

## Connections and Circulations on the Indo-Myanmar Borderland

Zamkhan Khual Guite

*Ph.D. Research Scholar of History & Ethnography,  
School of Social Sciences, Mizoram University*

Lalngurliana Sailo

*Professor of History & Ethnography, School of Social Sciences,  
Mizoram University*

**Abstract:** *The article is the study of the Indo-Myanmar borderland in the ambit of trans-regional and national trade flow that has shaped and reshaped cultures and societies across political spaces. Despite modern-day political divisions along linguistic and cultural borders, the Indo-Myanmar borderlands, are indeed, a contact zone. The geographical position of the region provides a conduit to merchants, traders and travelling religious priests who travelled between China, Southeast Asia and India since ancient times. As such, the article studies the history of connectivity and the movement of goods, with attention on firearms, thereof with the experience of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo who are entangled in the Indo-Myanmar borderland.*

**Keywords:** Indo-Myanmar borderland, connections, circulations, bell-metal gongs, firearms, beads.

Throughout the known human history, there have been contacts and connections which have served different purposes. Be it maritime or overland, some passageways penetrated human societies and their occupied territories by way of trade or war. These passageways are characterized by the movement of people, goods and ideas. Global History, as a subject, began exploration by focusing on connections, "circulations and exchange of things, people, ideas, and institutions."<sup>1</sup> Sebastian Conrad, thus, said, "And indeed, a focus on transfers and interactions is a crucial ingredient of all recent attempts to understand the global past. The mobility of goods, the migration and travel of people, the transfer of ideas and institutions: all these processes are the stuff that have helped produce the globalized world in which we live, and they are the privileged objects of study by many global historians."<sup>2</sup> The turn towards global history since the late nineteenth century offered new ways of doing history by focussing on wider

perspectives by going beyond national or cultural boundaries, which are, for the most part, porous. In doing so, certain regional-centric views began to be questioned and scholarship on spaces across national or political boundaries and their connections became the focus of study. Global trade flows and the movement of ideas have shaped and reshaped cultures and societies across political spaces. Despite modern-day divisions along linguistic and cultural borders, the Indo-Myanmar borderland has a long history of importance in global trade flows and the movement of ideas. The geographical position of the region provides a conduit to merchants, traders and travelling religious priests between China, Southeast Asia and mainland India since ancient times. This article is a preliminary forage situating the region in the context of global and local trade flows. As such, the article delves into the trade networks and the trans-regional and global trade flows that connected and circulated in the highlands situated between India and Myanmar. To be more precise, the article will focus on the affairs of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo who occupied the triadic states of Manipur, Mizoram and Chin State.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the paper is a bold attempt to explore such connections and circulations thereby relying on colonial ethnographies, archival data and other secondary sources relating to the subject.

#### **The Indo-Myanmar Borderland Scenario**

The borderline between India and Myanmar stretches 1,643 kilometres running from the tri-point with China in the north to the tri-point with Bangladesh in the south. Geographical nomenclatures and contemporary geo-political boundaries have delineated both physical landscapes and human communities. Rather than emphasizing commonalities and proximity, this process has tended to highlight differences and divergences between people and places.<sup>4</sup> Indrani Chatterjee strongly postulates the necessity of writing histories of connected geographies and cultures by disowning the 'disconnected histories' scholarship designed by a colonial system which has crippled generations of scholars. Thereby, she explores the various connections that Assam, in particular, had with its neighbouring regions.<sup>5</sup> The region is, in fact, an entwined region often predicated with insurgency, cultural divisions, and economically underdeveloped. Had it not been for the run after economic gains, among others, the British would not have been interested in mapping, surveying and occupying the region. However, the importance of the region in terms of connections and passageways has been growing and the same is also being worked out in different ways.<sup>6</sup>

Geo-political boundaries, as in contemporary parlance, were unknown before the advent of the British. From triangulation to trigonometrical survey, idealized by General Watson in 1745, maps were drawn and re-drawn. Government-sanctioned surveys and expeditions in the Indo-Myanmar frontier resulted in the demarcation of administration and boundaries. The Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826 starts defining boundaries between the Kingdom of Ava and Manipur, particularly between the East

