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**OBITUARY.**  
1924.

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 U Shwe Kyu

M. Musaji  
 J. St. C. Saunders  
 D. H. M. Silvanus

**Chinese invasions of Burma in the 18th century.\***

It is possible to exaggerate the extent of China's influence on Burma—political or cultural—but it is difficult to assess too highly the historical value of its references to Burma, scattered over the 24 Dynastic Histories and a whole host of miscellaneous literature. Wherever we look in Further India or the islands—whether to Annam, Cambodia, the Malay States, Java, Borneo or Sumatra—the facts are the same; all took their culture, script and religion from India, but the chief record of their olden history they owe to China. From the beginning of the 1st century B. C. China understood the writing of history much as we understand it to-day. Annals were preserved, documents filed, biographies written; statements of travellers and itineraries were collected; there were census reports and district gazetteers, bibliographies, dictionaries, treatises on music and ceremonies, on trade, botany, hydrography and phonetics. All were grist to the historian. From the 3rd century A. D. scientific principles of map-making were clearly grasped, subject only to the limitation that the earth was thought to be flat. On the fall of one dynasty its successor set about the task of writing its history. The whole mass of material was collated by laborious scholars who were content to waive the theory if only they might register the fact.

Most interesting to us, no doubt, are the sections on foreign countries. It is strange, surely, to find in the Chinese history of the T'ang dynasty ten pages devoted to Pyu music. It is as if, in a history of England, we found a chapter devoted to the tom-toms of Timbuctoo. Yet to this happy chance we owe our earliest full-length picture of Burma, about the year 800 A. D. During the next three centuries, down to Kyanzitha, Chinese history is almost silent about Burma, for the Sung dynasty drew its line of frontier north of Yunnan. As a result, there remains unsolved perhaps the hardest problem in Burmese history, namely—who are the Burmans? and how did they get here? For the fall of Pagan the Chinese, or rather the Mongols, were largely responsible; and the chief record of their invasions of Burma has been translated into French by Huber in Volume IX of the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, and placed side by side with the meagre story of the Hmannan Yazawin. For the next period, of Shan domination, there is abundant material in Chinese; but apart from brief summaries by Parker, none of it is translated. One may safely surmise that when these sources are tapped, the history of Burma in this bewildering period will need to be rewritten.

\*Read at the Ordinary Meeting on 29th August 1924. In a forty minutes' lecture it was not possible to make all the necessary reservations. I may be excused therefore for pointing out that the account given of the opening stages of the campaign is provisional, since here the Chinese and Burmese sources offer points of contrast and obscurity which will need further investigation. (G. H. L.)

In the 16th century the Toungoo kings, Tabin Shweti and Bayinnaung, often raided the frontier, penetrating with enormous armies into the heart of Yünnan. Things changed when they died; but the Chinese had not forgotten them when their turn came two centuries later. The immediate effect, in 1594, was the establishment by the Chinese of the Eight Gates of the frontier. The original position of these gates is somewhat uncertain; their position on my map is only approximate. They might be classed as moveable furniture, within twenty or twenty five miles. When Burma retired, they advanced; when she advanced, they retired. It saved the Yünnan Viceroy a lot of correspondence, and the Emperor was none the wiser. But the time came, as we shall see, when an Emperor looked at the map; and then there was trouble.

The middle of the 16th century saw the fall of the Ming dynasty; and the last of the family, Prince Yung-li, took refuge in Burma. In 1662, when the Manchus demanded him at the gates of Ava, he was tamely surrendered. From this date onwards, for nearly a century, Burma had no official relations with China.

This brings us to the subject of this paper. But first a word about the sources. On the Burmese side, I have used a translation of the relevant chapters of the *Konbaungzet* made for me by Maung Kin Kyi, student of this College. U Tin has shewn me a manuscript in his possession which contains further information, chiefly about the negotiations during, and after, the war. The only other Burmese record I have seen, in the Monywa Sayadaw's Yazawin, appears to be identical with that of the *Konbaungzet*. Maung Ba Kya tells me that the common author was probably the Sayadaw himself.<sup>1</sup>

The account given is on the whole reliable, if we except the numbers ascribed to the forces on either side. Mr. Harvey states in his History that Burmese historians as a matter of course shifted the decimal point one place on these occasions. From the evidence afforded by these campaigns I should call this but a modest estimate. The Burmans were strangely ignorant of the causes which led the Chinese into war. The two reasons they allege—the death of a Chinaman in a brawl near Kengtung, and a minor trade dispute at Kaungton over the question of the bridging of the Taping (a burning question, I believe,—*absit omen*—at this moment), are not mentioned at all by the Chinese.

