Chapter-3

Historical Background of the Kabui Nagas of Manipur
Chapter-III

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The study of the Kabui Nagas will be incomplete without locating the roots or the past history. This chapter therefore, aims at tracing the origin of the tribe. The first task is to divide the history into three phases based on the significance of the period and the social changes experienced by it – the legendary or the pre-historic period; the early history till the colonial period; and the post colonial or the post independent period.

The history of the Kabui Nagas is the story of the evolution of the society in time and space. It is the story of the development of their culture and civilization. However, to write about them is equally a challenging task since the past story of the people is narrated in their rich folklore, myths and legends, songs and ballads, religious hymns and oral traditions handed down from generation to generation. As most of them are not written into texts and documents, they remain in the realm of oral folklore. To Ajay Skaria¹, “with the emergence of the literate culture, oral traditions about the past are expected to be slowly forgotten, to be replaced by a literate historical culture”. Therefore, history sometimes implies the folk memory of the community particularly of a non-literate or preliterate one, which shares the common heritage. Such understanding without proper sources could distort history and may lead to artificial creation of story. Thus, in order to find deeper knowledge and analysis of the problem, a comparative study has been made with the existing literature and the oral history of the tribe through a detailed interview and discussion. To achieve the goal, all secondary resources are closely examined and verified through several rounds of participant observation followed by interviews and discussions of the selected and concerned persons.²

Sources of information:

Though references to the people are found in the Chronicles of Manipur, the first English accounts of the Kabui Nagas was given by Captain R.B.Pemberton, in his Report of the Eastern Frontier of British India (1835). He was the first European

² While analyzing the historical background of the Kabui Nagas, I relied most of the writings of Prof. Gangmumei Kamei who at the present is the greatest historian in the field. However, to arrive at the conclusion, cross checking was done through suitable technique of research.
to have visited the Zeme, Rongmei and Puimei villages. He used the term “Koupooees” to mean the people. The second writer who refers to the Kabui people of the present Manipur, Nagaland and North Cachar was John Butler in his *Travels and Adventure in the Province of Assam* (1855). But the pioneer work on the people living in Manipur was Col. William McCulloch’s *Account of the Valley of Munnipore and the Surrounding Hill Tribes* published in 1859. McCulloch was a British Political Agent posted in Manipur for many years. He was known at that time as an expert on the state of Manipur and the surrounding hill tribes. But his use of Pemberton’s term ‘Koupooee’ and the Puimei term of ‘Songboo and Pooeeron’ as the two Subdivisions, of the tribe has left behind a trail of identity confusion. Otherwise his account reproduced elsewhere in this work is very important. In 1874, the *Statistical Account of Manipur* written by another distinguished British Political Agent, Dr. R. Brown continued to add more to the knowledge of the ‘Koupois’ tribe. He divided the tribe into three sub groups- Songbu (Rongmei), Koireng (Liangmei), and Koupui (puimei). Both McCulloch and Brown exclusively dealt with the Kabui Nagas.

C.A Soppit was another officer who served in North Cachar Hills of Assam. He wrote a complete work entitled, *A Short Account of the Kachcha Naga (Empeo) Tribe in the North Cachar Hills* in 1885. He used the term *Empeo* to mean the Zeme. However, it did not have much circulation. In fact it was T.C. Hodson who was then Assistant Political Agent of Manipur and who later joined the London University as a Professor of Anthropology who wrote on the Kabui in his *Naga Tribes of Manipur* in 1911. The confused title of the tribe as *Koupoosee* or *Koupui* was set to rest when he adopted the term ‘Kabui’ a name of the Rongmei and Puimei used by the Manipuris. Kabui was the term used in the ancient, medieval and modern history of Manipur. Dr. J.H. Hutton in his *The Angami Nagas* in 1929 used the term ‘kacha Naga’ to cover the four subgroups- Zeme, Liangmai, Maruongmei and Kabui. Robert Reid’s *History of Areas Bordering Assam* published in 1942 gives an account of the Zeliangrong revolt (1930-1940) whom he described as the Rebellion of the Kabui and Kacha Nagas. Reid’s history publicized the uprisings of Jadonang and Gaidinliu. Ursula Graham Bower’s *Naga Path*, 1950 is a personal experience in the Zeme country. G. Makuga’s *An Introduction to Rongmei Naga*, 1993 was the first work on the Kabui (Rongmei) Nagas. However, the writings of R. Marulung like *Rongmei Wari Shingbun*, 1986; *Zeliangrong Wari Shingbun*, 1996; *Naga Dharma; Rongmei Kashoi Kadam*; and *Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei Luh* written in Manipuri and Kabui have given
accounts of the religion, folklore and songs. Mamgthoi Thaimei's *Bhuban Ching* (Bhuban Hills) is a compendium of Kabui folklore, history of Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu and development of Zeliangrong religion. Asoso Yunuo's *Naga Struggle against the British under Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu* is the first full scale account of the Zeliangrong uprisings. A.K.Nag's *Rani Gaidinliu: Joan of Arc*, 1975 is the first Indian account of Rani Gaidinliu. He also wrote *The Fifty years of Zeliangrong Movement*, 1977, and *Volume of Jadonang*, 1971. R.Constantine's * Manipur Maid of the Mountains*, 1980 devotes a chapter on Rani Gaidinliu. Gangmumei Kamei's bibliographical notes of Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu in * National Biography of India*, 1972 give a definitive biography of the two personalities of Zeliangrong rebellion. His *Jadonang: A Mystic Naga Rebel*, 1997 is a definitive biography or history of Jadonang and the Zeliangrong rebellion. Ragongning Gangmei's *Rongmei Folklore* and *Jadonang Liu* are good contributions. So also are the writings of K.Thenbilung, Sujata Miri's, *The Liangmai Nagas, their story and legends*.

Several doctoral theses on the Kabui Nagas have come out of several Indian Universities. To mention some few, we have Tamphasana Rajkumari’s thesis on a *Zeliangrong Movement* of Manipur University, 1998; Hunibou Newmai’s *Zeliangrong Religion* from North Eastern Hill University, 1986 and so on. There are also several M.Phil dissertations that were written on the Kabui Nagas. For instance, Thenbilung Kamei’s *Social and Cultural life of the Zeliangrong* with special reference to the Rongmei Nagas, Manipur University, 1988; N.B.Pamei’s *The Trails from Makui Longdi*, 2000, Shillong; and N.Daimei’s *The Ethno history of the Zeliangrong Naga*, Manipur University, 1984 etc. However, the terms such as Koupooee, Kabui, Rongmei, and Haomei, were confusingly and synonymously used to mean the tribe. Instead of these names, later writers prefer to call the term Zeliangrong to mean the tribe.

With regard to the sources of information, there has not been much that could give a picture on the whole tribe. However, the archaeological remains like the prehistoric caves, the megaliths or the memorials of the ancestors, stone inscriptions of the neighbouring rulers who made forays into the Zeliangrong country, the relics of fortresses reminiscent of the Burmese invasion and Kachari expedition and historical places of the sojourns of the rulers did provide some account on the tribe. The chronicles of Manipur like the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the *Ningthourol Lambuba*, the *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba* and several historical texts refer to the relation of the
zeliangrong people with the kingdom of Manipur and the principality of Moirang in the South Manipur Valley. The British archival records which are written based on experiences and observations are also available. Moreover various social organizations of the tribe especially after 1947 have preserved many records regarding the political and social development of the Zeliangrong Nagas. Their attempt to integrate themselves into a single community led the tribe to situate them with the past history.

According to Prof. Gangmumeei Kamei (2004), the Zeliangrong history could be spread over three phases; the Pre history which includes the legendary and mythical accounts dealing with the origin and migration of the people from their ancestral place to the present habitat, evolution of their polity and culture through the different stages of civilization from the cave men to the Neolithic age; the ancient period or the early history which deals with the ancient relation of the Kabui Nagas with the Meiteis from the 1st century down to the 18th century; and their contact with the Kachari rulers and the colonial period starting with the gradual conquest of the Kabui Nagas in the 19th century, associated with the introduction of the British rule, and the post-independence period of democratic process, economic development and social consolidation. However, for the sake of better understanding, let us divide the history into three phases; (i) The Legendary or the pre historic period, (ii) The Early history till the Colonial period and finally (iii) the Post Colonial or the Post Independence period.

Historical Period:

The Legendary or the pre historic period:

Ph.Gongchalung in his book Zeliangrong Naga Phaikam divided the period in the traditional history into four Zuks which has been adopted from the Hindi Jug, which is a cycle of time in terms of centuries. They are firstly the Razuk, the age of the gods, secondly, Tamang Tami Zuk, a period of change from the days of gods to that of the beginning of civilization, thirdly, the Kolli Kola Zuk, the age of human civilization, full of material achievements, sufferings, competition among men, simply the age of evil, and fourthly Kolda Zuk, which has yet to come. It is believed that the world will come to an end. This is not a historical periodization but more influenced by Christian or Hindu view of man's civilization on earth.

3 Gongchalung, Ph. (2000) Zeliangrong Naga Phaikam, Imphal, p.11
**Creation of Man:**

Like any other ancient people, the Kabui Nagas have a huge collection of religious hymns and traditions on the story of creation of the universe, the sky, the sun, the moon, and the earth, the gods and men. A divine origin of the universe is the basis of creation. It is believed that, a Supreme Being, called Tingkao Ragwang or Tingwang, was the creator of the universe, the gods, men and animals. It was from His will that creation was started."4

In the beginning, there was a void. The Supreme God, Tingkao Ragwang created the God Dampapu and Dampapui Goddess. In the hymn chanted in the worship of earth, known as the Dichuk, the creation of the earth and universe is narrated. It was believed that man was also created by the will of God. The hymn of the naming ceremony (Najumgaiimei) gives a myth to which the two deities created the man on the advised given by the Supreme God. Another tradition gives a narrative in which the two deities created several prototypes of man; they created a fish called Khagak, a toad and a monkey. However, the Supreme God was not pleased, so the fish was freed into water, the toad on the land, and the monkey in the trees. Being not satisfied at the creation of the two deities, Supreme God, Tingkao Ragwang showed his image to them so that they could create man and woman after his image. The two deities created them with the clay of the earth. But once again the two bodies were lifeless. The Supreme God then gave life and blessed them with fertility. Later, the two deities also created plants, animals, birds and insects.

**Origin and Migration:**

There is no scientific prove with regard to the original homeland and the migration of the Kabui Nagas. Though, folklore, mythology and ethnology have been utilized to arrive at a tentative conclusion, there has been no archaeological finding so far. The historicity of the ethnic territory of the Nagas in general has been more or less settled with John Butter’s report of 1873 on the Naga territory. However, the different admixtures during their long period of migration have made the search for the roots of the Kabui Nagas difficult as the myths and legends have been plenty and profuse and difficult to identify. At the same time, layers and layers existed in the migration and settlement of the people right up to the present day.

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According to Dr.G.A. Grierson⁵, the Zeliangrong people speak a language related to the Bodos of Assam and has been grouped under a sub-family of Naga-Bodo within the Tibeto Burman languages. Another Indian philologist, Dr.S.K. Chatterjee⁶ has grouped the Zeliangrongs under the Indo-Mongoloids, a name coined by him to mean the Tibeto-Burman group of races and languages and several linguistic and anthropological studies confirm this opinion. Racially, the Kabui Nagas are Mongoloid, a group of the southern Mongoloids who migrated southward across the Himalayas in the prehistoric period of Northeastern India and Southeast India. Many Naga traditions point to Makhel in North Manipur as their homeland and a point of migration during their migration from South West China to Burma and island southeast Asia, and then North ward movement back to Manipur, then to northern Manipur before branching out to their respective tribal habitats.

It is believed that the southwestern region of ancient China including Yunan was inhabited by the non-Han Chinese ethnic groups. On the basis of tradition and linguistics, southwest China had been identified as the original homeland of the speakers of Sino-Tibetan language;⁷ the land between the upper course of Yang His Kiang and Hwang Ho. The Tibeto Burman and the Siamese-Chinese groups belong to this linguistic family. Therefore, the Nagas, the Meiteis, Kachin and Kuki-Chins must have lived in this region of China, and migrated to northeast India via Burma, and South East Asia, in batches and at different periods. The Kabui Nagas used ‘sea coast objects’ like shells, cowries and conchshells in their cultural usages, hinting at their habitation in western islands of South East Asia. Dr.J.H. Hutton and Dr.W.C. Smith on the basis of comparative ethnography, have pointed out similarity among the various Naga tribes of Burma, Indonesia, Philippines and even New Zealand. Though lacking in solid evidence, it is difficult to ignore these highly authoritative speculations. It must have taken centuries for the ancestors of the Kabui tribe to move down from the mountains South West China to the equally rugged Burma through its river valleys, to the vast islands of South East Asia and then moving into their present habitat.