India Company and the King of Ava. In 1834, an agreement was signed between the British East India Company and the King of Ava that demarcated the kingdom of Manipur and Ava, known as the Pemberton Line (Aitchison, 1909). This line is ambiguous and, again, drawn from the Company's perspective. In 1881, a new boundary line was drawn by Sir James Johnstone in favour of Manipur, known as the Johnstone Line, to rectify the previous unjust treatment of Manipur and protect British interests (Johnstone, 1896). Consecutive expeditions carried out in the Chin-Kuki-Mizo land eventually changed the region, leading to the Chin-Lushai Conference in Calcutta on January 25, 1892, under the presidency of Sir Charles Alfred, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, "to discuss civil and military affairs connected with the control of the Lushai and Chin Hills."<sup>7</sup> The Conference ended with demarcating the Chin-Lushai land, placing the Chin Hills under Burma, and the Lushai Hills under India.

Therefore, the region wherein the Chin-Kuki-Mizo inhabits lies near the kingdoms of Tripura, Assam, Manipur, and Myanmar. Either in feuds, raids or for trade, the people interacted with their neighbours for a long time. S. Thang Zou made a study of the pre-and colonial Lushai *bazaars* and trade wherein he mentions that the Lushais went for trade to plains and sometimes people from the plain went to the hills for exchange of goods. The pith of his study is a challenge to the 'romanticization' of the Lushai economy described as 'isolated, splendid or self-sufficient' by the British.<sup>8</sup> Similitudes may also be found elsewhere.

Considering the innumerable numbers of communities and the region they inhabit; such global trade flows tremendously changed the socio-cultural milieu of the region as it became a 'contact zone'. Pratt used the term 'contact zone' to describe the space in which two or more cultures meet, interact, and influence each other. The contact zone can be physical, such as a colonial settlement or a border between two nations, or it can be cultural, such as a situation in which people from different cultures come into contact through trade, travel, or migration.<sup>9</sup> Coupling with this is the notion of culture area which is a geographical region inhabited by a community of individuals who share common cultural characteristics and practices. These areas are identified by distinctive beliefs, values, customs, and material traits that set them apart from other cultural areas. These cultural traits and practices often develop over time as a result of interactions between different groups, their surrounding physical environments, and the resources available to them.<sup>10</sup> Here, the essence of Felipe Fernandez-Armesto lies in the interaction between humans, of the penetration of human strangers into alien cultures. He defines the notion as "the experience of welcome, which may even include deference of various kinds, accorded in some societies to newcomers who are not easily classifiable in the terms of the approached community, except as strangers, outsiders, foreigners or by some roughly equivalent term." He went further by saying, "One would expect strangers to be massacred - and they often are. More interesting, however, are the frequency of the exemptions and the

depth of collaboration between strangers and host communities, such as often ensues."<sup>11</sup> There is a way of welcoming the stranger – either with peace or with force. He was aware of the difficulty for a stranger to permeate through cultural frontiers which could lead to aggression and unwillingness on the part of the latter.<sup>12</sup>

### Connections in Perspective

As an envoy, on his return to China after visiting the Western Regions in 126 BC, Zhang Qian told Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty that,

When I was in Daxia (today's Afghanistan), I saw Qiongzhu bamboo walking sticks and Shu cloth (Sichuan silk of China), and so I asked the local people where they got such goods and they told me that the local merchants had bought these goods from Sindhu (today's India) which was located in the Southeast of Daxia (today's Afghanistan), several kilometres away. In Sindhu (India) there were a large variety of goods produced in Sichuan province of China, indicating that it was not distant from Sindhu (India) to Sichuan province.<sup>13</sup>

Little did Zhang Qian know of the existence of a trade road that connected Sichuan and India as his travel road ran north from China to the Western Region. Eventually, Emperor Wu despatched envoys to India after learning that there was a trade road that linked China and India; however, the journey failed for obvious reasons as the region between China and India passed through rugged terrains covered with forests, jungles, mountains and rivers.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Zhang Qian's explorations first revealed the Silk Road *per se* of the Western Region while at the same time making a passing reference to the existence of another Silk Road connecting China and India, also known as the Southern Silk Road (here forth SSR).<sup>15</sup>

