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# Aboriginal Savages of Formosa

[P. 410] Po-sia or Po-li-sia is a large, beautiful, and well-watered plain, lying in the very heart of the great mountain range which, running through the centre of the island of Formosa, divides it into an eastern and western portion. It lies nearly 30 miles eastward from the city of Chiang-hua, in a break in the mountain system. There are two ways in which it can be reached from Tai-wan-foo. Pursuing the ordinary north road as far as Ka-gi, you can continue the journey east by north-east, and enter Po-sia on the afternoon of the fourth day. Owing, however, to the thieving propensities of the Chinese in several small villages before entering Po-sia, the Sek-hoan of the plain very rarely make use of this shorter road, and this is just what the Chinese wish. There can be no doubt that they have an eye on Po-sia. The Sek-hoan having acted as the pioneers in opening up the region, the craftier Chinaman endeavours now, by every act of trickery and oppression, to dispossess them. The route generally chosen, and by which I went, is to proceed directly north from Ka-gi to Toa-sia. Here a small armed party requires to be taken as an escort through the territory of the Chay-hoan, or uncivilized aborigines. Leaving Toa-sia we would proceed in a south-easterly direction for 9 miles or so along the base of one of the smaller ranges, and then for two days in an easterly direction through a wild and mountainous region, where neither the Chinese nor the Sek-hoan have ventured as yet to establish themselves. In this way Po-sia would be reached in six days after leaving Tai-wan-foo. Po-sia is inhabited almost exclusively by the Sek-hoan. These form one of the two great tribes of civilized aborigines who occupy the western side of the island, the others being the Pepo-hoan.

I arrived at O-qu-lan, the first of the Po-sia villages on the 23rd of April, 1873. From careful enquiries made while visiting twenty-nine of the villages (there are thirty-two in all, three of them being situated right outside the plain in the hill region), I estimate that the entire population of Po-sia may be set down at about 6000; one would not think so at first. A few of the villages occupy the middle of the plain, but the most are situated in out of the way corners by the foot of the hills, and are almost hidden out of sight by the lofty bamboos which surround them all. An approximate estimate of the extent of Po-sia and of its population can be found only after walking over it in all directions, following the irregular line of march along the base of the high hills, and entering the secluded villages you come upon from time to time. I spent several days in this interesting work during my present visit. On entering a village we at once proceeded to the school, where the people soon gathered from every house to see the foreigner, and listen to his story. In almost every case we were kindly received. They made tea for us, and in other ways testified their good will. From the forethought of one of my colleagues, I was supplied with a store of quinine which I found very

valuable. We frequently met bartering companies of the Chey-hoan to whom small articles such as needles and flints were given, and to any suffering from fever doses of quinine. This accounts for a rather unexpected invitation.

One evening about dark, A-tun, a Sek-hoan barterer, [p. 411] who knows the dialect of the savages, led in a party of Chey-hoan to O-qu-lan bearing a message from their chief A-rek to the foreign doctor. Some of his people had been benefited by my medicine, and A-rek wanted me to visit his settlements, and try to cure some who could not leave their huts. Of course, I told them the doctor was not here, but was at present in the great southern city, a distinction I might as well not have attempted, as I had been giving medicines which had done good. So as I was glad to have an opportunity of going further east, I agreed to leave Gu-khun-soa with them on Monday, the 12th of May. Three of our men were to accompany me, namely, A-tun, who would act as interpreter, my table-boy, who is a married Pepo-hoan, and a Chinese burden-bearer. The chief, A-rek, had sent his son to conduct us to his village. A few minutes after leaving Gu-khun-soa, we entered the mountain defile and were fairly on our way. For seven hours we walked over hills and across streams without the shadow of a road, and always due east, before we halted to take food. Again continuing our journey, we at last sighted, from the brow of a steep hill, the village of Tur-u-oan, the head-quarters of the tribe, and our resting place for the night. The stream between us and the village was deeper and swifter than any we had passed. Almost all the inhabitants turned out to have their first sight of a foreigner. We halted before the largest of the houses, and on entering were in the presence of the man whose name had been for years a terror to the natives of the western side of these mountains. A-rek had been suffering from fever, and was rather weakly. I gave him a good dose of quinine, and shortly after he drank off a preparation of Liebeg's extract of meat with evident relish. There was little done that evening. It was almost dark when we arrived, and the prospect outside was anything but inviting. Some thirty people gathered into the large apartment. They were rather shy at first, but became more communicative in the course of the evening. I presented A-rek with about half a yard of red flannel, which they greatly value, a few wooden combs, flints, and a piece of an old brass chain I had used to hold my keys together, and the possession of which evidently gave my host an additional feeling of superiority. Many of the remarks made by the company were translated by A-tun -- not a few of them referred to myself. I was the white-skinned foreigner who came from above, and though my head were cut off I would not die, and so on.

