Tay (Shan) Encroachments into the Irrawaddy Basin and the Fall of Ava: Western Mainland Southeast Asia in the "Age of Commerce"

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Abstract—The "Age of Commerce," habitually and primarily regarded as a maritime phenomenon, actually affected the interior of western mainland Southeast Asia, including the highland Tay (Shan) world, a rich source of valuable commodities, such as musk, jade, amber, and rubies, which were destined to be exported from the seaports of Lower Burma southward to Melaka and westward to India and beyond. The economic boom further activated the southward downhill movement of the Tay onto the Irrawaddy Basin, ultimately leading in 1527 to the fall of the Upper Burma capital Ava, a thriving riverine emporium. The Tay seizure of the vital trading center in the "Burmese heartland" made the western mainland a commercially more integrated unit, which would in turn be politically unified decades later by Bayinnaung, the king of the maritime state more blessed with the Age of Commerce.

Introduction

Over a quarter of a century ago, Anthony Reid, in his magnum opus *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, attempted to write a "total history" of the region, "treating Southeast Asia as a whole" (AOC I: xiv).[1] It was not entirely total, for a large and significant piece was missing. As Reid regretfully acknowledged, his seminal work is ocean-oriented, in which "the hill peoples of the northern mainland will not play a large part . . . even though many of them were linked by culture with the Thai of the coast and the central plain" (7). By "the hill peoples of the northern mainland," he probably and mainly meant groups of Tai-speakers in northern Thailand and Laos. This article, by focusing on the Tay (Shan) of the northwestern mainland who were linked by *commerce* with the Burmans of the Central Plain,[2] and less closely with the

[1] Abbreviations of frequently cited materials are listed at the end of the article.

[2] Throughout this essay I use "Tay" rather than "Shan," as I agree with Christian Daniels (2012: 148n) on "calling ethnic groups by their own names," and "shunn[ing] this exonym [Shan] in favor of their autonym, Tay." For the romanization of Tay words, I basically (but not strictly) follow the suggestions of Shintani (2000). Meanwhile, in this article "Burman" means a group of people who were (and are) the dominant inhabitants of the Irrawaddy Basin during the Age of Commerce and who left lithic epigraphs inscribed in old "Burmese."

Mons of the coast, takes up the task Reid has reluctantly left, thereby giving a due account to the fragment of a total history.

For the omission of the Tay, whose active involvement in the political economy of the Irrawaddy Basin during the first half of the Age of Commerce (corresponding to the late Ava and early Toungoo period in Burma) had significant implications for succeeding Burmese history, the scarcity of necessary sources, not the negligence of Reid, is the primary culprit. When he was preparing his two-volume work, Reid could not find fine referential materials he could rely on for a detailed description of how the Age of Commerce affected the interior of the western mainland, namely the kingdom of Ava and various Tay principalities that encircled the Burman polity to the northwest, north and east. This is due to the fact that the Ava period has been largely neglected by historians, thus "yet to see a single book-length monograph in English" (Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin: 2012: 107).[3] Also less researched is the Tay encroachment on the Irrawaddy Basin in the late Ava period that ultimately led to the demise of the Burman capital.[4] Therefore, the fall of Ava in 1527 to northern Tay forces, an epoch-making event in Burmese history, has not been adequately examined by scholars.[5]

Recently, however, the academic tendency has been gradually changing in a favorable way. Michael Aung-Thwin, the leading historian of early Burma based on epigraphic study, wrote a rare article on the Ava period, which is a brief summary of his "much larger manuscript on the narrative and institutional history of Ava and Pegu" (2011: 2). By its nature, therefore, his path-breaking work is not very informative on the Tay movement of the early 16th century.[6] Probably we will have to wait for the publication of a full-length manuscript for a thorough account of the Tay takeover of the Burman capital. Aye Chan, another historian of Burma, provides a rare glimpse of the Ava period viewed from Tay perspectives (2006). As his essay covers a long

[3] This is despite (or because) "historical research on . . . Toungoo continued to receive more and more attention" (Aung-Thwin 2011: 2). The Ava period was neglected to the extent that "in a list of eighty-two master's theses submitted to Rangoon and Mandalay Universities Faculty of Arts and Sciences before 1976, not a single one was on the Ava period" (Aung-Thwin 1998: 201). Of what little has been written, Tin Hla Thaw's article (1959) mainly focuses on the genealogical reconstruction of the Avan kings, and only covers the years 1400–1500, thus leaving the fall of Ava untold.

[4] Actually, history of the Tay as a whole has long been a neglected field, despite its significance in the history of mainland Southeast Asia, let alone Burma. Since the publication of GUBSS more than a century ago, only a handful of scholarly works in English on Tay history have been available, which include: Luce (1958); Daniels (2000; 2011); Fernquest (2005; 2006); Aye Chan (2007); Sun (2010b); and Kirigaya (2015a). Of these, the works by Fernquest, Aye Chan, and Sun are of direct relevance to this article, and thus shall be discussed (though briefly) below.