D.P. Singhal has documented two routes, maritime and overland, that linked India and China and predated all other routes connecting the two regions. The maritime route passed through South East Asia whereas the overland route began from Pataliputra (modern Patna), passed through Assam and Upper Burma and reached Kunming.<sup>16</sup> The trade route through Bhamo, a trading centre between Burma and Yunan, thrived to be an important one. The grandness of the Bhamo route is testified by the fact that income through this route yielded nearly half a million pounds Sterling as late as 1855.<sup>17</sup> The commercial advantages held by Upper Burma, the Shan States and Western China attracted merchants since the British occupation of Pegu in 1852.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, using archaeological and textual sources, Elizabeth Moore documented exchanges between Myanmar and Yunnan where most of the exchanged items were iron, bronze and pottery.<sup>19</sup> Besides the great mineral wealth of Yunan, the enormous wealth of its neighbouring provinces of Sechuan and Kwei-chow and their extensive trade in tea, silk, rhubarb, tobacco, sugar, hemp, oil, varnish and other commodities should also be considered.<sup>20</sup>

Trade routes between India and China, and even to South East Asia

passed through the region; the condition was also acknowledged by the English East India Company (EIC) soon after they arrived in Bengal. The terrain, of course, is an advantage by being easily accessible to merchants but there was constant trade between Armenian, Afghan, Shan, and European traders with Bengalis, Khasis, Cacharis, Manipuris, and others at different marketplaces. Trade routes that existed before the advent of the EIC crossed Yunnan, Myanmar, Manipur and Cachar and entered eastern Bengal.<sup>21</sup> Other than that, some routes connected region to region but were short distances in nature. In as much as they were short distances, they played a pivotal role in the circulation of commodities, people and ideas, and at one end or the other converged to longer ones. In the case of Manipur, three principal roads entered the erstwhile kingdom. These were from Cachar eastward, constructed after the first Anglo-Burmese War; from Kohima in Assam passing through Mao; and, from Tamu on the frontier of Burma.<sup>22</sup> Besides these, the apparent existence of other routes between Manipur and Myanmar, 'either unnoticed or went unnoticed',<sup>23</sup> is also mentioned by Carey and Tuck that run from Imphal to Tedim, passing through the villages of Kakching, Sugnu, Lenglakot and Tonzang.<sup>24</sup> These routes were nevertheless significant as they presented conduits to merchants and traders. Be it short-distance or long-distance, the region served as a conduit to people, ideas, commodities, and traders. As such, the region can be regarded as a 'contact zone' where people from different regions meet and exchange.

### **The Circulation of Commodities**

An important aspect in the study of global connections in history is the circulation and exchange of objects and ideas, and the movement of people. Objects, ideas and humans in motion have had repercussions; at one end they can be accepted or rejected and at the other, they can be adapted to local conditions. Stefanie Ganger identified that the term 'circulation' which is used to describe "virtually any sort of movement, transmission, or passage,"<sup>25</sup> and also, according to Philipp Sarasin and Andreas B. Kilcher, from the 1990s it became a "catch-word for all kinds of processualities and transfers."<sup>26</sup>

In *The Eastern Frontier of India*, R.G. Pemberton mentioned the existence of a barter system between people of the hills and plains, and commercial activities.

Those occupying the central ranges, and who, as has been before observed, have no direct intercourse with the inhabitants of the plains, are compelled to barter the produce of their hills with the next adjoining tribe, who have by a similar exchange with those bordering on the more civilized countries between them, obtained the products of the plains; under all these disadvantages, Bell-metal Gongs and Kurtals, the manufacture of the industrious inhabitants of Yunnan, are found in almost all the hill villages along our eastern frontier, clearly proving that channels for a more extended commercial intercourse do exist, which only require attention to

