

The Early *Syām* and Rise of Mäng Mao: Western Mainland Southeast Asia in the “Tai Century”

Ken Kirigaya

ABSTRACT—During the “Tai Century” (c. 1250-1350), the early *Syām*, ancestors of the modern Shan, emerged as major challengers to Burmese supremacy in western mainland Southeast Asia. The tension reached a climax when the twin Burmese capitals, Pinya and Sagaing, fell to Mäng Mao, the most awe-inspiring kingdom in the upland Tai world. The emergence of the early *Syām* as a major military power and the subsequent rise of Mäng Mao to trans-regional paramountcy were closely associated with and paralleled by the “Mongol Century” in China. Besides the advanced military technology of the Mongols, the early *Syām* also derived great benefit from the economic boom on a pan-Eurasian scale under the Pax Mongolica, as exotic commodities of the subtropics and precious metals as well as gems were readily available in their homeland, through which the Southwest Silk Road, the principal trade artery connecting China to India, traversed.

Introduction

During what the late David K. Wyatt termed a “Tai Century,”¹ various Tai-speaking peoples, spreading from Assam to Vietnam, through the northern rim of mainland Southeast Asia and the southwestern extremity of China, made their first appearance, and became a part of Southeast Asian history. Some of them ventured upon a downward movement from the upland valleys, encroaching on the major river plains to replace the classical “Indianized” states and to begin their own history. Wyatt, of course, made a general examination of these movements of the Tai-speakers who would become ancestors of the modern Siamese and Lao. In northwestern mainland Southeast Asia, the late G. H. Luce, a pioneer of early Burmese history based on epigraphic study, presented a detailed account of another Tai-speaking

¹ “A Tai Century” is the title of Chapter 3 of his *Thailand: A Short History*.

group, the early *Syam*, forefathers of the modern Shan.² Luce's study, however, finishes its account around 1300 when the Mongol troops pulled out of Burma, whereby it leaves untold the early *Syam* of the 14th century, especially "the story of the rise of 'Maw Shans', who sacked the two capitals of Central Burma, Sagaing and Pinya, in 1364."³ Other Burma scholars, namely Than Tun, Paul Bennett and Aye Chan, deal with 14th century Burma, but only cursorily discuss the early *Syam* and the Mao attacks on the twin capitals.⁴ This is partially because they mainly draw on Burmese sources, in which records on the early *Syam* are regrettably insufficient. As their history "sits astride both Chinese and Southeast Asian history,"⁵ archival research on the Chinese documents, which could prevent historians from "viewing a skewed fraction of the whole historical transcript,"⁶ is indispensable for the study of the early *Syam*.

Therefore, some scholars recently have approached the Mao history from the Chinese side and offered fresh views. Liew Foon Ming and Sun Laichen, scholars of Sino-Southeast Asian relations, have extensively employed Chinese texts and attempted thorough examination of historical events directly involving Mäng Mao, or *Luchuan* in Chinese.⁷ Their works, however, basically concentrate on a series of battles between Mäng Mao and the Ming from the late 14th to the mid-15th centuries, with special focus on the famous "Three Expeditions against Luchuan" in the 1440s. In short, they discuss not the rise but the demise of Mäng Mao and the descendents of the early *Syam*. Jon Fernquest's comprehensive study on the history of the "Tai frontier zone," though principally covering the period 1382-1454, briefly reviews the early history of Mäng Mao.⁸ While the article, based on a broad and careful reading

² G. H. Luce, "The Early *Syām* in Burma's History." Cf. idem, "Note on the Peoples of Burma in the 12th-13th Century A.D.," pp. 68-9.

³ Luce, "Early *Syām*," p. 172.

⁴ Than Tun, "History of Burma: A.D. 1300-1400." Paul J. Bennett, "The 'Fall of Pagan': Continuity and Change in 14th-century Burma." Aye Chan, "Burma: Shan Domination in the Ava Period (c.1310-1555)," p. 37. More recently, in 2012, a comprehensive history of Burma was written by the Aung-Thwins, whose treatment of the Shan raids on the Irrawaddy Basin in the 1360s is more or less the same as the other works. Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar Since Ancient Times: Traditions and Transformations*, p. 110. Another recent, insightful essay (2011) by Michael Aung-Thwin on the history of dualistic relations between Ava and Pegu does not discuss the Shan incursions of the 1360s either.

⁵ Jon Fernquest, "Crucible of War: Burma and the Ming in the Tai Frontier Zone (1382-1454)," p. 73.

⁶ Ibid., p. 57. Victor Lieberman (2003: 122) argues, "those Tai populations most exposed to Pagan and Angkorian administrative and religious culture proved best able to profit from the crisis of the charter states." He views the history of early *Syam*, whose inroads jeopardized Upper Burma in the 1360s, only through the eyes of the Burmese, entirely neglecting the Chinese influence upon them.

⁷ Liew Foon Ming, "The Luchuan-Pingmian Campaigns (1438-1449) in the Light of Official Chinese Historiography"; Sun Laichen, "Military Technology Transfers from Ming China and the Emergence of Northern Mainland Southeast Asia (c.1390-1527)."

⁸ Fernquest, "Crucible of War."

of Burmese and Chinese sources, reveals hitherto unknown issues concerning the origins and nature of the Mao polity, it does not furnish detailed explanation of sociopolitical and economic background of the sudden rise of Māng Mao and its inroads into the Irrawaddy Basin.⁹ In any case, although the main concern of the works cited above is slightly off the theme here, the orientation set by these scholars towards setting the story of Māng Mao's war—not in the context of Burmese history but in a wider framework of Sino-Tai relations—is of importance and direct relevance to this study. As stated above, the Mao heartland lay on the periphery of Burma and China, so the story of the rise of Māng Mao can only be adequately examined outside the confines of national history of Burma or China.

Wyatt once pointed out, “The political transformation of continental Southeast Asia was paralleled by the rise to power of the Mongols in China and the extension of that power into Southeast Asia by diplomatic and military means.”¹⁰ Meanwhile the late George Coedès, in his classic magnum opus that contains a chapter titled “The Repercussions of the Mongol Conquest,” noted, “[Mongol] impact produced deep repercussions, the most important of which was the advent of Tai power in the Menam Basin and Burma.”¹¹ The northwestern mainland, i.e. the heartland of the early *Syam*, was not outside this Mongol influence,¹² as the region was directly connected to Yunnan, which, with the opening and broadening of trade networks and the huge development of mining industry under Mongol supervision, was prospering to an unprecedented degree at the time. The Mongol factor, through warfare, exchange of diplomatic and tributary missions, and commercial intercourse, undoubtedly stimulated petty Tai regimes dotted around the modern Sino-Burmese border region. And it was the emergence of these Tai powers and the ultimate ascendancy of Māng Mao over them that transformed the political landscape of western mainland Southeast Asia in the 14th century.

⁹ Christian Daniels, “mak[ing] as much use as possible of Chinese sources,” has sought the “main driving force behind . . . polity building activities” of the Tai and discussed the great role played by the changes in material culture (Daniels 2000, 51-52). His instructive article, as its title clearly tells, deals with the formation of Tai polities in general, not that of Māng Mao per se. He has also made (2012) another very important point concerning the way the Burmese script was adopted and modified by the Tai-Mao. The spread of the Burmese script into the Tai world is now dated much earlier, over several centuries, than has hitherto been suggested.

¹⁰ Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 30. Recently, a group of scholars has emphasized the impact of the “China factor” on 15th century Southeast Asia. Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen, eds., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor*.

¹¹ George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, p. 189.

¹² As Yuan rule in China proper was short-lived, lasting less than a century, and the Mongol invasions of both mainland and insular Southeast Asia were mostly unsuccessful, the Mongol impact on the region as a whole was limited compared to that of the Ming. Sun Laichen, “Assessing the Ming Role in China's Southern Expansion,” p. 51. Yet, at least its overland impact in several aspects on the upland Tai world was profound, and thus will be discussed in due course.

Māng Mao, centered on the upper Shweli region,¹³ fatally devastated Pinya and Sagaing, successors to Pagan, which commemorated the finale of the Tai century and initiated a new epoch in Burmese history. The fall of the twin capitals in Central Burma to the Tai invaders is of course well known as a major, epoch-making event in Burmese history.¹⁴ However, as seen above, Māng Mao's sack of the twin capitals, despite its lasting physical and psychological impact on the society of the Irrawaddy Basin and its implications for succeeding Burmese history, has never been a main subject of scholarly research. Hence we know little of the geopolitical background of Māng Mao, what accounted for its rather rapid rise and who its rulers were.

This article, by setting Māng Mao's past outside the confines of national history of Burma or China, and reinterpreting it within a larger context of Sino-Southeast Asian relations, examines this scholarly and unexplored, yet fairly crucial, subject in the history of the region. In other words, the issue it addresses basically and humbly corresponds to what the late G. H. Luce more than a half century ago called the "story of the rise of the 'Maw Shans'," which he certainly hoped to "present . . . in the pages of a future issue of this *Journal* [*of the Siam Society*]."¹⁵

A note on major sources

Textual records on the history of the early *Syam* and Māng Mao are scarce, and, if any, they are separately kept in different languages. As the Mao heartland lay between Burma and China, both Burmese and Chinese materials are employed in this article. The former includes standard Burmese chronicles, such as the *UK*, *HMN*, and *YT*.¹⁶ However, during the Pagan and Pinya/Sagaing periods, it is the Old Burmese inscriptions, not the chronicles compiled centuries later from various sources, which provide basic information on the early *Syam*. The Chinese literature consists of official dynastic records, especially the *Yuan Shi* (*YS*),¹⁷ and private works, such as the *Baiyizhuan*. Entries in the *benji* [Basic Annals] and the *dili-zhi* [Treatise on Geography] of the *YS* are a mine of information on the early *Syam*, and are unobtainable in the Burmese sources. The *Baiyizhuan* is a first-hand account of Māng Mao written by Qian Guxun and Li Sicong, Chinese envoys sent to Ava-

¹³ For a detailed account of where Māng Mao was, see Fernquest, "Crucible of War," pp. 32-33. For the romanization of *Syam*/Shan words, I basically, but not strictly, follow the suggestions of Shintani (2000).

¹⁴ Bennett remarks, "the destructive Shan inroads of the 1360s probably caused more physical damage than the 'fall of Pagan'." Bennett, "Fall of Pagan," p. 4.

¹⁵ Luce, "Early *Syām*," p. 172.

¹⁶ Abbreviations of major references (with lengthy titles) are shown at the end of this article. For a concise explanation of the Burmese sources, see Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, pp. 249-53, and Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Conquest and Anarchy, c. 1550-1760*, pp. 294-300.

¹⁷ For a bibliographic account of the *Yuan Shi*, see *LNCH*, pp. 16-17.

