

**CHANGING VISUAL CULTURE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL
VISUAL AND TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS AND VISUAL CULTURE OF THE
ZELIANGRONG NAGAS**

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requirements for the award of the degree of*

Master of Philosophy

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DECLARATION


I declare that the dissertation entitled “**Changing Visual Culture: A Critical Study of the Colonial Visual and Textual Representations and Visual Culture of the Zeliangrong Nagas**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

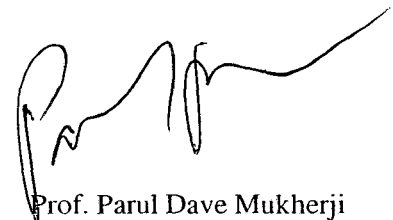

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to critically examine the visual and textual materials of the Zeliangrong Nagas like photographs of the traditional attires, costumes and artifacts, to trace and distinguish the changing representations and fashions of the Zeliangrong community, from the late 19th century onwards to the contemporary contexts of the 21st century. Oral narratives of the people, the symbolic pattern which get manifested in the weaving of intricate costumes- shawls, stoles, kilts, etc., method of building traditional houses, storytelling of the exploits of legendary heroes and other cultural practices around which notions of identity of the tribe is articulated are being examined. The photographs/pictures for this study start from the days of the British colonial regime photographs of the Zeliangrong Naga beginning from the late 19th century. These photographs in question show only partial reality of the culture and tradition of the Zeliangrong Naga at that point of time. In a nutshell, this study aims to contest and refute some of the prevailing notions and stereotypes traditionally held to be true about the Zeliangrong Nagas that have been handed down since the British colonial days. So this study will also briefly examine the politics of exclusion and inclusion and the politics of labeling by the British and the dominant Meitei community from the Imphal valley who eventually occupies a dominant position in the region.

Colonial Mis-representations.

There is a general tendency among most scholars in post-independent India to simply reproduce in volumes of researches, the British colonial writings and visual representations of the Zeliangrong Nagas without much critical analysis which only adds to the existing colonial inspired stereotypes. For instance some Naga scholars are so pre-

occupied with the origin of the concept and term like the word 'Naga' which has varied interpretations, and so many of the research findings often get lost in the labyrinth of conflicting interpretations (Gonmei 2009). Social science research lately has become degenerative in the Lakatosian sense¹ especially amongst the scholars who undertake works on the Nagas because the research does not add anything substantially new and path-breaking. This study will attempt to problematise the available colonial picturisations of the Zeliangrong Nagas – visual and textual representations.

Some of the fundamental changes that the British colonial regime brought about on the Zeliangrong Nagas which have left them in subaltern positions in terms of population, linguistic and socio-religious aspects are:

- (a) the political and administrative trifurcation of their country into three units without local knowledge and consent;
- (b) manipulation of the local demography by strategic settling of the Kukis in their lands and patronizing the Kukis with arms and ammunitions to fight the 'hostile' Nagas;
- (c) separate representations of the Zeliangrong people as Zemi, Liangmai and Rongmei and in the official census record as Kabui and Kacha Naga;
- (d) the socio-political labeling of the Zeliangrong Nagas as hostile, weak, child-like, and so on to suit the colonial interests; and
- (e) record of the Zeliangrong villages names in distorted Manipuri names. (Gonmei 2004).

Socio-political repercussions of such drastic changes have proven to be extremely disadvantageous for the traditionally under-developed Zeliangrong society. Even

¹ Imre Lakatos argue that a research becomes degenerative if no substantive and new ideas are added to the existing knowledge. See, Lakatos (1978) "The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers" Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

independent India has not been able to address the injustices meted out to the people by the colonial regime due to political inertia in the established three units that the Zeliangrong are put into as minorities. So when the Zeliangrong people re-started their reintegration movement² called the Zeliangrong Peoples' Convention (ZPC) led by Rani Gaidinliu in 1980, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland asserted that there should be no more redrawing of the states' territorial boundaries. Further, diplomatic gestures like the oneness and shared historical legacies of the different communities were played out. On the other hand the ZPC movement claimed that the Zeliangrong people had been deprived of all the due shares that they were entitled due to manipulations by the dominant majority communities like the Meiteis in Manipur, Cacharis in Assam and other Naga tribes in Nagaland.³

Visual Culture and Political Culture Interface

Visual culture and political culture of a society are closely related. Visual culture is that aspect of the political culture which gets manifested in the form of culinary items, costumes, art, warfare, leisure, polity and so on depending upon the type of economy. From the ancient times till today the economy of the Zeliangrong people is essentially agriculture and allied activities, with a small section of the population moving towards the secondary sector trade and retailing and very few people working as employees of the multinational companies (MNCs) and government servants in the tertiary sector. The visual culture of the Zeliangrong society is being examined in the context of folklores and the contemporary political culture. In the Marxian sense as Berger (1972) has pointed

² Some Zeliangrong elders argue that in the 1950s the Zeliangrong people gave up a Zeliangrong re-integration movement for a separate state within India due to the pressure from the Naga movement under Naga Nationalist Council (NNC). ZPC movement began as a movement to demand a Zeliangrong Homeland in the 1980s and was called off in 1993 again due to pressures from the Naga movement. See, Gangmumei Kamei (2004) "The History of Zeliangrong Nagas: From Makuilongdi to Rani Gaidinliu" Guwhati: Spectrum Publishers.

³ Meiteis constitute the dominant majority ethnic group in Manipur with over 67 percent of the entire population of the state, while the Cacharis are the dominant tribal groups in North Cachar Hills with 55 percent of the Autonomous District Council's and Naga tribes like the Ao and Angami in Nagaland dominate the political and socio-economic institutions. See, the Census of India 2001; Publications Division, (2009) India Yearbook 2009, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, and the Statistical Handbook of Manipur, (2008) Government of Manipur.

out, visual culture is the manifested form of superstructure which rests upon the base structure. But the present Zeliangrong society is a subaltern society in the Gramscian sense⁴ because irrespective of any tall claims made in the secondary or tertiary sector the society is predominantly in the primary and secondary stage of growth. Hence, the cultural aspects of the people are essentially traditional, rooted in nature and the environment. So technologically such society may be under-developed but the social norms and ethos have been well defined in order to sustainably survive in a close harmony between the human and the natural world. British colonial regime failed to acknowledge such values and labeled the society as primitive, hostile and backward so as to facilitate its expansionist policy as it did to the Irish, Welsh and the Scots (Lebow 2007).

Such prejudices and stereotypes are being re-enforced by the dominant majority although in a subtle manner. Stereotypes of the tribals as incompetent are re-enforced in the discriminatory policy of the government of Manipur especially in Manipur University (MU). MU now a Central University has less than five (5) teaching faculty from the tribal communities whereas there should be about thirty to forty tribal (35-40) faculty. In the pretext of lack of competent candidates from the tribal communities most of the seats are filled up by general candidates as ad hoc and temporary teachers.⁵ The Sanskritised Assamese and Manipuri always view the tribals through the prism of their elevated social status. Meiteis identify a tribal with the pejoratively insinuating and sweeping term, **Hao** for all the tribals. Incidentally, the Zeliangrong people identify among themselves as **Haomei** but not in front of outsiders. Just like the British, the dominant communities who

⁴ Subaltern was first used in a non-military sense by Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Some believe that he used the term as a synonym for proletariat, possibly as a codeword in order to get his writings past prison censors, while others believe his usage to be more nuanced and less clear cut. See: Morton, Stephen (2007) "Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason." Cambridge: Polity Press; Guha, Ranajit (1988) "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" in Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.) *Selected Subaltern studies: Essays from the 5 Volumes and a Glossary of Subaltern Studies* New York: Oxford University Press

⁵ See, the Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh by the All Tribal Students' Union, Manipur and the Manipur University Tribal Students' Union in June 2007.

run the government, who also owned and controlled the media, police the streets and towns and take all major decisions of the states, label the Zeliangrong people as inferior. So the tribal communities in Manipur mobilize themselves around common platforms like the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur (ATSUM), Manipur University Tribal Students Union (MUTSU), etc in addition to their respective organizations as pressure groups to collectively bargain for their rights with the state government.

Research Questions

Visual Study is an offshoot of Art History, and a discipline in the making, inspired by the critical theorists with Marxian orientation. The manner in which Visual Studies has raised the questions of the politics of representation gives it a post-modern orientation. Even though the subject matter to be studied here is not even modern in the strict sense of the term as it has been understood in the industrial west society, the traditional Zeliangrong society will be examined through the critical lenses of visual studies because it lends itself to a critical analyses of artifacts which are not important only in an aesthetic sense but are part of cultural politics.

So some of the questions that are raised in this study are: Why are the colonial prejudices and stereotypes and the accompanying discriminatory politics of exclusion and inclusion still being promoted and followed in independent India? Is it because the people are not capable of undoing the colonial wrongs because of lack of political empowerment? Or is it because the continued retention of the prejudices and stereotypes serve the interests of some political systems inertia? What can be done to correct the misrepresentations of such community?

Scope of the Study

In order to streamline the broad nature of the subject, a case study of the different oral narratives about the legendary ancestral village of the Zeliangrong Nagas called

Makuilongdi is being made in order to study the shift in the tradition from different regions. So the case study of Makuilongdi will represent the visual culture of ancient times reconstructed through the oral and material artifacts. Kakhulong, a small Zeliangrong settlement in the heart of Imphal city will be used as a case study of the colonial days and also to study the influence of Sanskritization and Westernization. This village came up as a service-provider to the Maharaja of Manipur and the British. Popular youth culture of the Zeliangrong youth is also examined through the lyrical and fashion statements of select Zeliangrong youth icon and musicians. Then the socio-religious transformation image of the Zeliangrong people is seen through the perspective of the Rongmei Naga Baptist Association and the Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak - two religious organizations based in Imphal actively working among the Zeliangrong people. The rhetoric's in party speeches resorted to by both the parties are also examined.

Methodology

In this study, the qualitative method has been used. The qualitative method include the interviews of selected respondents - elders and leaders who knew the historical background of Makuilongdi village, elders from Tamenglong, Tamei, Namdulong village, Kakhulong village at Imphal, including the functionaries of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC) at Chingmeirong Kabui village and the Zeliangrong contemporary artistes. I have visited the Kakhulong village, and the traditional religious institutions such as TRC. The secondary sources are also used in the form of journals, magazines, websites, pamphlets and books pertaining to the Zeliangrong Nagas.

Outline of the Study

The first chapter is an introduction to the various challenges that the Zeliangrong Naga people faces as an excluded community from the decision-making system of the political system they had been living in since the colonial days and the various social and political discriminations meted out as per the prejudices and stereotypes.

Chapter two examines the origin and growth of the concept of visual culture study and elucidates the analytical framework for the study. It also briefly examines some of the definitions and debate about the study of visual culture.

Chapter three has two case studies. The first case study is on oral traditions of Makuilongdi, that is, the Zeliangrong narratives about the ancestral village which has shaped the contemporary Zeliangrong society in all its facets from art, music, and dance to rites and rituals. The second case study is about Kakhulong, a village situated in the heart of Imphal town that was set up around the time British colonial regime came to be in power in Manipur. Kakhulong also throws a lot of light on the influence of Christianity and Westernization and the process of subtle but enduring Sanskritization on the Zeliangrong people.

Chapter four deals with Zeliangrong contemporary society. The third case study deals with Zeliangrong popular youth culture. Some select youth icons from the pop-rock musicians, their social background and their musical genre and lyrical contents are examined to bring out the nuances of the youth culture. The fourth case study is about 'Orange Festival' - how the aspirations of the youth for some fun, fame and glory in the form of beauty pageant is mixed with commercial interests and other interests of the local authority. Critics like the All Zeliangrong Students' Union Assam, Manipur and Nagaland (AZSU), Zeliangrong Students Union, Manipur (ZSUM) arguments of the festival tilting towards being more of a skin-show than a serious attempt to address the needs of the orange farmers seems to be true. The fifth case study is about the proliferation of the churches and spread of Christianity and the revival of the traditional Zeliangrong religion since the 1990s and the uncomfortable relations between the church and the traditional religion followers. The sixth case study is about Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu and the Zeliangrong People Convention Movement (ZPC), first led by Jadonang against the British, and upon his death, by Rani Gaidinliu in the colonial and post-colonial era; and the ZPC Movement for re-integration of the Zeliangrong and the

demand for a Homeland by Rani Gaidinliu till her death in 1993. The section also critically observes the subtle social exclusion and the politics of discrimination against the tribals by dominant majority communities and the state. It also examines the spectacular representations of social and peaceful co-existence and the underlying or latent social grievances premised on social inequalities in the social system of Manipur.

Conclusions drawn after examining these case studies and some of the questions raised in the beginning are that: The Zeliangrong people as a subaltern community by default due to colonial balkanization of their country would continue to remain so and they would be victims of colonial prejudices and stereotypes even in independent India if they do not empower themselves in all aspects. One of the reasons for their inability to mobilize and strengthen themselves is the strong penchant for autonomy and independence among the different socio-political and religious organizations that purportedly works for the welfare of the Zeliangrong people. So in the name of growth and development of regional organizations through autonomous and independent policy, the strategic interests of the Zeliangrong community seem to have been simply given secondary importance.

Endnotes:

1. Berger, John (1972) "Ways of Seeing" London: Penguin
2. Gonmei, Poujenlung (2009), "Ceasefire Diplomacy: Will there ever be an 'Honourable Solution' to the 'Indo-Naga' Conflict," New Delhi: unpublished article *currently in the press*, Naga Students' Union, Delhi.
3. Guha, Ranajit (1988) "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" in Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.) *Selected Subaltern studies: Essays from the 5 Volumes and a Glossary of Subaltern Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press
4. Lakatos (1978) "The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers" Volume 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Morton, Stephen (2007) "The subaltern: Genealogy of a concept," in Gayatri Spivak (ed.) *Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Malden, MA: Polity,

Chapter 2

VISUAL CULTURAL STUDIES: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Origin of Concept and Development

Visual Culture has emerged out of the crisis experienced within the discipline of Art History around the 1980s. The authority of western art history as a single history began to be questioned with the onset of globalization. “The term visual culture first appeared on the cover of books whose topics were neither Western art nor - in the spirit of their time - art with a capital-“A””: Towards a Visual Culture: Educating through Television (1969) Caleb Gattegno” (Dikovitskaya 2005). At the same time, visual culture as a term is said to have been first used by the art historian Svetlana Alpers in 1983 in an essay that attempted to grapple with the uses of criticism in art history and literary theory in the “Art of Describing” (Whiteman 2005) and (Dikovitskaya 2005). Svetlana Alpers used the term while focusing on the notions of vision, image-making devices, and visual skills as cultural resources related to the history of Dutch painting. The study dealt with a culture in which images, as opposed to texts, emerged as central to the representation of the world (Dikovitskaya 2005).

