Chapter 6

Towards New Identity
CHAPTER VI

Towards new Identity

The Kabui Nagas after the independence period are commonly known as the Zeliangrongs. We have seen the history that made this people struggle for their ethnic identity and recognition. The independent India witnessed an ethnic assertion of the Zeliangrong due to more ethnic consciousness and a struggle for integration has been gaining momentum by the various Zeliangrong organizations. However, the setback still remains as the tribe could not be used a common name for the kindred tribes of Zemi, Liangmei and Rongmei (Kabui) including the Puimei. The distant in interaction is widened as the tribe is geographically divided in the states of India - Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and even in some parts of present day Burma. Constitutionally, they are recognized as two different tribes – Kabui (for Rongmei and Puimei) and Kacha Naga (for Liangmai and Zeme), though they are from the same descendants or origin as already explained in the previous chapters.

The post-independent period is crucial in the making of their new identity. By this time, many people began to be aware of their identity as they educate more and more and expose to modern living. The migration and interaction with many other ethnic groups help to realize the importance of their identity and culture. The conversion of Christianity led some people to challenge the age-old tradition and resulted in the more western behavior and attitudes towards life. The Kabuis living in the Valley who interacts closer with the Meities started adopting their ways of life. In the course of time, their identity is identified more with the Hinduised Meiteis. This means that at the present the Kabuis have multiple identities and as a result there is the clash of culture. In addition to it, the forces of development and the process of modernization affects the day today life of the tribe, culture and tradition. In the name of such development and progress, many people lost the culture, tradition and religion. Therefore, this chapter seeks to study the identity consciousness and emerging identity of the Zeliangrong people. It will deal under the broad three sub-topics:

(i) Zeliangrong Movement
(ii) Christianization and
(iii) Tingkao Ragwang Chap-riak
Zeliangrong Movement:
The Movement which began in the early 1920’s by Jadonang was perceived and described differently by many writers. J.P. Mills, the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills and well known anthropologist romanticized Jadonang as “the Messiah King” of the Nagas. Robert Reid, a British Governor during that time described the movement as “Zeliangrong Uprising". However, he contradicted his very own writings in the book ‘Winds of Change’ (1962) on the movement and called it ‘an outburst of a highly superstitious people and not as freedom fighters’. Ursula Graham Bower in her book ‘Naga Path’ made a sympathetic reference to Jadonang as the religious mystic who visualized a kingdom for his people. J.Roy in ‘History of Manipur’ described the movement as a challenge to British Imperialism. F.S. Downs in, ‘Mighty Works of God’ described the movement as heathen and anti-Christian. According to N. Joykumar Singh, it was a millenarian tribal movement. Many leaders and writers like A.Z.Phizo, A.Dasgupta, Khuswant Singh, D.P.Stracey, B.B.Ghosh and Hamlet Bareh referred to the movement as a ‘Naga revolt against British colonialism’. Likewise many other have written and opined on the movement till date. However, what we need at the hour is to see how the movement started, reached the peak, and continued in different shapes and forms. It means to say that the movement is seen rather as a process of continuity and change. The earlier writers have concentrated the movement confining during the times of Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. As it coincided with India’s struggle for independence, the movement in that period gained definite attention. However, what is lacking is that they failed to notice the movement which even today is struggling after 60 years of India’s Independence. The irony is that the Zeliangrong people are now divided geographically into many states of India. This created further a distant to the already displaced community. The arrest of Gaidinliu who succeeded Jadonang in the peak of the movement added more confusion to the people. The movement continued under various Zeliangrong organizations demanding integration of all Zeliangrong inhabited areas under one administrative and political unit and recognition of the tribe as ‘Zeliangrong’ in the

1 Reid,R. (1942) A History of Frontier Areas Bordering Assam, Shillong.
Roy’s work was mostly based on the famous article of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s “Daughter of the Hills” which was published by the Hindustan Times (National Newspaper), dated 14th December, 1937.
Scheduled Tribes list in the Indian Constitution. But, the tragedy is that despite many attempts, the Government of India has not yet recognized the tribe as ‘Zeliangrong’ and still prefers to use divided names to mean the same group of people.

**Origin and Growth of the movement:**

The nomenclature, Zeliangrong is a collective ethno-cultural entity of the people who speak the dialect of Zemi, Liangmei and Rongmei (Kabui) including Puimei tribes of North East India. The term was used for the first time in 1947, when the ‘Zeliangrong Union’ was formed to mean the same group of people sharing common origin, language and culture. As stated, it is a combined named of kindred tribes of the Zemi, the Liangmei and the Rongmei (Kabui) including the Puimei with the prefixes taken together to form the term ‘ZELIANGRONG’ (Ze+Liang+Rong). However, the struggle to integrate these cognate tribes was started in 1925 by Jadonang, a Kabui (Rongmei) leader. Many writers have located the birth place of Jadonang at Kambiron or Puiron in the present day Tamenglong District of Manipur. What is more important is the strategic location of the village as it served as one of the resting places on the Manipur Cachar Road, around 12 Km. from Nungba Sub Division of Tamenglong district of Manipur. As a result, many traders from Manipur, Assam and neighbouring regions including the British officials and soldiers moved to and fro through the 40 houses village. And it is obvious from the description that Jadonang, being born in that place had carefully watched and understood the travelers. By this time, the hill tribes with the British conquest of Manipur in 1891 were directly administered by the British officials. They were started imposing to pay the house tax which they had never done to the Manipuri Maharaja. New systems such as *Pothang Bekari* (sometimes written as Begari) and *Pothang Senkhai* were also institutionalized by the British which really hurt the sentiments of the Zeliangrong people. These systems of free services and taxes greatly affected the economic life of the already poverty-ridden people. Furthermore, these hilly people were imposed with oppressive forest laws which prevented them to use and consume forest products such as bamboo,

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7 It is a fact that Zeliangrong is recognized differently in many states. For instance, in Nagaland they are called ‘Zeliang’; in Manipur, they are known as ‘Kabui’ for ‘Rongmei’ and ‘Puimei’; ‘Kacha Naga’ for ‘Zemi’ and ‘Liangmei’. There are some sections of people who opposed to call an umbrella name ‘Zeliangrong’ to mean Rongmei (Kabui), Zemi, Liangmei and Puimei tribes. However, the struggle has been to integrate all tribes who share common origin, ancestry, and culture.

8 *Pothang Bekari* was a kind of forced labour introduced by the British. Whenever any official of the State went on the tour in the hills, the villagers in those areas had to carry the goods and luggages free of cost. On refusal, they were usually punished mostly by whipping. Whereas, *Pothang Senkhai* was a kind of forced contribution mostly in the form of money imposed by the British to feed the touring officials and other employees of the Government.
cane and other useful trees which are used for making houses and other domestic purposes. They were also asked to render free services for repair and maintenance of Government roads, bridges and dams. At the more, the British Government failed to protect the Zeliangrong people when the Kuki rebellion\(^9\) (1917-1919) broke out in Manipur. By this time there was huge Kuki migration into the land of Zeliangrong regions. This had created a huge insecurity on the minds of the people. At one hand there was disunity, inter tribal and inter village feuds and at the other, the social and religious practices of the people were full of taboos and superstitions. Furthermore, Christian missionaries have already gained momentum in the hills of Manipur and as a result of it many people were converted to Christianity. In the valley, there was huge Meitei expansionism which began their rule by acts of invasion and subjugation on the hill tribes especially the Kabuis and called them with different names such as "Haos" and "Chingmis" and started imposing duties and demanded paying of tributes, providing soldiers, porters and other services to the Maharaja. At this very outset, Jadonang started a movement which came to be known as the Zeliangrong Movement in 1925. The aims and objectives can be broadly divided as

(i) Reformation of traditional religion by abolishing irrational customs and superstitions.