[5] As its main analytical focus is on the long-term patterns and trends of Toungoo politics, Lieberman's celebrated work understandably spends only a few lines, without detailed examination, on the fall of the preceding Avan dynasty (1984: 25). Another renowned study of Lieberman (2003), by its nature, also scarcely mentions the downfall of the Upper Burma capital. The Andayas' more recent work (2015), a comprehensive study of Southeast Asia during the "early modern" period, does not give enough explanation to the fall of Ava either.

[6] Moreover, he "see[s] Ava's decline more as an Upper Myanmar affair," dismissing the possibility that it was affected "by economic factors stemming from the age of commerce" (11).

period of 260 years, however, the fall of Ava is only cursorily reflected, with little attention to the factors behind the Tay inroads.

A synthesis of Burmese, Chinese, and Tai materials, Jon Fernquest's well-researched and documented article (MGNY) exactly corresponds to the period under discussion, i.e. the first half of the Age of Commerce, and extensively deals with Tay incursions into the Irrawaddy Basin, with a detailed description (probably the most detailed ever written in English) of the fall of Ava. Yet, as his study is "first and foremost a narrative history" (286), with its main focus on relating a story of the rise and expansion of Toungoo, analysis of the primary driving force behind the Tay inroads into the capital zone of Upper Burma is slightly off the theme of his article. Meanwhile, Sun Laichen, historian of Sino-Southeast Asian interactions, thoroughly examines a "gem fever" during the Ming, which was generated by the excessive import of precious stones from the Tay realm. He correctly emphasizes the overland economic impact of Ming China on the emergence and prominence of some Tay powers, and consequently, albeit briefly, on the decline and collapse of Ava (GEM: 187). However, as his study is featured in a collaborative work on the "China factor" in the transformation of Southeast Asian economy and politics in the 15th century, and exclusively discusses its overland impact, maritime commercial influences on the interior of the western mainland are not adequately taken into consideration.

"Scholars of Southeast Asian history and Sino-Southeast Asian relations need to make a significant shift from a maritime to an overland perspective," argues Sun Laichen convincingly, while rightly criticizing modern scholarship for the disproportionate emphasis on the external stimuli from the sea for explaining changes and developments in political patterns and trends of the region (2003: 495).[7] However, the issue at hand is, to echo the late David K. Wyatt's subtle observation (1999), a "perspective from the interior" on the booming seaborne trade has been largely neglected by scholars with "maritime mentality" (Sun 2003: 495), whose research dominantly deals with influences of oceanic trade on state formation and development along the Southeast Asian littoral. For a vivid and detailed description of the "total history," it is indispensable to examine how and to what extent maritime commerce stimuli affected economic and political transformations of the interior western mainland. While overland impact from China on the Tay world was truly enormous, especially in the 15th century, maritime stimuli to the rise and southward expansion of inland Tay powers in the ensuing decades were never marginal, let alone ignorable.

Katherine Bowie (1992) effectively unraveled the "myth of the subsistence economy" in a general picture of 19th century northern Thailand, or Lan Na (lit. One Million Rice Fields), denying its image as a homogenous, egalitarian, self-sufficient, non-market, and unchanging society.[8] A similar assumption was widely held by an

[7] He also states, quite correctly, "The matter of maritime trade as an important and even crucial driving force for state formation in the precolonial period has been dealt with abundantly by historians of Southeast Asia" (GEM: 187). However, analysis of state formation exclusively focuses on polities directly exposed to seaborne contacts, while inland domains are virtually ignored, which this article attempts to discuss.

[8] Actually, besides agricultural production, trade was another pillar of the economic base of Lan

earlier generation of Burma scholars that the Tay were chiefly uncivilized, rice-cultivating hill-dwellers, invading at will lowland Burman towns with prospects of booty and plunder, but with little commercial interest.[9] However, control of trade, especially of overland Sino-India trade via the Tay country during the Pax Mongolica, was vital to the rapid rise to transregional paramountcy of Mäng Mao, which ultimately brought an end to the twin Upper Burma capitals, Pinya and Sagaing, in the mid-1360s (Kirigaya 2015a). The Mongol dynasty was replaced by the Ming, with which Tay regimes in the modern Sino-Burmese border region continued to maintain intense military, diplomatic and commercial intercourse throughout the 15th century.[10] Then, around the turn of the century when the Burmese littoral was experiencing the Age of Commerce, the Tay made a "significant shift" from an overland to a maritime orientation in their political and commercial aspirations.