For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to distinguish an academic discipline from that which it studies (hence musicology/music, Art History/the history of art). The expression visual culture may be a source of confusion because it can refer to both a discipline and an object of study... it is perhaps premature to call Visual Culture Studies ‘a discipline’ because it is so eclectic. Rather than being a single discipline, visual culture studies is a hybrid, an inter- or multidisciplinary enterprise formed as a consequence of a convergence of, or borrowings from a variety of disciplines and methodologies... (Walker and Chaplin 1997).”

Visual Culture as a discipline traces its genesis to the late 1980s as an interdisciplinary study when art history, anthropology, film studies, linguistics and comparative literature encountered post-structuralist theory. Deconstructionist criticism showed that the academic humanities were as much artifacts of language as they were outcomes of the pursuit of truth. The inclusive concept of culture as 'a whole way of life' became the object of inquiry of cultural studies, which encompassed the high 'arts' and literature without giving them any privilege status. As a result of the cultural turn, the status of culture has been revised in the humanities. It is currently seen as a cause of rather than merely a reflection of or response to-social, political and economic process. The importance of the concept of cultural studies in the humanities has added further momentum to the rise of visual studies. Perception has come to be understood as a product of experience and acculturation, and representations are now studied as one among the other signifying systems that make up culture. Although the new field of visual studies has enjoyed proliferation in the Anglo-American academy over the past decade, there is no consensus among its adepts with regard to its scope and objectives, definitions and methods (Dikovitskaya 2005). The undefined territory and boundary of the discipline and its multi-disciplinary character has its flaws. While the multi-disciplinary of Visual Culture Studies is exhilarating, there is a danger of incoherence and internal contradiction because the concepts and methods derived from one discipline may be incompatible with those borrowed from another (Walker and Chaplin 1997).

John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing', put out by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1972 is considered an early and very accessible work of postmodernism. It was originally a television series turned into a book. The book criticizes traditional Western cultural aesthetics by raising questions about hidden ideologies in visual images. The series is partially a response to Kenneth Clark's Civilization series, which represents a more traditionalist view of the Western artistic and cultural canon. The book has contributed to feminist readings of popular culture, through essays that focus particularly

on depictions of women in advertisements and oil paintings. 'Ways of Seeing' is considered to be a seminal text for current studies of visual culture and art history. The third chapter is on the use of oil painting as a means of depicting or reflecting the status of the individuals who commissioned the work of art. In the fourth chapter, on publicity and advertising, Berger argues that colour photography has taken over the role of oil painting, though the context is reversed. An idealized potential for the viewer (via consumption) is considered a substitution for the actual reality depicted in old master portraits. His Marxist humanism and his strongly stated opinions on modern art made him a controversial figure early in his career.

Definition

Visual Culture has been defined in many ways depending upon the political orientations of the persons concerned. Visual Culture according to Mirzoeff is, "a tactic with which to study the genealogy, definitions and functions" of today's life from the point of view of the user (1999). He adds further that visual culture is a "...visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology [which is] any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to television and the internet (Mirzoeff 1998:3)." Mirzoeff's definition has been contested by Duncum with the following three criticisms. He states that a definition that is dependent upon technology appears limited. It would seem to exclude natural scenery, for example. Perhaps this can be allowed if observing real life directly is now considered to be, as postmodern theorists argue, a matter of seeing through a veil of media images. Second, it must surely be possible still, even in a consumer society, to consider people more broadly than as consumers. And third, in a point I will develop further below, art education is centrally interested in meaning and pleasure, but not visual information per se (Duncum 2001).

Due to the complexity and accompanying confusions with such approaches on Visual Culture scholars like Barnard (1999) have sliced up the concept into two distinct contents namely, visual and culture and have defined it as “anything visually produced, interpreted or created by humans which, or is given, functional, communicative and/or aesthetic intent” and he goes on to define culture in the line of William’s (1981) as the “signifying systems” of a society, which are “(the institutions, objects, practices, values and beliefs) by means of which a society is visually produced, reproduced, and contested.” Sights of visual culture includes an extensive list ‘fashion, textiles, pottery and ceramics, hairdressers, shavers, cars, architecture, garden design, advertising, personal, public, corporate and popular images, film, television, computer environments, and games, Internet home pages, newspapers and magazine design, typography, products and packing of all kinds. (Barnard 1999).” Going by the above definitions and its contents, it can be observed that the concept is still too broad and unwieldy for any serious discipline to evolve and to contribute to the study of social science.

Visual Culture according to Duncum implies two things: “The term visual suggest that we are concerned with substantially visual artifacts. Artifacts often involve codes other than visual ones and engage sensory modes other than sight, but we are interested in artifacts to the extent to which, or when, we infer that they have meaning that is substantially visual. Secondly, the term culture suggests an interest in more than the artifacts themselves. It suggests an interests in the social conditions in which the artifacts have their being, including their production, distribution, and use. Images are viewed in their contextual richness, as part of an ongoing social discourse that involves their influence in social life (Duncum 2001).” Duncum’s dichotomization of the concept of visual culture for the purpose of simplification yet logical and concise seems to be very appropriate for this study to begin with. Yet because of the relatively nascent stage of visual culture as a concept and discipline it has no theories and no master narrative. It is a youthful, amorphous medium that is still trying to find its own identity (Homer 1998).

Visual Culture can be roughly defined as those material artifacts, buildings and images, plus time-based media and performances produced by human labor and imagination, which serve aesthetic, symbolic, ritualistic or ideological-political ends and/or practical functions, and which address the sense of sight to a significant extent (Walker and Chaplin 1997).

Visual Culture: Analytical Framework

Visual Culture Studies being a relatively new discipline or a discipline in the making is still undefined in its approach, scope and methodologies. It still relies on many of the existing social theories for systematic studies and explanations. Most social science researches are premised upon certain theoretical underpinnings either to prove or to disprove an established knowledge. However, in the case of Visual Culture Studies because of its nascent nature and yet to develop theoretical studies and research have limited this study to a simple analytical framework. Devising an analytical framework for this study will be based in the works of W.J.T Mitchell (1992) who coined the term 'pictorial turn' in 1990s as a framework of focus for the ongoing theoretical discussion on pictures whose status lies "somewhere between what Thomas Kuhn called a 'paradigm' and an 'anomaly' and which have emerged as 'a kind of model or figure for other things' in the human sciences (Mitchell 1994). At the same time the related issues of vision and visuality have been zealously explored across a broad range of the humanities and social science- the trend called the visual turn (Jay 2002, a,b). Mitchell has further posited that a new inter-discipline of visual studies has surfaced around the pictorial turn that runs through critical theory and philosophy. In short Mitchell is suggesting that visual culture is born out of the study of art history and cultural studies and it is the cultural turn that has made the study of visual studies possible in the first place (Dikovitskaya 1997).

In general, the study of visual studies and culture since the 1980s is composed of two research paradigms. One that is quantitative and organized in the lines of natural

sciences and another whose approach belongs to the interpretative and hermeneutic tradition that emphasizes human subjectivity and contextual meaning. Before the cultural turn, researchers did not much question the meaning or operation of social categories themselves, nor did they pay attention to individual motivation within social formations. Research project based on a commonsense meaning of the social typically used quantitative methods. "In the end multi-million dollar studies of census records... and thousands of case studies came up with contradictory rather than cumulative results. Social categories- artisans, merchants, women, Jews- turned to vary from place to place and from epoch to epoch, sometimes from year to year. As a result the quantitative methods that depended upon social categories fell into disrepute (Bonnell and Hunt 1999)."

Social scientists began to explore cultural contexts in which group or individuals acted and to emphasize the interpretation of symbols, rituals and discourses. The issue of subjectivity and the subjective side of social relations was given an important place on the research agenda. The scrutiny of culture demonstrated, among other things, that all our approaches are contaminated with ideological preconceptions. The previous paradigm based on a belief on an objective nature of social scientific enquiry was subsequently displaced by a standpoint that reveals culture - representational, symbolic and linguistic - to be an instigator of social, economic and political forces rather than a mere reflection of them (Dikovitskaya 1997). The cultural turn could be read as a 'return' to certain neglected classical and traditional sociological themes after a long period dominated by more structural, functional or empiricist concerns (Hall 1997).

The cultural turn brought to the study of images a reflection on the complex interrelationships between power and knowledge. Representation began to be studied as a structure and process of ideology that produces subject positions. In the light of Louis Althusser (1971) broadened notion of ideology - that it covers all aspects of societal life and that it is analogous system of signs - the work of art came to be seen as a

communicative exchange. As a result the concept of autonomy of art was replaced by the concept of inter-textuality. Art is now treated as a specific discursive system that during the modern period created the category of art work as a repository for values that had been suppressed within the dominant culture of mass production.

Framing an analytical framework for the study has proven to be very challenging because there are scores of literature on visual culture but no single unique methodology that could be generally applied. For instance one of the doyen of visual culture Mitchell does not think that visual culture has a distinctive methodology, and prefers to keep the question of methodology open, taking rather the tack that, 'this is my field of inquiry, here is where I will focus my attention, and these are the questions that I will ask (Mitchell in an interview with (Dikovitskaya 1997). Mitchell prefers to be eclectic about methods when doing structuralist and formalist analyses, using an allegorical reading or psychoanalytic model and following these approaches as long as they seem productive. On the other hand Herbert prefers the adoption and utility of a specific set of methodology to study visual culture. Therefore, the framework here will be a critical, eclectic and flexible in order to obtain the results that could be accrued from both the methods that is anti-methodologists and methodologists.

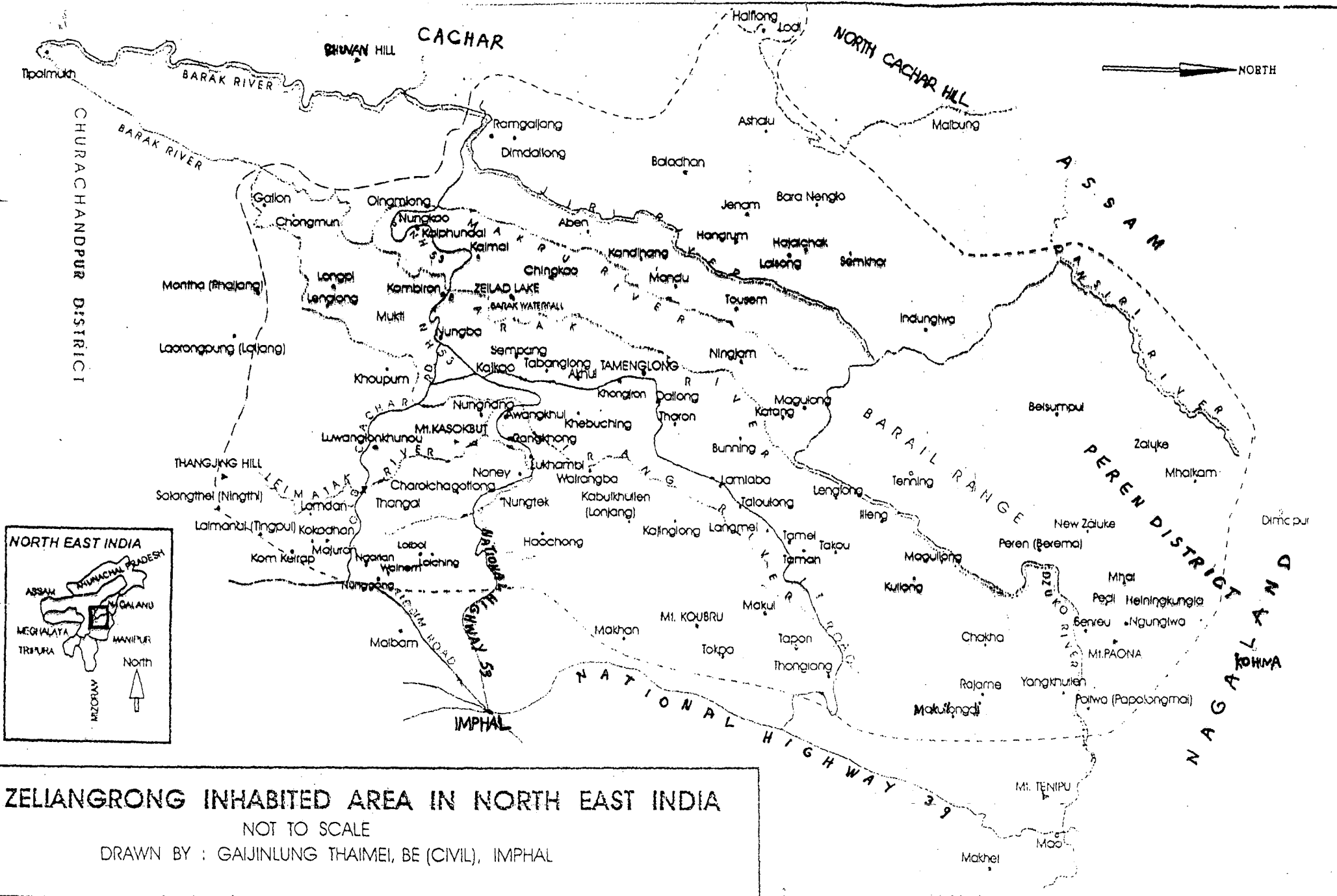
The analytical framework for this study shall be essentially critical in approach. Analytical framework can be divided into two kinds those that focus upon content and those that focus upon form. (This distinction is a longstanding but problematical one. A representational work of art is a synthesis of both form and content consequently they can only be separated in the realms of thought and criticism. A picture, we say, is of something; therefore, content is the substance or purport contained within a representation. There are two, principal sources for content: first, real events, scenes and people (fact); and second; the human imagination (fiction); mixtures of the two are sometimes referred to as 'faction' and 'drama documentaries'. A representational work of art is a synthesis of both form and content consequently they can be separated only in the

realms of thought and criticism (Walker and Chaplin 1997). So the contents and forms of any work of art and culture associated with the traditional society namely, the Zeliangrong and their representations will be taken as the analytical framework for this study. This content and form format will be critically examined through the pictorial and cultural turn of Mitchell and Althusser's concept of ideology and the interrelationships between power and knowledge, wherein, representation is seen as a structure and process of ideology that produces subject positions.

