

The background of the cover is a detailed architectural drawing in white lines on a dark green background. It features various geometric shapes, including rectangles, circles, and arcs, representing a complex plan or section of a building or structure. The drawing is dense and intricate, with many small details and patterns.

INDO-BURMA FRONTIER AND THE MAKING OF THE CHIN HILLS

EMPIRE AND RESISTANCE

Pum Khan Pau

ROUTLEDGE



INDO-BURMA FRONTIER AND THE MAKING OF THE CHIN HILLS

This book examines the British colonial expansion in the so-called unadministered hill tracts of the Indo-Burma frontier and the change of colonial policy from non-intervention to intervention. The book begins with the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26), which resulted in the British annexation of the North-Eastern Frontier of Bengal and the extension of its sway over the Arakan and Manipur frontiers, and closes with the separation of Burma from India in 1937. The volume documents the resistance of the indigenous hill peoples to colonial penetration; administrative policies such as disarmament; subjugation of the local chiefs under a colonial legal framework and its impact; standardisation of ‘Chin’ as an ethnic category for the fragmented tribes and sub-tribes; and the creation and consolidation of the Chin Hills District as a political entity to provide an extensive account of British relations with the indigenous Chin/Zo community from 1824 to 1935. By situating these within the larger context of British imperial policy, the book makes a critical analysis of the British approach towards the Indo-Burma frontier.

With its coverage of key archival sources and literature, this book will interest scholars and researchers in modern Indian history, military history, colonial history, British history, South Asian history and Southeast Asian history.

Pum Khan Pau is Assistant Professor, Department of History, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India. He was Raman Post-Doctoral Fellow at Arizona State University, USA (2014–15). His area of specialisation is in the history of the indigenous tribes of the Indo-Burma borderlands during colonial and postcolonial times. He has published in the *Indian Historical Review*, *Strategic Analysis*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, *Journal of Religion and Society*, *Journal of Burma Studies*, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* and chapters in edited volumes.



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ABBREVIATIONS

ASA	Assam State Archives
FEAP	Foreign External-A Proceeding
FEBP	Foreign External-B Proceeding
FPAP	Foreign Political-A Proceeding
FPBP	Foreign Political-B Proceeding
FPEP	Foreign Political-E Proceeding
FSEP	Foreign Secret-E Proceeding
FSC	Foreign Secret Consultation
FPC	Foreign Political Consultation
IOL&R	India Office Library and Record
JASB	Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal
JBRB	Journal of Burma Research Society
NAI	National Archives of India
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives

PREFACE

The Chin/Zo people are an ethnic group of the Indo-Burma borderlands settled predominantly in the Chin Hills District, now Chin State of Myanmar and its adjoining areas. From the last decade of the nineteenth century when these hills were brought under British rule till 1935, they were under the administration of the British Indian Government. Until relatively recently the Chin/Zo people had not received adequate attention at the hands of historians either in Burma/Myanmar or in India in particular and South Asianists or Southeast Asianists in general, and as a result, the literature on the Chin/Zo remains limited. Standard textbooks on Burma, such as J. S. Furnivall's *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge 1948), John F. Cady's *A History of Modern Burma* (New York 1958), Thant Myint-U's *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge 2004) and Mary P. Callahan's *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca 2005) make only sketchy references to the Chin/Zo people. One of the earliest works on the relations between the Chin/Zo and the British was Charles Crosthwaite's contemporary account, *The Pacification of Burma* (1912), dealing with Chin/Zo resistance against the imposition of colonial rule. Dorothy Woodman's *The Making of Burma* (London 1962) covers much the same ground, but in one chapter. Among the anthropological and sociological studies on the Chin/Zo, H.N.C. Stevenson's *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes* ([1943] 1986) and F. K. Lehman's *The Structure of Chin Society* ([1963] 1980) remain standard accounts. A diary of E. H. East in *Burma Manuscript* (1983), Robert G. Johnson's *History of the American Baptist Chin Missions* (1988) in two volumes and Laura Hardin Carson's *Pioneer Trials, Trails and Triumphs* ([1927] 1997) not only provide valuable information on the activities of early missionaries of the Chin Hills but also throw some light on the socio-economic life of the Chin/Zo. Vumson's *Zo History* (1986), Sing Khaw Khai's *Zo People and Their Culture* (1995) and Lian H. Sakhong's *In Search of Chin Identity* (2004) are recent studies by native Chin/Zo scholars, albeit with limitations. A very recent work on the Northern Chin Hills is T. Gin Khaw Thang and Pauneikhai Suantak's *Tributary Hill Polity* (2017). However, none of these publications deal adequately

with the Chin Hills, nor did they use archival sources. They are mainly based on published materials. My study of the Chin/Zo people is based largely on primary and secondary sources. The bulk of the work is drawn from archival materials which are examined critically. This is one of the pioneering works on the Zo (Chin-Kuki-Lushai) people of the Indo-Burma borderlands and it is intended to fill the historiographical gap between the colonial 'North-Eastern Frontier of India' and British Burma in particular, and South Asia and Southeast Asia in general.

