

NOTES ON THE HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF THE CHINESE-TIBETAN BORDERLAND*

Paul Huston Stevenson

Peiping Union Medical College



FIG. 1—A part of the mountain barrier of the Chinese-Tibetan borderland. (Photograph by Hummel.)

The Chinese-Tibetan borderland is a region unique in both its physiographical features and its human inhabitants—a wild mountainous country, aptly described by Edgar as “a mass of sawtooth peaks, precipices, box canyons, sombre forests and pounding streams,”¹ “a fascinating region presenting ethnological and other problems of great interest.”² The height of the snow peaks projecting from the higher ranges—many of them 20,000 and at least three estimated to be over 25,000 feet high³—has earned for the lofty mountain complex the title of the “Himalayas of Chinese Tibet,”

while the beauty of the lower valleys has suggested the alternative name of the “Chinese-Tibetan Alps” or more frequently the “Szechwanese Alps.” Ethnically as well as physiographically the region forms a distinct boundary between China and Tibet; politically the area has been a bone of contention between Lhasa and Peking for several centuries. An anthropological reconnaissance conducted by the author in the spring and summer of 1926 afforded an opportunity of studying both region and inhabitants.⁴ The area under con-

* The author is greatly indebted to Dr. David Hummel, of Dr. Sven Hedin's Sino-Swedish Expedition to Central Asia, for kind permission to use several of his excellent photographs. Dr. Hummel's photographs were taken during a recent botanizing trip through the extreme northern portion of the Chinese-Tibetan borderland region, but those selected represent scenes thoroughly typical of the region as a whole.

¹ J. Huston Edgar: *The Haunts of the Giant Panda*, *Journ. West China Border Research Society*, Vol. 3, 1926-1929.

² Ernest Henry Wilson: *A Naturalist in Western China*, London, 1913.

³ The best description of the natural features of this country is given by Joseph R. Rock in a series of admirably illustrated articles that have appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* during the last ten years.

⁴ P. H. Stevenson: *The Chinese-Tibetan Borderland and Its Peoples*, *Bull. Peking Soc. of Nat. Hist.*, Vol. 2, 1927-1928, Part II.

sideration is shown in Figure 2. It is from 75 to 100 miles wide and stretches along the western border of China proper from Sungpan and the Kunka Pass on the north to the still rugged though lower mountains of Yunnan some 300 miles to the south. The area as a whole is divided topographically and ethnically into several more or less distinct sub-regions.

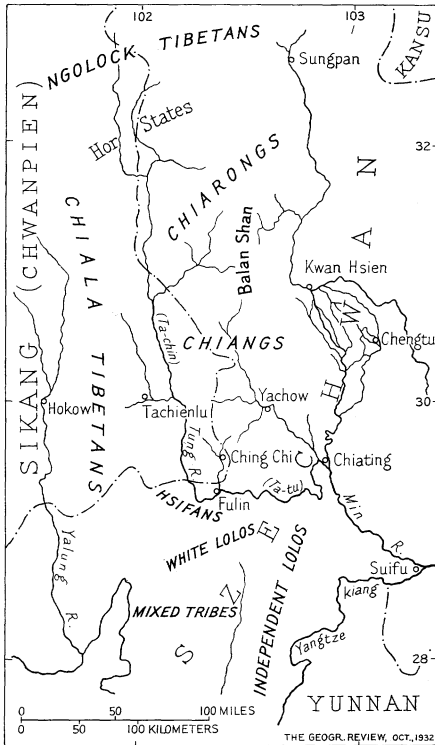


FIG. 2.—Distribution of the main tribal groups occupying the central section of the Chinese-Tibetan borderland region.

Of the several entrances to the area that which is afforded by the old official Chinese road from Chengtu to Tachienlu via Yachow provides the most satisfactory cross section for the purpose in hand. This famous highway bears off to the southwest from the Chinese city of Chengtu and for four days, as traveled by chair or on horseback, traverses the small portion of the irrigated Chengtu basin that intervenes between Chengtu and the mountains on the west. At Yachow a sharp demarcation in both the topography and the type of human occupation occurs. Here the road strikes boldly into the high mountains. The irrigated rice fields and crowded Chinese cities of the Chengtu

plain, exemplifying in concentrated form the outstanding characteristics of Chinese life and culture, are now left behind. From Yachow on through Tachienlu and thence to Lhasa this road earns the reputation of being the highest trade route in the world. Today little is left of its former splendor and economic importance, and only the shuffling feet of the tea carriers, their diminishing traffic being gradually taxed out of existence by tribal and brigand tolls, represent an unworthy substitute for the conquering armies and gift-bearing embassies of the past.