Burma and Māng Mao in the late 14th century. As each official left his own respective monograph, there remain two versions of the *Baiyizhuan*, whose contents are slightly different from each other, yet equally valuable.¹⁸

Other than Burmese and Chinese records, local Tai chronicles are also used. Despite the fact that much of their dating, and even the historicity of numerous episodes, are doubtful, they are valuable as they furnish more detailed accounts of the Mao history than those of Burmese and Chinese sources. *Yinyunruiwude Meng Guozhanbi Jianshi* (YMGJ) is a Chinese translation of a chronicle of Māng Mao, from the legendary founding of the kingdom up to the end of the reign of Sākhanpha, its supreme lord, during which Māng Mao's territory was most extensive. Neither the authorship nor the date of the YMGJ is known. *Heimeng Gumeng: Mengmao Gudai Zhuwangshi* (MGZ) is also a Chinese translation of the history of Māng Mao and its surrounding area originally written in the Mao script by Zhaopaya Tanmatie in 1778. As he once served the *Siyiguan*,¹⁹ he must have kept many Chinese records, besides local Tai materials, at his disposal. MGZ's account on the reign of Sākhanpha is somewhat different from that of the YMGJ. Meanwhile there is a Thai translation of the chronicle of Hsenwi, *Phün Müang Sænwi* (PMS), whose last entry is in the year 1801.²⁰ The PMS shares the same biographic account of Sākhanpha with the YMGZ, thereby showing that the legend of Sākhanpha was also deeply entrenched in the Burmese Shan world.

The early Syām in Pagan's epigraphy

First, a word about the early *Syam*.²¹ In the following, the term generally denotes the ancestors of those Tai speaking peoples categorized as Ahom, Hkamti Shans, Burmese Shans and Chinese Shans by Lebar and others.²² The term *Syam* itself is, however, not confined to western mainland Southeast Asia. Thus, remote eastern relatives of the early *Syam* first appear in a Cham inscription of 1050 as slaves and around the middle of the 12th century in the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat as mercenaries.²³ The debut of the early *Syam* on the western mainland was in

¹⁸ Qian's work is annotated and collated by Jiang Yingliang in *Baiyizhuan Jiaozhu* (BZJ), while Li's version is reproduced in Appendix I of the BZJ.

¹⁹ The *Siyiguan* [College of Translators for the Barbarians of the Four Quarters] was a Chinese "governmental office . . . that handled the translation of documents submitted to the emperor by foreign tribute missions." Daniels, "Script without Buddhism," p. 152.

²⁰ Just to note, Tadahiko Shintani has also translated this chronicle (and a chronicle of Hsipaw) into Japanese, *Taizoku ga Kataru Rekishi: Senwii Ohtooki, Unbon Siipo Ohtooki*.

²¹ While I agree with Christian Daniels (2012: 148n) on "calling ethnic groups by their own names," and "shunn(ing) this exonym [Shan] in favor of their autonym, Tay," I will use "early *Syam*," a term coined by Luce, on whose study this article is based.

²² Frank LeBar, Gerald Hickey, and John Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia*, pp. 190-97.

²³ George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, pp. 140, 190-1; Luce, "Early *Syam*," p.

1120, when a Pagan inscription recorded a *Syam* “slave” dedicated to the Buddhist church.²⁴ As this first case shows, in the Pagan epigraphs “the word [*Syam*] is frequent in slaves-names . . . including a weaver, turner, drummer, and devotee.”²⁵ A very notable exception is a *sambyan Syam*, who dedicated a slave to a religious foundation in 1241.²⁶ Meanwhile intermarriage between *Syam* and Burmese seems to have been practiced, as we find some *Syam* uncles, sons, husbands and wives among Burmese families.²⁷ As a result, early *Syam* were “very much mixed up with the Burmese.”²⁸ Probably because of their voluntary downward migration or forced resettlement by Burmese forces, some *Syam* communities appeared in the lowlands of Central Burma. An inscription found in Wetlet, about twenty-five kilometers down the Mu canal from Shwebo, refers to *Syam ywa*, straightforwardly “Shan village,” clear evidence of a *Syam* settlement around the Irrawaddy Basin.²⁹ Other *Syam*-related toponyms include *Mun Syam*, located by Luce somewhere in the northwest of Kyaukse, and *Khanti*, supposedly derived from a Tai word *khamti*, meaning “golden place,” which, or one of which, was undoubtedly near Sagu, about sixty kilometers down the Irrawaddy from Pagan.³⁰

These epigraphic records only refer to the early *Syam* who were part of Burmese society; they do not provide us with enough information on political and social conditions of the *Syam* outside the Burmese sphere of influence, nor do they relate how and when the ancestors of the modern Shan came to settle in their homeland that surrounds the heartland of Burma. Therefore, we have to reconstruct the whereabouts of the early *Syam* with a clue provided by an inscription of 1196, in which Tagaung is listed

124; Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp. 13, 24-5. For a more recent, detailed, and comprehensive account on the origins of the Tai linguistic family “found along a thousand kilometer arc from Guanxi to Assam,” see Chris Baker, “From Yue to Tai.”

²⁴ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 124; idem, “Note on the Peoples of Burma,” p. 68; Than Tun, “Social Life in Burma, A.D. 1044-1287,” p. 39. The inscription of 1120 is found at *SMK*, I, 336.

²⁵ Luce, “Peoples of Burma,” p. 68. Here one must be very careful with the word “slave,” *kyun* in Burmese, as its connotation in the Pagan period must have been different from the one commonly used in the context of European history. See Michael Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma*, p. 150, and Than Tun, “Social Life,” p. 42.

²⁶ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 124; *SMK*, II, 25. *Sambyan*, or *sampyan* in some cases, was a high-ranking official in the Pagan court. The famous Three Brothers, who dealt a final blow to the Pagan dynasty, retained the title before their ascension to the throne. In some inscriptions the eldest of the three, Athinhkaya, was described as *sampyan kri*, “great *sampyan*,” both Yazathinkyan and Thihathu, the second and the youngest of the trio, as *sampyan*. Luce, “Early *Syām*,” pp. 153-55, 158; *SMK*, III, 153, 194.

²⁷ See, for example, *SMK*, II, 45, 91, 185, 201, and III, 128.

²⁸ Than Tun, “Social Life,” p. 39.

²⁹ *SMK*, III, 213.

³⁰ Luce cast reasonable doubt on such an early *Syam* settlement in this too southerly location. Luce, “Peoples of Burma,” pp. 68-69. *Khanti* is mentioned more than twenty times in the *SMK* I, II, and III, the earliest dated to 1150. *SMK*, I, 25.

as a *nuinnam* (*naingngan*), “conquered land” of King Narapatisithu.³¹

In the second third of the 11th century, Tagaung, or the place later to be so called, was probably already a major city of Pagan, along with Meiktila, Minbu, and Prome, where votive tablets made by Aniruddha, the de facto founder of the dynasty, who is supposed to have reigned from 1044 to 1077, were found.³² By the middle of the 12th century at the latest, the early *Syam* must have come down from the northeastern uplands to populate the riverine city and rename it *Ta Göng*, which, then, would become a “conquered land” of Narapatisithu in the late 12th century. However, as Burmese hold on the city was not firm enough, or it might have been taken by a non-Burman people, Pagan had to fight the “Tagaung War” in 1228, whereby Burmese authority over the city was finally established.³³

Meanwhile, Burmese chronicles have no reference to the “Tagaung War,” nor do they mention even a single combat between the early *Syam* and a Pagan army. Not only the chronicles, but none of the five hundred Pagan inscriptions contained in the *SMK* refers to a military conflict between them. The paucity of military records is somewhat surprising given that Burma-Shan warfare was one of the main features throughout the history of the region until the very end of the Burmese monarchy in 1886. Conceivably, large-scale downward *Syam* thrusts from the surrounding hills into the extensive plains of the Irrawaddy, which would become increasingly active in the 14th century, had yet to begin. As the early *Syam* were predominantly confined to the upland interstices with their chiefs mutually independent from each other, they were not politically unified under one suzerain to mobilize their resources for a large military operation. They were only experienced in tribal feuds, but never in “interstate” warfare. Furthermore, as interior highlanders, they had very limited access to advanced military strategy and technology, and thus well recognized their fighters were no match for the well-armed and organized Pagan forces that could even penetrate into Yunnan, well beyond the Chinese frontier in the mid-1270s. However, these disadvantages, derived from geopolitical factors, altogether changed positively for the early *Syam* after the arrival of the Mongols in the region on their way to Pagan in the 1270s.

³¹ *SMK*, I, 66. Tagaung is the Burmese pronunciation of a Tai word, *Ta Göng*, literally, “Ferry of Drum.” Together with Tagaung, the city of Ngahsaunggyan (possibly another toponym of Tai origin), located around modern Bhamo, is described in the inscription as the northern boundary of Pagan.

³² Than Tun, “History of Burma 1000-1300,” pp. 7-8.

³³ The war was fought against either *Syam* or *Kadu*, a linguistically distinct group still identifiable in the 20th century. G. H. Luce, “Geography of Burma under the Pagan Dynasty,” p. 49; idem, “Old Kyaukse and the Coming of the Burmans,” p. 76; idem, “Peoples of Burma,” p. 58; Than Tun, “Social Life,” p. 38.

The early *Syām* in China's historiography

Ancestors of the various Tai-speaking groups are called *Baiyi* in the Chinese literature. The term, written “White Clothes,” first appears in the *Xin Tangshu*, in which the “*Baiyi* Death-devoted Army” constituted the main force in the Nanchao campaign to the Annam Protectorate located in the modern Hanoi area in the mid-9th century.³⁴ Two texts dating to the Song dynasty, *Zhufan Zhi* and *Lingwai Daida*, also refer to the *Baiyi* who inhabited to the west of Annam, i.e., the upper Red and Black River region of northwestern Vietnam, southeastern Yunnan and northern Laos.³⁵ Meanwhile, in southwestern Yunnan, according to the later Yuan account, in the time of the Dali Kingdom under the Duan Clan that had replaced Nanchao in the mid-10th century, the *Baiyi* and other barbarians eventually regained their former lands, and thereafter “slowly began to flourish.”³⁶ This indicates that the ancestral group of the *Syam* had for centuries established their power base in the southwestern corner of Yunnan, the gateway to Upper Burma along the river valleys. They had come into contact, whether amiable or hostile, with the Kingdom of Pagan by the end of the 12th century at the latest, when King Narapatisithu of Pagan claimed his territory extended northward to Ngahsaunggyan, probably the first large town or stockade of Burma after a “long descent” from the Yunnan Plateau.

Then came the Mongols. In 1253-54, by the order of his elder brother, Mongke Khan, the future Khubilai Khan led his troops across the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, penetrated into the deep valleys of Yunnan and swept the city of Dali, successor to the old Nanchao Kingdom that had once maintained extensive influence over the northern uplands of mainland Southeast Asia.³⁷ One of Khubilai's generals, named Uriyangqatai, son of a trusted commander of Genghis Khan, continued the military campaign during the following years,³⁸ as a result of which, for the first time in its history, Yunnan was administratively and economically integrated into China proper.³⁹

Because the Mongol campaign in Yunnan was part of a larger military operation against the Southern Song, and thus moved from Dali eastward to modern

³⁴ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 174n; *XTS*, p. 6282.

