

Lan Na under Burma: A “Dark Age” in Northern Thailand?

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This article supplements and develops Justin McDaniel’s essay that boldly questions the long-established way the Burmese period of rule over Northern Thailand (c. 1560-1770) has been depicted. Because of the ferocious atrocities committed by the Burmese in the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767, their image in Thai perception is unarguably negative, leading to the customary depiction of their rule in Lan Na as ruthlessly oppressive, and the 200-year period a “dark age.” However, evidence from historical accounts and other fields reveals that was not necessarily the case. Much blame habitually placed by Thai historians on the Burmese is scholarly baseless, albeit ideologically meaningful in the creation of the significant “Other” to define the positive Thai-ness, based on which Thai nationhood is constructed.

The Burmese, according to Thai historical perspective, were aggressive, expansionist, and bellicose. . .

Here . . . the otherness serves as a token of negative identification regardless of what that nation is or does. Other nations have always been blamed for damage and evil. It is convenient for Thai historians to blame the Burmese even for the loss of historical documents. . . (Thongchai 1998: 166)

Without any intention, the image projected in the Thai TV drama represents a fixed set of ideas about the Thai perception of what the Burmese are like. In this, the producer has emphasized the negative image of the Burmese. He dehumanized them, depicting them as monsters who plunder, kill, and rape Thai people. (Sunait 2000: 54)

The height of Burmese rule was between the 1560s and 1750s. This period of more than 200 years has been classified as one of destruction, darkness, oppression, and intellectual stagnation. However, epigraphic, codicological, economic, and archaeological evidence does not indicate that the period of Burmese rule in the region was particularly devastating. . . (McDaniel 2007: 88-9)

Introduction

Justin McDaniel, specialist in Northern Thai Buddhism, wrote a thought-provoking essay (2007) that challenges the conventional way of depicting the Burmese as an archenemy of the Thai and removing them from Northern Thai Buddhist history. He asserted that the article was “just the first stage of a much larger project that needs to be taken on by scholars of Burmese history and Buddhism” (89).¹ However, few, either Burmese or Siamese, have devotedly responded to his call since then.² The task may be carried out better by “foreign scholars who . . . might not be explicitly or implicitly influenced by modern Thai bias against the Burmese” (93). I, without a “pro-Thai/Tai attitude” (95), but with some, if humble, knowledge of the languages concerned—Burmese, Thai, and Tai Yuan—thus take up the issue again, and supplement and develop McDaniel’s important article by focusing mainly on the administrative aspect of Burmese rule in Lan Na, which he has left to those who show interest in his research.

The kingdom of Lan Na, once the center of politics and Buddhist scholarship in the upland Tai world, fell in 1558 to the massive Burmese army led by King Bayinnaung. Burmese rule in Lan Na lasted, intermittently, more than two centuries, which neatly corresponded to the “early modern” era.³ Despite its prolonged and profound impact on local society as well as on mainland Southeast Asia as a whole, the 200-year period has so far attracted little scholarly attention. Notable exceptions to this academic trend are the studies by Sarassawadee Onsakul (2005) and Latdawal Sæisiao (2002). Ambitious and pioneering though both works are in their field, they employ no Burmese sources, either primary or secondary, which inevitably and regrettably makes their description of Burmese rule in Lan Na rather one-sided and thus less convincing.⁴ Furthermore, the historical perspective of both scholars is influenced by a long-established intellectual, ideological prejudice that originated and developed outside Lan Na studies. This issue will be discussed in due course.

Besides the language barrier, the scarcity of references in Northern Thai

¹ Perhaps because his article was featured in an issue of the *Journal of Burma Studies*, he urged Burma scholars only. Alternatively, he might have been greatly disappointed with the academic environment in Thailand that “the likelihood of a surge in student and scholarly interest in Burmese history and language is doubtful” (91). However, more than anyone else, it is indeed the scholars of Thai studies, especially Lan Na specialists, who need to take his suggestion into consideration.

² Partially because his article was published in the *Journal of Burma Studies*, to which few Thai scholars subscribe, it does not seem to have attracted due attention from Thai scholars.

³ The contemporaneity between the Burmese era in Lan Na and the early modern period is briefly mentioned in Ann-CMC, p. 285. Abbreviations of frequently cited materials are listed below.

⁴ McDaniel (91), although describing Sarassawadee’s work as “definitive Thai language work on Northern Thai history,” criticizes it for the short account of the 200-year Burmese period in Lan Na, and writes that she “provides a grim picture of Burmese rule.” Meanwhile he praises Latdawal (93n) for her favorable description of Burmese policy toward Lan Na Buddhism. However, as I will show below, Latdawal also “provides a grim picture of Burmese rule,” probably grimmer than Sarassawadee’s.

manuscripts to Burmese rule surely accounts for the scarcity of research on the 200-year period. For example, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, the basic text for the study of Lan Na history, spends only three pages with fragmented accounts for the years 1600-1700 (CMC: 129-32). Most crucially, however, it is the deeply entrenched negative image of the Burmese, hence their rule in Lan Na, in Thai perception that makes the research far less attractive.⁵ Hemmed in between the “golden age” of Lan Na under the Mangrai dynasty and its restoration and “renaissance” by the Kawilan dynasty, the 200-year Burmese domination has been considered a “dark age” in Lan Na history.⁶ Thus Prisna in his MA thesis on the relationship between early Bangkok monarchs and Lan Na vassals writes (1973: 80): “The poverty and suffering of the people [of Lan Na] were the result of the policy aimed to only benefit the Burmese. . . . As a result of Burmese rule, Lan Na declined politically, administratively, and economically.” Usanee in her MA thesis on the history of Ayutthaya-Lan Na relations notes (1983: 134): “Throughout the period of Burmese rule in Lan Na, there always arouse rebellions,” while two scholars of Lan Na literature, Phannpen and Phaithun, remark (2001: 6): “During the more than 200 years of Burmese administration, the Lan Na people always tried to fight for freedom.” Latdawal, whose pioneering work I have just mentioned above, writes:

The impact of Nyaungyan administration on the people of Lan Na was far graver than that of other [Burmese] dynasties, as the Burmese used the power to enforce military conscription and taxation, which imposed considerable hardship on the masses. Consequently, some local groups refused the [Burmese] authorities at the time. (2002: 163)

Udom Rungruangsi, the leading philologist of Lan Na, relates (2003: 5): “The people in Lan Na tried to get united to liberate themselves from Burmese many times,” and

The period during which Chiang Mai and other major towns of Lan Na accepted Burmese vassalage brought a downfall to Lan Na, including scholarly activity and religious study. The mind of the people that had reached a state of peace became tainted by the brutality of war. Agricultural products that had once been abundant became scarce, because the people went to battlefields rather than plow their fields.

⁵ McDaniel rightly points out (90), “The effects of the ‘trauma’ of the Burmese burning of Ayutthaya and the pervasive anti-Burmese attitude have steered many Thai scholars away from researching or even considering the Burmese influence on Northern Thailand.”

⁶ For a general description of the golden age of Lan Na, see LNCH (63-6). But see also the section titled “Whither a Golden Age of Buddhist Literature?” in McDaniel’s essay (101-9), for his questioning of the “use of the term ‘golden age’ to refer to the pre-Burmese period . . . and the term ‘renaissance’ for the period that follows.” Meanwhile, for a “dark age” paradigm in the historiography of post-Pagan Burma, see Aung-Thwin (1998: 136).