THE CHINESE ELEMENT

Approaching the region by this route one may consider first the presence and distribution of the few Chinese that are to be found in the area. Highly gregarious by nature, skilled tillers of the soil by

a time-honored irrigation technique, adepts at coöperative living wherein each is a social unit rather than an individual—the Chinese are ordinarily found only in those regions that enable them to indulge these specialized traits. The average Chinese represents in many ways one of the world's best examples of a thoroughly socialized individual. Even when seemingly detached from his group—either as a carrier, an itinerant trader, or an established merchant in a far distant land—the individual Chinese always maintains as close a contact with his body politic and his own kind as is possible. One of the effects of this highly developed racial and social consciousness has been to weaken the dependence of the individual upon his immediate environment as long as an economic contact with his native land is assured.

Speaking generally the relatively few Chinese found scattered through the area in question are confined to one or the other of two particular types of settlement. The more important is represented by the Chinese settlements along the great highway that for centuries has provided the link between China and Tibet. The size of the settlements and the distance between them are determined largely by the requirements of the traffic passing over the road; the smaller vary in size from half a dozen to forty or fifty families at the end of each of the various stages. At irregular intervals this number is augmented by slightly larger groups of merchants and traders that have established themselves in the few market towns along the way. Occasionally one of these larger centers will accommodate also the headquarters of a Chinese official. His task is a most difficult one. The great distance from Peking together with the difficult and dangerous nature of the duties involved combine to make official appointment to this region a matter of rather doubtful honor.

CHINESE AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS

The second type of Chinese settlement in the region is found in the few agricultural communities that have managed to establish themselves on the occasional alluvial cones large enough to permit irrigated cultivation. The encouragement of agricultural conquest has been a definite government policy in recent years, and the old imperial title of "Warden of the Marches" is now changed to that of "Commissioner of Cultivation." The Chinese agriculturists that have taken root in this area, however, are few and far between. Preferring to starve if need be among their own kind, most of the Chinese colonists transplanted into this inhospitable region have filtered back to their former homes in the fertile lowlands of Szechwan.

Only two or three of these settlements of any size are to be found along the entire route from Yachow to Tachienlu. Each occupies an

alluvial cone or fan that projects out over the floor of one of the low and fairly wide valleys. The fans afford practically the only opportunity to be found in the region of putting into effect two age-old agricultural traditions dear to the heart of the Chinese farmer: the artificial control and distribution of the water supply and the construction of terraced fields

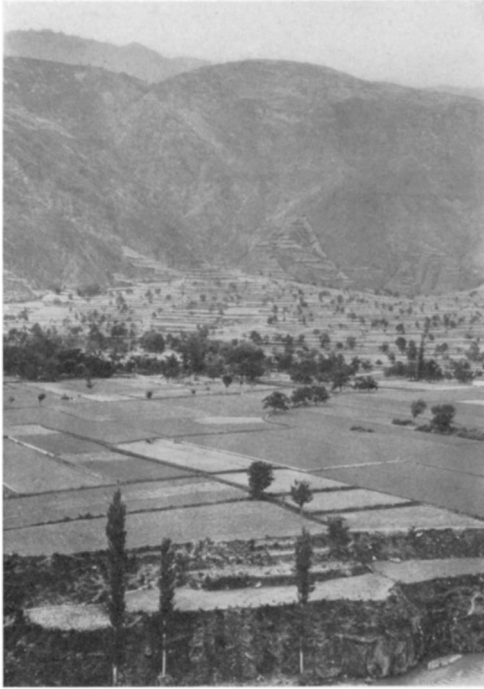


FIG. 3.—Chinese cultivated alluvial fan. Note how the fan extends all the way to the bottom of the picture. (Photograph by Hummel.)

that can be irrigated by controlling the water supply from above. Chinese civilization has from the beginning been an alluvial agricultural civilization, based on the highly developed art of small stream control. Looking down from above on one of these cultivated cones encompassing in a single field of vision the supplementary work of both nature and man engenders a train of speculations as to the possible origin and evolution of this traditional agricultural technique. Nature, it is evident, is herself busily engaged in leveling, terracing, and channeling the loose sandy soil thus deposited by water action.

The natural surface of such a fan even when untouched by human hands demonstrates the relative ease with which new channels can be made, while the alternate terraces that have been formed by the recurrent freshets from above also invite the attention of a primitive agriculturist. Improvement, stabilization, and utilization of nature's crude terraces and the purposeful control of a part or the whole of the water supply by further artificial channels are only matters of time to a people alert enough to observe and profit by the object lessons thus provided for them. Some such sequence of events has probably foreshadowed the early beginnings of alluvial fan cultivation the world over.

