

THE POLITICAL EXPANSION OF THE MAO SHANS*

by

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The Mao Shans are a well-known section of the Thai race that migrated to Burma from the north from very early times, when in the 13th century A.D. they became very powerful and started to build an empire for themselves. The rise of the Mao Shan power in the region of Yünnan and Upper Burma in the first quarter of the 13th century brought about a great change in the political structure and the social outlook of the peoples inhabiting this area as well as neighboring territories. The concentration of the Mao Shans in the extensive fertile plains of the Shweli valley and their advance to the south-east and to the west up to the valley of the Brahmaputra in what is now called Assam led to the consolidation of their power in a number of closely allied states in this region, some of which had enjoyed six to seven hundred years of unbroken rule. A review of the history of the Mao Shans is necessary to understand their political expansion, particularly in Burma and Assam.

As to the migrations of the Thai into Burma, the opinion generally held by scholars is that these movements began about two thousand years ago. The great waves of migration always moved towards the south and west whenever events in the north upset the Thai centres of power. Infiltrations during times of comparative peace were chiefly due to the restless character of the race. Other causes of movement in large masses were, of course, warlike expeditions or the pressure of Chinese invasions and conquests. Dr. Cushing enlightens us on the fact that the 6th century of the Christian era saw a great wave of Thai migration descending from the mountains of southern Yünnan into the Nam-Mao (Shweli) valley and adjacent regions. (*Vide*: "The Shans" in the *Report on the Census of Burma*, 1892, p. 200).

Compared with the earlier movements the strength of this 6th century migration was such as to convert almost the whole

* See also the related article by Kachorn Sukhabanij, which immediately follows.

valley of the Shweli into a great centre of Thai political power for the first time in history. The result was the speedy growth of states such as Hsen Wi, Mong Mit, Bhamo and others in this region. It was from the Shweli valley that the Thai communities spread southeast over the present Shan States, reinforcing the earlier colonists, and to the north and west across the Irrawaddy in Upper Burma. By the 13th century the spearhead of the Thai migration in the west established a foothold in Wehsali Lông (Assam) which in a few centuries came completely under Thai rule.

In the 7th century there arose a powerful Shan kingdom, called Mong-Mao-Long, across the northeastern frontier of Burma in the neighborhood of the Shweli River. This was the kingdom founded by the Mao Shans, the Shans who settled along the Shweli. Who are the Mao Shans? M. Terrien de Lacouperie, from his Chinese sources, gives *Ti*, *Mou* and *Tsiu* as the "tribal names with settlements in Szetchuen". *Ti* has its modern representative in Mông-Ti; *Mou*, in Mông-Mou or Mong-Mao; and *Tsiu* seems to appear in Hsö, the Tiger race of the Hsen Wi. The Shweli River was called Nam-Mao by the Mao community of the Thai who settled in its valley. No one place was the seat of the government all through the long period of Mao rule in the kingdom, but the site often adopted was Cheila, according to Ney Elias' manuscript. It was where modern Se Lan is located, about thirteen miles east of Nam Hkam, while modern Mông Mao is in the territory of Yünnan opposite Se Lan on the right bank of the Shweli. Another place called Pang Hkam was an old Mao capital. Relics of Mao Shan cities in the shape of parapet and formidable entrenchments are still to be seen. Anawrahta, the Pagan king (1044-77 A.D.), once visited Nan Chao in quest of the Buddha's tooth, but while returning, married Sao-Môn-la, a daughter of the Mao Shan king. But there is nothing to show that the Mao Shan king ever had to acknowledge the overlordship of the Pagan monarch. According to the Hsen Wi Chronicle, Sao-Môn-La was the daughter of Sao-Hôm-Mông. In the year 1047 "the king Anawrahta Mangsaw of Pagan went

up to Mōng Wong in search of the five relics of the Buddha, and on his way back he stayed at Mōng-Mao and Mōng Nam and met Sao-Hôm-Mōng there and married his daughter Sao-Môn-La”.

The disintegration of the Shan Kingdom of Nan Chao that inevitably followed the Mongol conquest of Ta-li in 1253 had far-reaching effects on the fortunes of Burma and Siam. When the heart of Nan Chao fell there was almost a general exodus of the people, who were mostly Thai, from Yünnan to the west and to the south.