The late David K. Wyatt, in the context of northern Thailand, stressed that the "upland interstices" such as Lan Na were "involved in the same sorts of global transformations as the major empires that surrounded [them]" (1999: 265).[11] Its western neighbor, the highland Tay world, remotely connected to the Bay of Bengal by the "extraordinary navigable" Irrawaddy (AOC II: 54), was by no means immune to global trends from the sea. As the majority of products exported from Burmese seaports came from Upper Burma, primarily the Tay Hills that produced, first and foremost, rubies, plus other luxury goods, "there was necessarily a close link between maritime trade and interior districts" (DEIC: 120).[12] Lieberman states:

> By the start of the sixteenth century, this commerce [centered at the Lower Burma coast] had three principal components. The Mon country supplied the increasingly important port of Malacca (as well as north Sumatra) with . . . a variety of luxury goods (rubies, sapphires, musk, lac, benzoin, gold) funneled to the Peguan coast from the interior . . . . A second line of commerce focused on West Asia and India, particularly the Coromandel Coast, Bengal and Gujarat. Merchants from these areas exchanged large quantities of Indian textiles for Burmese luxury products. (1984: 27).

Na, at least since the foundation of Chiang Mai in the late 13th century (Kirigaya 2015b: 288).

[9] See Aung-Thwin's sound criticism of the negative, "barbaric" image of the Tay deeply entrenched in the traditional historiography of Burma (1998: 136; cf. Lieberman 2003: 133). The negative image is ascribable, probably substantially, to the sacrilege - massacring 360 learned monks, pillaging numerous pagodas, and burning uncountable *tipitaka*, Buddhist manuscripts – ordered by Thohanbwa, "a full-blooded savage" (Harvey 1967: 107), who was enthroned at Ava when the Burman king was killed in 1527.

[10] For intense Sino-Tay military exchanges during the 1440s, see Liew (2008) and Fernquest (2006).

[11] In the inland Laotian context, Reid also confirms, "Even thus remote from the ocean ports the effect of the commercial boom was tangible" (AOC II: 55).

[12] Lieberman remarks that "the Irrawaddy artery ensured that Lower Burma . . . remained indissolubly joined to the dry zone, and by extension, to the Shan country" (2003: 129). Meanwhile, Aung-Thwin emphasizes (2011) a "symbiotic dualism" based on economic necessity between Upper and Lower Burma. He further adds the Tay Hills to the symbiotic relationship, making it a "tripartism" (7).

Therefore, "Any development of maritime trade necessarily implicated interior districts" (119), whence came most of these luxury goods.[13] In line with these arguments, this article discusses how the Age of Commerce, habitually and primarily regarded as a maritime phenomenon, stimulated the political economy of the interior Tay world, with its implications for the downward thrust of the Tay onto the Irrawaddy Basin, which culminated in the fall of the Upper Burma capital in the midst of the Age of Commerce.

Some challenges to the Age of Commerce thesis

Anthony Reid argues, "There was . . . a distinct lull in the seaborne trade for almost a century before 1370" (AOC II: 10),[14] and then, the trade picked up again around 1400.[15] Consequently, the year 1405 is singled out by Reid for the commencement of the Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia (12). The year commemorates the greatest event in the maritime history of China: the first dispatch of a huge Ming fleet commanded by Admiral Zheng He, a Muslim eunuch originally from Yunnan, to the seas of Southeast Asia and beyond. Dispatched seven times in total, mostly during the reign of Yongle (1403-1424), Chinese vessels reached as far as the coast of East Africa. The Ming fleet, by demonstrating its massive wealth and naval supremacy unrivaled by any native power at the time, secured the sea routes that connected China and the Middle East through Southeast Asia and India, which spurred maritime commerce across the Indian Ocean. The great expeditions also reorganized tributary relations between the Middle Kingdom and southern port-polities, which further facilitated the seaborne traffic between China and Southeast Asia.[16]

This overall picture, however, is challenged by John Miksic (2010). After carefully examining various archaeological sites of the 11th to the 15th century in maritime Southeast Asia, he denies the view that "Southeast Asia's economic system change[d] rapidly as a result of the Zheng He voyages," and observes that "despite superficial change, the underlying structure of Southeast Asian trade remained much the same over the 12th to 15th centuries" (385; 403).[17] In other words, "There was no specific trade boom in Southeast Asia in the 15th century" (Wade 2010: 30). This conclusion, while plausible for the archipelago, cannot be easily applied to the western mainland, including the Burmese littoral.

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[13] Again, Reid also remarks, "Inland trade . . . no doubt . . . received a great stimulus from the boom in seaborne trade during the age of commerce" (AOC II: 53).

[14] For a criticism of the century-long slump, see Kirigaya (2015a: 252-4).

[15] According to Reid (AOC II: 326), "The jump in the arrival of Malukan spice in the Mediterranean, the sending of massive Chinese fleets to Southeast Asia, and the beginning of large-scale pepper exports" were the chief indicators of the upturn.

[16] The best beneficiary of the Chinese expeditions was Melaka, founded around 1400. Its first king, Parameswara, who had been continuously exposed to Ayutthaya military pressure from the north, successfully removed the Siamese aggression by establishing close diplomatic relations with Ming China when the fleets were sailing through the Straits (Taylor 1992: 175-6; Wang 1998: 320). Parameswara even paid a personal visit to the Ming court in 1411 (*MSL Taizong*: 1490).