The Zeliangrong people believe that the present habitat is their original homeland. Their origin is surrounded in mystery and myth. The legends, the ritual hymns and traditions refer to their coming out of a hole or cave in the earth, called

⁶ Chatterjee S.K (1974²nd Edn.) Kirata Jana Kriti, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, p.21. The Zeliangrongs are mentioned as Kabui and Kacha Nagas.
⁷ Ibid. p.21.
Taobhei which is still a mythical place. An invoking portion of a ritual hymn the Munsoi (a ceremony to ward off evils) says that humankind came out of the Taobhei when the mithun pushed out the stone slab at the mouth of the cave at Ramting Kabin, a deep gorge between the two hills which are deep and dark.8 (See photo 1).

Where is Taobhei?

Of the two places mentioned, Taobhei and Ramting Kabin, Taobhei literally meaning a stone cave or a stone boulder is purely a mythical place. Some enthusiastic researchers try to establish the location of Ramting Kabin and Taobhei in a place with, ‘a deep gorge between two hills! About ten kilometer North of the Liangmei Village of Oklong in Northern Manipur. The gorge is dry in winter and there is water during the rainy season. There is also a stone slab called Chatuki. It is very deep and dark that the stars are seen dimly.9 According to Zeme legend, they came out of the Taobhei, which was located at Makhiang (Makhen).

There is no record available in writing, nor saying narrating their arrival at Makhel or Makhan. Many writers considered Makhiang (as the Liangmei called Makhen) as the place where all the Naga tribes lived together before a major dispersal took place. It is believed that they spoke one language there. Interestingly, there still exist a similar or near similar words between them. During the stay in Makhel, a single family through many generations grew up to become clans. They identified them with the first grandfather’s name which later became their clan’s name. Besides the Zeliangrongs, there were other Naga tribes such as Mao, Poumei, Maram, Thangal and the Tangkhuls. The Angamis, Lothas, Semas and Chakhesang have the tradition of originating and migrating from the village of Khezakenoma to the East of Makhel and North of Tungjoy; a tradition also links up the Angamis to Makhel.

The historicity of Makhel as an ancient village of the migration of some of the tribes has been collaborated by the megalith of dispersal, Tamraratu in the present Mao village of Makhel. Sometime ago, in the beginning of the twentieth century, T.C.Hodson while officiating as the Assistant Political Agent in Manipur visited the megalith and got it restored. Earlier he explored the magnificent megaliths of

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8 Some priests who were engaged in the performance of the Mundanmei ceremony interpret that what is mentioned of the cave and the deep gorge between the two hills, Taobhei and Ramting Kabin may signify the female organ through which procreation occurs.
9 Gongchalung, Ph. op. cit. p.2.
T.C.Hodson located the original homeland at Rongdingjang and it has been conjectured that it be located at Paona Mountain in Upper Zeme country of Nagaland. Ramting Kabin has been identified with Zeme village of Remai, which is not likely to be true.
Willong. Hodson writes, “At Makhel is to be seen a stone now erected which marks
the place from which the common ancestors (of the Nagas) emerged from the earth.
(See photo 1a, 1b and 1c). Makhel is regarded as the centre from where the migration
took place. Hodson like many other authors refers to the following archaeological
monuments at Makhel as the living symbols of their common origin.

(i) A stone menhir or megalith called Tamraratu, a stone of dispersal.
(ii) A wild pear tree known as Chutebu (Kaji) at Sajouba near Makhel. At the
time of dispersal, they took oath that they would unite again in future and
planted this tree. A genna is observed if a branch of this sacred tree is
broken. It is a taboo to cut the branches of the tree.
(iii) A peepal tree (Marebu) which grew out of the tomb of the mother who
died first at Makhel. According to a legend, a woman came into contact
with some element and mysteriously conceived. She was the mother of
God, tiger and man (ora, okhe and omai).
(iv) Some precious stones in the family of the Chief of Makhel and a big shield
of an unidentified animal hide.

From Makhel, the ancestors of the Zeliangrong including the Kabuis went westward
and took a temporary shelter at Ramting Kabin, which succeeded the Zeliangrong
settlement at Makhel. Ramting Kabin is a Liangmei word meaning an “old squeezed
land” (Ram means land or village, Ting means old and Kabin means squeezed = land-
old-squeezed) based on the narrow topography of the village on the mountain. The
life depicted in the myth in respect of Ramting Kabin was a developed kinship based
society in which the idea or concept of marriage was known. N.B.Pamei describes the
life at Ramting Kabin, “Ramting Kabin may have been safe from the wild beasts, but
it was not suitable for human settlement and it is said, in that place, people hardly saw
stars. Imaginatively, Ramting Kabin, therefore, was like a cave with a single gate.
This may be the reason why some said that the Zeliangrong people came out of a
cave.

10 Hodson, T.C., op.cit. p.13.
11 Some writers interpret the Taobhei Cave as located at Ramting Kabin and from there the ancestors
went to Makhel with family of a husband and a wife.
According to Zeme legend, their ancestors shifted from Makhel to Nimringdi and then to Ramting Kabin and then they moved to Makuilongdi.\(^\text{13}\) From Ramting Kabin they went to Chawangphungning.\(^\text{14}\) Many years must have spent at Chawang Phungning where the concept of Chawang or Guang meaning King or Chief was developed in the rudimentary form. It is believed that Chiefship had emerged in this settlement. An elder who led the people in the migration and settlement at the new site was made the Chief. Frequent references made to the Chawang Phungning or Guang Phungning in many hymns and legends led to the development of their songs, incantation and ritual hymns to God.\(^\text{15}\) From this place, they proceeded westward and ultimately arrived at Makuilongdi or Nkuilongdi meaning round big mountain. Nothing much is known about this village before the Zeliangrong migration. However, among the migrating hordes, the ancestors of the Maram and Thangal were also there as indicated by their tales of migration from Makuilongdi. Makuilongdi has been known by many names like Chawang Phungning or Guang Phungning. Many Liangmai lineages trace their migration from Guang Phungning, which according to them was the main village of the cluster of villages, commonly known as Makuilongdi. Many Kabui or Rongmei hymns refer to this prosperous village of Guang Phungning as well.

Makuilongdi became quite prosperous with enough land for agriculture. Therefore the people had surplus food and had also developed shifting agriculture. The extent of Makuilongdi was far and wide. From a village it had become a cluster of smaller hamlets and settlements due to the distance of the jhum field from the main village. Tradition says that thirty ceremonies of Tarang Kai (ornamented ritual house) were performed at Makuilongdi in a single year. Performance of such costly ceremonies reflected the plentiful harvests in the village and a surplus in food production. At Makuilongdi, a political system was developed under a Chief. The Chiefship was perhaps a continuation of Chawang Phungning or Guang Phungning. The Chief was one Ngiuba, descended from Pokrei or Dirannang.

**Migration from Makuilongdi:**

Makuilongdi was the cradle of Zeliangrong culture. A well-developed society based on the shifting agriculture with polity, which looked like Chiefdom with

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\(^{14}\) Zeme name of Chawang Phungning is Nguak Phungning and the Rongmei name is Gwangphungning.
\(^{15}\) Pamei, N.B., *op. cit*, p. 9.
influence over the villages established by the brother and son of Nguiba. They spoke a
language akin to the Maram and Thangal. At Makuilongdi, the people were divided
into two major clans, Pamei and Newmei as indicated by the two stone megaliths at
Makuilongdi named as Pamei Tao (stone) and Newmei Tao (stone). Tradition says
that during its heyday, Makuilongdi had a total of 7777 households. At Makuilongdi,
the vibrant Zeliangrong culture and polity got developed and reached its zenith.
According to the legend, the migration from Makuilongdi was caused by the sudden
exodus of the people at the divine warning of violating the law of nature and social
discipline of the village by indulging in the performance of thirty sacrificial house
constructions (Locally called Tarangkai) in a single year without any break forgetting
their lunar calendar of agricultural rites and devoted to enjoyment and merry making.
Suddenly, cicada insects flew to the village and being shocked and terrified, the
people moved towards different directions. A more rational and scientific reason for
their migration was believed to be caused by the pressure on land due to the increase
in population and differences on the issue of succession to the hereditary
Chieftainship.

Zeme Migration:
The Zemes were believed to be descended from Nguiba, Chief of Makuilongdi
or Nguak. Nguiba's eldest son, Namgong (or Mangangtabou), after his failure to
succeed his father left his parents and went out to establish a new village, name
Hereira which is regarded as the first village. Therefore the Zemes were the
descendants of Namgong. From Hereira, Namgong went to Nroikike and then to Nui
(the present Yangkhullen). The name, Zeme was derived from their settlement at the
hill range, which was the frontier of the Zeliangrong habitat, frontier or periphery as
"Zena" or "Nzie"! From this the people were known as Zeme or Nzieme. The Zeme
thus moved northward of the Barak river and even moved further north to the present
settlement. It has been speculated that the Zemes had come over to the Barail, in
search of brine. They established the big village of Papolongmai also known as
Puiluwa16, which had reached a population of 900 houses when Francis Jenkins
invaded the Zeme and Angami Hills in 1832-33.

The Zemes migrated in several waves which later extended their settlement
upto Malangpa on the Jaintia border and to the west of the Barak and to the hill ranges

16 Bareh, Hamlet (1965) Gazetteer of Kohima District.
overlooking the Cachar Valley. The first wave of migration was believed to be completed by the end of the 13th century according to Jamei Saul.17

The Liangmai expansion:

The original inhabitants of Makuilongdi remained at their village under the Chieftainship of Kading, the second son of Nguiba. The population became smaller, and they remained at Makuilongdi, so they came to be known as the Liangmai meaning the northerners.

The Liangmais migrated to the hills overlooking the Imphal Valley to the northwest. They established villages to the west of the Barak River, the western most villages being Namtiram and to the South, they came to Kuilong.

The Rongmei (Kabui) Migration:

The Rongmei means the people of the fallow lands and of the southern region (also referred as Maruongmei). The third son of Nguiba, Rembangbe (pronounced Nrengbangbe in Liangmai and Rembangbou in Zeme) led a large group from Makuilongdi towards the south. Later, they came to be known as Marongmei or Rongmei. This group is believed to be more scattered yet most adventurous.

The migrants towards the South settled down for many generations at Kajinglong village. Many lineages trace their origin to Kajinglong, which was an important sub-centre of migration to the south. The settlement history of the Rongmei and Puimei (also called Kabui) villages points to Kajinglong as their home village. It was known as the place of conflict between men and spirits. Many legends witness the presence of such conflicts. Ultimately, man fought out and confiscated the clothes (Ra-Phei) and flower (Ra Mun) and subjugated them. From Kajinglong, people went out to many directions founding villages to the South of the Irang River, particularly Longjang (known to the Manipuris as Kabui Khullen) which was originally a Liangmai village, which accepted Puimei migrants.

Kajinglong was also well known for the evolution of the Kamei clans. However it is rooted in the legendary folktale where the Chief of Kajinglong known as Kamgong with seven sons tried to rescue his own single daughter called Duithoiulu from a python. It was the youngest brother who hunted the python and brought to the village. The python vomited one magical gong from his stomach and was killed. From this incident of rescue of Duithoiulu from the python grew up the seven lineages of the

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17 Jamei Saul, Expanding Identities and Zelianrong; a Souvenir of NE India Zelianrong Festival and Seminar.
Kameis, which were equivalent to that of Pamei of the Liangmai with names given for particular brothers.

The Rongmeis further migrated to the East and West in Imphal Valley and Cachar Valley in the historical times. With regard to the Puimei, N.B.Pamei writes, "A total of nine Puimei villages are grouped together between the Liangmai and the Rongmei. However, the villages are quite small (apart from one in the South) by Naga standard more keeping with some of the newer Naga groups dotting across Manipur Valley. It is of course reasonable to speculate that this group was a mixture of Liangmai, Rongmei and others." They are found in the villages of Haochong, Oktan, Yeilong, Nungtek, Talamlong, Lonjang, Puichi in Tamenglong hills between the Irang River and the Iyei River. A couple of settlements are also found in the Manipur Valley (Changangei and Yurembam).

Movements of the Tribe:

Remarkable changes had taken place in the life of the people soon after their emergence from their legendary cave - Mahou- Taobei, which is on the south-western direction of Mao of the North District of Manipur. Though it is not without difficulty to give proper explanation regarding the real causes of the said changes, it may not be too unreasonable to presume that certain factors like influence of the new environment, pressure on the land, famine, drought, epidemics and blood-feuds, etc., might have certainly played a considerable part in it. Thus, if traditions are to be believed, then, there is no room for doubt that his people was led, a long way, by the new spirit of adventure as soon as they were out from the cave, and had exposed themselves for the first time, directly to the tempting influences of the new environment around them. Thus, following the whims of the more powerful and daring adventurers from amongst them, many of them started migrating, batch by batch, to distant hill ranges which attracted them most.

