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MIZO MIGRATION AS HISTORICAL IMAGINATION: BETWEEN MYTH AND EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the cultural memory, collective identity, and migratory history of the Mizo (Zo) people, with particular attention to Chhinlung, a symbolically charged site considered their ancestral point of origin. Rather than treating Chhinlung as a fixed geographical location, the analysis approaches it as a foundational myth that underpins a shared historical consciousness among various Zo subgroups. Through oral testimonies, linguistic studies, genetic data, and comparative historical records, the study reconstructs the movement of Zo ancestors from the Sino-Tibetan frontier into present-day Mizoram and neighbouring regions.

Engaging with the theoretical frameworks of James C. Scott and Claude Lévi-Strauss, the article interprets the Zo preference for upland settlement, oral knowledge systems, and shifting cultivation as deliberate strategies aimed at maintaining autonomy from centralised authority. These patterns are read not as cultural remnants but as adaptive responses to ecological and political pressures. The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating oral tradition with linguistic and genetic evidence to explore the formation of collective identity. In doing so, it highlights the role of memory, mythology, and geography in sustaining a non-state mode of life. Migration, in this context, is understood not merely as territorial displacement but as a long-term assertion of autonomy and belonging.

Keywords: *Mizo migration, Chhinlung, oral tradition, Zo identity, non-state spaces, hill settlements, political autonomy, shifting cultivation, Tibeto-Burman languages, genetic ancestry, cultural memory.*

Introduction

On 9 February 2021, the Mizoram government issued a press release anticipating the arrival of refugees from Myanmar following the military coup (Thangluah 2021). Within weeks, families crossed over forest paths into Mizoram, bringing children, bundles of clothing, and

rice. In 2023, a similar movement occurred during the ethnic conflict in Manipur between the Kuki and Meitei communities. Again, those fleeing violence were received not with suspicion but with hospitality. Their arrival was understood not as intrusion, but as return.

This response was not the result of policy. It arose from memory of kinship predating colonial borders. The annexation of the Zo highlands by the British between 1871 and 1890 divided contiguous territories among Rangoon, Imphal, Aizawl, and Dhaka. Yet, these new boundaries failed to sever older ties. Zo groups across the Chin Hills, Manipur, and Mizoram continued to recognise common origins and maintain reciprocal ties through language, ritual, and customary law.

Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as "imagined communities" formed through shared sentiment across time and space (Anderson [1983] 2006, 6) is especially resonant here. Among the Zo, imagination is inseparable from practice. Historical memory shapes responses to present crises, with hospitality functioning as a political expression of belonging. State institutions may view such actions through the lens of legality and security. But for many in Mizoram, the displaced are not strangers they are relatives.

As E. H. Carr observed, history is a dialogue between past and present (Carr 1987, 30). This article attempts such a dialogue. It examines Mizo migration through oral traditions, linguistic and genetic data, and regional historical sources. It draws upon theoretical approaches from political and structural anthropology to understand how a stateless people maintained identity across centuries. The aim is not to locate a precise origin or a definitive chronology but to reconstruct a pattern of movement and adaptation that underpins the Mizo historical experience.

The article is structured to progress from theoretical and methodological framing to the analysis of empirical material. It engages with oral narratives concerning origins, examines linguistic affiliations within the Tibeto-Burman branch, and considers genetic research that traces ancestral ties to East and Southeast Asia. The study then outlines the sequential phases of migration from the Sino-Tibetan frontier into the Chin-Lushai Hills. Attention is also given to the ways in which ecological factors such as terrain, subsistence strategies like shifting cultivation, and the sustained reliance on oral transmission, contributed to the maintenance of decentralised social structures. By examining these elements, the article investigates how the Mizo sustained a coherent sense of collective identity in the absence of formal state institutions and how this historical condition informs their contemporary experiences of displacement and negotiation with authority.

Theoretical Framework

This study engages with frameworks in political and structural anthropology to explore how Zo modes of living facilitated the preservation of autonomy. Central to the analysis is James C. Scott's formulation of "non-state spaces," developed in *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), where he contends that many upland societies in

Southeast Asia intentionally adopted practices that limited their incorporation into centralised polities. Strategies such as mobility, oral transmission of knowledge, and shifting cultivation are interpreted not as residual or primitive traits, but as deliberate techniques of avoidance. The Zo experience illustrates this thesis: repeated relocation to remote and inaccessible regions, the use of transient agricultural systems, and adaptable social forms contributed to minimising their exposure to state surveillance and control.