On the Chinese side, I have used a translation by Warry from Wei Yüan's narrative in the *Shêng wu chi*, the Imperial "Military Record". This gives, I think, the best concise account of the whole war; but it omits much, especially the political or inner history of the struggle. And here I have relied on Parker's summaries from the long accounts given in the *Tung hua lu* or Imperial Archives. They are invaluable as a sidelight on the action, being authentic records of despatches received in Peking;

1. For Colonel Burney's articles and translations on the subject of these invasions, see Cordier, *Bibliotheca Indosinica*, Vol. I, p. 426. I regret that I have not had access to them.

but they must be used with caution, for the contents, as we shall see, were sometimes dressed for the Emperor's inspection, and perhaps the thing most interesting about them is his caustic comment. The only contribution I have made myself is a translation of a diary, the *Chêng mien chi wên*, written by a Chinese officer, Wang Ch'ang, who took part in the last campaign—a typical war-diary, excellent in relating what fell within the author's immediate experience, but of little use elsewhere. It appears in the *Hsiao fang hu chai Geographical Miscellany*, together with several other narratives of which Mr. Yih (of the London School of Oriental Studies) has kindly furnished me with notes. There is also an account in Chao P's *Wu kung chi shêng*. No doubt there are other sources, e.g. the Yünnan encyclopaedias, of which I know nothing. It is plain that here is abundance of material; all that prevents further research is the absence of a Chinese Historical Library in Rangoon, such as is to be found in other capitals of Indo-China.

For this excellent map I am entirely indebted to Professor and Mrs. Stamp. In the details of the frontier and Bhamo districts, of which I have no first hand knowledge, I am under great obligations to Captain Medd and Dr. Hanson of Bhamo and to Mr. Shaw of Taungbaing.

About 1750 a large Chinese colony was mining silver at Mao-lung, probably Bawdwin; and the chief merchant, visiting Ava, persuaded the king Mahādhammarājādhpati, to send to Peking one of those complimentary embassies which the Chinese regarded as tribute-missions. Two hairpins, of silver and gold, and a gilt pagoda mounted on an elephant were sent as presents. The Emperor entertained the envoy at a banquet, and on his departure gave him a door slab, inscribed in the imperial hand—"Happy Pacification of the Western Jewel". But the Western Jewel was far from being pacified; the Mao-lung colony was dispersed, the merchant executed, and the envoy returned to find his king a captive in Pegu, and Ava a smoking ruin. Meantime a usurper, a village hunter it was said, had assumed the title of Aungzeya, "the Victorious", and had the impudence to address a letter to China claiming descent from the emperor Augustus.

Now among the first enemies of Aungzeya, or Alaungpaya as he is more generally known, was a people of mysterious origin, the Kwe. The Chinese thought them the descendants of the suite of Prince Yung-li, one of whose names was Kuei; but this is scarcely credible, for the suite numbered only six or seven hundred and they were massacred almost to a man. Mr. Harvey has given me an interesting note on the Kwe. They are variously classed as Wa, Karen, Shan, Lahu, Lolo, Chinese, Siamese or Shan Tayok. They hardly appear in Burmese history before 1740, and seem to vanish about 1770. In Burma proper they were settled in two separate colonies, the Kwe Lawa at Okpo in Mandalay district, and the Kwe Karen near Pegu town. The former were a nest of dacoits, under a chieftain Kwe Gunna-ein, who gave continual annoyance to the old Ava dynasty. The latter were the prime movers of the Talaing

rebellion of 1740; the first nominee for the kingship, the wandering monk Smin Htaw Buddhaketi, is said to have been a Kwe, or at least brought up amongst the Kwe. When Alaungpaya first came to the fore, the Kwe of Okpo joined him; but later, suspecting a plot, he massacred seven hundred of them. Now the son and heir of the captive king of Ava had visited the camp of Alaungpaya, but receiving small encouragement he threw in his lot with the Kwe, and retired with them into the mountains of Mongmit and Hsenwi, where he was still at large in 1756. Already, at the end of 1754, Alaungpaya had sent a general to dispose of him and them.