This book is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India. It would be apt to mention the circumstances which helped in shaping the contours of my academic endeavours. It all began with my grandparents, Ton Thang and Nok Zam. From a remote hill village in the Indo-Burma border, my grandparents moved to the plain of Lamka (Lamka *zaang*) in Churachandpur District of Manipur chiefly in search of better livelihood and opportunity for the education of their children. This vision of my grandparents to gain education became the guiding spirit of my parents. Toeing the line of my grandparents, my parents Nok Swan Lian and Zen Khan Vung took utmost interest and concern in providing education to their children. They often not only insisted upon their children to study and pursue education, but also devotedly and unsparingly prayed for them even in the middle of the night. It still reverberates in my ears, the late-night prayers of my father for his children. Though it is one of the hardest things to accept the fact that my father is no longer around to see this book, I am happy and fortunate to have my mother around to share all the credits with her (late) husband.

I would like to put on record my sincere gratitude to Professor Imdad Hussain who has done me an honour by agreeing to write the Foreword of the book. Formerly Head, Department of History, and Dean, School of Social Sciences, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Prof. Hussain has an in-depth knowledge and expertise in frontier and military history, particularly with reference to the North-Eastern Frontier of India. I am immensely fortunate and grateful to have worked under his supervision. It is not only his distinguished scholarship but also his cordiality and friendliness to his scholars, especially to me, that made me feel privileged. Today, if my academic endeavour is of any value, it is because of the mentoring I have received from Prof. Hussain. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support I received from the University Grants Commission (New Delhi) through the award of Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and Senior Research Fellowship (SRF) during the course of my research. I express my thanks to the faculty and staff of the Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University and also to my colleagues in the Department of History, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, for the academic environment I have shared with them then and now.

I am greatly indebted to many friends with whom I had academic interactions and gained a lot of knowledge from their scholarship and expertise: Khup

PREFACE

Za Go, L. Lam Khan Piang, Kham Khan Suan Hausing, Letkholen Lhundim, Pum Lam Mang, A. K. Thakur, Vanlalruata Rengsi, Robert Thongkholal Haokip, Yasmin Saikia, Chad Haines, Juliane Schober, David Vumlallian Zou, Sajal Nag, Arpita Sen, David R. Syiemlieh, Khup Khan Thang Taithul, Stephen Khup Chin Pau, Jangkhomang Guite, D. Letkhojam Haokip, T. K. Muana, S. Pau Khan Enn, C. Thang Za Tuan, J. M. Ngul Khan Pau, S. Neng Za Khup, T. K. Suan, Peter Gin Khan Do and many others. Thanks to my brother Nok Khan Langh who helped me in preparing some of the maps.

To my elder brother Thang Sian Mang (eldest amongst six brothers and one sister), who sacrificed his own educational pursuit and joined the Army Medical Corps to support the education of his younger siblings, I am greatly indebted. I would have had never gone for post-graduation studies, but might have rather landed somewhere as a private school teacher without my elder brother's support. The unfailing love, encouragement and support of my parents, my two aunts (*Ni*) D. N. Manno and (*Ni*) Niang Sian Cing and their families, my siblings, relatives, in-laws and well-wishers became the backbone of my endeavour. The prayer and timely support, morally and financially, I received from them during the course of my research sustained my interest till its completion.

This work would not have seen the dawn of light had it not been for the selfless support and endurance of my wife Niang Van Ngai and our three lovely children Lian Muan Thang Tanghau, Cin Khan Khual Tanghau and Vung San Hoih Tanghau. They are always readily and prayerfully available for me even in my trying and challenging times. What I thought was a disturbance/interruption by my daughter – who often climbs up on my lap and takes control of my laptop while my work is in full swing – turns out to be her contribution to give me some physical and mental relaxation from concentrated and monotonous work.

I am extremely grateful to Routledge and its editorial team for their interest in my work and also for the continuous support and cooperation in the process of the publication of this book.

Above all, may all the glory and honour be to Almighty God, to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude for His abundant blessings.