Usually man of the past ages used to migrate, in batches from one particular place to another or from one particular region to another in search of better amenities of life. Instances of such a peaceful migration are not very rare even in the present days. Thus in the recent past, quite a good number of people of the Rongmei tribe of the West District and the Kukis of the Tengnoupal district of Manipur had migrated to the new land named 'Bei-Kapning' -one of the most fertile belts in Nagaland. In the

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same way, the establishment of a new village at "Tong Long" referred to in one of our traditions where Khemjunang the leader of the people, had killed large number of Mithuns on its inaugural function, also undoubtedly shows a peaceful migration of the people of those days.

In those ancient days, it also happened now and then, that sometimes man was compelled to move out of a particular place under the pressure of certain very unfavourable circumstances where life became risky due to repeated inter-village or inter-tribal feuds. Thus, Rongmei folksongs and folktales also give due illustrations regarding devastations of a large number of villages through the joint operations of these anti-social acts of foolery and valour of the past ages. In the same way, the sad story relating to the devastation of a village named "fazing-Long" in the West district of Manipur, is still remembered by many, as one of the most painful fire-side tales; while the small curvature lying between two small hillocks named "Phen-Teng" still remains reminding the people of the two Rongmei villages ruunely "Sangjee and Longjaang" of the West District of Manipur, regarding the foolhardiness of the past ages.

In view of such recurring dangers, it was a common practice of the Rongmei people of the past to establish their villages in such a manner and at such a part of the hills, where they must be in a comparatively better position to defend themselves successfully against such dangers of inter-village or inter-tribal feuds. They used to establish their villages only in that part of the hills which would afford them extra strategic advantages for their self-defence. Thus, in those days, when any hero or any powerful group had the freedom to make raids upon any other group, any time, the life of the villagers depended to a great extent, on such extra - strategic advantages afforded by the topography of that particular place where the village stood. It is a fact that in the past ages inter-village or inter-tribal feuds did really cause terrible havocs to the life of the people as well as the stability of their villages much more than any other factors.

In the present state of our knowledge it will be difficult for us to give the real cause of the movements of the people of those days from one part of the hills to another, since such causes stood changing from people to people and from time to time, and from place to place. The same is the difficulty in ascertaining the exact date, chronology, etc. of their migration, although it is fact that for some reason or the other, they moved and moved from age to age and established villages at different
places in different epochs.

Whatever might have been the real causes of their migration, this is a fact that the Rongmei people began loosening their solidarity as soon as they were out from their cave so much so that they started splitting and re-splitting themselves into a number of groups, which were found establishing villages in different hill ranges.

As a result, large number of villages came into existence on several hill ranges. And it is a fact that the number of villages continued multiplying, year after year, spreading continuously, at the same time, in the southern direction, till at last, some of them came to the borders of the Lushai hills. Thus, names of Rongmei villages in that area namely Lam-Jang, Faina-Deeteng, Pei-Kasaothao, etc. still reminds us of the Rongmei settlement in southernmost borders of Manipur those days.

But in course of time, when the Kuki incursions into that region became continuous and blood-feuds between the people became very frequent, some of them started moving northward again, and came back to the present day Khoupum and Nungba areas.

Here also the situation for those people who were returning there from the south was not at all favourable and thus the traditional inter-village hostility of the past ages started flaring up there, now and then. Moreover, pressure on land also became very high with the influx of new immigrants into that region. Consequently, some of them moved eastward and began occupying same parts of the hill ranges lying to the West of the Imphal valley while some of them moved westward in search of cultivable lands and started settlements on those parts, of the hill ranges bordering Cachar.

Very soon, the Rongmeis of the Eastern hill ranges facing the Imphal valley were tempted to migrate to the fertile valley, where people had a much easier means of livelihood and at the same time, life there, was comparatively secure. Instances of the Rongmei migration from the hills to the valley were not very few during the British rule also - both before and after the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919, when there was no security for life in those areas. Migration from hills to the valley became all the more widespread and protracted during 1960s and 1970s also because of the hostile activities of the Naga underground movements.

Thus, migrations of the Rongmeis from the hills to the Manipur valley was due partly to the comparative economic advantages of the valley and partly to the lack of security for life in the Manipur hills. It is a fact that those who had once come
down from the hills, and had the real taste of the life in the valley—better economic advantages and security—had ceased to entertain any more thought of going back to the hills to face the real rigours of life there as before. It is a fact that migration of the Rongmei people from the hills to the valley as well as from the villages to the towns, becomes increasing in the present days because of better amenities of life available in those places.

Migration to the Valley

Rongmei settlement in the valley had been slow but continuous in three successive periods of the history of Manipur—namely pre-British period, British period and post-British period. It may briefly be described below.

1. Chingmeirong & Langthabal Villages

During the pre-British period, when Manipur was under the Meitei Rajas, the Rongmei settlement in the Manipur valley started from the days of Maharaja Garibaniwaj (1709-1749). According to the Meitei Puyas, the Rongmeis who had rendered helps to the Meitei Rajas in their war against the Burmese in 1934 were allowed to settle down on the Chingmeirong and Langthabal Hills.

It is said that the Meitei Rajas of those days employed the Rongmei people in several capacities—some for husking paddy in the royal house, some for collecting and supplying fire woods, some in the Royal band party and others in several other works of life. Thus, the Rongmei people of those days were also rendering regular Lallup services to the Meitei Rajas of those days. This was, indeed, one way, though under certain compulsion, as to how the Rongmeis of the hills were brought nearer to the valley people and were made gradually acquainted with the new life styles of the valley people.

In fact, the Rongmei villages in the valley did not come into existence all at once. It was indeed, the result of long and continuous process. The way how the Rongmei villages came into existence in the Imphal area, gives a very interesting reading.

2. Majorkhul

It was a common practice of those days that the Rongmei people, as mentioned above, who were then employed in different Lallup services of the Rajas were allowed to live in the Ingkhons or any other land belonging to the Raja's high officials concerned. Different Rongmei people who were employed in different Lallup services were living in different Ingkhons of the Royal officials of the Rajas. At first,
the number of the employees was negligibly small, but gradually it went on increasing year after year: In course of time, many of such settlements had grown into villages of considerable sizes. The present Rongmei village namely Majorkhul also started during the days of Maharaja Chandraldrti in a very pitiable form of few houses only in the Ingkhon of Maisnam Samu Major, a very prominent army officer of the said Raja. It is said that some Rongmei people were employed by Samu Major in the Lallup village so established in that Ingkhon was soon known as 'Phoush-khun' that is "village of huskers". Soon however, that name was changed into Majorkhul since the land for that village was originally given by Samu Major.22

The site of this village was at first exactly in the premises of the present day maternity ward lying to the east of the District hospital, Imphal, which was then the Ingkhon of the Maisnam Samu Major. Sometime after, the site of the village had been shifted a little to the east in the same area where the Assembly Secretariat building now stands. During the early part of the twentieth century, the said Rongmei village was again shifted to another area of Imphal now known as the Gandhi avenue by an order of Major Maxwell, the then Political Agent of Manipur. In this period, the villagers of Majorkhul had rendered a regular free service to the Imphal Civil Hospital. Many of them were also employed in the Bungalows of the European Sahebs - Political Agent, Engineering Officer, Medical Officer, Police Officer, P.M.S.D., etc. on a nominal remuneration. Some of them were employed as Mallis, some as Pani-Wala, some as cooks, some as Bearers serving them in their lunch and dinners.

And again in 1948, the site of this Rongmei village had again been shifted, for the third time, by an order of the Manipur State Legislative Council, to the northern side where the said village stands today.

3. Keishamthong Village

As shown above, some Rongmei people were employed in the Royal band party of the then Meitei Rajas; and they were allowed to live in some vacant land not too far way from the palace since their service was needed to the Raja concerned any moment. Those Rongmei people who were employed in the Royal service were living in that part of the area now occupied by the Manipur State Road Transport Corporation, Head Quarter at Imphal. In the beginning, their number was very small, but in course of time it had increased more and more till at last they formed the bulk of the band party of the Rajas down to the days of Maharajah Sir Churachand. The same tradition continued during the days of Maharajah Bodhachandra also.
Regarding the site of the village, it is said that sometime during the reign of Sri Churachand, it had been shifted to vacant land lying to the west of it, where the village in question, stands today. The then band party of the Rajas was a part or a section of the Manipur Police Establishment of the state. The Rongmeis who were in the said band party were accordingly given night duties in the Royal house, in the State treasury, in the Bungalows of the P.M.S.D. and other high military officers. The same system continued till the last day of British rule in Manipur. And after the British left the nomenclature of that establishment had been changed as the "First Manipur Rifles" and therewith, the state's police establishment and army establishment became separated from each other for the first time in Manipur. And in the army establishments of the present day namely Manipur Rifles, a large number of Rongmeis from Keishamthong are still being employed.

4. Raj Bari

The beginning of this Rongmei village is also said to be almost in the same process, having been started at first by a few Rongmeis who were in the service of the Rajas of Manipur. It is said that the Icing of Manipur, Maharajah Sir Churachand was rearing a big tiger in an iron cage. And some Rongmeis were employed by him for day-to-day feeding of that tiger. And the Rongmeis so employed were allowed to live in a tin-roofed shed somewhere to the east of the present day Mahabali temple, but not too far away from the place where the said tiger was kept. Year after year their number went on increasing. Some Rongmeis of this village were also employed in the band party of the Rajas.

Thus, it appears that the first settlement of that area was made by a few employees of the Rajas of those days and the area of their settlement had gradually extended with the increase in the number of the people employed by the Rajas from year to year.

There are several other instances also in which prominent Rongmei leaders of the past ages came into close contact with the Meetei Rajas and as a result, many Rongmei leaders or close associates of the then Meetei Rajas made their settlement in some parts of Imphal or near about it. And it is a fact that each of such little areas (Lam) under their possession had in course of time become a miniature Rongmei village comprising of only a few houses. This is, in short, the usual way as to how Rongmei villages had come into existence in the past ages in the Imphal valley.

During the British protection period also the same seems to be the process
regarding the beginning of Rongmei settlements in the capital area. Generally, the British officers - Political Agent, Medical Officer, Police Officer, Engineering Officer, etc., were invariably found employing Rongmei people in their respective Bungalows - some as orderly, some as Malli; some as Cooks, some as Pani Wallas, some as Bearers serving them at the time of their lunch and dinners, etc. These people were allowed to live in the vacant lands within the British Reserved Areas in Imphal and that too not much far away from their Bungalows. The Rongmei employees of the then British Officers' bungalows at Imphal were accordingly the founder members of the Rongmei villages of Imphal area, since it was from those little spots of land under their possession in those days that villages had in Course of time, come into existence in the capital area.

5. Kakhulong

Special mention may be made in this connection of the name of the Rongmei village namely Kakhulong, whose early settlers were all employees in the bungalows of British officers - Political Agent, Medical Officers, Police Officers, etc. It is said that the nucleus for this village was started in a tin-roofed shed that stood at the south western corner of the Bungalow of the then Political Agent of Manipur. The first few Rongmeis employed in the bungalow of the Political Agent were allowed to live in that shed; and sometime after, when their number increased and as a result all of them could not be accommodated in one and the same shed some of them went to the vacant land lying to the west of that shed but outside the compound of the bungalow and lived there in their own huts constructed by themselves. The then government of Manipur did not raise any objection to that since those people were rendering to them various services that they badly needed in those days. And almost all the people living in that village were employees of the then British Sahebs and the village was accordingly nick-named 'Saheb-Manai'.

6. Ragairong

In the same way the early settlers of Ragairong-a Rongmei village near the Minuthong were all employees under the Fourth Assam Rifles. Since they were people rendering service to the army personnels of that battalion, they were placed within the cantonment area. It is difficult to give details like - date or year of their first settlement, number of the people first settled, from where those people came, etc. since evidences at our disposal are too meagre to give such details. At first their number was few but it went on increasing more and more as the years rolled by. Now,
this Rongmei village-Ragairong is one of the biggest Rongmei villages in the Imphal area.

7. Namthanlong

The early settlers of this village were people who had exceptional acumen and ability in the arts of tanning and shoe-making. During the British protection of Manipur - shoe making and tanning were the professions of the inhabitants of this village. The village was accordingly nick-named, at one time, "Muchi" - in the sense of a "village of shoemakers'. At first, their number was small, but subsequently it went on increasing their number year after year. And now this Rongmei village - Namthanlong is one of the big Rongmei villages in the Imphal valley. In the changing world of today we find that the general trend of changes so far witnessed relating to his Rongmei village are seen not only in the size of the village but also in the lifestyles and professions of its people. Now people of the new generation have given up the professions of their forefathers of the by-gone days and have taken to many new ones.

Movements of the Rongmei (Kabui) People in late 1940s

The movements may be viewed as the under-
(1) Migration from the hills to valley,
(2) Migration from the hills or villages to the cities or other commercial centres.

