiang tribe that "expanded eastward and joined the Han race in the course of historical development" are most likely those Ch'iang who were either relocated by the Han from their homelands into far off places, and were fully assimilated into Han Chinese society, or subjugated and later Sinicized. Then we have those that "travelled southward, crossed over the Hengduan Mountains, and entered the Yungui Plateau". The Hengduan Mountains are a group of mountain ranges in southwest China that connect the southeast portions of the Tibetan Plateau with the Yunnan–Guizhou Plateau. The Yunnan–Guizhou Plateau or Yungui Plateau is a highland region located in southwest China. The region is primarily spread over the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou in China. Some of the Ch'iang who settled in the south in areas of present day Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces, therefore, did not leave China but remained there. We then have some that "went even further, to Burma, forming series of ethnic groups of the Tibetan-Burmese language family". These are

the ancestors of the KCM. Chen of course did not mention the millions of Ch'iang who were killed and wiped out by the mighty Han army described by the Ch'iang as 'magic army'.

Chen's book also confirms that the direction of the historical migration of ancestors of the Ch'iang in China was from north to south, and then from south to west. It also confirms that the initial migration of the Ch'iang from their homeland in China's north-west took place during the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

With regard to the agricultural and nomadic tribes left on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau (meaning the 'West Qiang Tribe', author), Chen says "they formed the Tibetan race after the unification of the Tubo kingdom during the time of China's Tang Dynasty". The Tubo Kingdom or Tibetan Kingdom existed from AD 618 to 842. And the Tang dynasty reigned from AD 618 to 907, with breaks from AD 690-705. Chen says that the Chinese historical sources describe the "Qiang people" as Western herdsman. And that the Tibetans were referred to as the 'West Qiang Tribe' who were most likely once a part of the Ch'iang, or whose ancestry was most likely influenced by the Ch'iang. He however holds here that the Tibetan tribes, implying West Qiang Tribe, was born after the formation of the Tubo Kingdom (Chen, 2003: 7). The implication of this is that the ancestors of the KCM (Ch'iang) had left China definitely before the formation of the Tibetan Kingdom in AD 618. "From the mid-seventh century to the eight century," writes M. Wang, "the Tibetan Kingdom conquered almost all the tribes and confederacies of 'the Qiang' in this area" (Wang, 2002: 135). This further proves that the Ch'iang, ancestral to the KCM, had left north west China by the mid-7th century AD.

As pointed out earlier, linguistic studies have established that the Tibeto-Burman speaking group (such as the Burmans, Tibetans, and the entire Kuki-Luh-sai-Chin, author) slowly got separated from the parent Sino-Tibetan group of eastern Tibet and north western China, in the middle of the first millennium, that is, AD 500. From around AD 500 peoples from this TB group began moving from China into Peninsular South East Asia comprising countries such as Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (University of California, Homeland and time-depth of Sino-Tibetan, 2020).

One Qiang (Ch'iang) tribe, Di, established two powerful and large states, Former Qin (352-394 AD), and Later Liang (385-403 AD). It is stated that, "Yet all written records of the Di end around the year A.D. 420" (University of Washington, The Di Tribes, 2020). The University of Washington website does not give any reason for the absence of written records of the Di around AD 420. But it is most likely that the Di left China, along with other Ch'iang tribes.

The ancestors of the KCM, under tremendous pressure from the Han, left their homeland in eastern Tibet and north western China by 200 AD, towards the end of the Han rule (period of Han dynasty being 206 BC - AD 220). They moved towards southern China. They lived in south-western China, probably in the present Sichuan Province, for some time. Together with other non-Han Chinese, they successfully revolted against the (Han Chinese) Jing dynasty by overthrowing the Jing rule in north China during the 'sixteen kingdoms of the five barbarians' period (AD 304 to 439). However, after a series of military campaigns against the Ch'iang and others, the Northern Wei (originally non-Han but later became Han Chinese) had defeated the 'barbarian' and other powers, and unified all of North China by AD 439. The Northern Wei ruled

in North China from AD 386 to 534. The year 439 marked a defining moment for the ancestors of the KCM. In this year, they have finally decided to leave China for good. They moved further south, moving and living in the present Yunnan Province of China for some years, and finally leaving the present day China's territory (Yunnan province) by AD 500.