³⁵ Yang Bowen, *Zhufan Zhi Jiaoshi*, p. 1; Yang Wuquan, *Lingwai Daida Jiaozhu*, p. 55. This triangular area is thought to be the place of origin for the southern Tai group, the “ancestor of all the Tai peoples of Laos, Thailand, Burma, northeastern India, and southern Yunnan”. Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 6.

³⁶ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 128; *YS*, p. 1482. Their lands had been formerly conquered, and the people evacuated to resettle elsewhere, by the sixth king of Nanchao who reigned in the late 8th and early 9th century.

³⁷ *YS*, pp. 58-60.

³⁸ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” pp. 125-6; *YS*, pp. 2979-81. He further made his way along the Red River down into Vietnam, which he could subdue.

³⁹ The Han and Tang dynasties occasionally maintained garrison stations along the main routes in Yunnan, but never exercised effective control over the entire region.

Kunming and other stockades, the area to the west of Yongchang seems to have been relatively unaffected by the campaign. Therefore the Mongols had to wait another several years until various chiefs of the native peoples, including the *Baiyi*, came to accept Mongol suzerainty and a tributary relationship with the Khan. This led to the establishment in 1261 of *Jinchidengchu Anfusi* [Pacification Commission of Jinchi and Other Places] to secure administrative control over the “barbarians” occupying the southwestern corner of Yunnan.⁴⁰

Despite these administrative and diplomatic measures taken by the Mongols, native insurgences started, and forced the central government to dispatch punitive forces in 1268 and again in 1270,⁴¹ and to divide the *Anfusi* into two in 1271, with jurisdiction over the East and West Routes respectively, to keep a closer watch over local affairs.⁴² As domains of the *Baiyi* and other native peoples began to take Mongol vassalage, the buffer zone between Burma and China became increasingly slender, which would eventually and inevitably lead to direct contact, largely military in nature, between them.

In 1271, the year Khubilai’s dynasty was officially named *Da Yuan*, the first Mongol envoys visited the Pagan court to demand submission. But they failed to have an audience with King Narathihapate, only returning to the newly founded capital, Dadu, modern Beijing, with their Burmese counterparts.⁴³ The next diplomatic mission with an “imperial letter threatening invasion” was dispatched two years later, but the Pagan monarch, instead of officially expressing declination to submit to the Khan, detained them.⁴⁴ With no expectation to yield an immediate submission from Narathihapate, the *Yunnan Xingsheng* [Branch Secretariat of Yunnan] insisted on the pacification of Burma in 1275, which was dissuaded by Khubilai, who was then predominantly preoccupied with the final campaign against the Southern Song. The next year the Yunnan government embarked upon major administrative reform to secure control over the Sino-Burmese boundary area,⁴⁵ promoting the *Jinchi Anfusi* to *Xuanfusi*, under which came the *Liu Lu Zongguan Fu* [Six Headquarters of Route

⁴⁰ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 128; *YS*, p. 1482. The term *Jingchi* (lit. Gold Teeth) once referred to a group(s) belonging to the Mon-Khmer language family, who habitually covered their front teeth with gold. Eventually, it also came to mean the territory they occupied, and even to indiscriminately designate the native peoples, including *Baiyi*, living in the Sino-Burmese border region.

⁴¹ *YS*, p. 3012; *Zhaobu Zonglu*, f° 8.

⁴² *YS*, p. 1482. “Route [*lu*] was stably defined territory administered by a Route Commander [*Zongguan*], with place name pre-fix.” LNCH, p. 79n.

⁴³ The following account is based on Luce, “Early *Syām*,” pp. 130-31 and *YS*, pp. 4655-56, unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁴ Note that the Burmese chronicle has a seemingly related story that Narathihapate, despite strong opposition by his ministers, killed Mongol envoys. The year of the killing was 1281, not the early 1270s, though. *UK*, I, 298.

⁴⁵ The *dili zhi* [Treatise on Geography] of the *YS* states that the reform took place in 1278 but an account of the *benji* [Basic Annals] of Khubilai, and other entries in the *dili zhi* suggest it was in 1276. *YS*, pp. 177, 1482-83.

Commanders], mostly headed by native chiefs of Tai descent.⁴⁶

Seeing bordering Tai domains, one by one, falling into the Mongol orbit, the Pagan court in 1277 dispatched myriad troops with armed elephants and horses from the plains of the Irrawaddy through the *Syam* lands up to the Yunnan Plateau, attacking Gan-e, presumably a Tai domain on the Daying River, and even trying to build stockades between Tengyue and Yongchang, major garrison towns in southwestern Yunnan. The Burmese forces were soon repulsed by the Mongols, who, according to a rather lengthy proud account in the *YS*, allowed few Pagan soldiers to find their way home alive. Now the Tai of the borderland were witnessing in their backyard two neighboring “empires in collision”, in which they would be inevitably and increasingly involved.

In 1277-78, the Mongols took the offensive, marching through the Baiyi zone, and, after a “long descent” from the Plateau, encroached upon the Irrawaddy Valley. They reached as far south as Kaungzin and subdued 300 stockades, many of which were probably ruled by native Tai chiefs.⁴⁷ This would be followed the next year by another expedition of Yunnan troops to further tighten their control over the Burma-China borderland, which resulted in summoning another 300 stockades to surrender and registering 120,200 households, as well as “the fixing of the taxes and land-rents and setting up of post-stages and garrison troops.”⁴⁸ These two rather small campaigns were aimed only at becoming acquainted with the geopolitical configuration of the Irrawaddy Valley,⁴⁹ and to settle the restless frontier conditions, preparatory to a far greater military operation against Pagan.

In September 1283, a large army left the capital of Yunnan heading westward and early the following year the Yuan troops reached Tagaung, “Burma’s nest and hole,” which they took and later named *Zhengmian Sheng*, the Branch Secretariat of Conquering Burma.⁵⁰ The territorial extension beyond the traditional boundary of Yunnan down to Tagaung on the Irrawaddy, and the subsequent conquest of the city of Pagan, led the Mongols to the encounter with domains of the early *Syam* within the border of modern Burma, which necessitated the setting up of new Route administration offices at Mubang, Mengguang and Yunyuan, to name only the important ones.⁵¹ These three Routes were of direct relevance to the affairs of Upper Burma, as they corresponded, respectively, to Hsenwi, Mogaung (Mäng Kōng in Tai), and Mohnyin (Mäng Yang), major “Shan States” playing a significant role in

⁴⁶ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” pp. 128-29; *YS*, p. 1482. One of the six headquarters was Luchuan, the Mao heartland.

⁴⁷ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 133; *YS*, p. 4657.

⁴⁸ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 133; *YS*, p. 3067.

⁴⁹ In early 1280 Yunnan officials, in requesting the pacification of Pagan, reported to Khubilai, “The geographic configuration of the *Mian* [Burma/Myanmar] kingdom has been captured in our eyes.” *YS*, p. 4657.

⁵⁰ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” pp. 135-38; *YS*, p. 4658.

⁵¹ *YS*, pp. 1463, 1484; *Zhaobu Zonglu*, f° 4.

the history of post-Pagan Burma.⁵² The heartland of Burma was now surrounded by a long and broad crescent of *Syam* domains.

During the more than twenty-year Yuan-Pagan war, the Mongol *Zhengmian* forces, on their way to and from the *Mian* kingdom, made numerous marches through the Baiyi lands, where uncountable native people were levied to the expeditions.⁵³ The service in the Mongol military brought the Baiyi into direct contact with the most advanced military technology and strategy the world had ever seen,⁵⁴ and the participation in the *Zhengmian* campaign acquainted them with the geopolitical configuration of Upper Burma, into which they would make repeated incursions. In 1303, two years after the end of siege warfare at Myinzaing, which was the last Mongol expedition against Burma and a total failure, *Zhengmian* Province, with its large garrison of 14,000 men, was abolished.⁵⁵ The complete withdrawal of the Mongols from Upper Burma in 1303 created a large power vacuum to be filled by the Baiyi, who, according to the very contemporary Chinese record, were “flourishing the most among the southwestern barbarians.”⁵⁶ The early *Syam* no longer thought they were no match for the Burmese troops, who were now in a disadvantaged position without direct access to Yuan China.⁵⁷ Western mainland Southeast Asia was about to experience the Tai century.

The early *Syām* and the Pinya-Sagaing dynasts

After the disintegration of the kingdom of Pagan at the turn of the 14th century, the political center of Burma shifted to the Kyaukse region, the chief granary of the kingdom, then under control of the notorious Three Brothers.⁵⁸ Then, in 1312, a new capital city, Pinya, was built by Thihathu, the youngest of the trio, who, while

⁵² For greater Shan involvement in the politics of 15th century Burma, see Fernquest, “Crucible of War,” pp. 48-66. Later in the 1520s, the lord of Mohnyin destroyed Ava, where he installed his son on the throne. While Mohnyin and Mogaung would be “Burmanized” in the late 18th or early 19th centuries, Hsenwi maintained its ruling house, remaining as an influential Shan State until the end of the Burmese monarchy.

⁵³ For example, one Baiyi regiment of 2000 men, probably engaged in a mission of transporting provisions, was additionally called into the battle at Myinzaing to help surround the southern side of the city in 1301. *ZML*, f° 7.

⁵⁴ For a vivid description of the Mongolian use of gunpowder technology in the attack on Baghdad, the “heart of the Arab world,” in 1258, see Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, pp. 182-83.

⁵⁵ Luce, “Early *Syām*,” pp. 163-64.

⁵⁶ Written by Li Jing, a Chinese official assigned a governmental post in Yunnan c. 1300. *Yunnan Zhilüe*, p. 173. Whether the “barbarians” here include *Mian* is not clear.

⁵⁷ They also lost a large profit from the Bay of Bengal trade, as the coastal cities became independent of Upper Burma. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, pp. 121-22.

⁵⁸ The “Shan” ancestry of the trio has been questioned by Aung-Thwin, which in turn has been refuted by Aye Chan. For relevant discussions, see Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History*, chap. 5, “The Myth of the Three Shan Brothers,” and Aye Chan, “Shan Domination.”

maintaining tributary relationship with the Yuan court,⁵⁹ became the founder of the Pinya and Sagaing dynasties that would be together destroyed by the *Syam* from the north in the 1360s.

The “fall” of the kingdom of Pagan, however, did not fundamentally alter the cultural and social structure of the Burmese world centered on the Irrawaddy Basin.⁶⁰ The people of the Pinya-Sagaing period still donated lands and “slaves” to religious institutions, and left inscriptions to commemorate their votive donations, just as their parents and ancestors had done during the Pagan period. Thus, the *Syam* were still recorded in the inscriptions of Pinya-Sagaing as “slaves” dedicated to Buddhist churches,⁶¹ and the familiar *Syam* toponym, *Khanti*, was also mentioned in 1310 among donations to the religious sector as a site for constructing a reservoir.⁶²

Although the disintegration of Pagan did not bring a fundamental, immediate change to the cultural and social sphere of the Burmese world, in which the *Syam* still maintained their former social roles, it did transform the geopolitical condition in the Irrawaddy Basin, which consequently invited *Syam* incursions into Central Burma. Thihathu thus had to repulse the troops of Onbaung and Maing-hkaing,⁶³ the first explicit mention by the Old Burmese inscription of the toponym of Tai origins other than Khanti and Tagaung. It is also the first reference, either in epigraphy or chronicle, to the battle between the Burmese monarch and *Syam* powers, which would continue until the very end of the classical state of Burma in the 1880s. The battles must have occurred before 1324, as Thihathu, who fought the *Syam* forces, presumably reigned until that year,⁶⁴ and must have taken place in or around Central Burma, as the inscription states that Thihathu “drove out” the *Syam* forces of Onbaung and Maing-hkaing, rather than going on an expedition against these domains. The battle, fought in the vicinity of the “heartland” of Burma, clearly

⁵⁹ The *YS* records tributary missions from *Mian* during the reign of Thihathu, in 1308, 1315, 1319, and 1321. Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 164; *YS*, 494, 590, 611.