Claude Lévi-Strauss's analysis of knowledge and power further complements this view. He proposed that literacy functions as an instrument of state formation, enabling enumeration, taxation, and control (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 292). From this perspective, the Zo people's continued use of oral tradition can be interpreted not as a cultural absence but as a form of autonomy. By refusing a written record, they retained historical memory within the community, limiting outside interference and institutional oversight. What might appear to external observers as a lack of development was, in this context, a safeguard against surveillance.

These frameworks allow for a reading of Zo migration as more than movement across terrain. The pattern reflects adaptive responses to shifting political and ecological conditions. Their preference for highland settlements, rejection of fixed agrarian models, and preservation of oral knowledge systems all suggest an orientation toward independence rather than incorporation.

Such an interpretation invites a rethinking of conventional migration models. The Zo people were not passively displaced by more powerful neighbours; they actively selected locations and practices that preserved social cohesion while limiting vulnerability to coercion. Their cultural choices narrated through myth and maintained through practice functioned as strategies of evasion and survival. These insights inform the analysis in subsequent sections, where we examine how memory, language, and genetics align with the Zo's spatial and political choices over time.

Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining ethnography, historical analysis, linguistics, and population genetics. In the absence of indigenous pre-colonial written records, oral tradition serves as the primary source. We critically examine narratives collected by colonial officials (e.g. J. Shakespear, N. E. Parry) and Mizo scholars (e.g. K. Zawla, B. Lalthangliana), treating them not as literal history but as oral historiography narrative frameworks encoding memory, migration, and collective identity. Cross comparison of myths from various clans enables us to identify common patterns and chronological layering.

Written sources from neighbouring literate societies provide supplementary reference points. Chinese dynastic records, such as the *Shiji* and *Hou Han Shu*, mention movements of upland groups in areas overlapping with ancestral Zo territory. Burmese chronicles and inscriptions offer insight into hill valley interactions. British colonial records, though external in viewpoint, offer valuable ethnographic and

demographic data from the late nineteenth century.

Linguistic evidence is examined on two levels. First, we review the classification of Mizo (Duhlian or Lushai) within the Tibeto-Burman family, particularly its place in the Central Kuki-Chin subgroup (Bradley 1997). Linguistic subgrouping offers clues to migratory pathways. Second, we conduct lexical comparisons between Mizo and languages such as Yi (Lolo) of Yunnan, identifying cognates (e.g. *ni* for "day", *vawk/va* for "pig") that point to historical links. These comparisons are suggestive of either shared origins or contact during migration.

Genetic data further supplements our analysis. We reference the 2004 Y-chromosome study by India's Central Forensic Science Laboratory, which found strong East and Southeast Asian lineage markers in Mizo male populations. These results align with both oral claims of eastern origin and linguistic affiliation with Tibeto-Burman groups. Broader studies (e.g. Basu et al. 2003) confirm these patterns in mitochondrial DNA, with Mizo samples clustering with East Asian rather than South Asian populations. While genetic evidence cannot pinpoint specific migration routes, it supports the hypothesis of movement from East Asia through the Burmese highlands into Mizoram.

A major methodological challenge lies in the lack of archaeological data. No major excavations have been undertaken at early settlement sites. Our chronology therefore relies on converging patterns in oral, linguistic, and historical sources. Where these align, we propose plausible timelines; where they diverge, we highlight the uncertainties.

Colonial writers often sought to classify indigenous groups into rigid migration "waves," flattening complex histories. Local sources, while closer to the subject, are not free from retrospective construction. Our method involves triangulation checking sources across origin myths, colonial reports, neighbouring literatures, and linguistic reconstructions to identify credible points of convergence.

The study reconstructs Mizo migratory history through comparative, multi-source analysis. Each line of evidence oral tradition, linguistics, genetics, and historical records offers partial insight. When considered together, they allow for a fuller narrative of how the Mizo imagined, enacted, and remembered their movement across time and terrain.

Oral Traditions and Mythic Origins

A recurring feature across Zo communities is the myth of emergence from beneath the earth, often linked to a cave or sealed place. Though names vary—*Chhinlung* (Lusei), *Sinlung* (Hmar), *Khul* (Thadou Kuki), *Khur* (Aimol, Lamkang, Zomi), *Lailun* (Lai) the symbolism remains consistent: a shared subterranean origin. This myth helps to unify diverse clans, suggesting a common ancestry despite geographical and linguistic divergence (Zawla 1993; Lalrinawma 2005).