At any rate, conditions in China during the Sui Dynasty (AD 581–618) and the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907) were no better for non-Chinese ethnic groups than the preceding periods, that is, a period between 2 century BC and 6 century AD (Benn, 2002, 2004: 2, 16, 29, 30-40; Timesmaps.com, Sui Dynasty, 2020). Under the circumstances, smaller ethnic groups such as the Ch'iang would have thought it wise to leave China.

Conclusion

The popular legend that holds that the Kuki-Chin-Mizo once came out of a mysterious cave, a rock, or an underground hole, called *Chhinlung*, *Sinlung*, *Khul*, etc., that traces the origin of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of people, to my mind, is now no longer a mystery. The legendary cave, the place of origin of the KCM, is most likely the cave houses in China. The ancestors of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo must have surely lived once upon a time in the numerous cave houses in China.

And we also now know that *Chhinlung*, or *Sinlung* refer to 'people of Chin', or 'the Chin people'. And it is not a geographical place, nor a place of origin of the KCM.

And to stress the obvious, each one of these nomenclatures *Kuki*, *Chin*, and *Mizo* stands for the entire Kuki-Chin-Mizo.

Notes

1. I use the term Lusei here in the historical context. The 'Mizo' history as it has been written in Mizoram tends to be Lusei-centric. This is despite recent trends in 'Mizo history' writing that make attempts to present a more balanced and inclusive history of the various KCM tribes. Therefore, the *Chhinlung* mythology is being presented here as Lusei specific although it has now become quite popular among today's inhabitants of Mizoram, both Lusei and non-Lusei. *Chhinlung* mythology is, obviously, a product of a historical narrative. Therefore, readers need to view the analysis on this in a historical context, something that was talked about hundreds of years ago. In other words, the popularization of *Chhinlung* myth in Mizoram now is a product of a historical narrative that kept the Lusei tribe largely at the centre.

The official website of the Indian state government of Mizoram (<http://www.mizoram.nic.in/>) says: "The origin of the Mizos, like those of many other tribes in the North Eastern India, is shrouded in mystery. They are generally accepted as part of a great Mongoloid wave of migration from China and later moved out to India to their present habitat. It is possible that the Mizos came from Shinlung or Chhinlungsan located on

the banks of the river Yalung in China. They first settled in the Shan State and moved on to Kabaw Valley to Khampat and then to the Chin Hills in the middle of the 16th century" (About Mizoram, Chhinlung, 2020).

In Mizoram, the myth of Chhinlung is given an official recognition by the state run internet website (available at <http://www.mizoram.nic.in/>), is symbolized in state-run hostels in educational institutions (such as Chhinlung Hostel), and promoted and popularized in literatures (for example, 'Zofate chhinlung chhuak', meaning descendants of Chhinlung, children of Zo; 'Chhinlung Magazine') and others such as Chhinlung Academy, Chhinlung Store, etc. Of late, the myth is so popularized so much so that the general public have taken it as a historical fact, which is not the case as its historical validity has not been proven.

2. *Han campaigns against the Ch'iang people*

It has been noted earlier that the most likely ancestors of the Lushai-Kuki-Chin are the Ch'iang people who once inhabited eastern Tibet and North West China. Here we find the accounts of the Han military and cultural campaigns against the Ch'iang people during their (Han) long reign (206 BC - 220 AD). The Han relentlessly waged wars against the Ch'iang people for about 300 years, beginning in 112 BC and ending in 184 AD with the ultimate defeat of the Ch'iang people (Wikipedia, Qiang historical people, 2020).

The two groups of people originally lived together the NW of China. The Ch'iang peoples were largely nomadic, consisting of many disparate tribes, where as the Han were a largely homogenous ethnic group, and lived a settled life. The territorial boundary of China expanded greatly under the Han rule.

The reason for the Han-Ch'iang war, according to Than Tun, is the competition for land. The Ch'iang, whose main occupation was sheep rearing, were constantly on the move looking for good pasture, and the Han, whose occupation was cattle rearing and wetland cultivation, lived in fixed areas. The two groups, who perhaps lived side by side peacefully for generations, gradually began to fight over control of land. There was a stark danger of fully being assimilated into the Chinese society and subjugated forever by the stronger Chinese (Han). In order to avoid this, the Ch'iang peoples began to move away from their northern territory to southern China about 100 BC (Than Tun, 1969, quoted in Lalthangliana, 2001: 40-47).