The people who had been autonomous and content with their own communities came to have a lord of different nation and different language. (9)

Finally, Wyatt, in his book “now becoming a standard text on Thai history in English” (Thongchai 1998: 144), strongly argues:

For a half century [ca. 1660-1710], the Tai Yuan . . . silently suffered an onerous regime that taxed them heavily and often levied on them conscription for Burma’s armies far from their homes. If for Ayutthaya the century or so following the first major Burma invasions of the 1560s was a period of recovery, economic development . . . for Lan Na the period was one of suffering. Caught in frequent wars, towns and villages frequently were depopulated, their families deported. . . . By the early eighteenth century . . . its rich cultural heritage, especially the glories of the sixteenth century, was neglected. (2003: 105-6, under “Lan Na in a Time of Tumult”)

These negative remarks on Burmese rule, however, were made before the publication of, or without referring to, the pioneering works by Sarassawadee and Latdawal (except the remark by Latdawal himself).⁷ Therefore they are based not on thorough research or textual references, but primarily on the presumption held by the authors themselves that the Burmese who “wrought awful desolation” (Wyatt 2003: 118) in the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767 must have been demonized, hence Burmese rule in Lan Na was heinously oppressive, which naturally resulted in frequent, pervasive local uprisings against the devilish rulers.

Plausible as it seems, the presumption is not without problems. First, as the triumphant Burmese forces at Ayutthaya consisted not only of Burmese contingents, but also of auxiliaries of Shan, Yuan, Lao, and even fellow Thai from northern cities,⁸ it might have been these Tai brethren, including Siamese compatriots, who “raped, pillaged, and plundered” the people of Ayutthaya, and “put the torch to everything flammable, and even hacked at images of the Buddha” (Wyatt 2003: 118). Next, the Burmese who sacked the Thai capital in 1767 belonged to the Konbaung dynasty, whose rule in Lan Na had just begun a few years earlier, and would last only a decade. More than a half of the 200-year Burmese era in Lan Na corresponded to the Nyaungyan period. The two dynasties were qualitatively and quantitatively different from each other, so

⁷ McDaniel also lists Thai scholars who have not “paid any serious attention to the possible Burmese influences of the Burmese period in general,” and who provided a “grim picture of Burmese rule and the ‘suffering’ and ‘poverty’ of the local people under their rule” (91).

⁸ KBZ (I: 376) lists contingents from Tak, Kamphængphet, Sawankhalok, Sukhothai, Phitsanulok, Nakhon Sawan, and seven other towns among the Burmese forces. Wyatt (2003: 117) also refers to Shan, Tai Yuan, and Lao auxiliaries in the Burmese army, although he fails to mention Siamese troops levied from these northern towns.

were their ways of rule in Lan Na. Furthermore, as Ayutthaya and Lan Na, with their distinctive historical identities and historically different relations with their powerful western neighbors, were not a single unified political entity, or the same “nation” in 1767, it is fairly unlikely that the Burmese cultivated the same feeling toward the two Tai-speaking domains, treating them equally. Hence, a simple negative evaluation of Burmese rule in the Lan Na of, say, the 1580s or 1650s, based on the judgment of the “Burmese” atrocities at Ayutthaya in 1767 was, in spatio-temporal terms, problematic. While Sunait (2000) emphasizes the impact of the negative image of the Burmese on literary works and show business in Thailand, the series of negative remarks on Burmese rule in Lan Na suggest that, not only among novelists and producers of TV dramas and movies, but even among academics, has the Thai perception of the demonized Burmese widely and deeply prevailed.

The demonization of the Burmese originated in the historical writings of the early Bangkok era, during which those who had fresh memories of the tragic end of Ayutthaya publicly “expressed antagonism towards the Burmese” as an “enemy of Buddhism, the Thai people, and the Kingdom” (Sunait 2000: 57). Then, a century later, emerged the concept of “Thai national history,” which was closely associated with the “idea of Thailand being a nation-state belonging to the Thai people with Bangkok as its only center” (56). Within this formal framework of Thai national history, the narrative, or the myth, of the demonized Burmese was shaped, reproduced, and used to “create a sense of national unity” and to “show adoration for the three pillars of the country: nation, religion, and monarchy” (55). The myth also served to “define the domain of Thainess from outside,” i.e., to “identify the un-Thainess,” which is “one of the most effective strategies to differentiate We-self and otherness” (Thongchai 1998: 5, 169). To misquote Duara, the narrative of the demonized Burmese “enabled a totalizing conception of society built on a radical distinction between self versus Other” (1996: 63). “A demonic otherness” ascribed to the Burmese was, and is, “one of the most significant instruments in the identification of Thai nationhood” (Thongchai 1998: 6, 163).

Thai nationalist historiography, called “royalist historiography” by Vickery (1979), which “focused more on the histories of the great centers, namely Sukhothai, Ayudhya, and Bangkok,” and emphasized (disproportionately) the continuity of Thai history, “went unchallenged until the 1980s,” when “the growing interest in so-called local history in Thailand” emerged (Thongchai 1998: 162-3). Consequently, “the Ministry of Education approved various curricula for ‘regional/local history’ in secondary schools throughout the kingdom” and, in the north, “curricula for Lan Na studies (literature and history) at the M.A. level has been approved at Chiang Mai University and Chiang Mai Rajabhat University,” as a result of which “much has been achieved so far in the field of Lan Na studies” (LNCH: 11). Therefore, Lan Na scholarship, to some extent, has been an effective counter-narrative to the center-oriented linear historiography, thereby proving correct the late David K. Wyatt’s

conviction that “the histories of Siam and Thailand are not synonymous with the histories of Ayudhya and Bangkok” (CMC: xxxi). However, the domain of study of the Burmese era in Lan Na is still under the powerful ideological influence of the royalist historiography.

As pointed out above, Lan Na and Ayutthaya were not a single political entity, so conceptualization and interpretation of the 200-year period should be made outside the confine of the royalist historiography. However, the negative treatment of the Burmese era, which has been influenced by the dominant presumption rooted in the sack of Ayutthaya and developed within the framework of Thai national history, explicitly shows that the historiography of Lan Na under Burma simply follows the way the Burmese have been depicted in the royalist historiography, and thus is not quite autonomous from the Bangkok-centric perspective. Echoing van Leur’s famous remark (1955: 261), scholars of Lan Na studies are observing history of the region from the court of Ayutthaya or the palace of Bangkok. I will therefore chronologically examine the nature of Burmese rule in Lan Na by letting the sources speak for themselves without any intellectual, ideological prejudice; this leads to my questioning the validity of the “dark age” paradigm, and the deconstruction of the myth of the demonized Burmese prevalent in the historiography of Lan Na as well as the Kingdom as a whole.

Lan Na and Toungoo dynasts: 1558-1615

By the time Bayinnaung appeared before the wall of Chiang Mai in 1558, Lan Na had already internally disintegrated and been militarily weakened. Grabowsky remarks:

The twenty-five years that followed the death of King Müang Kaeo [in 1526] are characterized by internal strife. Five rulers ascended to the throne one after another during the time, and none of them ended his or her reign peacefully. . . . After the violent death of the last two kings, Lan Na was plunged into chaos and anarchy for several years. (LNCH: 70)⁹

The CMC (119) aptly states that in 1547/48 Lan Na “was unstable and had truly entered a Kali Epoch [i.e. a dark age].” Wyatt also confirms (2003: 71-2): “By the mid-sixteenth century, Lan Na again had lost its focus and was the helpless prey of contending factions based in the principalities of the northern upland valley.” Therefore, given that “Ayutthaya’s territory and population, as well as economic resources, were much larger than those of Lan Na” (LNCH: 66), had there been no Burmese intervention, Lan Na would have become a northern territory of the

⁹ McDaniel also states (2007: 101), “the ‘golden age’ [of Lan Na] ended long before the Burmese armies entered Northern Thai territory.”

"Southerners," who had been the archenemy of the Tai Yuan for a century or so and were now furnished with far superior European-style firearms. What might be termed "Lan Na-ness" was, in a sense, preserved and prolonged by the Burmese.