Among the Lusei, one well-known version tells of a period of darkness (*Thimzing*), followed by human rebirth

through *Chhinlung* (Shakespear 1912, 93). As each clan emerged, a noisy couple prompted the cave's guardian to seal the entrance, explaining why some ancestors remained trapped. Variants among the Mara and Paite mirror this theme: groups declare their identity as they emerge, some being more numerous or vocal, leading to uneven representation in the world. These differences, often couched in humour, explain present-day clan sizes or traits.

Thadou oral tradition offers a more elaborate account. A culture hero, Chongthu, orchestrates an escape from the underworld after slaying a serpent and breaking the stone lid of *Khul* (Shaw 1929, 17). Only a few escape before the passage closes. The tale includes a curse from those left behind, accounting for human suffering. Rituals still invoke the name of Nemneh, the one believed to have uttered this curse.

Some groups like the Paite long emphasised terrestrial origin sites such as Ciimnuai. However, more recent texts have integrated cave myths, aligning with broader Zo traditions. This illustrates how oral narratives are reshaped to express unity: myths once localised are increasingly woven into a collective framework. The Hmar, through poems and songs, memorialise *Sinlung ram* as a land of origin and longing, expressing a form of ancestral nostalgia (Infimate 2020).

These myths, while differing in detail, form a cohesive body of memory. The act of remembering Chhinlung reinforces kinship and provides a symbolic charter for unity. That the motif persists despite the spread of Christianity and formal education indicates its resilience. Rather than being discarded, Chhinlung has been reinterpreted, some equate it with biblical motifs, others with historical homelands. It continues to appear in organisation names, literature, and commemorative expressions.

Oral traditions perform multiple roles. They account for difference why one clan is larger or more fortunate and reaffirm sameness: all Zo groups emerged from the same origin. The myth becomes both a historical and political tool, used to justify solidarity across borders. The reception of refugees from Myanmar in recent years illustrates this: the memory of shared origin translates into practical hospitality.

In this context, *Chhinlung* functions less as a geographically verifiable site and more as a mnemonic of shared ancestry. It operates as a unifying narrative through which dispersed groups recognise historical connectedness. Despite the absence of written documentation, oral tradition has remained a central mechanism for preserving continuity. These narratives extend beyond cosmological explanation; they articulate social meanings tied to identity, legitimacy, and collective belonging.

Linguistic and Genetic Evidence

The Mizo language referred to in earlier literature as Duhlian or Lushai is classified within the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. More specifically, it falls under the Central Kuki-Chin subgroup, alongside closely related languages spoken by communities such as the Hmar, Paite, and Lai. This linguistic

affiliation reflects not only a shared ancestry but also sustained intergroup contact among Zo-speaking populations.

Comparative linguistic analyses reveal substantial overlap in core vocabulary and phonological patterns across Kuki-Chin varieties. Terms related to the natural environment and kinship structures display recurrent regularities, underscoring a common linguistic heritage. While mutual intelligibility varies, the persistence of basic lexical similarities suggests divergence from a shared proto-language within a relatively recent time frame. For instance, Mizo retains partial intelligibility with Hmar and Thadou, whereas languages like Mara, spoken further south, exhibit lower levels of lexical overlap, implying an earlier phase of separation in the southern regions.

Scholars such as David Bradley (1997) and Paul Benedict (1972) situate the proto-homeland of Tibeto-Burman speakers near the headwaters of the Yangtze and Mekong rivers, in what is now Yunnan and eastern Tibet. From this upland nexus, Tibeto-Burman groups are believed to have dispersed in multiple directions. The Kuki-Chin migrations likely followed a trajectory along the Chindwin River, moving westward toward the Indo-Burma frontier—an account that aligns with oral traditions describing an east-to-west movement.

Linguistic parallels between Mizo and several languages spoken in Yunnan further support this connection. Lexical correspondences with Yi (Lolo) languages, such as *ni* ("day") and *va/vawk* ("pig"), suggest either a shared origin or a prolonged history of contact. While such resemblances do not provide conclusive evidence of direct descent, they indicate the existence of a historical zone of interaction in the highlands of southwestern China.