Besides the territorial dispute, the Han were out to assimilate non-Chinese people into Chinese (Han) culture, calling non-Chinese such as the Ch'iang 'barbarians'. The Han felt the need to 'civilize' non-Chinese a la the English's 'Whiteman's Burden'. Those willing to be assimilated were 'integrated' while those unwilling were relentlessly pursued, enslaved, killed, etc.

The vivid accounts of the Han campaigns against the Ch'iang people are found in a book by Warren W. Smith (1996, 2019) *Tibetan Nation: A History Of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. Excerpts from the book are given below:

During the Han expansion into tribal areas, submissive tribes were rewarded with lands within the frontier of the Han, or Han title to their own land, and a feudatory political status. Resident tribes were persecuted in campaigns of annihilation. In 94 AD., the Ts'ang-i Ch'iang surrendered with more than half a million people; in 107 and 108, another fourteen Ch'iang tribes of more than fifty thousand people surrendered. A major rebellion of the Ch'iang occurred in 107 AD and was not successfully suppressed until 118. In the conflict, the Ch'iang were said to have fought as mounted warriors.

While some of the Ch'iang tribes submitted to the Han, others fled to the heights of Tibet. In one punitive expedition of 160, a Han force pursued a group of the Ch'iang as far as the mountains of Mane Machin, where the Ch'iang were defeated and slaughtered. During the Former Han, many Ch'iang tribes fled to the highlands to escape Han expansion into Kansu and Kokonor. One Ch'iang tribe, the Mi-tang Ch'iang, after having suffered a decisive defeat by the Chinese, was said to have passed far beyond the headwater of the Ssu-chih Ho (the upper Yellow River), and dwelt there in dependence upon the Fa Ch'aing. It is said that Han punitive expeditions were characterized by great brutality, thousands of decapitations and the capture of hundreds of thousands of the nomads' livestock.

The Hou Han Shu (Later Han Records) has a passage describing Han expeditions against the Ch'iang (Smith (1996, 2019):

When the tribes were somewhat weakened, the imperial forces attacked them, and, they still more weakened by the number of dead and wounded, the imperial troops followed up the pursuit...Skinless bones were strewn on the tops of the loftiest precipices, beyond expression or calculation. There were no more than the one or two in a hundred of the Jung able to skulk away among the grass and stones, and so evade the lances and arrows of the troops.

(The Ch'iang tribes) dwindled away in numbers, till they were unable to maintain their integrity. They were divided and dispersed, attaching their settlements to other bodies. Some were utterly destroyed, leaving no posterity. Some were led away into distant lands. The surrendered Ch'iang who resided were also robbed of their cattle, women and children by the Chinese who looked down upon them and called them 'barbarians'. The Ch'iang often then revolted, but ultimately defeated by the stronger Chinese forces.

In AD 167 AD, Duan Jiong, a Han Chinese military commander conducted an anti-Qiang campaign and massacred Qiang populations as well as settled them outside the frontier in northern China (Cosmos, 2009: 104).

The following accounts of some of the Ch'iang tribes obtained from the University of Washington website (University of Washington, The Di Tribes, 2020), in italics, would further open our eyes to the dire conditions of the Ch'iang people during the Han dynastic rule.

Towards the end of the Former Han (202 BC-8 AD) at least some of the Chuo Qiang tribes were forced to ally themselves with China:

Before Han secured the Ho-hsi area, the Western Regions had served as the meeting round for the Ch'iang and Hsiung-nu (formidable nomadic tribal confederation in the north of China, bitter enemies of the Han Chinese). As Wang Shun and Liu Hsin pointed out in 6 B.C., Wu-ti had established the frontier commanderies of Tun-huang, Chiu-ch'üan, and Chang-i with the specific aim of separating the Ch'o-Ch'iang from the Hsiung-nu, thereby "cutting off the right arm" of the latter.