FOREWORD

'Recent studies of India's landward periphery have hardly even scraped the surface of the real problem', wrote Parshotam Mehra, one of the country's leading historians of the India-China frontier, some four decades ago, 'namely to provide a framework for reference on which developments on the frontier could be viewed in their historical perspective'. Curiously, in discussing the evolution of the McMahon Line in India's North East Frontier Mehra has all but ignored its easternmost or Burma-end. This section, extending northwards from the Izu Razi pass to the Diphu pass near the Assam-Burma-China trijunction, constitutes only a small portion of Burma's equally sprawling eastern and northeastern territorial limits. The annexation of Upper Burma after the third and final Anglo-Burmese War had pushed the eastern frontier of British India to the edge of China's Yunan Province. The imperial rivalries that created these frontiers, some by negotiation, some others by Britain's unilateral Declaration, and which brought diverse peoples within the fold of their Empire, has surprisingly not yet attracted the attention of historians. Dorothy Woodman's excellent if a little dated *The Making of Burma* (London 1962) is perhaps the only exception. By and large, therefore, it is to the anthropologist Edmund Leach for the Kachins and Frank Lehman for the Chins, we have to turn for any knowledge of these colourful frontier peoples and their brush with European imperialism.

In this arid field, Pum Khan Pau's *Indo-Burma Frontier and the Making of the Chin Hills* should stand out as a useful and timely corrective. This story when placed within the broader perspective of empire building and the methods of control over conquered territories and peoples should acquire an even greater interest. I shall refer to a few of these.

The Chin Hills, now the Chin State of Myanmar, was Burma's north-western frontier. It is another if more striking example of how colonial needs created frontiers and, when that need passed, obliterated them. One may recall the disappearance (even in textbooks) of Bengal's south-eastern and south-western frontiers as the territories that lay beyond them were incorporated into the Presidency by the East India Company. The Chin hills remained a frontier only briefly after the British occupation of Upper Burma.

The building of roads through these hills to link India with Burma and the laying out of an administrative system together put an end to the Chin hills as a frontier. Conflicting claims by Bengal, Assam and Burma upon this vast country, the Chin-Lushai hills as it came to be called after the annexation of the adjoining Lushai hills (now the Indian state of Mizoram), however, prevented the emergence of a single state as each province retained parts of the conquered territory. The Chin hills largely remained with Burma. But the boundaries of the three provinces, determined on the administrative convenience of each, ignoring ethnicity and common culture have left a potent source for future conflicts. With the re-emergence of the Chin hills as a frontier after the separation of Burma from India (1935–37) and more especially with each of them becoming independent nations that possibility is closer to reality. The India-China border dispute is not the only legacy gifted by Britain to her successor governments in South and Southeast Asia.

That European imperial expansion in Asia as in Africa was contested by the indigenous people, which this book addresses, is the second facet that deserves underscoring. British occupation and dominance of the Chin hills was neither easy nor peaceful. The Chin tribes like their western neighbours the Lushais (more correctly known today as Mizos) and the Kachins further away to the northeast took up arms to resist the ‘outsiders’. Their opposition was protracted leading many British officers to use the term rebellion instead of resistance. A useful definition of these terms is made by the editors of that excellent collection of case studies, *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York 1970), Robert Rotberg and Ali Mazrui. ‘Resistance’, they write, is

Opposition to external hegemony and occupation prior to the time when the alien power has imposed upon a conquered territory a new administrative framework (whether or not fully effective) requiring obedience to alien values. Rebellion is the militant expression at this later phase.

The response of Africans wherever they were able to put up a show of resistance was varied according ‘to the nature of the alien thrust, the indigenous perception of the potency of the thrust, the structure of the society being defended, the political abilities of its leaders, and each side’s deferential access to the modern instruments of combat’. This has also been the experience in the case of many of the tribes in India’s northeastern hills and Burma’s Kachins. We know see it for sure in the Chin hills.

We also know now who the Kamhaus were, the subdivisions or clans within the Suktes, the identity of the Sizang, of the Hakas and the Tashons or Taisuns as Pau calls them. So also the various ‘Kuki’ tribes in the northern hills who for long had been a thorn at the side of the Manipur authorities (an appendix at the end of the book showing the proper names of the tribes