In Burma the Thai had already been in power in the regions of the Shweli valley since the 6th century, although in the 11th century the extension of the Pagan empire brought much of the territory, over which the Thai communities were holding sway, under the suzerainty of the Burmese monarch Anawrahta. But Kublai Khan's advance almost to the frontiers of Burma not only exposed the Pagan kingdom to the invading Mongols, but also caused a great influx of Thai people into Burma from the northeast. These new entrants upset the balance of population in the country and became an immediate source of strength to their kinsmen who had already been settled there for generations.

For about thirty years after the conquest of Yünnan the Mongol-Chinese army was moving about on the border of Burma as an impending menace to her security. During this period Kublai Khan negotiated with the Pagan king, Narathihapate, for a perpetual alliance with his country. But the latter's insolent rejection of the offer provoked the Mongol chief so that in 1284 (or according to some, 1287) an expedition, composed largely of Mohammedans of Turkish race and Shan levies, swept down on Pagan and overthrew the Burmese monarchy with great slaughter and devastation. The downfall of Pagan afforded an opportunity to the Shans (Thai) of Burma to assert their strength. This eventually resulted in the partition of Burma into a number of free Shan states with their own princes, although subsequent events made them tributary to China and Siam. It is to be noted that Kublai Khan's expedition against Pagan must have marched through Mao territory and that the latter remained

unharmcd can be accounted for only by the existence of friendly relations between the two countries. Moreover, the destruction of Pagan was a blessing to the Mao kingdom, enabling it to extend its influence into Burma.

From long before Kublai Khan's invasion of Ta-li the Thai tribes had been migrating to the south, following the courses of the great rivers like the Mekong and the Menam Chao Phya, forming settlements in what is now Siam but what was then part of the Khmer empire. Certain Thai states came into existence in Siam even as early as the 9th century. Thus about 857 the Thai Prince P'rohni founded the city of Muang Fang. During the same century, another Thai state, called Muang Sao (modern Luang P'rabang in Laos) sprang up in northern Siam. In 1096 a descendant of Prince P'rohni, K'un Chom T'amma, founded the city of P'ayao which became the capital of an independent Thai state. It must be remembered, however, that King Anawaraha attacked and permanently weakened the Cambodian empire and for some time extended his sway over Siam. He was most ardent in spreading Buddhism in Burma and Siam. But when the Burmese control over Siam was removed a number of independent or semi-independent Thai states arose.

The Thai, who were growing in numbers in the centre of Siam, revolted against Khmer rule. A Khmer general named Khlon Lamphong was sent by the king of Cambodia to restore order, but he was defeated in a pitched battle by two Thai chiefs, K'un Bang Klang T'ao and K'un P'a Muang. These two chiefs then captured the city of Sukhodaya, which was then the northern outpost of the Khmer empire, and set up a feudal state about 1237 with K'un Bang Klang T'ao as its first king who assumed the Hinduized Khmer name of Sri Indraditya. According to Phya Anuman Rajadhon, Sri Indraditya became king of Sukhodaya in about 1252 or 1257.

Kublai Khan's invasion of Yunnan was indirectly responsible for the growth and consolidation of Thai rule both in Siam and Burma. King Indraditya's power to withstand Khmer pressure lay chiefly in a constant supply of Thai recruits from the north.

Another Thai kingdom, called Ayudhya, was founded by the Prince of Uthong (modern Sup'an) in 1350. It was destined within a few decades to supplant altogether the older kingdom of Sukhodaya and become the capital of a greater Siam for more than four hundred years. The Prince of Uthong became its first king under the Hinduized name of Ramadhipati I.