One more thing worthy of note is that "Lan Na was never a firmly unified kingdom with Chiang Mai as her undisputed political center" (LNCH: 71). The kingdom was largely divided into two geopolitically distinctive areas, "Northeast Lan Na" with its center at Chiang Sæn, and "Southwest Lan Na" with Chiang Mai as its capital. "The division of Lan Na into two contending core-areas further intensified during the centuries that followed the Burmese conquest in 1558" (72). Thus King Mæku, who had been reinstalled by Bayinnaung on the Chiang Mai throne, had to lead a northeastern campaign with Burmese aid to "fight the Chawa enemy and those provincial lords who were Chawa" in 1559 (CMC: 125-6).¹⁰ What appears to have been a local revolt against the Burmese may in reality have been an outbreak of embittered rivalry between the two centers. This "North-South-dichotomy"¹¹ would repeatedly appear in the course of the 200-year history.

In 1564 Mæku with other rulers of Lan Na domains, including Chiang Sæn, rebelled against Bayinnaung, probably due to the Burmese conscription of Lan Na troops for a large military operation against Ayutthaya (CMC: 127; Ann-CMC: 262). Transcending the geopolitical and historical dichotomy, Chiang Mai and Chiang Sæn were united against the Burmese, as a result of which Mæku was captured and taken to Pegu. Perhaps partially deducing from this large rebellion of 1564, a conventional view concludes that the people of Lan Na tried many times to become united to liberate themselves from the Burmese (Usanee 1983: 134; Phannpen and Phaithun 2001: 6; Udom 2003: 5). On the contrary, however, a rebellion of this sort would not arise again until the late 1720s, more than 150 years later, and even then it was not a joint effort by Chiang Mai and Chiang Sæn, as we shall see below.

Instead of Mæku, Bayinnaung installed a certain queen of the Mangrai dynasty on the throne of Chiang Mai (CMC: 127).¹² This lady ruled until her death in 1578. As the CMC spends only a few lines on her reign, and other Lan Na sources are more or less the same, we know few events worthy of mention during these years, and further exploration into the socioeconomic and political conditions during her reign is impossible.

Then in 1579 Prince Tharrawaddy, son of Bayinnaung by his second or third queen, came to take charge of Lan Na. Upon appointing his son ruler of a foreign country, Bayinnaung advised:

¹⁰ For a more detailed account of the Burmese-Tai Yuan joint campaign, see Ann-CMC, p. 262. Chawa in the past meant the Lao capital of Luang Prabang. At that time, Sai Setthathilat, a Lao king, who "continued the struggle against the Burmese," was supported by the northwestern lords (LNCH: 70).

¹¹ Not to be confused with the relations between Lan Na and Ayutthaya, whose inhabitants are depicted as "Northerners" and "Southerners" in this article.

¹² McDaniel (100) has another story of this queen.

When you arrive in Chiang Mai, call local ministers and dignitaries *bagyi-daw*, *badwè-daw*, or *naung-daw*¹³; do not yearn for good local elephants and horses; do not let royal pages and servants, sons and grandsons, commit extortion in towns and villages; follow local customs concerning the rate of tax, customs, tolls, and brokerage. These are the [most important] issues in administering a country. (UK III: 53)

The advice is not entirely a eulogistic fiction for the great, or probably the greatest monarch of Burma, but reflects to some extent Bayinnaung's true voice, as some of these rules are what he might also have followed. Northern Thai chronicles testify that when he pacified Lan Na in 1558, Bayinnaung "called for elderly people and asked about the customs of the land," then said, "I who am the king would act according to the custom of those kings [of Lan Na who reigned previously]" (Sarassawadee 2005: 112). Although Lan Na sources do not make it clear whether Tharrawaddy, Bayinnaung's son, faithfully followed the fatherly advice,¹⁴ a rather favorable description of Chiang Mai (that at least indicates he paid some attention to his father's words) can be found in a travelogue by the English adventurer, Ralph Fitch, who visited the city in 1587.

Jamahey [Chiang Mai] is a very faire and great Towne, with faire houses of stone, well peopled, the streets are very large, the men very well set and strong, with a cloth about them. . . . Hither to Jamahey come many Merchants out of China, and bring great store of Muske, Gold, Silver, and many other things of China worke. Heere is great store of Victuals. . . . Heere is great store of Copper and Benjamin. (1905: 194-5)

This firsthand account probably bears some credibility, thereby determining the English East India Company, with expectation of lucrative trade, to send its agents with commodities to Chiang Mai in 1612 (Farrington and Dhiravat 2007: 257; Nantha 1970: 58, 69). The "Kali Epoch" that had reigned over Chiang Mai since the late 1540s seems to have already been over under the Burmese ruler.

In the mid-1590s, Tharrawaddy severed his allegiance to Pegu, now under the rule of his half-brother, and became autonomous. The lack of military backing from the Burmese homeland, however, invited renewed attacks from other Lan Na domains supported by Lan Sang, as a result of which Tharrawaddy accepted suzerainty of, or alliance with, Ayutthaya (Ann-CMC: 266-7). This was not a simple rebellion by the

¹³ These words are respectful terms for addressing men older or younger than one's father, or those older than oneself.

¹⁴ McDaniel describes (98) Tharrawaddy as "respecting the customs of the Chiang Mai royal court, treating the local population fairly and following the advice of Chiang Mai court ministers, officials and learned monks."

frustrated Lan Na towns against the ruling Burmese, but an anomalous, complicated situation in which Chiang Mai under a Burmese prince supported by the Siamese king fought the “Northeastern” Lan Na domains backed by the Lao. Likewise, prolonged disputes over the succession to the Chiang Mai throne after Tharrawaddy’s death in 1607 variously involved court intrigues and power struggles among contenders of Lan Na domains: Ayutthaya, Shan, and Lao (Ann-CMC: 268). However, the dispute primarily revolved around the regentship of Tharrawaddy’s sons, not the kingship itself. The scions of the Burmese prince who never set their feet on the Burmese homeland were, although as puppets, supported and perpetuated by the local elite. Ironically, the royal house of Chiang Mai established by Bayinnaung was brought to an end by his grandson, Anauk-hpet-lun, of Nyaungyan Burma.

Lan Na under Nyaungyan rule, part I: c. 1615-1660

While Tharrawaddy was ruling Chiang Mai, there was a dynastic change in the Burmese homeland, from the Toungoo to Nyaungyan, whose second king, Anauk-hpet-lun, intervened in the succession disputes at the Chiang Mai court in 1614. While CMC (130) states that it was the rebellion of Lampang against Anauk-hpet-lun that led to the Burmese intervention, KMRC (22), an eyewitness account of the event, claims that the ruler of Nan asked the Nyaungyan monarch to pacify Lan Na. As the new Burmese dynasty had yet to lay claim to suzerainty over Lan Na in 1614, Lampang technically could not, and did not have to, rebel against Anauk-hpet-lun. It was the initiative taken by the Nan lord that led to the Burmese expedition against Lan Na. After successfully pacifying the region, Anauk-hpet-lun rewarded the ruler of Nan by conferring the throne of Chiang Mai upon him (Ann-CMC: 269). Other Lan Na domains, including Chiang Sæn, were also entrusted to local lords. Therefore Lan Na was under native rule, outside direct Burmese administration.

Meanwhile, for some years before the Burmese intervention, communication lines between Lan Na and Ayutthaya were temporarily disturbed, so the English East India Company could receive no news from its agents sent to Chiang Mai (Farrington and Dhiravat 2007: 116). Immediately after the Burmese pacification, however, Ayutthaya merchants came by boat to the market in Hòt, a southern Lan Na town on the Ping River, which was now open “throughout the day every day” (KMRC: 59). Anauk-hpet-lun, by reestablishing social order and commercially favorable conditions in the region, may be credited with the reopening of trade between the North and South, as a result of which some Lan Na people “became rich” (59).