(ii) Establishment of an ethnic identity by integrating tribes such as Zemi, Liangmei, and Rongmei (Kabui) including Puimei.

(iii) Establishment of 'Makam Gwangdi'\(^10\) or proclamation of ‘Naga Raj’ by driving out the outsiders such as the British and the Kukis.

In order to achieve the goals, Jadonang revitalized the age old traditions, removed conservative and orthodoxy of the society and try to preserve and protect the

\(^9\) The famous Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919 was fought by the Kuki tribes against the British Colonialism. It was officially stated that the Rebellion started as a violent reaction to the British recruitment of Kukis to the Manipur Labour Corps No.22 for service in France during the First World War. There was a conflict in the style of recruitment. The rebellion which started against the British also targeted the Nagas, specially the Zeliangrong in the North West of Manipur and the Tangkhuls in North Eastern Manipur and in some tracts of Upper Burma. See Gangmumei Kamei (2004) A History of the Zeliangrong Nagas: From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu’, Guwahati:Delhi, Spectrum Publications, pp.132-141.

\(^10\) Makam Gwangdi, the kingdom of the Makam refers to the establishment of Zeliangrong Kingdom. This was described by the British as ‘Naga Raj’, a concept of the present day Sovereign State. The term was first used by J.C.Higgins, the then British Political Agent of Manipur in his report to the Chief Secretary of Assam. The Makam Gwangdi of Jadonang was also refered to by Graham Bower in her work, 'Naga Path' as a ‘millenium on earth’ where there would be prosperity, no war and no suffering. It soon became a political ideology which made Jadonang clashed with the colonial authorities and his political struggle made his movement relevant to the Indian freedom stuggle going on in other parts of India.
culture and religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas. He trained the youth and called them ‘Riphen’ meaning soldiers. They were trained to use weapons such as daos, spears and guns. It was more like a military exercise with strict discipline. Gangmumei in his book, ‘Jadonang: A Mystic Nag Rebel’ recorded the strength of the army to 500. Many villages were believed to have contributed both emotional and economic support to this army. Some writers described the movement as anti-christian which is incorrect. In fact it was a rather a movement to popularized the traditional religion by preaching a new cult of ‘Heraka’. The outbreak of the movement was renaissance of the Zeliangrong people because it touched almost all aspects of the collective life of this tribe. However, Jadonang was arrested and imprisoned by the British for proclaiming himself as the king and for declaring the impending end of the British Raj. This made him more popular in the eyes of his people. He was then released but re-arrested on 19th February 1931 and hanged on 29th August 1931 on the alleged murdering of four Manipuri traders.

Jadonang was succeeded by his disciple Gaidinliu when she was barely 17 years old. She used Gandhiji’s name and Jadonang’s songs in order to mobilize the people. She propagated that the British would be soon driven out with the help of Gandhiji and Nehru. It was believed that she had contacts with the Indian National Congress, the Bengali Congress Workers of Cachar District, Assam and sympathizers from various other tribes such as Mao, Maram, Thangal and Angamis of Khonoma. Pandit Nehru came to know of Jadonang and Gaidinliu’s movement during his tour of Assam in the winter of 1937. In his article, ‘The Surma Valley: The Daughter of the Hills’ he described the rebellion and called Gaidinliu, the ‘Rani’. Since then she has been called Rani Gaidinliu.

Rani Gaidinliu followed the aims and objectives of the movement which was left unfulfilled by her mentor Haipou Jadonang. Besides these, she added one aspect to secure socio-economic development of her people. She trained young boys and girls and fought the British with courage and vigour. In February 1932 they attacked the Assam Rifles patrols in North Cachar Hills in a broad daylight and this has received a huge attention by the British. The Government forces retaliated by burning

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12 To Jadonang, Heraka means a new cult believing in one high God in place of many, removing superstitions in beliefs and customs, organizing temples, introducing hymns and discourses and uniting the tribes to establish an independent Kingdom.
13 His famous article was published in the ‘Hindustan Times’, a newspaper, in 1937.
down several villages including the village of Bopungwemi in Naga Hills. The Manipur Government has announced a reward of Rs.200/- later increased it to Rs.500/- and exemption of house tax for 10 years for anybody or any village who give information leading to her arrest. Finally, she was arrested on 17th October 1932 under the leadership of Captain Macdonald of Assam Rifles at Pulomi village and awarded life imprisonment. She was kept in several jails. Nehru requested Lady Nancy Astor, the first lady member of the British House of Commons to get Rani Gaidinliu released from jail. The matter came up for discussion in the Parliament. Lady Astor informed Nehru in a letter dated 10th May 1939 that the Secretary of State for India had stated that “the movement among the Nagas has not yet died down and would break out if she was released and that she is at present considered a potent source of danger to the peace of Manipur State and Province of Assam”. Pandit Nehru further urged Premier Gopinath Bordoloi of Assam to intervene in the matter and get Gaidinliu released from jail. Bordoloi was helpless as the Naga Hills district was in the Excluded area, which was not a part of Assam; and Manipur was a princely State. Likewise, the Akhil Manipuri Mahasabha of Manipur presided by H. Irabot Singh demanded her release in its annual session at Imphal in 1938 but Manipur Government refused to consider the demand. The Haripura session of Indian National Congress Party in 1939 under the presidentship of Nehru passed a resolution demanding the release of Rani Gaidinliu but in vain. When India got independence, it’s first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the authorities in Assam to release the freedom fighter. However, the Assam Government was incompatible and ultimately, at continuous intervention of the Prime Minister, the officials agreed to release her on one condition that she lived outside Manipur until further orders. Rani Gaidinliu spent the next few years at Yimrap near Mokokchung village in the present day Nagaland State with a pension of Rs.15/- per month. This was after her 14 years of confinement in jail.

Impact of the movement:

Jadonang’s seven years of the active social and political movement produced a strong sense of solidarity and cultural heritage among the kindred tribes scattered in Manipur plain, Cachar plain, western hills of Manipur, North Cachar and Naga hills.