Migration from the hills to the valley, as shown above, was due to several causes; among them - economic factors, better job opportunities in the urban areas or commercial centres, and lack of security for life in the hills were among the most important causes. A large number of Rongmei people living on eastern hill ranges facing the Loktak lake had come down the valley and started establishing a Rongmei village named "Thienjang" in the Loktak project area. Many of them have employment opportunities under the Loktak project schemes. Some of them are getting facilities for trade and commerce in a small scale while still others have opportunities of improving their economic conditions by taking up a more improved method of wet-cultivation there. Some of the Rongmei people from Mukten, Langteng"Daron, Juron, Charungkhou, Sengai, etc. who were, at one time, living on the top and not-easily-accessible-part of the hills, have started coming down the valley. Many new villages are coming into existence in several parts of the Bishenpur area.

During the recent past when the Naga underground movements were very
active in the hills of the West district of Manipur, life became very insecure for many; and consequently, many of them were compelled to leave their hearth and home. Some of them had migrated to some parts of Nagai and even. We find many new Rongmei immigrants from Manipur in many places of Nagaland like Dhobi Nala, Jaluke, Samjuram, Beikapning and other parts of Nagaland, while still others, to some places in the Cachar district of Assam.

Some of the existing Rongmei villages - like Rajbari, Lagailong, Turung, Chingmeirong, Koirengei, Sagolband etc. which are in and around the greater capital of the state had also increased considerably, in their house-hold strength due to the influx of the immigrants from the hills. Besides, many new Rongmei villages having considerably big number of house-holds are also coming into existence in the said area.

The Early history till the Colonial period:

The early history of the Kabui Nagas is a dark period as the sources of information is very scanty. Only a handful of legends and folktales have been written by some ancient writers. We do have chronicles and historical texts of Manipur giving stray references to their innumerable raids to the Naga villages including the Kabuis. However, since the 18th century, we have sources of information to give a connected account of the history of the Kabui people. We have the British accounts and more importantly, for the last 3-4 decades, many experts in the field of family, marriage, kinship, polity, economy, culture and practices have been involved into deeper research and have successfully come out with lot of writings. When we refer to all such writings, it is safe to conclude that the early history is the history of the contact with other peoples such as the Bodos, the Kacharis, the Meiteis and the British till its conquest. References have already been made to the linguistic connection with the Bodos of North Eastern India in the prehistoric period perhaps before the sojourn of the Zeliangrong people at Makhel. There are Liangmai songs, which refer to the feuds between the ancestors of the Zeliangrong peole with the ancient Bodos during their journey to Makhel.

Nangalogae of Claudius Ptolemy

Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria of Egypt, a Greek geographer, wrote the Geographike about the ancient geography dealing with India, Northeastern India and Southeast Asia. A lot of research was done on this geography by G.R.Gereni in his Researches on the Geography of Ptolemy, McCrindle and other Indian scholars,
P.C. Choudhury and K.L. Barua. Ptolemy refers to a number of toponym and ethnonym in North east India and Burma. He refers to a tribe named Nangaloga living in the hills of Northeast India. McCrindle suggested and later on was agreed to by G.R. Gereni that Nangaloga might mean the Nagas of which the Zeliangrong people are a group. As the informants of Ptolemy were mostly traders (as he never visited India), the Zeliangrong tribes were perhaps the first tribe to come under the observation of the Indian traders since they had occupied the present habitat by the first century A.D. Likewise, the Zeme and the Kabui (Rongmei and Puimei) were the first Naga tribes whom the British in the 19th century had came across.

Further, the famed "Periplus of the Erythesian Sea", a Latin work refers to the brisk trade between the Roman world and South India. This book refers to a large number of places and tribes in Northeast India who had been carrying on the trade with the Roman traders who came to South India. The discovery of a Roman site at Guwahati proved that Northeast India was a part of the Roman trade with India. The Periplus refers to the annual journey made by a "scarcely civilized tribe called the Besatae, small bodied men, broad, flat faced and peace loving character. Once a year they came to sell them baskets of malabhatrum (tezpat) which were prepared on the spot and exported to South India in the form of small balls. Besatae must be one of the tribal groups who sold tezpat leaves to the Indian trader. And tezpat grows abundantly in the Zeliangrong regions and the people even now depends their livelihood by selling this. Moreover, the trade routes between India and South East Asia passed through the southern region of the Zeliangrongs.

The historical text in Manipuri named Poireiton Khunthokpa, refers to the adventures of one colonizer from the East named Poireiton in Manipur. He is said to have visited many Shan villages in Kabaw Valley of Burma and Eastern and Southern hills and Valley of Manipur. This historical work refers to a number of tribes and communities living in Manipur-Poirei (Meitei), Chakpa, Naga tribes like Tangkhul, Anal and Kabui. According to Pakhangba Nongkaron, another historical text, Poireiton was a contemporary of the Meitei King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba against whom Poireiton fought for the throne of the Kangla. Poireiton was defeated and gave his sister Lainsna to Pakhangba who later married and settled down as a Chief of Lamdeng village.

20 Ibid. p.4.
Pakhangba also fought against the Khaba tribe (or a clan later) who once controlled the Kangla. He was defeated by the Khabas and fled to Moirang. He came back strongly and dominated the Khaba tribe. According to another historical text called “Chakpa Khunta Khunthoklon”, one Khaba Chief named Lamleksang Khaba fled from the valley and went to the village of Nungnang and became a Nungnang Kabui. The authenticity of this text is accepted by many distinguished scholars. So, Khaba Lamleksang, a refugee from Imphal Valley during the reign of Pakhangba (33-154 A.D.) went to the Khaba village of Nungnang. It was the first reference to Kabui tribe in the history of Manipur. There is also an evidence of the Kabuis settling at the Koubru mountains around the same time. It is believed that the group of Kabuis led by Rembangdi, a son of Nguiba who left Makuilongdi went southward and came to be known as Marongmei or Rongmei, meaning the southerners. The Meitei Kingdom of Kangla depended hugely on Koubru Mountains for various reasons such as natural resources and worshipping of Gods and Goddesses. This means that naturally the King and the tribes are in contact with each other. There is even a story of King Pakhangba who went to Koubru Mountains along with his priest to cut trees for making boats. The name of the mountain Koubru is also said to be derived from a Zeliangrong culture hero named Kabuiru (Sanlamba), from Kabuiru to Koubru where the Meiteis worshipped the God of Koubru as Soraren as a regional God who settled first.  

The Moirang Connection:

Moirang was the name of a principality in South Manipur Valley inhabited by a Meitei Clan named Moirang. This principality had an independent existence from the early period to the second half of the 15th century A.D. The Kingdom of Moirang depended on Loktak Lake, the forest of western hill ranges known as the Laimaton-Thangjing range occupied by the Zeliangrong people before the arrival of other tribal communities. The relations between the Moirang and the Zeliangrong people were recorded in the chronicle of Moirang, known as the Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba and Moirang Kangleiron. However their relation was romanticized by two traditions, namely, the connection of Kabui Salangba Maiba, a Kabui (Rongmei) priest who was mentioned in the Khamba-Thoibi epic of Moirang of the 12th century A.D. and the tradition of Menti village Chief who tried to have a matrimonial relation with the

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King of Moirang. It was during the reign of Chingkhu Telheiba (1093-1148 A.D.) that the famous epic story of Khamba and Thoibi occurred. It was a story of romance, struggle, chivalry and intrigue popularized by Moirang Kangleiron, the ballads of Moirang. In this story, a Kabui priest was mentioned as an expert in medicine and in religion. His name, “Kabui Salang Maiba” is a compendium of three words, Kabui his tribe; Salang the name of the village: and Maiba meaning a medicine man or his profession. In the epic, Kabui Salang Maiba befriended a great warrior nobleman, named Puremba of the Khuman clan who took shelter in the Moirang principality. With the help of Puremba, the priest was even said to have married to Hempi, a girl of Salang village who soon after became very prosperous.

Specific was also mentioned in the Moirang chronicles where Ura Kongyangba, the seventh King in the Moirang genealogy invaded the Kabui village of Nungshai. He captured Nungshai Langmaiba, perhaps a Kabui Priest (Langmaiba means a priest). Ura Kongyanba was also said to be given the title of Kabui Nungshai Ngamba. This chronicle mentions that the wife of Oinamlong Chief, named Kasanru sent a stick to the Moirang queen to guard the paddy being dried in the sun. Oinamlong (Goinanglong) was a Kabui village which was also known as Kala Naga. This village was always in contact with the Moirang.

The Meitei Expansion and the Zeliangrong Resistance (12th to the 17th century):

By the beginning of the 12th century, the Zeliangrong people including the Kabuis which were left undisturbed by any outsider became an area of Meitei expansion. As we have already mentioned of their settlement in the southern regions of Manipur, they stretched towards several mountain ranges that ran down from the Great Barail, the eastern hill range of Koubru-Laimaton-Thangiing Range, the western of Taosem range between the Jiri River and Makru rivers flowing to the great Barak, and the great range of Oinamlong-Chingkhonglong which was also known as the Kala Naga Range between the Makru and the Barak. According to Manipur chronicles, by the 17th century, the boundary between Manipur and the western state Tripura aws the great Barak, known to the Meiteis as Gwai between the Akhui crossing to the North up to the confluence of the Barak and Tuivai, known as Tipaimukh. The Tuivai flowing from Mizoram was known to the Zeliangrongs as Duigai. The ancestors of the Kabuis moved down south from Kajinglong to various

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villages, the most prominent being Nungnang which had already become quite well known by the first century A.D. They extended their settlement till Ganglon (Luwanglon both Khullen and Khunou) and Khaupum village. The Zeliangrong regions such as Leimatak basin, Rangkhong, Taotep (Nungtek), Charoi, Luangmai (Noney), Thangal, Laojangteng (Zaozangtek) and Nungsai became the victims of the Meitei expansion. The Kabuis (Rongmei) were further pushed upward by the Kukis, Hmar, Lushais from the 18th century onwards causing great disturbances to the people.

Manipur by the 12th century had become an organized state. King Loiyamba (1074-1112A.D.) issued a royal edict named Loiyamba Shilyen, which was the first written constitution. The Meitei State expanded and came into conflict with the Naga tribes inhabiting the surrounding hills. The royal chronicles, Cheitharol Kumbaba and Ningthourol Kumbaba record many raids and expeditions to the Naga villages, capture of their Chiefs and collection of booties of the war. Frequent raids are recorded in respect of the Tangkhul villages in the eastern hills Chingsong, Monthou, Akla, Akhutlong, Kaihao, and the Marams in the Northern hills, Anal and Tarao in the South East and the Kabui (Rongmei) and Liangmai in the western hills adjacent to the valley of Manipur. From the 12th to the 17th century, the Meitei Kingdom was concentrated in the subjugation of the Tangkhuls, Marams and Zeliangrongs.

Since the days of Chatiu who migrated from Makuilongdi, a number of villages were established in Koubru Hills. Other villages like Makhan, Konsaram, Khunku, Changdailong (Ireng) were established. The Liangmais of the Koubru Hill were called in the chronicles of Manipur and British accounts as Quoirong or Koireng (not referring to the present Koireng tribe). And the Kabuis (Rongmeis) who settled in the Laimaton range established the villages like Tairaang, Koklou, Sim Kaibap, Thing Cheigoi, Pongringlong, Chongphun, Tunglong, Makam, Duiteng, Zeinu and later on Khonglong. The Zeliangrong villages were the targets of the repeated Meitei aggressions due to several reasons, the first being the rich forests of the Koubru Mountain where timber for boat making and housing, thatch for house roofs and firewood, and elephants which were caught for the royal stable and sale to Burma and Assam. The second reason was the need to maintain the route through the Zeliangrong regions in the West through which trade was carried on. Moreover most invaders came through this western route and therefore to keep an eye on, this route became the most important security point.
King Khagemba (1597-1652), the greatest King of pre Hindu Manipur was also said to have conquered the various regions of Zeliangrong including the Kabuis. He started a vigorous campaign and in 1633 A.D. he invaded the Zeme village of Yang (ancient Niu and now Yangkhullen) which was one of the oldest Zeliangrong villages in North Manipur. Again in 1640, Khagemba invaded the Puimei village of Nungtek with a large force. He then proceeded North and invaded the Liangmai village of Makui in the western side of the Koubru Hills to the East of the Irang River whose basin was occupied. The aggressive policy of Khagemba towards the Zeliangrong in general and kabui in particular was continued by his son Khunjaoba (1652-1666).