In the next decade, Burma renewed its military campaign in Lan Na, pacifying two northeastern domains, Nan and Chiang Khòng (Ann-CMC: 270). A few years before the Lan Na campaign, a Nyaungyan army led by Anauk-hpet-lun’s younger brothers engaged a Lao army probably somewhere along the Mekong, and then went on an expedition against the Sipsong Panna region, which they successfully

subdued (UK III: 184-6). Anauk-hpet-lun informed his younger brothers that he himself would command forces to the Lao capital when the rainy season was over. While the royal brothers, the future King Thalun and Minyè-kyawswa, were collecting provisions and preparing a large number of war-boats at Chiang Sæn for the Lao campaign, the news of the rebellion of Chiang Khòng came in (186). The chronicle evidence strongly suggests that the restive Lan Na domains were again supported by the Lao side. In any case the rebellion was not widespread, as Chiang Mai and Chiang Sæn posed no threat to the Nyaungyan army, remaining loyal to the Burmese commanders. A noble of Chiang Sæn, according to the local account, even reconciled the royal brothers, who with their own troops engaged each other, after being informed of the death of Anauk-hpet-lun in 1628 (Ann-CMC: 271). Thalun, as a reward, appointed this noble as ruler of Chiang Sæn and conferred upon him a seemingly Burmese epithet.

The royal brothers returned to the Burmese homeland to challenge the new king, their nephew, son of Anauk-hpet-lun. Anticipating that a prolonged civil war would deter Burmese leaders from taking military action against a remote corner of the empire, the lord of Chiang Mai who had been appointed by Anauk-hpet-lun in 1615 invaded Chiang Sæn with support from the Lampang lord, and imprisoned the ruler of Chiang Sæn, Thalun's protégé (CMC: 131). After a swift victory over his nephew, Thalun again led Burmese troops to Lan Na and seized Chiang Mai in 1631 after a two-month siege. He spent about two years pacifying the region and rearranging the administration in accordance with the local customs. Thereafter, remarks a Lan Na chronicle: "All the people [of Lan Na] lived pleasantly and happily" and "Chiang Mai flourished very much" (TNSN: 188-9).

That these sentences favorably describing the welfare of Lan Na society actually reflect the local reality is not clear and does not concern us much. The issue at hand is that they have never been referred to by scholars of Lan Na studies. The TNSN in which the controversial sentences can be found is a Thai translation of a chronicle of Chiang Sæn written in the Northern Thai script. It is an easily accessible and readable reference work for students of Thai history, because it belongs to the *Prachum Phongsawadan* [Collected Chronicles], presumably the most major collection of historical documents and essays readily available in college libraries in Thailand. Thus the text is listed in the bibliography of both Sarassawadee's and Latdawal's studies (2005: 301; 2002: 169).¹⁵ Actually both scholars have quoted another sentence from the TNSN (192), only a few pages after the sentences at issue, which says: "Ever since Engche became Mahatham of Ava, we Lan Na Thai have suffered increasingly because we had to collect money to feed the Burmese" (Sarassawadee 2005: 124; Latdawal 2002: 112-13). In the "dark age" paradigm, the

¹⁵ Both Prisma (1973: 222) and Usanee (1983: 159) also list the TNSN in their Bibliography, while works of Phannpen and Phaithun (2001) and Udom (2003) contain no List of References.

Lan Na people under Burmese rule could not, and should not, “live pleasantly and happily,” but must “have suffered.” This is a backward projection of the present image of the demonized Burmese onto the past.

Sarassawadee has translated a chronicle of Chiang Sæn written in Northern Thai script, whose “content resembles that of the *Tamnan Singhanawat* [i.e. TNSN]” (2003: 7).¹⁶ She assumes that the author of the chronicle was a Chiang Sæn native who might have had a high-ranking post in the Burmese administration “because the content reflects an intimacy with the Burmese administrators” (15). In reference to the very passage “All the people [of Lan Na] lived pleasantly and happily” and “Chiang Mai flourished very much,” she describes the author as depicting Burmese rule favorably, making a clear contrast to the content of the CMC, which is filled with disorderliness, wars, and rebellions against the Burmese (15).¹⁷ However, as the sentence “Ever since Engche became Mahatham of Ava, we Lan Na Thai have suffered increasingly because we had to collect money to feed the Burmese” and other negative accounts on Nyaungyan rule suggest, the author is not particularly pro-Burmese: he (probably not she) is simply not anti-Burmese, with a historiographically neutral stance. The 18th or 19th century author was not under the influence of the modern Thai historiography, ideologically associated with “the image of the Burmese as an archenemy of the Thai [which] emerged . . . after the kingdom of Ayudhya fell to the Burmese armies in 1767” (Sunait 1992: 90). It is the myth of the demonized Burmese that has caused Sarassawadee’s misreading of the author’s character.

According to the TNSN’s account, the pleasant and happy life in Lan Na made possible by the Burmese protection lasted for approximately three decades, until the early 1660s. Wyatt (2003: 106) states that “for Lan Na the period [c. 1560-1660] was one of suffering.” This is not true of the last third of the period. He also notes (105), with a negative tone: “for decades [after the reconquest of Lan Na by Thalun in the early 1630s] the chronicles record only the transfers of governors from one müang to another.” In other words, there were no records of major disputes among local leaders, or of large military expeditions against, or external threats from, other Lan Na domains, Lan Sang, or Ayutthaya, which could have uprooted the lives of the masses. During the thirty-year period there was no conscription for military service or evacuation to foreign lands, which in the past had incessantly imposed enormous hardship on the people for centuries. According to Wyatt:

¹⁶ Thus the two chronicles might have been derived from the same original, or their originals shared a single source. The chronicle translated by Sarassawadee must have been completed before 1896, its last copying date.

¹⁷ However, regarding the period of Nyaungyan rule in Lan Na, the contents of the Chiang Sæn chronicle and the CMC are more or less the same. Furthermore, the last entry of the Chiang Sæn chronicle is the year 1728, as Sarassawadee asserts (8), before the CMC begins to tell the chaotic social conditions in Chiang Mai and around.

The Chiang Mai chronicles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are filled with warfare; it seems to have occurred almost as a feature of everyday life. The Kingdom of Lan Na was in conflict with nearly all its neighbors at one time or another, and all too often was even at war with itself. (2003: 63)

In the 16th and the first third of the 17th century, sociopolitical conditions were not largely different from the previous centuries, in which even a decade of tranquility could not be hoped. The thirty-year peace in the mid-17th century was something that had been longed for in the region since the early 14th century.

Not only in Lan Na, but also in its neighboring countries did peace prevail at the time. In Burma the reign of Thalun (1629-48) was “exceedingly peaceful” (Lieberman 1984: 57n), as he concentrated on “preserving rather than enlarging” the territory and concluded peace terms with Ayutthaya, the kingdom his predecessors had considered a vassal (55-6). Ayutthaya was under the rule of King Prasat Thong, “King of Golden Palace,” who reigned for twenty-seven years (1629-56), during which time Ayutthaya, as a supplier of commodities in high demand and as a distribution center, played an increasingly important role in the flourishing international commerce that attracted traders of diverse nationalities, including the Dutch (Wyatt 2003: 96). Lastly, Lan Na’s eastern cousin, Lan Sang was ruled by King Surinyavongsa, whose long reign (c. 1637-94) “is usually seen as the Indian summer of Lan Sang history” (Lieberman 2003: 284). The Lao kingdom at the time “enjoyed a golden age of prosperity and cultural growth,” which “subsequent generations would remember with pride” (Wyatt 2003: 86, 104).¹⁸ Therefore Lan Na under the “Pax Birmanica”, which subsequent generations would remember with anger and humility, was not a limited local phenomenon, but was closely associated with the peaceful political conditions covering large parts of mainland Southeast Asia.

Lan Na under Nyaungyan rule, part II: c. 1660-1730

The thirty-year Burmese Peace in Lan Na was broken in the early 1660s when Ayutthaya under King Narai sent expeditions against the region on two occasions, the latter of which resulted in the fall of Chiang Mai (Ann-CMC: 275-6). As Burma at the time had been preoccupied, first with a series of battles in the capital area with Chinese invaders from Yunnan, then with war against Ayutthaya along the Burmese littoral, Ava could not mobilize any sizeable military resource for the aid of the imperial periphery. Thus, when a Burmese rescue force arrived at Chiang Mai in March 1663 and found the city already occupied by an Ayutthaya army, Avan troops had no choice but to retreat (UK III: 280). Not long afterward the city of Chiang

¹⁸ At the same time the kingdom was also experiencing “the golden age of Lan Sang literature” (Peltier 1983-84: 153).

