

NOTHERN MYANMAR'S COMMERCIAL RELATIONS WITH YUNAN PROVINCE DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

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Abstract

Myanmar and China are neighbouring countries, sharing nearly two thousand miles long border. They have relations since thousands of years ago. The Northern Myanmar's commercial, cultural and political relations with Yunan Province began in the time of Pyus (Piao) and Tang Chinese (A.D 628-907). The commercial relations with Pyu (Old Myanmar) began as early as 3rd century. The diplomatic relations between the two countries began only in the Tang dynasty. The encounters of Northern Myanmar and Yunan Province (China) came about by the fact that the two countries were in contact territorially, which caused to bring about politico-socio-economic relations. As it is seen, of the neighbouring countries of Myanmar, China is the only country which plays an important role of for the foreign policy of Myanmar from the early time down to present day. The province of Yunnan, China was in contact with Myanmar along the Myanmar-China border. In carrying out trade with India, Chinese usually crossed the northern part of Myanmar. The principal goods exported to China were cotton and jade, of which the latter was carried by mule on their way to Yunnan. In Myanmar - China trade, Bamaw became a major trading centre. Jade mines were located also in Mogaung Township. However, Chinese jade traders stayed only at the royal capital, as they could go to jade lands of Hpakant and Mogaung only with royal permission. In going to Yunnan, jade traders first used the route from Momien to Kunyung Liem to Chansi. Therefore, based on contemporary records in Myanmar, an attempt is made to describe border trade and political of the two countries during the colonial period. The objective of this paper is also to mention the elements which motivated Myanmar relations between Yunnan province and Northern Myanmar (Kachin State).

Key Words: commercial, Trade, Jade, Cotton

Background history

According to geographical situation, Myanmar situates between China, India and Southeast Asia, it is contact to these regions. Northern Myanmar is very important to connect these three regions enabling the establishment of a multi-dimensional relationship across the regional borders.² In Upper Myanmar trade and commerce, there were trade routes going along the Ayeyarwaddy River to Bhamo and then to Yunnan Province of China, trade between Shan State and Upper Myanmar, and the trade route from Central Myanmar to China passing through the Kachin State.³ Among them, I would like to present commercial relations especially Yunan province (China) and Northern Myanmar. The Chinese merchants began to perform trade and commerce relations with Myanmar since the Pyu period. According to Sun Laichen's paper, Xu Xiake, a merchant mentioned the overland trade route between Myanmar

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² Bamaw Tin Aung, *Myanmar Naingngantaw Thamaing* (The History of Myanmar), Yangon, Pyithu Alin Sarpaytaik, 1963, pp.45-45

³ J.G. Scott and J.P. Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, Vol.I, part.i, Rangoon, Government Printing, 1900, pp. 463-465

and China. Similarly Liu Kun mentioned how to make classification of Myanmar jewellery in the markets and the arrival of caravan merchants from China through Yunnan-Bamaw route.¹ There were two overland trade routes between Myanmar and China during the reign of Myanmar Kings. One is Bamaw-Yunnan route and the other was Theinni - Thibaw route. The major export item of Myanmar was jade which had been the favourite trade item among the Chinese merchants.² Now, I would like to present commercial relations between Northern Myanmar and Yunnan Province within colonial period.

Trade Relations

The most important commodities of Myanmar - China commerce were Jade and cotton. Chinese cotton merchants lived in Sagaing, opened factories to collect and buy cotton from the surrounding areas to export to China. Similarly, at the royal capital of Inwa, there was a Chinese quarter tayoketan where Chinese jade merchants resided. They tried to get royal permission to work jade mines in Mogaung and Hpakan.³

In order to monopolize the jade trade in colonial period, Chinese formed companies and opened jade sale shops in Shanghai, Canton, Hong Kong and Penang. They also came to Bamaw, Mogaung and Mandalay to trade jade, to get the revenue from jade, British collected daily fees and rations from Kachin, Shan and Myanmar jade mine owners. During the Colonial Period, the merchants from China yearly came to Myanmar in a large number. Jade mining and trading was monopolized by Chinese Choy Yin and Maung Yin Det and other Chinese companies.⁴ Some bought jade making a base at Mogaung or some went to Phakan, Lonkin and Tawmaw jade mines and directly bought jade that had been dug out. From 1898 to 1940⁵ the export of jade from Myanmar was shown in the following table.