Language divergence within the Kuki-Chin group likely occurred over the past 1,000 to 1,500 years, during the period of migration through Upper Burma and the Chin-Lushai hills. The timeline corresponds with the absence of ethnic labels like "Chin" or "Lushai" in early historical records. Their emergence as distinct identifiers appears only in colonial or post-colonial periods.

Genetic evidence complements the linguistic data. A 2004 Y-chromosome study by the Central Forensic Science Laboratory analysed 414 male individuals from Mizo tribes. The findings indicated dominant haplogroups associated with East and Southeast Asia. These results confirmed a strong genetic affinity with populations from Tibet, Yunnan, and Southeast Asia, and minimal connection to West Asian or Indian upper-caste lineages (Ralte 2024).

Mitochondrial DNA studies (e.g. Basu et al. 2003) support this conclusion. Haplogroups common in East Asia such as M, D, and B were found in high frequencies among the Mizo. The absence of South or West Asian maternal lineages reinforces the narrative of eastern origin preserved in oral tradition. The convergence of oral memory, linguistic classification, and genetic markers strengthens the case for migration from the Sino-Tibetan frontier into Northeast India.

One recurring marker, Y-haplogroup O-M134, is widespread among Tibeto-Burman groups and present in ancient

samples from the Gansu region, once inhabited by the Di-Qiang peoples. Its prevalence among the Mizo indicates continuity with these prehistoric populations. While not determinative of a single point of origin, it places the Mizo within a broader highland East Asian lineage.

The Mizo display a high degree of internal genetic homogeneity, consistent with a recent common origin. Differences among clans (e.g. Lusei, Mara, Hmar) lie in haplogroup frequencies rather than lineage type. This suggests that while clan histories diverged, they draw from the same genetic foundation. Instances of admixture with local groups during migration are visible in minor haplogroup variants but do not disrupt the overall pattern.

Genetic distance studies position the Mizo closest to other Tibeto-Burman populations such as the Naga and Kachin, and further removed from Indian subcontinent populations. These findings echo the linguistic and historical evidence. Even small traces of other ancestries, where present, align with known patterns of integration oral traditions record episodes of absorbing outsiders during migration or conflict.

Linguistic and genetic data together substantiate the narrative of migration from the east into the Indo-Burma hills. Language links the Mizo to other Kuki-Chin speakers and more distantly to Burmic and Yi groups in southwestern China. Genetic markers confirm the biological affinities implied by these linguistic connections. Neither line of evidence stands alone, but in combination with oral tradition and historical sources, they provide a robust framework for understanding Mizo origins.

Migration Phases and Patterns

The migration of the Zo people can be reconstructed in phases, each reflecting responses to ecological and political pressures. Though precise dates remain uncertain, oral traditions, regional histories, and linguistic inferences allow for a plausible sequence of movement.

Phase I: From the Sino-Tibetan Frontier (Antiquity to c. 8th century CE)

Chinese records describe upland groups often labelled “Di” or “Qiang” inhabiting regions now part of Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. These areas formed part of the early Tibeto-Burman heartland. Between the first and eighth centuries CE, some communities began drifting south and west toward Upper Burma, likely following the Chindwin and Irrawaddy river corridors (Than Tun 1988). This stage, though not preserved in specific oral narratives, lays the geographical foundation for later movement into the Indo-Burmese frontier.

Phase II: Khampat Sojourn (9th to 14th centuries)

Zo oral tradition consistently refers to a settlement named Khampat, located in the fertile Kale-Kabaw valley (modern Sagaing Region, Myanmar). This site is remembered as a period of consolidation, where various clans lived under shared cultural norms (Kipgen 1997, 39). Symbols such as the Khampat Banyan (*Khampat Bung*) became implanted in collective memory. Stability in

this period likely coincided with regional calm following the decline of the Nanzhao kingdom.

Accounts of Khampat's abandonment vary. Some cite internal strife and environmental challenges, others external pressures, particularly the rise of Shan power in Upper Burma during the fourteenth century. By 1364, the Shan had sacked major cities and expanded into peripheral zones. Manipuri chronicles also record turbulence in the region. Zo narratives suggest the departure from Khampat was not hasty but the culmination of multiple disruptions. A legend of a banyan tree planted before departure encapsulates the sentiment: departure was temporary in intention, permanent in consequence.