In the case of the early Chinese the art of artificially regulating a meager though assured water supply was probably developed in Central Asia along the northern periphery of the Tibetan massif. The particular type of agricultural technique was no doubt improved

and perfected by the proto-Chinese during their slow migration eastward into the historic valleys of the Wei and Yellow rivers. Larger and more compact populations came to depend on common artificially controlled sources of water supply, thus calling into existence the elements of collective consciousness and social solidarity that even today constitute the chief basis of China's claim to superiority over the other mainland peoples of eastern Asia. The extent to which the direction and limits of expansion of subsequent generations of Chinese have been determined by this specialized agricultural technique, however, is excellently illustrated in the region under consideration. Here this particular method of cultivation, formerly the servant of Chinese advance, has now become the master. Neither in temperament, in mode of living, nor in physique are the Chinese as individuals adapted or adaptable to the type of country in question except as they are

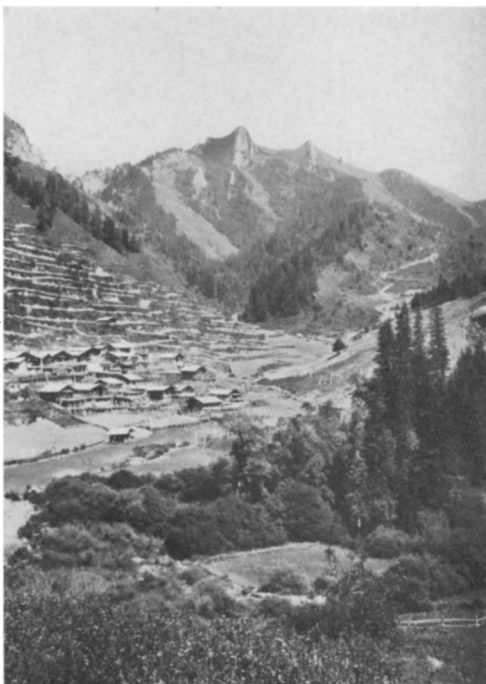


FIG. 4—Chinese-Tibetan alpine valley with a typical tribal settlement. (Photograph by Hummel.)

able here and there to put into practice these traditional agricultural methods. Hence the small size and scattered location of the few Chinese communities that manage to retain their precarious footing in this rugged borderland area.

As an actual illustration we may take the Ching Chi Valley traversed four days beyond Yachow. A diagram of a small section of this valley is shown in Figure 5. The valley in question features an alluvial fan formation low enough in altitude (6500 feet) to support a compact Chinese agricultural population and a fair-sized town. The town, Ch'ing Chi Hsien (Clear-Water Settlement) is the administrative center of a good-sized district inhabited largely by Hsifan tribes and White Lolos. Up on the mountain side just beyond the lower right-hand corner of the diagram is the site of the former Lolo capital of the region. The Black Lolos have long since withdrawn into the mountains bordering the Chien Chang Valley two days

to the south, leaving the region entirely in the hands of the Chinese. The road bearing off to the south leads down through this historic valley via Fulin and skirts the western border of Independent Lolo-land on its way to Yunnan. The road traversing the region from east to west is a section of the main Chinese-Tibetan highway from Yachow to Tachienlu. Figure 6 shows the east-to-west contour of the same region by a section drawn through the alluvial fan in the center and extended to include the rain screen on the east.

THE TRIBESPEOPLE

We turn now to the intrinsic elements of the borderland population. Beginning at a stone's throw from each side of the highway described above and occupying the narrow valleys and mountain slopes both to north and south are the so-called tribespeople, the folk that really belong to this wild mountain country. They exist for the most part as small semi-independent groups still rendering a sort of feudal allegiance to their hereditary chiefs. An extremely heterogeneous lot when considered as a whole, these people have in common a proud and defiant spirit, conscious of having successfully resisted Chinese dominion from time immemorial.

Although some of the tribal groups are apparently of Tibetan mixture, for the most part they are of obscure origins and relations. A certain amount of Chinese blood is to be detected in several of them, particularly among the White Lolos and certain of the Hsifan groups, but on the whole the tribespeoples are rather sharply marked off in physiognomy and physique as well as by social and cultural attributes from both Chinese and Tibetans. Many of the tribes represent detached remnants of larger groups that once spread widely over the more fertile lowlands now occupied by Chinese.

