



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ETHNIC-POLITICAL IMPACT OF INDO-MYANMAR BOUNDARY WITH REFERENCE TO MIZORAM

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ethnic political impact of Indo-Myanmar boundary of Mizoram in the North East India. Mizoram shares borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar and the Indian states of Tripura, Assam and Manipur. Brawny historical, cultural, political, traditions and ethnic connections between Chin and Mizo might suggest a strong claim to belonging. Some of the routes to India from China across Yunan and Myanmar were laid through even before the Han Dynasty of China. The Emperor Wu, who ruled China during 140-86 B.C sent an envoy Chang Chien who learned about India and seen Chinese silk in India while he was on a mission to find out and allied tribe living west. Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura in India; and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. Zo is one of several similar identity movements in the Northeast India, which have variously been described as “cosmopolitan identities”, “micro-nationalisms” and “adjacent identities” (S. Zou 2012).

#### INTRODUCTION

While dividing the people into different ethnological groups they cannot but continue to be an admixture of the Mongolian blood. The people use to say that they came from the east and immediately from Myanmar. With the exception of the Tai groups the people have no written record of their own which ascertain their racial origin and the country to which they belonged. Tell tales handed down by a father to a son or by the old to the young from generation to generation are the only source of information to be relied upon or believed before anything more can be dug out of the distant past. The immigration of the people took place through the eastern hill ranges on the Indo-Myanmar and Sino-Indian border. Some of the routes to India from China across Yunan and Myanmar were laid through even before the Han Dynasty of China. The Emperor Wu, who ruled China during 140-86 B.C sent an envoy Chang Chien who learned about India and seen Chinese silk in India while he was on a mission to find out and allied tribe living west. The Falam sub-division, in which lived the people whose customs are discussed in this monograph is situated in the centre of the Chin Hills District. Though known to us as the Chins, the people themselves do not recognize the name, they are very closely related to the Lushai in the Assam Hills to the west, the Haka and Lakher tribes to the south, and the Kuki tribes to the north. Ethnographically and historically the area is of considerable importance, as almost all the villages claimed by the tribes mentioned above as their original homes are either within or close to the borders of the Falam sub-division. The process of migration by whole tribal groups has continued right upto the present day, many Hualngo having come into the Zahau tract since the annexation, and other similar movements having taken place throughout all the tribal areas. Its lesser counterpart, migration by households is a constant phenomenon. Most of the earlier migrations were occasioned by tribal wars and almost all resulted in the long run in the tribes which were pushed out from the centre appearing as slave

— raiding and pillaging foragers on the borders of the civilized plains of Bengal, Assam and Myanmar. These forages were no child's play, as maybe judged from the facts recorded in the Chin Hills gazetteer and in Mackenzie's History of the North-East Frontier and their natural result was firstly the entry of punitive columns into the Hills and finally administration. The major tribes of the Falam sub-division are Shimhrin, Ngawn, Khualshim, Tawr, Zanniat, Tashon, Lente, Hualngo. There are many sub-tribes among the Shimhrin and Zanniat. The chaotic changes that took place prior to the annexation, combined with a somewhat precipitate stabilization of the political combinations existing in the early days, has resulted in a situation in the villages which makes it almost impossible to use any of the known terms of racial division without qualification. But the groups of tribes have this in common — cultural and linguistic unity. They are not political or social units and only rarely function as economic units. Prior to the annexation the Zanniat and the Tashon were democratic tribes whose villages were ruled by councils of elders (called Nam kap) selected to represent village quarters or in some cases patrilineal extended families. The remainder were ruled by Headman from time immemorial and they are called the Autocratic Group. While there is a fairly strong resemblance between the cultures of both groups as a whole, there is between them a certain difference in the detail of their customs traceable to their respectively democratic and autocratic political framework. In the autocratic group the Headman of each sub-tribe are related to each other, often very closely, while those of the Shimhrin sub-tribes are similarly related to their respective Chiefs. The Chiefs and Headmen have an added authority not shared by their contemporaries of Lumbang and Tashon. The relationship between these tribes and their neighbors in areas contiguous to the Falam sub-division, the Tawr and Khualshim both have definite cultural connections with the Haka tribes, the Tashon, Zanniat and in some respects the Ngawn with the so called Sokte and related groups in the Tiddim sub-division to the north, and the Hualngo with the Lushai to the west. The Shimhrin occupy the central position, both geographically and culturally. The majority inhabitant of the state of Mizoram on the Indian side belong to the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman branch of Indo-Mongoloid races. Through

