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SINO - MYANMAR RELATIONS (1752-1890)

Abstract

The Sino-Myanmar commercial, cultural and political relations began in the time of *Pyus* (Piao) and Tang Chinese (A.D 628-907). So, based on contemporary records in Myanmar, an attempt is made to describe border trade and political of the two countries during *Konbaung* and the colonial period. As it is seen, of the neighboring 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 objective of this paper is also to mention the elements which motivated Sino-Myanmar relations between Yunnan province and Northern Myanmar (Kachin State).

Historical Background

Geographically, Myanmar situates between China, India and Southeast Asia, it is intercourse to these regions in land, water and jungles. As neighbors they also had relations in terms of racial, cultural and economical, all of which were the result of nature itself. Due to these geographical situations, the development and changes of Myanmar could not occur independently, instead developed interdependently with neighboring countries.¹ Since about 3000 years ago, members of Mongol descendants gradually entered the land what we now called Myanmar. Besides, the *Pyu* of Mongoloid descendant, Tibetan-Myanmar, took the culture of irrigated agriculture and some production activities along with some ancient Chinese culture, into Myanmar.² According to Chinese records, it is understood that Proto-Myanmar had lived in Gansu region in the northwest of China. As they were being oppressed by the Chinese, these people migrated first to Tibet plateau, then to Yunnan.³

In Yunnan, Proto-Myanmar lived in Yung-chaung (Baoshan) which was the land bordering N-Maihka in the North, Mekong river in the east, and *Hsenwi* in the south. They called their leader as Mien or *Minsaw* (King) Unbearable to the oppression of *Nancho*, they descended down to the plains of present day Myanmar in about 9th century. G.H Luce firmly believed that Myanmar lived first in *Kyaukse* area. The name *Kyaukse* appeared in the old names of villages in the oldest Myanmar inscriptions.⁴ This Proto-Myanmar was able to repulse the attack of other peoples who had arrived earlier in *Kyaukse*. Besides, it was found that the New Tang Annals recorded about the social, economy and culture of the *Pyu*. It also recorded how *Pyu* people had built their city. This fact reveals how long the Sino-Myanmar relations lasted in the histories of Myanmar and China.

The concrete evidence of the early evidence of Sino-Myanmar relation can be seen in search for trade route by the Chinese Minister Kiang Chi Yang in the time of Emperor *Wuti*, 128 BC. As the trade route passed the northern Myanmar, Chinese for the time became interested to trade with Myanmar.⁵ Two hundred years after the death of *Wuti*, in about 97-121B.C, emissaries from Alexandria got relations with China passing through Myanmar and Yia Yong Chang.⁶

Trade and commercial relation

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.⁷ After the passed away of Emperor *Wuti*, about 200 years in 97-121, envoys from Alexandria arrived in China via Yongchang, after crossing Myanmar.⁸ Though Myanmar-China trade developed, there cannot be found records of the settling of Chinese' in Myanmar. In the time of Han dynasty, the Silk Road became famous. Sometimes, Myanmar jades were exported to Yunnan of China. Yunnan traders used mules to carry the jade.⁹ In going to Yunnan, jade traders first used the route from *Momien* to *Kunying Liem* to *Chansi*.¹⁰ In 832 AD, *Pyu* capital was destroyed by *Nancho*, but the *Nancha* king established friendly relation with the *Pyu* Kingdom. In AD 9, the Ko-lo-feng route was used by *Pyu* diplomatic and trade missions. When the traders passed Kuo li-kung Mountain located between *Tengyueh* and *Tali*, horses were used as packed animal. The route is still in service now between *Tengyueh* and *Myitkyina*.¹¹

On the strength of Chinese annals, Professor Luce described the trade routes between India and China, via Myanmar as follows: one route began from *Yongchang* to *Tengyueh* in the west, transferring *Waingmaw* and *Mogaung* which led to Tashugat, the Gohati and Magada. The other route led to the southeast and reached *Pyu* city and then crossed Chindwin and arrived Manipur. Gold extraction was done at the mountains near the upper reaches of N Maihka, where officials collected about 7 to 10 ratio or 6 to 10 ratio. Gold workers were exempted from military service.¹² As gold could be panned along the banks of Ayeyarwady, where as amber could be mined at the *Yunchang*. Salt Boiling was done at Mi-lo-chu, situated between *Myitkyina* and *Mogaung* and salt could be produced at the mountains between Hsenwi and N Maikha and salt was used as a medium of exchange. Chinese traders imported salt, pickled tea and silk into Myanmar and exported cotton from Myanmar to China.¹³

