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**ZELIANGRONG RELIGION IN NORTH EAST INDIA:
DYNAMICS OF AMALGAMATED COLLECTIVE
IDENTITY OF THREE COGNATE TRIBES**

Abstract

Writing indigenous religion of Zeliangrong community has been no less complex especially while keeping the issue of objectivity in mind. Zeliangrong community comprises of two popular faiths, Heraka and Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak (TRC), having followers from three cognate tribes such as the Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei with their amalgamated indigenous belief systems. The revitalisation movement brought greater amalgamation of indigenous belief systems among them. A need is felt to document the points of convergences and divergences between these two faiths Heraka and TRC and among three cognate tribes. This paper attempts to interrogate this basic hitherto unresolved issues. Accordingly, this paper divides itself to four prominent parts after a brief introduction. The first section consolidates the historical genesis of their scattered belief systems followed by a discussion of the impact of revitalisation movement and the role of leaders thereof in amalgamation process. The third section delves into convergences and divergences between two faiths amidst unification of three tribes into Zeliangrong. Finally the paper sums up the findings towards modelling out the dynamics of such historic unification process.

Using data from a variety of secondary sources and primary data through field ethnography and key informant interview, this paper sums up and concludes that Zeliangrong is a finest example of indigenous religion in North East India, representing unity in diversity, convergence of faiths and beliefs, rituals and practices, resilience and dynamism. Their indigenous identity of religious ideologies appears to be closely intertwined as a true representation of their belonging to a spiritual community exclusively their own.

Keywords: *Zeliangrong Religion, Cognate Tribes, Revitalisation Movement, indigenous belief systems, North East India*

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Introduction

Few months before India got independence, on 15 February 1947, considering the social-cultural affinities and political struggle as well, the *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei* tribes decided to amalgamate into one collective identity known as '*Zeliangrong*.'¹ Since time immemorial, they settled in the hills and valley of Manipur (southwestern part of Manipur Mountains), Assam (North Cachar district) and Nagaland states (northwestern part) in North East India. In respect of the large-scale settlement of each tribe, *Rongmei* is in Manipur, *Zeme* and *Liangmai* populated predominantly in Assam and Nagaland states respectively. But it is difficult to define their settlements based on modern state political boundary and these tribe's villages found in various parts of the northeast. According to Census of India 2011, the *Zeliangrong* population in these three states is 2,08,552², and 11,325 (18.4 per cent) follow indigenous religion. Linguistically and ethnically they belonged to Tibeto-Burman family of Sino-Tibetan language phylum (Grierson 1994; 7). *Zeliangrong* primarily settled on top of mountains for strategic security reasons. There are also a good number of old *Zeliangrong* settlements in Manipur valley. All these tribes maintained customary laws relating to marriage practices and umpteen other areas of socio-political, religious life. *Zeliangrong* society is a patrilineal society, whereas it gives a handful of social and economic freedom to women. The chief and *Pei* (the elders' council) were the dual-core of the traditional *Zeliangrong* administrative system. Before further discussion, some very essential points need to be cleared are, firstly, before the socio-religious cum revitalisation movement, each cognate tribe had their unique indigenous belief system, though many similarities were there among them. Secondly, based on this movement, the British ethnographers already misrepresented the *Zeliangrong* community as '*Naga*.' In colonial accounts, it is mentioned that *Jadonang* is fighting for '*Naga Raj*'. However, *Jadonang* neither called himself as '*Naga King*' nor talked about '*Naga Raj*'. Instead of *Nagaraj*, *Jadonang* used a term called *Makamei* (Kabui 2004; 149-50).³

A note on etymology of *Zeliangrong* needs to be brought in order before going further about it. According to *Zeliangrong* oral tradition, they were emerged from a cave called (*Mahao*) *Taobei* situated near Makhel, Senapati Hill tract (Manipur) and established settlements at *Makhel*, *Ramtingkabin*, and *Makuidlongdi*. Due to population explosion and consequent migration, three groups of people migrated towards the north (*Liangmai*), west (*Zeme*) and south (*Rongmei*) direction (Kamson 2015; 2-3). These conglomerate tribes are mainly settled in Manipur, Assam and Nagaland states. According to traditional *Zeliangrong* belief system, the centre of the universe is *Makhel* and *Makuidlongdi* area.

The Scope and Objectives

Writing the indigenous religion of the *Zeliangrong* community has

been no less complicated, indeed when it comes to the issue of objectivity. While attempting to delineate the indigenous belief systems of the major tribes of *Zeliangrong* community, this article gives more stress on two popular faiths viz., *Heraka* and *Tingkao Ragwang - Chapriak* (TRC), which have their followers from aforesaid three cognate tribes such as the *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei*. Based on the consciousness of *Zeliangrong* identity in the 1990s, the two popular religious faiths gave different views regarding the indigenous religion of these cognate tribes. While the *Heraka* claims that the indigenous religion of *Zeliangrong* is monotheist, the TRC subscribes to polytheism. However, the pre-reformation belief system was primarily polytheist by nature. Lacking in structure and channelisation was one of the main reasons for unavailability of proper space of Supreme Being before the 1920s which emerged not without critics, due to revitalisation movement. This paper attempts to interrogate this primary hitherto unresolved issue. Accordingly, this paper has the following fourfold objectives:

1. To study the historical genesis of scattered belief systems of three cognate tribes
2. To understand the contributions of revitalisation movement and the role of leaders thereof in the amalgamation of indigenous belief system
3. To delve into convergences and divergences between two faiths *Heraka* and TRC amidst unification of three tribes into *Zeliangrong*
4. To sum up the findings towards modelling out the dynamics of such historic unification process.

To that end, the scope of this paper has been descriptive in nature and reliance is placed on wide variety of available sources such as books, articles published in journals, documents, archival resources and research reports, folklore, folktales, publications of various organisations, paper clippings, search engines, blogs and corroboration through discussion with key informants in the field.

The Historical Genesis of Indigenous Belief System:

Zeme, *Liangmai*, *Rongmei* are the three cognate tribes historically bound under two faiths namely *Heraka* and *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak* (TRC) under *Zeliangrong* socio-cultural Union. Before going further to discuss the impact of revitalisation movement of indigenous belief system and all the characteristics of *Heraka* and TRC respectively, it is imperative to take stock of the historical genesis of the indigenous belief system of the three cognate tribes such as *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei*.

Zeme: Etymologically *Zeme* is composed of two words: 'Ze' means *West* and 'Mai' means *people*. Thus *Zeme* refers to descendants of the westwards migrated group. *Zeme* understanding of the so-called human world was confined within the *Barak* River valley where the flood is quite rampant and hill range

of North *Cachar Hills* (Assam) and some portion of Tamenglong district of Manipur. In *Zeme* society, till the end of the 19th century, *Sibrai* aka *Chubrai* was considered as the supreme being, who created the universe. He transformed the earth from the abundant water covered body to the habitable place of various flora and fauna (Soppit 1885; 5-6). *Sibrai* came down from 'upper realm'⁴ to 'lower realm'⁵ and started creating land mass, mountains, and then created animals, birds, men, and the like. Besides *Sibrai* they had benevolent spirits (gods) like *Moushini* (god of grains), *Songhu* (god of peace and harmony of the village), and *Gaja* (god of war) and other malevolent spirits and deities.

In their folklore, multiple pieces of evidence of feuds, raids and headhunting practices between *Angamis* (mostly settled in the Naga Hills) and *Zeme* tribes are on record (*ibid* 1885; 11). Therefore, before the revitalisation movement their worldview, the concept of space and territory was more confined with their settled place at North Cachar Hills and its northeastern region inhabited by the *Angamis*.

According to a folktale developed in the 19th century, an authority of 'lower realm', arguably (*Bangla*) *Raja*, passed away and his soul went abode, where he met *Sibrai* aka *Chubrai's* daughter and married her. After some time, in the abode, he started challenging his father-in-law (Supreme Being) and got defeated in a wrestling match being destined to neither 'upper realm' nor 'lower realm'. Since then he resided below the earth so-called 'underworld'.⁶ This generated a feeling that during traditional times, the *Zemes* was not able to draw a clear boundary between the gods' world and the human world. In these folklores, there is a conspicuous absence of any evidence of any appointment given to gods to create the earth by *Sibrai*. The Supreme Being instead was working closely with human and even appointed a god to look after the 'lower realm' (*Raja*-king).

In the early first half of the 20th century, an ethnographical account mentions that *Zeme* progenitor '*Maileng*' met a goddess called *Heratingrangpui* (Hodson 1911; 128-29). Without mutual consensus, *Maileng* impregnated her who delivered all creatures of this world. This folklore diverges under the 19th-century concept of the origin of 'lower realm'.

The advent of Christianity and influx of New Kukis in the *Zeliangrong* inhabited areas created an unrest scene (McCulloch 1980; 45; Shakespeare 1909; 171-72; Johnstone 1896; 26, Shaw 1929; II, Pamei R. 1996; 32). Since 1925 onwards, to encounter external forces, they reshuffled all existing portfolios of gods and goddesses for the sake of creating one unified Supreme Being. During the reformation of indigenous religion (1925-47), the worldview of *Rongmei* mainly influenced the *Zeme* and *Liangmai* tribes' existing indigenous belief in their worldview. In the process, *Zeme* and *Liangmai* incorporated many gods and goddesses of *Rongmei*.

On the creation of the earth, in *Zeme* folklores, a new heroine '*Charahsingrangpui*' was newly introduced. She was an essential figure in

Rongmei folklore. She was the mother of *Bisnu* and other important six gods of the lower realm. These six were *Bisnu*, *Napsinmei*, *Chonchai*, *Charakilongmei*, *Koklou*, *Karangong*, and *Apouna* in seniority order. Now *Charahsingrangpui* secured the position of *Jiberai's* (*Chuprai/Siberai*), life partner. Under this assimilation process, the cosmographies of *Zeme* tribes had also been changing towards *Rongmei* cosmology (Longkumer 2010; 79-83).⁷ After the arrest of *Gaidinliu*, one folktale on the creation of the human world had also emerged, saying *Herapou* as the first progenitor of the *Zeme* society.