The outstanding groups of these mountain peoples are the various Hor States, purely Tibetan in character and occupying jointly with the Chiala Tibetan tribes the high plateau north and west of Tachienlu; the Chiarong tribespeoples, more particularly belonging to the Szechwan borderland region and dwelling in the deep valleys of the Balan Shan to the northwest of Kwanhsien; while the Ch'iangs, one of the oldest and largest of these tribal complexes, are distributed rather widely among the valleys immediately north of Yachow. To the south and west of Yachow, in an area aptly designated the "wilderness," the broader valleys are occupied chiefly by White Lolos and Hsifans; while still farther south, south of the eastern stretch of the Tung (Ta-tu) River, is the home of the Independent Lolos. Each of these major groups represents a tribal complex with numerous subdivisions into larger or smaller units.⁵

⁵ Many of the details of physique, dress, dwellings, and social organizations of these peoples have been dealt with elsewhere by the author, *loc. cit.*

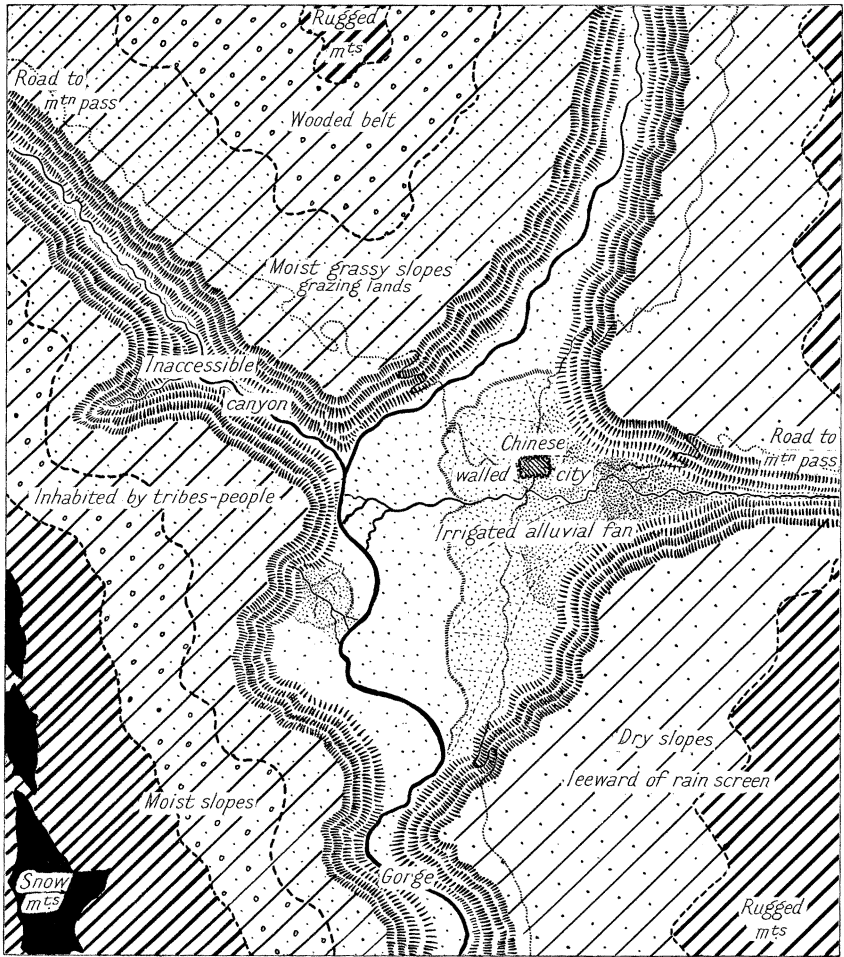


FIG. 5

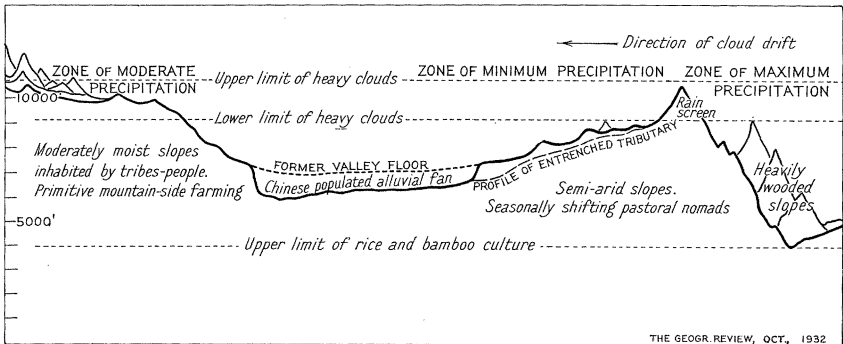


FIG. 6

FIGS. 5 and 6—Regional diagram and climatic cross section of the Ching C'hi Hsien Valley.