Jade Export from Myanmar from 1898 to 1940

Year	Value in Rupees (Rs)
1898-99	633,021 ⁶
1904-05	624,050 ⁷
1914-15	823,000 ⁸
1916-17	1,131,000 ¹

¹ Sun Laichen, "Chinese Historical Sources on Burma", *The Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol.II, Dekalb, Northern Illinois University, Center for Southeast Asian studies, 1997, pp. 31, 33-34

² Khin Maung Nyunt, "History of Myanmar Jade Trade till 1938", *Traditional Current and Perspective*, Yangon, Universities Historical Research Center, 1996, pp.251-254 (Henceforth: Khin Maung Nyunt, 1996)

³ Khin Maung Nyunt, 1996, 257

⁴ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1903-04), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1905, p. 41

⁵ Chhibber, H.L., *The Mineral Resources of Burma*, London, Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1934, p.59

⁶ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1898-99), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1899, p. 54

⁷ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1904-05), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1905, p. 36

⁸ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1914-15), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1915, p. 69

1917-18	1,200,000 ²
1924-25	706,800 ³
1925-26	162,751 ⁴
1926-27	470,225 ⁵
1927-28	320,440 ⁶

Merchants and brokers bought cotton in Upper Myanmar and exported via Rangoon port. The largest amount of Myanmar cotton was bought by China and Southeast Asian countries.⁷ Myanmar cotton was sold to China and shipped it through overland route via Bamaw. Myanmar cotton trade depended solely on China. Therefore cotton trade was in the hands of Chinese merchants in Yangon. According to Mr. Litton's letter sent to Bamaw Deputy Commissioner on 12 February 1902, we knew that a custom office was opened at Manwyne.⁸ Litton also described that Kunlunkha road and Kulika River are connected with Taping River. Tax for import goods were collected at Momien (Tengyueh) and export goods from Myanmar were taxed at Momeit.⁹ Momeit custom office was opened, except Sunday and holidays, from 10 a.m. to 4 pm daily. On important days, it was opened from 6 am to 6 pm. Import goods were duty free at the ports.¹⁰

A branch custom office was opened at Shanxi for the goods from Myitkyina road. Goods from Momeit road were taxed at Manyun branch office.¹¹ The letter from Chief Secretary of Myanmar to Indian Government dated 17 March 1902, described that the Nanpaung Manwyne road was now in used, in substitution of Bamaw-Yunnan road. The letter also requested to permit to use once banned trade routes by the agreement of 1894 Sino-British treaty, and local officials should supervised tax collection on Chinese goods. According to Captain J.J. Cormain, Bamaw Deputy Commissioner sent a letter to Mandalay Commissioner in March 1902; we knew that two Chinese mule-men were killed by tiger on the Myothit-Nanpawng road. Thus local hunters were asked to kill the tiger by offering Rs

¹ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1916-17), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1917, p. 80

² Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1917-18), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1918, p.96

³ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1924-25, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1925, p.53

⁴ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1924-25, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1926, p.36

⁵ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1926-27, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1927, p.63

⁶ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1927-28, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1928, p. 60

⁷ Daw Kyan, "Thibaw Nan Kya Pyi British Myanmar Sipwaye Acheane" (The Economic Condition of British Myanmar at the time of Thibaw's dethronement), *Tekkatho Pyinnya Padesa Sarsaung*, Vol.III, Yangon, 1968, 237 (Henceforth: Kyan, 1968)

⁸ Kyan, 1968, 238

⁹ Trade with China on the North-eastern frontier, National Achieve Collection, Yangon, 1901-02, 1/1A Acc-No.3514, p.8 (Henceforth: 1/1A Acc-3514)

¹⁰ 1/1A Acc.No.3514, 5

¹¹ 1/1A Acc.No.3514, 8

300 or 500.¹ Yunnan Consular Mr. Litton described in his letter of 8 May 1902, to the Commissions of Bamaw and about the political importance of the opening of custom office of China at Momein.² The letter dated 14 July 1902, addressed to Mr. L.A Mackinon, described that on the Momein road, beside the mule tax, each trader was levied about 75 cent³ if he went to Bamaw, and if he proceeded to the interior of Myanmar, about 8.5 Annas⁴ was collected. Trader and mule owners were found to prefer the Momein road.⁵ Captain J.J. Cornin, Bamaw Commissioner, explained about the benefit of the opening of Chinese custom office at Manwyne on 17 June 1902.⁶

