

## Towards Ethno-Linguistic Governance

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**Introduction:** The United Zou Organization defined the Zou people as, "He who speaks the Zou language and practice the Zou custom is a Zou"<sup>1</sup> (Zou ham a ham a, UZO tawndan zuite khu Zou ahi hi). Here, the role of language and culture is indispensable in identity formation and nation building. Enquirers usually used language and culture to determine the identity of a person. During the times of the Judges in the Bible, there was also such pronunciation-based screening with the word "Shibboleth" to determine if the person was an Ephraimites or Gileadites. (Judges 12:6) Such is also true along the Indo-Burmese frontiers of Mizoram state. "R" is the determining factor to identify who belongs to the other side of the border. Once a Mizoram customs officer asked a Burmese national, "Ar ti rawh." He was said to respond, "Vok kati zawk ang." Thus, his nationality was proven.

The second most important element to know people group is culture, custom and tradition. While culture changes from time to time, custom and tradition have been inherited from our progenitors from time immemorial although custom undergo modification to meet with the contemporary demand. For the most comprehensive studies of our custom, refer to the Zou Custom Book. Meanwhile, researchers suggested that culture undergo certain changes in a decade. My Mom once told me culture did not change before the advent of Christianity in Zoland. She was of the opinion that changes was brought about by the advent of Christianity on one hand and the military expedition of the British empire on the other. Prior to that, the Zou people were self-governing, self-supporting and self-sufficient in their own world. This paper attempts to revive and restore the aforesaid spirit of the Zou people. Looking at the above elements, we can draw an ethno-linguistic territory of the Zou people with special reference to what Sing Khaw Khai says, *"The Yos (Zo/Zou) are most unique in the sense of the name they bear and the culture they practice in reflection of the ancient Zo tradition. Their origin myth points back to times immemorial. No proper study has yet been made as to why the generic Yo as spelt in former literature was applied to them. Yo families are today living in north-east of Tedim town, in Tonzang township, in Kale-Kabaw valley, and also in Manipur state, India"*<sup>2</sup> as the epicenter for change to take place. Zou people living in this area speaks the same language, practice the same culture and custom, inherit the same tradition and history which is why there will be no problems in terms of the aforesaid elements rather than the policies, programs and strategies. The immediate neighboring territories of the conventional name Kuki-Chin-Mizo-Zomi will eventually pick up if this experiment succeed. Therefore, the underlying map represents the epicenter of the laboratory for this Ethno-Linguistic Governance without the so-called Kuki-Chin-Mizo-Zomi, but just the traditional name ZO or ZOU. (See Appendix - I)

### **Why do we need Ethno-Linguistic Governance?**

To answer this question, one has to analyze the practical or factual position of our land and our people. The dreamland Zogam is not yet born or ready. Therefore, the real-land has to have some sort of administrative set-up or governance and be ready to welcome the eventual birth of Zoland, if you will. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "If we want independence, we must to prove worthy of it... We must not treat our people as the English treat us. We must remove untouchable from our society and our hearts."<sup>3</sup> Such must be the case in our nation building. Nation building with malice to someone and with

discrimination will not succeed. A house divided against itself will not stand.<sup>4</sup> A nation headed by militants or military junta will not have a chance to speak for itself in the free world.

The Indo-Burmese boundary was drawn by Captain Pamberton in 1834.<sup>5</sup> Prior to that, Manipur Kingdom was described as, "...always confined to the fertile valley of 2,238 square kilometers inhabited by Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Kha-Ngamba and Chenglei alias Sarang clans. In the ancient period, the valley of Manipur was divided into seven clan-based kingdoms, and functioned like the ancient Greek city-states. There is no mention of any Meitei lords or kings interfering in our politics, religion and economy. There was only mentions of battles with them. Battles and wars are fought between two sovereign and independent kingdoms or countries. Likewise, the Pyu people migrated to Burma around 912 AD, long after we have settled in the present Burma. We were then known as the Burmese racially, and belong to the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic group to the outside world. The Pyu people were concentrated around Ava settlement and there has never been any mention of tax levied on our people, not even to speak of any interference in terms of politics, religion and economy. Captain Pamberton admitted, "These people are practically independent." However, he was never hesitant to draw the international boundary between India and Burma in 1834, sliced and awarded some portion of our land to India and the other half to Burma. Thereafter, some portion of our land was given to East Pakistan when it attained independence. Whatever the case, we now need to live in peace and tranquility with our neighboring brothers and sister of the greater union - Burma and India or before we attain independence. God will justify the chicken hearted captain of the British empire who acted against his conscience and knowledge. See Appendix - II

The post-independence upheavals did not yield anything but mass bloodsheds and Divide-and-Rule policy. The real-land or what we adorably called "Tunnu Zogam, Zuopa Satsa" (Motherland Zogam, Founded by Father) had become a dreamland. Almost all ethnic groups have been fighting to regain their sovereignty and independence since Indian and Burmese independence but not even one succeed. Military strategies failed and manpower dwindled, but no change takes place. The real-land has sunk more and more into the dreamland. Therefore, the only option we have in the real-land is to create an Ethno-Linguistic Governance and stay away from political boundary before Zogam is created.