⁶⁰ Bennett concludes, “There is no clear evidence of any extensive or widespread damage to the economic structure of society following the Chinese invasions of 1277-1301.” Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” p. 4.

⁶¹ See, for example, *SMK*, III, 211, 307, 328.

⁶² *SMK*, III, 247.

⁶³ *SMK*, III, 331. Onbaung is *Ungpōng* in Tai, modern Hsipaw (Sipō). Maing-hkaing (not to be confused with Maing-kaing located to the south of Hsipaw) should be either *Māng Khūng* or *Khāng* in Tai, located in the vicinity of Wuntho to the west of the Irrawaddy. As the two domains lay wide apart, their alliance could not be a realistic option. Probably they marched down to the Irrawaddy Plains separately on different occasions.

⁶⁴ While *UK* and *HMN*, though offering different lengths to Thihathu’s reign, 22 and 24 years respectively, agree with each other on the final year of the reign, 1322; the *YT* claims that Thihathu reigned for 16 years and was succeeded by his son, Uzana, in 1319. *UK*, I, 324; *HMN*, I, 377; *YT*, I, 374-76. According to Than Tun, who scrutinized Old Burmese inscriptions, Thihathu was succeeded by his son in 1324. Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 123. Aung-Thwin makes the reign yet longer, until 1332, which, however, must be a misprint for 1322. Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History*, p. 117.

indicates the growing tendency of the highland *Syam* toward downward thrusts into the Irrawaddy Basin during the period of political fragmentation, including the split of the Burmese capital into Pinya and Sagaing, after the “fall” of Pagan.⁶⁵ Whatever the nature of the battle, Thihathu could manage to drive out the *Syam* of Onbaung and Maing-hkaing, which might have resulted in one Onbaung queen at the court of either Pinya or Sagaing.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Chinese sources report military actions taken by another ambitious *Syam* domain, Hsenwi, stating that in 1319 Daibang, the lord of Hsenwi, made a raid (on the territory of Yuan China), and in 1325 another lord of Hsenwi, Bamiao, leading a Baiyi army, attacked an unidentified stockade called Bahuang.⁶⁷ Also, in 1325 a force of Baiyi invaded Yunlong prefecture, to the northeast of Yongchang and northwest of Dali, far beyond the traditional boundary of the Baiyi territory in the southwestern corner of Yunnan.⁶⁸ The Baiyi, or early *Syam*, became increasingly active militarily, expanding their boundary into the spheres of Burmese and Chinese influence.

The raids by Onbaung and Maing-hkaing on the Irrawaddy Basin were only the beginning of a series of military struggles between the newly emerging and threatening *Syam* powers and the Pinya-Sagaing dynasties that, after the death of the founder, Thihathu, were weakened by internal and inter-dynastic conflicts. According to the Yuan account, in 1324 the prince of *Mian*, *Wuzhena* (Uzana of Pinya) and others were contending for power, and tribute was not sent as regulated, so the emperor ordered the Yunnan government to admonish them.⁶⁹ Two years later, the “*Mian* kingdom was again in turmoil,” and Dalibiya (Tryaphya of Sagaing) asked for military intervention by the Mongols.⁷⁰ The next year, Tryaphya requested the Yuan court to set up again a Branch Secretariat at Myinzaing, which was rejected.⁷¹ Although it is not exactly clear what was disturbing which *Mian* kingdom, Pinya or

⁶⁵ Besides the *Syam* from the north, Toungoo, Taungdwingyi and Yamethin from the south were posing a threat to Thihathu, who thus had to marry his only princess to the ruler of either Taungdwingyi or Yamethin. Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” p. 21; *UK*, I, 319-20; *YT*, I, 175.

⁶⁶ *SMK*, IV, 6. According to the editorial board of the *SMK*, this inscription was inscribed around 1338. Whether this Onbaung queen was a token of vassalage by the *Syam* ruler is unknown. As she was not a concubine, but a queen, *mibaya* (*mihapura*) in Burmese, the marriage more likely represents partnership, if not friendship, between the Burmese monarch and the *Syam* lord.

⁶⁷ *YS*, p. 592; *Zhaobu Zonglu*, ff° 7-8.

⁶⁸ *YS*, p. 659.

⁶⁹ *YS*, p. 651. Uzana succeeded his stepfather, Thihathu. The contenders may have included a certain person named Sithu and Kyawswa. The former, whose family background is totally unknown, succeeded Uzana in 1340; while Kyawswa, also known as the Lord of Five White Elephants and a stepbrother of Uzana, ascended the throne in 1344.

⁷⁰ *YS*, p. 683. The *UK* states Tryaphya succeeded his stepbrother, the real son of Thihathu, the first ruler of Sagaing, in 1330, while the *YT* and *HMN* claim it was in 1322. *UK*, I, 334; *YT*, I, 190; *HMN*, I, 389. According to Than Tun, Tryaphya was crowned on 5 February 1327. Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 126; *SMK*, III, 308. The date might have been a founding day of the inscription.

⁷¹ *YS*, p. 683.

Sagaing, and what forced Tryaphya to turn to Yuan China, the tension between the two cities, besides possible incursions from the south by Toungoo or Taungdwingyi, should be the main cause.⁷²

In any case, the political equilibrium between the twin capitals seems to have been maintained, and a tribute mission to the Yuan court, from either Pinya or Sagaing, was recorded in 1332.⁷³ Then, suddenly in 1338, in response to the request made by Uzana of Pinya, the *Bangya Dengchu Xuanweisi Duyuanshuaifu Bing Zongguanfu* [Chief Marshal Office of the Pacification Commission-cum-Route Command of Pinya and Other Places] was set up.⁷⁴

Although internally and externally weakened,⁷⁵ the Pinya-Sagaing dynasts could still manage to engage the *Syam*, as an epigraph mentions that in 1341 or 1342 the “Lord of the White Elephant” went up to the “*Syam* war” and returned.⁷⁶ Then in 1356, a Burmese general appointed by King Thihapate of Sagaing (reigned 1352-1364) went to fight the “Battle of Chindwin.” He won the battle, whereby “Maw was besieged” and he was rewarded by the pleased king.⁷⁷ This was the last recorded Burmese offensive against the *Syam*, who then took the upper hand. In 1359 the land of King Kyawswa of Pinya was destroyed by the *Syam*, the first successful Tai invasion of Central Burma ever recorded.⁷⁸ The country was disturbed again in 1362

⁷² According to the chronicle account, the father of Tryaphya was not Thihathu, but a mere commoner, who had married Tryaphya’s mother, also of non-royal descent, before her marriage with Thihathu. *UK*, I, 318-19. Therefore Tryaphya had no princely blood, which must have undermined his royal legitimacy.

⁷³ *YS*, p. 802.

⁷⁴ *YS*, p. 846. What was behind Uzana’s rather sudden request is totally unclear, as no related chronicle or epigraphic accounts are available.

⁷⁵ In Sagaing, Tryaphya was dethroned and imprisoned by his own son in the mid-1330s. A few years later Tryaphya somehow succeeded to have his son, the reigning monarch, killed, but he too was killed by a powerful minister, who then installed the son of the first ruler of Sagaing on the throne. *UK*, I, 334-35.

⁷⁶ Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 129; *SMK*, IV, 27. According to the account of the inscription, this Lord was Kyawswa of Sagaing, although the chronicles do not mention that he owned a white elephant. While Than Tun says that the lord won the battle, the lithic record does not explicitly claim his victory. The chronicles are silent on this battle.

⁷⁷ Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 129. Thihapate is known as Minpyauk in the chronicles. As the battle was called “Battle of Chindwin,” it must have taken place somewhere along or near the Chindwin River, in the upper part of which was located Kale, a major *Syam* domain. But the Burmese literature does not usually designate the *Syam* of Upper Chindwin “Maw (Mao),” the ethnonym restrictedly applied to the Tai of the Upper Shweli Valley, modern Sino-Burmese border region. One possibility is that the “Maw,” as a result of territorial expansion, ruled over the Upper Chindwin Valley at the time, which is fairly possible according to contemporary Chinese sources. This issue will be discussed in due course.

⁷⁸ Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 124. Burmese chronicles do not refer to this event, and the *SMK* does not contain this inscription. Therefore it is not clear whether these *Syam* were of “Maw” or of other places. This *Syam* campaign must have devastated a large area of the Irrawaddy Basin, not only in the vicinity of Pinya, but also that of Sagaing, as the *Syam* army had to march through the region before they reached Pinya.

by *Syam* inroads.⁷⁹ Then, finally in 1364, both Pinya and Sagaing fell to the Tai Mao troops led by Thohkyibwa, younger brother of the Mao sovereign, “Lord of 900,000 Men,”⁸⁰ who was, according to the chronicle account, solicited by Narathu, King of Pinya, for coming down to plunder the rival city, Sagaing.⁸¹ By devastating the two dynastic powers on equilibrium across the Irrawaddy, and by causing a great demographic change around the Irrawaddy Basin,⁸² the *Syam* incursions paved the way for the foundation of a new Burmese dynasty centered at Ava that, with its vicinity, would intermittently remain as the capital of successive Burmese kingdoms until 1886 when the British abolished the last classical state of Burma.

The rise of Mäng Mao under the Pax Mongolica

While Burmese literature contains scarce information on the early history of Mäng Mao before its attack on the twin capitals, the *Yuan Shi* offers some references to the powerful Tai kingdom, calling it Luchuan, where a *Zongguanfu* [Route Command] was established in 1276.⁸³ In 1330, a *tuguan* [aboriginal official] of Luchuan sent tribute to the Yuan court.⁸⁴ Although it is not clear whether this *tuguan* was Säkhanpha,⁸⁵ Mäng Mao at the time was only one of the local Baiyi regimes tributary to Yuan China. It had yet to lay claims to suzerainty over even its immediate neighbors, not to say the remote domains beyond the Salween and Irrawaddy, as the

⁷⁹ Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 124. Again, the chronicles do not mention this event. A fragmented inscription dated 1362 seems to refer to this invasion, though I am not sure; it says that *Syam* came when King (Thihathu III of Pinya?) on his way to Lower Burma stayed at Magway along the Irrawaddy. *SMK*, IV, 127. Than Tun, based on an inscription dated 1400, gives 1360 as the year when Thihathu III died. The chronicles present different regnal years and even different kings from those found in the epigraphy.