be more fully developed.<sup>27</sup>

Published in 1835, the account presented in the book acknowledged the existence of trade between the hills and plains. J. Shakespear, mentioned that big gongs, apart from smaller ones, cost 150 which was imported from Burma.<sup>28</sup> William Shaw, on the other hand, mentioned a different story wherein bell-metal gongs of different sizes, brass plates ornaments and knives were manufactured by one TamlopaThadou at Thijonbung and Lhanpelkot. However, he also indicated the practice was discontinued as Burmese or foreign-made ones had taken their place.<sup>29</sup> Bell-metal gongs played a significant role in the socio-cultural life of the natives, and most of the known gongs seem to have come from Burma.<sup>30</sup> On the issue of iron technology, Shakespeare attributed that the art of working iron was adopted from either the plains of India or Burma.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Woodthorpe maintained that forging as practised among the 'Lushais' was found to be similar to the one used all over lower Bengal and the knowledge was adopted from Bengali captives. Rice beer siphons and other ornamental paraphernalia were cast with brass through the process of *cire-perdue*.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 1: Bell-Metal Gong. Collection of K.L. Berema



Figure 2: *Siallam Dar*: One of the oldest brass gongs of Ngente, now an heirloom of Lalrengpuia Sailo.<sup>33</sup>

During the Lushai Expedition 1871-72, Manipuri horse dealers settling in Silchar used to trade ponies to the British, who used them as baggage animals.<sup>34</sup> These ponies must have reached the hills as they were owned by village chiefs and big men in the society through gifts and exchange. There is also an instance where, in 1845, a pony was presented to a Kuki chief in return for the favoured present of a Nuzzur of three elephants' teeth and a copper gong to the Superintendent of Cachar.<sup>35</sup> The reason behind this is that ponies were included in burial rites by slaughtering a number of animals, including ponies, though the possession of it was exclusive to chiefs or big men.<sup>36</sup>

Servants of the Colonial administration in the likes of J. Shakespear, L.W. Shakespear, Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck, among others, have mentioned the circulation of firearms and the technology of gunpowder in the Lushai Hills of India and Chin Hills of Myanmar, and that such items were adapted to local conditions. Guns found in the region during the early period of contact between the natives and the British had the inscription of the makers or the first owners indicating their place of manufacture such as in America, France, Germany and Italy, and were acquired by the natives through long-distance trade. At the same time, Carey and Tuck believed the probability that most English-made guns that reached the natives were the old flint-lock muskets which were replaced by percussion-cap ones. Instead of the old ones being broken up, they were shipped to Rangoon and Chittagong to be sold to the natives. These guns come from both east and west as they have names of Burmans in Burmese and of Indian sepoy in Persian stamped on the heel plates of the muskets.<sup>37</sup>

Firearms, essentially, were procured from different places. Tribes living in the Indo-Myanmar frontier have long acquaintances with their neighbouring regions where they would get a supply of firearms to their doorsteps or physically procured by themselves. LipokmarDjuvichu made a comprehensive study of the 'illegal' arms trade along the northeast frontier of India wherein he mentions that Calcutta represented the import transit point of such contraband: Muslim traders and Bengali agents in Calcutta, Sylhet, Cachar, Assam, and Manipur played a significant role in the circulation of firearms.<sup>38</sup> There is no denying the fact firearms were procured from different places, but the bulk of firearms possessed by the Chin-Kuki-Mizo must have come from Myanmar.

In 1869, Captain Strover reported that 'the muskets of the kind which were in the possession of the Loosais were often seen in the Northern Shan States and among the Kakhyen tribes north-east of Bhamo, and that they were probably obtained from Burmah,'<sup>39</sup> and these firearms have bands of iron, brass and silver which are used as clasps to keep the barrel attached to the wood-work of the matchlock. A report in 1870 also conjectured that the Loosais must have received a supply of guns from Upper Burmah as it resembles the guns possessed by people to the north of Bhamo.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it is also interesting to mention that "the more complicated and delicate the character of the arm the more harmless it is in the hands of the natives."<sup>41</sup>

As such, many of the firearms in possession of the natives were old ones.