### **Steps to Ethno-Linguistic Governance**

Knowing that Ethno-Linguistic governance has no geo-political boundary but rather a virtual boundary, we need to make sure that we live in peace and harmony with our neighbors on one hand and maintain a working ethno-linguistic government on the other. Here are some basic steps to ethno-linguistic governance:

- 1. Uniform Custom:** There are so many variations of the Zou custom although we pledge allegiance to the UZO. There are so many self-made rules and regulations above and beyond the UZO custom. Example - the bride price and dowry, divorce penalty and the alarmingly increasing divorce rate, etc. There will be female infanticide, bankruptcy, poverty and family, kinsmen feud in the very near future.
- 2. Administrative Set-up:** The administrative set-up of the UZO is worth mentioning in ethno-linguistic governance. UZO must follow the three branches of a government - Legislative, Judiciary and Executive. The Zou House shall consist of two chambers - Senators and Representatives. Members of the Senate

shall be appointed from each clan of the UZO constituent body and each clan shall be responsible to nominate its own two member Senators. The House of Representative shall consist of elected members from each unit based on popular votes - preferably one per thousand popular votes. Another branch of the UZO shall be the Judiciary which shall be nominated by the Executive branch and approved by the Zou House. The third branch of the UZO government will be the Executive branch elected by the people. This branch will execute laws passed by the legislative branch and mobilize human and non-human resources to protect, promote and defend the constitution of the UZO and its people. This branch will spread its wings to have secretaries of every department deemed necessary from time to time. Example - Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Education, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Secretary of Labor, etc. All these three branches of the UZO shall be independent to maintain checks and balances in governance.

**3. Uniform Literature and Mass Media:** The single most important and binding factor to Ethno-Linguistic governance is Literature and Mass Media. We are around 50000 to 70000 people literally living around the globe. Two decades ago, our geographical settlement or territory was confined to the Indo-Burmese frontiers, but now we have begun to settle almost everywhere around the world. Here, we must not neglect that population is very important in nation building. Some countries where we have significant population are - India, Burma, United States, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, etc. The prospect of having united Zou literature society always outweigh the effort to make it happen. It is time to have one version of the Zou Holy Bible, hymnals, Sunday school subjects, vernacular subjects, etc. We also need to take advantage of electronic revolution where almost everything has been done in e-format and e-version. There are e-mail, e-business, e-governance, e-library, etc. We can take advantage of this and share our news, happenings, current affairs, etc. through the e-revolution. This will unite us psychologically, culturally, religiously, linguistically and bind us together in the spirit of brotherhood. There are more works to be done after having uniform literature and mass media. There is no Burmese Zo, Indian Zou, USA Zo, Malaysia Zo, but only the United Zou Organization.

**4. United Zou Organization - Global Summit:** Another step to Ethno-Linguistic Governance is uniting our people around the globe. Currently, UZO has been established in India and United States, and is beginning to be established in Burma. The prospects of establishing UZO in many other countries such as Malaysia, Israel, Australia, Singapore, European Countries, etc. are phenomenal. After all this structural formation is done, there must be an assembly of the UZO-GS at least a year, where delegates from around the world will meet and move the wheel of progress and development. Progress reports from every member country will be presented; our past, present and future visions, plans and goals will be laid out by intellectuals and researchers, and uniformly executed by member countries. Currently, UZO in India and USA are able and ready to do if there is the will and resolutions.

**5. Taking Advantage of e-revolution:** Technology changes the civilization of humankind. The horse and bayonet age has been changed to very sophisticated satellite laser guided technology. Today, Global Positioning System (GPS), Computers, Internet, etc. changes every aspect of our lives. Electronic versions such as online shopping, online banking, online business, online classes, online library - kindle, nook, e-book, online warfare (Computer viruses), online news and forums, online meetings and conferences, etc. are on the rise. Even satellite-fed images can be watched live around the world. All these e-revolution can help us in our endeavor towards ethno-linguistic governance. It is time UZO have an online library and the Zou individuals pen down whatever we can, know and feel and contribute to the

development of the Zou people. Hard copy publication is not the only means to print our books - Bibles, Hymnals, religious and secular books, etc., we can always take advantage of electronic version.