The Zeliangrong people in the 18th Century:

The 18th century was a landmark period in the history of the Kabui and the Zeliangrong Nagas. We have fairly dependable sources of information – the royal chronicles of Manipur and the early British accounts, the Angami-Kachari, Zeme tradition of inter tribal feuds and migration. It was a significant period in which the fights of the Kabui Nagas against the outsiders including the foreigners were intense and at the same disturbing with the increase of Kuki immigrants who were being pushed out of Chin Hills and Mizoram by the Lushai tribesmen. The Zeliangrong people were to reckon with the powerful Meitei rulers of Manipur, the aggressive Angamis and migrating Kacharis who established their capital at Maibong and Khaspur. They were engaged in a resistance against the Kukis. Hemmed in all sides by hostile and powerful neighbours who wanted to dominate the Zeliangrong people to exploit their resources, the Zeliangrong people made a heroic struggle to preserve their land. But the fight was sporadic and with the village level resistance and not a tribal solidarity struggle, they were finally subjugated. The 18th century was therefore a century of the pacification of the Zeliangrong people. During this period, special reference may be mentioned on the account of King Garibniwaz who adopted vigorous policy towards the hill tribes including the Kabui Nagas. Garibniwaz (1709-48) was believed to be the greatest King of Manipur. He is well known as a great conqueror, for his invasion of upper Burma, defeat of Tripura and subjugation of the hill tribes. He was credited for the introduction and imposition of Lallup on all the hill tribes. Lallup was a feudal service rendered to the King between the age of 16 to 60, for ten out of 40 days during wartime as a militia soldier and during peacetime as workers. The hill tribes including the Kabuis were asked to engage in the cutting of
valuable timber and supply to the King, rendered the service by way of offering of plantain leaves, looking after the royal gardens and livestock farm etc. These services were not paid and it was free of charges. Garibniwaz also introduced a kind of administrative system in which the functionaries like Khullakpa, Khunbu, Luplakpa and Lambu were introduced. He abolished the Chiefship among the hill tribes (office of the Ningthou in Naga village was replaced by Khullakpa), involvement of the Naga tribes in his military campaign against Burma, settlement of the tribes in the Valley of Manipur, and of course, alienation of the hill tribes from the Hindu Meitei due to his conversion to Hinduism and introduction of caste system.

The Cheitharol Kumbaba recorded the invasion of the Zeliangrong villages by Garibniwaz and his popular crown prince Shyam Shai. He invaded the Liangmai village of Tokpa and inspected the Ngaprum pan. Shyam Shai underwent an expedition in the Kabui villages and later invaded Kabui Thinglon, which might be identified with Thiulon village in the West Bank of the Barak. The Meitei forces attacked the Kabui (Rongmei) village of Majuron (Juron) in the southern part of the Leimatak watershed and invaded their village of Charoi. In 1748, Garibniwaz invaded Charoi Chagotlong and made a fortress over the bank of the Tupul (Phaan) river.

Garibniwaz, popularly known as Pamheiba was believed to have grown up in a Naga vaillage of Makeng probably among the Thangal tribe. He was then adopted by King Charairongba who later brought him to the capital and was initially made in-charge of a department of tribal affairs known as Hao-Macha Loisang (a kind of Department of Tribals). In order to fight and invade Burma, he invited the hill tribes, particularly the Tangkhuls and the Zeliangrongs especially the Kabuis to join the Manipur army. Later the Kabuis who returned from the war were asked to settle in the Manipur Valley like Chingmeirong, Langol Hills and even in Langthaban. This unfolded an era of friendship between the Meiteis and the Kabuis. During his reign, King Garibniwaz permitted the villages of Khaupum and Luwanglon to sell their commodities in the market at the capital. He befriended many common people of the Kabui tribe and even the Khullapa of Noney village was privileged to ride an elephant. However, this incident was disturbed by the Kabui Anouba (new Kabui)23 and resulted some lost of life.

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23 Cheitharol Kumbaba, (1967) Imphal, p.103. For the first time a reference to Kabui Anouba was made in the chronicle. Since Noney was a Kabui (Rongmei), the Kabui Anouba might mean the
This friendly gesture continued to prevail between the Meiteis and the Kabuis even after the King Garibniwaz. During the reign of Chingthang Khomba, who was also known as Bhagyachandra Singh or Jai Singh (1759-1762)-(1763-1798), a good relationship existed between the two communities despite religious orthodoxy of the Hindu Meiteis. However, the relationship with the other ruler was not healthy. Burma under Alungpaya of Konbaung dynasty became very powerful that time and had invaded Manipur several times. The Moirang had rebelled and their Chief Khellemba usurped the throne of Manipur. The fugitive King Chingthang Khomba took refuge in the Zeliangrong country for help in his fight against the Burmese. He got military help from the Zeliangrong villages of Tamenglong Hills and north Manipur. And after his liberation of Manipur from the Burmese he occupied the capital in Manipur Valley. However, his religious orthodoxy still had a negative impact on the tribals. There are many stories preserved in the songs that recorded the visit of the Zeliangrong people to the Kangla capital and were refused. Cheiyharol Kumbaba also recorded sporadic raids on the Zeliangrong villages. King Chingthangkhomba went in an expedition to invade Rangkhong and Kabui Anouba (New Kabui) in 1781. During this time, a significant event also took place. It was the appearance of the Kuki (Khongjai) in the southern fringe of the Zeliangrong country. It is said that the Khongjai lineage of the Kukis had come to Manipur during the reign of Khagemba. Kom, Koireng, Hmar, Kharam and Chiru had occupied the area before the coming of the Kukis. The royal chronicle records the incident in 1786 A.D.

Gambhir Singh after his accession to the throne of Manipur embarked on a series of expeditions to all the Naga and Kuki areas more upon the Nagas to restore the authority of the King which was almost absent during the quarter of a century after the death of Maharaja Bhagyachandra Singh and during the seven years war. He invaded many tribal villages. He sent officials to collect tributes from the Kabui villages near the Barak River, which was the western boundary. In 1827 the famed Kabui (Rongmei) village of Montha was attacked and destroyed for non-payment of tribute to the King. In 1828, Gambhir Singh conquered Khoupum village, which was never conquered earlier by any ruler of the Meiteis.

Puimei who were concentrated at Nungtek and Haochong through which the Khullakpa of Noney was traveling.
The Zeliangrong-Kachari Relation:

The Zeliangrong relations with the Kacharis started with their Kingdom at Dimapur located in the sprawling plains adjacent to the Naga Hills. The kacharis were the second civilization with which the Zeliangrong came into contact since the 16th century. However the account of their relationship is limited due to the lack of reliable sources of information. The Kacharis were a rising power in the Assam Valley when the Ahoms from upper Burma appeared in the 13th century to conquer Assam. The Ahoms built up their seat of power at Charaideo and then, Sibsagar. The Ahoms expanded at the cost of the Kacharis who were pushed to the south in Dimapur. The Kachari civilization grew at Dimapur as indicated by their relics. Even at Dimapur, the Kacharis continued to be attacked by the Ahoms culminating in the sacking of Dimapur in 1530 A.D. The Kacharis then retreated to Maibong in the present North Cachar Hills. Maibong was built as a capital of the Kachari Kingdom. For two centuries, the Kacharis held sway at Maibong. It was at Maibong that the Zeliangrong people came into contact with the Kacharis. It was during the 17th century onwards that due to Angami military pressure, the Zemes migrated to the western Barail. This was the second wave of Zeme migration. This movement of the Zemes almost coincided with the Kachari expansion to what is called the North Cachar Hills. Further in the 18th century, the Kacharis moved further down to the plains of Cachar with the capital at Khaspur. These were the last days of the Kachari State.

The Kachari forage into the Zeliangrong areas of Manipur has been preserved in folk songs and folk tales. There is one anecdote related to the Zeilad lakes. A Kachari Chief came on an elephant and tried to drain the water of the Zeilad Lake. However, he failed and went into the lake. There is another pathetic and tragic story of a beautiful and long haired Kabui (Rongmei) beauty of Makoi (Atengbe) village named Rongsonnei, wife of a poor man, named Nakam who was abducted by the men of the Kachari King and the circumstances leading to the decision of the wife to become the second queen of the Kachari king, and the suicide committed by her disappointed husband, by drowning in the Barak river. The story of Jamlennang, a zeme hero who fought against the Kachari forces was also a histories episode for the people. He was believed to have captured and torture to death by the Kachari King. There are other stories of the relations between individual villages with the Kachari royalty, and people to people, there was a trade contact. The Manipuri chronicles.
recorded that the Kachari mercenary soldiers had passed through the Zeliangrong country innumerable times.

**The British Conquest:**

The British conquest of the Zeliangrong people was the result of the British policy of colonial expansion towards the Northeast India—particularly towards Manipur, the Nagas and the Kacharis after their conquest of Assam in 1826. The British did not have a separate policy towards the Zeliangrong as such. But their general policy greatly affected them as the Zeliangrong constituted major segments of the territory and population of North Cachar, Naga Hills and Manipur. The policy of the British was an evolution to deal with the situation created by the Angami expansionism and aggression on the frontier of the British territory, more on the North Cachar and Upper Assam. The British conquest of the Zeliangrong people was completed with their annexation of North Cachar in 1854, the establishment of the Naga Hills District in 186 and the conquest of Manipur in 1891.

The British accounts of the Zeliangrong people in the 19th century give a picture of the Zeliangrong society and culture. A separate chapter (chapter-3) deals with the society, culture and religion of the Kabui Nagas. The colonial rule which followed the annexation aimed at the extension of the empire, control of the Angami raids on the Zeliangrong villages, abolition of head hunting, collection of revenue to meet the expenses of the administration, judicial adjudication of the disputes over the land, property and crime, and civilizing the tribes through welfare activities such as education, health services and road communication.

The Zeliangrong people of Manipur were never administered during the reign of the kings of Manipur during the pre-colonial period. They exerted political control over the villages located near the two important routes, known as the Akhui route and the Cachar route. The Maharajas extracted tributes and carried out military raids, if the villages did not pay tributes. The interests of Manipur and the British were on the Cachar Road linking the Manipur Valley and Cachar via Bishnupur, Khaupum, Nungba, Kala Naga (Oinamlong) and Jirighat. After 1891, the British imposed their rule over the hill areas of Manipur which were administered by the British Political agent. The British however did not allow the Raja and Manipur State Darbar to extend their jurisdiction over the hills. The British Political Agent and his Assistant who was a member of the Indian Civil Service and ex-officio President of the Manipur State Darbar (PMSD) looked after the administration. It was only after the suppression of
the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919)\textsuperscript{24} that three Sub-divisions were created to administer Naga Areas, the Northeast Sub-division at Ukhrul and the Northwest Sub-division at Tamenglong to administer the Zeliangrong and the Southwest Sub-division at Churachandpur. The Sub-divisions were kept under the charges of Sub-Divisional Officer who were the Anglo-Indian members of the provincial Assam Civil Service. The British did not interfere in the internal affairs of the tribes in their villages. However the hill areas were divided into five divisions, each division under one Lam Subadar under where supervision seven Lambus were appointed for the administration of the hill area. A Lambu was originally a Meitei official who dealt with rural administration. When the tribal areas were brought under the political control of the Maharajas of Manipur the tribes were not administered directly. But there were a large number of Lambus who were not officially appointed by the state but moved about in the hills and Valley to be broker between the state official and the villages in respect of service under the Lallup system. The Lambus were not properly supervised by the Kingdom of Manipur. However, they were very oppressive in their dealings with the hill tribes, as they were interested to supervise the maintenance of the trade routes. After the British conquest, the Lambus were appointed and paid salaries, seven rupees originally. They acted like a peon who acted as interpreter between the tribes and the state officials including the British officers. The Lambus were also appointed from amongst the educated and influential tribal families in the villages. At times, they acted like the Dobasis of the Naga Hills in the interpretation of tribal customary laws and deciding on the cases.

The Kabui village administration during this time was quite similar. The Government entrusted their village Chiefs, known as the Khullakpas (administrators), Khunpu (owner of the village), Luplakpa and the Meitei Lambus, and Changloi (Advisor assistants) for the administration of the village, judicial and revenue collection. The Khullakpas and Khunbus of the Kabui (Rongmei) Nagas were heredity village functionaries. The village council or the Pei under the Khullakpas or Khunbus were entrusted with the collection of house tax, solving any problems, and

\textsuperscript{24} Initially, it was against the British imperial and but later turned out to be against the Zeliangrong in the North West of Manipur including the Kabuis and the Tangkhuls in Northeastern Manipur and in some tracts of Upper Burma. This anti Naga action was aimed at the establishment of the Kuki authority over the Nagas and the occupation of their land for cultivation by the Kukis. (details see Gangmumei Kamei, A History of the Zeliangrong Nagas: From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2004, pp.129-138)
serve as a platform of discussion and debate. The Zeliangrong people of Manipur State suffered during the colonial rule. The interference in their culture like ban on head hunting, imposition of taxes, forced labour and oppression, opening of schools, hospitals and repair of the bridle path mostly done on forced labour brought hardships on the people.²⁵ Neither, the British Government nor the Missioneries nor the Maharaja did enough to mollify the resentment of the people. Their misery could not be adequately compensated by the appointment of a few school teachers, peons, clerks, road muhorriss and Lambus. Therefore a rebellion against the British imperial was started by a young mystic leader named Jadonang and continued by his disciple, the fiery and charismatic girl, gaidinliu. Robert Reid, a Governor of Assam called this phenomenon of Jadonang and Gaidinliu as the Rebellion of the Kabui and Kacha Naga.²⁶ A historian described it as Kabui Rebellion because the leaders of the rebellion belonged to the Kabui.²⁷ The then Chief Secretary of Assam Mr.Crosgrave called it a Naga Raj Movement based on Political Agent J.C.Higgins’ telegram that a Kabui Naga Raj was proclaimed at Kambiron. A writer describes it as the Naga Struggle against the British.²⁸ This revolt has been dealt separately in chapter 4. (See photo 2: Rani Gaidinliu).

