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## **Bamaw in the Shadow of *Sampa***

Kyaw Swe Nyunt\*

Occupying strategic location at the confluence of the Ayeyarwaddy River, the artery of Myanmar and the river Tapaing, *Sampanago* commands both gateways to Northern Myanmar and to China along the Taping Valley. It flourished by exploiting the fertile land around it and by extracting dues and fees on the trade, carried out by local peoples and by collecting taxes and dues from foreign trade, done by a host of Shan, Myanmar, Mon, Chinese Tai and Chinese merchants between Myanmar and China, along the Taping river valley. When *Sampanago* faded out, Bamaw came to appear occupying and integrating the old *Sampanago* within its boundary. Thus it went on thrived like the old *Sampanago*. But the changing situations made Bamaw more prominent than ever before. All these are to be seen in this paper.

The legend of *Sampanago* in Myanmar oral history is rich with varied and wide stories. Various legends notwithstanding, the existence of *Sampanago* as a matter of fact was hard and concrete. In Bagan, the rulers of it had established a tradition for the defence and security of the country, in that they established an array of fortress towns. These towns were required to send soldiers to the royal army, in case of emergency or expedition against the enemy or a country. There were three grades of towns: deca-soldiers sending towns known as *Kyeik-pyu-myo* or *Se-pyu-myo*; centi-soldiers were sending towns known as *Ya-pyu-myo* and thousand soldiers sending towns known as *Htaung-pyu-myo*. *Sampanago* was one of the 19 *Thom-gyeik-pyu-myo* in Bagan period. *Sampanago* went on existed till 1557 A.D at least, as in that year it was found that all the King's boats and barges were amassed at the *Sampanago* in the campaign against the Shan rebellion.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to know what the word *Sampanago* means. *Sampanago* come from the Pali word "*Sampanagara*" in that the word "*Sampa*" denotes "*champac*" and that of "*nagara*" represents "*village and town*" of human habitat, thus meant the village or town where *champac* is thee or full. In another instance it can be like that the word *Sampanagara* can be broken down into *Sam* + *pa* + *nagara*, where "*Sam*" means

“measuring weight”, “*pa*” denotes “fish” and “*nagara*” represents human habit of village and town, thus the village or the place, where fish were weighed.

The Biography of Bamaw town, compiled by Bamaw wundauk U Htun Kywe mentioned that “*Sampanago*” means “*Sathaka town*” or “*Kaungsin town*”. The Pali-Myanmar Dictionary says that the word “*Sathaka*” means “the alcohol drinking cup”. The word “*Kaungsin*” is a Shan, which corrupted from the word “*Kaungnin*”. It means the hill or the mound where elephants were placed or kept or captured, thus in compounded word became elephant hill. Thus, the word “*Kaungsin*” means the mound or the hill where elephants were placed or kept or in short “elephant hill”.

It is to take notice that *Sampanago* was also known as “*Naungkho*” locally, in that the word “*Naung*” means “fish” and that of “*kho*” the “bridge”, thus indicating “place of the bridge where fish were amassed or weighed”. From these etymological studies, the word *Sampanago* may actually mean “the place of fish”.

The existence of *sampanago* since the olden days can be ascertained, by the observance of the old wall, the remnant of which can be still being seen at present day. As it locates at the confluence of Taping and Ayeyarwady, *Sampanago* commands strategic position, which is greatly assisted by easy accessibility to the Taping plain where ample supply could be got. The easy navigability rendered by its location on the east bank of Ayeyarwady made it a port for the fleet of royal navy, albeit comprising boats and barges of those days. All these were characteristic of a fortress town. By the physical configuration of present day *Sampanago*, it might built a wall and a moat, the later encircling the inner wall. Trace of the old channel, still seen about three furlongs in the south of *Aikkhawdaw Zedi* or *Shwekyina* pagoda might be the old moat of *Sampanago*. The inner wall might have a breadth of about fifteen feet thickness. One can not be for sure, because local people used the brick from the old wall in making brick powder, which was sold to the people. The sizes of the brick from the old wall have measurements of from 18" × 9" × 2.5" to 18.5" × 9.5" × 2.5". At present, the old *Sampanago* has contained four villages of *Sampa*, *Sitkegon*, *Komkha* and *Naungkho*, within its old bounds. The old fortress might cover a circumference of about ten furlongs. The old wall of *sampanago* locates at 413 feet above sea level at the point of North latitude 24 17 29 and East longitude 97 13 72. Due to nature’s gift its strategic location and situation, *Sampanago* had included in the *Aniruddha’s* forty-three toll station towns.<sup>2</sup> A toll station