The Ch'o-Ch'iang were a powerful Ch'iang tribe, described as the first state southwest of the Yang barrier on the route to the west (in the mountains southeast of Lop Nor). By the middle of the first century A.D. they had dwindled to insignificance, with a registered population of only 1,750 individuals. But in the

early years of the Han dynasty, they had been active throughout an extremely large area in the Western Regions, stretching along the K'un-lun Mountains from the neighbourhood of Tun-huang in the east to the Pamir in the west, ruled by kings. The king of the Ch'o-Ch'iang bore the unique title ch'ü-Hu-lai, "the king who had abandoned the Hsiung-nu and made over to the Han empire." This suggests that the Ch'o-Ch'iang must have been forced to switch sides after Han expansion to the northwest. After their submission the Ch'o-Ch'iang not only joined the Han side to fight against the Hsiung-nu, but also occasionally took part in punitive campaigns against other Ch'iang tribes.

Setting out from the Yang barrier the state nearest to Han is that one of the Ch'iang (tribes that is termed) Ch'o. Its king is entitled Ch'ü Hu lai (abandoner of the nomads who made over to the King).

This submission to the Chinese did not last long:

In addition, T'ang-tou the Ch'ü-hu-lai-wang king (abandoner of the nomads who make over to the king) lay close to the Red Water Ch'iang of the Great Tribes, and was several times subjected to raiding. Finding the situation intolerable, he reported a state of emergency to the protector general, but Tan Ch'in, the protector general [who held this post between 4 and 13 CE] did not bring him relief or help at the right time. T'ang-tou was in a grave and urgent situation; angry with [Tan] Ch'in he went east to seek [the means of] defence from the Yü-men barrier, where he was not admitted. He took his wife and children and over 1000 of his people and fled to surrender to the Hsiung-nu. The Hsiung-nu received him and sent an envoy (to Han) with a letter describing the state of affairs.

3. Ch'iang (Qiang) people: historical and modern

We have made numerous references to the Ch'iang (also written as Qiang), the ancestors of the KLC, in the preceding sections. Who then are the Ch'iang?

The Ch'iang in China are classified into two groups: 'historical', and 'modern'.

Historical Ch'iang

The Ch'iang consisted of several tribes, said to be well over 150 tribes. The original home of the Ch'iang is in an area now situated in the modern Qinghai Province of China, that is, NE Tibet and NW China. Their ancient country was bounded on the west and north by the Ma Chu (Yellow River), on the east by the T'ao River of Kansu, and to the south by the Jupar mountains (Min Shan). This is an area that the Chinese indicate as the original home of the Ch'iang (Smith, 1996, 2019).

The Ch'iang people, who came from the north, were not the original inhabitants of the area. The original inhabitants of the area were the Goki people whom the Ch'iang conquered. In the Qiang folklore and the classic verses of the Shibi about "The Qiang Ge War", the nine brother tribes claiming to be Erma (Ma, Rima, and Rima), in order to avoid the chase of the "magic soldier" (referring to the Han army), under the leadership of the leader Abba Baekong, the nomads Ch'iang moved from the north to the south of the Minshan mountainous area on the upper reaches of the Minjiang River and settled there. According to legend, Erma, who descended south, met with the natives of the upper reaches of the Minjiang River, who were engaged in farming, living in stone blocks, and affluent indigenous people, Goji and Gabu (Garb, Gaerdu). At the

beginning, the two sides got along peacefully. Erma learned from Goki and Gabu the techniques of farming and building stone blocks. Later, due to the protracted war between the two sides for the cattle and sheep, the pious God Erma obtained the help of the White Stone God and eventually won the war. The Goki people were mostly wiped out or fled (Xu Xueshu & La Mingying, 2009; Xu Xueshu & La Mingying, 2020).

The Qiang were noted for producing high quality steel armour, and oracle bones (ancient system of writing on animal bones or tortoise shell). They developed a high level of civilization. Magnificent ancient stone watch towers called Qiang Towers and Qiang fortresses are that are still standing till today in parts of south China are testimonies to their level of advancements. According to Nicola Di Cosmo (2004), the 'Four Barbarians' (listed below) that include the Ch'iang were mentioned in some ancient Chinese texts as perhaps related to the people of the Chinese civilization (Cosmo, 2020: 108-112).