⁸⁰ Known as *Thohanbwa* to the contemporary Burmese and *Sikefa* to the Chinese, the Mao lord was in Tai called *Säkhanpha*, who was the most awe-provoking and powerful king illustrated with many legends in the northwestern Tai world. One legend claims that he was once clawed by a tiger, an incarnation of the local spirit, on his back, thus obtaining the name, *Säkhanpha*, “Tiger-Clawed Lord.”

⁸¹ *UK*, I, 336; *HMN*, I, 392-393. Because Narathu broke his word to support the Mao forces upon their attack on Sagaing, he was carried away by the Tai, hence posthumously named Maw-pa-Narathu, “Narathu who was carried away by the Maw.”

⁸² An inscription of 1375 refers to refugees from the Irrawaddy Basin who “flocked into Toungoo consequent on the downfall of Sagaing and Pinya.” Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” p. 24.

⁸³ *YS*, pp. 1482-83. Other Route Commands were also set up, mostly in the present-day Dehong prefecture.

⁸⁴ *YS*, P. 750. Besides paying homage to the new Khan, enthroned the previous year, the envoys were perhaps also assigned the mission of furtively observing the Mongol court that had been divided by the powerful clans for several years. A few months later Hsenwi also sent an embassy with the same aim.

⁸⁵ Local Tai chronicles, the *PMS* and *YMGJ*, state that he ascended the throne in 1311, whereas the *MGZ* says he did so in 1336. *PMS*, p. 191; *YMGJ*, p. 41; *MGZ*, p. 79.

YS a few months later also records a separate tributary mission from the *tuguan* of Hsenwi called Hundou.⁸⁶

In a decade, however, Mäng Mao rapidly rose to transregional paramountcy, against which a punitive Yunnan force was sent in 1342.⁸⁷ The first Yuan expedition was most likely repulsed by Säkhanpha, as the *YS* four years later reports, “Sikefa is invading and plundering Routes and Districts [under Yunnan administration],” and the Yuan court consequently ordered the Yunnan authorities to pacify Luchuan.⁸⁸ The second campaign was not very successful either, although the *YS* claims that the Prince of Yunnan came to present the spoils of war with Luchuan to the Khan in 1347.⁸⁹ During the waning years of the dynasty, the imperial house had been severely weakened by the internal power struggles among the dominant clans supported by influential ministers since the 1320s, and thus was unable to mobilize a large, powerful military force into the southwestern periphery of the vast empire to subdue a rapidly rising native power.

Besides the series of internal power struggles that had shaken the foundation of the throne, Yuan China was also suffering from widespread revolts that particularly devastated southern China where several rebel leaders established their own regimes. Sending a punitive expedition against the peripheral area far beyond the region under control of the rebels was thus no longer a realistic option for the Yuan court. Therefore, when a tributary mission led by Mangsan, son of Sikefa, arrived in 1355, about a decade before the final fall of the Mongol capital to the Chinese rebels, the Yuan court was only too glad to appoint Sikefa as *Xuanweishi* [Pacification Commissioner] of Pingmian.⁹⁰

This was, of course, merely a nominal suzerain-vassal relationship between an emperor in the remote capital and a local sovereign with considerable regional authority. A near-contemporary Chinese account thus remarks, “Although Säkhanpha sent tribute and accepted the official calendar of the Yuan dynasty [a token of vassalage], he exceeded the imperial regulation of proper dress and utensils allowed for a vassal, which was beyond the control of the Yuan authorities. Thereafter began the powerful Baiyi [i.e. Mäng Mao].”⁹¹ Now totally freed from the “Tatar Yoke” in the east, Mäng Mao could concentrate its military resources on the southern campaign, and began to launch a series of incursions into Central Burma, eventually bringing the final blow to the twin capitals, Pinya and Sagaing, in 1364.

Available evidence is uninformative on the administrative organization of

⁸⁶ *YS*, p. 755. As seen above, Hsenwi’s repeated raids on the territory of Yuan China from the late 1310s to the mid-1320s are recorded by the *YS*, while no report on Mäng Mao’s military action prior to the 1340s is available.

⁸⁷ *YS*, p. 865.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 875.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 877.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2340.

⁹¹ *BZJ*, p. 146.

the powerful Baiyi polity. Jon Fernquest has thus posed a relevant question, “Was Mong [Māng] Mao a fully integrated state (c. 1340-1454) or was it only a loosely held together chieftainship with decentralized and diffuse power?” He has aptly concluded that “there was a level of political integration not yet that of a fully developed state,” and that the Mao polity was based on a “network of chieftainships that joined together occasionally for a common purpose in tenuous and changing confederations.”⁹² Christian Daniels remarks, Māng Mao and other Tai polities “seemed to have been leagues or alliances of basin polities that were frequently prone to fission on the downfall of charismatic leaders.”⁹³ In terms of the political structure, then, Māng Mao was similar to Sukhothai under King Ramkhamhæng, its glorious Tai brethren, where

all but the core of the kingdom remained separated into small müang units, each with its own ruler; and the relationships between local rulers and the king were defined by the relative power of the individuals concerned and confined to the duration of their lifetimes (Wyatt 2003: 45).⁹⁴

Furthermore, the Mao polity can also be compared to another famous Tai brethren, Lan Na, which was a “conglomerate of city-states [müang/māng], some of them quite independent at times, but usually accepting the authority of the powerful city-state Chiang Mai.”⁹⁵

Two factors are thought to have particularly contributed to the huge and rapid expansion of Māng Mao under Sākhanpha. The first is closely associated with its military strength, which could be partially ascribed to the leadership of Sākhanpha, the “Tiger-Clawed Lord.”⁹⁶ As stated above, the charismatic nature of the leader was the key to building a network of chieftainships that constituted the vast confederation. Besides a commander’s personal military and spiritual prowess, the Mao army, as stated above, took great advantage of the Mongol-derived advanced military strategy and technology, especially firearms and cavalry, the two outstanding features of the Khan forces.⁹⁷

⁹² Fernquest, “Crucible of War,” p. 66.

⁹³ This is Fernquest’s personal communication with Daniels in 2006, quoted in “Crucible of War,” p. 30.

⁹⁴ Wyatt (2003, 51) also notes, “The vast confederation of Ramkhamhæng’s Sukhothai had disintegrated on his death.”

⁹⁵ Hans Penth, “On the History of Chiang Rai,” p. 12. Grabowsky and Liew-Herres also argue (*LNCH*: 71) that, contrary to the widely accepted view, “Lan Na was never a firmly unified kingdom with Chiang Mai as her undisputed political center. Even during the fifteenth century when Lan Na was experiencing her ‘golden age’ it was not the case.”

⁹⁶ According to the accounts of the local chronicles, he was not a legitimate successor, and, by implication, a usurper, who could make his way to the throne.

⁹⁷ Horses were traditionally raised in Yunnan and exported to the Southern Song, and even to Vietnam and Champa, directly or via the Song. With the horses, argue some Chinese scholars,

The second factor derived from the favorable economic and commercial conditions of Yunnan and the empire as a whole, from which Māng Mao readily and enormously benefited. Khubilai Khan, unlike previous traditional Chinese dynasts, officially encouraged and generously supported trade by issuing paper currency, extending the Grand Canal connecting Southern China to his capital, constructing roads, and developing the postal relay system, *ortoo* or *yam*, in his newly acquired territory.⁹⁸ In addition, the agents of trade could receive governmental loans at low interest through an official agency called the “General Administration for the Supervision of the *Ortoogh*” established by Khubilai in 1268.⁹⁹ The status of merchants, formerly a rank above robbers, acquired an unprecedented elevation, “second only to government officials,”¹⁰⁰ and they therefore became the “group that benefited the most from Khubilai’s policies.”¹⁰¹

Furthermore, despite his pastoral-nomad origins, Khubilai was not an inland- or steppeland-looking cavalry headman, but an ocean-oriented mercantile leader. The Mongol Empire inherited from the Southern Song a naval power that had served as “mere guardians of the coastal and river districts.”¹⁰² Khubilai expanded and transformed the Song navy into a large oceangoing fleet, whereby Yuan China became the first oceanic power in the world.¹⁰³ Besides the navy, Khubilai also took over command of a large group of seagoing Muslim merchants under the leadership of Pu Shougeng, who, also a Muslim, had previously served the Song government and, under the Mongol regime, continued to take charge of the famed port of Zayton, “one of the largest in the world, perhaps the very largest.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, although Anthony Reid remarks, “There was . . . a distinct lull in the seaborne trade for almost a century before 1370,”¹⁰⁵ textual records and archaeological findings indicate quite the opposite.

cavalry spread to eastern mainland Southeast Asia. Bin Yang, “Horses, Silver, and Cowries: Yunnan in Global Perspective,” p. 299. The art of cavalry with the Yunnanese horses must have spread in the opposite direction, eastward to neighboring Māng Mao. Furthermore, the vicinity of Hsipaw and Hsenwi was a well-known horse-rearing area. Cf. Fernquest, “Crucible of War,” p. 60.
⁹⁸ Morris Rossabi, “The Reign of Khubilai Khan,” pp. 449-450; Weatherford, *Genghis Khan*, Chapter 9. With the improved and expanded transport systems, Marco Polo could make an extensive journey within the empire. For his vivid description of the *ortoo* system, see his, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, pp. 125-26.

⁹⁹ Rossabi, “Khubilai Khan,” p. 449. *Ortoogh* comprised “merchant associations composed primarily of Muslims.”

¹⁰⁰ Weatherford, *Genghis Khan*, p. 225. Meanwhile, the social rank of Confucian scholars was profoundly degraded “to the ninth level, just below prostitutes but above beggars.”

¹⁰¹ Rossabi, “Khubilai Khan,” p. 449.

¹⁰² Weatherford, *Genghis Khan*, p. 210.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁰⁴ Muhammad Ibn Battuta, *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, p. 287. Marco Polo states, “for one spice ship that goes to Alexandria or elsewhere to pick up pepper for export to Christendom, Zaiton is visited by a hundred.” Marco Polo, *The Travels*, pp. 200-01.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680 Volume Two: Expansion and Crisis*, pp. 10-12. Cf. Kenneth Hall, “Economic History of Early Southeast Asia,” p. 217. Reid

Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta witnessed Chinese junks at the ports on the Malabar Coast,¹⁰⁶ where the merchants purchased an enormous amount of pepper for Chinese markets. The volume of pepper trade was probably so excessive that the Yuan government imposed restrictions in 1296 on payment by Chinese silk at the ports of the Malabar Coast, such as Quilon and Pandarani.¹⁰⁷ Polo and Ibn Battuta also testified that Chinese porcelain was exported from southern Chinese ports to India and the Middle East, i.e. “all over the world” before the discovery of the New World.¹⁰⁸ Their testimony is attested by the ample findings of Chinese ceramic shards dated to the 13th and 14th centuries along the coasts of southern India and Egypt.¹⁰⁹ Thus, “the [Chinese] ceramics form quite an impressive evidence for the Chinese trade of the 13th and 14th centuries, i.e. during the time of the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties.”¹¹⁰ The trade across the Ocean between China and the Middle East via India was very active, definitely more active than ever, during the 13th and 14th centuries, i.e., the Mongol Century in China.¹¹¹

With two major commercial terminals, Dadu (modern Beijing) for the Silk Road of Central Asia and Zayton with other southern China ports for the seaborne route, or the “maritime Silk Road,” that ultimately extended to the Middle East and beyond, the Mongol Empire, now becoming the “Mongol Corporation,” created a pan-Eurasian trade link, or what is sometimes termed the “Thirteenth-Century World

continues to say, “The relative decline in trade is reflected in the paucity of Chinese porcelain remains for this period in Southeast Asia, especially by contrast with the great abundance after 1400.”