In Burma, as we have noted above, real Thai immigration began in the 6th century about the time of the descent of the heavenly Princes Hkun-lung and Khun-lai. At that time Upper Burma was ruled by the princes of the Sakya dynasty of India who had been driven from Kapilavastu as a result of wars that took place between Kapilavastu and the neighboring states. According to the Burmese *Tagaung Yazawin*, the first Sakya prince to enter Burma with his army was Abhi Rajah of Kapilavasthu (Kapilavastu, or the Middle Country), who arrived as early as 923 B.C., that is, several centuries before the birth of Gautama Buddha. He came by way of Arakan and first founded what was called Sangassarattha in the Tagaung Country. The capital was established on the site of the old city of Pagan, called Chindue in some accounts, on the left bank of the Irrawaddy. It seems his family virtually merged among the local tribes and his two sons were known by Burmese names. He carried to Burma the pre-Buddhist traditions of the Sakyas, a people of the sub-Himalayan region of north India. It is doubtful whether the Aryans had extended their sway over this part of India to the north of the Gangetic valley proper during that early period. The thirty-third descendant of the Sakya line of princes was Bhinnakarajah who reigned roughly speaking about the commencement of the Buddhist era, or partly during Gautama's lifetime. During his reign a Chinese army which was actually manned by Thai forces invaded his country, captured Pagan, destroyed it, and compelled him to flee for his safety. This invasion was from the "Sein Country in the kingdom of Gandhala".

As a result of Vitatupa's invasion of Kapilavasthu another Sakya prince, Dhaja Rajah, fled to Burma and took shelter at the place where Bhinnakarajah's queen resided, Naga Seng at Male in

Burma. He founded a kingdom for himself in Burma and rebuilt the capital immediately beyond the north wall of the old city of Pagan after the withdrawal of the invading Chinese army. This was the Tagaung of the Burmese and the Tung Kung of the Shans, and the date of its foundation as given by the Burmese is the twentieth year of the year of religion (523 B.C.), and by the Shans the twenty-fourth year (519 B.C.). Dhaja Rajah's dynasty appears to have ruled at Tagaung until the great Hkun-Lung of the Ahom Chronicles displaced it and placed his son Ai-Hkun-Lung on the throne at some date probably within one generation posterior to the year 568 A.D., the date of the foundation of the kingdom of Mông-ri Mông-ram (in Shan: Mông-hi Mông-ham) of the Ahom Chronicles.

The Thai principalities came for a time under Burmese domination during Anawrahta reign. But with the fall of Pagan and further accession of immigrants from the Nan Chao and Mông-Mao regions, the Thai principalities of old asserted their independence. Whether Anawrahta reduced Mông-Mao to the status of a vassal state or not, it is certain that the succeeding kings of that state were entirely independent and reigned in unbroken continuity and peace until the death of Pam Yao Pông in 1210 A.D. According to the Burmese Buddhist's *Tagaung Yazawin* we find that Pam Yao Pông was the son of Chao Taiplung and the grandson of Khun-Kum of the line of Hkun-Lung. Chao Taiplung, the ruler of Mông-Mao-Long, divided his kingdom between his three sons giving Tailung, the eldest, Mông Mao; and Lengsham Phuchāng Khāng (or Phrutyāng Khrāng), the second son, rule of the territories of Mông-Mit and Kupkingdao in the Shweli valley in Upper Burma. According to one manuscript by Harakanta, Burrua Pameoplung was the eldest son of Chao Taiplung. Phuchāng Khāng was succeeded in his kingdom by his third son, Sukapha (Hso-Ka-Hpa), who later founded the Ahom kingdom in Saumarpath in Assam some five years after Sam-Lông-Hpa's invasion of Assam, as related below. The eldest son, Sujitpha, was appointed ruler of a country

called Tai-p and Sukhranpha; the second son was given the rule of Tai-Pông of which Mong Kawang or Mogaung was the capital.