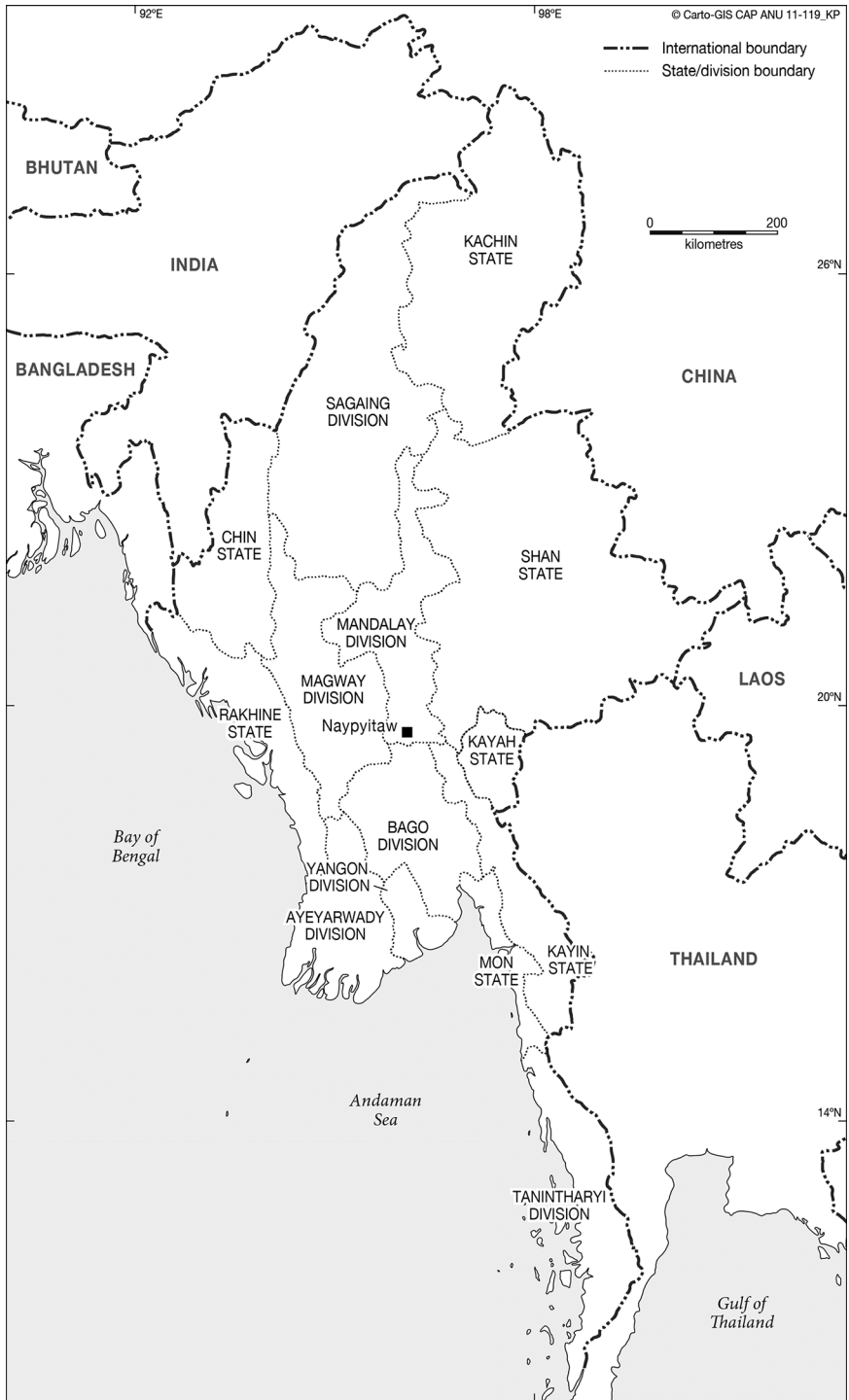
incorrectly rendered in British records and contemporary literature and their correct form will be found useful). What comes out in sharper relief is the political structure of the Chins and its bearing on the 'pacification' process. The Chin Hills Regulation, into which an administrative system based on the indigenous structure of chiefs and headmen was incorporated, is the Chin hills version of indirect rule.

The closing of the brutal military operations and the replacement of the army by military police into which many of the tribes were enrolled, was apparently an aspect of pacification. It was undoubtedly a fundamental feature of colonial policy. The point has been brought out in a study of French colonial warfare in the 1943 version of *Makers of Modern Strategy*, edited by Edward Mead Earle:

Different in means (from continental warfare), colonial warfare is also different in goal: it aims not at the destruction of the enemy but at the organization of the conquered peoples and territory under a particular control. As far as possible, it must avoid destruction during the campaign; first, in order to preserve the productive potential of the theatre of operations and thus economize the supplies coming from more distant bases; but more important because the conquered country is to be integrated immediately after the conquest into the 'imperial' whole, politically as well as economically. It is in all respects desirable, therefore, that the territory should be in the best possible condition when conquest has been effected. The problem is not so much 'to defeat the enemy in the most decisive manner' as to subordinate him at the lowest cost and in a way to guarantee permanent pacification.