¹⁰⁶ Polo, *The Travels*, pp. 245-48; Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, pp. 234-38.

¹⁰⁷ *YS*, p. 2402-3. Pandarani is variously spelled. See, Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: the Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, pp. 666-67.

¹⁰⁸ Polo, *The Travels*, p. 201; Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, p. 289.

¹⁰⁹ Y. Subbarayalu, “Chinese Ceramics of Tamilnadu and Kerala Coasts,” p. 113. Regarding the discoveries in Egypt, Axelle Rougeulle relates, “A huge amount of contemporary Chinese imports, mostly Longquan celadon, has been brought to light at Fustat, and some similar pieces are, for the first time, recorded on the Red Sea Egyptian coast”. Axelle Rougeulle, “Medieval Trade Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (8-14th Centuries): Some Reflections from the Distribution Pattern of Chinese Imports in the Islamic World,” p. 171.

¹¹⁰ Subbarayalu, “Chinese Ceramics,” p. 113

¹¹¹ Hermann Kulke, based on the “evidence for the presence of a large Indian merchant community in China, and of Chinese traders in southern India” in the 13th century, and the “findings of Chinese ceramics [in port-cities of southern India], the greatest amount of which belong to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,” concludes, “these centuries [thirteenth and fourteenth] were a period of intensive and mostly direct trade relations between southern India and China.” Hermann Kulke, “Rivalry and Competition in the Bay of Bengal in the Eleventh Century and Its Bearing on Indian Ocean Studies,” pp. 30-31. K. N. Chaudhuri, in his influential essay on the trade and civilization of the Indian Ocean, asserts, “By all accounts the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were unusually prosperous in the history of the Indian Ocean trade, in spite of the Mongol advance and the appearance of the plague.” K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, p. 63. Actually, it is not “in spite of,” but “because of” the Mongol advance.

System.”¹¹² In 1340, a Florentine merchant remarked that trade routes from Italy to China, which proceeded through the territories of various Mongolian regimes, “were ‘perfectly safe, whether by day or by night’.”¹¹³ It was the heyday of the era of the Mongol Peace, and it was when Māng Mao became a hegemon of southwestern Yunnan, on the periphery of the Mongol Empire.

Peripheral to the traditional Chinese world of the Central Plains, Yunnan had long been closely connected with Tibet, Southeast Asia, and South Asia by a route network called the Southwest Silk Road.¹¹⁴ This third Silk Road, the main section of which traversed Yunnan and Upper Burma, linked the other two, overland and maritime ones. Khubilai, from his own experience in the military campaign to Yunnan in the early 1250s, deeply recognized the strategic importance and commercial potential of the region, and thus appointed in 1274 a trusted veteran administrator as Grand Councilor of the Branch Secretariat of Yunnan.¹¹⁵ The old official, Saidianchi Zhansiding (Sa’id-I Egeil Sams al-Din), a Muslim, utilized his religious connections to promote a large Muslim migration into Yunnan, whereby trade networks were newly opened, widely developed, and extensively linked with other zones of commerce.¹¹⁶ Muslim traders were the main agents on the Inland, Maritime, and Southwest Silk Roads.

Not only as the crossroads of transregional trade routes, but also as a supplier of valuable commodities, such as horses and precious metals, did Yunnan play a significant role in the overland interactions.¹¹⁷ As stated above, horses had long been locally reared and traditionally exported to the Southern Song where they were

¹¹² Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*.

¹¹³ Weatherford, *Genghis Khan*, p. 224.

¹¹⁴ For a general description of the Southwest Silk Road, see Bin Yang, “Yunnan in Global Perspective,” pp. 285-92. See also Janice Stargardt, “Burma’s Economic and Diplomatic Relations with India and China from Early Medieval Sources.”

¹¹⁵ *YS*, p. 3064. Upon the appointment, Khubilai personally told the appointee, “I myself have once proceeded to Yunnan . . . I need to select a moderate and devoted official who could benevolently preside over the governance, and no one is more suitable for the post than you.”

¹¹⁶ No statistics for the Muslim population in Yunnan during the Yuan period are available, but Muslim migration caused a large demographic change in Yunnan. Marco Polo certainly witnessed Muslims on his visit to the southwestern corner of the empire. Polo, *The Travels*, p. 148. An Arab account dated to the early 14th century states, “the great city of Yachi [modern Kunming]’ in Yunnan was exclusively inhabited by Muslims.” Andrew D. W. Forbes, “The Role of Hui Muslims in the Traditional Caravan Trade between Yunnan and Thailand,” p. 292. Zheng He, the celebrated eunuch admiral who led seven grand naval expeditions to the Indian Ocean in the early Ming dynasty, was a descendent of those Muslim immigrants.

¹¹⁷ The following passages on trade in horses, silver, and cowry between Yunnan and Bengal basically rely on the relevant account of Bin Yang, “Yunnan in Global Perspective,” pp. 294-312, which is in turn partially based on Ranabir Chakravarti, “Early Medieval Bengal and the Trade in Horses: A Note,” John Deyell, “The China Connection: Problems of Silver Supply in Medieval Bengal”, and Hans Ulrich Vogel, “Cowry Trade and Its Role in the Economy of Yunnan: From the Ninth to the Mid-Seventeenth Century.”

desperately needed to provide the advantage of superior cavalry in the century-long warfare with its northern counterparts.¹¹⁸ However, as a result of the Mongol pacification of Yunnan in the 1250s, the eastbound exportation of local horses stopped altogether. Because the Mongols already maintained many sources of high quality warhorses in Inner Asia, they could not be new customers. Eventually Yunnan horses were exported in large quantities westward to Bengal, where they could not be bred, and where they were highly valued for military use.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, Yunnan was also rich in metal resources and mining operations, far larger than those in former times, began under Mongol supervision.¹²⁰ According to official statistics of 1328, the gold mining tax in Yunnan was the greatest in the empire, and that on silver nearly constituted half of the national total. Furthermore, the province maintained the only taxable copper mine of the empire and also produced a fair amount of iron.¹²¹ Among these precious metals, silver also found a market in Bengal where it was sought by the sultanate for coinage. According to analysis by John Deyell, the period 1218-1290 in Bengal witnessed “exhaustion of original stock and sporadic importations of bullion on a limited scale not sufficient to maintain the currency in circulation.” Then, the period 1291-1357 was blessed with a “very large net inflow of bullion on a regular basis and on a greater scale than in the previous century.”¹²² The scarcity of bullion stock before 1290 and large increase in silver inflow into Bengal after 1291 correspond to Polo’s observation that no silver mine was worked in Yunnan in the 1280s. More importantly, the period 1291-1357 exactly coincided with the emergence of various *Syam* powers in the Sino-Burma borderlands and the ultimate ascendancy of Māng Mao over them.

In exchange for the horses and silver, Yunnan imported from the coastal sultanate a large quantity of cowry for local currency. Marco Polo observed in the 1280s that the Yunnanese people used cowry as money, and stated that the seashells came from India.¹²³ Actually it was not from India but from Bengal where cowry, as recorded by Wang Dayuan, the 14th century Chinese traveler, were used side by side with silver coins called *tanka*, minted with the Yunnanese silver, for daily

¹¹⁸ The Southern Song text, *Lingwai Daida*, refers to a governmental office for purchasing horses from Yunnan. Yang Wuquan, *Lingwai Daida Jiaozhu*, pp. 186-91.

¹¹⁹ Chakravarti, “Early Medieval Bengal,” pp. 202-03. Marco Polo noted that considerable numbers of horses were exported from Dali to India (not Bengal). Polo, *The Travels*, p. 150. *Yunnan Gonglu Yunshushi*, p. 38, without specifying the textual source (but probably based on Polo’s account), also states, “Good horses of Yunnan were exported to India during the Yuan.” The exportation of horses to Bengal might have started before the Yuan, but the quantity must have greatly increased after the shutdown of the Song market.

¹²⁰ A local saying goes, “From [the reign of] Khubilai began the gold mining industry” in Yunnan. *Yunnan Gonglu Yunshushi*, p. 39. Curiously, Marco Polo, who is said to have visited Yunnan in the 1280s, observed that there was no silver mine in the region. Polo, *The Travels*, p. 157.

¹²¹ *YS*, pp. 2383-84.

¹²² Deyell, “China Connection,” p. 213.

¹²³ Polo, *The Travels*, pp. 148, 149, 152.

transactions between the natives.¹²⁴ Since the Bengali coast did not yield cowries, the seashells were shipped from the Maldives in exchange for Bengali rice, as witnessed by Wang Dayuan and Ibn Battuta in the first half of the 14th century.¹²⁵ In Yunnan, cowry money was used not only for small purchases at local markets, but also for payment of taxes and government salaries, and purchase of land and houses, thus fulfilling the “functions of modern abstract money.”¹²⁶

Among several trade routes, both seaborne and overland, that could connect Yunnan to Bengal, the principal artery was no doubt the Southwest Silk Road.¹²⁷ After a large descent from the Yunnan Plateau, the path entered Upper Burma, where it divided into two main courses, waterway and overland. The water route in turn largely consisted of two branches: the first one going down the Irrawaddy to either Pagan or Prome, whence overland paths proceeded to either Arakan or Chittagong, whence extended the waterways to Bengal;¹²⁸ the third branch also sailing down the Irrawaddy all the way to the ports on the Burmese littoral, where ships bound for India were available. The alternate land route consisted of two branches: one extending northwestward from Upper Burma via Mogaung and other Tai enclaves through the Hukong Valley to Assam,¹²⁹ and going down the navigable Brahmaputra River to the Ganges Delta; the other route from Upper Burma leading westward to the upper Chindwin River via Kale, ascending the Manipur Hills, following the path to Sylhet then down to Bengal.

Available documents do not furnish much information on which route, seaborne or overland, was more attractive to the merchants who transported bullion and horses from Yunnan to Bengal. Given that in the Medieval Age ships were neither large, well-built, nor heavily armed, with poor navigational systems, oceangoing travel was always with the risk of wreck and piracy. Meanwhile high-value/low-bulk bullion and horses were suitable for overland caravan transport. Therefore, “whenever conditions of peace enforced by armed authority prevailed,” remarks Deyell, “transit by land was competitive with the water mode.”¹³⁰ Burma, after the fall of Pagan, was no longer a unified political entity, and the Irrawaddy route was thus divided into several sections under control of provincial powers and a Mon kingdom in the south. Meanwhile the overland trail from southwestern Yunnan via

¹²⁴ Su Jiqing, *Daoyizhilue Jiaoshi*, p. 330. The use of cowry money in Bengal was still observable in the early 16th century. Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, pp. 93-94.