[17] See also Brown's article (2010) in the same volume for a similar topic.

Unlike Melaka and other coastal polities along the main east-west exchange route, Burmese ports were located off the major seaborne traffic between China and India via the Straits.[18] The impact of the maritime "China factor" was thus not very tangible along the Burmese coast.[19] Furthermore, the western mainland did not produce the main export item of the archipelago, pepper and spices, namely clove and nutmeg that brought the "biggest profits" and "lured merchants from the other side of the world" (AOC II: 2). As geoeconomically disadvantaged with its location off the east –west sea-lanes, the trade patterns and trends of "spiceless" Burma developed differently from, and rather independently of, the archipelago. Less affected by the archipelagic economic patterns, maritime Burma's trade activities were traditionally more oriented toward a large commercial network centered on the Bay of Bengal, which connected the western mainland more to the Subcontinent.[20]

Another criticism of the Thesis comes from Victor Lieberman, who argues that "the heavy emphasis on maritime influences to explain local change tends to be reductionist and exaggerated" (1993: 478).[21] He further points out, "Maritime commerce stimuli are presented as the prime mover, indeed the only significant impulse to change" (1995: 797), and concludes that "integration in the chief mainland states was never purely, and in many contexts not even primarily, a function of maritime commerce" (2003: 19). I am well aware of other possible factors that stimulated political transformations on the western mainland in the century c.1450-1550.[22] Yet, I still find it crucial to examine seaborne stimuli to the active Tay involvement in Upper Burma affairs, as Lieberman himself admits, "After 1450 or 1500 . . . maritime trade seems to have become more critical to mainland development" (459). The interior of the western mainland, including the Burmese heartland and the surrounding Tay Highlands, was of course no exception to this trend, as Lieberman asserts, "Any development of maritime trade necessarily implicated interior districts" (1984: 119). Without "reductionist" perspectives and exaggeration of the role played by maritime commercial impulses, implications of the Age of Commerce for the incursive Tay movement should be properly discussed.

[18] Thus, no visit by Ming ships to Burmese ports during the grand expeditions was recorded either in Burmese or Chinese literature.

[19] Actually, even in the archipelagic context, "Southeast Asian trade with China is only one part of a much larger economy" (Miksic 2010: 389).

[20] For the significant role of commercial connections with Indian Muslims in the booming trade of Arakan and Lower Burma ports in the first half of the 15th century, see Charney (1998).

[21] Reid's description of the inland Lao kingdom, "The golden age of King Surinyavongsa (1637–1694) in Laos . . . was made possible by the expanding trade demands of the age of commerce," is probably an example of reductionist observation (AOC II: 57; cf. 210).

[22] Other than Lieberman, who refers to the heterogeneity in the impulses to political integration on the mainland, and to the fluidity and indeterminateness in their relations (2003: 199), Christian Daniels emphasizes the significance of the transfer of agricultural technology in the consolidation of several Tay polities (2000; 2010).

Western Mainland – geoeconomic and historical setting

Maritime trade had always been vital to the economy of the western mainland, especially coastal commercial towns, since early historic (if not prehistoric) times. While not much is known about early trade (and it is outside of the scope here) due to the paucity of archeological and textual data,[23] historical accounts from Burmese records suggest an active Indo-Burma trade in the late 1360s when an Avan monarch "envied their southern counterparts' monopoly on maritime customs and trade" to the extent that he "wistfully and quite inaccurately styled himself lord 'of all the (maritime) harbors'" (Lieberman 1984: 23).[24] Elsewhere and later, Ye, an old trading town down on the western coast of the Malay peninsula, was "reclaimed from jungle and opened" around 1438, while the ensuing decades witnessed an increase of foreign merchants who brought Indian cloths and an exceeding commercial prosperity to the coastal cities of Burma (26). According to Burmese and Mon chronicles, Ayutthaya attacked Martaban, a famous Mon port, and its neighboring areas around 1410 (UK II: 10; HMN II: 9-10; YT I: 288; YA: 275).[25] This Siamese attack might have involved the destruction of Ye, located due west to the famous Three Pagodas Pass, so that the coastal town had to be "reclaimed from jungle" three decades later.

A chronicle of Ayutthaya relates that during the reign of Ramathibodi II (c. 1490-1530), Muslim merchants from the Coromandel Coast (i.e. Kingdom of Vijayanagar) began to sail across the Bay of Bengal and visit Ayutthaya (probably via Tenasserim, an important transit station on the western coast of the Malay peninsula), whereby Indian textiles were imported to the Thai kingdom (Vliet 1975: 67).[26] Meanwhile,

[23] Aung-Thwin, in his decisive work on Pagan, could scarcely examine the role of commercial activity in the kingdom's economy, as "there is little contemporary evidence on external trade" (1985: 113).