15 Details see, K.S.Singh (1982 Ed.), Tribal Movements in India, Vol.1, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, p.82.
The post independent period witnessed many ups and downs in the history of the Zeliangrong movement. The period between 1960 and 1993 was very crucial in the understanding of the movement. It was marked with lot of political and religious interfaces. By the end of 1950’s, the Naga National Council (NNC) was gaining momentum.\textsuperscript{18} The beginning of 1960 witnessed a conflict between Zeliangrong movement under Rani Gaidinliu and the Naga’s struggle for independence under A.Z.Phizo and T.Sakhrie. Rani Gaidinliu was labeled as ‘Indian Rani’ and questioned her religious beliefs describing as ‘worship of spirits’. Her army was called ‘Khamgai’ literally meaning men without direction. During this period, the Zeliangrong movement adopted twin objectives of preservation and promotion of the Heraka cult against the growing Christianity of the Nagas. According to Gangmumei Kamei, “the movement was not opposed to the Naga independence movement. However, conflict erupted on religious issues”.\textsuperscript{19} This was evident when the clash between Gaidinliu’s forces and the Christians occurred at Toushem in 1966. This incident was misinterpreted by many as if the movement was against the Naga cause. However, due to huge efforts made by the Zeliangrong leaders, the tension was calmed down. In September 1966, around 300 soldiers of the Rani’s army were absorbed into the Naga’s struggle. Politically from 1966 to 1972 Rani Gaidinliu was inclined to support the movement for the integration of the Naga areas into the state of Nagaland. Therefore, the concept of ‘Makam Gwangdi’ was reduced to the demand for ‘Zeliangrong political unit’ in a state of Nagaland.\textsuperscript{20} The definition of ‘Zeliangrong political unit’ as a District, Union Territory or State, was expressed by the third conference of the Zeliangrong leaders of Manipur in October 1980. They demanded for the integration of all Zeliangrong areas into a political and administrative unit at Tamenglong. The conference elected Rani Gaidinliu (in her absence) as the President of the ‘Zeliangrong People’s Convention’ popularly known as ZPC. On 7\textsuperscript{th} June 1981, ZPC adopted the official slogan ‘Zeliangrong Ringtelou’ which means ‘Long Live Zeliangrong’ and subsequently submitted memorandums

\textsuperscript{18} The Naga National Council (NNC) is a Naga Organization demanding for a creation of separate Naga State.
\textsuperscript{20} This demand was outlined in a very comprehensive Memorandum sent on 18\textsuperscript{th} August 1972 to the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi by Rani Gaidinliu, soon after she was awarded with ‘Tamra Patra’ during the Silver Jubilee celebrations of India’s Independence as recognition of Freedom Fighter of India.
one after another to Prime Ministers of India Smt. Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai, and Rajiv Gandhi. The delegations met Mr. Bajpai (Former MP Lok Sabha), Mrs. Sheila Grewal in 1985 (former Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi), Mr. Buta Singh in 1986 (former Home Minister) and many representatives of Government of India. The North Eastern Council (NEC) under the guidance from the Planning Commission was instructed to study on the problems and developments of the Zeliangrong areas in 1985. The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi directed the Department of Culture to entrust the Anthropological Survey of India to make a thorough investigation on the Zeliangrong cognate tribes (Zemi, Liangmei, Rongmei and Puimei) and came up with a report that from linguistic and anthropological view, they belong to same group of people. Despite many commitments and assurances, the Government of India did not come up with concrete solutions on the issue of integration and recognition of the name Zeliangrong. Then came the conflict of Kuki and Naga in Zeliangrong regions in 1992 and the political activities and demands remain standstill. Zeliangrong movement once again suffered a big blow with the death of Rani Gaidinliu on 23rd February 1993 after prolonged illness. The movement took a different turn in 1994 when Zeliangrong Religious Council (locally known as ‘Zeliangrong Rachap-Riak Phom’) was formed to revive the traditional religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas. This Council seeks to preserve the customs, festivals and culture of the people and to check the external influence and onslaught by other religion to the indigenous faith. They constructed a house of worship called ‘Kalum Kai’ at Chingmeirong, Imphal-East District of Manipur and offers regular prayers and offerings to the Supreme God known as ‘Tingkao Ragwang’. The Council instructed all Zeliangrong villages to construct such house of worship in their respective places. The Council resolved that the Zeliangrong Religion be named “Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak” and propagated that there should be community or mass prayer in every village offered to Tingkao Ragwang on every full Moon Day. The followers are asked to practice traditional hymns and dances and special attention is given to traditional costumes, dresses and festivals of the tribe. The outcome of the Council is the declaration of ‘Gaan-Ngai festival’ (the biggest post-harvesting festival) as general State holiday in Manipur.21

21 This was declared by the United Front Government of Manipur led by Shri W. Nipamacha Singh on 10th January 1998 Vide Order No.1/7/91-R and L/pt-iv dated 27-12-1997.
Therefore, we see a sea change in the Zeliangrong movement in the search for identity. The struggle which originated in 1925 aimed at driving out the British and establishing of Zeliangrong Kingdom by integrating all cognate tribes and areas. It attracted a lot of attention both at national and regional levels. The struggle became a part of syllabus of NCERT in the study of National Movements against the British colonialism and has included a chapter on Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu’s struggles. Gaidinliu was given a title ‘Rani’ by Nehru. She was awarded Tama Patra in 1972, Padma Bhushan in 1981, and was also given Swarna Vivekanand Purashkar Award and Bhagwan Birsa Munda Purashkar Award with a citation. The period during Jadonang and arrest of Rani Gaidinliu was more of a militant phase. It aimed at attaining a complete sovereign State. This followed by independent India which marked the beginning of dialogues and discussions. The post independent period witnessed the emergence of many civil organizations and bodies. The movement was then shifted slowly in demanding within the constitutional framework. It soon began to encounter with the Naga Nationalist movement under A.Z.Phizo and then Th.Muivah and Isaac Swu. A conflict and clash of ideology erupted between the groups of Rani and the Naga’s freedom struggle. Later, Zeliangrong movement became more inclined towards the integration of all Naga areas into Nagaland. However, the demand to integrate all cognate tribes and recognition of Zeliangrong tribe became an important issue. From here we saw the movement asserting its common ethnic identity without forgetting the political goals of the tribe. The issues were time and again discussed and debated at the Prime Minister’s level and many a time assurances were given to the people. However, there was no concrete solution for the people. But, the irony is that geographically, they are divided into many states of India and the name ‘Zeliangrong’ is still not recognized and different names such as ‘Kacha Nagas’ for ‘Zemi’ and ‘Liangmei’ and ‘Kabui’ for ‘Rongmei’ and ‘Puimei’ continue to used in the Indian Constitution even after 80 years of Zeliangrong movement.

**Christianization:**

Christianization refers to the way of life by the people who believes in Christ and His philosophy. In this context, we refer to Christianity as a process of change that affected the lives of the Kabui Nagas and consequently asserted their identity through the religion.
The Coming of Christianity:
The first missionaries who had toured the hill ranges of Manipur were the Jesuit missionaries- Stephen Cacells and J. Gabral through the Brahmaputra Valley. The purpose of their tour was, however, exploratory ostensibly to find a route into China and Tibet. Later, there grew up Catholic Churches in Manipur and surrounding areas. But the first significant contact with the Hill Tribes of Manipur was made by the Serampore Mission of the British Baptist Missionary Society in the early part of the 19th Century. Curiously enough, the initiative for starting missionary enterprise came from the Government Officials. This was because of the realization of the futility of the policy of military expedition which produced jealousy and suspicion culminating in endless wars of retaliation and revenge. Thus, what could not be achieved by the military power could be gained by the power of the gospel. American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society was the next group of Missionaries who landed in the Naga Hills in 1871. Under the leadership of Mr. William Pettigrew, many Tribals were converted especially the Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur. The next group of Missionaries who came in contact with the Hill Tribes of Manipur was the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission Society (WCMFMS) which were a conglomeration of Anglicans, Welsh Presbyterians and Congregationalists (Independents) under Jacob Tomlin, an ex-missionary of London Missionary Society in India. These Missionaries, in course of time, succeeded in converting the Hill Tribes of Manipur. The single most important development that made the imagining of Nagas as a collectivity possible was their conversion to Christianity. Although, they followed several sects and denominations, their conversion is considered as the most massive movement to Christianity in all of Asia, second only to that of the Philippines, in the words of historian Richard Eaton.