Phase III: Dispersal across the Hills (15th to 17th centuries)

Following their exit from Khampat, Zo groups dispersed into the hills spanning present day Mizoram, Manipur, Chin State, and Tripura. Distinct clan identities began to solidify during this phase. Some groups Paite, Simte, Thadou moved northward, while others Lai, Mara, Hmar migrated southward. Lusei clans initially remained near the Chin Hills before expanding west.

This period saw the fragmentation of earlier unity. Mountain barriers, inter-clan rivalries, and adaptation to local ecologies led to differentiated identities. Yet the memory of common origins Chhinlung and Khampat was retained. Oral histories reflect both shared ancestry and internal differentiation, with various clans highlighting their own founders and settlements.

External forces also influenced dispersal. Expansion of the Meitei kingdom and the Ahom power in the Brahmaputra valley pushed earlier groups further west and south. These include the so called "Old Kuki" tribes Hrangkhawl, Biate, Rangkhol—whose settlement in eastern Mizoram predates the arrival of Lusei chiefs (Lalrimawia 1995, 15). Skirmishes between advancing and settled groups are frequently mentioned in oral accounts.

Phase IV: Lusei Consolidation and Pre-Colonial Order (18th to 19th centuries)

By the mid-eighteenth century, Lusei expansion intensified. Sailo chiefs especially those from the Seven Chiefs group began establishing villages in the central Lushai hills. Motivated in part by the desire to avoid tribute demands from stronger Chin chiefs, these groups moved westward into more autonomous territory.

This phase marked a shift from migration to internal consolidation. New settlements spread across Mizoram under Sailo rule, often absorbing or displacing earlier inhabitants (Sangkima 2004). Inter-clan feuds, alliances, and chieftainship lineages shaped territorial patterns. Oral memory and genealogies became tools of legitimacy, as chiefs justified authority through descent and conquest narratives.

The Sailo polity was decentralised but culturally cohesive. Shared language, custom, and migration memory helped maintain unity across villages. The emphasis shifted from movement to governance

village life was organised around chieftainship, communal ethics, and rituals rooted in earlier histories. This period formed the immediate backdrop to British annexation.

By the time colonial powers made their entry into the region, the principal features of Mizo social organisation had already been established: a village-based system of chieftainship, reliance on shifting cultivation, the transmission of history through oral tradition, and a pronounced orientation toward autonomy. The extended migration from the Sino-Tibetan uplands to the Lushai Hills had given shape to a society characterised by mobility, resilience, and a unified sense of identity. This migratory history was not relegated to the distant past; it was actively sustained through narrative, ritual, and communal values that continued to inform everyday life and social practice.

Highland Autonomy and the Role of Orality

The Zo people's inclination toward highland settlements was not solely determined by geography but functioned as a calculated political choice. Upland environments provided insulation from the reach of lowland state authority. By establishing communities in elevated and often inaccessible terrain, the Zo limited the capacity of external powers to impose control, extract resources, or enforce taxation. Their subsistence system especially the use of shifting cultivation reinforced this autonomy by reducing the permanence and traceability of their settlements, thereby diminishing their visibility to external regimes.

Unlike wet-rice agriculture in the valleys, jhum (shifting cultivation) involved clearing forest plots for brief periods before moving on. This dispersed, temporary farming system did not support centralised taxation or surplus extraction. There were no permanent granaries, no codified land records, and no standing labour force conditions that made external governance difficult. Scott's notion of state evasion is directly applicable here: the Zo managed to remain politically autonomous by not producing the administrative legibility required by states.

Each village operated as a self-contained unit under a chief, but authority was not absolute. If governance failed or became oppressive, people could leave and join another settlement. This mobility curtailed the consolidation of power. Social norms, especially *tlawmngaihna* (altruism), supported a flexible and egalitarian structure. Communities functioned with a high degree of consensus and cooperation. Chiefs governed by custom, but their legitimacy rested on communal acceptance.

These arrangements made conquest challenging. The terrain itself favoured defence. Upland stockades could be protected by small numbers. When threatened by more powerful neighbours the Manipuri, Burmese, or later the British the Zo often retreated into the forest, abandoning settlements that could be rebuilt elsewhere. Pre-colonial military campaigns frequently failed to achieve long term control for this reason.

The British noted this resistance to subjugation. Upon annexing the Lushai

Hills, colonial authorities introduced permanent settlements and enforced census operations mechanisms designed to "fix" populations and facilitate administration. This shift marked a departure from the previous fluidity of settlement and governance.