Visual Cultural Studies and its critical methods, especially the form and content analysis of Walker and Chaplin (1997), which has been also called the manifest and latent functions analysis by Robert K. Merton (1957) is applied in the context of the study of the Zeliangrong people and their representations by the British colonial regime and the continued mis-representations even in independent India, especially in the state of Manipur. Berger's concept of Publicity, which he defines as "the life of this culture – in so far as without publicity capitalism could not survive – and at the same time publicity is its dream (Berger: 154)". Berger's concept of publicity will be read as the visual and textual representations of the British, who depend upon the publicity to foster their own regime expansion and stability. Berger's concept of publicity and the British strong penchant for demeaning the natives in order to give legitimacy to their authority may be effectively used to explain the situations of the Zeliangrong Nagas.

Endnotes:

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Map showing the Zeliangrong inhabited areas in North East India

Chapter 3

NATIVE ORAL NARRATIVES AND THE COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ZELIANGRONG NAGAS

Visual culture and practices of a traditional society that did not preserve and leave behind visual or textual materials is reconstructed and represented through the communities' oral narratives like the folklores, songs, myths and legends. Social institutions like the marriage and kinship system, artifacts like their costumes, hunting implements, weapons, architecture, also do play important role in the reconstruction and interpretation of such society. Zeliangrong society belong to such society that has been reconstructed and re-represented by many historians, anthropologists, political scientists and sociologists in their respective disciplinary perspectives. However, since the artifacts do not speak for themselves, many studies and writings that are available today and those that shaped the policy and decision-makings tend to mis-represent such society. The British colonial visual material in the form of photographs and textual materials of the Zeliangrong is a good example of a conscious attempt to represent the locals in a subservient light to facilitate their colonial aggrandizement and continued exploitation.

In the imagination of the Zeliangrong tribe, Makuilongdi plays a pivotal role as a place of their origin. This case study will also look at various oral narratives that allude to Makuilongdi as to how this village continues to capture the imagination of even the present generation in their struggle with identity crisis and subaltern position.

Case Study One

Makuilongdi: Ancient Visual Culture

Makuilongdi was the great ancestral village of the Zeliangrong people in and around present Oklong, Senapati district in Manipur. Zeliangrong people now live in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland after the trifurcation of their homeland with a total population of about three lakhs, as estimated by the Zeliangrong Union (ZU), the apex body of the tribe. Makuilongdi is the story of a tragedy that befell a proud and prosperous ancient settlement/village in the midst of a festivity that went off-limit and berserk. Due to the general prosperity the people were habitually given to merry-making round the year. Legend has it that the number of households reached an astounding and magical figures of 7777 (seven thousand, seven hundred and seventy seven)¹ before the malicious omen struck the village forcing the inhabitants to undertake an en mass exodus. Legend has it that the migrating masses moved out and the thousands of feet that trudged along leveled off banyan roots on the road. Mustards sown by the groups of people who moved out earlier were eaten by the later groups (Gonmei 2004). Such narratives which denote the magnitude and duration of the exodus seems obviously exaggerated but the exodus did occur as have been substantiated by the arguments that will follow.

According to legends, the Chief of Makuilongdi was one Nguiba who had three sons from two wives, the eldest being Kading, Nrebangbe and Namgang second and third sons respectively (Pamei 1996). This narration seems to be a later interpolation to create a kind of hierarchy whereby lot of respect is given to the elders. As a matter of fact on the basis of this hierarchy of brothers in contemporary times efforts are being made to assert the identity of each regional groups/brothers into three different tribes. Such narration is critically examined because those that moved to the north came to be known

¹ The number Seven is considered to be an auspicious number in the folklores and traditions of the Zeliangrong people.

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as the Zemi, those that stayed around the old settlement/village came to be known as Liangmai and those that went down south came to be known as Rongmei that is the northerners, central land and the southerners. The exodus could not have been solely on the basis of kinship and family lines. Such narratives seem to be largely true in spite of the occasional hyperbole and exaggerations thrown in here and there. It could be seen as an effort to give special effects to the oral traditions being handed down from generation to generation.

Over all Makuilongdi was a kind of utopia - land of plenty, where one was rarely sick, hunters and gatherers did not return empty handed and there was general peace and prosperity. In Makuilongdi the Zeliangrong people adopted and refined most of their culture - dance, songs, warfare, village administration, social norms and so on. It was the cradle of the Zeliangrong people and their culture (Pamei 2004).

Authenticity and veracity of oral traditions/narratives about Makuilongdi is critically examined in five core areas namely, social institutions like the marriage and kinship systems and clans system, linguistic pattern, social mores and traditions, folklores - dances and songs and the material artifacts in all the regions namely, Zemi, Liangmai and Rongmei regions. Although the veracity of Makuilongdi as a village with 7777 households and its prosperity would be difficult to prove or disprove, some of the more substantive and durable material culture do prove some of the oral narratives. If Makuilongdi was a mere mental construct and oral narratives eulogizing of the past then the shared culture and traditions of the Zeliangrong would not be commonly found let alone inherit them. But the Zeliangrong people did inherit the legacies of Makuilongdi and this is manifested in the social, cultural and religious practices today. Zeliangrong people strictly practiced exogamy in the ancient times; by and large the marriage and kinship system is being retained today with endogamy also slowly being tolerated. Clans system is symbolized in the form of animated totemism like abstention from eating certain birds and animals. For example, the two elementary clans of Zeliangrong namely,



Newmai and Pamei did not eat the bulbul and the wild pigeon respectively. The two clans could intermarry. But intra-marriage within the same clan was strictly prohibited. It was considered a taboo and such couples were summarily ejected from the village as outcasts.

Some of these oral narratives are found in the artistic impressions of modern Zeliangrong people like the works of Poujairung Thamei, a retired civil servant and resident of Keisamthong village in Imphal. The painting below in popular style supposedly depicts the people of Makuilongdi before the exodus. According to Thamei, the painting is an attempt to immortalize the romantic courtship and the tragic story of the prince of Makuilongdi and the damsel from the rival neighbouring village which is fondly narrated in many Zeliangrong households. The couple from rival villages met secretly in the *Bamduan*, a rest-shed with stones stools for the weary travelers in those days. It was fashionable and functional for an eligible bachelor to carry a weapon like the spear or sword as a means of self-defense from the enemies. It was also the expressed insignia that he was a warrior who has sworn to protect and defend his people. Young men wear a kilt called *nai/ni* the pronunciation varies from region to region. Eligible girls would sport a long hair that would go down to her waist with a fringe-cut just above the eyelashes. Her blouse and skirt are intricately hand-woven attire, the design of which that has been followed till now without many changes even in the contemporary times. Her circular bracelets are made of brass. It was customary for a young woman to go out with a *Ka*, basket that is slung at the back with its strap on the head. Girls used to fetch water, firewood, carry food and vegetables and many other items on a *Ka*.



Prince of Makuilongdi and his ladylove from rival village: A painting by P. Thaimei

Zeliangrongs share a common linguistic legacy. Save for little variations in the prefixes and suffixes dialectics commonality is self-evident in the Liangmai and Rongmei region, and then the Zemi and Liangmai region are also very close again. Social mores and traditions also bear very close resemblance. Folksongs and dances belong to the same genre. And the material artifacts in the form of attires and costumes of men and women are even closer. Thus, the oral narratives of the Zeliangrong people since Makuilongdi are being reconstructed and represented as a symbol of the people being closely-knitted. Naga Raj² Movement Jadonang and Gaidinliu were premised on the shared kinship for the emancipation of the Zeliangrong people from the exploitative regime of the local neighboring kingdoms and the British colonial regime.

² Naga Raj was a term used pejoratively by the Political Agent of Manipur Captain Higgins in his reports about Jadonang to his superiors in Assam.

However, there are local scholars who use the parameters of the British colonial³ and the neighboring Hinduisation influences to portray Zeliangrong people as a 'disparate people' (Nag 2002) and as a 'social and political construct' (Oinam 2002). Zeliangrong people themselves are arguing in this line today that they are different tribes.⁴ Such arguments assume significance in the light of the general preference for a united Zeliangrong identity and its socio-political assertions in the form of the Zeliangrong People Convection (ZPC) and the Homeland Demand carving out districts in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland in the 1980s. Intense negotiations went into the movement between the ZPC leaders and the Central Government of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi and hints of a Union Territory status was made by the center (Pamei 2004). But the ZPC movement was shelved with the rise of the Naga movement under the NSCN in the early 1990's and the demise of Rani Gaidinliu in 1993 (Kamei 2004).

When seen through the critical analysis of form and content as has been spelled out in Mitchell's pictorial turn and cultural turn and Althusser's knowledge as power argument it can be safely concluded that the visual culture contents of the Zeliangrong people has remained more or less the same from the time of Makuilongdi to the contemporary times. However, what has changed is the form. Appearances also did change not because of change in content but because of the external intervening factors like westernization and sanskritization forces in the Zeliangrong society. Some enduring contents of the Zeliangrong culture that has not change since the times of Makuilongdi are: the marriage and kinship system; the clan system; the artefacts like the shawls, stoles, kilts etc. The intervening factors that have supposedly changed the forms of the Zeliangrong visual culture came in the form of time and distance.

³ British political agents first came to the Zeliangrong country in 1832 in a political expedition assisted by the Manipuri king and this resulted in the subjugation and the subsequent blithe enumeration/naming of the Zeliangrong people as Kabui and Kacha Naga. See, Johnstone, James (1896) "My Experience in the Naga Hills and Manipur" London: Sampson Low, Makston and Company

⁴ See the Zeme, Liangmai and the Rongmei Councils argument and their representations to the Government of Manipur and the subsequent State Government recommendations to the Government of India in 2006 and 2007 for recognition as separate scheduled tribes in addition to the existing Kabui and Kacha Naga, bypassing the 2001 and 1991 recommendations which seeks to maintain the Zeliangrong unity.

Tarangkai/ki: Pre-Colonial Visual Culture

In addition to the social culture of Makuilongdi available through oral narratives pictorial representation of Makuilongdi culture is also available in the form of Tarangkai/ki which has been handed down from generation to generation. Tarangkai/ki is the traditional house which has unique geometrical patterns layout and motifs of colourful animals in the front porch of the building. Legend has it that the design of Tarangki/kai was memorized and reconstructed by Amangh, the only human/mortal who went to dine with the gods before the final parting of ways between man and god with a big feast which came to be known as the Amangh Jouruhmei. Amangh cleverly fooled the god's prohibition not to look around and he observes the architecture and motifs of the Tarangki by lifting the wine and food high up in the air as if to cool before he ate and drank. So construction of this house represents a great success in the life-cycle of a Zeliangrong Naga. Tarang-Baanrumei is the commemoration of such feat and the sign of accomplishments in life to seek divine blessings. In the traditional Zeliangrong beliefs, such feats facilitate one to attain salvation and entry into heaven. This practice continues today among the wealthy and successful Zeliangrong people who keenly preserve and follow the traditional socio-religious beliefs.

The picture below is a crude replica of a Tarangkai/ki which is rarely constructed these days due to the prohibitive financial constraints involve with the elaborate rites and rituals and the laborious process of time and energy. Construction of a Tarangkai/ki and Baanrumei involves throwing feasts for many days to all the people that come as well-wishers. Adoption of a modern way of life, especially Christianity by most of the Zeliangrong people has seen the decline of such traditional art and architecture. Nowadays, the motif of Tarangkai is being copied and used as a generic architecture for any cottage and hut. The motif also finds representation in the shawls with the pictures of tiger, elephant, tortoise and other animals. In a sense, the concept of Tarang-Baanrumei is

the act of giving back to the God through service to the people by successful people who have accumulated enough wealth and resources.



A replica of Tarangkai/ki in Laisong village, North Cachar Hills Assam.

(Source: www.e-pao.net).

Case Study Two

Kakhulong: Colonialism and Visual Culture of Zeliangrong

Sources for this case study are the visual and textual materials of the British colonial times, Meitei and local collections and the oral narratives. Kakhulong, a small Zeliangrong village on the banks of the Nambul River in Imphal established in 1895 like many other Zeliangrong villages in and around Imphal started as a service provider to the Manipur Durbar and the British Political Agent in the latter part of the 19th Century. It was also previously known as ‘Saab-bang’ among the Zeliangrong people (Kamei 2004). The literal meaning meant ‘servants of the British officials.’ Most of the men folks were

employed with the British and the Manipur Durbar as gardeners, cleaners, cooks and porters, while the women folks were engaged in brewing the traditional liquor, 'zouzu' and rice beer 'zoungao and zoudui' for personal consumptions. Gradually, the Zeliangrong people turned this venture into a commercial entrepreneurial activity. This was a welcome break from the Head-Hunting and *Sangna Rih*⁵ and the uncertain life in the hills which was brought by the easy availability of fire arms and the arrival of new rivals - Kukis as the British soldiers and their tactical settlements in strategic locations in the Zeliangrong country side.

Colonial textual representations of the Zeliangrong Nagas like the one by Grimwood in her "My Three Years in Manipur" talks about an incident where she tried to civilize her Naga gardeners with gifts of bathing-drawers but ended in an embarrassing faux pass because the gardeners wore them as jackets and turbans the following day and came to work. She wrote, "After this I gave up trying to inculcate decency into the mind of the untutored savage." The particular gardeners Grimwood refers to here are the Zeliangrong Nagas of Kakhulong which is a village just across the river from the British Residency in the present Kangla fort. For the Zeliangrong Naga gardener's bathing-drawers as a gift was a novel idea and must have thought of some means to show their gratitude by wearing them to work. On the contrary, the British lady found their actions embarrassing and resolved never to reform such charity again. It was the cultural gap that separated them and caused the fiasco but the English lady even called the dutiful and faithful domestic helps as untutored savage with a one-sided perspective of the superiority of the Whiteman.