In the post-independence era, *Zeme* and *Liangmai* tribes' worldview have become closer because of the re-establishment of *Heraka* faith headquarters in Nagaland after her (*Gaidinliu*) release from jail in 1945. That led to the incorporation of folklore/myth of the creation of the lower realm of two tribes (*Zeme* and *Liangmai*). Since the 1990s, the position of *Banglawang's* previous identity switched over from son-in-law position to the real son of Supreme God. He requested *Tingwang* (his father) to appoint him as the ruler of earth and was ultimately crowned. *Banglawang* took the help of insect, earthworm, crow and snakes in shaping the surface of the planet, before water body entirely covered it. On successful accomplishment, he became free. To kill boredom, he cut his thumb and out of it made two girls 1) *Jegale* (his wife), 2) *Hejale* (his sister). Later he impregnated *Hejale*. She left the place to avoid social stigmatisation and reached an island of the Barak River. She laid eight eggs and hatched seven. She left her eight eggs with a bunch of banana. All seven were blind by birth. But youngest and smartest one (*Mishnu*) killed a monkey who was stealing their banana. And the blood splashed out from monkey made them gain their eyesight. They dropped the 8th number into the lake (Newme 2009; 24).

Liangmai: Etymologically *Liangmai* is composed of two words: '*Liang*' means north and '*Mai*' means people. Thus *Liangmai* refers to descendants of the northwards migrated group. The *Liangmai* tribe also has various folktales on the creation of the human world. According to the indigenous *Liangmai* belief system, *Charawang* was the Supreme God.⁸ For His blessing and to appease malevolent (*Chara-Kasabou*) and benevolent (*Chara-Kawibou*) spirits, they performed some sacrificial rites (Newmai 2009; 52-53). A popular belief is that the first human being (*Liangmai*) came out from *Rcunting Kebin* Cave (near Oklong, Senapati district, Manipur) and settled in various places viz. *Makhel*, *Makuilongdi* and even claimed that they once ruled Imphal valley.

Later there was tension at first human village due to social population explosion and confusion regarding the successor of their patriarch's position because *Charawang* already had three sons from two wives. Therefore, he organised a traditional game competition between said two eldest sons. In these games, eldest son from the second wife was defeated by the eldest son from the first wife. As a result, the other eldest son left the village and settled at Barak River Mountain and youngest son from the second wife also migrated

towards the south and settled nearby Imphal valley (*Nongmaijing Hill*). Another myth suggests that the first human being *Pokhrei* (male) and *Dichalu* (female) settled at *Makhel* and later they got married and produced offspring. The third myth tells that there was a spinster named *Charahsingpui*, who met one wanderer from an unknown place called *Tanghotpiwa*. He impregnated and left her forever. To avoid social stigma, she migrated and settled temporarily at the confluence of two rivers (the Barak and Makru rivers) and laid eight eggs. Then she left her eggs there with full life support items. She settled at Barak River valley in the village of *Banglawang*, the creator 'lower realm' (Miri 2006; 1-5). Out of eight eggs, seven boys hatched out first. Seven brothers searched and found their mother in the southwestern part of Manipur. Later, all seven brothers became favourite gods of *Liangmai* tribes (*ibid* 2006; 64-68). This is one of the latest developed folktales of *Liangmai* tribe which assimilate the folklores of *Rongmei* tribes.

Rongmei: Etymologically *Rongmei* is composed of two words: '*Rong*' means south and '*Mai*' means people. Thus *Rongmei* refers to descendants of the southwards migrated group. For *Rongmei* tribes, *Tingkao Ragwang*, the master of the universe lives in the 'upper realm' and is believed to be the one who gave the earth, created all being on the planet, taught humans through the medium of dreams how to construct a house, how to make fire and how to dig the pond and the like. *Tingkao Ragwang* appointed *Dampapu* and *Dampapui* (Gaan Ngai 2012; 2) a couple of god and goddess of the celestial world. In the process of creating a human being, they created many creatures like a frog, monkey and finally, they could create a proper human shape copying a model figure given by *Tingkao Ragwang*. He approved the first two humans created by this couple, put the soul and gave the title of *Tangpu* and *Tangpui*. They got married, and God sent them to the earth with the animals which were created by *Dampapu* and *Dampapui* (op. cit. Kamson 2015; 34, Kabui 2006; 35).

Again, *Tingkao Ragwang* created *Didimpu* aka *Kadipou* and *Thingtungbungpui* based on the model of a human being. But they were not humans, a pair of god and goddess instead. He created them to look after the earth. *Didimpu*, aka *Kadipou*, was appointed as the ruler of the 'lower realm'. He settled on the planet with his seven sisters. *Didimpu*, aka *Kadipou* and *Thingtungbungpui* produced seven daughters. In the process of trying to create his male offspring, *Didimpu* aka *Kadipou* had sex with his youngest sister *Charasinglangpui* and secretly produced his seven illegitimate sons. Later on, all his illegitimate sons got married to his legitimate seven daughters. *Charasinglangpui*, as per her plan, youngest son *Apouna* was projected as the successor of *Didimpu*, the ruler of the 'lower realm'. In a wrestling game, *Apouna* defeated *Didimpu* (his father) and became the ruler of 'lower realm'. Therefore, in all ritual and sacrificial rites besides *Tingkao Ragwang* he uses to get a particular position of patriarchal authority. Other six brothers were holding different powers. Eldest brother *Bisnuaka Mandiamu* (*Liangmei*) is worshipped in every household.⁹

The revitalisation movement¹⁰ brought a more excellent amalgamation of indigenous belief systems among these three cognate tribes. With pan *Zeliangrong* concept, the cognate tribes had also altered their spatial proximity, and later they commonly conceptualised one Supreme Being called '*Tingkao Ragwang*' or *Tingwang*. The folktale of *Charahsingpui* is one of the latest developments which assimilate the folklores of *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei* tribes. The history of the revitalisation movement of indigenous belief system is discussed in the following section.

The Revitalisation Movement and Amalgamation Process

The revitalisation movement of indigenous belief system commenced in the 1920s as a colonial resistance mobilisation by the local populace to protect their culture, faith, ideology and practices from undue dilution. The pioneers of this movement were two the then jubilant local youths viz., 'prophet' *Jadonang* and 'rani' (queen) *Gaidinliu*.¹¹

Jadonang was born at Kambiron village situated at NH 53 believably in 1905.¹² At a very young age, he earned the fame of *muh*.¹³ In traditional *Rongmei* society *muh* is a medicine man who knows hymns and chants of rites and rituals of festivals and ceremonies and able to communicate the 'upper realm' beings, spirits (malevolent or benevolent) and most importantly is able to interpret the Almighty's cosmic revelation through symbolic natural phenomenon (Kabui 2002; 10). His contributions to the religious reformation and social upliftment, the *Zeliangrong* called him *HaipouJadonang* (the prophet *Jadonang*).

While serving the society as a *muh* he encountered uncountable cases of social trauma and various form mental stress due to colonial exactions like tax exaction, fallow land grabbing (Singh 2012; 275-76, op.cit. Kabui 2004; 152-53) and Christian missionary's evangelical activities as well. He realised that the root of all social ailments came from colonial intervention, particularly disturbances in the cycle of *jhum* cultivation. He decided to start a socio-religious movement. At the beginning he confronted manifold problems like 1) no unity among the villages, 2) internal feuds and raids, 3) disruptions due to *gennas* (taboos), 4) inaccessible terrain, 5) random sacrifices, and 5) ignorance about the causes of their affliction. He knew the solution lays with the revitalisation of scattered indigenous belief systems under one firm structure. He declared that the Almighty chose him to spread His messages. He also claimed that all his actions are entirely under the guidance of Almighty. Since 1925, he constructed four temples one after another as there was no temple structure before called *Makam Gwangdi*, kept a python inside the sanctum sanctorum and performed sacrificial rites to please almighty.¹⁴ Then various institutions were established inside the temple compound like a centre for reformation in existing religious philosophy, *Ripen* (traditional martial art unit), *women's unit* to compose songs, hymns, chants praising the Supreme Being

and also trained them to serve as spy keeping surveillance over enemies. Through this medium, he prophesied the power of Supreme God and advised his followers to reduce sacrificial rites to other gods, goddesses, deities and malevolent spirits. He also visited many *Zeme* and *Rongmei* villages (Manipur, Assam) to spread the message of revitalisation endeavour (op. cit. Kabui 2004; 57).¹⁵

In 1930, he requested *Zeliangrong* community to discontinue house tax payment and *pothang*¹⁶ system and challenged the *lambus*¹⁷ of the colonial power. Instead, *Jadonang* advised to donate their tax money and rely on *Makam Gwangdi*, which could protect them from further colonial exploitations (*ibid* 2004; 149-52).¹⁸ This approach led to spark a sense of belongingness and unity among the cognate tribes (op.cit.Longkumer 2010; 49-50).¹⁹ He was also trying to establish a link with the Non-violence Movement led by M.K. Gandhi but could not succeed (op. cit. Kabui 2002; 27).²⁰

The tour diaries and official records maintained by J.H. Hutton,²¹ J.C. Higgins,²² and J.P. Mills²³ reflected the British struggle to subdue the *Jadonang's* movement. On the pretext of spreading propaganda against the government, the British arrested him on 6 December 1928 imprisoned for three days. Again on 18 February 1931, Khyati Narayan Das, S.I. cum O.C. of Lakhipur Police station and his team²⁴ arrested him at Lakhipur Bazaar while he was travelling with fifty followers. He was transported to Manipur in March 1931.²⁵ On the charges of murder of 4 Manipuri traders, *Jadonang* was tried, sentenced and hanged till death on 30 August 1931 (Reid 1948; 170).²⁶

Gaidinliu was the closest lady lieutenant of *Jadonang* (his maternal niece) in his socio-religious movement. The dismantling of *Tarang Gwangdi*, the arrest of close associates of *Jadonang* led to *Gaidinliu's* escape from Manipur to Northern Cachar Hills and established a new headquarters therein.

Since the late 1920s, many *Zeme* villagers from this region had already joined this movement. Under her leadership, she gave more stress on educating the peasants on how to develop a sustainable mechanism to fight against the confiscation of fallow lands of traditional Swidden cultivation. Within a short period, she became a prominent figure. There was not much difference between the teachings and philosophy of *Jadonang* and *Gaidinliu* except her approach having some radical elements. The colonial officials trickily issued a warrant order on her head and spread propaganda, i.e. the *Gaidinliu's* movement is 'spirit of defiance now abroad.'²⁷ The Deputy Commissioner with a detachment of the 3rd and 4th Assam Rifles arrived Henema but failed to arrest her. Sending of Assam Rifles was to make *Kukis* happy and give them a secure feeling.²⁸ In March 1932 she attacked two Assam Rifle camps at Hangrum and then *Bopungwemi* (Naga Hills District). Captain Macdonald Commanding Officer of the 3rd Assam Rifle finally captured her on 17 October 1932 at Pulomi (Naga Hills) and put behind the bar (op. cit. Singh 2012; 276-78). Her imprisonment continued until 1945.