In 18th century, Chinese traders opened a cotton trading center in *Sagaing* and rest houses were opened in *Amarapura* for Chinese traders. In 1784, trade between the two countries developed. Jade merchants went up to the Uru river, Kachin State and

carried jade to Yunnan. American missionary Howard Malcom recorded in his journal of 1839 that Chinese had grown sugarcane near Ava and produced brown and yellow types of sugar abundantly.¹⁴ In 1839, Chinese imported copper, iron, silk, yarn, silk clothes, gold, silver, embroidery, aromatic substance (*kado*), walnut, carpet, and mercury into Myanmar and exported cotton, ivory, animals and meat and salt fish to China. Cotton and jade were principal export goods from Myanmar to Yunnan.¹⁵ Chinese traders also bought cotton, teak, jade and oil from Myanmar. Cotton was a principal product of Myanmar since the days of Myanmar kings. In Badon's reign, cotton trade was carried out in *Sagaing*, which became a major center for Myanmar brokers and Chinese merchants. Cotton was primarily exported to Yunnan.¹⁶ In the days of Myanmar kings, cotton trade was carried out only by Chinese. But in Mindon's reign, cotton trade became a royal monopoly and the trade developed into an international trade. In Thibaw's reign, the economy of the country was on the brink of collapse and thus cotton trade declined. Yunnan Myanmar trade went on to exist till colonial period; in that Chinese went on to carry out cotton trade.¹⁷

In Myanmar - China trade, *Bamaw* became a major trading center. Jade mines were located also in *Mogaung*. 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.¹⁸ 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 southwestern provinces could be sent to Calcutta directly. To find out market for British goods and to produce natural resources of the southwestern 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.¹⁹

At *Mong Wan*, there was a small amount of salt trade. Sawbwas at the border and Shan territories in China collected tax for animal passage and on other goods. 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 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. In tax collection, first class goods were taxed by Rs 3-12-0 per load, that of second class goods by Rs 2-4-0 per load and those of third class goods by 1- 4- 0 per load. Goods of first class were cotton, yarn and high priced goods, goods second class were cotton and European made goods and those of third class were earth oil, betel nut and dried salted fish.

(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.²⁰

(5) Bamaw-Loije-Manwyne route-Maung Wun Sawbwa collected Rs 1 for the passage of animal. Chinese officials also collected tax on goods. By referring to the words of Kachin leaders, it was learnt that Shan and Chinese merchants used the route with goods worth more than Rs 1000. Bamaw-Namkhan and Man-I route were major trade routes, where merchant had to pay bulk of the taxes.

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) Warabaum-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.²¹

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.²²

Trade Between Myitkyina And China **Statistics for period October 1913 to September 1914**

IMPORTS

| Goods | Registered at | Duty | Reported at | Duty paid | Difference |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| | Myitkyina | leviable,Hk. | Tengyieh | Hk, Tls | between |
| | for export to | Tls | | | duty leviable |

| | China | | | | and duty Collected |
|---------------|--------------|---------|-----------|---------|-------------------------------|
| Cotton yarn | Pcls. 520 | 254.800 | Pcls. 307 | 150.430 | |
| Kerosene oil | Cases 036 | 131.040 | Cases 83 | 11.620 | |
| Jadestone | Pcls 292 | 340.655 | Pcls. 304 | 360.045 | |
| Total Hk, Tls | - | 726.495 | - | 522.095 | 204.400 |

EXPORTS

| Goods | Registered at Myitkyina for export to China | Duty leviable,Hk. Tls | Reported at Tengyieh | Duty paid Hk, Tls | Difference between duty leviable and duty Collected |
|---|--|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Vegetables, Fruits, Nuts, Sheep, Goats, Pigs, Poultry, Eggs, etc. | Value Hk. Tls.30,000 | At 3 per cent ad valorem Hk. Tls 900 | <i>Nil</i> | <i>Nil</i> | |
| Total Hk. Tls. | - | 900 | <i>Nil</i> | <i>Nil</i> | 900 |
| Total amount of duty leviable on imports and exports | | | | | Hk. Tls. 1,626,495 |
| Total amount of duty collected on imports and exports | | | | | Hk. Tls. 522.095 |
| Total amount of duty leviable but not collected | | | | | Hk. Tls. 1,104.400 |

(source: Sub-Question of opening to International Trade of the Kuyung Route between Myanmar and China by the establishment near the frontier, National Achieve Collection, Yangon, 1916,p.4 (Henceforth: 1/1B Acc. No.7409)

Sino-Myanmar commercial relations were used the Bhamo-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 was 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 13 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.