Upon arrival in the Imphal valley, the inhabitants of the village came under the influence of the Sanskritic Meitei culture and the predominant Western culture. From costumes to naming of babies, ubiquitous influence of Sanskritic influence was quite

⁵ Sangna Rih was the inimical traditional head-hunting practice of the Zeliangrong Nagas which had become self-destructive from that of an honourable practice only carried out by and between rival warriors with due rites and rituals.

evident. The new born infants were given local names like Chaoba, Tomba, Engellei and more Sanskritic names like Ram, Shyam, Arjun, etc with the purpose to let the youngsters fit in with the discriminatory social system in predominantly Hindu society. Today, many question the rationality of such mundane imitations of the Sanskritic lifestyle and culture.

However, the Zeliangrong people, in spite of the overwhelming influence of Sanskritic and Western/Christian influence, still retained the basic elements of their socio-religious lifestyle during the colonial times. Women folk proudly wore their traditional shawls and skirts throughout the year with the men occasionally donning the traditional costumes mostly in festive occasions and attended the local 'Hao Kaithian'⁶ to trade their wares which include rice beer, birds, dogs and pigs and wooden and earthen wares. This was a specially designated market for the tribal people settling in and around Imphal. Although settled in a new environment and in a semi-urban setting the traditional village administration continued with full traditional socio-religious fervor. So there came about a kind of dual-identity of the Zeliangrong people as a people who was trying to integrate with the local populace and their social norms and private or internal lifestyle of the people who still longed and cherished the traditional customs of the fore-fathers. So they celebrated their festivals with full traditional rites and rituals in their own domain. During the Chakaan Gaan-Ngai in keeping with the traditional feasting and merry-making the Zeliangrong people prepare variety of delicacies from chicken, pork, beef, fish, cat, dog and so on and are partaken with the locally brewed rice beer and liquor. And these are generously shared with the neighbors and even strangers. Such extravaganza lasting many days invariably affected the economy and have been responsible for the slower rate of saving, growth and development of the Zeliangrong people as compared to people who are frugal yet hardworking.

⁶'Hao Kaithian' was a kind of ghetto market that the British designated for the tribals near Majorkhul, Imphal. The market was bombed by the Japanese air force during the Second World War.

Chakaan Gaan-Ngai the biggest festival celebrated by the Zeliangrong has been described by J Shakespeare (1912) in a very mechanical manner without asking as to why the dance and song have been formed in that style and what message they conveyed.

“In the first figure all the lads had spears. The two biggest boys and two biggest girls took up positions in the centre of the semi-circle, a boy and a girl side by side, facing the other couple, boy opposite boy and girl opposite girl. The whole party chanted a monotonous refrain, the spears were raised and twirled in time with the beats of the drums. The two couples in the centre danced vigorously an indescribable sort of jig, advancing towards each other with arms bent, hands raised to the level of the head. From time to time they would meet and clasp hands, boy with boy and girl with girl, and twist round; the semi-circle of dancers all the while dancing a step similar to that of the two central couples.”

Gaan-Ngai has been given varied interpretations and descriptions even by many Zeliangrong scholars: as the post-harvest festival because the festival is performed at the end of the agriculture year; and, New Year festival because the festival is being held in a new lunar calendar (Kamei 2004). It is a very comprehensive and inclusive festival lasting five to six days in which events for the gods, for recently deceased, the young and the old, women and children find space and time. So the different interpretations are true but they need to be read together with the prevailing social situations and not to be seen in isolation from one another. It is also the occasion where the villagers light new fire and keep it burning throughout the year till the next Gaan-Ngai. It is a festival that celebrates the essence of life that is, the final conquering of man over nature-from light to darkness and ignorance to knowledge.⁷

Another interesting aspect of the Zeliangrong people was the stoic resistance against the pervading influence of Christian missionary movement for nearly a century from the early part of the first decade of the 20th century until the end of the 20th century.

⁷ Gaan-Ngai Committee, (2003) “Significance of Gaan-Ngai” Zeliangrong Students Union, Delhi,

They took kindly to assimilating the virtues of Hinduism in their daily socio-religious activities but took strong offense to Christian missionaries and their activities. Incidentally, the Christian missionaries who tried to reach out to the people of Kakhulong were from the Zeliangrong community only. But they were hardly welcome guests in spite of their best efforts. Such social indifference towards Christianity on hindsight seems to have been perpetrated by the notion that most of the Christian missionaries are self-professed righteous and religious people who lie and swear at the drop of the hats.⁸ Early Christians were also seen as lazy and easy going people. So with all these baggages attached to their credentials, the early Christians teaching and preaching were not taken seriously by the Zeliangrong people.

Curiously under the influences of the American Baptist Missionary and later the Roman Catholic missionaries, many of the Zeliangrong people were converted to Christianity beginning from 1905. The missionaries found their first convert in the person of Namrijinang Maipak an employee of the Manipur Maharaja Band Party. But in the face of stiff opposition to preaching in Zeliangrong villages around Imphal, the missionaries turned to the hills. Up in the highlands the war-weary, battle-scarred and resources drained (on sacrifices and offerings to the gods) hill folks readily welcomed the Christian missionaries and many were converted. Consequences of such *en mass* conversion is the lost of connectivity with the past culture and knowledge and discarding of most of the legacies. Christmas has replaced Gaan-Ngai, social institutions like the Khangchu/iu and the symbol of beliefs and actions has been replaced by Church and its allied branches like the Baptist Youth Fellowship (BYF).

In short this is the story of the Zeliangrong people who attained social mobility through acculturation of the dominant group's lifestyle and social norms and the favour

⁸ Namrijinang Maipak the first Zeliangrong Christian convert failed to convert among the Zeliangrong people in Imphal. So he turned to Tamenglong area and succeeded in spreading Christianity there. See Ramkhun Pamei, (1996) "Zeliangrong Naga: A Study of Tribal Christianity" New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

of the British colonial regime in the 18th and 19th century in and around Imphal. They qualified for the mobility through hard labour and their loyalty to their duty. Some even went to successfully contest and become local politicians, doctors and engineers and high-ranking civil servants. But the critical questions remain unanswered. As people and community they have attained high social mobility. But questions still persist about their identity and stereotypes that the British have inflicted upon them before they came to occupy that social position. They remained unchanged.⁹ The identity and stereotypes are preserved and re-enforced in the visual and textual writings of the Royal Chronicle of Meitei Kingdom, British and in the present state of Manipur. Kabui and Kacha Naga movements and the narratives continue to be part of the historiography of Indian National movement. They are reproduced in countless textual writings like the textbooks of the state government of Manipur and the journals and periodicals like Chronicle, Wizard, etc published in New Delhi which caters to the students/candidates pursuing careers in the civil services examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission of India. Part of the sections dedicated to tribal movements during the Indian National movement are so mechanically reproduced from one author after another that at one point of time the Chronicle magazine identified Jadonang as a Kuki and not as a Zeliangrong national leader who challenged the British colonial rule.

⁹ The term has been replaced by Zeliang in 1963, in Nagaland but in Manipur the legislative process is taking a long time due to internal differences in opinion among the Zeliangrong people over which term nomenclature to adopt. The debate was between Hamai/Haomei and Zeliangrong since the last two decades. Now it is whether Zeliangrong or separate recognition of Kabui, Kacha Naga , Zemi, Liangmai and Rongmei as scheduled tribes



'Kabui Nagas' in T.C Hodson "Head-Hunting among the Hill Tribes of Assam" Folklore, Vol. 20, No. 2. (Jun. 30, 1909).

By the end of the 18th century most of the Zeliangrong people especially those engaged with the British and Meitei had adopted mostly western dressings and social etiquettes. Except during the festive seasons such dressings were no more in vogue as casual wears. The above picture is a festive costume but T.C. Hodson has represented the two youngmen as still those involve in head-hunting in his writings because scantily clad young men with scythes slung on their shoulders makes for an interesting pictures of headhunters. The person on the left side of the photograph has adorn himself with the Zeliangrong traditional make up, wherein the white paste has covered the leg region, this has been a tradition since the Makuilongdi days, and this is to indicate the community festive celebrations. At the same time, the replica Zeliangrong sword called "Dou" in

local dialect, as seen in the photograph; signify that the venue is in the Imphal region during the colonial reigns. On closer observation, this image represents the Meitei Maharaja employees from the Zeliangrong community, as this attire has a distinct similarity with the Meitei people. The hill brethren and the Imphal valley Zeliangrong Naga can be distinguished on such variations of adornment, despite belonging to the same community. The lungis adorned by these two men in the photograph including the necklaces is an abridged format of the Zeliangrong costumes. The Zeliangrong community began to settle in and around the Imphal valley from the mid 19th century onwards. This photograph indicates the process of cultural influences from the Meitei Maharaja courtly circles, and this trend continues till today in the case of the indigenous Zeliangrong religion.

In fact, the British writers have thoroughly miniaturized the stature and dignity of the Zeliangrong people by creating a hierarchy among the Nagas by labeling the Zeliangrongs as “primitive, weak, meek and humble” in many of the administrative and political colonial reports (Johnstone 1930, Hodson Mckenzie 1923). Note the titles of the British Colonial articles and the Journals that have been reportedly produced by the experts including anthropologists and historians.

“Notes on the Wild Tribes Inhabiting the So-Called Naga Hills, on Our North-East Frontier of India.” R. G. Woodthorpe. *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 11, (1882),

“The Kaupuis, on the other hand, are perhaps one of the oldest races, but from being much more peaceable they have attracted less attention; they are accordingly very interesting from an anthropological point of view.” - George Watt in “The Aboriginal Tribes of Manipur,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 16. (1887), pp. 346-370.

Such blithe indifference in dealing with the matters relating with the indigenous people culture and lifestyle is nothing but what Berger calls the publicity stunt by the

British expansionists parading in the guise of 'experts' with their oft repeated cliché of white man's burden to civilize and develop the brown man so that the British colonial empire can spread.¹⁰

British Colonial regime also officially introduced Zeliangrong as two or three disparate tribes, namely, Kacha Naga and Kabui through their limited and ill-informed sources from neighbouring Naga tribes and non-locals like the Meiteis. Such social labeling had been effectively practiced by the British with the Irish in the 13th and 14th century calling the Irish 'childlike, always intoxicated and thus needing a firm hand for their welfare' (Lebow 2007). As Sartre writes, the colonial labeling and stereotypes became self-fulfilling and self-justifying images even with the Zeliangrong Nagas in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The community that produced the first Naga nationalist militant movement with leaders like Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu in the 1920s could not have been so weak to the point of submitting themselves to the British expeditions without raising any protests. But they were portrayed as weak at one point of time and in other as hostile, head-hunters and so on. If seen through Berger's argument as spelled out in 'Ways of Seeing' the British colonial political rhetoric in labeling Jadonang and Gaidinliu as Naga rebels is deliberate and politically motivated,¹¹ because the colonial rulers really did want the masses to believe that they were weak and unreliable. The intentionally extended trial of Jadonang in Imphal for the alleged murder of Meitei traders is also politically motivated because the prosecutor, the judge and the police was all rolled into one person namely, Higgins (Kamei 1997). Jadonang was given little chance to prove his innocence. Despite the

¹⁰ British colonial cliché of the white man's burden to civilize is what Berger observed as publicity – the life of this culture – in so far as without publicity capitalism could not survive – and at the same time publicity is its dream. See: Berger (1972)

¹¹ Higgins used the term 'Naga Raj' for the first time in his letter to the Assam Governor about the insurgency in the Naga hills of Manipur with two purposes in mind. Firstly, to portray the Nagas as the real hostile and belligerent group so that necessary forces and resources could be obtained from the higher authority. Secondly, as a kind of sarcastic denigration of the people and the movement who dared to challenge the might of the British. See: Gangmumei Kamei (1997) "Jadonang a Mystic Naga Rebel" Guwahati: Spectrum Publication.

elaborate show of right to representations and legal counsel being made available to Jadonang all his followers and witnesses turned hostile at the end and testified that Jadonang was the one who ordered the murders under the typical prisoner's dilemma tactics used by the British. The British orchestrated the trial to arouse the communal feelings of Meitei against the Zeliangrong people but the expected Meitei public backlash against Jadonang and his people on communal lines never happened.

It is against the background of colonial and Meitei hegemony and misrepresentations of Zeliangrong tribe, that, we can understand resistance offered by the people in the form of cultural practices such as festivals and ways of life.

End Notes

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Chapter Four

Contemporary Visual Culture of Zeliangrong Nagas

In the last century, Zeliangrong people have been through many momentous and path-breaking events. Some of the events that shook and shaped the society were the coming of the Anglo-Manipuri political expedition beginning in 1832 (Johnstone 1896) and the subsequent trifurcation of their country into Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, the Kuki Rebellion¹ in 1917-1918, coming of Christianity, influence of Hinduism/Sanskritization (Srinivas 1995) and spread of modern education. Each of the five events shaped the identity and visual and textual representations of the Zeliangrong people in a very significant way.

Had they not been arbitrarily divided into the three states as minorities, the people would have significant political representations and would have been able to assert and affirm for their rights more effectively. Tamenglong, Peren and Haflong are Zeliangrong traditional towns now important administrative towns in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. Kuki Rebellion and its preceding British tactical and strategic policies to settle Kukis in Zeliangrong Naga country created immense political instability and this protracted conflict continues today. The coming of Christianity has immensely benefitted the Zeliangrong people by providing a common platform to end the protracted inter-village vendetta called *Sangna Rih* and moments for rapprochement and reconciliation. It also enabled the people to give up many repressive outdated traditional practices like the innumerable taboos prevalent. Wholesale conversion also brought about its adverse side effects. Repercussions came in the form of the loss of valuable traditional knowledge,

¹ Kukis called this rebellion the "Last War of Independence of Manipur" whereas the local historians point out that the rebellion was fuelled by the British act of deserting the Kukis after having used them as British soldiers in the First World War in Europe.

artifacts, social ethics and values. Adoption of certain traits of Hinduism/Sanskritization² promoted certain level of social status and mobility to the people living near the predominantly Hindu society in Imphal, Silchar and the North Cachar Hills. However, the mobility has been only cosmetic and no substantive gains have been achieved. Only the coming of modern education has brought about substantive change and empowerment of the Zeliangrong people. Christian missionaries did play important role in bringing the light of critical knowledge of science and technology to the traditional society (Pamei 1997).³

Case Study Three

Popular Youth Culture: Musical Taste of the Zeliangrong Youth

After having seen the various factors that have shaped the Zeliangrong people it would be apt to examine the contemporary society in its different facets. One is, that of the Zeliangrong youth. It is a mosaic of color, shape and size and ideals. Most Zeliangrong youth today by the looks is identical with any other youth in India or abroad. MTV, Channel [V] and the Star TV network brought the world closer to the Zeliangrong youth after Indian's economic liberalization in the early 1990s. Hollywood movies, western music, novels, magazines and other periodicals greatly shaped the youth's popular culture orientation. Popular local rock bands even sprang up doing cover versions of the multi-million dollars selling rock stars like the Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, AC/DC, Kiss, Scorpions and so on. However, the talents and enthusiasm do not let them go far for lack of sustainable market. Some of the promising local rock bands that created

² Zeliangrong people adopting Sanskritization processes are limited to dressings and naming of individuals. That is at the visual level in order to gel with the predominant society. They continue to eat meat, drink local liquor and other traditional practices which tribals in mainland India gave up to attain social acceptance. See Srinivas, M.N. (1995) "Social Change in Modern India" New Delhi: Orient Longman.