[24] Meanwhile, a Mon king of Pegu seems to have introduced himself, quite accurately, "Lord of Port" to the Chinese in 1406 (Chen 1970: 25). The Ava-Pegu war of the 1380s-1420s was partially fought for control over Lower Burma maritime harbors (cf. Lieberman 2003: 126; Harvey 1967: 90). Burmese chronicles claim that King Rajadhiraj of Pegu yielded maritime customs at Bassein to the Avan king in token of a marriage alliance (UK I: 419; HMN I: 468; Harvey 1967: 90). Mon chronicles are silent on this issue.

[25] The YT and YA state that Martaban and Moulmein were attacked by Ayutthaya while UK and HMN claim it was Ye in Martaban's territory that was under Thai attack. This Siamese invasion might have been derived from Thai ambition to dominate maritime trade on both sides of the Malay peninsula, which also pushed the Ayutthaya military southward down to Melaka at that time. The oldest surviving chronicle of Ayutthaya, compiled c. 1680, bears no information on this attack on the Burmese coastal cities. Instead, it refers to another Ayutthaya invasion in 1488 of Tavoy, a port-city on the western shore of the Peninsula, some 250 kilometers to the south of Martaban (LP: 8). Another Ayutthaya chronicle compiled in 1795 dates this attack to 1470, which corresponds to the one mentioned in a Mon chronicle (Cœm: 31: PMP: 34).

[26] Van Vliet's account should be chronologically inaccurate as, compared to Lower Burma, the coming of Indian Muslim traders to Ayutthaya that controlled port towns on the western coast of the Malay peninsula was too late. The Ayutthaya possession of, or close relationship with, Tenasserim is attested by the Burmese inscription of 1444, which states, "*Ussa*, son of the Ayuttaya lord of Tenasserim and grandson of the Lord of the White Elephant of Martaban, is crowned at Pegu"

a chronicle of Vijayanagar refers to "tributary" missions from Pegu and Tenasserim during the reign of Deva Raya, c. 1419-1449 (Sewell 1970: 302, 404). The 1430s also witnessed the "rise of a mainland trading state," Arakan, the fourth geoeconomic component of the western mainland, that benefited from trade connections with Muslim India (Charney 1998). Along the northeastern and eastern rim of the Bay of Bengal commercial exchanges were definitely active in the 15th century. Busy cities of coastal Burma attracted not only their ambitious Thai neighbors from the other side of the Peninsula, but also the landlocked kingdom of Ava to the north, who "envied their southern counterparts' monopoly on maritime customs and trade" (Lieberman 1984: 23).

Michael Aung-Thwin, whose path-breaking article (1996) effectively unraveled the "Myth of the Three Shan Brothers"[27] and the "dark age paradigm" in the historiography of Ava, asserts, "Upper Burma throughout its precolonial history had little need for external trade" (1985: 114), and, "It was land and the labor [not trade] that were vital [to the state]" (115). He therefore emphasizes the agrarian aspect of Ava's economic base, arguing, "Both the agrarian and maritime states [i.e. Ava and Pegu] needed each other in the most important ways" (2011: 4). He continues to remark, "This dualistic relationship was based on economic necessity, whereby luxury goods and other imported and maritime specialties were exchanged for the basic products of the interior, particularly rice" (4).[28] Rice, along with "pulses (peanuts, soybeans, sesamum)" and "sugar (cane and palm) and other foodstuffs" (4), produced in and imported from Upper Burma, were vital to the diet of Lower Burma people.[29] However, it was the rubies imported from Ava – "Burma's greatest riches" (DIEC: 24), "sole merchandize [of Pegu]" (Varthema 1928: 82)[30] – which were much sought after in the coastal cities to attract merchants from afar. While it would be partially true that "[Ava's] concerns were . . . the maintenance of irrigation works and its cultivated lands" (Aung-Thwin 2011: 6), Avan leaders also paid close attention to the conditions and terms of trade with Lower Burma, as "the majority of Burma's export products came from Upper Burma" (DIEC: 120).[31] This is especially so when Ava was troubled with meager coffers.

(SMK V: 35). A Siamese record (dated by David Wyatt to 1468) describes Tenasserim and Tavoy as tributaries of Ayutthaya (*Kotmai* I: 70; Wyatt 1967).

[27] See also Aye Chan (2006) for a counterargument.

[28] This may be another "myth of the subsistence economy" in the context of Upper Burma.

[29] Actually, rice seemed readily and plentifully available in Lower Burma, as large quantities of rice were exported to Melaka (Pires 1944: 98).

[30] John Huyghen van Linschoten, a late 16th century Dutch traveler, states, "Rubies, Safiers, and other stones . . . of the Countrie of Pegu are esteemed the finest, whereof there is great store . . . . daily brought out . . . into all places" (Linschoten 1883 I: 97; II: 140). According to other late 16th century descriptions (Frederici 1905: 128; Fitch 1905: 191), even merchants from Mecca, despite their loss from selling their commodities, such as wool, scarlet and velvet, to their Peguan counterparts, came to Pegu for trade, as they still gained huge profits by bringing home luxury articles, most of which were from the Tay realm.