Post Colonial or Post Independence Period:

The echo of the Zeliangrong revolt, the martyrdom of Jadonang and imprisonment of Gaidinliu has soon faded away. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s attempt to release Rani Gaidinliu and the Manipuri Mahasabha’s demand for her release were ignored by the British Political Agent and the Maharaja of Manipur. The colonial authorities backed by the ruling circles condemned the Zeliangrong leaders, Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. Even a school textbook condemned the rebellion.

Then, it followed the coming of the Second World War to Manipur and Naga Hills, and the famous battles of Kohima and Imphal. The Zeliangrong people were never expected that Japan would invade this part of the world after defeating the British army in Singapore and Burma. However, the defeat and retreat of the British army shocked and changed the Zeliangrong people’s image of the British. Soon after

²⁵ Ibid. p.138.
²⁶ Reid, Robert (1942) History of Frontier Areas Bordering Assam, Shillong, Reprinted, Guwahati/Delhi, Spectrum Publications.
the conquest of Malaya and Singapore, Japan’s Imperial Army, supported by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army (INA) conquered Burma and pushed the British Indian army out of that country. It was when the refugees from Burma marched into Manipur through the Tammu-Moreh road, that the people of Manipur realized the imminent coming of the war to the peaceful and isolated Manipur. The refugees came in thousands. They were treated with respect by the Zeliangrong Nagas.

The Zeliangrong area was not the battlefield but the war has seriously affected them. Though there was no great devastation, the people were very much involved in the war with fear, tension and uncertainty of the outcome of war. The main question was what would have happened if the British withdrew from Manipur and Kohima. Therefore the war brought tremendous changes in the mind of the people. The physical and psychological seclusion created by distance and inaccessibility of their geography had been broken. They witnessed thousands of Indian refugees trekking through their hills and saw the Allied forces with full modern military equipment, planes and tanks. This war somehow made them felt that they were a part of the fast changing world of modern technology, freedom and democracy. The two years following the end of the Second World War and preceding Indian Independence in 1947 were significant years for the people of the North East in general and for the Kabui Nagas. The end of the war brought lot of changes in the history. India has attained its independence in 1947. However, the British wished that the tribes retained their unity, solidarity and identity. The first step toward this was taken by Sir C.R.Pawsey, the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills in persuading the Nagas to establish the Naga Tribal Council in February 1946, with a clear cut ideology of Naga nationalism. Among the hill tribes, there was a wave of unity and fraternity and they formed the tribal organizations like the Tangkhul Long, Kuki National Assembly, Gangte Tribal Union, Vaiphei National Union and the Kabui Naga Association. The Kabui Chingsang or Chingsang Samiti was the first fraternal organization of the Kabui tribe in 1925. It was aimed at solving the inter-village disputes and disputes arising out of customs and traditions of the people. It was also an attempt to unite the people living in the Kabui Range after the traumatic Kuki Rebellion. As mentioned above, the Kabui Samiti was established in March 1934 and the Chuksu Garoumei oath taking of “Pardon of the past wrongs and affirmation for future amity and harmony” was performed on 7th April 1934. When the Second World War was
coming to an end, the youth of the community proposed the revival of the Kabui Samiti, which was split and became defunct since 1940. They started a preparatory organization named Kabui Young Working Committee in 1945. It revived the Kabui Samiti and constituted the Kabui Association, which was then renamed as the Kabui Naga Association at the suggestion of Political Agent, G.P. Stewart. It was an organization of the community to deal with the social, cultural and economic issues. During the interim period before India’s Independence, many tribal organizations were established. Every tribal organization was given a plot of land each by the Political Agent in the erstwhile British Reserve Area. The Kabui Naga Association was given a plot in the Sadar Bazar, known as Paona Bazar in the heart of Imphal city. It raised a lot of enthusiasm among the people and consequently subscribed money to start a trading company. Very soon, the Association ran a trading company at Imphal with branches at Kangchup and Bishnupur. Though the commercial venture somehow was not satisfactory, but it aroused a community feeling of working together, involving the representatives of the villages in the Valley and hills of Tamenglong Sub-division. The Kabui Naga Association adopted a written constitution and became popular in deciding customary cases and adopting the age-old customs of the community in a printed form. This led to the desire of unity among the people in the years to come. By this time, the Naga National Council (NNC) was already taken its root under the charismatic leaders of A.Z. Phizo and T. Sakhrie. This council has been responsible for shaping the desires of the entire Naga to create a separate Naga Nation. The Kabui Naga Association was also sharing a good relationship with NNC, and more influence on unity, the leaders of the community came together and form a common organization of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei (including Puimei). The idea was to create and protect the Zeliangrong people from any danger in the eventual withdrawal of the British from India. So on the initiative of the Kabui Naga Association, a historic conference was held at Keishamthong on 15th February 1947, which resolved to form the Zeliangrong Council.

The Zeliangrong Council had no history and it was a short lived organization. However, the Zeliangrong identity had far reaching consequences. The Kabui Naga Association in its annual meeting at Dailong in December 1947 decided to convert the Association into Manipur Zeliangrong Union, which according to its Constitution is the union of the Kabui and Kacha Naga. If Zeliangrong Council gave birth to the name ‘Zeliangrong’, it was Manipur Zeliangrong Union, which continued to bear the
banner of Zeliangrong through its formulator history. It was converted to Zeliangrong Naga Union in 1960 and the Zeliangrong Union in 1993 by dropping the term ‘Naga’.

The political developments that followed the British departure on 15th August 1947 were of far reaching consequences in the political future of Manipur. Maharaja Bodhchandra Singh realizing the democratic aspirations of the people of his kingdom made two important legislations. The Manipur Hill Peoples Regulation, 1947 and the Manipur State Constitution, Act 1947, which were drafted by the Constitution Drafting Committee nominated by the Maharaja and the panel of nominees elected by the political parties and organizations. The Manipur Hill People Regulation, Act 1947 provided a comprehensive legislation for the administration, both administrative and judicial, of the hill areas. And for the Zeliangrong people the creation of the Zeliangrong fraternity was the greatest achievement in the 20th century. As a result, the feeling of oneness had persisted through despite the differences in the political perception and objectives, the mainstream Indian democratic process, ethnic nationalism or ethnic regionalism of the Zelaingrong people. The religious diversity, Christianity and indigenous Zeliangrong faith, inter-cognate group self identity assertion, lack of common language, and administrative fragmentation are not the necessarily barrier to the evolution of the common Zeliangrong identity. After the departure of the British, the political development was conditioned by the political processes in the Naga Hills district (now Nagaland), State of Manipur and North Cachar Hills district of Assam. The Zeliangrong people were drawn into the Naga Independence movement initiated by the Naga National Council. They actively participated in Phizo’s political activities and joined the Naga rebellion. In Manipur, the Zeliangrong people participated in the democratic process of the State initiated by the Maharaja and the liberal leaders who were influenced by the mainstream Indian nationalism, though there were regional and Meitei nationalists who believed in the autonomy and regionalism of the State. The North Cachar Hills did not have a separate political identity as the Eastern India Tribal Union, based in Shillong where leaders like Rev. Nichols Roy participated in the Constitution drafting process and pleaded for the autonomy of the hill areas of Assam culminating in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Manipur’s participation in the Indian Republic after her merger was dominated by the 23 years of central rule and people’s dissatisfaction and movement for statehood for Manipur. There was also the extension of the Naga insurgency in Zeliangrong area which was a reaction against India represented by the
unpopular Governments of Manipur and Assam. The people resorted to an intense movement in the Zeliangrong area, popularly known as the ‘Homeland Movement’. This was the reflection of the three trends of the Zeliangrong political perceptions; participation in the mainland Indian political process was necessary for social and economic development; the homeland was necessary for the strengthening of the Zeliangrong identity and Zeliangrong regionalism; and finally active participation in Naga insurgency for more identification and fraternity among the whole Nagas. In fact, it was the Zeliangrong people who started the first “Naga Raj” movement during the colonial period.

**Naga Insurgency in Zeliangrong Area:**

The initial Zeliangrong response to the Naga national movement started by the Naga National Council was definitely more than a moral support. The leaders had good understanding with each other. When the then President of NNC A.Z.Phizo started huge campaign against the non-acceptability of the Indian Constitution, the educated youth leaders of Zeliangrong like N.B Pamei and M.Thaimei were fully aware of his ideology and vision. The Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) which was formed then extended its administration in the Zeliangrong province and many of them were awarded with good posts. Zeliangrong recruits to the Naga Home Guargs had even reached a total of 400 combatants, excluding the non-combatant civil workers. It implied that the involvement of the Zeliangrong people in the freedom struggle of the Nagas was quite strong. However, it was believed that they did not gain much status when compared to other Naga counterparts. The Zeliangrongos were put under the Zapfii State of the FGN. All their superior officers, both civil and military were Angamis. The whole Zeliangrong region was put under the Angami command. Moreover, the collected fees and duties were submitted to them. This in a way causes a friction between the communities. The domineering Angami hegemony wanted a subservient role for the Zeliangrong people in the Naga national liberation struggle. They suffered in the line of posting and promotion as well.

At Kaikao village, in February, 1960, the joint meeting of the Zeliangrong public leaders and the Naga workers of the NNC and FGN was held to thrash out the problem before it went out of control. The resultant of the meeting was to create a separate Zeliangrong Province and a separate creation of Naga Home Guards. These appointments were a bit incongruous in the sense that the military officers should be under the overall command of the Commander-in-chief of the Naga Home Guard as
also the political and administrative posts, the Ahng, the Tatar etc. The year 1960 was the peak of the Naga insurgency. It witnessed the establishment of Manipur Naga Council to which the Zeliangrong Naga Union was associated, under the pressure from the Maos, the Tangkhuls and the Anals. This means, the Manipur Zeliangrong Union was renamed as Zeliangrong Naga Union which was more dominated by the pro-Naga nationalists. Kaito Sema, the guerilla leader and the father of the Naga Army when visiting Tamenglong came to realize that the Zeliangrong Division of the Home Guards was not registered with the Naga Home Guard Headquarters. He abolished the Zeliangrong Division and relegated it to be the Ninth Brigade of the Naga Home Guards under the Brigadier Daiguang. They in the course of time dominated the whole Zeliangrong region. The first encounter between them and the Indian Army took place in Ndai Village with heavy losses on both sides. With Kaito’s support, the Ninth Brigade was gaining popularity with good arms and field officers. However, the Zeliangrong region soon became a target by the Indian Armies. The Army identified the area as the spring board for the onward route to East Pakistan. Therefore as a reactionary measure, they imposed the infamous “Armed Forces Special Powers Act (Assam and Manipur) of 1958”. Initially, it was declared for only six months but extended for many years and is still imposed in the Manipur state.

The Zeliangrong Integration:

The issue of integration of the Zeliangrong area into a single administrative unit was raised earlier by different Zeliangrong organizations and leaders including Rani Gaidinliu and K.Kalanlung. Here, we may recall Kalanlung’s memorandum to then Prime Minister of India Mr.Lal Bahadur Shastri, on 14th October 1964. The Memorandum reads,

“Our people have been scattered over three states because of political, historical and geographical factors. Though administratively separated, the three constituent tribes have glaring similarities in culture, religious custom and language. The demand for the self-rule of our people was always in the forefront..... It is the stand of the Zeliangrong people that we should all live in a common homeland with explicit rights to develop ourselves, to preserve our customs and religion, to develop our language and literature and to improve our standard of living and way of life”.