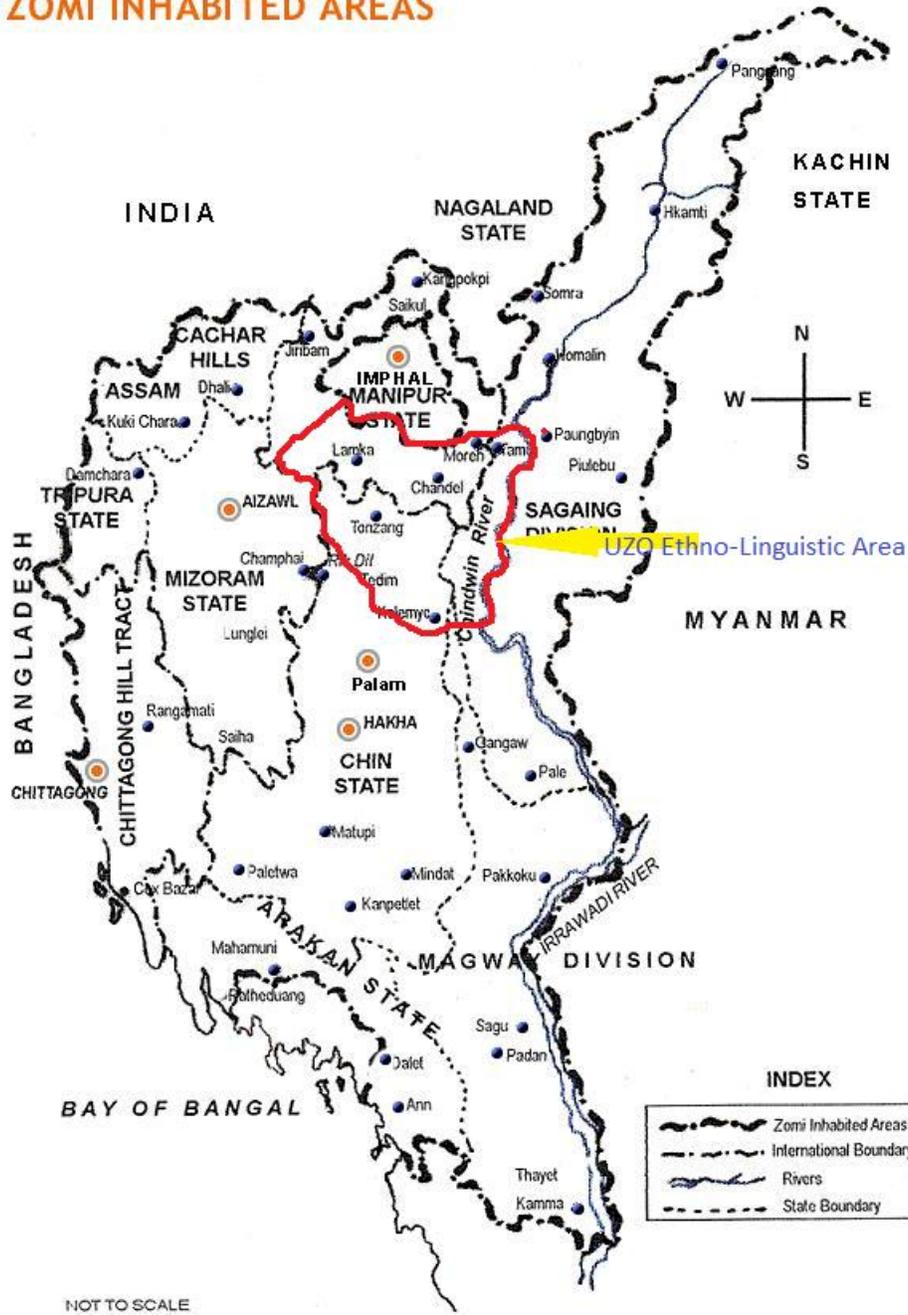
**Conclusion:** The Zou people who have been deprived of their land, rights and privileges since the British colonial era need to be aware of who we are, where we are heading and what it takes us to get to where we want to be. We must decide based on what and where we want to be, not based on what and where we are. Zoland needs to be created for us to live in peace and tranquility, but we must not forget to have enduring patience before the appointed time. Lands, kingdoms and government belongs to God. Kingdoms and government emerged, dominated whole or part of the known world and dwindled throughout history. Even if we cannot participate in geo-political government, we can still participate in ethno-linguistic governance and give our very best and better future to our people now and in the next generation. If we can participate in Ethno-Linguistic Governance, the advantages outweigh the effort and the benefits will be seen in the political, social, economic and religious spheres of our lives. If this is achieved as it is achievable, the Zou people around the world we join hands in times of war and peace and mobilize our physical, financial, intellectual and moral assets to get the situational job done right. God bless UZO, ZLS, ZYO and ZSP!!!

