

# WAS NAM THOM THE FIRST KING OF SUKHODAYA ?

by

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the possibility that the first king of Sukhodaya came from the Mao T'ai kingdom, and hence supply the connection between the kingdom of Sukhodaya and the Ahom kingdom of the Brahmaputra valley. This view is based on inscription records, Ney Elias' *Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans* (Calcutta, 1876), and the writer's own deductions based on the history of the neighbouring countries of this period.

In The Wat Sri Jhum inscription (believed by Professor Coedès to be inscribed in the reign of Rāma Khamhêng's son and successor, Dhammaraja I) we can trace from the first eight introductory lines the name of the Patriach, Maha Thera Sri Sattha, "whose grandfather was P'ya Sri Nao Nam Thom." Then from line 9 to line 20, this name was again mentioned three times, line 12 and line 15 as "P'o K'un Nam Thom", and in line 20 as "P'o K'un Sri Nao Nam Thom." This last reference also tells us that one of his sons was P'ya Pha Muang, chief of Muang Rard. Then in line 65, we read that "Prince Sri Sattha resented the offence made towards his father" by a certain T'ai chief. His father's name was given as P'ya Khamhêng.

From these references in the inscription, is it possible to reconstruct the connection of these four names as follows: Nam Thom was father of Pha Muang and P'ya Khamhêng. P'ya Khamheng's son was Prince Sri Sattha "whose grandfather was P'ya Sri Nao Nam Thom" (as recorded in line 8). If this reconstruction is correct, then Professor Coedès interpretation of line 41 is wrong.

Line 41, in modern T'ai rendering reads thus :

มีหลานพ่อขุนผมมั่งผู้หนึ่งชื่อสมเด็จพระมหากษัตริย์ศรีททา

Now, the word "หลาน" can be translated either "grandson" or as "nephew". Coedès took to the first translation, i.e., "grandson", so scholars and student have followed him believing

Prince Sri Sattha was the grandson of Pha Muang. Since Prince Sri Sattha was actually the grandson of Nam Thom, he could not be a grandson of Nam Thom's son, Pha Muang. He could then only be one thing; that is, the "nephew" of Pha Muang, which the word "หลาน" in this sense implies.

Now the mentioning of Nam Thom in this inscription establishes the fact that a T'ai chief was presumably ruling at Sukhodaya some time before the actual rise of the P'ra Ruang dynasty. Who then was he and where did he come from?

Since 1920, when Professor Coedès' paper, "The Origins of the Sukhodaya Dynasty" was read at a joint Session of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, the Société Asiatique, and the American Oriental Society, the name of Nam Thom appears never to have been mentioned again. Our scholars and historians have also followed Western scholars and historians by keeping mute. Yet Nam Thom was undoubtedly a real historical person, ruling over Sukhodaya some thirty to forty years before the founding of the P'ra Ruang dynasty.

In 1924, when Professor Coedès published his *Inscription de Sukhodaya*, Première partie, we have at our disposal our T'ai version of the inscription, and also his French translation. Apart from the small error he made in the case of using "grandson" for the correct word "nephew", we still have his immense work upon which to base the reconstruction of our Pre-P'ra Ruang Sukhodaya.

From the French translation of this Wat Sri Jhum inscription (called in the French part the "Vat Mahadhatu" inscription) we learn that Nam Thom was his T'ai name, with the title of P'oh K'un, or big chief, as he was chief of Sukhodaya—Sri Sajjanalai. His activities were recorded of erecting two *chedi* in Sukhodaya and in Sri Sajjanalai, and of going out to capture wild elephants to distribute as gifts to his other chiefs. One of his sons was also a big chief, Pha Muang of Muang Rard, who possessed "one hundred thousand" elephants, areca gardens and many towns as vassals. Another son was recorded, P'ya Khamhêng, who seemed

not to be warlike, for he disliked elephant duels and preferred the accumulation of fine things, such as silken pillows. His grandson, Prince Sri Satta, though rather warlike in his youth, gave up worldly life when his infant son died to seek peace and salvation in the footsteps of the Lord Buddha, and after pilgrimages to India and Ceylon, came back to be Patriach-Maha Thera—in the reign of Rāma Khamhông's successor, Dhammaraja I. All these events we know from this Wat Sri Jhum (or Vat Mahadhatu) inscription.

The interpretation of the change of a simple T'ai name, Nam Thom, into a Khmerized one, Sri Nao Nam Thom, is that our P'o K'un had accepted the hand of friendship extended to him by King Jayavarman VII of Angkor. Why the hand of friendship and not the yoke of vassalage? Perhaps because the great Jayavarman had bestowed to his son, Pha Muang, a Khmer princess in marriage. We know from the inscription that her name was Sikorn-Mahadevi. To his son-in-law, Jayavarman VII also bestowed a sacred sword, "P'ra Kan Jayasri" and a title believed by Professor Coedès to be second only to that of the king of Angkor, namely "Kamara-Teng-An Sri Patindraditya". Professor R.C. Majumdar, in his article "The Rise of Sukhodaya" published in *The Journal of the Greater India Society* (1943), interpreted all these royal gifts to be tantamount to the appointment of Pha Muang as "crown prince" and successor to the throne of Angkor. But later events do not seem to corroborate this interpretation, for we know from the inscription that Pha Muang later sponsored another T'ai chief to strike out for independence, and also took a hand in the expulsion of the Khmer army from the Upper Menam. We know that Jayavarman died in 1219,<sup>1</sup> or a year or two before, and if Pha Muang was his "crown prince," he would then have succeeded around that time to the throne of Angkor. But our inscription states that, at the time of the T'ai movement for independence, presumably around 1250, Pha Muang was still at Muang Rard, and from there he marched his troops to help Bang

<sup>1</sup> Coedès, *Les états Hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, page 291

Klang Thao defeat the Khmer forces and then "consecrated" his younger ally as "King of Sukhodaya."