These are but a few random thoughts that I felt might help to better appreciate Dr Pum Khan Pau's study on the Chin hills of present Myanmar. That he has brought to bear on it a personal knowledge of the indigenous political and social systems while still maintaining historical detachment adds to its value. He is himself a Chin or more correctly a descendant of the Tedim Chins who had long settled in the southern frontier of the Indian state of Manipur. Studies on India's North Eastern frontiers and the neighbouring countries formed an important part of the research programme of the department of History of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, which I had the privilege of directing during my years in the university. Pau's is a significant work under that programme and enriches our knowledge and understanding of an important area on the India-Myanmar frontier. I am certain it will stimulate further work on other equally important frontier areas of the two countries.

Shillong, June 2019
Imdad Hussain



Map 0.1 Burma/Myanmar and its neighbouring areas

Source: Map reproduced with the permission of CartoGIS Services, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.



Map 0.2 British Burma: administrative districts

Source: Redrawn by author from a map produced by Map Section, L&R Department, FCO, September 1981.

INTRODUCTION

Empire and imperialism remain as relevant today as in the past, as reflected in the growing popularity of imperial history. However, ‘empire’ and ‘imperialism’ are blanket terms and demand careful consideration (Doyle 1986; Bush 2006). According to Barbara Bush, ‘empire’ is a bounded geographical entity which is a less loaded term than ‘imperialism’. It inscribes social, cultural and political relations of power between the empire and its subordinated periphery, whereas ‘imperialism’ is a subjective term that is ideologically loaded and conveys a range of conflicting meanings (2006: 2). To Edward Said, ‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory (1994: 8).

The word ‘empire’ stretches back 2,000 years to the Latin *imperium* (Bush 2006). According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,

The concept comes down to us through a long, primary European tradition, which goes back at least to ancient Rome, whereby the juridico-political figure of Empire was closely linked to the Christian origins of European civilizations. There the concept of Empire united juridical categories and universal ethical values, making them work together as an organic whole. . . . The concept of Empire is presented as a global concert under the direction of a single conductor, a unitary power that maintains the social peace and produces its ethical truths.

(2000: 10)

Different meanings are ascribed to empire over time as Barbara Bush says, ‘Empire, *imperium*, *reich*, commonwealth, all imply expansion of states outside their territory, a widening of geographical space, either by land or sea, extending boundaries of power and influence’ (2006: 1–2). However, Bush further argues that ‘empires have waxed and waned, merged and dissolved for thousands of years and, without such empires, there would be no “modern world”’ (Ibid.: 4). But empire and imperial history is not only about

INTRODUCTION

extending boundaries and influence. In this regard, Bush explains that with the postcolonial 'turn', imperial history became 'sexy'. Other disciplines, in particular geography and cultural and literary studies, have muscled in on an area formally dominated by historians and political scientists (Ibid.: 5).

Perhaps empire and imperial expansion do not happen without challenge or resistance by the indigenous people. This is clearly explained by Walter Nugent, who says 'no "new" (to Europeans) region was truly empty. No region of the world, tropical, or temperate, to which people of European stock migrated in the 1870–1914 period, lacked indigenous people' (1989: 397). With regard to the expansion of British Empire to different parts of the world, Richard Gott argues that 'the British were for the most part loathed and despised by those they colonized' (2011: 5). He further says,

While a thin crust of colonial society in the Empire – princes, bureaucrats, settlers, mercenary soldiers – often gave open support to the British, the majority of the people always held the colonial occupiers in contempt, and they made their views plain whenever the opportunity arose.

(Ibid.)

The late nineteenth century witnessed a series of encounters between empire builders and the so-called frontierspeople all across the world, and the encounters in the Indo-Burma frontier was part of such larger imperial expansion. According to Nugent,

In the New World, Canada, the United States, Brazil and Argentina confronted relatively weak native peoples whereas Germany, France, and Britain superimposed upon peoples and civilizations older than their own, as in South and East Asia, or at least radically different from theirs, as in Africa and Oceania. The frontierspeople and the empire-builders differed less in who they themselves were than in whom they met.