This contraband was usually obtained from Bhamo, Akyab, Arracan and Chittagong.<sup>42</sup> Initially, the Lushais and other tribes obtained guns from neighbouring tribes in Burma. The majority of firearms were sourced from Burma, although a significant quantity also came from Chittagong. Shakespeare mentioned that "When the weapons first began to appear, the Lushais and other western tribes used to obtain them from the tribes on the Burmah border, giving slaves in exchange, a strong male being equivalent to two guns."<sup>43</sup> In a letter sent by James Johnstone, the Political Agent of Manipur, to the Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1878, mention is made of muskets being obtained by Suktes and Kukis from Burma. These are old five and six-penny flint locks of Birmingham export guns, or government muskets of about 80 years back. Mention is also made of the Kukis possessing firearms earlier than the Nagas.<sup>44</sup> Shakespeare also mentions the first witness to Lusei's use of guns about 1833 to 1850 during a long-standing feud between the Sailo and Thangluah clans.<sup>45</sup> The number of guns is nominal, though, and the mechanism of the guns is not completely known to the Lusei.



Figure 3: Tower-marked flintlock. Collection of K.L. Berema.



Figure 4: Percussion Rifle, 1926. Heirloom of the Chiefs of Suangdoh, Manipur.

Besides firearms being procured from distant places or obtained through an exchange, they are also in the possession of the natives through government means. To curb raids and counterraids and to protect the



Company's interests, natives are armed with old flint locks and used as guards along borders to prevent like-natives from trespassing into the Company's area of administration.<sup>46</sup> In 1870, there was a proposal to supply cheap percussion caps to the Loosais in exchange for their old matchlocks and flintlocks had the Loosais given in to settle permanently to the frontier of Cachar. However, the proposal was delayed for fear of the Loosais turning against the British.<sup>47</sup> From the late 1870s, the British Indian government settled Kukis who accepted British agency in the Kuki 'Punjees' of the Cachar district, in the Kuki 'colony' of the North Cachar Hills, and in the Kuki 'sepoy villages' of southern Manipur valley, to be utilized as a buffer against the infiltration by the Lushais, the Angamis and the Suktes/Lushais respectively.<sup>48</sup> They were, thus, provided with firearms for them to repel raids and incursions and protect the interest of the colonial administration. This policy of strategic settlement helped the British Indian government maintain control over the region and secure their interests.



Figure 5: Miniature flintlock rifle of native manufacture.<sup>49</sup>

As already mentioned, guns were obtained by natives through different means, the natives also had the skill to remake guns in order to suit their physique and ease of use. The Suktes and Kukis have the propensity to remake guns by mounting old flintlocks, which have come from Burma, on new stock.<sup>50</sup> Carey and Tuck praise the workmanship of the Sihzangs and the Suktes as compared to other natives. Although the Chins do not possess the knowledge of metalworking required to make gun barrels, springs, and hammers, they have the skill to turn percussion cap guns into flintlock guns. Moreover, to reduce the weight of the guns, the Chins carved their stock and made the butt and heel plate smaller than that of the original one.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, during the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-1919, there was a shortage of firearms among the Kuki tribes. As a result, they resorted to using unconventional materials to create weaponry. One such innovation was the use of the skin of gayal, *bos frontalis*, to make barrels for cannons. The mechanism resembled that of muzzle-loading firearms: the barrels were filled with gunpowder and stones were used as pellets. The use of leather cannons gave the Kukis an advantage in battle, as they were able to fire more pellets at a time than firearms. However, this innovation was soon discovered by the British. When the British discovered that animal skin was

used to manufacture the barrel, they began to kill gayals wherever they went in order to deprive the Kukis of their source of weaponry.<sup>52</sup>