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the influence of events and time, this group came to be well dispersed spatially before administrative delimitations were carried out. As a result, the inhabitants of the groups were found to be dispersed in significant percentages in the Churachandpur district of Manipur, Cachar district of Assam, eastern parts of Jaintia Hill district of Meghalaya and north Tripura districts. Besides, they are also found in substantial numbers across the frontiers in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

**Early Mizo History and its Origin:** The early history of Mizo is virtually based on legends, traditions, customs and beliefs. The administrators and scholars had to face difficulties in tracing the historical evolution of the Mizo tribes. Nevertheless, there are innumerable folk-songs, tales and fables that provide raw materials for their study of migration and early settlement in the regions. The origin of the Mizos is veiled in obscurity, and every conclusion is not very certain. There is common belief among the Mizos that their ancestors immigrated from a place called 'CHHINLUNG'.<sup>4</sup> Historians and anthropologists are of the opinion that this place is in the southern China. The Mizos were pushed out of Chhinlung by a powerful people. The Mizos think that their forefathers came from the cave one by one and when a couple belonging to Ralte sub-tribe came out, the loud talk caused the guardian God of the cave to close the cave fearing overpopulation.<sup>5</sup> Recently, an attempt to interpret the legend rationally has been made. Chhinlung is said to mean not a cave but the name of a prince in China, who was the son of Huang T. of the Chin dynasty (221-207 B.C.). The prince was annoyed with his father and thus left the kingdom and settled in Myanmar.<sup>6</sup> It is an undisputed fact that the Mizo came from East and their home was in Mekong Valley. K. Zawla asserted that the Mizo people came to Chindwin belt about 996 A.D. They lived there barely 200 years. The cruel chiefs and the great famine in which many people died forced the rest to leave the land. Before they left, they planted a banyan tree at Khampat and took a vow in front of their Myanmar neighbor that they would return to Khampat. During their movement the first place of halt was at Lentlang about 1466 A.D.<sup>7</sup>

**Causes of Migration:** The migration of the Mizo tribes from the north-west Myanmar to down south and then to the west and the present Mizoram (earlier Lushai Hills Districts) took place due to several reasons. The tribes moved to the new place for better and adequate land for cultivations. The other causes can be summed up as the fear of insecurity which they left during their habitation. The frequent inter-tribal disputes and pressure from the powerful tribes compelled them to migrate to the safer places. History bears evidence that they moved to Kabaw valley from north-west Myanmar in 1814.<sup>8</sup> Further, they had to face famine (Mautam) at a regular interval of 50 years. Consequently, these tribes had to change their places of habitation. The great famines of 1882, 1911 and 1959 bears the testimony to the fact.

**Shan State and Kabaw Valley and Chin Hills Settlement:** The first Mizo migration took place in the present Shan state of Kabaw valley in Myanmar after they left Chhinlung. The life at Khampat was miserable due to natural constraints like famines, shortage of food-materials, etc. The Lushai tribes decided to move westward in search of better source of livelihood. They moved towards north and north-west in organized Clan-wise migration. They occupied areas along the Indo-Myanmar frontiers in Chin Hills in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. they settled and established villages clan-wise. Some of these villages are still in existence such as Seipor, Suaipui, Saipui, Saihmun and Bochung.<sup>10</sup> The Chin Hills in Myanmar bordering Mizoram occupy the southernmost area, from a line roughly coinciding with the eastern extremity of the Manipur-Myanmar road, to the borders of Arakan on the sea. The Lushai-Kuki group peoples the centre – the Aijal area with along 'tail' of Kuki villages extending north-east between the Nagas and the Chins to the Somra Tracts west of Homalin on the Chandwin River. During the mid 16<sup>th</sup> Century A.D, the first batch of Mizo crossed Tiau river and settled in the area of present day Mizoram and they were called by the Bengalis or Assamese as Kukis.<sup>11</sup> The word Kuki has assumed different meanings. The term (Kuki) was given by the Bengalis to distinguish the tribesman from the plain settlers.<sup>12</sup> Major Shakespeare has referred