¹²⁵ Su Jiqing, *Daoyizhilue Jiaoshi*, p. 264; Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, p. 243.

¹²⁶ Vogel, “Cowry Trade, pt. II,” pp. 313-19; Bin Yang, “Yunnan in Global Perspective,” p. 308. In late 17th or early 18th century Lan Na, the monthly salary of Burmese officials was also partially paid with cowry. Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, p. 124.

¹²⁷ The following is based on Deyell, “China Connection,” pp. 219-20, and Map One, p. 225.

¹²⁸ Nicolo Conti, who visited Ava in the early 1440s, seems to have taken this trail. Nicolo Conti, “The Travels of Nicolo Conti,” p. 11.

¹²⁹ Cf. E.R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Map 4 on p. 33 and p. 241.

¹³⁰ Deyell, “China Connection,” pp. 218-19.

northern Burma to Assam, the longest and otherwise most dangerous part of the trade route between Yunnan and Bengal, was secure under a single authority, Māng Mao during Sākhanpha's reign.

According to the contemporary Chinese record, Māng Mao's territory in the 1390s was bounded in the east by Jingtong;¹³¹ in the west by Xitiangula (Manipur or Assam);¹³² in the south by Lan Na; in the north by Tibet; in the southeast by Chiang Rung (of the Sipsong Panna); in the southwest by Burma; in the northeast by Ailao (Yongchang); in the northwest by Xifan and Huige (Northwestern Yunnan).¹³³ The extent of Māng Mao's realm under Sākhanpha was probably more or less the same, or could have been even larger, as Emperor Hongwu, the founder of the Ming dynasty, in 1383 remarked, "I have recently been informed that the territory of Sikefa included 36 Routes. . . . It has been already forty years since those areas were occupied by the barbarians."¹³⁴ The imperial remark probably was an exaggeration, as there were only 37 Routes established in Yunnan under Yuan administration.¹³⁵ Although it seemed impossible for Sākhanpha to pacify almost all the Routes in Yunnan, the Mao territory was certainly extensive with many Routes in western Yunnan under its sway. Within this vast realm readily available were valuable trade items, such as exotic forest and animal products as well as precious stones and metals, including amber, jade, gold, and silver, destined for both Chinese and Bengali markets.¹³⁶

Under the territorial expansion of Māng Mao lay commercial objectives. Māng Mao's repeated eastward incursions into Yunnan during the 1340s were aimed at taking control over local silver mines and other sources of luxury commodities and trade routes branching off from the Southwest Silk Road.¹³⁷ Likewise, its long-distance westward expedition across the Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers to Kale

¹³¹ Jingtong is located to the east of the Mekong, about 120 km from Dali to the southeast.

¹³² Jiang Yingliang, at *BZJ*, p. 37, identifies Xitiangula as Pegu, based on the fact that the Ming established a *Xuanweisi* [Pacification Commission] at Dagula (Great Gula; Pegu) in the early 15th century. However, Pegu lay to the extreme south of Māng Mao, whereas Xitiangula (Indian Gula), not Dagula, was located to its west. Qian Guxun, Ming envoy to Ava and Māng Mao, who was the author of the *Baiyizhuan*, actually visited the Burmese capital, and thus left a geographically correct record, "To the south of the Irrawaddy lie three states, Toungoo, Talaing [i.e. Mon], and Burma [i.e. Ava], and to the west of Burma is Xitian [i.e. India]." *BZJ*, pp. 125-6.

¹³³ Another edition of the *Baiyizhuan* written by Li Sicong, who was the colleague of Qian Guxun, presents a slightly different description of Māng Mao's realm. It was bounded in the east by Jingtong; in the southeast by Chiang Rung; in the south by Lan Na; in the southwest by Burma; in the west by Kale; in the northwest by Xitiangula; in the north by Xifan; in the northeast by Yongchang. Li Sicong, *Baiyizhuan*, p. 146. Note that Xitiangula is located to the northwest of Māng Mao, and Kale, a major Tai domain in the upper Chindwin River, is added to the list.

¹³⁴ *Ming Shilu*, pp. 2414-15.

¹³⁵ *YS*, p. 1457.

¹³⁶ *BZJ*, pp. 118-22.

¹³⁷ Māng Mao might have retained control over the so-called *Dian-Zang Cha-Ma Gudao* [Ancient Road of Tea and Horses between Yunnan and Tibet], by which tea from Sipsong Panna and horses from Tibet were traded.

at the foot of the Manipur Hills and to Assam through icy terrain was designed to secure the “Passage to India” via northern Burma.¹³⁸ Therefore, while dominating the main section of the Southwest Silk Road, Māng Mao under Sākhanpha also functioned as an “export distribution center.”¹³⁹

The trade items and routes told, its agents shall be now discussed. Deyell refers to the Tai as “agent of transmission” of silver within the Mao domain, beyond which the precious metal found its way to Bengal through many intermediaries.¹⁴⁰ Yet we do not have to exclude the possibility that the newly settled Muslim migrants in Yunnan conducted the transport. Actually, as they developed a wide commercial network of overland caravan trade that connected Yunnan with Tibet, Assam, and northern continental Southeast Asia,¹⁴¹ it is more likely that the Yunnanese Muslims were the agent of transmission. After the safe passage through the Mao domain, extending from southwestern Yunnan via northern Burma to Assam, the Muslim caravan entered the Bengali frontier, where they exchanged the trade articles with their Bengali Muslim counterparts. Some of them might have even continued their journey to the Ganges Delta, which was also traveled in a reverse direction by Ibn Battuta when he came up from the Bengali coast to the foot of the Assam Highlands for an audience with a Muslim sage.¹⁴²

Wang Dayuan in the 1330s noticed a pilgrim route from Yunnan to Mecca. Although the Chinese traveler did not explicitly tell whether the route was maritime or overland,¹⁴³ as long as free and safe passage was guaranteed by the Bengal Sultanate, as had been the case with Ibn Battuta, the sea route from Bengal must have been an equally attractive and reasonable alternative for Muslim pilgrims from Yunnan. Zheng He’s grandfather and father are said to have been endowed with an epithet “hajji,” a highly respected title for a Muslim who has made the “hajj” pilgrimage to Mecca. They might have made an oceangoing journey to the Middle East, and the travel information they had accumulated was passed on to Zheng He, who would

¹³⁸ More than a half century earlier before Sākhanpha, Khubilai might have planned the westward campaign even to Bengal, although it was not carried out. Polo, *The Travels*, pp. 189-90. Meanwhile, the Mao campaign to Kale in the upper Chindwin Valley could have been the main cause of the “Battle of Chindwin” of 1356, as a result of which the “Maw was besieged” by the Burmese forces. The *YMGJ*, pp. 47-49, and the *PMS*, pp. 213-21, refer to the Mao expedition with “900,000 soldiers” against Assam, while the chronicle of Assam claims that the members of the Assam ruling house were the descendants of the Māng Mao royalty. Golap Chandra Barna, ed. and trans, *Ahom-Buranji: From the Earliest Time to the End of Ahom Rule*. Cf. Leach, *Highland Burma*, p. 241.

¹³⁹ For a parallel role played by Ayutthaya, see Chris Baker, “Ayutthaya Rising: From Land or Sea?” p. 53.

¹⁴⁰ Deyell, “China Connection,” p. 224.

¹⁴¹ Forbes, “Role of Hui Muslims,” p. 292.

¹⁴² Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, pp. 268-70.

¹⁴³ While Su Jiqing, the annotator of Wang’s work, identifies the route as the one through Burma or Bengal then by westward voyage on the Indian Ocean, Forbes refers to it as an “overland road.” Su Jiqing, *Daoyizhilue Jiaoshi*, p. 352; Forbes, “Role of Hui Muslims,” p. 292.

follow the maritime route with which he was familiar from his childhood.

In sum, growing trans-civilization interactions under the Pax Mongolica, expansion of trade networks by Muslim merchants, development of the mining industry in Yunnan, and increasing Bengali demand for Yunnanese silver and horses, altogether enhanced the economic base of Mäng Mao. Very conveniently located on the Southwest Silk Road, the main artery of Sino-Indian communications, which also connected the Inland and Maritime Silk Roads, the Mao kingdom, as an inland entrepot for Sino-Indian trade and a supplier of exotic commodities, derived enormous benefit from the economic boom. Driven by the commercial necessity to provide east/west-bound mule and pony caravans with the security of cargo, Mäng Mao under Säkhanpha expanded its territory along the trade route and to the sources of commodities. With the further prospect of direct access to the Indian Ocean trade, or due to the feuds with the Pinya/Sagaing dynasts who sent an expedition to fight the “Battle of Chindwin,” the Mao forces made southward incursions into the Irrawaddy Basin. However, they “only raided, looted, and left,”¹⁴⁴ without establishing a branch of the royal house there. Probably the capital area was economically and demographically unattractive and unproductive, as it had yet to recover from the Mongol invasion sixty years earlier, further devastated by the *Syam* incursions in recent years.¹⁴⁵ Probably the Mao raid was only punitive against Burmese territorial ambition northwestward along the Chindwin, the gateway to Manipur and further to Bengal.¹⁴⁶ In any case, the mere conquest of Pinya and Sagaing did not immediately lead to pacification of the entire kingdom and overall control of the Irrawaddy artery down to the Bay of Bengal, which certainly dissuaded the Mao leaders from furthering the military campaign.

The *Syam* in classical Burmese kingship

Both Paul Bennett and Michael Aung-Thwin stress the continuity of the Pagan tradition of kingship in succeeding dynasties.¹⁴⁷ Yet it was not without change. Bennett also remarks, “One attribute to the Pinya/Sagaing rulers does seem to modify Pagan traditions slightly. The 14th-century kings laid great emphasis on their

¹⁴⁴ Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *History of Myanmar*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁵ The lands devastated by the Mongols “became full of jungle” and “were untouched until 1386.” Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 129; Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” pp. 24, 27. The *UK* indirectly describes poverty-stricken Sagaing by stating that upon the conquest of Sagaing, the Mao army could obtain only two old men. *UK*, I, 337.

¹⁴⁶ Access of Sagaing/Pinya to the south, the source of commercial profit from maritime trade, was very limited, if any, as the land between the twin capitals and the coast was under control of their rival cities, such as Toungoo, Taungdwingyi, Prome, Sagu, Yametin, and, most importantly, the Mon kingdom of Lower Burma. This might have turned the attention of the Sagaing/Pinya dynasts to overland trade over the Manipuri Hills with Bengal.

¹⁴⁷ Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” pp. 11-15; Aung-Thwin, *Pagan*, pp. 50, 61.

possession of white elephants. . . . [They were] the physical symbols of the Cakravartin or universal monarch."¹⁴⁸ Another post-Pagan modification to the conceptions of Burmese kingship was immediately made after the Mao sack of the twin capitals, as the fall of Pinya/Sagaing left a devastating impact on the region as well as on the population,¹⁴⁹ and thus fundamentally and perpetually changed the way the Burmese perceived the *Syam*.