[31] Although Aung-Thwin properly includes "control over its precious stones and interior products" among Ava's concerns (2011: 6), which clearly points to royal interest in commercial profits, he makes no further mention of Ava's trade in gems and luxury commodities of Tay origins.

Like its predecessor, Pagan, Ava by its nature also suffered from the continuous flow of wealth to the *sangha*.[32] For the "merit-path to salvation," the primary social and political ideology of the state, a large area of Upper Burma's cultivable land and a large labor force were donated to tax-free religious institutions, thereby severely eroding the economic and demographic resources of the kingdom. Faced with the serious devolution of royal wealth to the *sangha*, which was institutionally and structurally unavoidable in the state, it would have been very surprising if Avan leaders had not looked for an alternative source of revenue. They thus controlled, or perhaps monopolized, trade in rubies (and other valuable commodities).[33]

According to a contemporary, early 16th century description, "[valuable precious] stones and musk the King [of Ava] takes for himself, and they are sold to foreigners, who come hither to seek for them on his account" (Barbosa 1989: 159). It also describes Ava as an "exceeding great city . . . inhabited by wealthy merchants where there is much trade in valuable precious stones, rubies and spinels which are found there" (159). Commerce was undoubtedly flourishing in Ava, where, as in the 17th century, the king was the "chief merchant" (DEIC: 106), who deeply understood the importance of revenues derived from trade to compensate for his meager coffers.[34] Ava, where "wealthy merchants" inhabited, and "much trade" in valuable commodities was conducted, was by no means the state that "had little need for external trade" (Aung-Thwin 1985: 114). Trade indeed was vital, probably more so than land and the labor, to the political economy of Ava in its last decades.[35]

Intensively connected to this cosmopolitan trading center of Upper Burma was the Tay Hills, the third geoeconomic and political component of the western mainland.[36] The hill regions functioned as military recruiting grounds for the lowland dry zone, and thus "when politically allied with Ava, they supplied valuable reinforcements in times of war" (Aung-Thwin 2011: 7). However, what connected both regions, hills and dry zone and further to Lower Burma, thus creating a tripartite relationship, was the supply of luxury commodities that were produced in the Tay Highlands, collected

[32] The following argument is based on Aung-Thwin (1985: 186-95; 2012: 113) and Lieberman (2003: 126-7).

[33] They might have asserted a monopoly, as Nyaungyan Min, the founder of another dynasty centered at Ava, did a century later in 1600 (ROB I: 9). Actually, Lieberman states, "Agents of each local ruler [such as Ava, Prome, Toungoo, Pegu, and Martaban] normally sought to monopolize luxury exports and imports" (2003: 148).

[34] Therefore, in the 1470s, the Avan king, who correctly evaluated the importance of commerce, requested the Ming to authorize Burman rule over Kaungzin and Mäng Yang (Mohnyin) to "control and benefit from the riverine and overland trade that past through those places" (GEM: 186; *MSL Xianzong*: 1810, 3436). Meanwhile, "Commercial revenues," argues Lieberman (2003: 148), "facilitated . . . better control over patronage, and a gradual movement away from landed religious donations to cash donations . . . . [which] protected the tax base from erosion."

[35] Sun rather boldly concludes, "Without exaggerating the role of trade, we can say that Ava's failure to control the overland trade with China contributed to its decline and final collapse" (GEM: 187).

[36] To this must be added a fourth component, Arakan, which, however, is less relevant to this article, as the maritime kingdom was less closely connected to the Tay realm. For a detailed account of Arakan in the Age of Commerce, see Charney (1998; cf. Lieberman 2003: 128-9).

at Ava, shipped downstream on the Irrawaddy artery to Lower Burma ports, and exported to Melaka as well as India and beyond.[37]

Not only southward to the maritime region (rather remotely), but also northeastward via the Yunnan Plateau to the Chinese world (far more closely), was the Tay realm connected.[38] While it had been operational since time immemorial, the overland Sino-Tay trade after the founding of the Ming was largely conditioned by the "cotton-hunger" in Yunnan and the "gem fever" in Beijing. As a result of the governmental migration policy, Yunnan's population swelled hugely in the early Ming period,[39] which consequently boosted the import of Indian textiles, finished Indian cottons, and Burmese raw cotton from Upper Burma (Lieberman 2003: 145). In addition, large quantities of gems were also procured by the Chinese, those officials especially assigned with this mission, and private traders (GEM: 172-5). In exchange for the commodities from the south, pony and mule caravans from the north led by Yunnan Muslims carried Chinese silks, utensils and bullion, to name a few, down to Bhamo, a riverine emporium located in the Sino-Tay-Burma border area (Lieberman 2003: 145; cf. AOC II: 53).[40] These Chinese exports were then shipped downriver to Ava, and further to the coasts. The inland trade network was thus linked with two major outlets, the coast of Lower Burma and Yunnan of the Chinese southwestern frontier. With commercial stimuli from both the southern ocean and northeastern plateau, the interior world, a supplier of valuable export items, experienced an economic boom.