However, increasing the number of temple construction, awakening the consciousness of unity, assimilation of diverse indigenous belief systems of conglomerate under one system, colonial resistances were the significant contributions of Rani *Gaidinliu*. She also took a leading role in removing the monolith culture of *Zeme* tribe, which went as a saviour against economic trouble in the village community and brought richness in the area.

***Heraka* and TRC: Convergences and Divergences**

As said at the outset, *Zeliangrong* is the amalgamated collective identity of three cognate tribes such as *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei* tribes arranged under two broad faiths namely *Heraka* and TRC largely converged due to the revitalisation movement of indigenous belief system and sometimes diverged due to extraneous factors. Before the assimilation process under the revitalisation movement, each tribe had a unique and independent understanding of space and time. Their knowledge of space of the 'lower realm' is strictly associated with their settlements only. Beyond it, they merely surrender to the spirits. For example, *Bisnu* Hill Cave had never been a pilgrimage place for *Zeme* and *Liangmai* tribes before the incorporation of the belief system of *Rongmei* tribes with their indigenous beliefs.

Following section attempts to look into such convergences and divergences between the two faiths at length *Heraka* and TRC under some broadheads namely The Faith, the Concept of 'Supreme God': Religious Teaching institutions, Teachings, Divine teacher, Seers and Prophets; Temple and Priest; Symbol and Totems; The Land of Death; *Thundijang*: The sinners; Festivals, Rites and Rituals; and Social Hierarchy.

The Faith

In different parts of *Zeliangrong* inhabited areas, a few numbers of faiths have emerged to retain the indigenous identity of the community. Among the various indigenous faiths, *Heraka* and TRC are the most significant and well-established faiths.²⁹ Suffice shall it to say that these faiths mostly cover the significant elements of other small faiths too. These two significant faiths have their points of more convergences and fewer divergences regarding their philosophy, teachings, festival, rites and rituals as discussed in the following paragraphs. Both *Heraka* and TRC claim that their faiths existed since time immemorial and historically evolved through the ages by lawgivers, religious diviners and prophets (op.cit. Kabui 2004; 1, Pamei 2001; 30). While *Heraka* is not emphatic about naming its prophet, according to TRC faith, the prophets who were working on the formation of religion were *Amhang*, *Tenglam*, *Tingpurangsonnang*, *Meijipu*, *Tingalepu*, *Thongramnang*, *Tingtrangpu*, etc.³⁰

Both *Heraka* and TRC abolished at par with Christian and Hindu religion by removing some taboos and gennas and abbreviated some practical rites. However, the TRC continued to sustain the faith towards giving desirable space to lower rank gods, spirits and deities.

During the absence of *Gaidinliu* being in jail from 1932 to 1945,³¹ constructing some *Kalumkai* and disseminating the teachings of *Jadonang* and *Gaidinliu* continued unabated by her followers.³² In the meantime, Ursula Graham Bower (Bower 1950; 4) reached the Naga Hills and then North Cachar Hill for her amateur research work. The *Zeme* people considered Bower as the messenger of God to serve in the absence of *Gaidinliu*.³³ Apart from research data collection, she involved³⁴ in enlisting many *Zeme* local in the British Allied force during the World War-II. Through her suggestions, the colonial government also introduced terrace farming in *Zeme* area but failed.³⁵

In the post-colonial era, *Gaidinliu* resumed her social-religious movement, but this time it was against neither the state nor any religious faiths. She was trying to bring a better peaceful and prosperous society through the revitalisation of indigenous belief system through her religious teachings. Based on her changing perceptions of ritual slaughter of fowl and animals to please the Supreme Being, her spiritual journey could be divided into four phases, such as 1) at the beginning she instead prescribed the existing traditional method of ritual slaughter with sharp *dao* and spear and complete drainage of blood from the whole body; 2) then after 15 years, she instructed to withdraw using of spear and adding a lower support of a thick wood log so that it can reduce the amount of suffering of sacrificed fowls or animals; 3) after almost a decade later (1970-1985), she instructed her followers to perform ritual sacrifices of big animals by covering its mouth part with a piece of cloth and taught even the slaughter of fowl should be performed without oozing blood from it; and 4) lastly on 11 January 1990 at *Kipeiloo* village, North Cachar Hills, she declared that *Heraka* religion decided to abolish all kind of ritual slaughter of any living animals rather concentrate only on puja with a clean mind and body at any specific time and day (Newme 2002; 4). A complete structure of organised religion was displayed by *Heraka* faith at congregation the same day. This incident inspired the *Rongmei* of Manipur to start the second reformation movement in Manipur, and the early 1990s apart from constant threats coming from both valley and hill based insurgencies on the ground why they are still following the indigenous religion (op.cit. Kamson 2015; 126).³⁶ The whole development says that *Heraka* cult is more closely inclined towards non-violent religious practices. Before this, her approach was only on the revitalisation of indigenous religion cum identity of *Zeliangrong* across the modern state boundary. The post-colonial development of *Heraka* faith was not much of economic issue rather they wanted to maintain an independent status for themselves in the society (whether, Bengalis, Meitei or Naga group) and also to stop the wild growth of Christian population in *Zeliangrong* community after independence. With a firm claim of purity, clean and belief in one god only they identify themselves with the '*Heraka*' faith of monotheism.

Defying the *Heraka* faith's claims on originality of traditional belief/practices of these cognate tribes, a new religious forum known as *Zeliangrong Rachapriak Phom* (ZRP) or *Zeliangrong Religion Council* (ZRC) came up on 16

April 1994 and renamed it as “*Tingkao RagwangChapriak* (*Phom* as they put it), on 16 April 2008.³⁷ TRC is believed to be polytheist, as because it worships multiple gods, goddesses and deities. TRC though it gives great emphasis on the worship of *Tingkao Ragwang* (Supreme Being), TRC claims that their ancestors were polytheists, not monotheists. Primary objectives of TRC were to preserve, protect, propagate, strengthen and expand the *Tingkao Ragwang* indigenous religion in *Zeme, Liangmai* and *Rongmei* inhabited areas (Kamson 2011; 29).

Since 1994, the ZRP faith has undertaken many reforms under the guidance of the *Zeliangrong* Religious Council (ZRC). The construction of *Kalum Kai* (temple); preaching of indigenous belief and custom, publication of holy book and pamphlets, abolition of unnecessary taboos of removal of expensive sacrificial rites from traditional marriage system, discontinuance of the ritual sacrifices of animals (Mithun, cow, pig) substituted by fowl sacrifices (*Takaan*) are among the remarkable reforms brought in by ZRP now called TRC. The TRC gives more emphasis on spirituality and mass prayer than unnecessary sacrifices.

The ZRP since 2008 tried to tackle a deep-rooted problem as to how to strike a balance between traditional indigenous practices and demands of modernisation viz., education, public and private sector jobs pressure, westernisation, missionary activities and the like. The essence of TRC religion is firmly based on Swidden and wet rice cultivation. In the traditional *Zeliangrong* folklores, particularly *Rongmei* tribe, cultivation field was a very significant space where usually supernatural being(s) and human maintain the demand and supply relationship. They perform varieties of sacrificial rites and rituals in seasonal festivals and household ceremonies for the blessings from *Tingkao Ragwang*, gods of ‘abode’ and “lower realm’, spirits and deities. In traditional times, they mainly seek blessings to be successful in cultivation and hunting. In fact, the meaning attributed to faithful and prosperous life was to perform the best duty in cultivation work. Now cultivation is becoming a secondary source of earning a livelihood as there are multiple options available for earning a livelihood. Hunting is also banned. Therefore, many ritual practices become null and void.³⁸

The Concept of ‘Supreme God’:

Heraka and TRC believed in the concept of the Supreme God are formless and invisible, the creator of the universe, including the ‘lower realm’ and also rules the ‘upper realm’, being the source of life and soul. He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. He is the creator, upholder and dissolver of His creation. They consider *Bhuban Cave* is the holiest place in the world which was chosen by God to reveal His presence. However, *Heraka* and TRC used different terminologies to designate their Supreme God. While *Heraka* called *Tingwang*, TRC used the term *Tingkao Ragwang*.³⁹

The underlying philosophy of *Heraka* religion is to filter down all impure '*Herui*' (blood-thirsty spirits, deities, etc.) items, purifying and enriching self and surrender to the Supreme Being (the core of all power) rather than wasting time, energy, resources by performing sacrifices to small deities. Like *Arya Samaj* (*Sanatan Dharma*) *Heraka* faith claims all sacrifices of animals for sacrifices are a later development which destroyed the purity of indigenous religion of *Zeliangrong* (op. cit. Newme 2009; 23-26; op. cit. Longkumer 2010; 136-39, Singha 2006; 75). Thus *Heraka* screened out local and non-local gods and goddesses of 'lower realm' and 'upper realm' and adopted the concept of purity. The TRC faith, on the other hand, attempts to retain the values of indigenous gods and goddesses, deities, etc. including the *Tingkao Ragwang*. TRC has also been reducing the number of sacrificial rites and removing the gennas (*Nrei*) and taboos in the line of *Heraka* faith, they deprecated the concept of pure and originality of indigenous religion as claimed by the *Heraka* (op. cit. Kamson 2011; 8). Though both faiths claim they are the faithful followers of the indigenous religion of *Zeliangrong* community, TRC faith claims that retaining the absolute foundation of the indigenous religion of *Zeliangrong* is to maintain a proper space for all small gods and goddesses.

Religious Teaching Institutions, Teachings, Divine Teacher and Prophets:

Religious Teaching institutions⁴⁰ in *Heraka* faith besides emphasising *Kelumki*, they also take a serious concern on the establishment of a school of spiritual teaching and discussion known as *Paiki*. Usually, they run it from the house of the chief of *Heraka* village (*Paipeu*). During the formation period of an authentic indigenous religion of these conglomerate tribes, *Jadonang* and *Gaidinliu* constructed a separate house where their followers can discuss and share the thought. From every household of *Heraka* village, a pious member called *Paime* has been chosen for religious service.⁴¹ Then, from among the *Paimes* a kind of benevolent chief office bearer (called *Paipeu*) who is capable of serving the society, having enough resource for charity is usually chosen.