#### References:

1. The Zou Custom book was retrieved from [www.zolengthe.net](http://www.zolengthe.net)
2. Khai, Sing Khaw. *Zo People and Their Culture: A historical, cultural study and critical analysis of Zo and its ethnic Tribes*. Churachandpur: Published by Khampu Hatzaw, 1995
3. This quotation was taken from the Hollywood film "Gandhi." My apology for not being able to accurately because this Seminar paper was written in Lamka where I am out of touch with so many of my materials.
4. Matthew 12:25
5. Bertram S Carey and H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, Our Dealings with Them, Their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country – Vol. I*, (Rangoon: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1896) P.172.

APPENDIX - I

ZOMI INHABITED AREAS



## APPENDIX - II

**The Zou Land Before British Entry**

Before the Zou inhabited region that was known to the British imperialists as “practically independent”<sup>1</sup> was awarded to Manipur and Burma by the Manipur Boundary Commission in 1894,<sup>2</sup> the history of Manipur was always confined to the fertile valley of 2,238 square kilometers<sup>3</sup> inhabited by Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Kha-Ngamba and Chenglei alias Sarang clans. In the ancient period, the valley of Manipur was divided into seven clan-based kingdoms, and functioned like the ancient Greek city-states.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the Burmese kingdom was called kingdom of Ava where the Pyu rulers ruled the valley of Ava and its surrounding areas. The only portion mentioned in the Treaty of Yandaboo in February 1826 was the Kubo valley that “lies between Heerok and Yoma range of mountains, which bounds the eastern side of the Manipur valley, and Ningthee or Kyendwen River. It commences from the foot of the hills in latitude 20° 30’ north and extends south to 22° 30’, where it terminates on the left bank of the Kathe Khyong, or Manipur river, which falls into the Ningthee, and marks the southern limit of the Kule Raja’s territory. The valley is divided into three principalities, viz., Sumjok, Kumbat and Kule.”<sup>5</sup>

During the British entry into Zou land, neither the ancient history of Manipur, nor the ancient history of Burma made any mention of their suzerainty over the Zou people which we now know as the Chin-Kuki-Zo people. They have lived in the land that Captain Pemberton, in the Treaty of 1834, called “Partly in Manipur and partly in Burma or independent territory.”<sup>6</sup> In 1872, disagreeing with the Colonel Thompson’s report and recommendation that said, “This ‘cross-hatched area’ should go to Burma, and that Manipur has no right to make war in that direction, but if threatened or injured by the Sooties (Kamhau-Sukte), they should refer their grievances to the Burmese Government through the Government of India,”<sup>7</sup> Alexander Mackenzie stated, “So far as our record show, the Burmese Government do not appear to ever have exercised any control over the Sooties to the south of the Manipur boundary line. The whole tribe seems to be practically independent, and not to have been

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontier of India*, 1884, New Delhi, Reprint 2003, P.173. Hereafter cited as Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontiers of India*

<sup>2</sup> Bertram S Carey and H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, Our Dealings with Them, Their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country – Vol. I*, (Rangoon: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1896) P.172. Hereafter cited as Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*

<sup>3</sup> Sipra Sen, *Tribes and castes of Manipur*, p.18. Manipur has an area of 22,327 sq. km. The valley has an area of 2,238 sq. km. (10.02%) and the remaining area of 20,089 sq km (89.97%) is the hills surrounding the valley.

<sup>4</sup> Naorem Sanajaoba, *Manipur, Past and Present*, Vol IV, p.10. Hereafter cited as Sanajaoba, *Manipur, Past and Present*

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontier of India*, 1884, New Delhi, Reprint 2003, p.172. Hereafter cited as Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontiers of India*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp.175-176

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172

affected at all by the Treaty of 1834. Though a line was drawn westward from the source of the Numsaulung to the Kathe Khyoung, there is no mention in the treaty of the territory south of this line having been made over to Burma." In 1856, Colonel McCulloch said that the south-eastern portion of Manipur had never been 'explored, and that the Manipur authorities had never tried to bring the tribes inhabiting it into subjection.'"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David Vumlallian Zou, *The Pasts of a Fringe Community: Ethno-history and Fluid Identity of the Zou in Manipur*, *Indian Historical Review*, 36, 2 (2009): 209-235. Hereafter cited as David Zou, *The Pasts of a Fringe Community*