Compared to the "murky beginnings" of the Age of Commerce that have been an issue among scholars (Sun 2010a: 67), the commencement of the economic boom in the interior could be roughly, if not clearly, dated, as the economic and political patterns of the region were largely transformed with the discovery of a single most important commercial product, rubies. Among luxury commodities of the interior, rubies, exclusively mined in the Tay principality of Mäng Mit, were the principal merchandise that lured the Chinese, who were seriously infected with "gem fever", to the periphery of the vast empire, and seagoing foreign merchants to the shore of "spiceless" Burma.

A local chronicle notes that Mäng Mit came to be known by the Chinese and Burmans

[37] Aung-Thwin remarks (2011: 8) that "although the 'upstream-downstream' relationship [between Ava and Pegu] was more important economically in the fifteenth century, in the long run, the political relationship between the dry zone and the hills may actually turn out to be more significant." However, as already seen, the *commercial* relationship between the hills and the dry zone was as important as the one between Ava and Pegu. Note that, not only rubies and other luxury commodities, but also tea (pickled and dried) that was vital, only next to rice, to the diet of the people in the dry zone, was exclusively produced in the Hills. Tea trade with Ava must have been vital to the economy of those eastern Tay principalities without mines of ruby, jade, or amber.

[38] Therefore Aung-Thwin describes (2011: 7) the Tay realm as the "conduit for new technology from China (such as firearms)", with no mention of trade between the two.

[39] "The vast majority (780,000 out of 800,000) were sent there [Yunnan] in the 1380s" (Sun 2010a: 68).

[40] In the 17th century, "most of Burma-Yunnan trade was conducted" at Bhamo (DEIC: 176), whence "everything was carried overland on mules, ponies, and bullocks to the Chinese market places" (178). A brief description of Bhamo in the 1490s shall be given below.

when ruby mines were discovered in its territory during the reign of Sänganpha, from 1414 to 1432 (MMY: 123). The chronicle account seems possible as late 14th and early 15th century Chinese records, generally known for their meticulous accounts of local specialties and curiosities, do not mention the ruby mines of Mäng Mit at all.[41] Nicolo Conti, the first known European to visit Ava in the late 1430s or early 1440s, did not refer to rubies either (1974: 11-15), while Hieronimo di Santo Stefano heard of "Ava, in which grow rubies and many precious stones," during his stay in Pegu in 1496-7 (1974: 5). Meanwhile, when King Dama-zei-di of Hanthawaddy (Pegu), with hopes of purify the Mon *sangha,* sent a group of monks to Ceylon in 1476 for an orthodox ordination, ruby rings were itemized on the list of gifts to the island king (*Kalyani*: 71). Finally, a Chinese historical account suggests that the rubies of Mäng Mit were known to the Chinese by the mid-1450s (GEM: 181). The local history of Mäng Mit, and Chinese as well as European records, roughly agree on the date of the discovery of Mäng Mit's rubies, i.e. around 1450, which happened to correspond to the early years of the Age of Commerce (this is a mere coincidence, though), which was a major event in the history of the western mainland. Without a supply of rubies, the volume of oceanic trade in "spiceless" Burma would have been markedly less significant during the Age of Commerce.

The year also corresponds (almost) to another turning point in the political history of the region. In 1449 the famous *Sanzheng Luchuan* (literally three punitive campaigns against Luchuan [Mäng Mao]) by the Ming that had begun in the 1430s finally ended with murky victory for the Chinese.[42] The end of the "march toward the tropics" with a destructive consequence on the economic and military resources of Ming China would be immediately followed by the infamous Tumu Debacle, which "virtually destroyed imperial armies in the north and led to the capture of the emperor himself by the Mongols" (Wang 1998: 326). Therefore, the year 1449 was a "turning point in the history of the dynasty" (326), marking the "decline of the great Ming empire" (Liew 2008: 373), which led to the reshaping of Chinese policy toward the southwestern "barbarians," from expedition to non-intervention, thereby bringing a decade of peace to the Sino-Burma-Tay borderlands.[43]

Lastly, in 1450 an Avan king sent Indian cloths as tribute to the Ming emperor for the first time (so far as the remaining Chinese sources tell) in Burmese history

[41] For example, the *Baiyizhuan*, written by a Ming envoy to Ava and Mäng Mao in the 1390s, has no mention of rubies among the notable products of the region, while listing other precious items, such as amber, gold, silver, and jade (Jiang 1980: 118).

[42] For detailed, well-documented accounts of the campaign, see Liew (2008) and Fernquest (2006).