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23 Bhuyan, S.K. (1948) Early British Relation with Assam, Shillong, p.3.
Today, Christianity has become an essential part of Naga identity. But this conversion to Christianity was the result of their incorporation into a larger political, economic, and cultural universe, so was their journey on the road to Nationhood.\(^{30}\)

**Colonialism and Conversion:**

Imperialism, colonial rule and Christian proselytism were the key aspects of the British conquest of North East India in the 19th century. After the British conquest of Assam in 1826, Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam made efforts to bring in the American Baptist Missionary Union based at Boston to work in Assam. Actually Rev. Miles Bronson and his wife were the first Christian missionaries to work among the Konyak Nagas in the village of Nainsang in 1839 but were withdrawn due to the ill health.

After the establishment of the Naga Hills district, another American Baptist missionary, Rev. E. Clark and Mrs. Clark, with native workers from Sibsagar worked among the Ao Nagas. Their mission was a success story. Learning the language, writing their grammar, writing down the tracts and hymns of the Bible, running schools, giving medical service, establishing churches, and generally creating a close interaction with them were the primary objectives of the missionaries. Likewise, many missionaries visited the Naga Hills and came to have direct contact such as the Zemes, the Angami Nagas and the Kabuis.

**Missionaries in Manipur:**

A young missionary William Pettigrew from England was sent by the Arthington Aborigines Mission based at Leeds and named after an English millionaire, Robert Arthington. It was a mobile missionary movement financed by Arthington and each member missionary would be sponsored for three years and then would be withdrawn. William Pettigrew was sent to start proselytizing works among the Meiteis of Manipur, which was conquered in 1891. Pettigrew learnt Manipuri and Bengali while in Bengal, and arrived at Imphal in 1894. However, he faced severe objections from the orthodox Hindu community. And the Political Agent Major Maxwell, who sympathized with the young missionary, advised him to work among the Tangkhul Nagas of Ukhrul. Meanwhile in 1896, the Arthington Mission Society withdrew the sponsorship of William Pettigrew as he had completed three years. Having no alternative, he applied to

the American Baptist Mission of Assam at Sibsagar for sponsorship, which was approved by their authorities at Boston in 1896. William Pettigrew worked in Ukhrul for 25 years, and did pioneering work, started a school and Mission centre, engaged in evangelical work, learnt Tangkhul language and came out of many writings on grammar, customs, religious beliefs in research journals. The first converts were seen from his own Mission school.

Political Agents, Maxwell, John Shakespeare, and A. Porteous gave strong support to the efforts of Rev. William Pettigrew. Shakespeare pressed the American Baptist Mission Union for more missionaries to work at Ukhrul. Thus, the activities of the Christian missionaries were growing day by day. The students of the Mission school taught by Rev. Pettigrew became not only Christian converts but they were made evangelists. Tangkhuls, Meiteis, Kukis, Koms, and Anals joined the school of Rev. Pettigrew at Ukhrul. The Kuki evangelists who were the students of the Ukhrul Mission School specially, Teba Karong, Longkhovel Kom and others did evangelical work in Southeast and Northwest part of Manipur hills. However, there was a strong objection from the Manipur State Darbar against the increase in the number of missionaries, location or establishment of Churches in the valley or conversion of any persons in the Imphal valley. But the conversion was started in the hills and among the tribes who had built up a good rapport with the British authorities despite the policy of “strict religious neutrality”.

Throughout the world, whether they are the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam, people generally find it very difficult to change from one faith to another. So, it was with the people of Kabui Nagas. To give up the ancient belief which was deeply rooted in their customs or religion was looked upon with hostility.

The Kabuis have an interesting tradition about a prophet named Panmei Guibamreiyang of Tamenglong village who foretold the coming of Christianity at least one hundred years before William Pettigrew arrived in Manipur. In a statement which brings to mind Acts 17: 6, he predicted a strange future, “the world will be upside down to me”. He spoke of roads, markets, shops and fine buildings that would one day be constructed. More important, he had a vision in which he saw the heavens opened with angels moving about and heard bells ringing. Though most of his contemporaries through him mad, they remembered a song that used to be sung again years later after Guibamreiyang had died; it was sung the Christians who called it “Ring the bells of
Heaven.\textsuperscript{31} The Zeliangrong tribes, prior to the coming of Christianity, were bound and blinded by all kinds of superstitions and practices. They were literally dead as far as their spiritual lives were concerned. Living in the dark jungles and forests they were not only far from the touch of civilization, but also from the true light by which they needed to see the reality of life. While they were living in such darkness, not knowing where to go and what to do, God, out of his love and through his faithful servant, proclaimed the Gospel of salvation in the Zeliangrong regions.

**Early Missionaries:**

The British Rule was established with the fall of the resistance of Manipur Raja against the British in 1891. Along with it, the door for the gospel of Christ was opened. The first seed of the gospel sown in the eastern gate-way of India was through Rev. William Pettigrew. He was sent out as a missionary by a wealthy Englishman named Arthington Aborigines whose wealth enabled him to start his own mission programme. While as a member of the Church of England, Pettigrew became convinced of the inadequacy of infant baptism and accordingly received believer before he came to Manipur from R. Write Hay, a missionary from a Baptist Missionary Society living in Dacca. On his way to Manipur he stayed in Silchar for three years as the power of the British had not been fully established in the state. In this period he mastered both Bengali and Manipuri to a great extent. Mr. Major Wood, the acting superintendent of Manipur state, permitted Pettigrew to come to Imphal, the capital of Manipur. Thus he set foot on the soil of Manipur on January 6, 1894. It was a momentous date, for it was then he, the first missionary began fulfilling Christ’s last injunction to his followers to share the good tidings of Jesus Christ.

The primary task with which he began was education. He wrote books to prepare for advancing education and literature such as the Manipuri Primer, Grammar text books and an English-Bengali-Manipuri Dictionary. He soon started two Lower Primary schools at Thangmeiband and Terakeithen in Imphal area. As the state authority realized how much the missionary was taking interest in and using his talents for the upliftment of the people he was appointed as an honorary inspector of schools. At this time the number of schools increased to eleven in the state. He held this office for two years.