Mai was liberated, not by retaliatory forces from Ava, but by local efforts (282-3). This indeed was a popular uprising, probably the first against foreign rulers in the history of Lan Na. However, those in power were not the Burmese, as customarily and widely believed, but the Siamese, who were, according to modern historians, the same “nation” with the people of Lan Na (Damrong 2002: 14; Prisna 1973: 89). After expelling the Ayutthaya troops from the city, the Chiang Mai residents informed Ava of the successful retake of the city and reopened the city gate to their old suzerain, the Burmese, who were only too happy to take charge of the domain again (UK III: 283). Quite understandably, the Chiang Mai people who had “lived pleasantly and happily” for three decades preferred as their ruler the Burmese to the Siamese who “felt little in common” (Sarassawadee 2005: 210) with their northern neighbors.

Probably in response to the loyalty shown by Chiang Mai that had been severely devastated by the Ayutthaya attack, Ava immediately executed a generous decree that Chiang Mai should “be exempted from taxes and all manner of duties for the next two to three years” (Dijk 2006: 104). The Dutch scholar, based on the VOC documents, states:

Fields everywhere were now densely sown and trade began to pick up. Newly placed orders for Indian textiles from Chieng [sic] Mai even allowed the Dutch to sell off most of their Burma remnants, including the *chassen* and *mulmul* that had long remained unsold in Ava.¹⁹ (104)

This implies more than that Burmese rule in Lan Na was not always mercilessly exploitative. It indicates that the people of Chiang Mai were relatively well off to the extent that they were accustomed to the fine taste of the Indian fabrics which they badly wanted even in the aftermath of the war. Many of these “consumers” did not belong to the top echelon of local society, as the Chiang Mai ruling elite had been deported en masse to the South by the Ayutthaya troops (Ann-CMC: 276). They were probably and mainly the city dwellers of various professions who directly or indirectly benefited from the trade that “began to pick up.” The “urban” populace definitely preferred smooth foreign fabric to locally woven coarse cloth, and were sensitive to the latest “fashion.”²⁰

The Ayutthaya campaign in Lan Na was a turning point in the history of Burmese rule in the region. It inevitably forced Ava to reconsider its administrative

¹⁹ “Mulmul and chassen were fine, loosely woven, smooth, and soft cotton fabrics, much like muslin and were ordered in Bengal specifically for the Burma trade” (Dijk 2006: 133).

²⁰ In 19th century Lan Na “it is quite possible that wealthier villagers tended to buy expensive imported yarns and fabrics” (Bowie 1992: 818). Meanwhile, in 16th century Burma, “Indian textiles ... became the basic apparel of interior elites, and possibly even of sections of the cultivating classes” (Lieberman 1984: 28), and in Toungoo in the early 17th century, “the only desirable textiles were those sold by Indian merchants” (28n).

policy towards Lan Na, as the conquest of Chiang Mai by the Siamese could have jeopardized the defense of the Burmese heartland that had already been devastated by the Chinese invasion. Nyaungyan leaders thus decided to tighten control over the stronghold on the eastern imperial periphery by appointing a *myowun* (governor), whereby Lan Na would be placed under the direct rule of Burma. Thereafter local chronicles begin to mention negative remarks on the sociopolitical conditions of Lan Na.

The CMC thus states (132): “In s. 1040 (1678/79) . . . Rot Sang Lam was made Wun . . . to rule Chiang Sæn. In s. 1044 (1682/83) Rot Sang Lam oppressed, and Min Sa [royal envoys] came to arrest him and sent him to Ava.” Meanwhile the TNSN (190) notes, “Maha Tham [King Minyè-kyawdin of Ava] ordered Fa Sangkung to take charge of Chiang Sæn as *bogyok* [Generalissimo] in 1673. Thereafter Chiang Sæn dignitaries had to collect things to support the Generalissimo.” However, the chronicle later relates (191): “Fa Sang[kung] was taken down to Ava in 1693/94. Then the Burmese came and had [the populace] satisfied.”²¹ These descriptions show that although some Burmese officials far from home on occasion grew oppressive and imposed hardship on the locals, Ava, closely monitoring the affairs of the imperial periphery, took necessary means to “satisfy” the local populace. This discredits Wyatt’s remark (2003: 105-6), “for a half century [ca. 1660-1710], the Tai Yuan . . . silently suffered an onerous regime that taxed them heavily and often levied on them conscription for Burma’s armies far from their homes.”²²

Meanwhile, both Sarassawadee (2005: 124) and Latdawal (2002: 134), emphasizing the distress caused by excessive Burmese demands on the local people for material support to Nyaungyan officials, have quoted the same passage from a local chronicle that records:

One *chakkai* (*sitkè*) of Chiang Rai had two subordinates. Each month, he was taken care of with rice worth 90,000 *bia* (cowry shell money) and 18,000 *bia* in money, while the two subordinates received 50 *bia*, one mat, one mosquito net, one pillow, and houses were built for them and people worked for them.²³
(Sarassawadee 2005: 124)

In Chiang Sæn, records the TNSN (192), every month the *myowun* was given “rice 100,000 and food, chilies, salt worth 250, 000 *bia*. As for *sitkè*, rice 5000 and 25,000 *bia* were given.” The numbers are large, which may compel some to hastily

²¹ As is expected, this sentence has attracted no scholarly attention, for it is entirely irreconcilable with the myth of the demonized Burmese.

²² Furthermore, TNSN’s remark (192), “Ever since Engche became Mahatham of Ava [i.e. King Sanei, reigning 1698-1714], we Lan Na Thai have suffered,” at least suggests that *before* 1698 there was not much suffering.

²³ Although the English translation says 90,000 *bia*, the original Thai text (Sarassawadee 1996: 248) only writes 90,000, without *bia*. The 90,000 may indicate the weight of rice, approximately 108 kilograms. See LI, pt. II, vol. I, 98, 410, for a similar case.

conclude that the economic burden on the locals was intolerably heavy, from which they always suffered. But having many digits does not necessarily mean having a large value. What is necessary to prove the Burmese demands were truly and greatly burdensome is to show how much monetary value the cowry had at the place at the time.²⁴ Although the paucity of historical data makes the estimation difficult, at least surviving Lan Na inscriptions record that kings and nobles of the Mangrai dynasty repeatedly made pious, generous donations worth hundreds of thousands of cowries to Buddhist institutions (for example, LI pt. II, vol. I: 58, 86, 304). This implies that the amount of the *bia* which kings of the Mangrai dynasty had at their disposal easily surpassed millions, perhaps over ten million. Meanwhile the *sitkè* was second to the *myowun* in the Burmese administrative rank in Lan Na, and in Chiang Rai he was the principal official in the local administration. The Burmese *myowun* was the supreme lord, a king so to speak, of a domain where no native prince who had been given an allowance of ten million *bia* reigned. This inevitably raises the question whether these expenditures of feeding rulers, though alien, were extravagantly inappropriate, more excessive than those under the Mangrai dynasty.²⁵ More comparative and qualitative analysis on the expenditures is seemingly necessary, before being presented as evidence of outrageous Burmese demands that caused local distress.

In the first decade of the 18th century rebellions against Burmese arose in and around Lan Na, by Nan and Chiang Khòng in the years 1703-4, then by Chiang Tung in 1708-9 (Ann-CMC: 280-1). While the Chiang Tung rebellion was plotted by its own ruler without outside aid, those of Nan and Chiang Khòng were part of a Lao expedition against Lan Na, just like the one in the 1620s. As these rebellions were not based on local anguish, merely motivated by Lao ambition, they did not find any native collaborators in other Lan Na domains, and thus remained of limited phenomena.