Closely linked to this political independence was the absence of writing. Traditional Zo society maintained no script of its own. Instead, oral transmission governed the preservation of law, history, and identity. Elders, storytellers, and ritual specialists served as custodians of knowledge. Folktales, clan genealogies, and customary codes were memorised, performed, and adjusted in each generation.

A widely told myth recounts the loss of writing: a dog, entrusted with sacred texts written on leather, ate them—leaving the people "without books." This motif is found among several Southeast Asian highland groups. It naturalises orality and offers a cultural explanation for the absence of writing. More subtly, it frames the non-possession of script as an act of fate, not failure (Lalzarzoa 2011).

Lévi-Strauss observed that literacy enables statecraft: laws, taxes, and obligations can be fixed in time and space. The Zo rejection or loss of writing had the opposite effect. Memory remained in local hands, transmitted through performance rather than preserved in text. This reduced external access to internal governance. Colonial officers, missionaries, and lowland rulers encountered a society opaque to their methods: no written laws, no archival claims, no codified boundaries. This opacity hindered administrative penetration.

Decisions were based on memory and consensus. Rights to land, rituals, and leadership passed through oral negotiation. When colonial agents attempted to formalise agreements, discrepancies often emerged between the written word and remembered intent. For the Zo, meaning resided in relationship, not in legal inscription. Orality was flexible, relational, and dependent on community validation.

Knowledge was widely held. Children grew up immersed in stories and songs that encoded history and ethics. There was no class of scribes; anyone could become an authority by mastering collective memory. This distribution of knowledge also made co-option difficult. Colonial powers could not find literate elites to serve as intermediaries. Power remained decentralised.

Literacy, when introduced through missionary work in the late nineteenth century, was rapidly adopted. Roman script was used to record language, history, and religious teachings. Rev. Liangkhaia's historical writings in the early twentieth century marked the shift from oral to written historiography. Yet this adoption of writing was strategic. The Mizo began to use literacy to defend customary rights, codify legal norms, and preserve folklore. Writing became a means of protection within new state systems.

This transformation did not erase oral culture. Songs, proverbs, and ritual chants continue to function alongside written texts.

Instead of displacing oral tradition, literacy extended it into new domains. In this way, orality and writing became mutually reinforcing. What had once been tools of resistance were adapted into tools of continuity under different conditions.

The Zo people's preference for upland settlement and reliance on oral knowledge systems functioned as interconnected supports for political autonomy. These practices allowed small, mobile communities to preserve internal cohesion while remaining beyond the effective reach of external authority. The introduction of literacy during the colonial period brought about a significant transformation, yet it did not constitute a break with the past. Rather, the underlying ethos of self-governance endured, continuing to shape communal life through both oral tradition and emerging written forms.

Conclusion

The historical migration of the Zo people demonstrates sustained strategies of mobility, cultural unity, and political autonomy. From the symbolic origin at *Chhinlung* to settlement in the Indo-Burma highlands, practices such as shifting cultivation, oral transmission, and village governance supported independence from external control. Core values like *tlawmngaihna (altruism), huaisenna (courage),* and *tawrhchhelna (resilience)* developed as practical ethics in response to instability and displacement.

Linguistic and genetic evidence aligns with oral traditions pointing to origins near the Sino-Tibetan frontier, supporting shared ancestry despite modern borders. Memory sites like *Chhinlung* and *Khampat* function as symbolic markers of kinship rather than precise geography. The reception of Chin refugees illustrates the persistence of remembered ties.

Colonial-era literacy and legal frameworks were adopted without abandoning oral systems, allowing identity to adapt without rupture. Today, across India and Myanmar, the Zo maintain a sense of belonging grounded not in state structures but in narrative continuity, shared values, and historical memory mobilised in times of crisis.

End Note

1. **O3a2c1a-M117 is a Y-chromosome haplogroup**, which refers to a specific genetic lineage passed from father to son.
2. ***Old and New Kuki***: These terms were introduced by colonial officers to identify separate phases of migration. *Old Kuki* includes groups like the *Hrangkhawl*, *Darlong*, *Biate*, and *Hmar*, who reached the region before the 18th century and followed clan-based social structures. *New Kuki* refers to later arrivals such as the *Thado*, *Haokip*, *Vaiphei*, *Simte*, and *Gangte* who came in the late 18th and 19th centuries, often under hereditary leadership. These terms mark historical differences in timing and community structure, rather than cultural distance.

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