was a checking point in the olden days. Every persons and everything that passed the toll station, were liable to be being checked and taxes were collected for the goods at the toll station. Royal Orders of Burma described *Sampanago* as a toll station town. The order issued on 4 January 1758 stated that:<sup>3</sup>

Tethe collected at the toll stations of *Tamawwa* and *Sampanago*, from the Myanmar, Shan and Mon traders is unaffordable by the small and poor traders. Through traditional, do not collect tethe at these toll stations, but collect fees only for two-third of the goods of big traders and for the three-fourth of the goods of small traders. *Ahmudans* at these toll stations shall have to grant permission licence to Chinese traders who shall not give presents of one “mat”, one “pyi” of rice and muslin cloth to the officials.

A toll station notwithstanding, *Sampanago* was more important as guard station, for the defence of frontier areas in this part of the country.

The name Bamaw could not be found in any early record. Local peoples thought that the name Bamaw came from the Shan word “*Manmaw*”, in which the word “*Man*” means “village” and “*maw*” denotes “pot”, thus designating “pot making village”. The oral history said that the one Sao Mo Khan built the city on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> waning day of Tagu, in 760 *sasana* years (A.D.1243). Bamaw was the place, from where such Myanmar commanders of Anandapyitsi and Yandapyisi marched to the battle ground *Ngasaunggyan* to face off Chinese intruders, in the twilight years of Bagan in 1281 A.D. As it was said that Myanmar forces stayed a defence resistance at the promontory of Bamaw River, Bamaw had been found existed since the days of Bagan.<sup>4</sup> The use of the word Bamaw was found at the time formation of cavalry units, on 4 March 1525,<sup>5</sup> on which day when a total of 51 cavalry units were formed, Bamaw cavalry unit was included.<sup>6</sup> The use of the word Bamaw could also be seen in the execution of the enumeration of the genealogy of fifty-five Sawbwas, which was done by minister *Thayepyanchi Nadayawda*, on order of King Nyaungyan, on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1602.<sup>7</sup> The bounds of Bamaw were:<sup>8</sup>

- in the east till *Loi Loi* mountaing, adjoining with the Shanland;

- in the west till the *Dagyigon* earth mound in the west of Ayeyarwady River, adjoining with the land of *Mohnyin*;
- in the north to the *Loingohart* ridge, adjoining with *Khanti* land;
- in the south till *hweli* river, adjoining with thlnd of *meit*;
- in the northeast till *Hemaw*, *Taungle* and *Sanhti* mountains, adjoining with the land of China;
- in the southeast to *Shwenyaungbin*, *Pinkhaw* stone pile and *Heitpoke* stone post, adjoining with the land of *Momeit*;
- in the southwest to the mouth of *Shweli* stream and to the middle of Ayeyarwady River, adjoining with the lands of *Momeit* and *Katha*;
- in the northwest to the *Kyauk-O* toll station in the upper part of Ayeyarwady, adjoining with the land of *Mogaung*.

As Bamaw was inhabited mostly by the Shan nationals, Shan sawbwas traditionally ruled town and the region. On 9 March 1602, it was found that Bamaw had supplicated to king Nyaungyan, that it did not want to stay under the rule of Momeit sawbwa, but to take refugee under the suzerain solar king. At first, Bamaw had to present pots and look after the elephants. As there was no ruler, it had to ask Momeit to grant a line of sawbwa. On account of this, Momeit sawbwa sent one minister, to whom a territory was also invested, the bounds of which were:

- in the north to *Kat* town;
- in the east to *Mowun*;
- in the south to *Hamtet*, *Meng Khaung* and *Kaungton* and
- in the west *Kyaukkyi*.