By composition of import and export, it was found that import exceeded the export due to Lauktha (Panthay) rebellion in Yunnan and Yawyin (Lisu) unrest in the environs of Myitkyina. Animal import was mainly for use in the army and that of sheep, goat and swine were for the public consumption. The import of medicine also got increased. Chinese asked the permit the import of lac.⁷

The trade would be developed in Yunnan and in Myanmar that part between the Ayeyarwady and Thanlwin. Police Commissioner (Railway and Crime Prevention) informed the Political Department on 4 November 1927, that there established packed-mule-station at Lukhue Kai, near the British territory of Hpimaw, 25 miles away from Yunnan, where the Headman of Lukhue Kai collected 10 cent per head of mule for the passage.⁸

Chinese merchants and mule men came to Myitkyina in winter by the route of Chipwe and Panwa. On 18 January 1928, Yunnan Foreign Affairs Department sent a letter to Yunnan Consul that informed that there was a total population of 17,000,000 peoples in Yunnan. Daily use of salt was at least ten catties and the average was about 3.50 dollars, on which about 5,950,000 dollars were to be given as tax. Therefore, it was said that the salt import from Tonkin and Myanmar was opposed.⁹

Chinese Annals also mentioned Bamaw as one of five major Myanmar-China trade routes. Myanmar-China trade temporarily halted in 1868 due to the outbreak of Panthay rebellion and after that from 1868 to 1874, the trade went on normal. British merchants on 26 January 1872, urged to open Myanmar - China trade. Sir Arthur Kottom proposed that the communication break was there between Ayeyarwady and Brahmaputra rivers, a distance of about 190 miles as the crow flies from Myitkyina to Brahmaputra river band along the Ledo road. If the connection was made between these two rivers, Chinese products from the south western provinces could be sent to Calcutta directly. To find out market for British goods and

¹ 1/1A Acc.No.3514, 11

² 1/1 A Acc. No.3514, 56

³ Cent is a monetary unit that equal 1/100 of the basic monetary unit.

⁴ Anna was a currency unit formerly used in India, equal to 1/16 Rupee.

⁵ 1/1 A Acc. No.3514, 69

⁶ 1/1A Acc-3514, 74

⁷ 1/1 Acc. No.3514, 75

⁸ Sub-Report Regarding Chinese Activities near Hpimaw, National Achieve Collection, Yangon, 1927, 1/1B Acc. Acc. No.4771, pp.1-3,

⁹ Sub-Imposition of --- imported from Myanmar into Yunnan, National Achieve Collection, Yangon, 1928, 1/1A Acc. No.4787, p. 25

to produce natural resources of the south western provinces of China, it was necessary to expand and upgrade the Bamaw route. Assam tea growers supported the upgrade of Bamaw route for they could only then get cheap labour from Yunnan.¹ Europeans opened agencies in Momeit. Indians and Panthays also took part in the commerce. Yangon merchants shipped the needed goods to Yunnan. Taxation of foreign goods owned by Chinese and Shan Sawbwas in China, at the border trade routes were as follows:

- (1) Santa-Simapa-Nalom route
(now to in use except the smuggling of opium)
- (2) Bamaw-Myothit- Nampaung-Manwyne route-

There existed the Pao Shang Chu or trade prevention office on the Momeit- Yunnanfu and West Yunnan-Myothit road. Main office was stationed at Manwyne. There were over 20 custom offices between Momeit and Yunnanfu.

- (3) Bamaw-Momauk-Kulikha-Taping route-a custom office was opened at Kulikha near Taping river in British territory
- (4) Bamaw-Silam-Warabum-Hosha-Lasha route-many traders used Hosha-Lash road, most of who were found to be Chinese.²
- (5) Bamaw-Loije-Manwyne route

Trade routes that passed Bamaw, where taxes were collected on goods, were as follows:

- (1) Nanpawng – Bamaw - Monwyne route - on which taxable goods were salt, cotton, silk, wool, jade and dried salted fish
- (2) Warabum-Bamaw-Hosa-Lasa route- at Hosa, taxes were levied for mule and horse, about Rs. 1 per animal
- (3) Loije – Bamaw - Maunggan route - tax was levied at Maungwun
- (4) Pankham – Bamaw - Maungmaw route- tax was collected at Maungmaw.³