(1989: 397–8)

However, frontiers differed from each other, not just geographically but also demographically and culturally (Ibid.: 400). This book is about the encounters and relationships between empire builders and the so-called frontierspeople or indigenous hill tribes in the Indo-Burma frontier in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By taking up this project, it is intended to fill the historiographical gap between Southeast Asian and South Asian studies in general and Burma/Myanmar and Northeast India studies in particular. Today, the Indo-Burma borderlands remain academically understudied, especially through the lens of history and borderlands perspectives, albeit it has become a place of convergence for two area studies – South Asia and

Southeast Asia – which have emerged in the post–Second World War period. Hence the relevance of this historical study.

The main theme of this book includes the penetration of the British Empire into the so-called unadministered hill tracts of the Indo-Burma frontier; change of colonial policy from non-intervention to intervention; resistance of the indigenous hill peoples to colonial penetration and its administrative policy, such as disarmament and subjugation of the chiefs under a colonial legal framework; and the creation and consolidation of the Chin Hills District as a political entity. It begins with the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26), which not only resulted to the British annexation of the ‘North-Eastern Frontier of Bengal’ and extension of its sway over Arakan, but also facilitated their contact with the hill peoples of these frontiers. The period ends with 1935, which marks the enactment of the Government of India Act that led to the separation of Burma from India and thereby changed the trajectory of colonial policy towards the frontier people.

Though this work has widely consulted published secondary sources, it is largely grounded on primary documents available in the National Archives of India (New Delhi), West Bengal State Archives (Kolkata), National Library (Kolkata), Asiatic Society (Kolkata), Assam State Archives (Guwahati), and other primary sources accessed from Arizona State University (USA) and elsewhere.

The first chapter discusses the importance of the location of the Indo-Burma frontier at a crossroads of India’s economic relations with China and Burma in the precolonial period. It seeks to situate the frontier within the larger context of British imperial policy by examining the expansion of the British Indian Empire in the ‘North-Eastern Frontier’ and the debates surrounding the establishment of ‘formal’ empire in Burma. While arguing that the Indo-Burma frontier is a sub-region of *Zomia*, this chapter also dwells on the land and the people of the Chin Hills, explains the etymology of the terms ‘Chin’ and ‘Zo’ – both of which are being employed in this work to refer to the people of the Chin Hills in general – examines indigenous hill polity and society and the early relationship between the hills Chin/Zo and plains Burmans.

The second chapter probes the early contacts between the British and the Chin/Zo people whose lands marched with the frontier of Arakan. It deals with the annexation of Arakan after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26) which brought the British into immediate contact with the Chin/Zo in its northern hills. The main discussion in this chapter is on colonial policy towards the Arakan frontier and the demarcation of an administrative unit and the appointment of a Superintendent of the Hill Tribes in Northern Arakan. This arrangement remained unchanged till the annexation of the Chin Hills.

The third chapter investigates British intervention in the affairs of Manipur that in turn paved the way for their coming into contact with the Chin/

Zo in the region south of its borders. The establishment of a political agency in Manipur in 1835 for the defence of the British 'North-Eastern Frontier' coincided with the rise to power of the Sukte under their Chief Khan Thuam and his son Kam Hau in the Northern Chin Hills. How did the British vis-à-vis the Raja of Manipur deal with the rising Sukte paramountcy in the Northern Chin Hills and to what extent was their frontier policy a success is the main thrust in this chapter.

What prompted the British to change its policy from non-intervention to intervention in the aftermath of the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885–86) is critically examined in the fourth chapter. A series of military operations launched by the British against the Chin/Zo and the stiff resistance in the form of guerilla tactics they had encountered from the latter as they sought to take control over the Chin Hills has been closely examined in this chapter. The fifth chapter critically analyses the general disarmament policy of the British and how it severely hurt the Chin/Zo sentiments, who considered guns one of their most prized possessions. It also examines how colonial disarmament policy backfired and resulted in a strong resistance movement, since the disarmament policy made guns the bone of contention between the British and the Chin/Zo. To what extent gun licensing was a success as far as disarmament was concerned is also examined.

The sixth chapter analyses colonial discussion and debate over the future civil and military administration of the Chin-Lushai Hills at the Chin-Lushai Conference at Fort Williams in 1892. It analyses the debate over the question of 'amalgamation' of the Chin-Lushai Hills, the newly acquired hill tracts which had been divided into three administrative units, and the reasons behind its failure. The boundary demarcation of Manipur and Chin Hills, as an immediate outcome of the failed Chin-Lushai Conference has been critically examined. Also prominent in this chapter is the promulgation of the Chin Hills Regulation Act 1896, which laid the legal framework for the administration of the Chin Hills through 'indirect rule', the problem in the Pakokku Hills, and the response of the Chin/Zo to the call for Labour Corps during the First World War.