A royal order of 1368, declared by King Tryaphya who succeeded Thadominbya, the founder of Ava, was a clear reflection of the psychological change that had quietly prevailed among the ruling elites of the Irrawaddy Basin. The edict was addressed to rulers and chiefs of various domains in the lands of *Syam*, *Yun* (Yuan, i.e. Lan Na), and *Tayok* (China), and to Burmese ministers and officials as well.¹⁵⁰ The *Syam*, together with *Yun* and *Tayok*, here represents an independent political entity, over which a decree of the Burmese monarch was claimed, or wished, to exercise certain influence. The desired claim to suzerainty over these foreign lands symbolizes the change in the essential qualifications for the Burmese monarch after physical and psychological devastation through a series of the wars with the Mongol conquerors and the *Syam* invaders.

By the same token, the inscription of 1375 represents the advent of the change in Burmese conceptions of ideal kingly conduct after the onset of intensifying Shan presence in the affairs of Central Burma. It says:

Just as in the Island of Ceylon where the Religion shone, (and where also) the heretics *Klañ* had completely destroyed the land so that the Island of Ceylon revive and the Religion shine again . . . through the effort done by the great king *Dutthagamani* who was the recipient of the prophecy that he would become the right hand disciple of *Maitrya*, on *Jambudipa* where the Religion shone bright, the country of *Mranma* was also completely destroyed by the heretic *Syam* and yet through the might and wisdom of . . . the great king *Tryaphya* . . . the heretic *Syam* were suppressed and the Religion shone again so that . . . *Awa*, capital of the *Mranma* land became as pleasant as the *Tavatimsa*.¹⁵¹

By comparing “the victory of king *Tryaphya* of Ava over the *dithi* (heretic) *Syam* to *Dutthagamani*’s victory over the Cola *Klañ* heretic, Elara, at Anuradhapura,

¹⁴⁸ Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” pp. 14-15.

¹⁴⁹ The devastating impact on the soil of Central Burma by the *Syam* incursions caused a large southward migratory movement by the inhabitants of the Irrawaddy Basin to Toungoo. Bennett argues, “The destructive Shan inroads of the 1360s probably caused more physical damage than the ‘fall of Pagan’.” He also states, “The evidence of serious economic and social disruption during and after the Shan invasions of 1359-1368 is more striking than that involving the Mongol/Chinese inroads.” Bennett, “Fall of Pagan,” pp. 4, 27.

¹⁵⁰ J. S. Furnivall and Pe Maung Tin eds., *Zambudipa Okhsaung-kyam*, p. 60. This order is also reproduced in *ROB*, I, 149-153.

¹⁵¹ Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” pp. 130-31.

Ceylon, in 101 BC”,¹⁵² the epigraphic account eulogizes Tryaphya for his maintenance of the Buddhist order in the land of Ava that, owing to the royal effort based on Buddhist precepts, became “as pleasant as the *Tavatimsa*.”¹⁵³ Hence, King Tryaphya, faithfully following Buddhist kingly deeds and righteously ruling over a land comparable to the celestial abode, is a clear manifestation of Burmese-Buddhist kingship here. Meanwhile the *Syam* underwent transformation from religious “slave” into the foe of the Religion to be pacified by a *cakkavatti*, “World Ruler, who rolls the wheel of empire (*cakka*) to the earth’s ocean bounds, inducing all kings to submit to the Buddhist Law.”¹⁵⁴ The *cakkavatti* cult was one of the essential components that shaped the Burmese conceptions of kingship, so were the *Syam*, as the significant Other, an integral part of that classical political ideology.¹⁵⁵

Once the presence of the heretic *Syam* became one of the dominant features in the politics of Central Burma, victory over, or more precisely any battle with, the *Syam* would be incorporated into a set of qualifications for a righteous Buddhist monarch in the Burmese context. The change in the way epigraphs describe King Thihathu, the founder of the Pinya-Sagaing dynasty, is especially illustrative in this regard. In an epigraph inscribed during his lifetime, Thihathu is moderately referred to as the king “who ruled over all the *Panya prañ* [land of Pinya].”¹⁵⁶ After his death his realm became somewhat larger, as inscriptions of 1332 and 1342 state that Thihathu ruled over all the land of *Mranma* (Myanmar) after conquering the 900,000 *Khan* soldiers.¹⁵⁷ Then, after the Mao sack of the twin capitals in Central Burma, Thihathu began to be described as “ruling over all *Mranma* and *Syam* lands after conquering the 900,000 *Khan* soldiers.”¹⁵⁸ The phrase “ruling over *Mranma* and *Syam* lands” with some variations would become a customary, distinguished modifier for successive Avan monarchs, who, after engaging *Syam* forces, proudly claimed their suzerainty over the *Syam* land.¹⁵⁹ As Ava’s supremacy over Upper Burma was challenged by the regional centers to the south, whose leaders also called themselves king (*min*), the modifier was indispensable for the Avan monarch to be the king of kings, or the great king (*min-gyi*).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² Luce, “Early *Syām*,” p. 198, n. 199.

¹⁵³ *Tavatimsa* is a heavenly abode of *Sakka*, “the Burmese-Buddhist equivalent of Indra,” who is “the most devout of the *devas* of the Buddha” and “guardian of the moral law in the world.” Aung-Thwin, *Pagan*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ Lieberman, *Administrative Cycles*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁵ Note, however, their conflicts were not “ethnic” but religious in nature. The Avan king fought to defend the welfare of Buddhism from external, heretical invasion and destruction, not for an “ethnic cleansing” of the Shan. See for a relevant criticism of the ethnic framework used to analyze the early history of Burma, Aung-Thwin, “Ava and Pegu.”

¹⁵⁶ *SMK*, III, 253-54.

¹⁵⁷ *SMK*, III, 331; IV, 44.

¹⁵⁸ Than Tun, “History 1300-1400,” p. 131.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, *SMK*, IV, 220, 230, 240, and V, 69.

¹⁶⁰ This holds good especially when the growing *Syam* power was a real threat to the Burmese

Conclusion

In the Pagan epigraphy the early *Syam* are depicted as individual components of Burmese society, not as an autonomous political entity posing a real threat to the Irrawaddy Basin. Neither Māng Mao, Mogaung, Mohnyin, nor Hsenwi are mentioned by any of the Pagan inscriptions. The early *Syam* begin to emerge as a major rival power of the Burmese monarchy in the epigraphy of Pinya and Sagaing, the twin capitals sacked by the Mao forces. It was the military, diplomatic, and commercial contact with the Mongols that transformed the early *Syam* from religious “slave” to archenemy of the Religion. As David K. Wyatt once remarked, “The political transformation of continental Southeast Asia was paralleled by the rise to power of the Mongols in China and the extension of that power into Southeast Asia”.¹⁶¹

The impact of the Mongols on the northern mainland through warfare and exchange of tribute and gifts has been emphasized by scholars like Coedès and Wyatt, and thus well researched.¹⁶² However, their commercial influence, despite its significance in the political transformation of the upland Tai world, has received far less scholarly attention. Admittedly, data on the trade of the interior Tai world in the precolonial period is very scarce. But the academic negligence is also due to what Sun Laichen aptly terms the “maritime mentality,”¹⁶³ which disproportionately focuses on the seaborne interaction when examining Southeast Asian trade.¹⁶⁴ In the case of the upland Tai world, a “shift from a maritime to an overland perspective” is crucial, as the overland commercial impact from Yuan China, especially from neighboring, flourishing Yunnan, was profound. Trade was vital to the economic base of the upland Tai, as was the foundation of Ayutthaya.¹⁶⁵ Not only in the rise of Māng Mao, but also in those of the Sipsong Panna and Lan Na, did the Mongol factor

of the Central Plain, which was the case, as Fernquest (2006) has vividly illustrated. Actually, in western Southeast Asia the *Syam* were as important a political and military power as the Burmese to the Chinese. This is clearly shown by the fact that when the *Siyiguan* [College of Translators for the Barbarians of the Four Quarters] was established by the Ming in 1407, only two out of eight colleges (*guan*) translated Southeast Asian scripts, Baiyi and Mian (Daniels 2012, 152). Note that the colleges of Lan Na and Ayutthaya were founded much later, in 1511 and 1579 respectively.

¹⁶¹ Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 30.

¹⁶² For intense Lan Na-Yuan relations, see *LNCH*, pp. 78-92.

¹⁶³ Sun Laichen, “Military Technology Transfers,” p. 495.

¹⁶⁴ Therefore, the maritime commercial factor in the rise of Ayutthaya has long been studied and well known, making a clear contrast with the interior Tai context.

¹⁶⁵ *The Chiang Mai Chronicle* states, “Commerce was thriving” in the Lan Na region in the 1270s, and “traders from there [Ayutthaya] come [to Haiphunchai].” It also remarks that King Mangrai was determined to take Hariphunchai [modern-day Lamphun] when he heard, “In trade, the people of the domain [Hariphunchai] are very prosperous.” David K. Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeo, eds. and trans., *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, p. 19. Meanwhile, the initial emergence of Ayutthaya as a maritime power, rather than a territorial one, in the late 13th or early 14th century was closely associated with flourishing maritime trade under the Pax Mongolica. Cf. Baker, “Ayutthaya Rising,” p. 55.

play a decisive role. Further research on the “Tai Century” in northern mainland Southeast Asia should also take into consideration the “Mongol Century” in China and Eurasia as a whole, because both were parallel phenomena, in time and space.

Abbreviations

<i>BZJ</i>	Jiang Yingliang, <i>Baiyizhuan Jiaozhu</i>
<i>HMN</i>	<i>Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi</i>
<i>IJAS</i>	<i>International Journal of Asian Studies</i>
<i>JBRS</i>	<i>Journal of the Burma Research Society</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JSEAS</i>	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of the Siam Society</i>
<i>JWH</i>	<i>Journal of World History</i>
<i>LNCH</i>	Liew-Herres Foon Ming and Volker Grabowsky, <i>Lan Na in Chinese Historiography: Sino-Tai Relations as Reflected in the Yuan and Ming Sources</i>
<i>MGJ</i>	Zhaopaya Tanmatie, <i>Heimeng Gumeng: Mengmao Gudai Zhuwangshi</i>
<i>PMS</i>	Renoo Wichasin, <i>Phūn Mūang Sænwi</i>
<i>ROB</i>	Than Tun, <i>Royal Orders of Burma</i>
<i>SBBR</i>	<i>SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research</i>
<i>SMK</i>	Burma, Department of Archaeology, <i>Shei-haung Myanma Kyauksa-myā</i>
<i>UK</i>	U Kala, <i>Mahayazawingyi</i>
<i>XTS</i>	<i>Xin Tang Shu</i>
<i>YMGJ</i>	<i>Yinyunruiwude Meng Guozhanbi Jianshi</i>
<i>YS</i>	<i>Yuan Shi</i>
<i>YT</i>	Twinthintaik Wun Maha Sithu, <i>Myanma Yazawin-thit</i>
<i>ZML</i>	<i>Zhiyuan Zhengmian Lu</i>

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