With regards to gunpowder, Carey and Tuck mentioned that large quantities were imported from Upper Burma before the advent of the British. However, after their arrival, such importation was put to an end. This eventually induced the natives to manufacture their own powder as its manufacture was not prohibited.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, speculations hover around that these natives learned the art from their neighbouring people such as the Burmese or the Meiteis. According to tradition, the Manipuris were believed to have learnt the art of gunpowder making from the Chinese merchants who visited the kingdom during the reign of Khagemba, c.1630. From the Manipuris, the Kukis, in turn, learnt the art and practiced for a long time.<sup>54</sup> N.E. Parry also conjectured the probability of the Shendoos acquiring the art from the same source whether directly or indirectly.<sup>55</sup> In addition, as a result of contact between Manipur and its adjacent regions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new technological and cultural concepts, viz. gunpowder and bell-metal coinage, among others, began to appear in Manipur.<sup>56</sup> Lewin stated that the Shendoos had already manufactured their own gunpowder when he visited their country in 1865, with sulphur being obtained from Burma.<sup>57</sup> For the bullet, pellets of different materials were used. Lead was preferred among the Chins but due to its scarcity, brass, bell metal, iron, round stones, and even clay pellets were used.<sup>58</sup> The Political Agent of Manipur, in 1878, stated that the Suktes and their defendant Kukis obtained ammunition from Burma.<sup>59</sup> Upon enquiry of the bullets used by Lushai traders at Cachar, it was found out that the Lushais, though they prefer steel, bought *thallees* and *tustlas*, heated them and made bullets out of them.<sup>60</sup> While most of the pellets manufactured were irons stolen from government bridges, telegraph wires and scrap metals, a good number of the material was bought from frontier markets.<sup>61</sup>

Trade embargo on firearms was beyond the control of the colonial government as the bulk of firearms owned by the natives came through non-government means. As such, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hill tract of Indo-Myanmar was apparently armed; their guns were used against kindred tribes, the plains and the British. The matter took a serious note on the authority of the British at a time when expansion and consolidation in the region was at its peak. During the course of the Sihzang-Nwengal rebellion of 1893, fines were imposed either in cash or in terms of guns.<sup>62</sup> Eventually licensing of guns was carried along in the frontier. The idea of "complete disarmament" loomed large by 1899, and confiscation of unlicensed guns from the natives was undertaken. In the Lushai Hills, in the process of gradual disarmament, a scale of one gun to fifteen houses, with a maximum of 25 guns per village was considered. However, the firearms bootleg did end as such. An approximate of 1,000 guns from Lushai Hills and about 500 from Manipur were brought into the North Chin Hills by 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1899; a total of 2,550 guns were withdrawn

altogether by 29<sup>th</sup> April 1899.<sup>63</sup> The flow of guns, thus, continued despite government regulations and checks.

Another significant item that is locally adjusted to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo is beads. Beads have held significant cultural importance for the people residing in the Indo-Myanmar borderland throughout history. They are used for decorative, ornamental, trade, and religious purposes. The common types of beads found in the region include opalized wood, amber/burmite, and carnelian. The Chin-Kuki-Mizo were exposed to the world of beads prior to the arrival of the British, and although the age of the beads acquired or used by the people cannot be accurately determined, the social reverence for them dates to the historical past. The various beads were obtained from Myanmar, either in a raw form that was cut and polished later or as finished products, such as necklaces or individual pieces. Beads are typically worn as necklaces in a variety of sizes and shapes, and since they are not indigenous to the region, they hold significant cultural and sentimental value.



Figure 6: Amber Necklace, locally known as Khiba/Khibah/Thihna. Heirloom of Chinkholhing, Moreh, Manipur.

The fossilized palmwood *Pumtek* or Mahooya beads are highly valued and they were made in Wadi, a walled town of Pyu. Although the origin of the bead was unknown to Chins, tradition has it that a man's goat produced *pumtek* beads and the quality depended on its diet. There are ten varieties available in round, flat, and cylindrical shapes with black and white stripes on a black background. The prices range from annas 8 to Rs. 100, but