The seventh chapter investigates the extension of the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896 to the Somra Tract in 1917 and also to other adjoining areas. By this means the British slowly absorbed the Northern Arakan Hill Tracts in 1928 and the Pakokku Hill Tract in 1930, which finally created the Chin Hill District. But the system of administration was not uniform in the Chin Hills. A large part of directly administered strip of territory outside it was brought under what was called 'loose political control' and there were, in addition, pockets of unadministered tracts beyond these. The entire Chin Hills was declared a 'backward tract' under the Government of India Act 1919 and 'scheduled' or 'excluded areas' by the Act of 1935 outside the control of Ministerial Burma.

INTRODUCTION

In the conclusion, the main arguments of the chapters are summarised. While the British became informed, albeit partially, about the Chin/Zo through their contact with them in the frontiers of Arakan and Manipur, respectively, such contact did not have any influence to change the conventional non-interventionist policy they had been following towards the frontier. What prompted the British to completely change their frontier policy to intervention was the realisation of the strategic importance of the Indo-Burma frontier after the fall of Upper Burma. This was swiftly followed by a series of military expeditions for annexation of the hill tracts. However, the guerilla tactics used by the Chin/Zo and the numerous availability of guns in their possessions became a thorn in the heels of the colonial soldiers who had to resort to the most barbaric means, such as wholesale burning of the crops and villages of the indigenous resisters. At the end of the day, it was through a forceful disarmament policy that indigenous resistance was broken and the British finally took control over the hill tracts in the early 1890s. That the Chin/Zo people, however, did not reconcile to colonial rule is an undeniable fact that had been manifested through the uprisings against their colonial masters during the First World War. Also, the separation of Burma from India by the Government of India Act in 1935 was the beginning of the division of the Chin/Zo people into different nation states in the postcolonial time. With that, the trajectories of the history of Chin/Zo people have also been shaped accordingly. The conclusion also highlights the need to pay attention to the fragmentation of indigenous space by colonial and postcolonial borders and how borders have shaped and dictated identity and belonging of people of the same ethnic community in postcolonial times.

SITUATING THE INDO-BURMA FRONTIER WITHIN THE LARGER CONTEXT OF BRITISH IMPERIAL POLICY

The Indo-Burma frontier was home to numerous hill tribes who had been divided into several tribal chiefdoms¹ before the advent of the British. These areas seemed to have had little geopolitical or economic importance for the British until they annexed Upper Burma in the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885–86). The war finally established British possessions on both sides of the Indo-Burma frontier, and therefore establishing direct communication between Bengal and Burma had become one of the immediate concerns of the British Indian Empire in the late nineteenth century. As a result, the next decade after the fall of Upper Burma witnessed British encounters with indigenous hill tribes of the Indo-Burma frontier. By the turn of the twentieth century indigenous resistance had been subdued and a new ‘Geo-body’ emerged, which not only left indigenous notion of space, geography and territory irrelevant but also reconfigured and expanded the British Indian Empire covering Burma and the hill tracts of the Indo-Burma frontier. The concept of the ‘Geo-body’, according to Thongchai Winnichakul, ‘refers to the political space defined by the colonial notions of sovereignty and boundaries’ (Winnichakul 1994: 16). Thus the real victim of the emergence of the ‘Geo-body’ was the indigenous cosmography and that this happened when the pre-modern and modern discourse collided, a phenomenon Winnichakul calls ‘politico-semiological operations’ (Ibid.: 18). However, the validity of the new ‘Geo-body’ was challenged, albeit with vested interest, by none other than British colonial officers in Burma who described the annexation of Burma as ‘the accident of propinquity’ (Furnivall 1948: 23), ‘a political accident’ (Craddock 1929: 126) or ‘the accident of contiguity’ (Donnison 1953: 72). In her recent work, Mary P. Callahan describes Burma a ‘territorial and administrative appendage to India’ (2005: 21). In 1937, when Burma was separated from India, it was largely a success of combined colonial-business interests who had lobbied hard with the argument, ‘The Burmans are so different from the peoples of India. . . . They come from a different stock, they speak a different language, their habits and customs and outlooks are different’ (Innes 1934: 194–5).