the term 'old Kuki' and 'Khawtlang' to differentiate them from the Lushai. These old Kukis migrated from Myanmar and went as Chittagong Hill Tracts and Hills of Tipperah. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts the term Kukis means the inhabitants of the interiors and inaccessible mountain tracts. In Cachar, it generally meant some family of the 'Thado' or Khawtlang clan. It is categorized locally as new and old Kuki-Chin people constituting the easternmost group of Indo-Mongoloid branch and were linguistically similar to the Myanmar, the Lolos and the Kachins (Singphos) but culturally different and are akin to Nagas and Bodos.<sup>13</sup> The Lushai are one of the well-known tribes of the Kuki-Chin group of the people.<sup>14</sup> The first batch of Mizo tribes who migrated from Chin Hills<sup>15</sup> into the present Mizoram and then to Cachar were the Ranghols, Betes or Hmars with their sub-clans. These were called old Kukis. Even today many villages settled by these people in Mizoram are still in existence such as Khawbung, Zote, Biate, Khetta, Darngawn, Leiri, Lungtan which were initially settled by them (Thado and old Kuki).<sup>10</sup> Broadly speaking, there are five major tribes - Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Paite, Pawi, etc., the minor sub-tribes are commonly known as 'Awzia'.

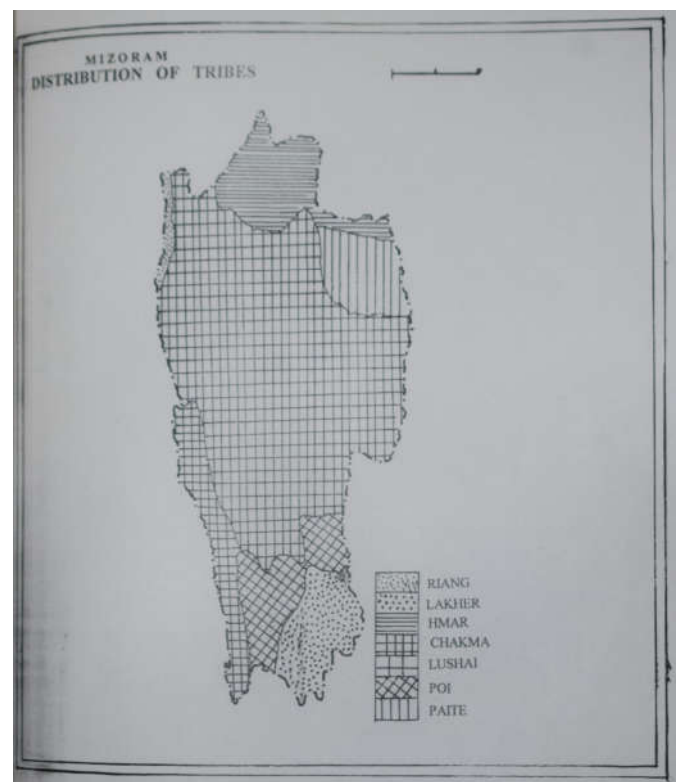


Figure 1. Distribution of tribes in Mizoram

**Lusei:** The Lusei sub-group consists of ten commoners and six chief of clans (Thangura chief). The commoners are Pachuau, Chhangte, Chawngte, Hauhna, Chuaungo, Chuaung, Hrahse, Tochwang, Vanchhawng and ChhakChhuak. The chief clans are Zadeng, Palian, Thangluah, Rivung, Rokhum and SaiIo.<sup>17</sup> Search for economic livelihood compelled them to migrate westwards. Thangluah and Rokhum passed through the hills moved west as well as to Tripura and Sylhet border. They were followed by the Zadeng, who penetrated the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Thangluah moved westward as far as Demagiri and Borkhal. The Palian followed the same route as the Zadeng. The Lushai tribes have moved forward from south-east round about 1810 A.D. and established complete supremacy of the North Lushai Hills between 1840 and 1850 A.D. The Sailo clan came into prominence and successfully subdued all their rivals.<sup>18</sup>

**Paite:** The Paites belonged to old Kuki group. Paite literally means goers. In Mizoram they are confined to an area between two rivers Tiau and Run, in the north-eastern Mizoram. Paites living in central part of Mizoram have lost their language but those living in Manipur

(Churachandpur district) and north- east Mizoram have preserved their traditional traits.

**Table 1. Type of sub tribes of the Falam Sub-division**

Tribe	Sub-tribe	Local Classifications	
Shimhrin	Zahau, Laizo, Khuangli, Sunkhla	Biar Dum	Pawi
Ngawn			
Khualshim			
Tawr			
Zanniat	Zanniat, Sipawng, Tapawng	Biar Rang	Mar
Tashon			
Lente			
Hualngo			

**Ralte:** The Raltes belonged to Kuki group who came from the north. They were subjugated by the Duliens who migrated from Chin Hills. They have distinct social customs and have noticeable difference in the dialects. They were allotted a separate portion of the village land.<sup>19</sup> They are predominantly located in western Lushai village of Lenkhunga, Kalkhama and Lalhrima. The Ralte sub-group have accepted the dominance of the Duliens but continued to maintain their traditional customs and language.<sup>20</sup> Among the Duliens, the Ralte language is understood in the Sailo chiefs habitually used Ralte language.

