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**Title of the Thesis: Governing the Imperial Frontier of India in 19<sup>th</sup> Century: A Study on the Administration of Manipur as a Frontier Space**

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## **Abstract**

The study examines the processes of imagining, production and governance of Manipur as a frontier zone in the nineteenth century. It explores the strategic significance of Manipur and the nature of its governance under the colonial rule that characterize it as a frontier zone. While colonialism cannot be dissociated from economic consideration, the present work argues that colonial engagement in the region was defined more by the military logic of strengthening the core by securing the periphery. In doing so it makes a distinction between the way colonialism was established in the mainland Indian subcontinent and in the North Eastern region of India.

The study has focused on the Anglo-Manipuri relations in the nineteenth century, specifically charting the shift from the signing of the Yandaboo treaty in 1826 to rebellion of 1891. In the shifting paradigm of power relations, Manipur had a strategic importance in controlling, or at least obstructing, the advancing Burmese Empire on the one hand and in subjugating the frontier tribes on the other.

Drawing on works on nineteenth century cartographic production of India, the present study argues that the emergence of India as a modern nation state was possible only when the boundaries were secured. Governing the imperial frontier was premised on colonial modes of knowing and controlling the colonized space. Not only did the cartographic practice underline

the transformation of space into place, the surveying of these areas also classified tribes and communities into far more rigid categories.

While the study shows how Manipur was produced and administered as a geographical place within the empire, it also reveals how this process of “practising” frontier was never smooth. Thus, in the context of the North East, its unknown terrain, the movement of the varied peoples inhabiting the region all challenged the accuracy with which the Empire presumed to know, possess and tame the territory. The early phase of survey and mapping, for instance, was marked by gaps, uncertainties and elisions.

As mapping became more scientific it transformed space into territory. The administration of the region as a frontier produced multiple forms of exclusivity like the creation of the Inner Line beyond which the frontier tribes were left to manage their own affairs. The cartographic regimentation of the colonial rule sought to contain and limit the “liminal” space of the Northeast frontier region and recast this space into a geographical entity and hierarchised it in such a manner that constituted and peripheralised Manipur as the frontier region. In attempting to locate the shift the colonial cartography brought about, the study also looks into the role of Meitei cosmology in imagining space in the pre-colonial phase.

As Manipur continued to play the role of a collaborator, series of treaties and alliances were signed afterwards which, in addition to the shifting and destabilizing contestations for power in the royal family, gradually and eventually cast Manipur into a more subservient state. The study then finally traces the change and continuity between Manipur in the pre-colonial and colonial state in the conclusion and posits how the vestiges of colonial rule still actively shape the post-colonial imagining and administering of modern Manipur.