What is less known, if not forgotten, in this whole gamut of ‘annexation’ and ‘separation’ processes were the fate of the hill tribes of the Indo-Burma frontier. In the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26), the British not only ended Burmese dominance over the ‘North-Eastern Frontier of Bengal’² but also extended its sway over Arakan and Tenasserim; the second war made them masters of Lower Burma. But the annexation of Upper Burma in the third and final Anglo-Burmese War (1885–86) has been mistaken to be the completion of British ‘conquest of the whole country including the vast expanse of tribal hills areas all-round the frontier’ (Furnivall 1960: 5). Burma was conquered, indeed. But the hill tracts lying between the western border of the former Konbaung dynasty and Bengal remained independent or ‘unadministered’. A memorandum written by the chief secretary to the chief commissioner of Burma to the secretary to the Government of India in 1893 admitted the

hills were never brought under any sort of regular administration by the Burmese government; the Chiefs were practically independent; and it was therefore not considered that the absorption of Upper Burma into British India had involved the incorporation into the British empire of the Chin Hills.³

This book probes how the British Indian Empire had to confront stiff resistance from the indigenous Chin/Zo tribes of the Indo-Burma frontier for another ten years after its conquest of Burma before it was able to legally incorporate the hill tracts into the new ‘Geo-body’.

Encounters between the British Indian Empire and the indigenous hill tribes of the Indo-Burma frontier have become an important area of investigation among historians and scholars relatively recently. Sandwiched between the Brahmaputra Valley on the west and the Chindwin Valley on the east, the mountainous Indo-Burma frontier cannot be studied in isolation without situating it within the larger context of British expansion to the two river valleys situated on both sides of the frontier. While economic interest was often cited behind British expansion, the importance of geopolitical interest cannot be undermined. That the Indo-Burma frontier is strategically located at a crossroads since the precolonial period is an established fact. It had been a zone of transition for cultural and economic exchange between India and China via Burma that preceded the establishment of the British Empire.

Indo-Burma frontier at a crossroads

Indo-Burma frontier lay at a crossroads of India’s cultural and economic relations with Burma and China. Scholars identify three main overland trading networks that passed through the Indo-Burma frontier since early times.

Two routes connected Assam and Yunnan via the Patkai range and Manipur through Burma, and another route from Bengal via the coastal road passing through Chittagong and Arakan Yoma to Szechuan in China (Stargardt 1971; Gutman 1976; Cederlof 2014; Pemberton [1835] 2000). These routes, which linked China and India through Upper Burma, held key roles in the East India Company's vision of its 'North-Eastern Frontier' in the early nineteenth century (Cederlof 2014: 84). However, strikingly enough, there is no mention of trade networks passing through the Chin-Lushai Hills, a colonial reference to the hill tracts predominantly settled by the Zo (Chin-Kuki-Lushai) people in the Indo-Burma frontier, except in the case of the southern route from Chittagong to Akyab that passed over the ridges to Buthidaung on the Mayu River, and to Paletwa on the upper Kaladan (now in the Chin state) which was in use from about the fourth to mid-seventh centuries (Gutman 1976: 5). In the mid-1870s, the Chittagong-Mandalay route was considered to be the 'shortest and direct' one for a possible connection between India and China (Iqbal 2015). These overland routes reflect the strategic importance of the Indo-Burma frontier as passageway between the Brahmaputra Valley and Chindwin Valley in the precolonial period.

Burma's cultural relations with India had a long history. According to G. E. Harvey, 'The Burmese are a Mongolian race, yet their traditions, instead of harking back to China, refer to India' (1925: 6). In fact, Indo-Burma cultural and economic relationships in the precolonial period were found more prominently through the sea route, as Sunil S. Amrith argues in his *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*. He clearly underlines how 'many forms of connection across the sea outlasted and outlived empires' (2013: 4). To the English East India Company, which established its first factory at Syriam in 1647, Burma became strategically important for its economic interest in order to dominate the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean (Trager 1966: 12). While development in the Bay of Bengal is beyond the purview of this book, I shall focus on the expansion of the British in the 'North-East Frontier of Bengal' and beyond.

Empires in the 'North-Eastern Frontier of Bengal'

R. G. Woodthorpe was perhaps the first to use the phrase 'North-eastern frontier of India' in 1873 ([1873] 1978: 3). A decade later, in 1884, Alexander Mackenzie refers to the 'North-East Frontier of Bengal', 'sometimes to denote a boundary line, and sometimes more generally to describe a tract'. 'In the latter sense', he added, 'it embraces the whole of the hill ranges north, east, and south of the Assam Valley, as well as the western slopes of the great mountain system lying between Bengal and independent Burma, with its outlying spurs and ridges' ([1884] 2001: 1). It was the expansion of Ava (the capital of the Burmese empire) in the 'North-East Frontier of Bengal' in the early decades of the nineteenth century which not only threatened the existence of several kingdoms in the region but also posed a threat to the