When the Chinese heard of them, in 1762, their chief Kung-li-yen—whom I identify provisionally with Gunna-ein—was a fugitive with all his family at Mêng-lien, east of the Salween. The Sawbwa of Mêng-lien gave him but a poor welcome. He forced him to recognise Mêng-lien's suzerainty; and having robbed him of his independence, robbed him also of his money and his wife. The Kwe, indignant, made raids across the frontier. The matter was reported to the Emperor, who sympathised with Kung-li-yen, but had him decoyed and executed and his whole family imprisoned, for it would never do to have the frontier disturbed. One woman and her babe were left, with the world against them—Nang-chan, once wife of Kung-li-yen. The Chinese naively remarks that she loved neither the Chinese nor the Burmans, nor even her captor, the Sawbwa of Mêng-lien. The last had first to be dealt with; in 1762, herself leading the band of avengers, she murdered him and burnt his city to the ground. But she would have her vengeance also on China and on Burma; and time was short, for an order was out for her arrest. She had friends in Kengtung, where the Sawbwa, a Burma nominee, had expelled his brother, the rightful heir, who had fled to China. She sent a message to the usurper, urging him to attack Kenghung, a neighbour state, but one of the "inner dependencies" of China. The message took effect; the fuse was lighted.

Now these regions had long been peaceful. The Viceroy of Yünnan had found leisure to write a treatise in fourteen volumes on the barbarian languages and scripts. When the Kengtung raiders appeared, the whole of southern Yünnan was thrown into panic. Three Chinese generals were severally defeated. But it was a war of sawbwars; and though the Chinese thought the Burmans were at the bottom of it, it seems probable that they were not. For Burma was otherwise engaged. In 1764 Thihapate's army of 20,000 men passed through Kengtung; they were bound, not for China, but for Siam. In the following year a general of the new king of Burma, Hsinbyushin, appeared with small forces on the Salween further north, demanding tribute from the minor sawbwars under Chinese protection. There was nothing strange about this. For centuries it had been the custom for the frontier states to pay open and nominal tribute to China on the one hand, and secret and substantial tribute to Burma on the other. When Ava was burnt by the Talains, they were glad, no doubt, of the respite from the heavier burden; and

now, when the Burmans called them to account, they were in no mood to comply. They complained to China.

Meantime the Yünnan forces were slowly closing on Kengtung. Thihapate had left it long ago, had taken Zimmè and Viengchang, and by January 1766 had joined hands under the walls of Ayuthia with Mahanawrahta's army, marching from Mergui. A Chinese army in Kengtung might well have been the signal for revolt in northern Siam; this is not stated, but I suspect it was the reason that made Hsinbyushin, in this same month, despatch a new army under Nemyosithu to relieve Kengtung. The siege of this town—the chief feature of the first Chinese invasion recorded in the Konbaungset—is scarcely mentioned by the Chinese, whose narrative of the opening stages of the war is not easy to piece together. Nemyosithu attacked the besiegers from without; there was a sortie from within; the Chinese cavalry proved no match for the Burmese elephantry, and they were driven back, first on the Talaw river, then on the Mekong, where the Chinese general fell. The campaign was over by March 1766.

This Burmese version, though uncorroborated, is very likely correct; for about this time the Yünnan Viceroy is stated to have "lost his wits," and smarting under the Emperor's censure, committed suicide "out of sheer fright." His place was taken by Yang Ying-chü, a man of large ambitions and meagre abilities. At first he made some headway in southern Yünnan; for a time Kenghung and even Kengtung were recovered. Such, at least, was the report received at Peking, but we are not bound to believe it. Elated by minor successes, he now conceived the idea of conquering Burma. "His generals" says the *Shêng wu chi*, "falling in with his humour, told him there were daily applications from states wishing to become tributary. Emissaries were despatched to Mongmit, Hsenwi, Mohnyin, Old Bhamo, Zimmè and other states to induce their chiefs to swear fealty or to invite their relatives or sub-sawbwars to do this for them. . . . All this was reported to the Emperor without examination by the Viceroy, but in effect these states were still half inclined towards Burma and were beyond the range of our effective control."

Decision rested with the Emperor Ch'ien-lung. He was a strong man. His generals had won brilliant victories in Central Asia, conquering the Eleuths of Kucha, subduing the great Muslim cities of the Tarim basin, Kashgar, Aksu and Yarkand, and to the north had organised the T'ien Shan. He had revived the glories of the Han dynasties, the empire of Wu Ti and Pan Ch'ao. A still more brilliant feat awaited him, the conquest of Nepal in 1792. No monarch ever gave himself more freely to the task of administration. Few things, even on the Burma frontier, could escape that vigilant eye. Couriers covering two or three hundred miles a day kept him in daily touch with the furthest corners of the empire. In ten days messages from Burma reached Peking. He was, of course, a Manchu; he speaks with regular, and perhaps unfair,

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