³ Terminologies such as Backward, Primitive and Tribal used by the colonial regime and continued to be used by Government of India is widely considered to be discriminatory and out dated and the term **indigenous** is used by the UN and its allied institutions.

quite a stir but faded into oblivion are the Cannibals, Black September, Orion, Machine Head, etc. Most of the band members came from economically weak families and did not go beyond high school like their counterparts in the west or in mainland India. So the lack of formal training in music and the language barriers in English have been the major factors in the inability of the local musical talents to come up. Moreover, there are no recording companies that could promote upcoming talents as in the west. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Cannibals was the symbol of Zeliangrong youth icon performing to sold-out concerts all over India and winning many inter-college prizes for original composition. Some of the inter-college competitions they won are the Sri Ram College of Commerce (Delhi) Crossroads Fest, St. Xavier College (Kolkata), IIT Kharagpur and many other regional and national rock music festivals.

Although popular youth culture among the Zeliangrong youth is traced only to the late 1970s the artistes traces the inspiration for their music to ancient musical genre of legendary musician like Gairiamnang and even Jadonang. Some select Zeliangrong popular music and their lyrics will be analyzed to get a glimpse of the popular youth culture. Paul Gangmei's song 'Oh! Zeliangrong' released in 2000 which talks about the Zeliangrong Youth goes like this:

"Kagan Muk khe niu khang...

Zip na bamei chana thiule...

Oh! Zeliangrongmei chana thiule kaam patla kho aniu phai kaam tei...

The abridged English translation would read as:

"Time is no more in our side...

Brothers who are still asleep...

Oh! My Zeliangrong brothers it's time we take the footsteps...

The central message of the song is very clear that the Zeliangrong society is in deep crisis politically, socially and economically - politicians not delivering their pre-

election promises, general anomie in social norms and lack of opportunities for the youth to excel and get a job to live. Even though not highly educated in a college and university the artiste in Paul Gangmei could see the problems confronting the society especially the youth. So in a way Paul Gangmei and his Cannibal rock band personified the dichotomy of fame and glory on one hand and the emptiness of such iconic status sans meaningful socio-economic status.

Another Zeliangrong pop-rock album of Jianngam Kamei entitled 'Kimkhuan' released in 1988 had a single 'Zeliangrongmei Chabuan' the lyrics goes like this:

"Zeliangrongmei chabuan guaito mik ruk patho tingan pathe..."

"Zeliangrong youth the dawn is here it's time to wake..."

Most Zeliangrong artistes use the imagery of sleeping and waking to denote the status of the people especially the youth who are urged to take the steps towards progress, positive thinking and forgiveness for the past inter-village vendetta and other personal differences. In fact the Zeliangrong people were at one point of time deeply bogged down in bloody vendetta, *Sangna Rih* from which they could not escape until the rapprochement in 1st April 1934 under the solemn oath of *Chug Thoibo* also known as *Chug Su Garoumei*.

In recent times the Zeliangrong musicians have diversified their genre from the traditional hard-rock and pop-rock dominance of the 1970s to 1990s to hip-hop, rap, reggae and much other local fusion music. Maybe this is due to the public acceptance of homegrown and socially more relevant music and their message. It could also be due to the change in technology from the traditional cassette player which is not easy to procure, is costly and not durable; to the availability of CDs and DVDs which can be easily copied and transferred without any difficulty in loss of quality, cost and cumbersome efforts. These days most youth download their favorite songs, local as well as international songs and share them with their peers on their I-pods, mobile phone.

Tazei Khuan a hip-hop-pop-rock band based in Tamenglong which has a mass following among the youth and the people of all ages alike, conveys the social message which is targeted at the frustrated youth who are on the verges of fatalism and self-destruction. A single hit song entitled **Bamei** conveys the frustration of the Zeliangrong youth, which goes like this:

Tuna koiti koitou mak
Sian phitini sianpounai
Tunini kho tulana
Ariumei guai junithe

Bamei! Bamei! tuna sakandiu
Hei kumma lungnithe apanti
Ningmei thungmakmei apanti
Nuina nuina khangni the
Asan khourui patmei guai

Gypsy liuni liutou mak
Motor tuangni tuangtou mak
Jangnini khou janglana
Liaonini khou laioni the

Joukai guti joupauou thou
Dukan guti baki thou
Second-handni hand kandiu
Liuchi kiuni kiu kandiu

Abridged and roughly translated version of the song would go like this:

“I’ve looked for a damsel but can’t find one.
I’ve tried making some money but ended up with debts.

Now I would eat and dine as it comes.
I'm going to accept whatever comes.

Crazy! Crazy! Or so let them call me.
So will this be my life.
A life without any achievement.
With a stoic smile will I face life?
Whatever fate has destined for me.

Wanted a Gypsy but could not.
Wanted to ride a Motor but could not.
Would now drink as I want.
Would lie anywhere I want.

At the liquor vend they ask me to pay up.
At the 'Dukan'(read cigarette store) they ask me to pay up.
Second-hand vehicle! Oh let it be.
She's a divorcee! Oh let it be."

Literary nuance and the syntax invariably get diluted in the translation but the central message is the anomic situations that most Zeliangrong youth find themselves in the contemporary society. A society where there has been a rapid social change from the traditionally agrarian society to a modern monetized consumerist economy in a span of two-three generations have left the youth lost in a lurch without any significant economic empowerment in the form of opportunities for jobs and career. This is because the government is the only jobs provider who monopolizes the job creation processes and sells it to the highest bidder. *En mass* migration of educated Zeliangrong youth to metropolitan cities for better jobs and career is another indication of the acute lack of opportunities for the young people in their native place. For example, in Delhi alone there are about three thousand Zeliangrong students and young people seeking different careers

for lack of the same at their hometown according to the Zeliangrong Welfare Association Delhi (ZWAD)⁴.



Alvina Gonson and B-Minor: A local pop-rock sensation in a rock concert in Imphal

(Source: www.e-pao.net).

The female lead-vocalist in the photograph above is Alvina Gonson, from Zeliangrong Naga community. She dabbles with pop and rock music and also does playback singing for Manipuri feature films. Her hip wardrobe is a black top with trendy jeans in tune with the popular pop and rock culture of the youth of Manipur and like the youth in the South East Asian countries which has come under the influence of popular

⁴ ZWAD is a registered NGO working for the welfare of the Zeliangrong people with its office in Shakarpur New Delhi. Its activities include providing loan to the needy, organizing annual get-together, Gaan-Ngai, etc.

Korean cultural wave.⁵ Her necklace *tadan tu* identifies her as a Zeliangrong girl though in this context she has adorned it in a fashion fusion style. At the same time, it conveys the craftsmanship of contemporary jewellery designer because it was originally a single strand beads necklace and not multi-layered ornaments as shown in the photograph. The two guitarists display the impact of western music infiltrating the youth of this region which has become a question of livelihood for most of the professional musicians. Most of them come from poverty stricken or broken homes and the public in general tend to discriminate them on such aspects. One central message about such youth musical trend is that they express the prevailing corruption in almost all institutional set-ups of the government, the compelling challenges of HIV/AIDS and the breakdown of law and order in this state. One cannot simply give a value judgment on this mushrooming music cultural scenario based on such aspects.

On the other hand on a modest level the bands and musicians that perform in the local languages are patronized by the people in various occasions like birthdays, marriages, youth conferences and festivals. One such musician is Jianngam Kamei a versatile musician and singer who plays many musical instruments and sings in different languages with ease. A polyglot musician who dabbles with folk, pop, rock and also score music for Manipuri feature films. So such musicians survive for a longtime even with a modest income. Whereas the Zeliangrong rock and pop musicians' musical genre and social demeanors are perceived by the public as rebellious and outlandish and against the traditional culture. Hence, their fame is ephemeral and many of them turn to drugs and alcohol addictions in frustrations just like their counterparts in the west do. Former Cannibals band members' history of substance and alcohol abuse is a glaring example of

⁵ Korean popular culture has influenced the youth in Manipur to a great extent like their counterparts in South-East Asia with the coming of the cable television and Korean TV channels like Arirang and KBS World and the Korean movies and music from across the border. The Korean popular culture has even prompted studies drawing imagined similarities between Manipur and Korea, for instance see: Otojit Kshetrimayum and Ningombam Victoria Chanu (2008) "Mapping Cultural Diffusion: The Case of 'Korean Wave' in North East India" in Narsimhan, Sushila and Kim Do Young (ed.). *India and Korea: Bridging the Gaps*, New Delhi: Manak Publications.

rock stars' stressful lives and lack of opportunities to excel in pecuniary and talent aspects.

In the photographs below Jiangan performs for a get-together of Makhua village diaspora in 2008. Makhua is a Zeliangrong village located on the side of the National Highway 53 just across the river Alang, which the British and the Meitei called *Irang*. Jiangan continues to be socially relevant and accepted by the people because his genre of music is a blend/fusion of soft rock, pop and traditional music.

En masse migration from the village to the neighbouring states occurred in the late 1950s especially with the outbreak of the armed conflict between the Indian armies and the Naga militants under NNC. More migration took place after the creation of Nagaland state in 1963 and the prospects of better livelihood there. Makhua Get-Together was an emotional homecoming for many of the people. Many Zeliangrong people migrated to new Zeliangrong townships in Kohima, Peren and Dimapur in Nagaland during the armed conflicts that saw many collateral damages (Pamei 1997).



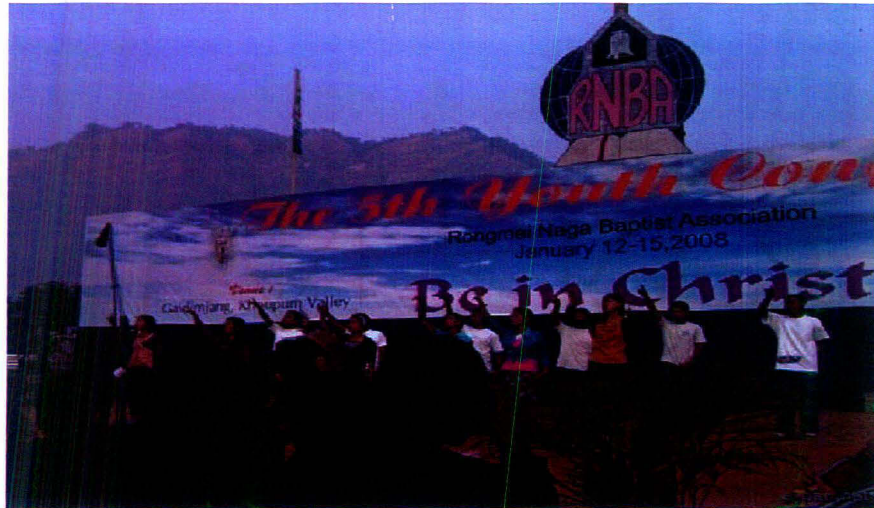
Jiangan Kamei performs in Makhua Get-Together 2009. Picture taken by Haureilung.



Motley of congregation at the Makhuam Get-Together 2009. Picture taken by Haureilung.

In addition to the rock and pop music culture lately there is another genre of rock music that has gained some social acceptability in the form of the Zeliangrong Christian Gospel Rock Musicians who also do mostly cover versions of their western counterparts like the Hillsong, Faithhill, Jaci Velasquez, Petra and so on. In fact they are euphemistically called 'Praise and Worship Team' and almost every Zeliangrong protestant church has one such team leading them in worship. To the uninitiated the sharp turn-around by the nearly puritanical Zeliangrong churches and the conservative public to accept gospel rock music may seem hypocritical. Critics charge the church and the Zeliangrong leaders with adopting double-standards with regards to music choice and taste of the youth, that is, 'why denounce secular rock music and promote gospel rock.' General morbid fear of losing the youth to drugs and alcohol and subsequently from the church is one major factor. Many young people have been victims of drugs and alcohol, especially to HIV-AIDS since the late 1990s. Another factor is because the music is considered to be reverent and not rebellious to the church and the social institutions. So

these two factors turned the tide in favor of 'Praise and Worship Team' and their genre of gospel rock.



A Praise and Worship Team performing a gospel number in a youth conference in Khoupum, Nungba, Tamenglong. Source: (www.e-pao.net).

Whether it is rock music or gospel music or the drugs and alcohol the Zeliangrong youth used and abused them as an escape mechanism to make their lives more meaningful and admirable look at. Jobs and stable career with the government which is held in high esteem by the people is simply out of reach for them. Save for higher education, the reliance on such vocations was not going to empower them in any significant way.

The photograph above depicts a group of young Zeliangrong people from the Rongmei Naga Baptist Association (RNBA) churches performing choreography with gospel song in the background music at the 5th RNBA Youth Conference, Gaidimjang village in Tamenglong. "Be in Christ" was chosen as the theme of the conference to re-emphasize the need of the Zeliangrong youth to be modeled in the likeness of Christ according to the President of RNBA, G. Gonmei. The youth conference was one of the

biggest in recent times and attracted even delegates from Assam and Nagaland. However, poor conditions of the approach road to the conference site after crossing the Old Cachar Road took many of the delegates by surprise. The local MLA who has been elected since the late 1970s almost without a break came in for a big criticism. Almost every church has a praise and worship team that leads the congregation during the devotional hour. English education has made the task easier to adapt to this ways of worship songs in the Church platforms. The Church in present scenario encourages its congregational followers to freely express the Christian faith and in this context youth fellowships plays an important contribution. So in a way, such youth conferences re-enforces the values of the church and the Zeliangrong traditions on the youth and at the same time provide them a social platform to interact with one another. The church also sees such events as the occasion to grooming future church leaders and workers.