Since Pameoplung was without issue, his ministers decided to place on the Mông Mao throne a prince named Tyao-Aim-Kham-Neng (Chao or Sao Aim Kham Neng of Ney Elias) of the line of Khun-Su, the youngest son of Khun-Lung. Tyao-Aim-Kham-Neng is undoubtedly Chao Changneu, son of Chao Changbun (or Chao Changmun of Assamese history). Chao Changneu advanced with his followers from Mông-ri Mông-ram to Mông-kha Mông-jaw and then entered the territory of Mao-Lung (Mông-Mao-Long), marching through Mông-pa Mông-khan. This was said to be the third influx of Hkun-Lung's posterity. At this time Chao Taiplung, the king of Mao-Lung and father of Pameoplung, advised Chao Changneu not to proceed beyond the Irrawaddy River: "You should never cross the Namkeo," he said. "We were sent down at the same time. We were born at the same time. We are in peace up to this time, so we must always be on friendly terms." This possibly refers to the western boundary of Mao-Lung beyond which the independent brother princes were ruling with whom peace and amity were maintained. The old King Chao Taiplung offered his daughter Nang-mong-blok-kham-sheng in marriage to Chao Changneu. It appears from the above account that at that time Mông-Mao was a feudatory state within the kingdom of Mao-Lung which extended up to the Namkeo on the west. Mao-Lung was simply Mông Mao Lung, the great country of the Mao Shans. According to the Hsen Wi Chronicle, in those days Chao Taiplung (Sao Tai Pong of the Hsen Wi Chronicle) governed the whole of the Shan States except Mông Mit, Mông Yang (Mohnyin), Kare Wong Hsö, Mông Kung Kwai Lam, Mông Kawng (Mogaung), and Mân Maw (Bhamo), which were independent of him and were governed by Sao Hkun Kôm of Sung Ko. In this connection we cannot rely on the dates as given by the translator of the Chronicle. Chao Taiplung's capital was the golden city of Hsen Se.

Pameoplung suffered from hysteria and after ruling for seven years committed suicide by cutting his throat with a knife. He was succeeded by Chao Changneu as the ruler of the Mông Mao state.

Chao Changneu died after ruling for ten years. He left behind two sons, Sao Hkan Hpā and Sam Lông Kyem Mong or Sam Lông Hpā, the latter being a remarkable figure in Mao history. Sao Hkan Hpā (or Hsö Hkan Hpā) succeeded to the throne of Mông Mao on the death of his father in 1220. Sam Lông Hpā (Hkun Sam Lông) had already become the first *Sawbwa* of Mông Kawang or Mogaung in 1215 and built a city on the bank of the Nam Kawng. He laid the foundation of a new line of *Sawbwas* at Mogaung, tributary to Mông Mao.

Sam Lông Hpā was a great general and under the direction of his brother, Sao Hkan Hpā, undertook a brilliant series of campaigns of conquest with startling successes, adding thereby vast territories to the kingdom of Mông Mao. The first of these campaigns began by an expedition against Mithila (Yun-nan-sen) which was at once crowned with success by the subjugation of the states of Mông Ti (Nam Tien), Momien (Teng-Yueh) and Wan Chang (Yung-Chang). From there he extended his operations to the south with the result that Kung Ma, Mông Mông, Keng Hung (Cheli), Keng Tung and other smaller states fell under the Mao yoke. The state of Hsen Wi managed to establish friendly relations with Mông Mao by a certain agreement. But according to the Hsen Wi Chronicle, Hsö Hkan Hpā himself commanded his forces while marching for the conquest of territories in the east in Yünnan and also later in the Hsip Hsawng Panna of Mông Yon and further south. Only the expedition to Mông Wehsali Lông (Assam) in the west was led by Sam Lông Hpā, as mentioned in this record.

Immediately after the close of the first campaign, Sam Lông Hpā was ordered to start with the second series of operations on the west. This time he swept across Burma right up to Arakan, annexing many important cities on the banks of the Chindwin whose rulers acknowledged the supremacy of the Mao Shan monarch.

His third and fourth expeditions were directed against Manipur and Assam, respectively. After the conquest of Manipur, Sao Hkan Hpā ordered, according to the Hsen Wi Chronicle, "an

army of nine hundred thousand men to march against M^öng Wehsali L^öng (modern Assam) under the command of his brother Sam L^öng Hp^ä and the ministers Tao Hs^ö Han Kai and Tao Hs^ö Yen." When they reached Wehsali L^öng, some cowherds reported the arrival of the army from Kawsampi, the country of white blossoms and large leaves, and the ministers submitted without resistance and promised to make annual payment of twenty-five ponies, seven elephants, twenty-five *wiss* (about 7 pounds weight) of gold, and two hundred *wiss* of silver every three years. Sam L^öng Hp^ä accepted these terms and commenced his march back. Kawsampi was said to be the Mao country in which, we are told by Dr. Cochrane, there is still a wealth of white blossoms at the beginning of the dry season in the jungles near the Chinese-Shan town of M^öng Mao. We know from Ney Elias' version of the *Tagaung Yazawin* that Sam L^öng Hp^ä conquered the greater portion of the territory in eastern Assam then under the sway of the Chitia kings. In the list of territories conquered on the west by Sam L^öng Hp^ä, the following are mentioned by Ney Elias:

M^öng Mit, Sung-ko, Tagaung, M^öng Kawng (or Mogaung, comprising ninety-nine M^öngs, among which the following were the most important,—M^öng L^äng (Upper Assam), Kahse (Manipur), part of Arakan, M^öng Kawn (in the Hukawng valley), Singkaling Hkamti, M^öng Li (Hkamti Long), M^öng Yang (Mohnyin), Mot Sho Bo (Shwebo), Kunung-Kumun (the Mishmi country of Eastern Assam), Khang Se (the Naga country of South Eastern Assam); Hsen Wi comprising forty-nine M^öngs.

In the same account, territories conquered in the present country of Siam are mentioned as follows:

Keng Hsen, the present Siamese province of Chieng Hsen (Chiengsen) on the Mekong, Lan Sang (or Vieng Chan, that is, Vientiane), Luang Prabang (the capital), Yon (Chiengmai and neighboring states), Keng Long (probably Keng Hung, the

Sibsong (or 12) Panua, called by the Chinese Cheli), Keng Lawng (said to be the country north of Ayuthia), and a few others. These territories were brought under Mao suzerainty by General Sam Lông Hpā during the second part of his first campaign when he started his drive to the south.

The results of the Mao General Sam Lông Hpā's military campaigns for extending the supremacy of the Mông Mao Kingdom over the surrounding countries have been summarised in the Hsen Wi Chronicle as given below:

Sao Hsö Hkan Hpā was a very powerful ruler and he obtained the submission of the following states and received tribute from them to the end of his days: Mông Se-yung, Hsang Mu-kwa, Hsi-pa Tu-hsö (the Chinese T'u-ssu?), Mông Hkon, Mcung Yawn, Kawi Yotara, Hpa-hsa Tawng, Labon, Lakawn, Lang Sang (this is what the Burmese called Leng Zeng and is no doubt the Chinese Lan-tsiang; it was probably Wing-chang [ViengChan] or Luang Prabang, whichever was for the time the dominant state of the Lao; Luang Prabang has outlasted Wing-chang as the capital), Wang Kawk, Mawk Mai, Hsip Hsawng Panna, Keng Hung, Chieng Hai, Chieng Hsen, Chieng Mai, Pai-ka (Pegu), Pang-ya (Pinya), Eng-wa (Ava), Hsa Tung, Yankong, Maw Lamyeng, besides Hsa-ching (Sagaing), and Wehsali Lông is almost certainly Assam, whose Buddhistic name is Weisali). He reigned for fifty-three years and died at the age of seventy-three in the year 567 B.E. (1205 A.D.)*.

The important point to be noted in the above is the discrepancy in the dates of the reign of the Mao sovereign Sao Hsö Hkan Hpā. If we are to rely on the Buddhist era as given in the Chronicle,

* Hsen Wi Chronicle as translated in the *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, part I, Vol. I, 1900, page 241.

Sao Hsö Hkan Hpā's reign will be sixty-eight years earlier. It is a point for further investigation. At any rate, the narrative given by Holt S. Hallett in his "Historical Sketch of the Shans" supports the fact, inspite of the chaos of dates, that in the 13th century the Mao rulers extended their dominions far and wide, including even a part, if not all, of modern Siam. Hallett points out that even as early as 568 A.D., Muang Kaing, Muang Nyaung, and Muang Ri, Muang Ram (Muang=Mong) were the capitals of the Mao dominions. We know that the kingdom of Mōng-ri Mōng-ram was first founded on that date by Hkun-lung (Prince Elder) and Hkun-lai (Prince Younger), the grandsons of Lengdon or Lengnon (Indra of the Hindus and Marduk of the Chaldeans), progenitors of the Ahom dynasty and hence also of the northern Shan rulers who descended into the valleys of the Mekong and the Shweli, re-naming the latter Nam Mao after the name of their race. Since then the Shan kingdoms rapidly increased in numbers, partly from conquest and the habit of placing relatives of the ruling chief as princes of out-lying provinces. Hallett also refers to the great Mao sovereign, Chau Kwamphā (i.e., Hsö Hkan Hpā) of Mōng Mao, who added the principedom of Theebo to his dominions, and also to the "Mau prince" (definitely Sukaphā, the founder of the Ahom Dynasty) under whose leadership the Mao Shans occupied Eastern Assam in 1220. As to the political changes brought about in Burma and the neighboring countries by the advent of the Mao Shans in the 13th century Hallett notes, "Between 1283-1292 the Mau shattered the Burma empire, and, perhaps with the aid of the Mongol-Chinese, pursued Tarok-pyee-meng, the Burmese King, farther south than Prome. About 1293 they annexed Zimmé (most likely driving the Zimmé Shans to Chaliang, from whence the Siamese, to escape a pestilence, descended and founded Ayuthia in 1350)". "The Mau empire," he further says, "split up nearly as soon as it had reached the height of its power; by 1350 Siam had taken over the Mau conquests as far north as the boundary of Zimmé. . . Zimmé remained under a Mau prince, but whether dependent for any length of time on the Mau empire or not is not known. This prince is said to have brought the present