It was found that it had been given till to lands of *Hantettaung* stream, ittebyin stream, *Yinkhe Thabyebin* strm and *Setkya stream*. Bamaw was found sending tributes of 300 pots and three golds to *Momeit* annually.<sup>9</sup>

Governors of Bamaw region, as fait can be found were:

Year	In Reign of	Name of Sawbwa
400	<i>Aniruddha</i>	<i>Tho Lyin Bwa</i>
412	<i>Aniruddha</i>	<i>ThoHaing</i>
415	<i>Aniruddha</i>	<i>Tho Hong</i>
458	<i>Kyansittha</i>	<i>Tho Sum</i>

513	<i>Alaungsithu</i>	<i>Tho Tu</i>
568	<i>Narapatisithu</i>	<i>Tho Khum</i>
587	<i>Zeyatheinkha</i>	<i>Tho Yun</i>
593	<i>Zeyatheinkha</i>	<i>Tho Sum</i>
608	<i>Kyazwa</i>	<i>Tho Saing</i>
626	<i>Narathihapate</i>	<i>Tho Set</i>
645	<i>Narathihapate</i>	<i>Thaw Khan</i>
646	<i>Narathihapate</i>	<i>Tho Lyin</i>
680		<i>Tho Ngauk</i>
681	breakdown of hereditary Sawbwas	
691	<i>Pyinya Uzana</i>	captain of horse <i>Yaza Thinkha Yan Aung</i>
696	<i>Pyinya Uzana</i>	<i>Nga Myat Thanday</i>
717	<i>Kyawzwange</i>	<i>Thopyi</i>
728	<i>Thadominphya</i>	<i>Nga Nay Htun</i>
729	<i>Thadominphya</i>	<i>Nga Paw Oo</i>
729	<i>Mingyiswasawke</i>	<i>Tho Hmaing</i>
730	<i>Mingyiswasawke</i>	<i>Nga Tun Nge</i>
743	<i>Mingyiswasawke</i>	<i>Mole</i> fief holder <i>Hawkyit</i>
750	<i>Mingyiswasawke</i>	<i>Nga Tun Nge</i>
751-1112	<i>Mingyiswasawke</i>	four <i>Pawmaing</i> in succession
1113	<i>Mingyiswasawke</i>	<i>U Myat Aung</i>
1133	<i>Hsinbyushin</i>	<i>U Shwe Ye</i> , title holder of <i>Velusara</i>
1155	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Nemyomihla U Kan</i>
1157	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Velusara</i>
1170	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Nemyomihla U Kan</i> in conjunction with <i>Wun U Po</i>
1171	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Maha Thura U Pale</i>
1174	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Mingyimingaung Min Sandathiri</i>
1175	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Maha Thena Thinkhaya U Tet Toe</i>
1177	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Mahaminhlaminkyaw U Ye</i>
1178	<i>Badopaya</i>	<i>Mahathirithihathu U O</i>
1190	<i>Bagyidaw</i>	<i>Mingyimahaminhlayaza U Shun</i>

1200	<i>Tharyarwady</i>	<i>Mahathihathura U Shwe O</i>
1206	<i>Tharyarwady</i>	<i>Mogaung Sawbwa DabanYaza(in provisional)</i>
1207	<i>Tharyarwady</i>	<i>Mingyimahaminhla Yaza U Maung</i>
	<i>Tharyarwady</i>	<i>Mahaminhlaminhtinsithu U Bwa</i>
1210	<i>Bagan</i>	<i>Mingyimahaminhla Yaza U Shwe Tok</i>
1212	<i>Bagan</i>	<i>Mahaminhlaminhtinsithu U Hmaing</i>
1214	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Mingyimahamingaung Yaza U Tok</i>
1219	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Mingyimahathilawa U Bwa</i>
1222	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Mahaminhlakyawgaung U Bu</i>
1223	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Mingyimahamingaungyaza U Tok</i>
1228	<i>Mindon</i>	reappointed <i>Mahaminhtinyaza</i>
1229	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Bagyi Taik Wun-cum-General U Net Pya,</i> title holder of <i>Mingyimahaminhtinmingaung</i>
1230	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Mahamingaungkyawzwa U Tok</i>
1233	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Lema Myosa-cum-chief of royal Boats</i> <i>Mingyimahaminhlayaza</i>
1237	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>Hsemwiwundauk U Shwe Kyu</i>
1238	<i>Mindon</i>	<i>three towns' governor Minhlathirithinkhaya</i>
1241	<i>Thibaw</i>	<i>Three towns' governor Mahamingaung</i> <i>Minkyawyetin U Kan</i>
1243	<i>Thibaw</i>	<i>Ganwegon Myosa</i>
1245	<i>Thibaw</i>	<i>Royal Lland Officer</i>
1246	<i>Thibaw</i>	<i>Hluttaw clerk U Lu Gyi</i>