There were Four Barbarians in Han Chinese culture, such as, the Northern Di or Beidi (Northern Barbarian), the Southern Man (Southern Barbarians), and the Western Rong or Xirong, also classified by ancient Chinese as 'Qiang' (Western Barbarians), and the Dongyi or Eastern Yi (Eastern Barbarians). (Wikipedia, Four Barbarians, 2020; Wikipedia, Dongyi, 2020).

Originally sheep rearing was their main occupation, but some of them later engaged in slash and burn agriculture.

Since the Ch'iang were non-Han Chinese ethnic people, and considered 'barbarian' by the Han Chinese, they were almost always at war. The Ch'iang tribes formed a confederation, fought many battles with the Han Chinese and were ultimately defeated. The Han relentlessly waged wars against the Ch'iang people for about 300 years, beginning in 112 BC and ending in AD 184 with the ultimate defeat of the Ch'iang people (Wikipedia, Qiang historical people, 2020).

Despite this, one tribe of the remnant Ch'iang Di rose into prominence again. They were again becoming a very powerful force, rivalling and defeating the Chinese. Di conquered northern China during the (Chinese) Jin Dynasty (265-420 AD). They then established two powerful and large states. One state was known as Former Qin (352-394 AD), and another state was known as the Later Liang (385-403 AD). The two states were located in the north west China. But sadly, all written records of the Di end around the year AD 420 (University of Washington, The Di Tribes, 2020; Wikipedia, Di (Five Barbarians), 2020). This suggests complete annihilation of the Di by AD 420 by the Han.

Most Ch'iang including the ancestors of the KCM have left China on account of pressure from the Han Chinese. Many of them were killed, and enslaved and relocated while some of them were absorbed into maintain Chinese society and Sinicized.

Modern day Qiang (Ch'iang) people

Today's Qiang people form one of the 56 ethnic groups officially recognized by China, with a population of approximately 310,000 in 2000. They live mainly in a mountainous region in the north-western part of Sichuan on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, that is, south west of China. Their present area of settlement is more or less the same as their ancient area of settlement (roughly modern Qinghai Province), perhaps they have moved a little towards the south from the north. It is perfectly possible, though, that this

modern day Ch'iang of China only live to tell their story, whether they remain here for ages, or they came back here from somewhere else; the rest of the population having left China altogether while countless of them were murdered, banished, and relocated by the Chinese away from their original home.

Forced to travel to work and survive, many moved out of this region. Some live in other provinces such as Yunnan, Gansu, and Guizhou Province. The area of the Aba Tibetan and Qiang County, Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County, and the upper valley area of the Minjiang River has the largest concentration of Qiang people where more than 300,000 of them live (China high lights, Qiang minority of northern Sichuan, 2020; Wikipedia, Qiang people, 2020) .

It is believed that the ancestors of the modern day Qiang people of China were the Ch'ang (Qiang) people who lived in western China 3,000 to 5,000 years ago. Regarding the formation of the Qiang nationality, write Xu Xueshu & La Mingying, the academic community traditionally believes that its main body stems from the descendants of the ancient Hehuang and Qiang people who moved southwards and eastwards into the upper reaches of the Minjiang River in different historical periods, and merged some local Di, Hu, and Han people who moved into their history in the past (Xu Xueshu & La Mingying, 2009; Xu Xueshu & La Mingying, 2020). Bo-yang HU and Wei WANG also writes: "The Qiang Ethnic Minority nationality is one of the most ancient nationalities in China, can be traced back to four thousand years ago, the ancient Qiang Ethnic Minority ethnic group. About in Qin and Han Dynasties, the ancient Qiang Ethnic Minority people a from Gansu, Qinghai has migrated to the upper reaches of the Minjiang River and its tributaries (Zagunao River, the river Blackwater) alpine valley, reproduce, gradually formed today's Qiang Ethnic Minority" (Bo-yang HU and Wei WANG, 2016).

Beichuan is the only Qiang Autonomous County in China. It is within Sichuan Province, SW China. It has an area of 3,084 square kilometres and a population of 235,304 in 2017, 36.6% of which are Qiang people, a Sino-Tibetan people related to Tibetans, and 61.5% of which are Han Chinese (Wikipedia, Beichuan Qiang Autonomous Country, 2020).



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47. Interviews

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