Siamese alphabet into use." * Until 1283 various forms of writings were used in Siam, such as Kanji, Pali and Cambodian, creating confusion. Who was the Mao prince mentioned here? Was he the King Rāma K'ambhâng of Sukhodaya whose supremacy then extended over Zimmé?

Chronologically it is absurd to think that Sam Lông Hpā annexed Zimmé (Chiengmai) or possibly Sukhodaya in about 1293 during his southern drive. That event must have taken place about 1220 and before Khun Bang Klang T'ao, ascended the throne of Sukhodaya, a neighboring state of Zimmé. Zimmé's ruler was the great figure King Mengrai. Another important neighboring state of the time was P'ayao of which Khun Ngam Muang was the ruler. The three potentates were in friendship and amity at least during the early period of their rule. The present city of Chiengmai was founded by King Mengrai in 1296. Hence, these regions must have been subjected to the Mao empire, if at all, well before this time. Even Khun Sri Indraditya and Rāma K'ambhâng the Great of Sukhodaya were perhaps the early princes of the Mao Shan family who became sovereign rulers when the Mao Shan empire rapidly declined after the death of Hsö-Hkan-Hpā the Great of Mông Mao. It is to be noted in this connection that during the Sukhodaya period of Siam, particularly when King Rāma K'ambhâng was on the throne, "Siam received", as Wood informs us, "a tremendous wave of Thai immigrants, who fled from Yünnan after Kublai Khan's conquest of Nan Chao". These immigrants were certainly coming from the whole region of Nan Chao and Mông Mao and they were obviously northern Shans or rather mostly Mao Shans or Thai-Yai who at that time flooded Chiengmai and the neighboring areas. This influx of manpower certainly added great strength to the kingdom of Rama K'ambhâng who as the leader of the whole mass of the Thai population could start his great career.

In this connection, I am happy to be informed by Kachorn Sukhabanij of Bangkok, who is now engaged in researches on the

* Holt S. Hallet, "Historical Sketch of the Shans," in Archibald R. Colquhoun, *Amongst the Shans*, London, 1885, pp. 333-34.

history of Southeast Asia, that according to the No. 2 Stone Inscription in Siam, one P'oh K'un Nam Thom was the chief of Sukhodaya in about 1220. It is noted by him that Nam Thom's rule at Sukhodaya coincided with Sam Lông Hpā's first expedition towards Siam. It is, therefore, presumed that Nam Thom was probably a local prince or a prince of the Mao Shan family entrusted with the rule of Sukhodaya by Sam Lông Hpā after he had received the submission of that state. The second event of the complete annexation of Zimmé by the Mao Shans in 1293 might be due to a subsequent revolt against Mao suzerainty by some tributary chief of Zimmé. It appears that their hold over these areas could not be maintained for long by the Mao Shan rulers of Mông Mao. It may also be observed that the linguistic similarities between the Chiengmai Thai and the Shans of Upper Burma and of Assam testify to some form of political relations of the Mao Shans with that region. Further I believe the Chiengmai Thai and the Ahom of Assam have greater affinity than can be found between the Sanskrit and Pali-dominated Bangkok Thai and the Ahom. That affinity will be greater even in dress, musical tunes, manners and mode of living between the two groups of the Thai people even today.