Mr A.D Warren, from the Rangoon Merchant Association, sent a letter, dated 30 July 1902, to the Government of Myanmar, asking the Government to close down the trade camps between Myanmar and Yunnan.⁴ Northern Myanmar and Yunan province commercial relations were used the Bamaw - Yunan overland trade route. This route seemed to have existed since Bagan period. For many centuries, the Chinese caravan traders and jade miners rambled along this route into Myanmar. In colonial period, British were interested in the trade with China, via Myanmar, for which they built motor-road and drew plans for the construction of railroad. There were a total of nine routes that connects Myanmar and China, and many jungle roads. These routes were the principal trade routes on which the bulk of trade and commerce activities were carried out.

In 1889-90 the value of trade between Upper Myanmar and China was Rs. 53,349. Upper Myanmar mainly exported cotton and salt. The value of export was Rs. 48,441. Silk cloth was mainly imported and the value of import was Rs. 4,908. The value of silk cloth

¹ Tin Maung Yin, *Khit Myanmar Tihan* (Trans), The Making of Burma, Yangon, Gaung Saung Gyi Sarpay Teik, 1978, p.214-215

² 1/1A Acc No.3514, 79

³ 1/1 Acc. No.3514, 80

⁴ 1/1 Acc. No.3514, 87

import was Rs. 2,700.¹ The total value of China-Myanmar trade was Rs. 1.62 million in 1890-91 and Rs. 3.96 million in 1896-97.²

In 1901-02, about 10661 tons worth Rs. 21275 and in 1902-03, about 4450 tons worth Rs. 33277, of rice, chicken feed and bran were exported from China to Myanmar. The export was carried out through the Bamaw road. Similarly, the export of 71 tons of rice and chicken feed worth Rs. 195 in 1901-02 and 7 tons of rice and broken rice worth Rs. 16 in 1902-03 were carried out through Myothit road.³ By seeing the commercial values, British investors had interested in the Myanmar-Yunnan railway construction. Myanmar-China boundary commission also had held negotiation for it. Therefore, they rapidly held negotiations with the Chinese. The trade value between Bamaw and the Western China was Rs. 135.51 lakh in 1915-16. It exceeded the trade value of 1914-15 by 3.58%. The value of export from Myanmar increased to Rs. 15.22 lakh. The increase in the value of export was on account of the purchase of silver from Myanmar to the worth of Rs. 65.05 lakh in 1915-16⁴ when compared to the purchase of silver to the worth of Rs. 53.75 lakh in 1914-15.⁵ In 1917-18, the value of export from China to Upper Myanmar was Rs. 96.39 lakh and the value of the import to China was Rs. 91 lakhs. The value of the trade by routes passing through Bamaw and Myitkyina ranged from Rs. 157.67 lakh to Rs. 159.26 lakh. The increase in trade in this year was due to the rise of commodity prices.⁶

In conclusion, Northern Myanmar had more border trade with Yunnan Province (China). During the Colonial Period the foreigners such as European capitalists, Chinese and Indians exploited trade and commerce of Myanmar. Myanmar people had little benefit because of lack of skill in technological knowledge, lack of capital investment and lack of experience in foreign contact. Border trade between the two regions has experienced ups and downs, reflecting not only market situations but political, security and macroeconomic conditions in a broader sense. Northern Myanmar's commercial relation with Yunnan Province (China) in Colonial period was closely related with the Bamaw-Yunnan overland trade route. This route was believed to be existed since the Bagan period. For many centuries, the Chinese caravan traders and jade-mines came along this route into Myanmar. The Chinese merchants had settled in Bamaw to conduct their commercial transaction. The most important export items to China were jade and cotton whereas Chinese merchants imported silk and other sundries.

¹ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1889-90), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1890, p. 55 (Henceforth: R.A.B., 1890)

² Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1896-97), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing 1897, p. 35

³ Improvement of the road between Bamaw and Tengyeh (China), National Archives Collection, Yangon, 1903, 1/1B-Acc No.6317, p.28 (Henceforth: 1/1B-AccNo.6317)

⁴ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1914-15, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1915, p.58

⁵ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1915-16, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1916, p.73

⁶ Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year (1914-15), Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1918, p. 58

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