In 1247, U Lu Gyi was recalled to Mandalay; only to go on governed the town along with ***Malun*** three towns' governor ***Wundauk*** U Po Hla, Regimental Officer U Htun Kywe, U Po Htun, Liaison Officers U Kyi and U Pe and town clerk U Chein. After the annexation of Myanmar, the British appointed Regimental Officer ***Nemyo Minkyaw Thurein U Htun Kywe as Myo-ok*** to govern Bamaw.

After the passed away of ***Nandabayin*** in 1600 AD, Bamaw rebellion broke out in the reign of King *Nyaungyan*. Though the outbreak of rebellions of Mogaung and Mohnyin in successive period, could be seem as normal and conventional, this outbreak of Bamaw rebellion might be regarded special. When King *Nyaungyan* marched to

Bamaw to crush the rebellion on 14 February 1602, Bamaw Sawbwa and family took refuge in *Mengse* of China. *Nyaungyan* sent his son crown prince to *Mengse* to ask for Bamaw sawbwa. Chinese transferred Bamaw sawbwa back to Myanmar, who died of on taking poison. *Nyaungyan* had appointed his son crown prince as the sawbwa of Bamaw.<sup>10</sup>

On 8 November 1817, the king ordered Bamaw governor *Nemyo Thura Kyawgaung*, to stay in his resident in Bamaw. Bamaw governor was responsible to present the important events and situation immediately to the Palace, in which if the king displeased, the governor was doomed to be being punished. Such case was the dismissed of *Nemyozeya* on 14 October 1817.<sup>11</sup>

In Konbaung period, Bamaw became the gateway in Sino-Myanmar relation. In other words, it was a major trading center in Myanmar – China trade. The Dutch once had asked for permission to open a trading center in Bamaw, during the tenure of Minye Kyawhtin (1673-1698). The request was turned down, for which the Dutch threaten that they would invite the Manchu into Myanmar, to which Myanmar King retaliated by expelling the Dutch, who eventually had left the country in 1679 A.D. Myanmar-China trade had been thrived in those days, which by the words of Henry Yule was as follow:

Cleaned cotton, free from seeds and dust, were sent to Bamaw by boat along the Ayeyawady. Bamaw was an exchange market for import and export goods to China. Chinese made copperwares, carpets and warm clothings were traded in cash and other goods were bartered. Chinese goods were carried up to the Chindwin river valley in the west. Myanmar cotton were carried by dug-out boats to Bamaw. These dug-out boat known as *Peingaw*.<sup>12</sup>

British consideration to do trade with China, after the occupation of Myanmar, could be seen as follow:

Locating on the east bank of Ayeyarwady, about 300 *taings* (1 taing = 2 miles) in the north from Mandalay, Bamaw was a principal town in northern Myanmar. It was aid, there were about 4000 houses in the town. Urban residents were mostly of Shans and Chinese, where the British also had their resident. Many Chinese traders from Yunan usually arrived Bamaw, with goods of silk and saltpeter, carried by donkeys. Momein in

China was the nearest town from Bamaw. It locates about seven day's stages from Bamaw. Meanwhile, Chinese goods could not arrive, like before, due to the war in China. At present, steamers carrying passengers and freights, ply between Bamaw, Mandalay and Yangon. It can be expected that Bamaw would be greatly prospered in trade and commerce in the future.<sup>13</sup>

By the above mentioned facts, it can be understood that, being a border town, Bamaw occupied a strategic position, both in trade and military affairs, for which foreigners of Chinese, British and Dutch kept a keen eye on the town.