In spite of the valuable services he had rendered to the people, the state of Darbar became jealous of him. They forbade his work which was highly pleasing. The state Superintendent had to ask rather unwillingly that he either leaves Imphal or that he stops his missionary work as no preaching was to be permitted among the Hindus of the Meiteis. However, William Pettigrew was permitted to work at his own risk among the Nagas in the hills. He went to the North-Eastern hills of Imphal, among the Tangkhul Nagas. There he has to repeat the process of learning a language, produced it to print, and prepared text books. Eventually he opened a school at Ukhrul. He also helps the state as an officiating officer in all matters affecting the day to day administration of the hills. Most of the students who come to Ukhrul from different tribes of different areas become Christians while reading in the school. When they return to their respective homes they help to spread the gospel of Christ. Thus the gospel message was communicated to the Kukis, Anals, Kheis and Maos. However, the Ukhrul School was a distant for the Kabuis. There was no possibility for them to hear the name of Christ. They waited until a faithful man came to preach to his own people.

As a rule of his mission board Pettigrew would go back home after three years of service. But being wanted to continue with his mission in serving God, he once joined the American Baptist Mission which had been at work in the Naga Hill, so that he could stay in Manipur and neighbouring hills. This took place in the month of February, 1896. As the need of mission work increases Rev and Mrs U.M. Fox were invited to Manipur in 1911. For one year Fox and Pettigrew worked together. When William Pettigrew left for Furlough, Rev Fox took complete charge of the mission for five years. He opened the way for higher education by sending the students to high school. He also introduced carpentry school. This new training enabled the simple villagers to make modern furniture and to build more comfortable houses for their own families.

The First Convert of the Kabuis (Rongmeis) among the Zeliangrong Nagas, Manipur

The first man who was converted to christianity was Kamei Namrijinpou commonly called Maipak. He was born at Khoukiu, a village in hills. He and his father moved to the Imphal suburb of Keishamthong, a Rongmei village, following his mother’s death. His father secured employment for him in the Rajah’s band where he was eventually elevated to the rank of Major. In the course of time he married a
girl by the name Pantiguangliu but their marriage was marked by tragedy. All the children born to them died in infancy. In his increasing unhappiness Namrijinpou began to search for some thing that would bring him peace. It was during this time that he met Pettigrew and received from the missionary some tracts and scripture portion in Bengali. He also had long conversations with two of the early Kom converts from Ukhrul school- Teba and Longkhobel. In 1994 he and his wife accepted the new faith. He was baptized by U.M. Fox on the 6th December 1915 in Imphal. In the same year a son was born to them and the son lived. They named him David, alias Kaphunling which means ‘the seed of life’. His son grew up to be an outstanding Christian leader.

Namrijinpou and his friends started a small church building at Keishamthong. They began a strong evangelistic programmed. Though they were very few, every Sunday they rang the church bell and worshipped the lord.

Down says, “Early in 1926 a church (the second Baptist church in Manipur) was organized by Pettigrew at Keishamthong. Namrijinpou had been only one of the six persons Baptist at Imphal in December 1914. Others were added to the small Christian community including two Meitei women so that when the church was established it had 18 members including a Gorkha and a Sema as well as Meiteis, Rongmeis and Kukis”.

The hostility of the village increased against the family of Namrijinpou, but in spite of this he kept on preaching. Because he was so fascinated by the word of God, he resigned from his Government position on May 15, 1919, In order to take up evangelistic work among his own people, the Rongmeis, in the western hills of Manipur.

At the time when Namrijinpou, began preaching, there were some Kuki s Christian Churches at Tuiyangwaichong, Makui, Taphou and Langkhong. However, as stated earlier, the good news had never reached the Kabui Nagas. It is true when Pettigrew said in his report, “The people of Thadou Kukis are on the whole more open minded and acceptable to the truth of the gospel than the Naga tribes.” We cannot deny the words of T.Luikham when he said, “No want can deny the name ‘Savage’ for our people with our forefathers naked and their knowledge limited, when they

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32 Ibid. p.174.
were fighting each other for no lasting benefit and when life and property were insecured. In the midst of such terrible and difficult times Namrijinpou had brought the great joy of peace to his people. Due to his constant preaching, Mr. Jinlakpou of Kaikao village began to take interest in this new faith. When the Kukis rebelled in 1918-1919, Namrijinpou's evangelistic work was hampered. The preaching of the gospel was not possible in the whole areas. William Pettigrew said, "It must not be forgotten the mission work of any kind, so far as the missionaries were concerned, was absolutely forbidden during this local war".

The Naga began to assist the troops of the British Indian against the Kukis. Mr. Rani-Kamang Pamei of Dailong, Mr. Poudilemang Taoting and Mr. Sitonnang Pamei of Tamenglong were the leaders who led the troops and attacked the camp of Laijang (now known as Tamenglong Town) by night and capture Tintong, the chief of the rebelling Kukis. In the south of Tamenglong the troop was led by Jinlakpou of Kaikao village while he was at the outpost of Oinamlong. After a year Jinlakpou had been newly established at the end of 1919. In that way the Kuki rebellion was completely subdued.

The First Baptist Church in the Zeliangrong Area

Soon after the Kuki rebellion was subdued, an administrative head quarters was set up for Naga Hills Tamenglong Branch at Tamenglong (locally known as Nrenglong) in 1919. But owing to certain inconvenience after four years, the site of the head quarters was shifted to a new place about 5kms southward (at the present site of the present District head quarters). During that time no one from the Tamenglong village was converted into Christianity except some Government officials from Kuki tribes. In 1920 these Government officials and non-Christians of the Tamenglong village constructed a small Kutcha house with bamboo roofing for the purpose of worshipping Jesus Christ, under the initiative of Mr. Late Ngulhao Thomsong, Nungkhothang and Jalian. Thus, Tamenglong became the village where the first Baptist Church in the Zeliangrong area was established. After the Kuki rebellion Jinlakpou was appointed to an important Government post at the newly established sub-divisional head quarters at Tamenglong. There his interest in Christianity was revived through contact with Kuki Christians. He was converted into Christianity and

34 T. Luikham: (1948) A Short History of Manipur Baptist Christian Ukhrul.
35 Ibid. p.92
the record of his name of being converted was made first at this newly established church. Thus, he was the second Christian among the Zeliangrong Nagas. And he was baptized on the 24th Aug. 1923.

Then Mr. Jinlikpou wanted to go to his village Kaikao to preach the gospel but since he was in the Government service he could not. However, his desire to reach out his people was fulfilled when he was given a duty to take a census of the southern part of Tamenglong. While on census duty he preached in his own village. As a result, a total of ten houses, including that of his own family became Christians. Within two years there were twenty Christian families at Kaikao. The village elders of Kaikao complained against the Christians to the Government that they were destroying the tradition of the people. As a result they moved and founded a Christian village which they called Sempang, where they have planted the first Zeliangrong Naga Baptist Church in 1923.

Persecution among the early Christians:
The early Christians were severely persecuted by their villagers right from the beginning. The non-Christians believed that every conversion was a loss to the old faith.

The first kind of persecution was reported in Kaikao village in 1923-24 where the new Christian converts were asked to leave the village. They were looked down as enemies and false accusations were labeled to them. For instance, the villagers of Kaikao complained that the Christians were destroying the tradition of the people. In the words of Rev. Ramkhun, “the Christians in Kaikao village was ordered to leave the village in a week’s time and on refusal the Sub-Divisional Officer of Tamenglong who supported the non-Christians fined them with Rs.4000 for causing pain and trouble in the village”.