The next turning point in the history of Burmese rule in Lan Na was the appointment of a new Chiang Mai *myowun* in 1718. Until that year, the seat of the Chiang Mai *myowun* had been mostly reserved for the grandsons of King Nyaungyan, the founding father of the dynasty (UK III: 284, 286, 290, 294; LBHK: 293). As the new *myowun*, Nga-nyo, a cavalry officer, was not of royal blood, the irregular appointment was probably made possible through the strong ministerial patron-client ties that had prevailed in the Avan court and caused a malfunction of government control over officials in a remote territory (Lieberman 1984: 204). Unrestrained on the imperial periphery, Nga-nyo and his deputy enforced “ruinous taxation” and “severely oppressed the people and ground them down” (Lieberman 1984: 204; HMN III: 362; LBHK: 293). This inevitably led to the outbreak of rebellion in Chiang Mai, which was, as far as Burmese and Lan Na records observe,

²⁴ Hans Ulrich Vogel’s scrupulous work (1993) on the monetary exchange rates between cowry and other types of money in neighboring Yunnan is an excellent example of this kind of study.

²⁵ The *sitkè* of Chiang Sæn was given rice worth 5000 *bia*, quite modest compared to his counterpart in Chiang Rai (TNSN: 192).

the first popular uprising against the Burmese in Lan Na.²⁶ The Burmese garrison in Chiang Mai was easily defeated, the oppressive *myowun* killed, and the city taken by the rebels. Soon afterward the rebel force moved up to Chiang Sæn and laid siege to the northeastern city. The Burmese garrison, outnumbered by the Chiang Mai rebels, fled Chiang Sæn, leaving behind the city residents, who continued to stay within the city wall, rather than opening the gate to welcome the “liberators,” their Tai Yuan compatriots. The Chiang Sæn people somehow repulsed the surrounding rebel force, and, rather surprisingly, received again the Burmese who had just deserted them (TNSN: 196). It was probably the traditional “North-South-dichotomy,” not their loyalty to the Burmese, that forced the people of Chiang Sæn to fight against the Chiang Mai rebels. However, if Burmese rule in Chiang Sæn had been really oppressive, the populace would not have accepted it again (Penth 1989: 16; McDaniel 2007: 96). As in Chiang Mai in the early 1660s when the city residents drove away the Ayutthaya troops and welcomed the Burmese who had given up retaking the city themselves, the people of Chiang Sæn preferred the alien rulers to their Tai brethren.

Nga-nyo, *myowun* of Chiang Mai, and Lot Sang Lam (or Fa Sangkung), *myowun* (or generalissimo) of Chiang Sæn, both of whom oppressed the Tai Yuan, are fairly close to the Siamese image of Burmese officials as bloodsuckers and evildoers. While the latter was in office, the surveillance system of the Burmese government over its agents in the imperial periphery still functioned properly, which led to the recall of Lot Sang Lam. Decades later, when Nga-nyo was assigned the governance of Chiang Mai, the Avan court, already divided and weakened by “ministerial patronage networks,” lost administrative control over its officials who had by now only sworn allegiance to their own patrons, rather than crowns.²⁷ However, not every Burmese governor was self-indulgent.²⁸ Contemporary with Nga-nyo, another *myowun*, Bra-tha-paik, was appointed to take charge of Chiang Sæn (TNSN: 194; Ann-CMC: 281-2). Even under the corrupt, malfunctioning government, he seemed “considerate towards the people and the religion that have been entrusted to him” (Penth 1989: 15), as the TNSN lists many public festivals and religious donations made by Bra-tha-paik (195-6). It might have been his pious and generous patronage of the Religion that psychologically affected the locals in determining to expel the Chiang Mai rebels and accept the Burmese again into Chiang Sæn in the late 1720s. We shall see the details of his generous sponsorship below.

²⁶ Strangely, Lan Na sources mention no motive for the insurrection, with no reference to unrestrained tax demands or ruthless oppression by the Burmese officials.

²⁷ For the decline of Ava caused by a growing ministerial autonomy and related factors, see Lieberman (1984: chap. III).

²⁸ McDaniel (94) argues, “Burmese commanders differed in the way they treated their subjects,” and warns that an overgeneralization of Burmese rule “removes historical agency from individual Burmese, Northern Thai . . .” (114).

Lan Na Buddhism under Burmese rule

Chiang Mai without doubt was the “major site of Buddhist scholarship, especially in the early sixteenth century” (CMC: xxxi). “By the early eighteenth century,” however, “its rich cultural heritage, especially the glories of the sixteenth century, was neglected” (Wyatt 2003: 106). The negligence is easily ascribable to the Burmese, as shown below:

Due to the influence of Mon-Burmese culture, ordination as novices, rather than as monks, gained a popular preference. Novices tended to leave the priesthood before being ordained as a monk, which consequently caused a decrease in the number of elder monks, who could lead Buddhist scholarship to propagate Buddha’s teachings efficiently. As a result, deterioration in Buddhist scholarship became apparent throughout the realm [of Lan Na]. Since 1558 when Chiang Mai lost its supreme lord until today, no scholars versed in the Pali language and [doctrines and scriptures of] Buddhism have emerged in Lan Na. (Sæng 1980: 146)

Whether this argument is correct cannot be ascertained, as Sæng did not mention his source, and I have yet to find any historical statistics of Lan Na monks before and after 1558. One thing certain is that Lan Na Buddhism had been influenced by the Mon tradition well before the Burmese conquest, as King Kū Na (r. 1345-55) “took a strong interest in the establishment in Lan Na of a new, ascetic, scholarly sect” and “invited the Venerable Sumana, a Sukhothai monk who had studied at Martaban in the Mon country” (Wyatt 2003: 65). The Buddhist sect Sumana established was called “Raman (Mon) School” (Sarassawadee 2005: 75), as he had been ordained and studied in the Mon country, and “became the leading intellectual and cultural force in the kingdom over the next two or three centuries” (Wyatt 2003: 65). It seems necessary to examine, without intellectual and cultural prejudice, how Lan Na Buddhism was transformed during the 200-year Burmese rule, before blaming the Burmese for damage and evil, “regardless of what that nation is or does” (Thongchai 1998: 166).

By “its rich cultural heritage, especially the glories of the sixteenth century,” Wyatt most likely means the series of fine Buddhist literary works in Pali produced by informed, educated monks of Lan Na.²⁹ However, argues McDaniel, “although there was a decline in Pali composition during the Burmese period” (2007: 104), “the decline . . . seemed to be happening twenty years before the Burmese invasion” (106). Meanwhile, “vernacular manuscript composition increase(d) in the region under the Burmese” (109).³⁰ As McDaniel has already thoroughly analyzed the

²⁹ For the list of the works, see Sarassawadee (2005: 82).

³⁰ In addition, another Lan Na Buddhist literary tradition, the writing of the *Jātaka* tales (stories of the former lives of the Buddha) continued until the mid-17th century, nearly a half century after the Burmese takeover of Lan Na. The Lan Na *Jātaka* was further introduced to Burma (Mani 1982:

internal factors that caused the decline of Pali literature in Lan Na, I shall examine the external ones in the vernacularization of Buddhist manuscripts in the region.

Lan Na scholarship on Pali literature was closely associated with Sri Lanka, the preeminent center of Theravada Buddhism, where many Lan Na monks hoped to be ordained and trained in the Singhalese tradition. At the time of the Burmese conquest of Lan Na in 1558, Sri Lanka was in the “crisis of the sixteenth century” (De Silva 1981: 110-12), which began with the landing of the Portuguese on the island and ended with their dominance over the coastal areas. These Portuguese “in their zeal for proselytisation ... ruthlessly destroyed Buddhist and Hindu temples” (127). Not only the Portuguese, the Singhalese king Rajasimha³¹ “persecuted Buddhism” (Gombrich 1991: 167). And “throughout much of the eighteenth century [must be a misprint for the seventeenth century from the context] ... Buddhism was in a state of debility, worn out and almost moribund, to the extent that valid ordination of *bhikkhus* was a perennial problem” (De Silva 1981: 201). Thus by the mid-18th century “there were no true monks left in Ceylon” (Gombrich 1991: 167). King Sri Vijaya Rajasimha sent three missions to Ayutthaya in the mid-18th century to ask for senior monks who were to properly ordain the Singhalese counterparts (De Silva 1981: 155, 202). These centuries were truly a “dark age” of the island, long revered by Southeast Asian Buddhists as the sacred place, whither Lan Na monks had once traveled for ordination and study of Pali scriptures.