Captain Hunnery also had recorded that apart from Ava and Yangon, Bamaw was the third largest and the most interesting town in Myanmar.<sup>14</sup> After the conclusion of Anglo-Myanmar commercial treaty in 1867, British Resident Colonel Sladen in Mandalay had tried to find out trade route to China via Bamaw. Colonel Sladen was the one who, as the representative of British merchants, made plots and machinations for the occupation of Upper Myanmar. He had mentioned in his Yunan diary that it was necessary to control the town of Bamaw, in order the tradewith the northwest China to be developed.

There was a tradition of decennial tribute exchange between Myanmar and China. Regarding this, Chinese had sent tributes nine times to Myanmar king, via Bamaw governor, in the course of 84 years from 1801 to 1885. Such smooth relationship notwithstanding, Sino-Myanmar relation sometimes plunged into the stormy sea, where four Sino-Myanmar wars broke out during the period from 31 December 1766 to 18 December 1769. In these wars, great battles were fought between the two armies in and around the town of Bamaw. The reason d'etre of the outbreak of wars was mostly due to the reliance of Bamaw officers and merchants on China. Once, two thousand Chinese led by Set Kyin attacked and occupied Bamaw on 29 December 1883. Likewise, in the last days of King Thibaw, Chinese army approached near Bamaw on the day of 31 December 1885.

In Konbaung period, Bamaw and Mogaung became the Coventry, to where prominent persons from the royal capital were exiled. On 1 August 1805, Pyay feoffee Yan Naing Bwa was exiled to Mogaung. So did to Ahmyint Myo-ok Maung Gyi who complicated in thngun rebellion of 1866, on 14 June 1874. But on the contrary, the

venerable Bamaw Sayadaw became famous, for being exiled to Bamaw. In the affairs of Privy Council Herald *Yanaung Myosa* Maung Maung Tok, *Sidaw Myinwun* Maung Pe Nge was first exiled to Mogaung on 17 February 1882 and then executed the situation in border region between Myanmar and China was complicated, which forced some officials in the region in the east of Bamaw, to dance to the tune of prevailing conditions, obeying the orders of both merchants. Sometimes, the actions of these officials led to the breakdown or sour the relation between Myanmar and China. Chinese usually deceit Myanmar officials in border area, by employing tricks, in that they sent faked imperial letters to Myanmar, claiming the emperor had sent such letters for these reasons, Bamaw sawbwa issued the order to the officials in the frontier on 31 October 1810, that they shall pass the imperial letter and its entourage to the capital only after thorough scrutiny and repeated check.

On 13 October 1810, some Chinese officials such as Kyinta Lao Ye, co Lao Sung, Se She to Myanmar king via Bamaw governor, stating that some towns in China were under the suzeraining and thus they should be ruled by Myanmar King. When Myanmar official Meng Lien sawbwa was killed, Chinese imperial seal and hat were found among the possession of the sawbwa, which led to the conclusion that Meng Liem sawbwa took allegiance, both to Myanmar and Chinese Kings. Once the one Tao Swa Kon had escaped to Mogaung, for which Shweli governor in China had sent a letter on 19 December 1805 to Bamaw governor, requesting that Tao Swa Kon be either returned to China or killed. Likewise, during the Sino – Myanmar wars between 1766 and 1769 whenever governors or sawbwas of Mogaung or Bamaw escaped to China; they were invariably found collaborated with the Chinese.

Myanmar kings on their part were found very cautious in dealing with the Chinese, the relationship between the two countries, to be cordial and comfort. The regard of Myanmar kings on the administration of the town could be seen in the appointment of both Myanmar and Chinese town headmen in Bamaw, in addition to the appointment of Chinese officer to tackle the affairs of Chinese. Such regard could also be found in the appointment of Regimental officers in frontier towns, in that the left Regimental officer was invariably the Chinese and that of the Right Regimental officer was always Myanmar. Bamaw governor was responsible to enquire and investigate the internal affairs of China and required to supplicate to the capital. On 23 May 1850, Meng

Mien governor and commanders informed Bamaw governor about the change of Chinese emperor. *Panthay* rebellion in Yunan had disrupted Bamaw-Yunan trade. To prevent such trade disruption in the future, king Mindon issued a royal order on 20 February 1869, requiring Bamaw governor to carry out measures for the security and safety of trade route between Bamaw and Yunan.