In 1938, another incident of persecution occurred at Tamenglong in Manipur. The Christian church was pulled downed on the complaint that the church building which was made of semi-pucca was not a traditional building and could not be used as a house of worship. Once again, the then SDO of Tamenglong R.H.Shaw supported the non-Christians and gave an order to destroy it on 17th November 1938.

Similar persecution was faced by the Christians of Sempang in 1951 when they moved back to Kaikao ancestral village. When they were constructing a house of

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36 Ramkhun op.cit.1996. p.50.
worship, they were attacked by non-christians and eventually three Christian’s leaders were killed and eleven injured. The history of such persecution and conflict goes back to the Zeliangrong movement started by Jadonang and then by Rani Gaidinliu where the two groups fought on religious issues.

In May 1966, four church leaders from Namtiram village who were on their way to attend Taosem Baptist Church Building dedication were killed by the non-Christians.

In 1985 when Christianity came to Sangaiprou village under the leadership of Gaijon Newmei and Kwaklei Gonmei in Imphal, the Christians were again severely persecuted. The two families were threatened to leave the village, their houses stoned and fined heavily by the village authority. They were ex-communicated and whoever caught speaking to them were punished by the village. In June 2005 the Sangaiprou Baptist Youth (BYF) were invited by the All India Radio (AIR), Imphal to perform a cultural Kabui dance. However, the Youth Club of Sangaiprou whose majority are non-christians complaint against them arguing that they did not have the right to perform such dances. The beating of drums used in the Church was again brought up in the Sangaiprou Village Authority (locally known as Pei) and ordered not to use while singing in the church.

Another incident of alleged beating up of new Christian converts was reported at Chingmeirong Rongmei colony on 13th July 2006. Three families who were converted were asked to leave the village and ex-communicated. The problem is not yet solved even today. There are many more Kabui Christians who are persecuted in many forms and degrees. However, there is the growing number of Christian faiths among the Kabui tribe.

Social Change and Christianity:
Christianity in Manipur is by and large the product of British Missionaries who had come and stayed for many years. There are two schools of thought on social change and Christianity. One school argues that it brought drastic changes in society and the other who argued that Christianity has destroyed the traditional customs and culture of the Kabui Nagas. In the words of Prof. Gangmumei Kamei, “In the Zeliangrong area, there was not much help from the foreign missionaries; the Christian missionary movement was more or less as indigenous effort. However, the Christian missionaries in their mission to spread Christianity tried to destroy the social and cultural life of the people. By bans on dance and music, on the dormitory system, rejection of the
authority of the traditional Village Council, Christianity had caused great damage to the Zeliangrong culture.\textsuperscript{37} Likewise Vaiphei opined that, "the Kabuis lived in the plains (in and around Imphal City) with the Meiteis. They however did not assimilate to Hinduism. Their living in the city gave better educational opportunity to their children. So the application and identification of education and cleanliness with Christians in the hills did not apply to them. They get educated while remaining non-Christians".\textsuperscript{38}

The above argument to some extent is right in saying that the early Christians had discarded many traditional beliefs and culture of the people. However, it would be wrong in saying that the missionaries had brought less change in the Kabui society. It was during the British colonialism that many developmental activities and opportunities were given to the hilly tribes including the Kabuis. It was during their period that formal education was introduced in schools and colleges. They have brought better transport and communication system such as telegraph, telegram, radio, automobiles, electricity, hospitals, water supply and drainage system. It was the missionaries who introduced the art of writing which at later resulted in developing many distinct languages with proper grammar and pronunciation. The translation of the Bible into vernacular dialects for instance, translation of the Bible into Rongmei in 1979, Zeme in 1979 and Liangmei in 1982\textsuperscript{39} help the people to engage in reading and writing. Even the non-Christians directly and indirectly got benefits from the Christian missionaries. Most of their children were sent to the schools and convents run by the missionaries and as a result they got more exposure and employment. However, as stated above the early Christians discarded many customs and traditions of the people in the name of development and progress. They gave up many cultural practices, beliefs, rites, rituals and festivals. Even today the Christians do not believe in the traditional authority such as the Village Council and the Chief. Instead, the system of church and its leaders gain more importance and popular. In the course of time they prefer to remain different and asserted their identity through the new religion. The traditional music, folksongs, dance, drums are replaced by the modern Christian hymnals, chorus and music instruments such as guitar, keyboard and western drums. (See photo 1).

Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak:

In the history of the development of the traditional religions, there was no conscious effort to give a name to traditional religions. So was the case with many of the world religions. Hinduism was a religion whose name historically evolved through many centuries, so also Judaism or the Hebrew religion, Buddhism or Christianity. However, a comparison of these religions provides the following criteria for the evolution of their names.

1. The religion which was named after the God whom its followers worship like the following:
   (a) Vaisnavism: The cult of the worship of Lord Vishnu of the Hindus.
   (b) Saivism: The cult of the worship of Shiva of the Hindus.
   (c) Sakti/Saktism: the cult of the worship of Shakti (energy) in the form of mother like durga, Kali etc.

2. The religion which was named after the name of its founder like the following:
   (a) Buddhism: Founded by Gautam Buddha (India)
   (b) Zaroasterianism: Founded by Zaroaster (Iran)
   (c) Christianity: Founded by Jesus Christ (Israel)
   (d) Confucianism: Founded by Confucius (China)

3. Religions were also named on certain philosophical message of the particular religion; viz.
   (a) Islam: Islam means peace in Arabic. It was founded by Hazrat Mohammad of Arabia.
   (b) Taoism: Tao means the path or the way to God. It was founded by Lao Tzu of China.
   (c) Traditional religions like Judaism (Religion of Hebrew), Hinduism (religion of Hindus), Shintoism (religion of the Japanese) or the Sheng Khasi (religion of the Khasis) did not have a single religions teacher who founded the religion. However, they had many prophets and law givers.

Earlier efforts on Religion:

Many efforts were made earlier to give a name to the Zelianrong Religion. The Zelianrong religion like Hinduism, Shintoism or Judaism is a traditional religion and the need for a common name of the religion was felt by every section of the society. The practice of believing of Gods and Godesses was present right from the beginning. However, it was not organized to identify as a distinct religion. The identity of the faith
in its relation to other world religion is to be established. The census of India, 1961 recorded nearly a score of name; some efforts were made to give a name to the religion.

(i) *Heraka* is the name of the reformed cult developed by Rani Gaidinliu as revealed to her and Haipou Bhamei Bisnu at the holy cave of Bisnu at Bhuvan hills of Assam in 1931. Heraka means in Zeme “Pure” (Not Impure).

(ii) “*Champa*” is profounded by *Tingkao Ragwang Kariak Champa Phoam.* It means that from time to time, many attempts were made to define and give a common religion to the Zeliangrong people. The first mass movement to revitalize traditional religion was started by Jadonang and then continued under the leadership of Rani Gaidinliu. There was some impact and the result was manifested in some aspects. But, it could not strike at the root as the movement faced many circumstances. The conference of Zeliangrong religion in April, 1994 convened by the steering committee on conference on Zeliangrong religion was a historic in this field. It discussed the name of the religion of the Zeliangrong people in great detail. This conference was of the opinion that the religion should be named after the name of the supreme and Almighty God. It was expressed that the supreme and Almighty God who is the creator and Supreme Being is Tingkao Ragwang. The Zeliangrong people worship him as the Almighty God. It is considered appropriate to name the Zeliangrong religion after the Almighty God. There are references to the Almighty God in Zeme and Liangmai which is termed “Tingwong”.