As would be expected in the case of such a rugged and finely dissected country the inhabitants are relatively few in number and widely scattered over the region in small groups having little contact with one another and hence conserving a relatively high degree of ethnic purity. Centers of primitive ethnic types persist side by side, providing a clue in some instances to obscure ethnic strains now merged in the blended Chinese population of the present day. One such primitive strain, recognized in occasional individuals throughout the Red Basin area of Szechwan and considered by some students to have occupied a large part of central and southern China before the coming of the Chinese, is of a negrito or negroid character. In one valley, that dominated by the important center of Yunching, many excellent samples of this type are to be found. Physically the type in question is characterized by a low stature and a broad body build; a rather large head set on a short neck; eyes that show no trace of Mongolic characters; a wide-spreading and practically bridgeless nose; a marked shortening of the middle third of the face; and a rather striking maxillary prognathism with moderately thick lips. Although curly hair, and even one case of kinky hair, was noted later on among some of the Tibetan tribes farther west (Maoya-Wahsi) yet the straight black hair that appears to be dominant in Mongolian mixtures prevailed among this otherwise negroid type. It would seem, in passing, that this negroid element was probably first absorbed very largely by the earlier T'ai peoples and the resulting blend pushed southwest toward present-day Burma by the later Chinese, who evidently represented even in the beginning an already distinctive blend of more northern strains.

THE INDEPENDENT LOLOS

Another example of the isolated survival of a distinctive ethnic type in the region under consideration is that of the Lolo. Of the two kinds of Lolos, White and Black, the latter throughout the true Lolo country constitutes a highly inbred group of relatively pure hereditary stock. Among the nobles are strict taboos against marriage outside the blood circle, and the hereditary right to the appellation of "black bones" is cherished, as Baber observes, much as in our analogous aristocratic expression "blue blood."⁶ The question of the origin and ethnic relations of these Lolos is generally considered one of the most obscure puzzles of Asiatic anthropology. The outstanding physical characters of this distinctly non-oriental type are as follows: The general form of body is tall and deep-chested, conforming to the "linear" type of body build; the skin color, although

⁶ E. Colborne Baber: *Travels and Researches in the Interior of China*, *Royal Geogr. Soc. Suppl. Papers*, Vol. 1, 1886, pp. 1-152.

usually masked by a heavy coat of tan and giving the impression of light brown, definitely suggests an underlying swarthy white rather than either a yellow or yellow-brown; the hair is straight or slightly wavy, black or dark brown in color, of finer texture than that of Chinese and frequently wound into a distinctive "horn" that projects



FIG. 7—Semi-Tibetan tribal village. Note barley field in the foreground, and racks for drying the grain. (Photograph by Hummel.)

from a little on one side of the forehead; the face is long and sharp; the long thin nose with a well developed straight or slightly aquiline profile is distinctly different from either the Chinese or Mongolian and much more finely molded than the equally straight but larger Tibetan nose; the eyes are horizontal and show no trace of a Mongolian fold; the cheek bones are rather high but small, and the long sloping jaw usually ends in a well developed round chin; the teeth are strong and even, and the lips thin and straight.

It has been suggested that the noble-blooded Black Lolos represent the remnants of the ruling cast in an aboriginal population still spread rather widely throughout southern and southwestern China. The lower classes of these aborigines are probably represented today by the White Lolos, Miaotse, Chung-Chiao (Shans), and other hybrid groups still living in large numbers in Yunnan and Kweichow. It is to be regretted that practically all the observations and the few measurements reported in connection with the unqualified term Lolo have been made upon one or other of the many groups of so-called tame or White Lolos. These, under a variety of names and with

varying degrees of mixture with Chinese blood or culture, are scattered widely over certain areas of Kweichow and Yunnan where they live more or less directly under Chinese rule. The Black Lolos of the Independent Lolo country on the other hand are without comparison the most unapproachable people of the whole Tibetan borderland. When appearing in groups in the near-by Chinese market towns, where they have mostly been observed, they display a suspicious and forbidding disposition that brooks no familiarity. They remain one of the most interesting and least-known peoples of this part of Asia.

THE PROBLEM OF LOLO ORIGINS

Although during historic and late proto-historic times at least, the prevailing ethnic movements through most of Chinese Asia have been from north to south, yet a southern or southwestern origin for the Lolo group has been repeatedly suggested. So far as the author is aware the grounds for this assumption have never been clearly stated. Certain it is that in spite of the formidable river trenches that intervene the possibility of more or less intimate ethnographic relations between southwestern China and India at certain periods cannot be lightly dismissed. Buxton in his excellent survey of the peoples of Asia, while recognizing the difficulties of any direct statements regarding this question, nevertheless lends support to the view of a southern origin of the group by accepting Jamieson's opinion that they probably came in isolated groups from Burma.⁷