Paradoxically, Bamaw in the east frontier was found became important in the relation with Assam and Manipur in the west frontier of the kingdom. In the suppression of Assam and Manipur rebellion, Myanmar forces under the command of Bamaw governor *NemyoThura Kyawgaung* had marched to the west frontier on 23 November 1816. When Assam sawbwa sent a bride to the king, she was conveyed through the town of Bamaw to the capital. To receive the bride, the king ordered Bamaw governor on 7 August 1817 to prepare barges and boats adorned with flowers. *Maha Bandula* marched to Assam with over thousand Kachin soldiers on 17 february 1822 and on their return, they arrived in Bamaw on 1 January 1823, where Myanmar forces celebrated victory over Assam in their three days stay.

From these descriptions, it may be deduced that Mogaung and Mohnyin became prominence in the periods from Bagan to late Taung Oo, whereas Bamaw come importance in the periods from late Nyaungyan through the whole period of Konbaung.

In précis, *Sampanago* was set in the distinctive geographical settings, occupying a strategic place at the junction of the river Ayeyarwady and its tributary *Taping*, where a range of streams such as *Kabo*, *Mole*, *Nam Ngaw* and *Rai Baw* flow through the region. Around these streams with their plains encircles the *Vilasa* mountain ranges. The two Buddhist edifices of *Shwekyina* pagoda and *Aikkhawdaw* Zedi, both occupying river bank position are distinctive landmarks of *Sampanago* and surrounding area. *Sampanago* was once a commercial cross-road for all traders of Burman, Tailian, Gadu Ganan, Kachin, Mengsa and Chinese Tai. Being important commercially and militarily, *Sampanago* alias Bamaw became a district headquarters, when the British annexed Upper Myanmar. Bamaw was dependent on the river Ayeyarwady solely for its development before. But now, thanks to the east Ayeyarwady Development Plan, where Tagaung – Shwegu – Bamaw Union Road came to appear, easy accessibility renders convenient trade and commerce to *Sampanago* and its environment, leading to the trade

development and economic prosperity. The once prospered old *Sampa* is now seemed refluxing its muscles to achieve development in present day new era.

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<sup>1</sup> Kala, U, *The Great Chronicle, Vol I*, Yangon, Yarpay Press, July 2006, p. 222 – 237. (Henceforth: Kala, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> *Glass Palace Chronicle*, Vol I, Yangon, Sarthugyi Press, January 2008, p. 270. (Henceforth: *GPC*, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Than Tun, Dr., *The Royal Order of Burma, A.D. 1598 -1885, Vol III*, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1995, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Kala, I, 2006, 247.

<sup>5</sup> Thursday, 12 waxing day of Tagu, 886 M.E.

<sup>6</sup> Than Tun, Edit, *Jambudipa Ok SaungKyam*, Yangon, The University Press, December 2005, p. 5 (Henceforth: Than Tun, Edit, 2005.)

<sup>7</sup> 5 waning day of Tabodwe, 963 M.E.

<sup>8</sup> Shwehti Eindra, History of *Shwekyina* and *Theintawgyi, including chronicle of Sampanago*, 24-7-1966, p. 105-106

<sup>9</sup> Than Tun, Edit, 2005, 40.

<sup>10</sup> *GPC*, 2008, 635

<sup>11</sup> Maung Maung Tin (1), U, *The Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty, Vol II*, Yangon, Sakawa Sarpay, 1989, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission to the Court of Ava in 1855*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 256.

<sup>13</sup> *The Waves Magazine*, 4/08, July 2008, p.172

<sup>14</sup> Tin Maung Yin, U, *The Making of Burma*, Yangon, Yarpay Press, 2008, p.88