Rising early next morning I ventured out to look at the place. The first thing that arrested my attention was a string of skulls fastened up against the end of the chief's house. They were nearly all cloven in, and not a few had still some flesh adhering to them, as if they had been severed from the body only a month or two before. The majority of the other houses were similarly ornamented. I counted thirty-nine skulls on one hut, thirty-two on another, twenty-one on a third, and so on. I was told that they were the trophies of victorious clan fights, and of successful raids on the inhabitants on the western side of the mountains. The poor Chey-hoan sees his certain fall in the face

of the encroachments of the swarming Chinese, and in his sullen despair his hand is against every man. I was informed that not a year passes without from ten to twenty of the Po-sia people being killed in these raids. When I re-entered the large cabin, I saw further evidence of the degradation of these savages. Many suspicious-looking implements were lying about, and there could be no doubt that the thick mass of long hair which dangled from one of the rafters, consisted of the pigtails of the murdered Sek-hoan and Chinamen whose skulls were bleaching outside. I believe that many of the Chey-hoan are cannibals.

My pity was deeply moved for these poor people. They are in many respects a fine race: all say they are truthful, chaste, and honest. Murder is the most common of their many sins. Human life is regarded as of very little value; and they delight in hacking the bodies of those from whom they have received any real or fancied wrong. Both men and women paint their faces -- the faces of the old women are so daubed as to make them very repulsive. Their time is chiefly taken up in hunting. A large party returned from hunting on the second day after our visit. We tried repeatedly to impress on them some of the simplest truths, but their minds seemed incapable of receiving a single impression. The act of writing a few memoranda in their presence excited their suspicion. The supposed I was preparing something for their injury. I tried to explain what I was doing; but it was of no use, and so I put the note-book aside.

I was told of the following strange customs practised by these Chey-hoan. When any one dies, his friends clear away the log fire which always smoulders at one end of the apartment, and dig a deep hole on the place it occupied. Into this they place the body in a sitting posture, and beside the body they place pipes and tobacco with other articles used by the deceased while living. A simple ceremony to exhibit their grief is then gone through, then two of the nearest friends fill up the grave, the fire is replaced, and everything goes on as before.

Their houses are different from those I have elsewhere met with. They commence their erection by digging a large square hole or pit about 4 feet deep; the earth at the bottom of the pit is firmly beaten down to form the floor; the sides are built round with large stones, and this carried up as a stone wall about 3 feet above the level of the ground; a bamboo framework is then thrown over from wall to wall, and sufficiently large to project and form eaves 2 or 3 feet deep on either side; over this slates (or rather stone slabs) are placed, and the structure is complete.

The chief and some others were remarkably friendly on the second morning after my arrival. The medicine had cured them of their fever. They proposed to show me their wells, which A-tun assured me was a certain evidence of their confidence. They told me that one of their wells had been under evil influence for a long time, and had caused numerous deaths. They had been in the habit of firing into it in the evenings in the hope that the bullets from their long guns would dislodge the enemy. I found the well to be a spring with an almost unlimited supply of the coolest and sweetest water I

had ever tasted. I insisted that they should give up the use of the impure water they had been drinking and return to this.

The low, wretched charnel-houses in which they live made me wonder to see so many sturdy fellows among them. The scenery around is the wildest and most magnificent I have ever seen. Glencoe is nothing to it. All the country around and for a long day's journey to the east use the same language as A-rek's [p. 142] tribe. The word of A-rek in his younger days was law to this mountain people for many miles around. Thirteen villages are still subject to him. I visited seven of them, meeting with many suffering from fever, to whom I gave quinine; and with a few who had very severe spear wounds, for whom I could do nothing. In the course of these travels I met another chief, who territory is about 5 miles south from Tur-u-oan, and who is the head of thirty villages. His name is A-ui-a-tan. I presented him with a few English needles, with which he was agreeably surprised. He only know the miserable rusty bits of wire obtained from the barterers.

On leaving, A-rek obtained from me a promise that I would return again, and I was compelled to accept a present of a small piece of native cloth, especially prepared for me by his wife.

In returning from Po-sia to Tai-wan-foo we did not go by Toa-sia as we came, but went to the south by a new way, in order to visit the Chin-hoan, or water-savages, about thirty of whom we met at Gu-khun-soa a village of Po-sia. The Chin-hoan live on the shores of a large fresh-water lake about a day's journey south from Po-sia. This lake we found to be 4 or 5 miles long and about 3 broad. The chief occupation of this tribe is fishing in the lake. We saw their long canoes on the water. Each canoe is formed from the trunk of a single tree. They propel them by means of short paddles made in the form of leaves. They are found on no other part of the island. Their four villages are called Chin-sia, Wa-lan, Pa-khut, and Than-sia.

I reached Tai-wan-foo on the 27th of May.

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