The demise of the great, probably the greatest, Buddhist tradition which the Lan Na *Sangha* had faithfully followed for centuries must have played a role, if not been decisive, in the demise of Pali learning in Lan Na. The downfall of the religious authority overseas in turn promoted the domestication of Buddhism of Singhalese origins, which is symbolized by the shift in literary trend from Pali to vernacular. The emergence of vernacular textual tradition indicates, contrary to the conventional view that the 200-year period brought intellectual stagnation to the region, religious practice and learning were still active under Burmese rule.³² There is certainly no indication of extinction of senior Lan Na monks entitled to perform proper ordination, hence no invitation to Burmese or Siamese monks for reordination of their Tai Yuan counterparts.

13; Likhit 1983-84: 97).

³¹ According to Gombrich, Rajasimha’s regnal years were 1580-91, while De Silva tells he reigned until 1593.

³² For example, Wat Lai Hin, famous for the “second largest collection of palm-leaf manuscripts in all of Northern Thailand,” was “founded in 1693 and had its period of greatest intellectual activity in the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century” (McDaniel 2007: 87). In the monastery is a chapel that is “built in the Northern Thai style. The entire building is decorated with fine and beautiful patterns and figures. The gable [of the roof] and the arch of the entrance gate . . . are [the representation of] the craftsmanship of Lampang in the twenty-third century [i.e. the Buddhist century, roughly 1650-1750]” (Lampang: 101). Thus, not only the tradition of Buddhist learning and practice, but the architectural style of Lan Na was also preserved under Burmese rule.

The Burmese are also blamed for their lack of support for Buddhism.³³ However, King Thalun established several temples in Chiang Mai and Chiang Sæn, and had the Lamphun Reliquary gilded (SMK V: 146; Latdawal 2002: 129-30), and other chronicle and epigraphic evidence also “point(s) to a Burmese patronage of Buddhism” (McDaniel 2007: 98n). Meanwhile Bra-tha-paik, *myowun* of Chiang Sæn, was a good sponsor of the local *Sangha*. He sponsored several monastic buildings, and took charge of appointing *maha sangharajas*, supreme leaders of the Buddhist order in Chiang Sæn (TNSN: 195-6; Penth 1989: 15-6).³⁴ Furthermore, the Chiang Sæn *myowun* “commissioned a number of bronze Buddha images” (McDaniel 2007: 96). One of the images was installed in a monastery, “which was built on the place where he [deceased son of the former Chiang Sæn lord] was cremated” (Penth 1989: 17; LI pt. I, vol. I: 20-1).³⁵ This Buddha image (and the other bronzes commissioned by Bra-tha-paik also) bears inscriptions written in the language and script of Lan Na, which attests that the Burmese ruler, rather than imposing the Burmese style of Buddhism, honored local Buddhist practices. From the available records, then, it is safely concluded, “the Burmese followed local customs in relation to the donation of slaves to temples” and “the organization of the *sangha* also remained unchanged” (Sarassawadee 2005: 116). By no means was the Lan Na *Sangha* worn out or moribund during the Burmese era.

Not only Buddhist literature, the secular one, the tradition of poetry writing, was also maintained during the 200-year period. A poetical form called *khlong* survived well after the mid-18th century (Phannpen and Phaithun 2001: 42). A *khlong* called *Nirat Dòikæng*, written in 1708, is a fine piece worthy of note, which modeled itself on *Nirat Hariphunchai*, “the paragon of Siamese literature” (Udom 2003: 486), tentatively dated to the second half of the 16th century (Phannpen and Phaithun 2001: 19). The early 18th century poem clearly reflects the influence from the best classic written over two hundred years earlier (Udom 2003: 486), a visible representation of the long tradition of Lan Na poetry. *Nirat Dòikæng* is about a fourteen-day journey from Lampang to the Dòikæng Reliquary, during which the poet “depicts the beauty of nature and his yearning for his beloved” (19). During the long-distance journey,

³³ Sarassawadee remarks (2005: 116), “There are far fewer stone inscriptions that record support of Buddhism during Burmese rule than there are during the Mangrai dynasty.” However, the decrease in the number of inscriptions does not necessarily mean a decline in religious support. In Burma, “the tradition of lithic inscriptions . . . apparently began to die out in the late fifteenth century, as . . . ephemeral writing materials became more popular. Compared to over thirteen hundred inscriptions dated prior to 1550 A.D., barely sixty from 1580 to 1760 are available” (Lieberman 1984: 294). In Lan Na too, paper and palm-leaves must have replaced the lithic material for keeping religious records.

³⁴ He also organized several public festivals, including a rocket ceremony and a “verbal contest between girls paddling boats on the Mekong, which was a great event” (Penth 1989: 15).

³⁵ The son’s name is Phra Yôt Ngam Müang, who, according to the TNSN (195), succeeded his father, Caofa Lakthi, as lord of Chiang Sæn in 1724. The English text of the LI (pt. I, vol. I: 265) renders him a son of Bra-tha-paik, while their parentage is unclear in Penth’s translation.

the poet seems to have enjoyed free movement, without showing a pass to either the Burmese authorities or native officials at their posts. Meanwhile, people in Burma at the time were “required . . . to obtain a pass from their headman if they wanted to leave the village even temporarily” (Lieberman 1984: 104).³⁶ When he reached the final destination, the poet, to quote a line, “observes the environs of the Reliquary, which is dazzlingly glittering in the land of Lan Na that is grand” (Udom 2003: 393). In the eyes of the poet, a “dark age” did not befall Lan Na.

Lan Na economy under Burmese rule

As “Lan Na” literally means “One Million Rice Fields,” much emphasis has been placed on the agrarian aspects of the Lan Na economy. This consequently produced another myth in the historiography of Lan Na: “the myth of the subsistence economy” (Bowie 1992). However, while agriculture was certainly the economic basis of Lan Na, commerce had also been vital to the kingdom since its foundation. In 1274 King Mangrai, the dynastic founder, “was visited by a party of merchants from Hariphuñjaya [modern-day Lamphun]” (Wyatt 2003: 34), and one of them testified:

Traders of all countries frequent it [Hariphuñjaya] both by land and by water to trade. By water, one can reach Yodhiya [Ayutthaya], and traders from there come. In trade, the people of the domain are very prosperous.³⁷ (CMC: 19)

Mangrai thus decided to take the flourishing Mon principality, which would result in the foundation of the city of Chiang Mai in 1296. Although the testimony only refers to the trade with Ayutthaya, Hariphuñjaya also maintained its commercial relationship with the coastal cities of Lower Burma open to maritime trade on the Bay of Bengal. Therefore, the famous *Kalyani Inscriptions* established at Pegu in 1476 by a Mon king list ““handicrafts from as far off as Haribhunja [sic] being sent to Ceylon”” (Lieberman 1984: 28n).³⁸ Also, according to the early 16th century account, ““damasks, satins, brocades, white cloths from Bengal”” were probably imported to Chiang Mai (Pires 1944, I: 111, quoted in Lieberman 1984: 28n).

As already seen above, under Burmese rule commercial activity in Lan Na shows no sign of decline. Chiang Mai in the 1580s was a prosperous city which many Chinese merchants frequented with “great store of Muske, Gold, Silver, and many other things of China worke” (Fitch 1905: 195), and even agents of the English East India Company visited the city in the hope of conducting trade in 1612 (Farrington and Dhiravat 2007: 257; Nantha 1970: 58, 69). King Anauk-hpet-lun, even in the

³⁶ In early 18th century Lower Burma, “not a single person can go from one village into another without a paper or writing” (Manucci 1906, I: 373, quoted in Lieberman 1984: 104n).