heirloom beads such as *pumtek* are priceless and cannot be purchased.<sup>64</sup> Once the Chin possessed *pumtek*, there was no parting with it; it was believed that a family line might be terminated if the necklace was sold.<sup>65</sup> Necklace made from amber/burmite, locally known as *Thihna/Khiba/Khibah*, originated from Northern Myanmar in the Hukawng Valley. Amber necklaces were exchanged for salt at Tonzang, a village on the Indo-Myanmar border. According to oral tradition, salt traders from Myanmar traded amber necklaces for salt.<sup>66</sup> During the late 1910s, Pachhunga, an entrepreneur, from the Lushai Hills travelled to the amber valley in Kachin State to mine amber. He brought back lumps of amber, made necklaces from them and then sold them in Aizawl and Silchar.<sup>67</sup> The northern Chins such as the Suktes, Sihzangs and Tlaisuns are found to have coveted carnelian necklaces which they bought from the Lushais. These carnelian beads are sold in the markets of Chittagong and Assam, and the value of the necklaces differed according to their evenness. However, with the southern Chins, *pumtek* is more coveted as it is considered sacred, and the same constitutes one of the important import trade articles in the Chin Hills.<sup>68</sup>



Figure 7: *Pumtek* Necklace. "Brief introduction to the *Pumtek* beads of Burma". Retrieved from: [pumtek.blogspot.com](http://pumtek.blogspot.com).

The introduction of bell-metal gongs, firearms, and beads, among others, has tremendously changed the socio-cultural milieu of the people. The more firearms a village or a clan possessed, the more influence it exerted over its neighbouring areas. Firearms, thus, define social status as well as the supremacy of the owner. As a matter of fact, the introduction of

firearms to the natives was “the struggle for supremacy of tribes and villages in the region seen in the constant warring amongst them as witnessed by colonial officials.”<sup>69</sup> Likewise, bell-metal gongs and beads are also definitions of status symbols as they were not available to every individual social member.

Considering the circulation of commodities across the Indo-Myanmar borderland, it can be said that networks of trade existed in *longue durée*. For all the mentioned cases, the SSR played a significant role in the movement of goods, ideas and people since ancient times. However, it should be noted here that in as much as the SSR played an important role in connecting India and Yunnan, the degree to whether it passed directly through the Chin-Kuki-Mizo land is questionable because much of the history of the people depended on oral tradition and definitive conclusion cannot be ascertained to support the proposition. Despite such precautions in deriving conclusions, and whether the SSR passed through their land, the road tremendously reconfigured the socio-cultural milieu of the Indo-Myanmar borderland. As such, this condition consequently also influenced the Chin-Kuki-Mizo people. New forms of interaction came about in which the circulation of commodities and local adjustment played a significant role.

#### Notes and References (Endnotes)

1. Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (New Jersey, 2016), p. 5
2. Conrad, *Global History*, p. 12
3. The hyphenated term Chin-Kuki-Mizo is used to address the Zo ethnic communities inhabiting the Indo-Myanmar borderland who shared socio-cultural affinities, and who are identified as Chin in Chin Hills, Mizo in Mizoram and Kuki in Manipur. So, the term is used to encompass a wider coverage of a group of people. And, States here refers to state within state as in the states of Manipur and Mizoram in India and Chin State in Myanmar. Manipur is hitherto a petty kingdom having Kings or *Maharajas* of its own; Mizoram is the erstwhile Lushai Hills; and, Chin State is Chin Hills. The British occupation of India and Burma changed the state of affairs as surveys were conducted and boundaries were drawn. This created ‘otherness’ in the minds of the people as they are demarcated by national and international boundaries.
4. Joy Pachuau propounds the ‘givenness’ of the differences created by ‘boundaries or communities, or both’. She rather looks into and emphasizes on looking at North East India from a wider perspective considering the networks and circulations the North East India experienced historically. See, Joy L.K. Pachuau, ‘Circulations’ along the Indo-Burma Borderlands’, in *Flows and Frictions in Trans-Himalayan Spaces: History of Networking and Border Crossing*, (ed.) Gunnel Cederlof and Willem van Schendel (Amsterdam, 2022), pp. 105-136
5. Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Connected Histories and the Dream of Decolonial History’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41:1 (2018), pp. 69-86. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2018.1414768>.
6. See Lipi Ghosh (ed.), *The Southern Silk Route: Historical Links and Contemporary Convergences*, (New Delhi, 2019), especially the section on

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7. *Foreign Department Report on Chin-Lushai Hills, September 1892.*
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  9. Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession*, (1991), pp. 33-40. Doi: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469>
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