**Rangkhol and Thado:** About the middle of 16 century, the Rangkhol settled down in the area (near the Cachar border) but were subsequently pushed northward by the Thado tribe. The Thado tribe had settlements in the Lushai and Chin Hills, by replacing the Rangkhol and Bete tribes. But the Thados like those they replaced could not resist the advancing waves of Lushai tribes. The Lushai clans moved northward by about 1810 A.D. and the Thado were gradually pushed northwards of Lushai Hills to Cachar between 1840 and 1850 A.D. The Thados of Chin Hills were similarly conquered by the Sokte and were driven towards north into Manipur where they settled in southern region of Manipur.<sup>21</sup>

**Shendus:** The Shendus tribe includes all the Haka- Chin tribes including the Lakher and also other Chin tribes such as Maras.<sup>22</sup> The British called them Shendus.<sup>23</sup> Lt. Phayrs (1841) refers to the Tseindus and gives a list of 13 Tseindus clans, some of which can be identified with Mara clan, and others appear to be Poi.<sup>24</sup> The Shendus, according to Mackenzie were a formidable nation living to the north-east of Blue Mountain. These tribes appeared to be more numerous as a people than any other Indo-Chinese hill race who extended over a large part of the country.<sup>25</sup>

**Lakher:** The Lakher inhabited south-eastern corner of the Lushai Hills district and South of Haka Sub-division of the Chin district of Myanmar. Geographically, this tribe are located west of Kolodyne river and south of Blue Mountain. The Lakher villages were located in the large bend of the river. The principal Mara/Lakher tribal groups were Tlongsai, Howthai, Zeuhnanh, Liai, Sabeu, and Heima. The Shendus covered Poi as well as Lakher tribes. The Lakher were surrounded by the Fanais and Lushais on west, Chin in the east and north and the Khumis<sup>26</sup>, Matus and Khyengs in the south, which were the tribes of the Arakan hill tracts. The Maras were a branch of the 'Lai' tribe of Chin and spoke language/dialect which were similar to 'Lai'.

Like all other Indo-Myanmarese race, Maras also come from the north and settled to the present location from different places of Haka sub-division of the Chin Hills due to constant pressure in their frontier particularly from the east. They crossed Kolodyne and settled in the vicinity of Tisi river and adjacent regions. It is the common belief that the Lushai have been driven northward and westward by the Shendus.

**Chakmas:** The Chakmas are a distinct tribe localized in the south-western part of Mizoram. This tribe belonged to Eastern group of the Indo-Aryan family whose dialect was Chakma. It was a corrupt of the Bengali language written in corrupt Burmese script. Risley, classified them in the group of the Mongolian racial types. The Chakmas emigrated from Arakan and then moved to Chittagong Hill Tracts (now Bangladesh) in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Thus, different tribes and sub-tribes came down to the present Mizoram in successive waves and settled down in different parts of the present Mizoram. However, the settled life was disturbed by perpetual fear of raid and inter-tribal feuds. The advent of the British rule and the missionaries activities implanted a sense of love, value, sacrifice in their minds.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

India and Myanmar have always shared a cordial relation, sharing a long geographical border with four North-Eastern states in India. There exists three sizeable governing bodies in Mizoram such as the state parliament, the Presbyterian Church of India and the Young Mizo Association (YMA). Out of the three bodies, the most influential body on public opinion in the society accounted on the YMA. YMA is not the only community-based organisation to play such a role. Other leading organisations include Mizoram Upa Pawl (Mizo Senior Citizens) and the Mizo Hmeichhe/Insuihkhawm Pawl (Mizo Women's Organisation), all played major roles respectively in the lives of the Mizos. Many Mizos view these organisations and YMA in particular, as an essential part of the Mizo social textile constituted by and constitutive of social trait of 'Tlawmngaihna', an ethos of selflessness and altruism and care for others. YMA is valued for its work in organising funerals, caring for the elderly and rescuing people injured in landslides or swept away by rivers. It is an immensely successful community organisation in its practical achievements and a powerful example of civil society's role in the production of identity. However, communitarianism can also have a dark side, fostering parochialism, insularity and the exclusion of outsiders.

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