It must be admitted that the Lolo somatic type approaches more nearly to that of the Indo-Afghan element recognized today in north-western India, Kashmiria, and the Pamirs than to any of the larger ethnic groups found at present to the north of the Lolo area. But on the other hand it is even more clearly evident that certain rather significant cultural traits obtaining among the Lolos reflect a steppe experience distinctly reminiscent of Central Asia. Chief of these cultural characters are their use of felt and their intimate association with the horse. Although either or both of these are perhaps susceptible of adoption through contact only, yet they seem to be too deeply ingrained in the nature of the Black Lolos to be thus casually explained. Scanning the migration routes into this part of Asia for traces of the type, one must continue the search all the way around the northern wall of the great Tibetan massif and up into the valleys of the Pamirs bordering the extreme southwestern corner of Chinese Turkestan. The marvelous feats of horsemanship exhibited by the Pamirian mountaineers have been reported by many travelers, while both Deniker and Haddon comment upon the definite Indo-Afghan elements among an otherwise brachycephalic Pamiri (Iranian)

⁷ L. H. Dudley Buxton: *The Peoples of Asia*, London, 1925, pp. 155-156.

population of this district. Again, these valleys lie in close relation to those of the Hindu Kush region, which, according to Haddon, constituted in times past the chief area of characterization of the Indo-Afghan type and whence, according to the same authority, they spread into North India and possibly eastwards also.

Although seemingly a long trek along the base of the Kunlun and down into western Szechwan, yet this route even today is more easily traveled than the one through the length of Hindustan and across the river trenches of Burma and offers in addition an unbroken continuity with the horse-and-felt cultural complex. Furthermore, this historic pathway has witnessed the comings and goings of a great variety of turbulent ethnic groups—Huns, Huingnu, Uigur, Yueh-chi, Scythians, Tatar, Turki, and Mongols—several of which were undoubtedly non-Mongolian in origin and character. The fertile basins and bordering mountains of Szechwan were accessible to any of these shifting ethnic elements either through the Kokonor region or through Kansu and the Kunka Pass.

This suggestion of the possibility of a northern origin of the distinctive Black Lolo is presented to prevent a too ready acceptance of the equally hypothetical view of their southern origin. All that can be said at present is that the group would appear to be of definitely non-Mongolian stock and that the somatic type bears strong resemblance to the Indo-Afghan type, which is reported to have had its center of characterization and dispersal among the mountains to the west of the Tibetan plateau.

A STONE-AGE CULTURE

Others of the various tribal groups present problems but slightly less complex than those of the Lolos. In addition to detached physical types of interest chiefly to the physical anthropologist there are many interesting problems in cultural anthropology, philology, and primitive religions.

From the standpoint of general cultural advancement it is evident that the peoples of the region are in general just emerging from a stone-age culture. Large and small stone implements are found in considerable numbers throughout the region. These are mostly ground or polished and represent a variety of types merging gradually into the common present-day industries of the population. A remarkable collection of these stone implements, made by Mr. Edgar, the well known missionary traveler of Tachienlu, is now deposited in the Museum of the West China Union University at Chengtu. Stone mortars and pestles for pounding grain are still in common use throughout the district. Frequently these are of large size and are operated by water power. Baking on hot stones and in stone ovens is also common. A low-grade iron culture, however, is now diffusing fairly generally

throughout the area from several ore centers in the region where iron is mined and worked in primitive fashion. One very important iron-working center, Yunching, apparently supplies much of the ore and primitive manufacturing for a considerable territory. One point of interest in respect to the cultural sequence in the region is the apparent



FIG. 8



FIG. 9

FIG. 8—Typical road leading into the tribes country. The easily defensible nature of these roads is apparent. (Photograph by Hummel.)

FIG. 9—Yak transport on a high mountain-pass road. (Photograph by Hummel.)

absence of copper or bronze industries intervening between the stone and iron. This fact is all the more interesting in view of the relative accessibility of the copper mines of Yunnan through the Chien Ch'ang Valley. Although undoubtedly in contact with the early Chinese who used bronze, yet these particular tribal groups seem to have remained ethnically and culturally distinct.

SOME PRIMITIVE LANGUAGES

The Lolo language, especially its primitive pictograph, remains a study of particular interest. Phonetically this language would

appear to be an aberrant branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic stock; it provides, through its close relation to the ancient Si-hia (viz. extinct Tangut) language, a still further link with the north. Likewise the Ch'iang and Chiarong peoples, in respect to innumerable details of dress and architecture, to say nothing of obscure dialects



FIG. 10



FIG. 11

FIGS. 10 and 11—Tea carriers nearing Tachienlu with loads approximating three hundred pounds in weight.

and mysterious religious rites, present a rich field for general ethnological study. The general ethnological complexion of these more northern valleys suggests a Tibetan cultural veneer rather thinly covering a basic stock of more primitive and distant origins. The plundering Tibetan tribes from the northwest, using the valleys as gateways into the rich lowlands of Szechwan, formed alliances with the Ch'iangs and Chiarongs and left the impress of an early form of Tibetan Lamaism upon the country. It has been suggested that many of the pornographic elements of Lamaism have been borrowed from the ancient Bon sex worship, whose mysterious rites are still practiced in the hidden valleys of the Chiarongs. In essentials certain elements of this primi-

tive Shamanism have probably been carried over in the foundations of several of the religious systems of Asia.