This Conference therefore resolved that the Zeliangrong religion be named “*Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak* “vide resolution no. 5 dated 16-4-1994.

The conference on the Zeliangrong Religion held at G.M. hall, Imphal from 14th to 16th April 1994 was a historic and the first of its kind in the religions history of the Zeliangrong people. This conference was convened by the steering committee which was established by the Zeliangrong custom and religion protection committee, Manipur and its President was Shri M. Maringa. This conference, having deliberated on different aspects of the Zeliangrong religion, resolved to declare that the Zeliangrong people as an indigenous people have the right to profess, propagate and preserve our indigenous faith and practice with its related philosophy and theology.

The Conference expressed strongly its concern that the lack of a community level religion authority is the main cause of the decline of the Zeliangrong religion in terms of the numbers of its followers and its consequent stagnancy. Further, this conference, having resolved the great need to form a common religious authority of the
traditional Zeliangrong Religion covering Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, after a
detailed consideration, resolved to constitute a religious authority of the traditional
Zeliangrong religion called the “Zeliangrong Rachap-Riak Phom” (The Zeliangrong
Religious Council).

The Conference discussed the Draft constitution of the Zeliangrong Rachap-
Riak Phom which was prepared by the constitution drafting committee and approved it.
It elected the new office-bearers, the members of the Executive council and Shri
Mangthoi Thaimei was the first president of this phom and the Ecclesiastical council
was constituted and its members were also elected.

The Conference discussed minutely the name of the religion of the Zeliangrong
people in great detail. The participants were of the opinion that the religion should be
named after the supreme and almighty God Tingkao Ragwang who is the creator of all.
There were references to the almighty God in Zeme and Liangmei which is termed
“Tingwong”. This conference therefore resolved that the Zeliangrong Religion be
named “Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak”. Apart from the decision, the conference has
resolved the following points:

1. This Conference resolved that every Zeliangrong village should construct a
temple or a place of worship dedicated to Tingkao Ragwang and further
resolved that there should be community or mass prayer in every village
offered to Tingkao Ragwang on every full Moon Day. There may be prayer
in the individual family or group of families also.

2. The formal declaration of “Laogai Karikmei” based on custom to start the
name of Zeliangrong Religion i.e. “Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak” was
carried out on Thursday, the 21st April 1994 at community Hall, Majorkhul
Imphal at 10 A.M. by Shri R. Thaninchao, Khullakpa of Namthanlong
Imphal and a member of Ecclesiastical council of Zeliangrong Rachap-Riak
Phom.

3. The devotees of Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak felt that the need of the hour
was to construct a place of worship of Tingkao Ragwang to check the
external influence and onslaught by other religion to our indigenous faith.
Therefore, the council purchased a piece of paddy field measuring an area of
5 (five) louses and paying a sum of Rs.3(three) lakhs at the present site of
Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai, Chingmeirong and also purchased the
approach-road leading to Kalum Kai measuring an area of 180 X 12 feet by paying a sum of Rs.1.41 lakhs.

4. The 3rd foundation day cum annual general meeting of Zeliangrong Rachap-Riak Phom held on 16th April 1996 at G.M. Hall, Imphal discussed the symbol of Tingkao Ragwang. It was revealed by the office-bearers of this phom that for about two years, there had been intensive and extensive discussion in the matter. Several members were sent out to examine the symbol of worship of Tingkao Ragwang. While the meeting noted the need for adoption of a common symbol; there are local variations in the use of symbol. This symbol was based on ceremony at Tingkao Ragwang (Ragwangjang Lamei Kahiak). Therefore, after a long deliberation it was resolved unanimously to adopt the following symbol.

**Criteria for naming the religion:**

If naming after the founder is to be adopted as the criteria, as the Zeliangrong religion has no founder (of course several Muhs are there). However, these Muhs or the Priests cannot be considered as the founder of this religion. If it is to be based on the criteria of the community or tribe, it will lose the spiritual and philosophical contents of the religion. There is no alternative but to name it after the name of the Almighty God whom the Zeliangrong people worshipped from the ages. Therefore, it was resolved by the people to name ‘Tingwang’ in Zeme and Liangmei meaning the ‘Lord of the Universe’. At the whole, ‘Tingkao Ragwang’ means ‘Heavenly Supreme God’.

**Meaning of Tingkao Ragwang or Ragwang:**

Ragwang literally means the King of Gods, used in common parlance, Ragwang means God. However, there is a mythical account of the birth of Ragwang and his brother God in mysterious circumstances. There was a struggle for the throne of the king of Gods (Ragwang). He was born of unwedded Goddess, named Charasinglangpui, sister of the previous Ragwang who after making his nephew Ragwang (the King of Gods) retired to become Bangla Gwang (the God of Earthquake). His abode is supposed to be at Ragwang Phaipa (the landing place of God) in the Koubru peak in Manipur. The Ragwang of this myth who is worshipped now had parents. Tingkao Ragwang, the King of the Gods of the Universe is believed to be the Supreme Being who is the creator, redeemer, and eternal. And Ragwang of the above myth is believed to be the God in charge of human world and the God of the lower realm (Na-Ragwang). There is also a
popular usage of description of Gods based on direction *Na-Ragwang*, God of the lower realm, *Neikei Ragwang*; God of the western side, perhaps meaning “Bisnu”, the eldest brother of Ragwang, the God of the myth connected with Charasinglangpui.

**Symbol of Tingkao Ragwang:**

The Third Foundation Day cum Annual General Meeting of Zeliangrong Religion Council held on 16th April, 1996 at G.M. Hall, Imphal discussed the symbol of Tingkao Ragwang. It was revealed by the office bearers of this *Phom* (Council) that for about two years, there had been intensive and extensive discussion in the matter. Several members were sent out to examine the symbol of worship of Tingkao Ragwang. While the meeting noted the need for adoption of a common symbol; there are local variations in the use of symbol. This symbol was based on ceremony at worship at Tingkao Ragwang (*Ragwangjang Lamei Kahiak*). Therefore, after long deliberations it was resolved unanimously to adopt the following symbol.

![Symbol of Tingkao Ragwang](image)

**Interpretation of the Symbol:**

(i) The outer circle represents the universe.  
(ii) The two poles in the east and west represent as Didet (Bread) 
(iii) The two poles in the south and north represent as Ditung (Length)  
(iv) The centre space is known as Dichung or Dila (centre).  
(v) The circle is the sun and the white circle is the moon.  
(vi) This symbol must be used both in performance of prayer on every Full Moon Day and every Sunday offered to Tingkao Ragwang and any occasion of worship of Tingkao Ragwang.  
(vii) The universe, the sun, the moon, the earth and all other cosmic objects are the creation of the Almighty God, Tingkao Ragwang. He is believed to be absolutely benevolent.
Now, all the followers of this religion are to use the name “Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak” for educational, official, employment and census purposes. The symbol of Tingkao Ragwang represents his divine grace and power as reflected in the cosmos and universe. This symbol may be painted in the Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai and used as lockets and stickers. This symbol is the identifying mark of Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak.