He has to look after the office (*Paiki*) where *Heraka* followers gather, discuss, and plan for the welfare of society. Mainly the family of *Paipeu* is a centre for the meeting (*Paiki*). For *Heraka* faith *Paiki* is the second holy centre next to the temple. Each village at least should have one *Paiki*. Therefore, by default, the *Paiki* belongs to the wealthiest family of the village. *Paipeu* (head of the *Paiki*) is also the head of the village (op.cit. Longkumer 2010; 39).

Under the TRC faith the youth dormitories, village council and other senior villagers' councils were the (informal) educational institutions where all indigenous religious teachings and knowledge were imparted apart from being the centre of other curricular activities. According to *Rongmei's* myth, the practice of dormitory system is originated from the house of the mythical god called *Tingpurengsonnang*. His wife was the matriarch of the common

dormitory of gods in the 'upper realm'. Whereas, the *Herakas* believe the first bachelor's dormitory system was constructed in the 'upper realm' by *Mpeureisuang* and later on in the 'lower realm'. Indigenous society of *Zeliangrong* (particularly *Rongmei*) maintained two types of bachelor dormitories, i.e. *Khangchu* (Boys' Dormitory) and *Luchu* (girls' dormitory) (Kamei, B. 2015; 71). In *Heraka* faith, boys and girls dormitories are known as *Hangseuki* and *Leuseuiki*, respectively. Seniors in respective dormitory teach juniors not only singing and dancing (op. cit. Newme 2009; 41) but also warfare, self-defence skills, the values of community services, and how to lead a prosperous religious life. In TRC faith, bachelors were actively involved in, a) construction work of village gate, road, bridge, fencing and excavation of village pond; b) village defence services and relief works in case of natural calamities; c) performing the rites and rituals of *Traraang Maku Banru*, *Bamjou Jangmei*, *Rangaidai Matui*, *Tareng Paangben*, etc.; d) singing the wedding and festival songs in the formal marriage and preparation of internment of the dead and mourning for 5 (five) nights (op. cit. Kamson 2015; 254-56, op. cit. Kabui 2006; 42). The youths who don't learn these activities they could not join the community activities of festivals of seasons, village establishment, marriage, house construction, funeral, etc. Parents should enrol their daughters in *Luchu* once they attained puberty. Based on age hierarchy, the members of *Luchu* categorised into four tiers appointed by the village elders. Two senior most girls known as *Tunamunshinmei* are assigned to look after the house and are assisted by two other seniors (*Tunapui* the 2nd tier) girls. Other members are *Tuna Gandai* (senior girls) the third tier and *Tuna Ganlao* at fourth tier (rest of them usually juniors).

The instructions of the indigenous religion of *Zeliangrong* of both faiths are straight forward as it deals primarily with village community life. Anybody living who wants to go to the kingdom of God, where there is no pain, no sorrow, and complete absence from the cycle of life, he/she should follow the teachings of God.

The indigenous religion, irrespective of differences between two major faiths in approaches, the necessary foundation of religious teachings is almost the same. They give full stress on the moral virtue of indigenous belief system. The most common crucial right fold paths of indigenous religion are 1) right faith, 2) proper conduct and 3) right living. Human life has so many problems and caught in the trap of the cycle of life and death. The ultimate solution of these problems is a complete surrender to the Supreme Being as 'right faith' leads to 'right path' so as a soul to be elected to His kingdom. The followers should always speak the truth, not hurt others. The right action/conduct of indigenous religion of *Zeliangrong* encompasses the ethical approaches in life like, 1) do not steal others belongings, 2) do not involve in any sexual misconducts, 3) gives respects to the parents and elders, 4) participate in temple construction activities and religious performances, 5) offer charity, 6) love and help the poor, and 7) strictly follow the customary norms and practices. The

followers should avoid all types of wrong ways of living because 'if you do not know the meaning of right living, consequently your soul cannot attain salvation.' Prejudice, pride, anger, ego, greed, jealousy and vanity are the primary source of poor living in a person's life. Therefore, followers should avoid all these harmful impulses rather show politeness, charity, sympathy, love and affection to others, and involvement in charity and religious works.⁴²

Besides these conventional teachings of indigenous religion, there are approaches which maintain differences between these two faiths *Heraka* faith talks about the right action which should be non-violent by nature without sacrificial rites. A man could attain salvation through prayers, devotion and right living. A soul can reach abode only when he/she can fulfil the teachings of *Tingwang* (now written in *Hingde* texts). *Heraka* teaching objected many and random sacrifices to inferior gods; rather, they give full emphasis on devotional prayer to *Tingwang*(op.cit. Longkumer 2010; 39).

On the other hand, the TRC faith feels that performing sacrificial rites and rituals in the feast of merit (*Maku Banru*), *Ragaidai*, *Bamjou Kumei*, *Muleng*, and *Taraangkai Kumei* leads to salvation. Again TRC faith did not drop the concept of non-violent and devotional practices. This faith also gives values to devotional prayers, but they do not like to remove necessary sacrifices which their ancestors practices.⁴³

Jadonang was the first priest of the *Zeliangrong* community who started eradication of irrelevant, outdated religious practices and gennas(op. cit. Kamei B.; 44).*Heraka* and TRC have a common belief that the prophets took the primary role in enlightening men regarding the essence of Supreme Being and the path of their soul.

In the TRC faith, *Tingkarangpu*, *Thong-ram-nang* and *Amhang* were the sheers cum prophets of the early *Zeliangrong* indigenous religion. They were the pioneers who conceptualise the construction of the ornamental ritual house (*Taraang Kai*). Since the 'upper realm' and the 'lower realm' fall apart, these prophets became the only means to communicate with gods. In so far literary sources available on *Heraka* faith does not mention about other seers except *Amang*. *Amaang* / *Amangbou* / *Amhaang*, son of *Dunpong* and *Charenglu*, was born at Daluana village or Tening village in southern Nagaland. His parents passed away when he was an infant.

Along with his sister *Butamruna*, while struggling for survival, they kept migrating to places like *Tabanglong* village and then *Daluan* (*Henglep* area). Available literature suggests that he became a divine teacher at an early age. It says that the first human being who constructed a full-fledged ornamental ritual house. The Supreme Being instructed him to teach the creatures on the earth, how to make fire after the construction of this decorative house. He demonstrated the three methods of making fire such as a) fire direct from 'upper realm' like lightning, b) using of two stones, and c) extraction of fire with the help of dry wood and bamboo splint. They also believe that he was the first human being who set the rules of the performance of ritual ceremony

in the construction of *Taraang Kai*. The Grand feast of *Heraka* cult is dedicated to *Amang's* name. Therefore, their most important grand feast festival is known as *Amang Jaulubee*.

Temple and Priest:

Haipou Jadonang introduced temple construction in *Zeliangrong* traditional belief system. Some scholars claim that he took the model of the temple/church as such from Hindu and Christian religions. While some subscribe to this view, others argue that 'ornamental house' played a significant role in social, political and economic systems of traditional *Zeliangrong* (*Rongmei*) long before the intervention of *Vaishnavism* and Christianity.⁴⁴ *Taraang Kai* replaces the concept of construction of an ornamental house of ancient times to achieve the blessings from the Almighty. It is preferably a house of *Tingkao Ragwang* where the follower can have tranquillity in seeking God. The agenda of the temple is to promote the indigenous religion and its practices. Having temple gives a particular space where to disseminate and impart the knowledge on values of indigenous customs and beliefs and their roots to *Zeliangrong* youths.

Gaidinliu instructed her followers to perform community worship service on every full moon day at temple shrines, and hence, many changes in the concept of establishment of temples had emerged. Following her command, every *Heraka* villages started constructing temples at the most possible, prominent and most elevated places of the community. As per instruction, the main door of the temple should face towards the east because of two reasons, i.e. a) Bhuban cave is in the east direction, and b) the sun and moon rise in the east (op. cit. Kamson 2015; 33). The TRC faith also constructed temples in every locality of TRC followers. And another vital space for *Tingwang* is the Holy Pilgrimage of Bhuban Hills, where *Tingwang* believably comes to discuss with his subordinate gods of the 'lower realm' on the issue of the welfare of all beings of this world. And they also believed that souls of all demised chiefs dwelled in at the Bhuban Hills.

To maintain the sanctity or purity of temple, some basic rules for temples were set up such as, a) all temples shall open on puja days from early morning to 12:00 pm only, b) not to wear sandal and shoes inside the temple, c) not to allow women to enter temple during menstruation period, and d) not to let people belonging to other religion, particularly Christians are not restricted to enter the *Kelumki* (op. cit. Newme 2009:33). Steps to be followed by devotees to collective prayer at the temple on full moon day are as follow:

Table 1: The Steps of Prayers and Services in the temple of Heraka and TRC

Steps	Heraka	TRC
1	In the early morning, take a bath and wear clean cloth and reach the temple.	
2	Perform sunrise prayer before entering the sanctum sanctorum.	A <i>pujari</i> will sprinkle water on devotees at the entrance of the temple.
3	Prayer service outside the temple to the Supreme God. This is known as 'sunrise prayer'. The priest will perform the offering prayer.	Then devotees will sing an opening song (prayer) and offer holy wine to Him before the door of sanctum sanctorum is open.
4	Devotees will sing the devotional songs while entering the <i>Kelumki</i> . Inside the temple, each devotee will perform individual prayer.	Lighting of the candle and burn the incense stick and followed by singing back to back three prayer songs. And then chanting of the name of <i>Tingkao Ragwang</i> for one minute.
5	Preaching by village priest (or intellectuals of this faith) on theology and teachings of <i>Heraka</i> faith	Preaching by village priest (or intellectuals of this faith) on theology and teachings of TRC faith
6	The announcement of schedules of upcoming religious programs.	Devotee choice base chanting of hymns (like hymns of newly marriage, of learning, of of victory, of healing from
7	Devotees will perform a rejoicing song in praise of God	intellect, ailments)
8	Exultant (overjoyed) prayer will perform by the priests upon the offerings	The announcement of schedules of upcoming religious programs.
9	Incantation of <i>Herakamantra</i> by the priest	If any individual devotee request to perform the sacrificial rite (fowls or a pigeon), a priest will perform the sacrificial ritual with hymns behalf of the family
10	The priest will distribute the <i>telaudui</i> (holy water) to the devotees.	The priest will perform the last hymns known as <i>Khammei Rashoi</i>
Finally, will		After that, all devotees, in the queue, will climb the step and perform prayer at the Altar. a <i>pujari</i> of the temple standing near altar put on <i>Khammei Nimmei</i> (sindoor) on the forehead of devotees

In *Heraka* faith, holy water is known as *Telau Dui*. The traditional narratives of *Zeme* community reflected that they did not give much importance to water, unlike the ancestor of *Rongmei* tribe. In their folklore of creation of the world, *Banglawang* was struggling to create the earth because the surface of it was fully covered with the water body. Even the *Tingkao* warned *Banglawang* to avoid touching the water when he climbed down from abode of gods to earth with the help of a ladder. Again among *Banglawang's* eight illegitimate sons, biological mother *Hejale* deliberately removed the 8th son from the headcount. When her all seven sons met her first she asked them where the 8th number is. They said he could not hatch out and felt down into the river. On that moment, she wished 'let him be the king of water,' then onwards neither he came, nor his brothers and mother searched for him.