Here in these mountain recesses are also to be heard the lingering tones of some of Asia's most primitive dialects, spoken daily by decreasing numbers, however, as the Chinese language and customs on the east and the Tibetan on the west are being adopted more and



FIG. 12—Stone basket bridge near Yachow. The bridge is replaced yearly after floods.

more by the younger generations. Several rather significant cultural resemblances have been noted between these Chiarong tribes and certain of the tribal groups found along the northern border of India, in Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. But, as in the case of the Lolos, an adequate study of these detached ethnic remnants requires a much longer and more intimate contact than has so far been the good fortune of any anthropologist to make.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

What has been said might seem to imply that the orientation of these tribal groups to their environment reflected simply a physical survival through retreat, but it may well be asked if certain peoples might not instinctively choose a mountain valley habitat under the urge of peculiar mental or social attributes in their make-up.

It must not be overlooked that the term "environment" in the case of the human organism embraces other than merely physical factors. Such adaptations as we find between the primitive groups under discussion and their mountain homes reflect the interplay of certain psychical and social factors involved in the situation.

Certain it is that from the standpoint of successful correlation with their environment and the application of their inherent talents to the resources at hand the efficiency of the mountain peoples must be rated exceedingly high. The average tribesman manages to exist and satisfy his basic needs in a country and under circumstances in which the average Chinese would both mentally and physically



FIG. 13—A type of rope bridge for goods and passengers in common use in the tribes country.

promptly starve to death. In the affairs of his daily life the tribesman becomes a confirmed individualist: the family and the immediate tribal group represent the extent of his sociological horizon, and each tribe is a law unto itself. This aspect of the individual's tribal distribution is a positive factor. The gregarious instinct of man is apparently by no means shared equally by all men or races. Instead of the social tendencies that draw the Chinese together a centrifugal urge seems to be operative among certain of these tribal groups, sending them into the farthest valleys to live a life of apparently preferred separation and relative solitude.

The Black Lolos, and in only a slightly less degree many of the Ch'iangs and Chiarong tribes, provide excellent examples of this deliberate withdrawal. Although they enjoy free and easy relationships within their own groups, when in contact with outsiders they almost invariably reveal a characteristically frigid and unapproachable attitude. Many of these peoples are truly immiscible elements in the ethnic complex of the region as a whole and provide material for a study of those psychical and social attributes that lie deeper and are of more fundamental importance in race relations than color of skin or form of hair.

THE HSIFANS

It needs to be added, however, that in many respects several of the lesser tribal groups provide rather distinctive contrasts to the Lolos, Ch'iang, and Chiarong peoples whose generalized characteristics have been treated above. Particularly is this true of the Hsifan and White Lolo groups. Under the loose title of "Hsifan," which is a Chinese term meaning merely "western Barbarians," are included a large number of unrelated non-Chinese peoples scattered widely throughout the hinterland areas of China proper. In western Yunnan the term applies to a group of hybrid peoples of predominantly Tibetan mixture.

The Hsifans of the Tung River section of the borderland on the other hand, interspersed between the White Lolos of the wilderness on the north and the Black Lolos of Independent Lololand on the south, show no trace of Tibetan blood or culture. These peoples are cultivators of the lower slopes and in addition expert fishermen. Physically they are small in stature and possess whiter skins and rosier complexions than any of the other groups met in the region. Their facial features are rather delicate and regular, lacking the sharpness of the Lolos on the one hand and the coarseness of the Tibetans on the other. These Hsifans show little of the aloofness that characterizes their neighbors and reveal a distinct disposition to adopt Chinese culture. They are in contact with this superior cultural complex at Fulin, a good-sized Chinese center on the Tung River at the head of the lateral Chien Ch'ang Valley, where an important Chinese commercial highway bears off to the south past the Independent Lolo country and on into Yunnan.

