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## **The Taste of Salt: Identity, Memory and Food Culture of the Mizo Tribe**

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### **Abstract**

The Mizo people are believed to have come from northern Yunnan Province in China to Hukaung Valley in Myanmar around 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and made their entry into the hilly regions of Northeast India, later known as Mizoram, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This paper attempts to study the nomadic life of the Mizo people that sets them apart from other race in relation to their food and their memory functions. As far as Mizo history books go, Mizo people hardly stayed in a fixed location for long until they entered the present Mizoram; the most likely reasons being feuds and battles. This unsettling life required them to live an extraordinarily simple life to save time since they had to move out from one place to another to escape or strategize at short intervals, which in turn demanded them to prepare their food as simple, easy and quick as possible. There are no complex food cooking processes as such for this tribal people, especially with the local cuisines, even to this day. The term food is generally associated by the Mizo people with rice and whiteness; most of the vegetables or meat were eaten boiled; and half a century back edible-oil was really scarce for its main source was pig fat, salt still rarer and a delicacy. The Mizos say *Chibai* at greeting and farewell while shaking hands and this particular Mizo word literally translates 'to cook with salt' comparing the value of the salt and the gesture to signify treasured bonds between themselves. This study expounds how the simple ways of life of the Mizos, amidst extreme hardships, parallels their memory functions to an extent using their food tradition as a trajectory.

**Keywords:** Mizo, Food, Identity, Culture, Memory.