In between 1930 to 1932, *Gaidinliu* introduced the concept of 'holy water' to the *Zeme* society. *Gaidinliu*, as a priestess cum physician, collected water from Bhuban cave and started distributing this water to her followers with payment of the token amount in return. She used water as a source of

bonding, healing, hope, the blessing of suffering mind and body from colonial suppression. Since then, holy water (*Telau Dui*) has become a significant item in prayers and religious rites of *Heraka*. The *Heraka* believers used holy water on the inaugural day of a new house or *mandir* (temple). In baptising process of *Heraka* faith, they use *Telau Dui* as well. In the TRC faith also in all types of worship a priest or a *pujari* will sprinkle water over devotees' head in any religious function whether in *Tarang Kai*, ear-piercing ceremony or sacrificial rites to displace *Duigan Chakmei* (evil spirits).

The priest is called *Tingkupao* in *Heraka* and *muh* in TRC. In traditional *Zeliangrong* union, the highest regard was given to priest and village chiefs. The priest took a pivotal role in all religious activities for his locality. In every village, a selection committee used to select the most eligible person among the village elders for priest post. Though, it was a lifetime but not a hereditary position. The essential qualities of a priest are 1) good moral character, 2) capacity to communicate with God, 3) can interpret the dreams, 4) knows the true essence of indigenous religion, 5) in-depth knowledge of chants, hymns and mantras, 6) who can call and communicate with the dead person's soul and delivers messages to the family. He should perform other community services like in the event of birth, ear piercing, marriage, death occasion and calendar festivals. He should always be in the front in term religious activities/ services in the individual family and the village commune.

In terms of qualities and duties of a priest, though there are a lot of similarities between *Heraka* and TRC faiths, the priests of TRC has to perform varieties of worship prayers and rites like 1) calling of expired person's soul, 2) offering to goddess of paddy and wealth, 3) *Tingkao Ragwang Jang Lamei* (animal sacrificial rites to the Supreme God), *Tingkao Ragwang Ragaijou Jangmei* (ordinary devotional prayer with sacrifices of animals and fowls), and *Raren Loumei* (offerings to all deities of *Zeliangrong* pantheon), etc. There are four types of priesthoods in the TRC faith, i.e., 1) *Mujungpu*: an official priest who performs *Raren Loumei*. 2) *Pubu Daansaanmei*: a priest who can cures diseases through medicine or mantras, 3) *Mangtamei*: Dream Diviner and 4) *Raitu Muh*: an un-official priest who is non-performer of *Rauren Loumei*.

Symbol and Totems:

As far as the representation of religion is concerned, the *Heraka* faith uses earring as the representation of their faith and identity, whereas the TRC faith developed a new geometric symbol called '*Boudan*.' The meaning of *bou* is nest and *daan* is an indication of character. In this symbol, there are symbols of the moon, sun, circle, and the four lines running two lines perpendicularly cutting at right angles. In an informal interview with the local priest of TRC, Chaoba Kamson said 'the whole circle symbol represents the cosmos, and the Master of Universe is *Tingkao Ragwang* who has no beginning and no end and a formless Supreme Being'. The 'lower realm' beings (men,

animals, insects, plants) cannot live without the Sun, Moon, wind, water (rain), fire, etc. which are all belong to the 'upper realm', where *Tingkao Ragwang* rules. Therefore, the whole symbol signifies the omnipotence of *Tingkao Ragwang*.

In TRC faith, various clans are still maintaining the symbols which signify a sign of balance and coexistence between animal, nature and human being. In their community, if a person mysteriously got lost and believed that he/she is dead, but the corpse remains untraceable, then the family buried a log of a plantain tree as symbolic burial. This process is called *Pumlin*. Eventually then on that family forbids consuming plantain tree and its fruit anymore. *Ahuina* (a wild green pigeon) is totemic taboo for *Kamei* lineage a sub-clan of *Rongmei* tribe. So they are prohibited from killing and eating the flesh of it. A folktale shows, one day, a woman of *Kamei* clan before she left for *jhum* farming she told her adolescent daughter to prepare yam dish and then go to the field. Her daughter misheard that she should make the dish out of the head portion of her infant brother. Once she came to know her mistakes, she disguised herself as *Ahuina* bird and flew away. So *Kamei* clan is not allowed to kill *Ahuina* bird. *Hulak* (black monkey) and hornbill are totems⁴⁵ for the lineage of *Maliangmei* clan. According to their folktale, a lazy girl from *Maliangmei* clan disguised herself into a *Hulak* to avoid participation in girls' dormitory works for *Maku Banru* (feast of merit) since then she remains as *Hulak* and never came back. *Thaang* tree is also a totem for *Maringmei* clan; they never cut down this tree because they believe that one of their ancestors disguised into this tree after his soul was helping them in his sons' cultivation work. Dog meat is prohibited for *Rongmei* clan. *Khodai* is a totem for *Gonmei* clan.

The TRC faith, like *Heraka* detached almost 90 per cent of indigenous religious gennas, which are very impracticable in the present scenario where livelihood is virtually opposite to traditional livelihood. But they still observed some basic genna on the occasion of seasonal festivals (*Gaan Ngai*, *Rih Ngai*, etc.) and if any natural calamities occurred like an earthquake, fire bringing of the house, first rain or hailstorm happens after seed sowing festival (*Rih Ngai*).

The destiny of Soul: The Land of Death, Abode and Land of Sinners

The soul never dies. Righteousness and good deeds are the only means of a human soul to be liberated from the vicious cycle of life-death-life. The human body is the second highest destination of a soul. Animals and plants also have souls. Indigenous *Zeliangrong* religion has a firm belief in the connection between the deeds (*Karma*) and transmigration of the soul. Man is the architect of his destiny. *Tingkao Ragwang* gives judgment of every soul according to his/her acts. There is no escape from the effects of one's action. If a soul has done fantastic and noble deeds, God will uplift remove that soul the vicious cycle of human being's life and death. In the teachings of *Heraka* faith,

there is no evidence of seeing the rebirth of a soul in human life as coming back to a world of pain, suffering and sorrows. As per their understanding, resurrection signifies that God is still expecting some more good action from that soul. But a sinner's soul will take birth in the lower forms of an impoverished life. If that soul is not taking God's warning seriously, ultimately, it will be discarded for forever. An enlightened soul will go to *Tingimram* (abode the land of god) and live forever there without sorrow, pain, suffering, etc.

Taroiram/Herui-me-ram: The Land of Death: The TRC called it ***Taroiram*** and *Heraka* called it ***Herui-me-ram***. According to TRC faith, *Taroiram* neither falls under neither 'upper realm' nor underworld realm. This is a place where the majority of the spirits of ancestors' dwell. *Taroigwang*, aka *Tamanpu* is the ruler of *Taroiram*. *Tingkao Ragwang* created him. He married to *Tampanu*. He gives judgment to each soul according to their past deeds. His decision is strictly based on the right fold paths set by the Supreme Bring. He also takes the role of pathfinder of the souls. The TRC community believes that it is located in the bowel of the earth, but both are visible on each other's side. Bowel becomes a metaphor for god(s) where usually convey their message. That is why they always check the intestine of sacrificed animals and fowls in traditional rites and rituals. When a person passed away, the village community will first arrange the requirements of a soul during the journey from Human World to *Taroiram*. There is some difference understanding about the travel of a soul from the human world to the Land of Death in between TRC and *Heraka* faiths:

Table 2: Journey of a human soul from the human world to the land of death

Steps	Heraka	TRC
1	Once the dead body is buried, the soul usually leaves the place.	First, the corpse has to purify with a piece of fresh ginger and then take a bath. Dirty and odour body would not get a warm welcome in <i>Taroiram</i> .
2	Then reporting to <i>Heruim'mai</i> (junction of death). Here the gatekeeper of <i>Heruim'mai</i> will check all detail profile of the soul. Then accordingly, he gives direction to reach <i>Herui-me-ram</i> .	Then the corpse should bury in a village cemetery. Once it is buried, the gravediggers have to dance called <i>Taroulaamlaammei</i> and also break the dried gourd. After five days, the burial site should be cleaned. This is the process of a complete farewell to a departed soul. Then the soul will start its journey to <i>Taroiram</i> .
3.	The last destination in <i>Heruimeram</i> is <i>Mmai desat</i> (octagonal junction). Here the ruler <i>Jau-muang-peu</i> will decide which soul will go to where, whether to the kingdom of God, or the place of evil spirits (<i>Hemui-ram</i>)	Journey of a soul: 1) <i>Ambaan Rangbang</i> (village gate), 2) <i>Bamdondai</i> (resting place beyond village gate), 3) ride on the back of frog while crossing over the <i>Tuiduireng River/TanungDuipaang</i>

Contd...

running between the border of Taroiram and human world, 4) *Marinbangjang* (a beautiful place at Taroiram), 5) *Phoulenlong* (a windy place at Taroiram), 6) *Taroibamdondai* (a resting place at Taroiram), 7) *Taroi raang bang* (gate at Taroiram), 8) *Taroikaidai* (a village at Taroiram), 9) *Taroigwangbam* (a place of Taroiram).

According to a myth, *Meijipu* and *Angangpei* a couple lived happily. But suddenly, *Angangpei* passed away. Broken heart *Meijipu* followed his wife's soul and finally reached *Taroiram*. By all means, he convinced *Taroigwang*, aka *Tamanpu*. With some conditions *Tamanpu* allowed him to stay there. In *Taroiram* he was struggling for survival because food habit, lifestyle and many things were different from the human world. *An-Gangpei* knew that her husband is a live person he could not survive anymore there. So she convinced her husband to go back to human society and come back with the spade which is lying in their *jhum* farm. He went home and found shovel there but died on the spot due to snake bite. Now his soul automatically went to *Taroiram* and joined his wife and ultimately solved the previous opposite cultural problem.