³⁷ Just to note, the conventional dating of the foundation of Ayutthaya is 1351.

³⁸ Not only to Lower Burma, there was a trade route to Upper Burma from Chiang Mai (CMC: 69).

aftermath of the conquest of Lan Na, kept a market open at Hòt on the southern fringe of Lan Na, where “Ayutthaya merchants come by boat for trade at a market open throughout the day every day,” and “groups of the Chiang Mai people also visit and enjoy buying and selling, [as a result of which] some become rich” (KMRC: 59). Meanwhile, a commercial channel between Lan Na and Lower Burma entrepôts was certainly kept open by the Nyaungyan dynasts, through which Chiang Mai, as “exempted from taxes and all manner of duties” by King Pyè due to the devastating Siamese attack in the early 1660s, ordered a large volume of Indian textiles, thereby allowing the Dutch “to sell off most of their Burma remnants” (Dijk 2006: 104). The image of the Tai Yuan miserably dressed in rags under Burmese rule is probably wrong. The imported fabrics from India had long been basic attire donned by the people of Lan Na, or at least of Chiang Mai, who could send many orders for the textiles even within a year or so after a mass deportation of the local nobility with much treasure to Ayutthaya. The Burmese regime, if not very supportive of “free-trade,” had not been so obstructive to commercial activities until 1718 when a new *myowun* was appointed to take charge of Chiang Mai. A decade later Chiang Mai residents rose up against the governor and his deputy, the first popular uprising against Burmese rulers recorded both by Lan Na and Burmese materials since 1558. One of the motives for the rising was high customs duty (HMN: 362; Lieberman 1984: 204), which was surely obstructive to trade.

Conclusion

For modern states to properly and securely exist, “the monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence” (Gellner 1983: 34). The primary subjects of that education are not chemistry or geometry but history and geography (i.e. a study of the mapped nations).³⁹ But a national history taught in classrooms across the nation is a collection of seemingly factual pieces that historians “choose, sever, and carve . . . up,” as a result of which “very much more is left out than is put in” (Levi-Strauss 1966: 275). These intellectual, ideological interpretations and selections would develop into what Ernest Renan calls (1992[1882]) “collective remembering” and “collective forgetting,” which are the “essence of nationhood” (Gellner 1997: 46). This article has examined what is remembered (probably erroneously) and forgotten (hopefully unintentionally)

³⁹ As standardized mass education throughout the country requires linguistic standardization, the Bangkok regime “ordered that everything written in ‘minority’ languages and alphabets be burnt” (CMC: xxxi). For the loss of (literally uncountable) northern Thai manuscripts, Tai historians cannot blame the Burmese. Likewise, traditional Buddhist practices in Lan Na were brought to an end by the Bangkok government that enforced a religious unification of the country under a single authority (Sarassawadee 2005: 212-3). These are the issues not completely forgotten but less well remembered by the Thai.

in the historiography of Lan Na: oppressive rule by the demonized Burmese and pleasant and happy lives enjoyed by the masses under that rule. In other words, it has attempted to present “the Past *as it really was* to those who lived *in* that past” (Wyatt 1999: 264; italics original), not the past interpreted (or “invented”) by those who live in the present.

For a nation to be born, rites of passage, especially the bloody and heroic, if not genuine, ones are essential. The most favored rites in the Thai historiography are the “wars of national independence” (Sunait 2000: 56), notably the “history of ‘*Thai rop phama*’ (The Thai fought Burma),” which is “the most powerful and effective theme of Thai history” (Thongchai 1998: 163).⁴⁰ In the narrative of the war of emancipation the demonized Burmese serve as the significant “Other” to define the “Un-Thainess,” the existence of which is “as necessary as the positive definition of Thainess” and is actually “indispensable to the latter” (6). As the anti-Burmese war was mostly fought by the allied forces of Bangkok and Lan Na throughout the late 18th and early 19th century, the history of “*Thai rop phama*” gives a shared, indispensable historical experience and memory to the Siamese and Tai Yuan, whereby they could imagine they “share the same enemy and have always been part of the same nation” (McDaniel 2007: 111).

Although Prince Damrong Rachanubhab, the “father of modern Thai historical scholarship” (Sunait 2000: 56), and others believed that the union of the Siamese and Tai Yuan was naturally accomplished because both were *chat Thai*, the Thai nation (Damrong 2002: 450-51; Prinsa 1973: 89), it is not really the case.⁴¹ In the early 20th century the Lan Na people still “felt little in common with the Siamese, who felt likewise about their northern neighbors” (Sarassawadee 2005: 210). The Central Thai were culturally and linguistically remote from the Tai Yuan, whom they called “Lao” in the past, finding little difference between the two Tai brethren. Now the Lao, i.e. the dominant Tai-speaking group of a state called Laos, have been ranked in the top-three nations most hated by the Siamese (Thongchai 1998: 168), while the image of the Thai in Lao perception should be negative, definitely more negative than that of the Burmese, due to the total destruction of Vientiane in 1827 and subsequent mass deportation of its inhabitants by the Siamese army.⁴² If the unification of the Thai and Yuan in the 1770s was natural because both belonged to the “same nation,” why the one between the Siamese and Lao (not including the Yuan) has never taken

⁴⁰ Sunait describes (1992: 96) *Thai rop phama* as “one of the most influential historical works, responsible for popularizing the image of the Burmese as an enemy of the Thai nation. . . . It casts a long shadow over later historical writing, especially textbooks written for Thai schools and colleges.” Through its English translation, this classic work has influenced Western historians too.

⁴¹ McDaniel strongly argues (88n): “There was no natural or “Thai” allegiance between the Siamese (Thai) and Northern Thai.”

⁴² Scholars of Lao history, commenting on the fall of the Lao capital, claim that “this genocide of an entire people remained a veritable nightmare for its few survivors” (Mayoury and Pheuiphanh 1998: 60, quoted in Grabowsky and Turton 2003: 12).

place is indeed an interesting, though quite reasonable, question to ask. Asking that question will reveal that history really is “one of the most significant instruments in the identification of Thai nationhood” (163), and how “powerful and effective” the demoniac otherness of the Burmese is in that identification.

As a century has elapsed since Lan Na was administratively integrated into the Siamese state centered at Bangkok, it is about time to consider “rescuing history of Lan Na from the nation.” The 200-year period, as I have stated at the beginning, neatly corresponded to the “early modern” era, during which “the upland interstices” such as Lan Na were “involved in the same sorts of global transformations as the major empires” (Wyatt 1999: 264-5). Not in the paradigm of “dark age,” but in the global context of the early modern period, should the era of Burmese rule in Lan Na be placed and discussed.⁴³ Truly, as McDaniel concludes: “A reassessment of Northern Thai history needs to begin.”

Abbreviations

Ann-CMC	Ken Kirigaya. “Some Annotations to <i>The Chiang Mai Chronicle</i> ”
CMC	David K. Wyatt and Aroonrut Wichienkeo, trans. <i>The Chiang Mai Chronicle</i>
HMN	<i>Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi</i>
KBZ	<i>Konbaung-zet Mahayazawindawgyi</i>
KMRC	Singkha Wannasai, trans. <i>Khlong Rüang Mangthra Rop Chiang Mai</i>
LBHK	Thiri Uzana. <i>Lawkabyahakyan</i>
LI	Prasert Na Nagara, et al., eds. <i>Lan Na Inscriptions</i> .
LNCH	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>
SMK	Burma, Department of Archaeology. <i>She Haung Myanma Kyauksa Mya</i>
TNSN	<i>Tamnan Singhanawat</i>
UK	U Kala. <i>Mahayazawingyi</i>

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⁴³ As Wil Dijk has partially demonstrated, archival research of the VOC materials will make an important contribution to the study of “early modern” Lan Na.

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