The process of gradual adoption of Chinese culture among these Hsifans, with the ultimate result of their final absorption into the Chinese cultural group, is of interest as illustrating a process that has been going on along the southern and western periphery of the Chinese peoples for several centuries. One of the first steps of this cultural invasion is the wearing of Chinese dress among the men, while here and there are individuals having the added distinction of being able to speak the Chinese language and perhaps even being able to read the Chinese written characters. The sons of the chiefs and other well-to-do families are frequently sent to Chinese schools in Fulin or Yachow or even on to Chiating or Chengtu. On returning to their homes these highly traveled young men like to associate with the Chinese residents of the region and often speak of themselves as "we Chinese." In the imitation of the Chinese by these Hsifan groups we are witnessing nothing less than one of the most basic of the various factors underlying the whole phenomenon of human progress. Here two disparate cultures are in contact. One of them is consciously striving

to imitate the other on account of the prestige accruing therefrom to the imitator. As has probably always been true since the earliest beginnings of human progress, the single factor most conspicuous as providing that precious element of prestige is that of economic superiority. Such non-material cultural elements as beliefs, attitudes, and social practices may follow after, but it is doubtful whether these ever come first, in spite of the naïve belief of many that they invariably form the vanguard of human progress. In certain cases the people of whole settlements of Hsifans, perhaps without a drop of Chinese blood in their veins, have come to consider themselves as true Chinese.

“CHINESE” A CULTURAL TERM

The term “Chinese,” therefore, as applied to certain areas of China must be considered as a purely cultural rather than a racial term. In this connection it cannot be doubted that much of the apparent Chinese racial displacement of the greater part of the T'ai population formerly occupying most of the region south of the Yangtze is in fact a cultural displacement only. The typical Cantonese of today is most probably still a Shan in blood and basic temperamental disposition, although he has long since adopted as his own the vastly richer cultural complex evolved by the sons of Han. Be that as it may, many of the Hsifan groups occupying the lower and more open valleys of the borderland region provide excellent examples of the various stages by which the absorption of non-Chinese racial elements into the general Chinese cultural complex takes place. They also illustrate in their particular environmental situation and psychical make-up some of the factors that permit such an amalgamation. It remains to be noted that, whereas the more mobile masculine element has in many instances traveled far along the road to becoming “Chinese,” this progress is much less true of the women.

TACHIENLU

As one turns away from the rushing Tung River at Wassukow for the last leg of the climb to Tachienlu one usually looks up the river, here known as the Ta Chin (Great Gold) River, toward the Badi-Bawang tribes' country to the north. The accounts of the Emperor Chien-Lung's efforts to extend Chinese control over this lucrative area record some of the most difficult military expeditions of that famous Emperor's long reign (1736-1796).

Close by on the east is the equally unique Mupin region,⁸ a particularly wild area of special interest from zoölogical and botanical as well as ethnological standpoints. Living in these valleys for instance

⁸ J. H. Edgar: Muping, the Land of the Giant Panda, *China Journ. of Sci. and Arts*, Vol. 5, 1926, pp. 183-184.

is that mysterious animal the Giant Panda, lately hunted here under most difficult conditions by the Roosevelt brothers.⁹

Turning sharply to the west the traveler has before him the most fascinating and arduous day's climb of the whole ascent from Yachow to Tachienlu. The net rise encountered in the remaining twenty miles is only 3000 feet, but the up-and-down contortions of the narrow footpath add fully as many feet again to the climbing necessary to accomplish this last stretch, while down through the gorge a glacier-fed stream formed above by the junction of two good-sized tributaries at Tachienlu makes one of the wildest and most prolonged plunges to be seen anywhere.

Tachienlu, familiarly known as the Shanghai of Tibet, constitutes the gateway into the best climated and most populous province of Tibet—namely the eastern province of Kham. The city is the former capital of a semi-independent Tibetan state, the Kingdom of Chiala, whose territory extended for several days' journey to the north, west, and south. This petty kingdom was maintained as an administrative area under the subordinate rule of the King of Chiala until the days of the Chinese Republic. A true border-town atmosphere pervades the place, reflecting sharp contrasts in inhabitants, topography, and mode of travel. Here the endless chain of human carriers from the lowlands of China dumps its bales of tea, cloth, tobacco, spices, needles, building materials, oil, and other items of the outside world and loads for the downward trip with sheep's wool, fox skins and a variety of other hides, yak tails, musk, deer horns, rhubarb, and occasionally rugs and other articles from Kashmir or other regions even farther to the west. At Tachienlu the long caravans from Lhasa converge by two routes. The yak are quickly unloaded and sent up into the higher pastures to graze and wait for the return journey, for the city itself is only a little over 8000 feet high and is unsuitable for these beasts of the high plateau. The small settled population of the town is far outnumbered by the large floating population of transient merchants, traders, officials, and caravan men, among whom the Tibetans usually outnumber the Chinese about two to one.

⁹ Theodore Roosevelt and Kermit Roosevelt: *Trailing the Giant Panda*, New York and London, 1929.