Khoiguna Laam presentation at the Manipur State-Level Gaan-Ngai Festival 2008, Imphal.

Source: (www.e-pao.net).

Contemporary dances like **Khoiguna Laam**⁶ as depicted in the photograph above is a popular visual treat especially during Gaan-Ngai. The dance displays the blend of the

⁶ Khoiguna Laam or the dance of the Honey Bee is a famous dance popular among the Zeliangrong youth. It is performed to a romantic rendition of the Honey bee like dance of the Zeliangrong youth

tradition and modern trends happening simultaneously. The photograph represents the traditional dance by way of costumes adornment during festive occasions. In a sense, the hornbill feather worn by the girls was pre-dominantly a male head-gear costume since the Makuilongdi days. The male headgear attires is the *chei* that is the horn, including the symbolic “*Dao*” or Naga sword, the arm bracelets made of ivory sometimes brass and the white cloth tied on the legs are replacement of the white paintings on the Zeliangrong youth. The background decoration shows that this festival is of a contemporary phenomenon. The political identity of the Zeliangrong Naga can be summarized by this medium of expressions.

Another indicator of modernity is the blue color blouse of the girl’s attire and the necklaces of both boys and girls. Conventionally, the necklace is a piece of female jewellery piece, but in this context it has been worn both by boys and girls. The blue color girls blouse indicates acculturated Meitei influences because the original attire was a traditional black color cloth tied around the waist and by looking at this photograph, one can say that changes have taken place in a traditional Zeliangrong society by opting with the modern way of life. The male costume of white color cloth around the legs and arms shows a convenient option, the sacramental values are replaced with mere performance indicator. At the same time, the heritage material objects are not normally preserved amongst the Zeliangrong society, whereby one has to adopt the available options in these kinds of cultural celebrations. This photograph proves that this celebration is conducted in the township and the interior villages adopt more traditional centered environment as well as costume patterns. When contextualized through Clifford Geertz analysis from his article “Art as a Cultural System”, the interpretation of artistic gift and worthiness can best be realized from the outsiders view because the Zeliangrong people are simply recreating the cultural practices without any kinds of measurement yardstick. Whether one wants to contest Geertz’s hypothesis that the traditional form of expression are realized and admired by the cultivated inquisitive minds, the Zeliangrong

cultural practices presents a visual delight to the contemporary audiences. And this vibrant presentation has been handed down from the “Makuilongdi” days with abridged expressions on the attires and its adornment.

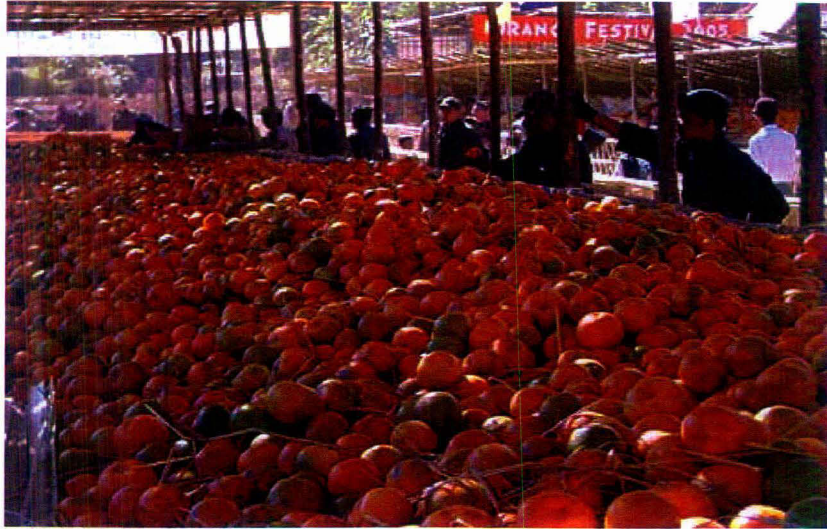
Case Study Four:

Orange Festival Cum-Craft Exhibition

Another interesting aspect of the contemporary Zeliangrong youth culture is the fusion of commercial interests and youthful quests for fame and glory in the form of the annual ‘Orange Festival’ in Tamenglong since 2003. The official version of organizing the Orange Festival cum Craft Exhibition:

To facilitate the socio-economic upliftment of the people of this district, which is still experiencing the “Poverty in the midst of plenty”, by taking advantage of the natural favorable conditions for the growth of horticulture crops? The main objective of the festival is to promote tourism and provide an opportunity to orange farmers to display their produce before potential buyers. The first and the second festivals held earlier during the last two years have generated a lot of awareness about the orange and other products of the district not only to the people of the state but to the people from other states and also abroad.

With locals support and the active cooperation of the district administration especially the then District Collector Mr. Thaithuilung Pamei the Orange Festival began in 2001. So far there have been nine editions of the orange festivals and heavy resources have been invested. Orange festival provide platform for exposing the handicrafts, handloom products and the oranges. The major attraction of the orange festival is the beauty pageant that heralds the end of the festival with young girls from even far off place like Imphal and Dimapur participating in the pageant vying for coveted title. Orange farmers are awarded different prizes for quality and quantity.



Oranges on display at the Orange Festival in Tamenglong .

Source: (www.e-pao.net).

However, critics of the festival like the All Zeliangrong Students' Union (Assam, Manipur and Nagaland), Zeliangrong Students Union Manipur (ZSUM) and many Zeliangrong scholars have pointed out that the pageant is more of skin-show than of any serious orange business and orange farmers. And that little progress has been made to promote tourism because there is no adequate infrastructure that will attract the tourist. It is also pointed out that some semblance of infrastructure needs to be in place before tourists can come. In its formal appearance, practice and precept the pageant is close to pageants like the Miss World and Miss Universe contests but not in its content. To organize the festival the district authority spends a couple of lakhs of Rupees out of the developmental fund meant for the district. Little of which actually benefits the purportedly intended target, that is the orange farmers and the promotion of orange production.

On the other hand the district official and pioneer of orange festival Thaituilung Pamei (IAS) argues that "it (Orange Festival) provides a platform for the orange farmers and all kinds of artisans - crafts, handloom workers, to showcase their products and

talents to the outside world, which in the end would provide an impetus to tourism in the district". Tamenglong indeed has lot of tourism potentials with many of the great rivers like the Barak flowing and originating from the district, spectacular waterfalls, mythical lakes, ancient limestone caves, rolling grassland and meadows. But without any infrastructure backed by proper policy, such one-sided promotion of tourism could end up with the situations like that of Goa with many ills like child - prostitution, law and order problem, culture-shock and most importantly the degradation of the fragile ecology and the environment.



Traditional Folk Dance during the Orange Festival 2009.

Source: (www. <http://manipur.nic.in/orange/orangefest.html>).

The above photograph shows a traditional dance performance in front of the structure that resembles a *Tarangkai/ki*, from the local Zeliangrong dance troupe. Here, the presentation was an act of opening the event and to welcome the guests to the festival. On closer observation one can see the slight variation in the attires of the dance troupe between the attires in Tamenglong and Imphal area. Around Tamenglong and the neighbouring states the men would be generally adorning themselves with the *Nai mumei*

a cowrie's shells embroidered kilt, with a *mareipan* stole slung on the side of the shoulder and elaborately painted calves.

In Imphal area the *naai mumei* is replaced by *nai haengmei*, red kilt with intricate weavings and the painting is done away with strips of white cloths on the calves. The women would use the *haenglan pheisuia* the red and black striped kilts and *phaengphei* without any blouse as their counterparts generally these days in and around Imphal valley. People debate on the originality and duplicity of such changing traditional costumes with lots of emotions and enthusiasm to the point of calling one another more 'original/genuine and fake.' However, it must be noted the question of originality and duplicity, in so far as costumes and traditional practices is concerned are very subjective because they are govern by the process of the political culture and the surrounding environments.



A participant at the pageant displaying traditional attires. Source: ([www.
http://manipur.nic.in/orange/orangefest.html](http://manipur.nic.in/orange/orangefest.html)).



Source: (www. <http://manipur.nic.in/orange/orangefest.html>).

Orange Festival plays a significant role through the medium of exhibiting traditions as well as selling oranges in the marked venue year after year. The electronic and print media has played an immense role to attract publicity for this occasion. The beauty contest attracts young girls from other communities of Manipur state. Thokchom Omena, a 19 years old Meitei woman won the coveted *Miss Orange* festival title and walked with a cash prize of Rs.75,000/-. Orange festival provides a platform to showcase the vibrant and colorful traditions of the Zeliangrong community to the outside world. The oranges on display show the entrepreneur skill of the natives coupled with the Government sponsorship through the publicity mechanism. The Zeliangrong native orange grower can henceforth focus on their occupation with more affirmative action from the local official authority. In this context, the Deputy Commissioner of Tamenglong district, Manipur

always play a significant role in promoting the festival. The beauty contest has attracted attention for it allows participation from other communities as well.

The above photograph of a girl in woven Zeliangrong attire indicates the mode of the fashion consciousness amongst the contemporary Zeliangrong youth. The attire is an indication of those designer creativities, for the obvious red color dress does not have an origin, though the basic pattern is of the Zeliangrong dress motif. The traditional dance programmes and the fashion parade by young girls displays the contemporary times. The traditional dances are usually performed for the harvests festival or for religious occasions.

Case Study Five

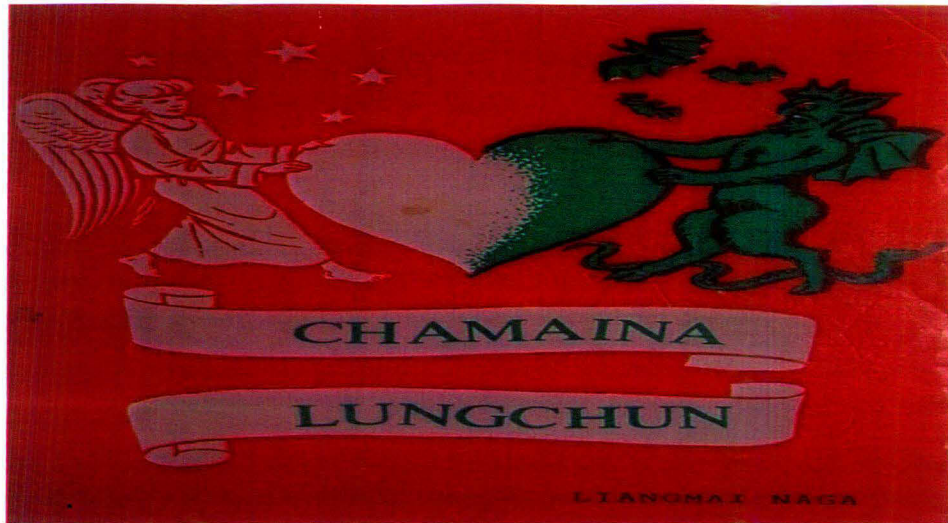
Proliferation of Church and Spread of Christianity and Revivalism of Traditional Religion -Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak: Social Rhetoric

I will now examine the latent conflict between the Christian Church [represented by the Rongmei Naga Baptist Association (RNBA)] and the Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak [represented by the Zeliangrong Religious Council⁷], and the politics of speech act and dramatized representation of the conflict played out by the two sides especially in the local media.

Christianity that came in the first decade of the 20th century has slowly proliferated in the Zeliangrong country and most of the Zeliangrong villages in Tamenglong, Tousem, Tamei, Nungba, Peren and around the Imphal suburbs have converted to Christianity, except for some villages in the heart of Imphal city. Zeliangrong Christians can be further divided into Roman Catholic and Protestant

⁷ Zeliangrong Religious Council is the body that looks after the revival and re-defining of the Zeliangrong religion now called as Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak. See: Kamei, Gangmumei (2001) "The Concept of the Zeliangrong Religion," in Remei, et al (eds.) Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai Souvenir, Imphal: Zeliangrong Religious Council.

denominations like the Baptists, Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals and the like. The Baptists comprises the majority.

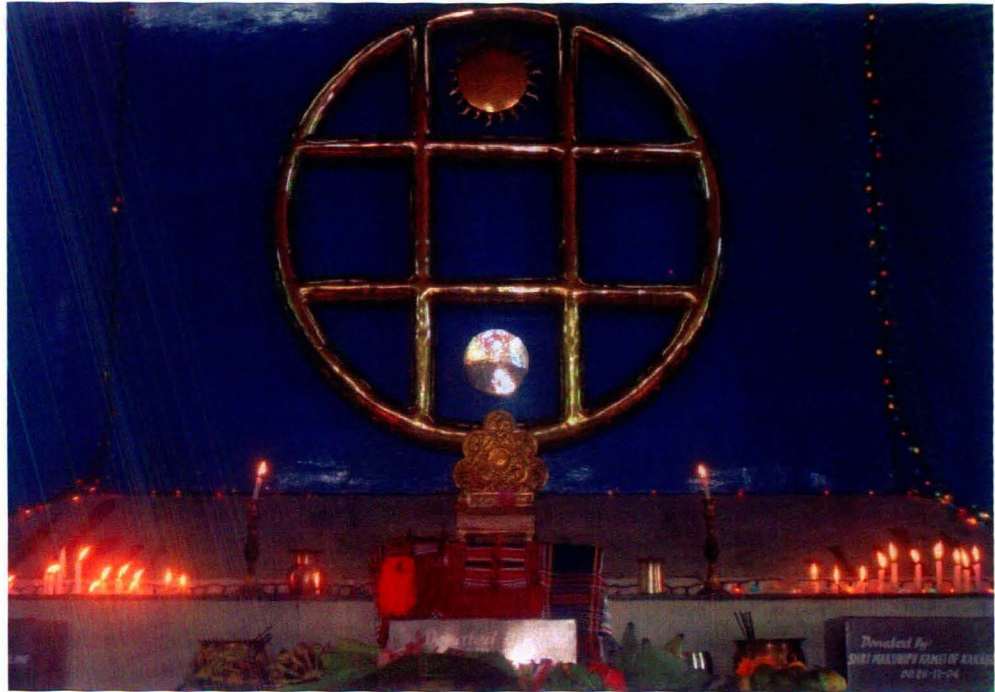


Chamaina Lungchun: The Heart of a Man

Chamaina Lungchun means the heart of man in local Zeliangrong dialect. It is a Bible tract which is distributed free of cost by Christian missionaries to the Zeliangrong people at Tamei and Tousem region in Tamenglong district since several decades till date. It is a graphic image of an Angel and the Devil holding on to the symbolic heart of mankind. This tract is being distributed as an effective medium to teach the principles of the Biblical. The psychological and spiritual impact with such graphic representations of the good and bad are very obvious. Such literatures are used by the Church to spread and re-enforce and revive the tenets of Christianity. This booklet was originated from France in 1732, later it got revised and re-written for the mission fields of Africa by Reverend J. R. Gschewend in 1929 again. It has subsequently been translated and printed under copyright in over 250 indigenous languages. It is published by All Nations Gospel Publishers, P.O. Box 2191, Pretoria, 0001, R.S.A (Reg. No. 61/0178/080).