The Council on the 4th Foundation Day cum Annual General Meeting held on 16-4-1997 had discussed the total abolition of unnatural death prevailing in Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak and resolved to approve the proposed reforms. The longstanding demand for declaration of Gaan-Ngai festival as general holiday was also discussed and debated. It was a great hope and aspiration of the followers of Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak in particular and Zeliangrong people in general and the aspiration was fulfilled with the installation of United Front Govt. led by Shri W. Nipamacha Singh by declaring the Gaan-Ngai festival as general holiday on 10th January 1998 vide order no.1/7/91-R and L/pt-iv dated 27-12-1997. It is a landmark in the religious history of Zeliangrong. So, the council extends its gratitude to Prof. Gangmumei Kamei, the then Hon,ble Minister, forest and environment. Govt. of Manipur for his wisdom by convincing the cabinet meeting held on 16-12-1997 to declare the Gaan-Ngai festival as General Holiday. As a gesture of obligation, the Zeliangrong Rachap-Riak Phom celebrated the festival in a grand manner with pomp and gaiety at Ragailong, Imphal on 10-1-1998 by inviting the Council of Ministers of Nipamacha Ministry and a shawl (Pheingao) was presented to all Ministers present.

The 5th Foundation Day on full moon day cum Annual General Meeting was held on 16-4-1998 and endorsed the resolution no.1.(one) dated 16-4-1997 and resolved that all kind of deaths both natural and unnatural deaths should be given normal and regular ceremony. On 11-5-1998 at 7-30 a.m. at the complex of Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai (the Temple) on full moon day the ceremony of ‘laogai karikmei’ based on Zeliangrong practice and tradition was performed by Shri Kameiphun Kamei, the then Khullapa of Kakhulong Peikai who declared that there shall be no unnatural death in the religion of Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak.
**Concept of Salvation:**

The aim of *Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak* is salvation of soul of men. According to our Belief, Tingkao Ragwang entrusted a mother creator named Dampapui to create men and other creatures. *Dampapui* created man in the image of God and all creatures of the universe. Tingkao Ragwang breathed soul into the body of man and bodies of creatures. Traditional ways to the salvation of soul or the way to Tingkao Ragwang are manifold. The most prominent way to Tingkao Ragwang or Heaven is through the performance of several religious sacrifices namely *Mulengmei, Mulengdai, Baanru Dungmei, Tarang Kai Shumei*. The philosophy behind these sacrifices is charity offered by the performers to men and God. Devotional hymns are sung and dances are performed accompanied by the chanting of invoking “Ho, Ho”. The *Tarang* sacrifices House representing the universe and dedication of the same to the Almighty, Tingkao Ragwang.

There are other ways of approaching God through smaller sacrifices and chanting of prayer.

Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak is giving emphasis on the prayer and meditation on Tingkao Ragwang for the salvation of the soul of men. Every individual may now attempt to attain salvation through the prayer to Tingkao Ragwang. Come and let us pray to him on every Sunday and every full Moon day at *Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai*, Chingmeirong, Imphal.

**Construction of ‘Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai:’**

The foundation pillar of Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai was erected on 2-11-1998 by Shri R. Thaninchao, Khullakpa of Namthanlong. The length of the Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai is 117 feet from rear pillar to front pillar and front wall to rear wall is 102 feet and its bread from (east to west) wall to wall is 45 feet and its high beam is 20 feet and its high of the roofing summit is 42 feet.

The Construction Committee of Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai had completed the works of construction of Tingkao Ragwang Kalum Kai through public donation taking 30 months and 5 days w.e.f. 2-11-1998 to 6-5-2001 and spending an expenditure of Rs. 39,92,185/= (Rupees Thirty nine lakhs ninety two thousand one hundred eighty five) only. The said Kalum Kai (A house of worship of Tingkao ragwang) which is the biggest temple among the indigenous religions in north east India was dedicated to Haipou Tingkao Ragwang by Prof. Gangmumei Kamei, former hon,ble minister, forests and environment and election, Manipur on behalf of the
devotees on 7th may 2001 at 6-45 a.m. so, the Kalum Kai has been functioning ever since.

However, the Zeliangrong Rachap- Riak Phom faces a great deal of financial problems for not having a constant source of income. In order to cope with the financial problems the Council plans to have a permanent source of income raising monthly subscription especially from the employees, pensioners and others who follow Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak. The income from “offering” made by the followers on every Sunday and every full moon day though small is used to meet all maintenance charges of the Temple. The actual amount of payment of Honorium is RS.3000/= per month. (a caretaker Rs.2000/- and a worker Rs.1000/-).

The Council also involved in emergency services for instance the recent flood in which (August 2002 flood) the Council donated a sum of Rs. 1000/- each to the affected villages namely (1) Chingkham (2) Keikhu and (3) Naorem. The Council sometimes extended financial help for medical treatment to the members of this Council.

Besides these, the Council acts as a medium in demanding for the welfare and development of the Community. When the Government of Manipur deleted the Gaan-Ngai festival from the list of General Holidays of Manipur Government on 20-10-2002, it acted as a pressure group with the other Organizations and demanded restoration of Gaan-Ngai holiday. Ultimately due to the public pressure, the Government of Manipur restored the Gaan-Ngai holiday on 11-11-2002. As a sign of victory and happiness the Gaan-Ngai Celebration Committee, Manipur organized a State level Gaan-Ngai festival at Bagyachandra Open Air Theatre (BOAT), Imphal on 16th January 2003 with Shri Ved Marwah, His Excellency the then Governor of Manipur as the Chief Guest, Shri O. Ibobi Singh, the then Hon,ble Chief Minister of Manipur as the President and Shri Z. Mangaibou, the then Hon,ble Minister of State (Independent) SCERT, Shri Samuel Jendai, the then Hon,ble MLA and Shri G.Patrick, former President, Zeliangrong Union as the Guests of Honour. Other State high dignitaries namely Shri S. Natum Singh, the then Hon,ble Minister of State (Ind) Science and Technology, Shri W. Nipamacha Singh, former Hon,ble Minister of Forest and Environment, Manipur and thousands participated the celebration.

The above discussion shows an ethnic assertion of the Kabui Nagas through Zeliangrong Movement, Christianization and Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak. As we have seen earlier, Zeliangrong Movement was a response to several factors that
threatened the traditional Kabui culture. However, in the present day times this movement is seen to have re-defined its position and thereby aims at reviving the religion of the tribe through the Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak. Therefore, one can argue that Tingkao Ragwang Chap-Riak is a part of Zeliangrong movement.

On the other hand Christianity was the result of British Colonialism in Manipur. The Kabui Christians accepted the new religion and asserted their identity through it. Even today they do not involve in the traditional dances and festivals of their tribe. This has created a distant relation with their own people who adhere to the traditional beliefs, faiths and customs. It is here that the next chapter is crucial in the understanding of the identity of the Kabui Nagas. It also explains the factors which lead to identity-crisis of the Kabui Nagas.
Photos of Chapter 6

Photo 1: A Kabui Christian wedding.

Photo 1a: Exchange of traditional shawls in a Kabui Christian wedding.

Photo 1b: The modern Kabui couple with traditional dresses.