Thundijang: the land of sin committed souls: As per TRC faith, any soul belonged criminal person will live in the land of insects and mosquitoes with full of hungry, sorrow, pain where there is no light. According to TRC faith, the soul is totally based on his/her past deeds. From *Thundijang* the soul will be converted into a plant called *Thubang*. When the plant is dead and rotten, the soul will transform into a worm. Then again fall into the food chain system; the bird will eat the larvae, men will eat the bird, and then the soul becomes in the form of a human being.

Festivals, Rites and Rituals:

Amang Jaulubee (the Grand feast) festival is one the most important festivals of *Heraka* faith. The festivals of seasons are, 1) *Hepumra*, New Year festival of *Heraka*; 2) *Heleingi*, the seed sowing festival; 3) *Nchangngi*, completion of seed sowing festival; 4) *Puakpatngi*, harvesting festival; 5) *Hegangi*, year ending festival, which performs for 2 or 3 days ahead of full moon day of the last month of the year. In all festivals, they offer crops or grains to the Almighty with prayers and devotion.

Sacrificial rites, prayers, devotional songs, dances are significant features of all big festivals of TRC faith. They also organise grand feast as a part of thanksgiving to the Almighty. Besides religious significance, the villagers wanted to forget misery, tiredness after continuous working in their cultivation fields. In a year they celebrate from nine to ten festivals. During traditional

days *Peikai* (Village Council) use to fix the date for celebrations of all festivals) and other institutions like *GaanchangKaibang* (House of village elders), *Kengjapui* (House of old women), *Mathew ei Kaibang* (House of women), *Luchu* (Girls dormitory), *Nap mu Kaibang* (House of calling of paddy) were organising the festivals.

The famous festivals of TRC faiths are 1) Seed sowing (*Naphadoi-Ngai* in April month), 2) Worship of goddess of Food Grain (*Ginki Ngai*), 3) Ginger Soup drinking festival (*Ngai festival/Maleng Ngai*), 4) Pre-Harvest Festival (*Pukpha Ngai*), 5) Rainy season festival (*Tun Ngai*), 6) Bread Tasting festival (*Ten Ngai*), 7) Seeing of Granary festival (*Dongjao Ngai*), 8) Greatest Festival (*Gaan Ngai*), 9) War victory festival (*Rih Ngai/Ring Ngai*), 10) Ear piercing festival (*Nanu Ngai*). In these festivals, the TRC cult maintains a welcoming space for all the gods and goddesses of 'lower realm' who hardly get the opportunity to enjoy in the temple of Supreme God (*Kalum Kai*). Though the TRC faith is in the process of reducing the sacrificial rites as much as possible, on the other hand, they are also giving full effort to save the practices which signifies the unique identity of *Zeliangrong* community.

There are many kinds of rituals, like 1) *Tinkao Ragwang Lamei* (worship of Him with sacrifice), 2) *Ragaijpou Jangmei* (worship of Him with prayers only), 3) *Bukaomei* (calling of soul), 4) *Lankaomei* (calling of wealth), 5) *Napkaomei* (calling of goddess of paddy), 6) *Raren Loumei* (worship of all gods of TRC), 7) *PumkanmeiTinkao Ragwang*.

The mode of ritual worship is the main difference between *Heraka* and TRC faith, where one follows devotional prayer another follows both sacrificial rites and religious prayers. Like the *Herakas*, the TRC faith has also been cutting down sacrificial rites as much as possible if it does not disturb the harmony of lower rank gods. In TRC, there are two types of worship, 1) Supreme God, first they pray to the TR with offerings with sacrificial rites. 2) Another kind of worship is expressed through *Munthimmei*, *Lumthengmei*, *Mhailu Bammei* and *Gantheng kai Kumei*, which are all meditation and fasting. Rituals dances like *Tranang* and *Banryu Laam* are also a form of worship of God.

On the auspicious *Heraka* New Year Day following the same above mentioned step of prayers to the Supreme Being used to perform at Bisnu Cave of Bhuban Hills. The devotees primarily fetch (holy) water from this cave's pond as much as possible to use in every full moon day prayer and traditional treatment of ailments. To attain the prayer at the holy shrine (*Kelumki*) one day before whether priest or devotees have to keep themselves clean one day ahead. The *Tingkupau* (*Heraka* priest) is not allowed to kill any living creatures or pluck any plants. Besides, he should not share a bed with his wife and abstain from worldly things. He should fast and remain clean. On the full moon day, he should continue clean. After the prayers and rituals, the *Tingkupau* can break his fast. Women under the menstrual cycle and anybody who indulged sexual

activities on the eve of holy days is forbidden to enter the compound and sanctum of *Kelumki*.

The unique Indigenous identity of *Zeliangrong* is also reflected in festivals. Traditional sacrificial rites of the *Zeliangrong* community have a specific format. According to their belief system, every offering of animals and fowls to either Almighty God or gods or goddesses or deities are not only seeking for their blessings but also to receive the revelation of their will through the sacrificed animals. As the process of sacrificial rites, the priest has to examine the spleen of the pig, leg portion and intestine of cock to know the responses of those respective beings. In the process of establishment of a new village of the TRC faith, they do check the omens by examination of egg (*Roidui Daan Jaomei*), extraction of fire (*Mhailapmei Daan Jaomei*), by smoke (*Mhaikhou Daan Jaomei*), by sowing paddy seed in the selected site (*Napgum Daan Jaomei*), pig's spleen (*Gapmei Daan Jaomei*), cock's leg (*Roiphai Daan Jaomei*), etc. (op. cit. Kamson 2015: 77-123; Schwartzberg 1994; 711-12, Scharer 1963; 110).

During traditional times *Zeliangrong* community organised various seasonal festivals in seeking the blessings from multiple gods and goddesses to increase the fertility of the soil, to protect their crops from diseases and good harvest. Whereas in the 21st-century protection of indigenous cultural practices and religious identity slowly overtaking the past value on cultivation by seeking for good health and community welfare. That resulted in raising the question of the changing space and value of indigenous gods, goddesses, and spirits and like that. The TRC villages are still celebrating these festivals with the objectives to preserve the traditional religious belief, practices, the social, cultural and religious identity and solidarity of the *Zeliangrong* people.

In these festivals, devotees offer holy wine and sacrifice animals and fowls to *Tingkao Ragwang*, *Kambuipui* (goddess in charge of food grain) and *Charaipui* (goddess of food and wealth distributor), *Kangdailu* (goddess of food grain) and *Tingalapu* (husband of Kangdailu), village deities, ancestors, *Dime*, and loitering spirits. Bachelors' dormitory system becomes outdated, however in these festivals, particularly during six days *Gaan Ngai* festival the TRC faith still maintains its traditional values. Moreover, on the second and third day of *Gaan Ngai* festival, they perform religious gathering with dream interpretation through the medium of two priests in the 'house of old women' and 'house of old men.'⁴⁶

Social Hierarchy in TRC:

During traditional times they believed if a person constructed an artistic ethnic house of merit locally called *Tarang Kai* after death, his soul would reach heaven. Construction of it involved an expensive investment like sacrificial rites cum grand feast. So the souls belong to common mass have very little chance to enter heaven; rather, it is meant for rich people only.

One of the most important ideologies of temple establishment was to unite cognate tribes of *Zeliangrong* so that they raise their voice against colonialism. The sudden arrest of *Jadonang* and *Gaidinliu* derailed what they wanted to do besides the spread of indigenous religion (Kamei 2015:56). While she was behind the bar, of course, the growth of indigenous belief system was there in *Zeme* villages, but the new temple construction system became a centre of social hierarchy. Increasing the power of priest and village owner led to an imbalance situation in the society. Neither they could protect their Swidden land from new Kuki settlers nor bring egalitarian social atmosphere. *Gaidinliu* took almost 40 years of streamlining and removing this element of social hierarchy.

During the traditional period, main hampers in growth came from gennas. And the power of announcement of gennas was in the hands of village priests and chiefs. So they controlled the livelihood, the economy of all villagers. For example, if a priest/chief announce today is the genna day, then the whole village cannot do anything. In one way it was a way of controlling village mass.

However, there is still a wealthy family, and village owner got a lot of opportunity for power in his position (op. cit. Kamson 2015: 251-53). *Gonmei* family of each village conducted presided over the majority of religious functions. *Longnapkaodai / Napkaodai*, Agricultural ritual and seed showing festival has to perform at the house of *Gonmei* and its sub-clan.

In post-colonial Manipur, as per my understanding, the social hierarchy among the *Zeliangrong* indigenous religion followers has gone down. Many taboos and gennas became obsolete and useless because of youths started a new life by enrolling in schools and colleges. Non-Christian *Rongmei* villages in the foothills of Imphal valley usually practice wet as well as *jhum* rice cultivation. And secondly, there was less intervention from *Kuki* immigrants in their settlements. As a result, construction of *Tarang Kai* and sacrificial rites were not a significant issue for them compared to *Zeme* villages. And the 1990s the TRC was born, and again all irrelevant gennas and taboos were removed from the social system of indigenous religion followers.

As far as the growth of *Zeliangrong* indigenous religion in Manipur state is concerned, it was prolonged because they were reluctant to start a socio-religious movement due to their past bad experience with the state (*Jadonang* and *Gaidinliu* case). From the 1930s to 1980s they (*Rongmei* tribe) stepped back from religious reformation rather practising in their individual and village level only.

Space Identity of Evil Spirits and the Eighth Number Brother:

In indigenous *Zeliangrong* religion, they consider odd numbers are lucky charm numbers. Among the odd numbers, 7 (seven) is the luckiest number. According to *Liangmai* myth when the first man and woman (*Pokrei*

and *Dichalu*) got married, she (*Dichalu*) makes a round of seven times to declared husband and wife (op. cit. Miri 2006; 64-68). On New Year Eve of *Heraka* devotees circumvallates the stone monolith three times in anti-clockwise, which represents the notion of the cycle of life (life-death-life)(op.cit. Longkumer 2010; 40). In a folktale of *Rongmei* tribe known as 'Seven Brothers and *laangchi*⁴⁷ log,' seven brothers killed a big snake, and the youngest one (No. 7) was asked to prepare the curry of it. While preparing, another snake came with a *laangchi* tree log and touched at the already cooked snake and made it alive and then left the place (op. cit. Kamson 2015; 186-189).⁴⁸ The brothers came back asked him where the dish is. He told the truth, but six brothers mistook it so beat him up and even broke his leg. Now he wanted to test the magic of *laangchi* tree. So he crawled near the *laangchi* tree, touched the broken leg with it and healed immediately. Then he cut a piece of *laangchi* bark and carried it back home. He used it purposefully. But one day his wife dried it under the Sun. The Sun and moon came down and moved away.