In the early part of the 20th century, the Zeliangrong people did not allow Christian missionaries to preach in any of the villages. But slowly they relented when the

early Christians in the government services serving as bureaucrats and business men living in the Imphal suburbs started their own fellowship. One such fellowship was the Zeliangrong Fellowship started in the late 1960s' at Dewlahland, Imphal by college students and some government employees. Now that the numbers of churches and Christians have increased so much that the Zeliangrong Christians and non-Christians who live in the same village as neighbors find themselves in awkward positions. This is because the professed principle of Christianity is "to preach and propagate the gospel to the non-believers." On the other hand, the traditional Zeliangrong people have also been enlightened by the conversion debates especially the voluntary and induced conversions. And more importantly, they are also conscious of their distinct identity as indigenous people and they aspire to assert for such identity. So many a times, there has been conflict over the conversion process and violations of right to freedom of conscience and religion. Zeliangrong Christians reading of the right to freedom of religion is also the rights to profess, practice, preach and also convert. On the other hand, the traditional Zeliangrong non-Christians reading of the right to freedom of religion is subservient to the law of the land that has expectedly prohibited conversion, the violation of which shall attract penalty and eviction from the village.



Altar of the Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai in Chingmeirong village, Imphal. Picture taken by Ningning (Aningbo) Niumai in January 2009.

The circle with crossed bars in the middle with the sun and the moon is the sacred religious symbol of the Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC). According to the TRC the sacred circle symbolizes the universal brotherhood of mankind and the seat below the circle is the throne of the Tingkao Ragwang upon which only the clothings of the Zeliangrong people can be presented. TRC is essentially a revivalist socio-religious movement of a people who has lost a lot to Christianity and Sanskritization. Some of the new rites and rituals pertaining to the concepts of sacred and profane resemble Christianity and Hinduism and a fine blend of the traditional religious beliefs.

Glaring example is the conflict at Chingmeirong Rongmei Village between the Village Authority and the one newly converted family, hereafter Mr. X⁸ and the Rongmei Naga Baptist Association (RNBA) on one side since 2006. Eviction notice was served to

⁸ Name with held for privacy and security reasons.

the converted families by the Chingmeirong village authority. A prayer hall that was constructed in the premise of the family was also razed to the ground by the villagers. Chingmeirong village authority claimed that it was not a hall of prayer⁹. The RNBA intervened and so did the local police. On closer examination of the conflict between the village authority and the newly converted family, it is clear that there is more than just conversion and anti-conversion protests. Old enmities which had remained latent for quite some time suddenly rekindled with the conversion of the said family to Christianity. So the village authority and certain members cited the old antiquated village resolution banning conversion to settle the old scores with the converted family. The converted family also tried to escape the wrath of the village authority and took the help of the RNBA. On the other hand, the villagers banked upon the Zeliangrong Religious Council. Stones were pelted in the cover of darkness and threats meted out so the local police intervened and arrested many villagers. But such issues are not solved by the police or any outsiders in the Zeliangrong customary law because the problem is domestic but the problem got escalated somehow and everybody wanted to fish in troubled waters.

Surprisingly, there were other Christians in the village who were not prosecuted by the villagers. They reportedly remained 'underground' and never disclosed their new faith openly and observed the village social norms and necessary obligations. It was only the particular family of Mr. X that the Chingmeirong Village Authority harassed and oppressed. So it is widely concluded that the conflict was mainly due to personal differences which crept again up in the wake of the family converting to Christianity. The conflict was played out in the local dailies with press release issued by one another in quick succession blaming each other for the impasse. Each side entrenched their positions by calling for 'emergency', 'general', 'three states meeting, etc.' of the respective bodies in the press.¹⁰ Predictably the civil society like the Zeliangrong Union (ZU) failed to respond to such internal crisis to mediate and arbitrate for peaceful and amicable

⁹ "Naga bodies decry attack on church at Chingmeirong" Hueiyen Lanpao, 17th December 2008, Imphal

¹⁰ Church Vandalised at Imphal, Sangai Express, Imphal

resolutions of the disputes, because ZU itself was in crisis and the ZU functionaries themselves were parties to the conflict.

At one point of time the cold war between the RNBA and the TRC got intensified to the point of one Zeliangrong non-Christian village in Imphal excommunicating a Christian family even in death with none from the village even turning up at the funeral of the deceased woman. In Zeliangrong traditional custom it is considered a privilege to attend a funeral and render a duty the least one could do for the deceased.

Other than such outright conflict outbreak between the RNBA and the TRC there is general understanding and mutual respect for each other in most of the Zeliangrong villages in Imphal. But, one can never say how long such peace and tranquility would last. However, so long as there is no hate speech made in the name of religion and promotion of religion there would be peaceful co-existence. And more so when people treat faith and religion as a private affairs and a personal choice which should not be forced upon unwilling people.

Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC) is purportedly founded and expounded upon the teachings and principle of Haipou Jadonang who was hanged by the British in 1931 for raising the slogan of 'Makaam Gwangtupuni.'¹¹ It was founded by the Zeliangrong Religious Council in 1994 (Kamei 2001). Declaration of the name of the new religion and other important events like site selection of the temple known as **Kalum Kai** was preceded by the symbolic shaking of the hoe which the Zeliangrong people called **Laogai Kalikmei. Laogai** or the hoe occupies an important place in the social and religious lives of the Zeliangrong people. In birth, marriage and death the **Laogai/hoe** plays an important role. Being an agriculturist society by origin the hoe is seen as the symbol of life, peace and prosperity through hard work and diligence.

¹¹ Higgins termed the movement as the Naga Raj Movement although Jadonang never used the term himself.

TRC also has many detractors even among the Zeliangrong non-Christians. They criticized TRC as a concocted form of religious worship which has many irrelevant practices and features not indigenous to the old traditional practices. TRC has adopted certain aspects of Christianity and Hinduism in its doctrinal and philosophical teachings. Even the mode of singing devotional songs, citing the prayers and other religious practices and tenets is essentially a blend of many religions especially Christianity and Hinduism. In fact such features of TRC only underlined the close association of the TRC religious leaders with the many Hindu religious organizations like the Rashtrya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS), Arya Samaj, Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) Movement, etc.

However, in spite of the occasional flare ups between the two groups, there has been general understanding and social harmony. It is only when certain vested interests tried to stoke up past differences then the differences turn ugly, violent and communal.

Case Study Six

Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu and the Zeliangrong People Convention Movement

Jadonang known reverently to his people as Haipou Jadonang was born in 1905, at Puiluan (then known as Kambiron) a small village on the Old Cachar Road which was used by the British and the Maharaja of Manipur as a transit between Manipur and Assam. Jadonang witnessed the repressive British officers and their local stooges passing by the road as a young man. *Pothang Bekahri* and *Pothang Senkhai* which is equivalent to forced labour as porters and forced taxation was imposed upon the locals on the Old Cachar Road.

Jadonang movement began as a socio-religious reform movement of the Zeliangrong society and later turned to challenge the oppressive British regime. His

encounter with S.C. Booth, a Sub-Divisional Office dressed in suit and a hat and his refusal to alight from his horse to salute the British officer landed him a week-term jail in 1926 in Tamenglong. Jadonang then slowly organized and trained a youth armed force called **Riphen** with strength of about 500 men to fight the British (Kamei 1997). His fame was spreading far and wide and so many people from Tamei, Tousem, North Cachar Hills and even the Naga Hills came to pay obeisance to his movement by bring mithun, cows and hard cash.

Through the widespread intelligence network the British became very alarmed about Jadonang's movement and looked for ways to frame him up. Incidentally, four Meitei traders were killed in Longkao for violation of the social taboo in which he had no role. But Jadonang was framed as the culprit with a very farcical trial where all his followers were forcibly made to testify against him. Thus, the British hanged Jadonang as a pre-emptive measure because the lessons of the 1832 political expeditions and the fierce Zeliangrong people's resistance was still fresh in the mind of most of the British army officials.

Jadonang is the icon of Naga resistance against the British and the Zeliangrong Movement¹² was carried on by his fiery teenager cousin in the person of Gaidinliu who also is widely claimed to possessed mystical powers like Jadonang.

¹² The Zeliangrong movement's slogan was also known 'Makaamei Gwangtupuni' meaning the Makaam people will be the king and ruler replacing the British.



A One-Rupee Postage Stamp of Rani Gaidinliu released in 1996.

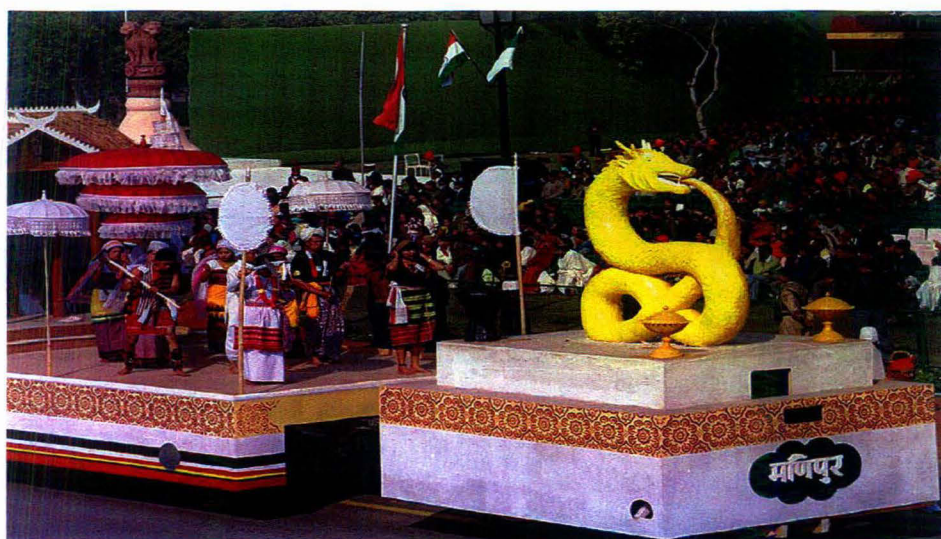
Rani Gaidinliu the winner of many national awards like the Tamra Patra, Birsa Munda Award and an icon of Naga resistance against the British colonial rule was honored with a postage stamp of one rupee by the Government of India in 1996. She passed away in 1993 at her village Luangkao with the Governor of Manipur Mr. Chintamani Panigrahi and many dignitaries attending the funeral in the inclement weather. She started a new socio-religious movement called the Heraka Movement, meaning the pure and fenced from other impurities (Longkumer 2008). In 1997 the National Democratic Alliance Government (NDA) led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced the Stree Shakti Purushkar Award in the name of Rani Gaidinliu and Kamla Khora, a tribal lady from Koraput, Orissa was awarded with the prize for her contribution to an effective implementation of prohibition of illicit liquor both local and foreign made in the block and many other social welfare programmes.

One interesting aspects of Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu movement is that, both the Government of India¹³ and the Naga militants like the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) who have been in conflict for more than 50 years and are currently in ceasefire and in negotiations since 1997, wherein both claims that the two Zeliangrong leaders are their freedom fighters. Such contested nationalism and ensuing armed conflicts have caused lots of sufferings to the Zeliangrong people even as the other communities in the region has progressed a lot in terms of political, social and economic empowerment. From being victims of collateral damages one could only wish that the peace processes in north India would bring about a general understanding and ensure peace and prosperity in the region.

Zeliangrong Peoples Convention also known as the ZPC Movement was a mass democratic and peaceful movement which aroused the Zeliangrong peoples' enthusiasm to live under one administrative set-up. It was a movement started in 1980 in a meeting held at Tamenglong authorizing Rani Gaidinliu to lead the movement (Kamei 2004). Rani Gaidinliu had a close relationship with the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi (Pamei 1997). So the ZPC leaders had access to Indira Gandhi and the Government of India was reportedly in the verge of coming out with a policy package as per the ZPC demands but the untimely demise derail the process. Even as the movement for ZPC Homeland gained momentum again during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister. The then Union Home Minister, Buta Singh supposedly assured a Union Territory to the ZPC delegations in New Delhi but the minister later denied that such assurance was given. Incidentally, the Member of Parliament and some local Member of Legislative Assembly who enjoyed the favour of the State Government and its policy resisted the ZPC movement (Kamei 2004). Amidst these odds that confronted the ZPC movement and the various trips made by the ZPC

¹³ For the contests of leadership see: Bipan Chandra (1999) *Modern India: Indian National Movement* New Delhi: NCERT and many other similar textbooks and writings. On the other hand the see also the NSCN websites: www.nagalim.nl, www.nagalimvoice.com or www.nagarealm.com

leaders to negotiate with New Delhi, Rajiv Gandhi lost the 1989 general election and shortly was assassinated. Then the Naga movement took on its new avatar in the form of a highly centralized movement asking all such movements like the ZPC to suspend or face the consequences. In the meanwhile Rani Gaidinliu also died in February 1993 and the ZPC movement of the Zeliangrong people to set up a common political and administrative unit to empower themselves from being subaltern community in three states ended unceremoniously.