Though the Government of India had rejected the demand for a Zeliangrong District in 1966, Rani Gaidinliu after the fading away of the Naga Integration Movement pressed the then Prime Minister of India Mrs.Indira Gandhi to consider the
Zeliangrong integration issue. In a very comprehensive Memorandum on 18th August 1972, Rani Gaidinliu, after the award of the Tamra Patra, reiterated her demand for formation of a Zeliangrong Political Unit in the State of Nagaland. On the same day, the Zeliangrong organizations like the Zeliangrong Council, Zeliangrong Naga Union and Zeliangrong Association, Assam submitted a similar joint Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India. However, Mrs.Gandhi pleaded her inability and assured that she would consult the Chief Ministers of the concerned States where the Zeliangrong areas are situated. In the year 1975, the Zeliangrong Naga Union convened the first conference of the Zeliangrong leaders to have a fresh discussion on the Zeliangrong Political Unit. The matter was discussed again at the Second Conference of the Zeliangrong leaders in 1976. The third conference of the Zeliangrong leaders of Manipur was held in October 1980 and discussed the question of the integration of the Zeliangrong areas into a political and administrative unit at Tamenglong. The outcome of this conference was the formation of “Zeliangrong People’s Convention” (ZPC) which became the supreme body of the people to deal with the issue of integration of all Zeliangrong areas into a political unit, a district, a Union Territory or a State. Rani Gaidinliu became the first President of ZPC. Under her leadership, a regular meeting was held and in the third meeting held at Laisong in North Cachar Hills on June 7th 1981, they adopted the official slogan “Zeliangrong Ringtelou” meaning “Long live Zeliangrong”. This third meeting also led to the drafting of the Declaration on the Zeliangrong Homeland.

In the post 1964 period, when the India-Naga Ceasefire was enforced, the Zeliangrong people were fully involved in the Naga National Movement on the demand of all Naga areas to be integrated under one political umbrella. However, the unfortunate circumstances such as lack of employment prospects in Nagaland had generated another crisis within the Naga brothers and sisters. The differentiation between indigenous Nagas and outside Nagas in Nagaland left the movement at standstill and as a consequent the Zeliangrong started asserting its independent and distinctive character. In the course of time, they have realized the bitter truth. Their identity as Zeliangrong were not legally recognize by any state even Manipur nor by the Government of India. This was a shocking for the Zeliangrong people at large. Prof. Gangmumei writes, “Then, identifying with Naga identity is not enough. It is a great psychologically and socially disturbing reality that the Zeliangrong people have to face. Neither the Government of India, nor the Government of Assam or Manipur
recognizes the 'Zeliangrong Identity'. A big question has thus arisen "Who we are?" Zeliangrong youth have started a fresh search for roots of the Zeliangrong identity; common ancestry, cultural and social oneness and common history. Phizo and his philosophy have given an identity for all Nagas. Yet the Zeliangrong people are looking beyond Phizo to Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu and our ideas for (the roots of) our identity within the greater Nagas nationality. Jadonang’s relevance has been accepted and realized now. Zelingrong people are asserting their identity, which may have several impleacation. The search for a homeland for the Zeliangrong people is a logical expression of the Zelingrong psyche and it has become synonymous with Zeliangrong ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{29}

At the present the Zeliangrong society is a mixture of people having different faiths-Christians, Hindus and the worshippers of Tingkao Ragwang (TRC). The coming of Christianity and the formation of TRC which aims at reviving the Zeliangrong culture and religion is explained in chapter-4 and Chapter-5. Now, the major task is to identify the various names and titles used to describe the people.

**Question of Identity:**

It is interesting to note that the same group of people was known by two different names - namely, 'Rongmei' and 'Kabui'. Of the two, the first was the name generally used by the people of the tribe themselves to differentiate them from the people of other tribes or communities, while the second was the name used invariably by all other people to denote the people of this tribe. Thus "Kabui" was the only name used in air the contemporary Manipuri literature as well as their folksongs and folktales, etc. to denote this people. The same was the name used in all the then British Government's records also, like Administration Reports, Census Reports, etc. And in the same way, this name was invariably found having been used to denote people of this tribe in all the works-books, reports, articles, research papers etc. of the contemporary European writers who wrote something about this people. Thus, for the last several decades the said two names - 'Rongmei' and 'Kabui' had, at best, been used as synonymous terms so much so that, at least they, stand in their own way, for one and the same people.

In the post-Independence period also, the name 'Kabui' was used, till the

\textsuperscript{29} Kamei, Gangmumei op. cit.2004 p.233.
recent past, to denote the people of this tribe in the official records of the Government. Thus the Government of India as per the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes Part 'C' States) Order 1951 and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order, 1956 recognized the name "Kabui" as a Scheduled Tribe of Manipur.

The Census Report of 1951 has, for the first time shown a portion of the population of this tribe under a separate heading 'Rungmei'. In the 1961 Census Report also the same people are shown separately under two separate headings - 'Kabui' and "Rongmei" as if they are two distinct linguistic or cultural groups. This has accordingly created a good deal of unnecessary confusion to many about the real identity and solidarity of the people. Moreover, the use of this misleading term "Kabui" side by side with the name 'Rongmei' gives a serious disruptive effect to the people of the tribe also.

Consequently, the educated elites of this tribe made several representations to the government for the discontinuance of the use of this misleading term "Kabui' in case of this people and to use the name 'Rongmei' in its place. The government is now fully convinced of the points raised and consequently action follows as proposed.

Multiple Identities

Origin of the word Kabui:

The origin of the name Kabui is wrapped up in obscurity, since nothing definite can be said on this question on the basis of the few evidences at the disposal. However, regarding its origin we may refer to Nungshirei's book Leisemrol, Mehoural Meihourol, published in 1954, which put legend as the main sources of her argument. According to the legend, it is said that the word Kabui is derived from the word 'Apui' - a name called to a Meitei deity Ireima, of whom this people had great reverence and devotion to the said deity. According to this legend, it is said that Kabui was a later derivation from 'Apui', then, 'Kapui' and finally 'Kabui'. However, another writer Mannimohan, S. in the book Poirei Sana Leibak, 1968, is of the opinion that 'Kabui' is the name of a people corrupted from the word 'Kambuimei', and ultimately referred them as 'Kabui'. He suffers from the lack of evidence to support his argument. On the basis of available traditional texts called Puiya (Meitei archive literature), Pandit O. Nitya Singh writes that the name 'Kabui' was the one taken from the name of a man named 'Kabuiru Salamba', which according to him, was the progenitor of the Rongmei's. Here, his view is very relevant for the particular
purpose to find out the relationship between the Kabui and other group like Meitei. Another Pandit (Raj Pandit, A.S., undated: 13), writes that the name Kabui was derived from the place name ‘Kamboj (or Kamboja). He held that the Kabuis of Manipur and Vikramaditya- the famous legendary Raja of Ujjayini were men of one and the same blood. Here the author tries to link with the origin of the mongoloid tribe with those of the Hindu mainland which is not possible as shown in other legends found among the tribes. E.N. Dun calls Kabui as Kaupui, a tribe of Nagas who are located in the hills between the Cachar and Manipur Valleys.\textsuperscript{30}

It is fact that this particular people - namely the 'Kabuis' were a people who had been living for several centuries on the western hill ranges of Manipur certainly with a specific name of his own long before their coming into contact with the Meeteis of the valley.

As a matter of a fact, traditions of the Rongmeis have given nothing to show that the Meeteis were also a people living, those days, on those hill ranges as the immediate neighbours of the Rongmeis. Similarly, the Meetei Puyas and the Puwaris too, remain completely silent about the Meetei's living on the hills with Rongmeis as their neighbours. Thus regular contact between the Meeteis of the valley and the Rongmeis of the hills most probably, started only when the latter had another migration on the eastern sides of the western hill ranges facing the valley, or when the latter had also had their own settlements somewhere in the valley proper. But the history of the Rongmeis undoubtedly shows that their settlement on the eastern side of the western hill ranges facing the valley was the last phase of their lives in the hills.

Thus, from the above, it seems not unreasonable to presume that even if the said theory-namely, the Meetei origin of the name 'Kabui' is to be believed, then, it may undoubtedly be too far from truth that the said name - "Kabui" by which that particular people are known today, was not their native or original name but one of later additions only, since their contact with the Meeteis of the valley was comparatively

A question before us now is-what was, then, this name by which this people were known before their coming into contact with thee' Meeteis? This question, therefore, calls for a critical scrutiny of all the available dates relating to the name of this people.

A writer\textsuperscript{17} refers to, a story which indicates that "\textit{Kabui}" is the name of a people corrupted from the word - "Kambuimei". It is said that the said man was a great devotee, and one day he was entertaining gods and goddesses with all devotion and in a most sumptuous way. His sincerity, devotion as well as the most befitting manner in which the said gods and goddesses were received and entertained that day, was so much satisfying to the gods and goddesses present, that all of them had given him blessings that all the worldly wealth will be his saying-"\textit{Tu Kambui Tang Kambuimei Subamlatho}" - (i.e., be plentiful in life with abundant and ever inexhaustible wealth). It is thus held that that very host who was given the said "Kambuimei" blessings by his divine guests was ultimately known as "\textit{Kabui}".

It is a fact that 'Kambuimei' is a chaste Rongmei word having specific meaning of its own. But 'Kabui' is a term which gives no meaning, no sense to the Rongmeis and it has no place in the dictionary of the Rongmeis too. Thus, it would be too queer a logic to presume that a people having a specific language of his own may be adopting a meaningless term of unknown \textit{9ri~} to denote themselves in lieu of a meaningful native term of his own. Thus, the theory regarding the 'Kambuimei' origin of the name "\textit{Kabui}" is too far-fetched and untenable.

As a matter of fact, the Rongmeis are a people who have a very rich cultural tradition - rich varieties of folk-songs, folktales. They have their own language which has a very rich stock of vocabularies. Their culture is still a living culture. And thus had this name "Kabui" been a real native name originally adopted by this people to differentiate themselves from the other people then, there shall be no reason why this term should not find a place in the dictionary of the Rongmeis and as such, it must give a specific meaning to the people concerned. But unfortunately, contrary is the case that the term or the word "\textit{Kabui}" gives neither any sense whatsoever, to the Rongmei people nor has it a place in the rich stock of the vocabularies of this people.

Thus, most probably, to the disappointment of the propounder of the said theory, the only evidence on which his theory stands is found not strong enough to stand the test of scrutiny.

On the basis of an evidence said to be from a Meitei Puya, another Pandit\textsuperscript{18} so writes that the name "\textit{Kabui}" was the one taken from the name of a man named "\textit{Kabuiru Salamba}", who according to that pandit, was the progenitor of the Rongmeis.

Generally, proper names are invariably connotative, and as such, they are
never found to be random choice of meaningless words that have no specific sense in them. A proper name, worth the name, has definitely, a specific meaning to the people of a particular community to which that very name belongs. Thus, had the name "Kabuiru Salamba" been the real, original name of the ancestor of the Rongmeis themselves, then it would certainly have a specific meaning to this people. But the name in question, gives no meaning to the said people.

Under the circumstances, it may also be quite probable that the name "Kabui" was the one so nick-named by some non-Kabuis, since it was not uncommon in the past ages, that a particular group of people was nick-named in different ways by certain other people. By way of an example it may be pointed out there that both the names "Kuki" and "Kacha Nanga" by which two different groups of people were known till the recent past, were not their original names, but were so nick-named by others. Thus, it may not be an impossibility in the case of this people also that they were so nick-named by some outsiders because of the fact that although the said name "Kabui" conveys no meaning to the so-called "Kabuis" themselves, it was a name by which they were known since long ago.

A question may arise here - Who was, then, that very outsider who had nick-named this people as 'Kabuiru Salamba' - a name which would certainly give some meanings to him? On this point, the "Puya" quoted by the said Pandit seems to be very clear in informing us that the name 'Kabuiru Salamba' was one of the seven names of seven brothers first created by the divine Creator - 'Leinung Thongaren Sidaba'. We are further informed that the said seven brothers were progenitors of seven different peoples namely- the Mayangkhang, the Tangkhul, the Langol Maring, the Kharam, the Chothe, the Kabui and the Meetei who are speaking different languages.

Thus, if the said Puya is to be believed, then, we may have certain reason to presume that the name 'Kabuiru Salamba' must be a name given by one of these seven, and as such, the said name must certainly have some bearing on one of those seven different languages of these people. But there is no evidence to show that the said name "Kabuiru Salamba" has any distinctive bearing on anyone of these languages.

Under the circumstances, it is difficult for us to ascertain the identity of the people who may be held responsible for giving the name. Thus, the theory of the "Kabuiru Salamba" origin of the name of "Kabui" also appears to be equally
untenable, since it is based on a distant and un-corroborated legend.

Another Pandit also writes\(^{19}\) that the name "Kabui" was derived from the place-name-'Kamboj' (or Kamboja). He thus held that the Kabuis of Manipur and Vikramaditya—the famous legendary Raja of Ujjayini were men of one and the same blood.

It is a fact that earlier centuries of the Christian era witnessed the growth of a brisk foreign trade between India and the West. And in those days merchandise from Ujjayini and other remote places in the north as far as Kashmir and Hindukush mountains were brought to the ancient harbour namely Bhrigukachchha - modern Broad at the mouth of the Narmada river for export to foreign countries. The chief articles of export from India were spices, medicinal herbs, cloth, silkyam, muslin, etc., while the principal imports were glass vessels, silver, gold, coral, conch-shell, etc.