Political relation

During the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885), Myanmar had hostile as well as friendly relations with China. The Kings of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) sent an embassy before the establishment of Konbaung dynasty. On 28 February 1750, an embassy from

China led by two officials arrived at the Court of Maha Dammaraza Dipati (1733-1752). Although Myanmar did not record in detail about the previous embassies, the arrival of the Chinese diplomatic mission led by Eithuyè and Tontayè with the letter of friendship from Chinese emperor was recorded in detail by Myanmar sources.²³

There were also some causes which led to the outbreak of Sino-Myanmar conflict during the King Hsinbyushin's reign. In 1765 an immediate cause for the outbreak of Sino-Myanmar war was caused by the conflict between a certain Chinese caravans merchant named Lawli who came to Bhamo. He proposed a project for building a bridge across Taping River. Bhamo *Myowun* and *Sitkè* of Kaungton replied that they would sanction the project after submitting report to the King. Lawli was angry at delay in getting sanction to build a bridge; insulted the Myanmar governor who therefore arrested him and sent him to Inwa for further interrogation. When he was released, Lawli found that the Myanmar officers had looted his caravan. Lawli later reported his grievance to Maingsi Sontu, western commander of Yunnan province.²⁴

With 250,000 men and 25,000 horses, The Chinese led by Yinsu Tayi and Sintalaoye invaded to Myanmar through the Sanda Route in January 1767. When the news reached Inwa, Myedu Min sent two military columns to Bhamo to reinforce Bala Mindin in Kaungton. The combined forces of Myanmar expedition was comprised of twenty-two armies and two hundred elephants, 2000 horses and 20,000 men. The Commanders in Chief were Maha Sithu and Nemyo Sithu. The first column was led by Maha Sithu and Marched through the overland route along Mohnyin and Mogaung. The second column to Bhamo was led by *Letwè Winhmu*. Another column, riverine route, was sailed up the Ayeyarwaddy river and led by Nemyo Sithu. The riverine force was comprised of 300 jingle-mounted war canoes and 15,000 men. The expedition to Bhamo began on 5 February 1767.²⁵

At that time the northern administrative headquarters of Myanmar was centered in Kaungton under Bala Mindin, not in Bhamo. When Bala Mindin knew the Chinese invasion, he managed to fortify Kaungton by building new earthen fortwall with merlons and battlements, mounting siegeguns and encircling the fortress with elephant and horse-traps. When Chinese approached the fortress, they were facing with fierce defence from well-strengthened fortress. As they could not withstand the fire power of Bala Mindin, they retreated to the place where it was twenty *ta* away from Kaungton. In this situation, Kaungton was further strengthened by the arrival of the reinforcement of *Letwè Windawhmu* Nemyo Sithu. Myanmar commanders discussed the plan to launch an offensive against the Chinese stations at Bhamo Zayseik. At that night, the Chinese came to attack the fortress, they retreated again with heavy losses. Then, an agreement was

reached between Bala Mindin and Nemyo Sithu and drew up a plan by which Nemyo Sithu had to attack Bhamo and if he could pincer movement to squeeze the Chinese. The battle lasted for three days and ended with the heavy losses on the Chinese side. The Chinese Commander Chao Hungpang (Yinsutayi) burnt his arms and ammunitions and retreated.

If we consider the whole events, the Sino-Myanmar relations before King Badon (1782-1819) were based upon the Chinese policy which advocated treating Myanmar as a tributary state. This policy finally led to the outbreak of war during the reign of Myedu Min. However, as soon as the war ended, the policy of the Chinese abruptly changed with the agreement at Kaungton. The most outstanding points which shed the light on the changing of the Chinese policy were;²⁶

- (1) Neither side made demands which humiliate the sovereignty of each other,
and
- (2) both sides agreed to change decennial missions,
- (3) agreed to the surrender of the *Sawbwa* of Bhamo, Theinni and Kyaington who were taking refuge to China and
- (3) agreed to surrender the junks and canoes which were running along the Ayeyarwaddy River to Myanmar king