The myths of the creation of 'lower realm' of *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei* connoted the value of seven number and disqualification of eight number as the odd man out. *Rongmei* folk tale of the creation of world says *Didimpou* aka *Kadipou* and *Thingtungbungpui* produced seven daughters. *Charasinglangpui* also laid eight eggs, but those seven eggs were hatched out first searched, met and lived with her together and she was supporting her seven numbered son like anything at last that created a conflict among the seven brothers. Consequently, the eldest son left the place and settled in the *Bisnu* Hills, Assam. In *Zeme* and *Liangmai* versions also *Charasinglangpui* gave importance to seven brothers only.

Regarding the 8th number son, *Dime*, in all three versions, she asked them about her supposed to be the youngest son (an 8th number) that also to verify whether all of them are her real sons or not. And both seven brothers and mother did not search for him nor did he join them in sharing the power in the 'lower realm'. However, the TRC faith worshipped him during the *RarenLoumei* ritual.

Loitering Spirits and Evil Spirits:

In *Rongmei* myths, *Raphompou* is a polluted god. He eats the flesh of rotten animals. He was trapped in a trap while he was trying to take the crops of cultivation field of *Rikhangrekpou* were destroyed by wild animals. To catch the animals, he put trap with rotten meat, but in place of livestock, *Raphompou* was trapped and succumbed to his injury. Gods found him. Gods wanted to conceal the case by convincing *Rikhangrekpou*. Later out of excitement, he speaks out at a funeral party what he did, and then it brings gods unhappy. The gods captured him on the accusation of breaking the promised not to tell anybody. In *Liangmai* community, *Radaopui* is an evil spirit. Seven number son of *Charasinglangpui* killed him. In seed sowing ritual rites, the cultivator

offers foods to loitering gods. Otherwise, these spirits will disturb the cultivation works (Marulung 1996; 34, op. cit. Kamei B. 2008; 22).

Regarding sacrificial rites, all the seven brothers from *Apou Ragwang* to *Bisnu* receives the offering of holy wine, the flesh of fowls and animals whereas *Dimeï* gets sacred wine in a banana leaf cup which was made turning in an opposite side like other evil spirits *Kunmei* and *Para*.¹

Worship of Nature:

The TRC claims that unlike Hindus, they do not worship natural object such as hills, mountain, cave forest, lake, river, stone, etc. (Doniger 2009; 166 and 292). Despite the fact, they maintain a cordial relationship with natural elements offering rites to the spirits of wind, fire, etc. *Ponthou*, a sacrificial ritual to invoke the spirit/god of wind named *Pongwang*. They performed this rite by sacrificing a small fowl at the courtyard of *Peikai* and hanging the slaughtered fowl at a temporary post and exposed it air so that it can invoke the wind god (*Pongwang*) (op.cit. Kamson 2015; 69-71). Another sacrifice is to invoke the god of fire. In case of digging the grave, they offer holy wine to *Ditigmei* (Mother Earth). They also provide offers to *Banglagwang* (god of the underworld) to avoid possible earthquake (regarding detail is with the creation of the world) (TRC:116-122).

With all said and done, let us sum up the issues of divergences for the sake of heuristic clarity. Divergences and dynamics emerged in the community of *Zeliangrong* unionisation among three cognate tribes. Under hitherto converge faith and practices around Heraka and TRC over dilution of leadership structure, the rise of an interest group, cross-cultural interactions, missionary efforts, the impact of Christianity and Hinduism and so-called the ends of conversion. The following table (**Table 3**) sums up the points of divergences between the two faiths.

Table 4: Heraka and TRC: Convergences

Indicator	Sl	Heraka	TRC
Faith			
<i>No. of gods and goddesses</i>	1	Monotheist	Polytheist
<i>Ideology</i>	2	Conservative	Susceptible to change
<i>Clinging</i>	3	Cling towards predominantly Zeme and Liangmai tribes	Cling towards Rongmei tribe.
The concept of the Supreme God			
<i>Name of Supreme Being</i>	1	<i>Tingwang</i>	<i>TingkaoRagwang</i>
<i>Purity concept</i>	2	Complete surrender to Supreme Being with no sacrificial rites and puja with pure water from <i>Bishnucave</i> .	Complete surrender to Supreme being, perform sacrifices and devotion as well.

Contd...

<i>Lesser gods</i>	3	Screen out lesser gods and goddesses and deities	Retain the value of gods, goddesses and deities all alike
<i>Religious Teaching Institution, Teachers, Divine Seers and Prophets</i>			
<i>Institution</i>	1	House of the village the chief	The village council, Bachelors' dormitory (male and female bachelors)
<i>Teaching</i>	2	Complete surrender to Supreme Being	Rites, a ritual in the feast of merit to various gods, goddesses.
	3	Nonviolence, without sacrificial rites	Sacrificial Rites
<i>Divine teachers, prophets</i>	1	One prophet 'Amang'	Multiple prophets were reckoned before <i>HaipouJadonang</i>
<i>Symbol and Totems</i>			
<i>Symbol</i>	1	Earring	<i>Boudan</i> (geometric symbol)
<i>Burial tree.</i>	2	Silent on symbolic burial.	Burial of log of a plantain tree.
<i>Taboo</i>	3	Abolition of irrational taboo and <i>gennas</i> .	Taboo over non-consumption of a plantain tree.
<i>Dog meat meat.</i>	4	Silent on the taboo of eating	Prohibition of eating dog dog meat.
<i>Temple and Priests</i>			
<i>Temple</i>	1	<i>Kelumki</i>	<i>Tarangkai</i>
to	2	No bloodshed in the premises of the temple.	Sacrifices can be performed please God.
<i>Priest</i>	3	<i>Tingkupao</i>	<i>Muh</i>
	4	Ritual performances in prayers days and festivals.	Apart from ritual performances, the priests perform many sacrificial rites and dream interpretation during seasonal festivals.
<i>Land of Death</i>			
<i>Terminology</i>	1	<i>Taroiram</i>	Herui-me-ram
<i>Festivals Rituals and Rites</i>			
<i>Festivals</i>	1	5 festival types	10 festival types
<i>Prayer</i>	2	Devotional prayer	Sacrificial rites and ritual prayers
<i>Offering</i>	3	<i>Bishnu</i> Hills and temple <i>Bishnu</i> Hills	Temple, Villages, House to village elders
<i>Social Hierarchy</i>			
	1	No such hierarchy	Temple construction and grand feast decided the hierarchy

Both the recorded history of the past and the prolonged history of the present leave reliable testimony to the fact that *Zeliangrong* is the amalgamated collective identity of three tribes arranged under two broad faiths namely *Heraka* and TRC. They converged mainly due to the revitalisation movement of indigenous belief system and diverged due to contingent extraneous factors.

All religious mobilisation till the end of the 20th century including the post-independence period in history related to in some form or other towards either division or bifurcation or claim of independent identity either at the intergroup or its intra-group level. In general, as such, in that sense unique is seem to be unique towards unification and integration of mainly converse faiths and practices while nonetheless diverse in certain of their worldview, belief and practices. Instead of the claim of independence *Zeliangrong* as a form of religious mobilisation attempted towards claiming and maintaining the identity to remain resilient. The following table (**Table 4**) sums up the points of convergences between the two faiths.

Table 4: Heraka and TRC: Convergences

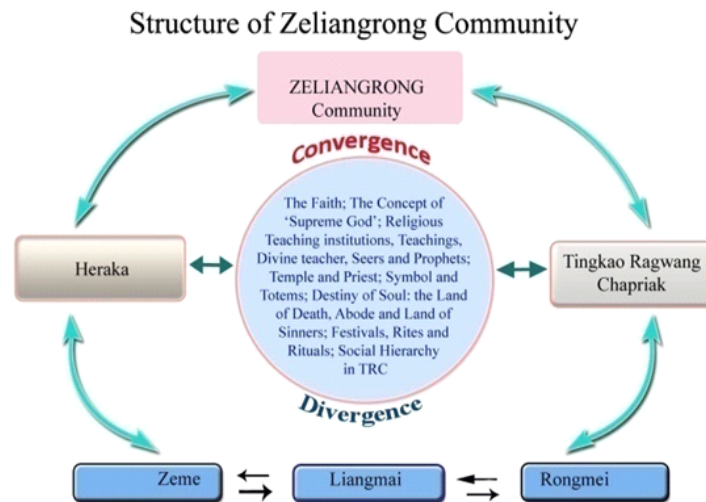
Faith	
1	Both had faith, belief practices, philosophy, teachings, festivals, rites, existing since time immemorial.
2	According to folklore, <i>Amang</i> is a prophet believed to be existing before <i>Jadonang</i> , common to both.
The concept of the Supreme God	
1	Both believe the Supreme Being is formless. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.
2	Supreme Being is settled in the abode
3	Temple is the purest place
4	He is the Master of Universe
5	Both beliefs in the concept of Supreme being with or without lesser gods.
Religious Teaching Institution, Teachers, Divine Seers and Prophets	
<i>Institution</i>	1 Both emphasised on building or religious teaching institution.
	2 Both have youth (male and female) dormitory system
<i>Teaching</i>	3 Both gave full stress on moral virtues such as right faith, right conduct and right living.
	4 Strongly believe in <i>Karma</i> .
<i>Divine teachers and prophets</i>	5 Both believe that prophets became the only means to communicate with God.
Temple and Priests	
1	Temple is a space to disseminate and spread the values of indigenous customs, beliefs and practices
Symbol and Totems	
1	Both used symbolic objects as an indication of their identity.
2	TRC and <i>Heraka</i> detached almost 90 per cent of indigenous <i>genna</i> .
3	All odd numbers are lucky for both and no. Seven is the most fortunate.
4	No even number is lucky for both, and 8 is the unluckiest number.
Destiny of Soul	
1	Both belief in the soul never dies, and the human body is the second highest destination of the soul through transmigration. (life and death, karma)
2	Puja and prayer are the only mean to achieve salvation.
3	Give full value relationship between <i>Karma</i> and reborn and form of reborn
4	Sinner's soul is selected for Hell, and pious soul permanently settled ended in heaven.
Land of Death	
1	After death, the majority of soul live till the judgment day.
2	Everything like food habit, lifestyle, and culture is opposite to human world.
Festivals rituals and rites	
1	Both have rituals, prayers, rites in prayer format.