Time for Show: A Zeliangrong Girl with a Ka, basket and traditional attires along with other artistes on a Manipur Tableau during the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi, January, 2001.

Source: (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Photo No.NNC : 41561).

In such national and international event, the Manipur State Government puts up the spectacle of a harmonious and peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic communities in Manipur with people wearing the traditional attires of different communities. But the harmonious spectacle that is seen above is not always true. For instance the Jawaharlal Nehru Academy of Dance, Imphal has many *Gurus* and artistes specializing in the traditional folk songs and dances of the Zeliangrong people and other

ethnic communities. On many an occasions such groups would represent the Manipur State Government masquerading as the different ethnic communities. Incidentally, in the India International Trade Fair (IITF) held in November, New Delhi every year the troupe from the said academy come to perform in the Manipur State Day celebration, according to one tribal official¹⁴ thus enjoying all the Tour Allowances and Dearness Allowances (TA&DA) and other allowances at the expenses of the State Government and the tribals. To such complaints, the State Government usual reply is lack of tribal people who were ready to go and participate in the national events.

Lack of tribal participants year after year in such national events with all expenses borne by the state is something which the government is accountable for and cannot provide satisfactory explanations. Many such opportunities get swindled by the dominant communities in the government employments. The glaring example is seen in the highly discriminatory process of recruitment of teaching faculties in Manipur Central University (MU). When MU was under the state government since its inception in late 1970s the requisite reservation of seats was to be at least 30-34 percent of the total seats. This was further reduced to just 10 percent arbitrarily by the syndicate of the University. When MU was upgraded to a Central University in 2004, the MU further reduced the reservation to 7 percent, citing the University Grants Commission rules¹⁵. All these manipulations were done in the name of lack of qualified candidates from the tribal communities, whereas the number of UGC's National Eligibility Test (NET) qualified tribal candidates outnumbered the general candidates for the last many years since 2000.¹⁶

¹⁴ The unnamed official is a Manipur Pavilion Director during the IITF in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

¹⁵ For details see: the Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India, Union Minister of Human Resource and Development and the University Grant Commission (UGC) by the All Tribals Students' Union, Manipur (ATSUM) and the Manipur University Students' Union (MUTSU). <http://manipuruniv.ac.in/>

¹⁶ See the UGC website for UGC Net qualified SC/ST list: <http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/scst.html>

To pacify the striking tribal students who wore black badges in the MU campus and boycotted classes and demanded a separate Hill University for the tribals, the State Government successfully negotiated with the Central Government to open a small branch of the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (IGNTU) in Manipur. The political rhetorics resorted to by the State Government was that a new Tribal University would be set up in Manipur, but the irony is that the IGNTU is already an established university in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, by an act of Parliament. So opening a mere branch or a study center of the IGNTU was touted as a great achievement by the student bodies and the State Government.

The politics of such inclusion and exclusion is not captured by the seemingly harmonious visual representations in the spectacular Republic Day Parade. Critical visual cultural studies can throw lights on such discriminatory politics in the context of the marginalized people like the Zeliangrong people.

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Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

Makuilongdi, the ancient Zeliangrong village has become an iconic symbol of solidarity for the Zeliangrong people. Its narratives and culture have been a source of inspiration to the Zeliangrong people. The eventful legendary/mythical village with 7777 households and the general peace and prosperity is fondly narrated and passed on to the succeeding generations.

Makuilongdi has inspired and shaped the contemporary Zeliangrong society in its art and culture, architecture, music, dance and so on. The popular painting of P. Thamei as emphasized in the third chapter reflects the youthful romance of the young couple and their attempt to overcome many social barriers and reconcile the divisive and exclusive policies of the two feuding villages, is a lesson that would remain relevant for all time. Social relationships are made or marred by certain self-perceived notions of right and wrong. Such social relationship starts from the individual level and diverges at the societal level. As Gandhi's famous saying goes, "You must be the change you want to be" Though such individual exercise to influence the social system, and the analysis of such events may be labeled a reductionist effort by the structuralists, it is worth the effort because visual studies is essentially a multi-disciplinary discipline.

Architecturally, the geometrical motif and pattern of *Taraengkai/ki* which predates even Makuilongdi has also influenced and shaped the contemporary architecture whereby, many still perform *Taraeng-Baanrumei* and even those (Zeliangrong Christians) who do not follow the rites and rituals of *Taraeng-Baanrumei* prefer to build replica of such structure as seen in the Orange Festival and many other occasions as fashion statement and a symbol of their allegiance to the age-old tradition.

In the area of folksongs and music Makuilongdi is said to have influenced the music of Gairemnang and even Jadonang, and they in turn have influenced contemporary pop and rock musicians like Paul Gangmei, and Jiamgam Kamei with strong sense of patriotism as elaborated in the previous chapter. Folk dances have also diversified so much but the basic content and essence of the art remains more or less the same.

Such is the all-encompassing influence of the traditions of Makuilongdi on the contemporary Zeliangrong society. And, it can be safely concluded that inspite of the process of social change in the form of globalization, liberalization, sanskritisation and westernization, their society have changed in their dresses, and lifestyle, but their culture, ethos, norms and values as elucidated in the fourth chapter have become a symptom of identity crisis. The Zeliangrong people still sing folk songs, perform folk dances and celebrate traditional festivals, and uphold several traditional institutional practices such as the construction of 'Tarangki/kai' (house).

Colonial mis-representations of the Zeliangrong Nagas and the ensuing stereotypes and prejudices have only been reinforced by contemporary studies and works of even the Zeliangrong Nagas who tend to mechanically reproduce the subtle colonial stereotypes. After analyzing the various visual and textual materials that have been produced by the British colonial regime such as the pictures of scantily clad Kabui Nagas young men as seen in Hodson's "Head-Hunting among the Hill Tribes of Assam", the motive of the colonial regime can be imagined, because head-hunting among the Zeliangrong Nagas have practically stopped by the end of the 18th century especially those engaged in social intercourse with the British and the neighbouring communities.

In fact, the traditional attires of the two young men as seen in the picture of Hodson's book are dresses associated with folk dances and not the dress used during the ceremonial head-hunting. Head-hunting as a matter of fact was also popularly practiced by the Kukis but the Kukis had never been represented as head-hunters by the British. On

the contrary, the British labeled the Nagas as hostile, primitive, savage and above all, the dreaded head-hunters, an insinuating tag which the contemporary Zeliangrong Nagas, like many other Nagas find it difficult to accept.

Mis-representations of the Zeliangrong Nagas by the British have been done through the prism of sanskritic worldview. For instance, the term Kacha Naga (refers to the Liangmai and Zeme tribes) has been inferred and recorded by the British as the name of a tribe or community with the sanskritic word *Kacha* in their mind. *Ketsa*, Angami for forest was heard and mistaken for the sanskritic Kacha by the British and the subaltern interpreters. Kacha Naga could not have been derived from any other source except the Angami word *Ketsa*.

On the other hand, the word Kabui finds mentioned in the name of some Zeliangrong people like the traditional healer, locally known as the Kabui salang maiba and also mythical half-man half-tiger Kabui Keioiba in the Meitei oral narratives. The word Kabui is not found in the Zeliangrong dialect but it's been used to refer to the Rongmei and Puimei Nagas. So, it is surmised that the word is of foreign origin, which has been labeled on the Zeliangrong people as a tribe during the Anglo-Manipuri hegemonic alliance.

The second case study in Chapter 3 proves that the sanskritization and westernization effects seen among the Zeliangrong people in Kakhulong village were adopted as mechanisms of social mobility. In order to overcome and integrate with the highly stratified social system and the inherent social discriminations in the Imphal valley in the 18th and 19th century, the egalitarian Zeliangrong society adopted certain practices of the local people; the acculturation processes ranged from adopting sanskritic and local names to the dress codes and food habits of the dominant community. The Zeliangrong people also changed and reformed their epicurean festivals like for instance, Gaan-Ngai

has been refined in order to suit with the new social and economical environment in the Imphal valley.

The third case study on popular culture among the Zeliangrong youth reveals interesting facts on the co-existence of a yearning for traditional culture and the adoption of modern ways of life. The Zeliangrong youth who dressed, sang and lived like popular rock stars of the western countries were also equally at home with traditional music and culture. Such ambidexterity reveals the strong desire of the people to be rooted in their social and cultural background in the midst of the identity crises they are undergoing through and the problem and challenges of being a subaltern community in the states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

The pop and rock singers who have been labeled as rebellious and anti-establishments invariably faded into oblivion for lack of patronage both socially and economically; whereas there is a new rock music culture in the form of gospel rock in the name of Praise and Worship team in the churches. Examinations of the pop and rock singer's lyrical contents indicate that they do have social messages. For example, Tazei Khuan sings about the fatalistic attitude seen amongst the Zeliangrong youth in their single album *Bamei*. The society like the Zeliangrong society which has seen metaphoric change from a traditional society to a globalised world without under going the lengthy process of social change like other communities like the west would definitely witness anomie situations due to the speed of the change in the social system.

Case study 4 on Orange festival indicates the complexity of the fusion of various interests. Outwardly, the official version of the festival is to promote the interest of the orange farmers and also facilitate the socio-economic development of Tamenglong district. However, a critical observation of the event reveals that there are many critics whose voices and opinions are true to certain extent. The unreserved spending by the organizing committee also benefited certain vested interest. And the criticism that the

event and the beauty pageant held in the side line grabs more attention as a skin-show than meaningfully empowering the intended beneficiaries i.e. the orange farmers. For instance, the cash prize for the winner of the beauty pageant is Rs. 75,000.00 whereas the orange farmer award winners gets a measly sum.

Case study 5 on proliferation of church and spread of Christianity and revivalism of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC) explores the reason for the latent and manifest conflict between the Christian church and represented by the RNBA and the TRC and the politics of rhetoric played out and dramatized in the local media. The traditionally conservative Zeliangrong society refuse to convert to Christianity in the early part of the 20th century especially in the Imphal valley whereas, Christianity had many followers at the same time. Thus, Zeliangrong people in the Imphal valley who were predominantly believers of the traditional faith prosecuted the early Christians in Imphal but gradually the church proliferated and Christianity spread and this came on to challenge the traditional faith of the Zeliangrong people. But, such conflict of ideas did not erupt into physical and communal confrontations in the past.

However, for the first time in the history of the Zeliangrong society, a conflict based on religious differences erupted in Chingmeirong village at Imphal leading to a situation involving the local police, the magistrate, the State Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Minority Affairs. It all began with a personal vendetta between the parties in conflict at the village which snowballed into the RNBA and TRC conflict. The RNBA's objective is proliferation and spread of Christianity while the TRC aims to revive the traditional religious believes. The seemingly irreconcilable principles and objectives of the two organizations surprisingly did not produce conflicts anywhere else except for some stray incidents of religious intolerances in Chingmeirong village.

The church has rightly been accused of neglecting the social and cultural traditions of the Zeliangrong people. It is generally observed that, many young

Zeliangrong people, considered to be good Christians turned out to be citizens who neglect in maintaining social etiquettes and values. On the other hand, the youth who belongs to traditional religion are said to have superior social manners. Perhaps, it is attributed to the practices of punitive action being meted out by the traditional religious followers and elders in the village. With regard to the Christian youth, their actions are often credited to the concept of sin and forgiveness. As much as the church has a modernized, westernized and adopted Christian values, the TRC also have to a large extent acculturated from the Sanskritic ways of life and the modern values.

Case study 6 on Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu and the Zeliangrong People Convention (ZPC) Movement attempts to answer the reason for the growth of the movement, its spread and popularity and the negotiations that the ZPC leaders carried out in New Delhi, and the indefinite suspension of the movement by the ZPC leaders. Jadonang movement to be precise emerged as a social religious movement and as a political movement that seek to uproot the British colonial regime and its alliances with the Meitei kingdom and the Kukis who unleashed arbitrary political and economic policies. Rani Gaidinliu carried on the movement in independent India and demanded that the Zeliangrong people should be given a homeland. This was carried out under the ZPC movement, which had mass followings all over Assam, Manipur and Nagaland and attracted political enmity from the government of the three states.

Inspite of the severe criticisms and challenges from the three states, the ZPC leaders diplomatically handled the political situations. The ZPC movement came to a standstill with the death of Rani Gaidinliu in 1993 and the upsurge of the Naga movement under the banner of the NSCN. And most importantly, the two leaders Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu have been interestingly portrayed as the leaders of Indian National Movement on one hand by the Indians and Naga National leaders by the Nagas on the other hand. And, in the middle, the general public get caught in the cross fire of

the contesting opinions and become collateral damages. This has been the case for the general public from the beginning of the Naga movement till date.

In post-colonial India, the stereotypes and prejudices labeled by the British continued to be identified with Zeliangrong people in a subtle manner. Social discriminations remain mostly unseen under the veneer of political spectacle like the Republic Day Parade of India in ceremonial presentations of different ethnic groups as peacefully co-existing as shown in the fourth chapter. Under the veneer of such seemingly peaceful co-existence, cases of acute social discriminations like the usurpation of rights of the tribal communities in Manipur by the dominant Meitei community are being practiced.

Manipur University (MU) and the gross violation of the reservation policy of the tribals which has been strongly contested by the ATSUM and MUTSU and the subsequent creation of a new branch of the IGNTU in Manipur only indicates the continuing discriminations by the majority dominated state and the vulnerability of tribals pressure groups to act steadfastly. For instance, when the ATSUM delegates went to New Delhi to present their grievances with the concern authorities like the Prime Minister, Human Resource Development Minister, Tribal Affairs Minister, National Commission for Scheduled Tribe and the University Grants Commission, all their allowances were reportedly borne by the state government, ATSUM delegates also supposedly wined and dined with the state government officials in Manipur Bhavan. If these allegations are true, the politics of exclusion and subtle discrimination of the tribals would continue unabated.

Finally, this study is an attempt to understand the visual culture of the Zeliangrong Nagas, wherein the pictures of the traditional dresses, costumes and artifacts were examined in order to map out and distinguish the changing representations and trend of this community in the contemporary society. This study sheds light on the transformation of the Zeliangrong Nagas, probing their oral tradition, symbols, method of building traditional houses, and folk tales. This study not only looks at the visual culture but examines the cultural practices of Zeliangrong community around which the idea of identity is built, amidst claims of marginalization and political contestations.

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