And then, the relations between the two countries had developed with the rise of King Badon. During his reign, Chinese five diplomatic missions arrived at the Court of Amarapura, where as four Myanmar missions were sent reciprocally to China.²⁷ Two years after the ascending of Badon Min, Chinese Emperor sent a royal letter of friendship in which he mentioned that friendly relations should prolong between the two countries.²⁸ On 3 April 1787, Chinese Emperor sent a diplomatic mission, led by Erh Shaoyeh comprising 300 members, to Amarapura.²⁹

However, the British conquest of Upper Myanmar in 1885 slowly changed foreign policy towards the border-area peoples. The British appointed superintendents to aid the local chiefs in their administration. This attempt to control local affairs was not completed until the 1930s, due to the tribal resistance to the British rule. The Chinese also appointed administrators to its vassal states, but the Central Government in Chang-an (Beijing) was not able to control it effectively for the last several centuries. As the British administrative control was extended in Northern areas, the Chinese influence declined. Strong diplomatic pressures were thus exerted to replace the buffer zones by a definite international boundary. This task was achieved by the explorations and surveying of the border areas by British officers such as J.G. Scott, W.A. Hertz, A.H. McMahon and the like. (One should thank them for their endeavors for the present boundary of the

Union of Myanmar). At the close of the 19th century Britain and the Imperial China started negotiations to delimit the common boundary. The question of "tribute" played an important role to justify its claim of suzerainty over Myanmar by pointing the decennial exchange of friendly letters and presents. It was one of the terms dictated by the victorious defenders on the invaders; it was the fourth stipulation in the Treaty of Kaungton, signed in 1769. Their blatant invasions between 1765 and 1769 were chronicled as punitive expeditions, but they were on the receiving end of lessons taught.

Chiefs along the Myanmar-China border were found to be the source of border disputes, for which the demarcation of border line became complicated. Understandably, chiefs along the border swayed according to the prevailing political force, obeying the orders of Myanmar kings at one time and heeding the Chinese order at other time. But in the mid-16th century, as Myanmar became strong, the whole of northern Myanmar and Shan territories fell under the rule of King Bayinnaung.³⁰

On September 2, 1892, the conference on Myanmar-China frontier negotiations began at the Foreign Office.³¹ At the conference, the Chinese were asked for their reply if the February proposals put forth by the Foreign Office. As the Shan territories east of Thanlwin did not include in the list of subjects to be discussed, Chinese representative Sir Macartney claimed, on behalf of China, the country lying north and east of Ayeyarwady. British representative at the conference Mr Neal replied that, if these regions were, to use Macartney's own words, "No man's Land", then it did not seem that China could possess any superior claim to it than Myanmar did.³²

Then the Chinese side claimed the belt of Kachin territory to the east of Ayeyarwady extending from Sandar to Bamaw and a tongue of land where the southwest of Yunnan projects into Myanmar territory. But the British were assured that China had not for a century, exercised any authority or claimed any jurisdiction within the valley of Ayeyarwady. Myanmar officers administered the country beyond Bamaw on both sides of Ayeyarwady, which was found in the records of China. By a memorial of Governor of Yunnan, issued at the close of the Panthay rebellion in 1873, the limits of Chinese authority on the borders of Southeast Yunnan were given and in it no reference was made to Kachin tribes. China once proposed that the territory of Upper Ayeyarwady be partitioned between the two powers as it was a terra incognita, a country without a political status. But the British were anxious for the possibility of the opening of military bases by China in the Ayeyarwady basin.

The Chinese then made a series of demand such as instead of the whole territory to the east of the Upper Ayeyarwaddy, China should receive a belt of territory outside her existing frontier, averaging 20 miles in breadth and extending from the Mole river to 25°

40' Latitude; to cede to China Keng Hung and Mong Lem and the Ko-kan State in the east of Thanlwin; and all territory to the west of Thanlwin, lying to the north of a straight line starting from near the Chinese town of Mung Maw to a point on the Thanlwin river opposite to Malipa, which should draw to include in it the post of Hunlung Kwam. The British replied that Chinese demands were inadmissible,³³ and asserted that the whole of the region which was the cradle of the Kachin race including the area west of the main (eastern) branch of Ayeyawady was regarded part of the Myanmar Empire. British rejected Chinese demand of mountainous territory, east of Ayeyarwady, by presenting a confidential memorandum to the Chinese Emperor by the Governor General of Yunnan, dated the 31st December 1885, which distinctly stated that the Kachin had never been subject to Chinese control. Thus Kachin territory was part of Myanmar dominion.³⁴