Conclusion

The paper started off with three principal objectives such as understanding the historical genesis of scattered belief systems of three cognate tribes namely *Zeme*, *Liangmai* and *Rongmei*; the contributions of revitalisation movement and the role of leaders thereof in amalgamation of indigenous belief

system; and the convergences and divergences between two faiths *Heraka* and TRC towards *Zeliangrong* unification of these tribes. This section sums up the findings of the study modelling out the dynamics of such historic *Zeliangrong* unification process.

Figure 1: Structure of *Zeliangrong* Community



There are various historical writings on the origin of these cognate tribes with specific claims of having a common ancestry. There is no unanimity among scholars theorising the origin of *Zeliangrong*. Ch. Budhi assumed that they came from Central Asia, whereas W.I. Singh projected that the *Kabui* is the descendant of Tai (Shan) came from Southern China. Besides collective consciousness of being *Zeliangrong*, ethnographical, anthropological and linguistic findings somehow support their similarities. According to traditional folklore, they came from a cave *Rcunting Kabin Cave* and first settled at *Makhel* and then *Makuilongdi* was the first proper village settlement of *Zeliangrong*. It also said that due to population explosion, power struggles among ruling clans, an imbalance in self-sufficient village structure led to an exodus of three groups from their ancestral settlement in Senapati Hill range towards three different directions. They migrated and settled in various hill ranges such as 1) the *Rongmei* in the south (foothills of Manipur valley and Hills), 2) the *Zeme* in the west (the *Barail* range) and 3) the *Liangmai* retained themselves at original *Makuilongdi* and later spread their settlements in north and northwest directions.

However, literature, folklore, myths of these cognate tribes before the colonial intervention and revitalisation reflected their identity and belief systems falling apart from each other. This nonetheless generated a type of new identity, contesting worldview and concept of space sacred or otherwise and the like. The worldview of *Rongmei* mainly influenced the *Zeme* and *Liangmai* tribes' existing indigenous belief system during the reformation of indigenous religion (1925-47), and they started incorporating many gods and goddesses of *Rongmei*. Under the revitalisation movement led by two eminent socio-religious reformers, namely *Jadonang* and *Gaidinliu*, the identity and belief systems of these three tribes started stitching up together towards consolidation and unification as something overdue. As a spread effect, the elites of these cognate tribes formed a union in the name of '*Zeliangrong*' in 1949. Thus, soon after independence, they started conceptualising their collective identity and nurtured not only collective consciousness but also their glorious past. With several ups and downs in between, the unification process continued with increasing the number of temple construction, awakening the consciousness of unity, assimilation of diverse indigenous belief systems of the conglomerate under one order due to the significant contributions of *RaniGaidinliu*. In the 1990s, with the formation of structured (indigenous) religious faiths, e.g. *Heraka* and TRC, these tribes indulged in putting their efforts to sustain their indigenous identity and beliefs.

Thus, *Zeliangrong* is the most beautiful example of indigenous religion in North East India, representing unity in diversity, the convergence of faiths and beliefs, rituals and practices, resilience and dynamism. Their indigenous identity of religious ideologies appears to be closely intertwined as an accurate representation of their belonging to a spiritual community exclusively their own.

NOTES:

1. This pan-*Zeliangrong* union formed in Imphal (Manipur) in 1945 later recognised and included *Inpui (Puimei)* in it.
2. No explicit mention found *Zeliangrong* as one tribe in Census of India reports.
3. *Makamei* is a metaphor of new geopolitical, religious cum identity space of *Zeliangrong* conglomerate tribes visualised by *Jadonang*. He prophesies that '*Makamei*' should set free from colonial British India.
4. The *Zeme* believed Almighty and his subordinates dwell in the 'upper realm.'
5. *Zeme* also considered the 'lower realm' is the space for human, spirits (benevolent and malevolent), gods and goddess.

6. *Zeme* folktale now assimilates the elements from *Rongmei* folklores.
7. MS 95022 Higgins Collection (SOAS): 11–18; MS 95022 Higgins Collection (SOAS): 15: 11–18.
8. Ethnographical records exposed cases that before revitalisation movement Almighty of *Liangmai* were *Charawang* but during revitalisation times His identity was diluted and became *Tingwang*.
9. Personnel interviews with i) Chaoba Kamson, religious head of TRC Faith on 11 January 2017 at TRC headquarters, Imphal, ii) Tomba Golmei of Keishamthong Kabui Khul, a senior priest of TRC, on 2 February 2017, and iii) Rockos Kamei, Langthabal Kabui Khul, Imphal on 22 January 2017.
10. Revitalisation movement is acculturative in nature and a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more unique indigenous culture.
11. Correspondence between W.A. Cosgrave, Chief Secretary to Government of Assam and C. Grimson, Political Agent, Manipur, dated 14th July 1933, regarding unrest among the Kacha Nagas, C.B. 1235, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
12. Kambiron village, Tamenglong district, Manipur.
13. Being a *Muh*, one has knowledge of indigenous medicine, chants, hymns to appease gods, goddesses, spirits, devils.
14. A confidential letter dated 27th June 1933, from the Political Agent in Manipur to the Chief Secretary to the Government Assam, Manipur State Archives, Imphal. File No. R-1/S-C/220, *Naga Movement 1930*, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
15. File No. R-1/S-D/237, *Naga Movement: 1930-33*, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
16. *Pothang* was a form of state imposed forced labour systems against her subjects.
17. *Lambus* are the agents employed by Manipur State *Durbar* (Royal Court) who were responsible for translating and passing orders from State Durbar to the hilly people.
18. The British officials called *Jadonang* as he was mobilizing against colonial tax system in *Zeliangrong* inhabited areas.
19. In *Zeliangrong* area *Jadonang* started indigenous religious gathering and reformation before the missionary establishing their church institution.
20. More than 400 people disciples treated him as demigod.

21. J.H. Hutton: letters, 1916-38; tour diaries, 1917-35, Manipur State Archives, Imphal
22. J.C. Higgins was the Political Agent of Manipur Princely State.
23. J.P. Mills, Commissioner of Surma Valley, letters from 1919 to 1936; tour diaries of 1927, 1928, 1936, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
24. He took primary assistance from Constable No. 201 GopeshwarSingh and *Chawkidar* No: 57 Keshab Ram Bagdi. In his letter to D.M. he praised the contribution of both.
25. Immediately Jadonang put in *Hajat*. On February 21, 1931, Jadonang was charged with 108 CrPC and was in custody until 2nd March, 1931 and then later transported to Manipur. File No. R-1/S-D/237, *Naga Movement: 1930-33*, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
26. Higgins had a mischievous plan not only to shake the psyche of *Zeliangrong* tribes but also to develop an enmity between *Meities* and *Rongmeis*.
27. *Gaidinliu* born and brought up in princely state of Manipur, later re-launched the revitalisation of indigenous movement in North Cachar Hills of Assam.
28. On 20 February 1932, Assam Government reported that there were evidences of unrest happening in *Zeliangrong* inhabited area. Letter No.Pol.-471/1645-AP, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
29. There are a number of indigenous faiths of *Zeliangrong* tribe namely *Poupei Chapriak* a faith mainly followed by a number of *Rongmei* of North Cachar Hills. *Poupei*(ancestral), *Chap*(godly nature) and *Riak* (existence of soul and mind). Due to semantic similarities, somewhere differentiation between *Heraka* and *Poupei Chapriak* became difficult. In *Liangmai Poupei Chapriak* are known as *Paupai Chen*.
30. Op. cit.interviews of Chaoba Kamson and Rockos Kamson.
31. Memo No. 222-24/C, 5th February, 1946, Manipur State Archives, Imphal.
32. Disciples of *Gaidinliu* were relentlessly working on reasserting a dominant religious space at Bhuban cave. They strongly believed that the holy place of Supreme Being on the earth is Bhuban Cave.
33. Since the execution of *Jadonang*, the whole hill ranges was affected by millenarian hope that was *Jadonang* will be reborn. In same manner, while *Gaidinliu* was behind the bar when Ursula reached there the *Zeme* considered her as the substitute of *Gaidinliu* sent by God.
34. Bower got recognition from local and British officials, providing a space to grow the Christianity in this region without disturbances.

35. The British India government adopted the *Angamis* terrace farming in the *Zeme* areas without any baseline leading to failure in the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram).
36. Some of valley based insurgency groups gunned down two *Rongmei* indigenous religion followers in the 1990s and at the same time the Naga insurgency group(s) were also harassing them for converting into Christianity in 1993-94.
37. The pioneers of the movement are Gangmumei Kamei, R. Marulung, A.P. Golmei, Abu Kamei, D. Kathuna, Tomba Golmei, Achung Pamei, etc. *TRC* is regulated and managed by a religious authority called the *Zeliangrong* Religious Council under two important organs: the 'Executive Council' and the 'Ecclesiastical Council'.
38. Personnel interview with Namthuibiyang, senior history professor at Imphal College, Imphal, on 28 January 2017.
39. While the *Rongmei* called Almighty as *Tingkao Ragwang*, for the *Zeme* He is *Tingwang*.
40. Both the *Heraka* and TRC emphasis on building religious and cultural teaching institutions giving full stress on youth (male and female) dormitories.
41. Op. cit. Interviews of Rockos Kamei and Tomba Golmei.
42. Op.cit. Interview with Chaoba Kamson
43. Op. cit. interview with Rockos
44. Majority of folklores, chants, hymns of *Liangmai* and *Rongmei* extensively talk about significance of ornamental house and *Makuilongdi* settlement. Believably, Jadonang's temple architecture resembled temple and church structures. For *Heraka* faith *Kalum Kai* is the second holiest place.
45. Totem: a natural object or animal or birds believed symbolic by a particular community to have spiritual significance and adopted by it as an emblem (a symbol).
46. Op.cit. interview with Tomba Golmei.
47. *Laangchi* is the name of a plant which has the magical healing power generally found in myths and legendary stories of *Zeliangrong* tribe. But still the scientists could not identify it like *Sanjeevani* in Hindu mythology.
48. Interaction with Lovejoy Panmei, Jwahar Novodaya Vidyalaya, Mamit, Mizoram, on 13 January 2018.
49. Op. cit. interview with Chaoba and Namthubiang

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