To return to Nam Thom, we also know, however sketchily, the extent of his domain. On the Southwest as far as Chot, the inscription tells us in the units of measuring distance, that it was 20,000 units; to the South, 200,000 units—i. e., ten times as far as that of the Southwest. Would this come as far down as the old Ayodhaya, then probably on the sea coast? To the North, the inscription is unreadable. The direction of the East seems to be left out completely. Was this pure negligence, or was it a fact so well known at that time where the eastern limit of the domain extended?

When was P'o K'un Nam Thom ruling at Sukhodaya - Sri Sajanalai? Before the founding of the P'ra Ruang dynasty by Bang Klang Thao is certain, but how long before? We know from Annamite (Maspero, BEFEO, XVIII, 3, page 35) and Cambodian (Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, page 235) records that in 1216 a Khmer army sent to make war against Annam and one sent to occupy Champa were hastily withdrawn, although the records give no explanation for this action. The reason seems to be supplied by the Mao T'ai chronicle, as between 1215 and 1220 Chao Luang-fa of that kingdom came down with an immense army and conquered the Menam delta as far as Ayodhaya and Tavoy.

In consulting Ney Elias, *Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans*, we find on page 19 a list of 25 places which at one time or another might have fallen under the Mao kingdom as a result of the first campaign of Chao Luang-fa (Sam Luang-pha) in 1216. After Hsen-wi, No. 3 on the list, we have the following significant entries:

4 Muang Nai

5 Chieng-ma

6 Chieng Sen

9 Yun

10 Chieng Rung

11 Keng Luang

- 12 Muang Lem
- 13 Tai Lai
- 18 Laweik
- 19 Lapyit
- 20 Lamu
- 21 Lakhaing
- 22 Langsap
- 23 Ayodhaya
- 24 Tavoy
- 25 Yunsaleng

The order moves from North to South up to No. 13, and then his army entered into the Khmer proper territories. The mentioning of Ayodhaya, Tavoy and Yunsaleng (Muang Thalang, or Salang) suggests that the Menam delta was then raided by his army. Was Chao Lung-fa's conquest just a claim of suzerainty over the T'ai people who had migrated South much earlier, or was it a conquest over alien peoples? Be that as it may, the 1215 to 1220 conquest of Chao Luang-fa over the Menam valley has been accepted by Western scholars as an historical fact.

Ney Elias did not specifically mention in what year this Mao T'ai raid took place. If it were in 1216, it might account for the reason why King Jayavarman VII recalled his armies from Annam and Champa. Jayavarman VII did not recall his armies out of pleasure. He must have had a good reason for doing so and that reason was most likely for the protection of his kingdom against Chao Lung-fa's army. The mention of Laweik in the list (No. 18) seems to confirm this assumption.

For the purpose of suggesting a date for P'o K'un Nam Thom's rule over Sukhodaya, 1216, or a year or two later, would probably not be far from the mark. He must have been a Mao T'ai prince or a trusted officer left behind by Chao Luang-fa to control the Upper Menam valley in conjunction with other T'ai chiefs entrusted to control other northern and north-eastern territories conquered. Chao Luang-fa's three other expeditions of conquest were in Arakan, Manipur and the Brahmaputra valley, this last in 1225. Then his star of destiny fell because his elder

brother, Chao Kam-fa, "being jealous or fearful of his brother's influence decided to put him to death by poison."<sup>2</sup> Having learnt of this bitter truth from his mother, Chao Luang-fa decided that he should let his brother rule without him, so he went away to live in Nan-chao, and we hear no more of him. Had he decided to fight his brother, he might easily have been the victor, but with him gone, Chao Kam-fa could not control the far-flung empire. It is true that in 1229 (Ney Elias, page 9) Chao Kam-fa sent his son to found the Ahom kingdom, but it was apparent that he could not control all the territories conquered by his famous brother and the empire melted away. Each chief left behind, especially in distant places like the Upper Menam, had to consolidate and hold his power as best he could. Hence, our P'o K'un Nam Thom's ready acceptance of the hand of friendship extended by Jayavarman VII of Angkor.

The suggestion that Nam Thom, first king of Sukhodaya, was a Mao T'ai in the army of Chao Luang-fa is purely my own deduction, but it seems to supply the missing link in the connection of the T'ai of the Sukhodaya kingdom with those of the Ahom kingdom. Both kingdoms came into existence as a result of Chao Luang-fa's conquests—Sukhodaya, a result of the first conquest presumably in 1216, and Ahom, in 1225. My deduction does not have the weight of epigraphy to support it, but shall we remain satisfied only with what Professor Coedès said in 1920: "The Sukhodaya dynasty emerges gradually from the mystery which has enveloped its origins"?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ney Elias, *Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans*, page 18.

<sup>3</sup> The eulogy of a certain "P'ya Mahadhammaraja" (in Inscription 3—Nakorn Jhum—from line 68 of Face one to line 11 of Face two) that he daily upheld the five precepts of the Buddha, etc., that he was efficient in capturing wild elephants and also in irrigation, etc., seems to refer to our P'o K'un Nam Thom, because the same inscription, lines 20 and 21, tells us that "P'ya Mahadhammaraja" erected a *chedi* 139 years before the dating of this inscription—which was 1279 of the Saka era. If we subtract 139 from 1279, we get 1140 Saka era, which corresponds to 1218 A.D., the year I have attempted to establish as marking the kingship of Nam Thom at Sukhodaya.