In December 1893, the conference was about to collapse, in that the most difficult problem was the section of the Bamaw-Namkhan road, passing through the debatable triangle, and China's requested to set up a customs station at Bamaw. After 10 February 1894, there was no conference at all. The final stages of the Convention signed on 1st March 1894, were done by correspondence. The Convention of 1894 showed hard bargaining between the British Myanmar and China. It was the first round of a strenuous struggle for the control of strategic areas along the border between Myanmar and China.³⁵

The Myanmar-China Boundary Demarcation Joint Commission set up by the term of 1897 Agreement, went along the mountain ridges dividing the two countries. The commission comprised of the Northern and the Southern parties, which had done substantial progress in demarcation from latitude 25° 35' North, the High Conical Peak southwards to the Taping River; from the Taping river to the Shweli; from the Shweli to the Thanlwin; from Thanlwin to the Mekong.³⁶ The Northern Part of the Boundary Commission had found out what the Chinese and British texts agreed on for their frontier. The boundary had fixed for the middle section of the Myanmar-Yunnan frontier, from the point where the Nampaung stream joined the Taping River to the point where the small stream the Nam Hpa joined the Nam Ting, according to the 1897 Agreement. The fixed boundary was about 300 miles long.³⁷

Police stations were established in the northeastern frontier of Myanmar to defend the region, for the Chinese traders carried arms along with their goods. At Nampaung, Alawpum, Nahpaw, Lapye and Nalon, police stations were opened.³⁸ Later new police stations were established at Wayawburm, Sinlun and Loignu to check the opium smuggling route.³⁹ Prevention of opium smuggling was stressed by opening new police stations at Pamkham and Lwe Jebum. It was found that Sadon out post had been established since 1892,⁴⁰ as it was located in the upper reaches of Ayeyarwady bordering

with China, where major Myanmar-China trade routes crossed. Near it was strategic Pienma and Hpimaw where Shan culture thrived.⁴¹

Hpimaw, Gawlum and Kang-fang, three villages located in the west of NMaikha-Thanlwin watershed and were included in the east Myanmar-China boundary. These villages were located closely in an area of 59 square miles. Hpimaw was located 39 miles away from Htawgaw. Hpimaw-HtawGaw pass was one of passes to the east. Kang Fang locates at an altitude of 6000', above the sea level. The areas of these villages were populated by Lisu, Maru, Azi and so on, and were under the rule of Kachin Duwas. They became well-known, when the issue of territorial right over these areas emerged.⁴²

All these border problems were settled through diplomatic means in most cordial atmosphere of friendly relation between the two countries. The back and forth discussion of border issue were taken place in Myanmar and China. A lot of concessions and compromises were done by both sides in their discussions about the Myanmar-China boundary problem. At last, the two countries were able to sign the Agreement on Myanmar-China boundary on 28 January 1960, in Beijing. According to this agreement, Myanmar-China boundary was delimited and demarcated, and Myanmar and Chinese teams set up boundary pillars along the agreed lines.

In conclusion, Sino- Myanmar commercial and cultural relations began in the time of Pyus (Piao) and Tang Chinese (628-907). In the Song dynasty there were records of diplomatic missions sent by Bagan. However, there were conflicts between the two countries sharing a long border. The Yuan-Myanmar wars occurred between 1271 and 1301, ended by a peace mission of Shin Ditharparmok. There were Myanmar invasions into Yunnan in the late 16th century. The Qing-Myanmar wars between 1765 and 1769 started by the Manchu invasions into Myanmar, in which the Manchus were definitely repulsed. However, there arose the Chinese view of Sino-Myanmar historical relation as the relation between sovereign and vassal. But Myanmar sees their relationship with China as one of “younger brother” to “elder brother”. Baobo (Pauk-hpaw) friendship was achieved by the two nations in October, 1960, when the boundary agreement and treaty of friendship and mutual non-aggression was signed by the Union of Myanmar and the People’s Republic of China.

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⁴⁰ 1/1B, Acc-6340, Sub, Defence of the North Eastern frontier of Burma, National Archives Collection, Yangon, 1904, p.5. Henceforth: 1/1B, Acc-6340

⁴¹ 1/1B, Acc-6735, Sub-Burma-China Frontier: North of latitude 25 35, National Archives Collection, Yangon, 1910, pp.6-13. (Henceforth: 1/1B, Acc-6783)

⁴² Khin Lay, "Hpimaw-Gawlam-KangFang", *Sha-sha-phway-phway Myanmar History*, Vol.II Yangon, Innwa Book House, 1996, p.386 (Henceforth: Khin Lay, 1996)