Traditions clearly show that since time immemorial conch-shell has been associated with remarkable social values in the cultural life of the so-called 'Kabui'. One may therefore, be instantly tempted to presume that perhaps the so-called "Kabuis" of Manipur were originally a people from Ujjayini itself or somewhere there-about, which was then within the orbit of the said conch-shell trade.

As a matter of fact, conch-shell evidence alone may be too insufficient to prove conclusively that the original home of the so-called 'Kabuis' was at Ujjayini or somewhere near about it. And what is required here in this particular context is not to show that the Kabuis were from Ujjayini but to prove that the "Kabuis" had blood relationships with the legendary Raja of Ujjayini.

Generally, geographical relationship or the so-called common-home relationship is not always a conclusive proof of the blood relationship between any two people, since it has almost always been a universal phenomenon, right from the beginning of human history that men belonging to different bloods, tribes or communities have been found living in one land, the same region or area. Moreover, the history and traditions of this people also give no hint on his having any relation with such a great figure of royal descent, as propounded by the said Pandit Raj.

On the other hand, it is not always uncommon among the numerous backward communities of tribes to be tempted to adopt surnames of the higher people or to link themselves racially With a renown heromythical or historical, as a mark of respectability and also as embodiment of their ideals in respect of courage, valour, honourableness and strength by which that hero or the people belonging to that
particular people have been traditionally distinguished. Generally, racial pride is an ingrained quality of man; and as such, there is no reason why the Kabuis shall be an exception to that.

Thus, had they really had a blood relation with the said legendary hero of Ujjayini, then, the same or at least, a glimpse of it could have been visible or heard through the windows of traditions, customs, folktales, folksongs and stories, etc., of this people.

The Kabuis had no recorded history of their own. But just as people of other communities had their own singers and bards who carried on legends and histories of their community in songs and poems from generations to generations, the Kabuis too, had innumerable singers and bards, from age to age who handed down orally the legends, history, customs, traditions and culture, etc. from one generation to another. But unfortunately, all of them are found completely silent on this particular question concerning the Kabui's migration from Ujjayini to the hills of Manipur. In view of this, the theory regarding the Ujjayini origin of the Kabuis as propounded by the said Pandit Raj appears to be a mere illusion and as such, the theory of their blood-relationship with Vikramaditya-the legendary Raja of Ujjayini also sounds equally fantastic.

A local legend which was current among the people has another explanation relating to the origin of the name 'Kabui'. One day, while some children were playing somewhere near the roadside lilal看电影 toy Mithuns of clay, some strangers came passing that way and asked the children to tell them the name of their village that stood nearby. The boys had misheard the question of the strangers for the name of the clay-made toy-Mithuns that they were making, and had accordingly given the reply off-hand, 'Kabui- Yee' (i.e., Millian). The strangers, too, had, on his part, taken the said reply 'Kabui-Yee' for the name of the village he was asking for. Thus from that day onwards, the name of that village came to be known as 'Kabui-Yee' and it is said that the name of the village had ultimately been used to denote the people of that village, and thus it had been changed from 'Kabui- Yee', to Kabui".

Leaving aside the authenticity or otherwise of the legend, this much is clear beyond doubt, that the children who were found playing on the roadside with Mithuns made of clay were not the Kabuis but the Rengmeis, since the reply that they were giving to the question of the strangers was in Rengmei language and not in Kabui, and as such, the village in question, must also be a Rengmei village. "KabuiYee" is a Rengmei
name for Mithun but the Kabui name of the same animal is 'Goichang'.
The change of the name Kabui from Kabui-Yee may not be a surprise at all, since
they indicate mere phonetic differences. But the identification of the Rengmei people
of that village nick-named as 'Kabui-Yee' with the so-called Kabui people, who speak
different language merely on grounds of the similarity of the sounds of the two names
will be too arbitrary.

Another, not completely similar, legend tells us that the name 'Kabui' was a
corruption from the name 'Kabui-Yee', which means Mithun. It however, tells its story
in a different way. Thus it is said that there was once a very rich Mithun-owner, who
had a great affection for his Mithuns. Very unluckily for that Mithun-owner one day
his Mithun was found leaving his home never to return there again. And for a number
of days he was searching for that Mithun all around but he could not find it again. The
loss of the Mithun was so much distressing and painful to the said Mithun-owner that
he did not feel like coming back home without that Mithun. Besides, he felt the house
deserted by that noble Mithun was no longer a house worth living for him also. He
accordingly, left his house forever and went to another hill range and lived there.
There he established a new home for himself and began living there cutting altogether
away from his near and dear ones of the former village.

His departure was equally painful to the members of the old village too. They
accordingly tried their best to bring him back to their village, but it was of no effect.
So out of displeasure, they nick-named him 'Kabui-Mayee' - which means "man who
follows the foot prints of the Mithun". It is said that since then the said Mithun-owner
was known as 'Kabui-Mayee', which in course of time, had been shortened as 'Kabui'.
It is thus held that the name 'Kabui' by which a particular group of people is known
today has to trace back its origin to that Mithun-owner.

It is of course apparent from the above that all the persons connected with the
above story were men of the same blood living in one and the same village at one
time. It is also equally apparent that the men of the old village who had nick-named
the said Mithun-owner as 'Kabui-Mayee' were Rengmei people and not the so-called
Kabuis, since the term 'Kabui-Mayee' is a Rengmei term. It is a fact that the Rengmeis
and so-called Kabuis are two kindred tribes, speaking different languages of their
own. It seems therefore, nothing unreasonable to say that the Mithun-owner, in
question, was also a man of the Rengmei blood.

But it may be too dramatic for that Mithun-owner who was, undoubtedly, a
man of pure Rengmei blood to find himself completely changed from his original native colour, and posed himself a completely new man the very next moment as soon as he was given a new name and became the progenitor of another people. Indeed, the theory that the said Mithun-owner will be a new man having different tongue and a different blood as soon as he is given a nick-name, sounds too fantastic for any real life.

**Origin of the term 'Rongmei'**

The term 'Rongmei' has, indeed, a very strong bearing on geographical direction. Thus 'Rong' means south' or southern direction man of the south or of southern direction: or "southerner'. In the same way, the term 'Rengmei' means "man of the north" or "Northerner", since 'Reng' means 'North' and 'Mei' means 'Men'.

This people namely 'Rongmei' is called 'Mee-Long' by the Kukis also. Moreover, the term 'Rong-Lam' which means 'Southern land' (Rong means south, Lam means 'Land') is also found very popular among the folk-singers of this tribe. It appears that the name 'Rongmei' has a close relation with the term 'Ronglam' since the former signifies the people, while the latter stands for that particular land where that people lived.

As a matter of fact, the term 'Rong-Lam' literally means "Southern land" appears to be very vague since it signifies no specific area of any particular geographical description. And in exactly the same way, the name 'Rongmei' with its general meaning 'man of the southern land' will also be a too strained interpretation if it meant for one and only one people of the-region since, as the meaning of the name itself shows, it will also inevitably include all the other groups of people constituting the entire population of the region, in question. But the said name "Rongmei" has been used in a very restricted sense to mean only that people for whom it stands today. Similarly, the term 'Rong-Lam' has also been used in that restricted sense to mean only that particular part of the land where the said people were found living in the days.

Thus, in view of the present day population structure of the region in question, it will definitely give rise to a question - why this name "Rongmei" (meaning - southerner) should stand for one and only one group of people of the so-called "Rongmei" area, whose population consisted not only Rongmei people but also of people of many other tribes. It is fact that the name "Rongmei" is not of recent birth, but is one of long standing, which was as old as the peoples themselves. Thus, it was
most probably, because of the fact that in those remote past this people - the
Rongmeis, was the only people originally living in these solitary hill ranges, and the
other groups of people who are found living in that region at present, were immigrants
in that area in some later periods only. As a result, the said name "Rongmei" was
wishfully applied as an honorific epithet in respect of this people, and in course of
time, this very name became the real name of the tribe.

The land where the Rengmei people were originally living in the ancient past
was known as "Reng-Lam". This is often referred to in the folk songs of the
Rongmeis as "Apui Reng-Lam", which means "Motherland of the North." Traditions
of the Rongmeis also say that they were the people coming from the North. Though it
is extremely difficult to pin-point the exact geographical location of the said "Apui
Reng-Lam", it is a fact that the Rongmeis of the ancient days were migrating from the
north to the southern side, and as such, they were the southern neighbours of the
Rengmei people of the North.

Thus, the relative geographical positions of the lands, held respectively by the
Rengmeis and the Rongmeis of those days appears to be self-explanatory to the
appropriateness of the honorific epithet 'Rongmei", which means 'man of the southern
side, or southerner, being given to this people and it is also most probable that the said
epithet was so given to this people, when they were found to be the only people
inhabiting in that land lying just to the southern side of the Rengmei area. And it is
not very unlikely that in course of time that very epithet had ultimately become the
name of the tribe itself, in the same restricted sense as the native people of China,
Burma, Assam, Bengal, Manipur and Punjab are respectively known as the Chinese,
the Burmese, the Assamese, Manipuris, Bengalis and Punjabis etc. after the names of
the land of their respective origin. This pattern is widely used.

Regarding the articulation of the Kabui identity from time to time according to
the change of the socio-political condition of the state, we may refer to various
literatures. Kabui Nagas of Manipur are also known by different names- Rongmei,
and at present Zeliangrong. According to Mangthoi Thaimei in the article “The
Rongmeis”, the term Rongmei has indeed, a very strong bearing on geographical
direction-Rong means south or southern direction and Mei means people. This people
namely Rongmei is called ‘Mee-Long’ by the Kukis. Moreover, the term ‘Rong-Lam’
which means ‘Southern land’ (Rong means south and Lam means Land) is also found
very popular among the folk-singers of this tribe. It appears that the name Rongmei
has a close relation with the term ‘Ronglam’ since the former signifies the people, while the latter stands for that particular land where the people lived. The land where the ‘Rongmei’ people were originally living in the ancient past was known as ‘Reng Lam’. This is often referred to in the folk songs of the Rongmeis as ‘Apui Reng-Lam’, which means ‘Motherland of the North’. Traditions of the Rongmeis also say that they were the people coming from the North. Though it is extremely difficult to pinpoint the exact geographical location of the said ‘Apui Reng-Lam’, it is a fact that the Rongmeis of the ancient days were migrating from the north to the southern side, and as such, they were the southern neighbors of the Rongmei people of the North.

The name Zeliangrong was started using to denote this group from the year 1947, when the ‘Zeliangrong Union’ was formed. Concerning the causes, nature and its impact, there are various literatures both in English and vernacular language. For example, N. Joykumar, in his book, Social Movement in Manipur (1917-1951), published in 1992, throws a light on the formation of the Zeliangrong Movement. According to him, the main cause of the movement was the result of conflict between the Natives and Colonizers. Here, the writer failed to give an account of the movement especially after the colonial period. Another writer, Gangmumei Kamei, in the articles, “Jadonang’s Concept of Naga Raj”, 2000 and “The Zeliangrong Movement: A Historical Study”, traces the origin of the movement and give an account of the present movement. And another writer, Lanbilung Gonmei, in his article, “Zeliangrong Identity: Past and Present”, 2000, not only provides an account of the origin of the movement but also presented the problem of the movement. According to him, because of the demand of “Nagalim” and secession from Indian Union by NSCN, the Zeliangrong movement for political identity has been considered as contradiction and divergent force to the ideology of NSCN. Thus the Zeliangrong movement for socio-political identity has been in great dilemma.

Locating the history of the tribe, we can conclude that originally, the people were known as Kabui. However, we can argue that this name has been more or less given by the outsider. The name Rongmei which locate at the direction of settlement is at the present gaining more popularity among the tribe. The hilly people who have converted into Christianity and many more in the Valley prefer to call them by this name. Later, when the issue of integration among the three tribes such as the Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei including Puimei, this people has decided to call themselves ‘Zeliangrong’. Though, constitution of India recognized only name Kabui as the
Scheduled Tribes of India, efforts have been very strong to recognize them as Zeliangrong.

Therefore, this chapter tries to locate the origin, migration and development of the tribe and the interaction with other ethnic groups and communities. It also brings out the confusion of the name and the multiple identities associated with the tribe. The finding of the study is that the word ‘Kabui’, ‘Haomei’, ‘Rongmei’, and ‘Zeliangrong’ refers to the same ethnic group and have been synonymously used in this study. The following chapters will discuss with society, culture, economy, polity, religion, and movements which consequently led to the identity crisis of the tribe.
Photos of Chapter 3

Photo 1: Taobhei (a Stone of Dispersal) at Makhel, Senapati District of Manipur

Photo 1a: The Charmed Stone (Champei Nap-Phao), Tubumei Village, Makhel.

Photo 1b: A closer look of the 'Charmed Stone' where crops are believed to be doubled when they are kept on the stone.
Photo 1c: Rah Phakthaibang (a wild pear tree): A legendary tree at Shajouba

Photo 2: Rani Gaidinliu