[43] Therefore, when the lord of Sænwi (Hsenwi), who was attacked by his subordinates, asked for Chinese aid in 1457, the emperor rejected it, saying, "The barbarians were not invading our peripheral area, but vengefully killing each other" (LZ: 908). Furthermore, when the Lang Sang king, whose father and brothers were killed by the Vietnamese army that had devastated the Lao capital and even attempted to march to Lan Na, asked Chinese help for a retaliatory expedition in 1481, the emperor rejected it (LNCH: 63). Apparently, the Ming empire was not as great as it had been half a century earlier, when it conquered Vietnam. In the latter half of the 15th century, China concentrated more on preserving, rather than enlarging, its territory.

(*MSL Yingzong*: 3957).[44] The Indian textiles, the "essential item of exchange in the Southeast Asian area" (Andaya 1992: 355),[45] and "the largest single item of import [to the area]" (Reid 1992: 470),[46] were brought to Ava by Muslim and South Indian traders, or perhaps by Ayutthayan and Peguan merchants who, as witnessed in the early 16th century, sailed up the Irrawaddy (Barbosa 1918 II: 159; Pires 1944: 111). These ocean traders bothered to frequent the Upper Burma capital for luxury commodities, notably rubies and musk, from the Tay Hills. The sending of Indian cloths by the Avan monarch (overland via the Tay realm) to the Chinese emperor thus attests a structural change in trade patterns and an increase in the volume of Indian textiles imported to the landlocked kingdom, thus symbolizing a close tripartite relationship between the coastal, inland and highland sectors of the western mainland. All told, at present, the year 1450 seems to be an appropriate, albeit symbolical, date for the commencement of the Age of Commerce in the interior world.

The "China factor" in the 15th century Tay world

Throughout the 15th century, the overland Ming impact via Yunnan was strongly felt in the Tay world, especially in those domains on the Sino-Burma-Tay frontier.[47] The century can be evenly divided into two: the first half, roughly corresponding to 1400-1450, which saw an intensive intercourse, through exchange of goods and tribute, and incessant wars in the last decade, between Mäng Mao and Ming China; and the second half, during which Mäng Mit, the sole producer of rubies, rose to a regional prominence due to the enormous profits derived from the gem trade. Immediately after its conquest of Yunnan in the early 1380s, the last stand of the Mongol remnants, the Ming came into contact with the Tay, especially the Sä clan, descendents of Säkhanpha, the supreme lord of Mäng Mao that had brought an end to the twin capitals of Upper Burma, Pinya and Sagaing, in the mid-1360s.[48] A few years after the ruler of Mäng Mao was appointed Pacification Commissioner by the Ming in 1382, the Sä lord made eastward incursions deep into the territory of Yunnan.[49] The Sä invasive

[44] Lan Na, a landlocked kingdom centered at Chiang Mai, had already sent as tribute "red and white color western cotton cloth" to the Ming court in 1396 (LNCH: 100; *MSL Taizu*: 3532). This "western" cotton cloth most likely means the Indian type.

[45] Gujarati textiles went "further East to be used in barter for obtaining the spices" (Meilink-Roelofsz 1962: 62). Not only with the Southeast Asians, the fabric was also "extremely popular with the Chinese," who would pay "a hundred gold coins in the size of about one yard length and half-yard width" (Ray 1999: 43).

[46] Dutch records from the 17th century reveal, "the volume of Burma's textile imports [from India] was phenomenal," and "much of the fabric was for . . . . everyday use by ordinary people" (DEIC: 3-4).

[47] Therefore, in those principalities located far from the border region, such as Mäng Nai and Yawnghwe (Yönghui), Ming influence was far less tangible, and these Tay domains seldom figure in Chinese records.

[48] The following account of the Mao relationship with the Ming in the first half of the 15th century is based on Jiang (1983: 235-60), Liew (2008), and Fernquest (2005: 39-66).

[49] As stated above, the population of Yunnan swelled hugely in the 1380s, as a result of the mass

movement was finally pacified by the Chinese in 1388, thereby establishing a tributary relationship between the southwestern "barbarians" and the Middle Kingdom.[50] In the late 1390s, a rebel general of Mäng Mao repeated an invasive movement into western Yunnan, which was pacified again by the Ming soon afterward. Thereafter the Ming-Mao relationship was peaceful for decades, based on regular gift-tribute exchange.

In 1427 the Ming garrison troops were expelled from Vietnam, which they had ruled since 1407. The disastrous Chinese defeat on the other side of the mainland unintentionally revealed that "the Ming court was in no condition to fight on the Yunnan border" (Wang 1998: 325), thus activating the age-old expansionist policy of the Sä clan. While maintaining a "friendly" relationship with the Ming on the surface (Jiang 1983: 248), Mao troops attacked neighboring Tay domains, which had been lost to them when the Ming carved up Mao territory to set up several native administrations in the early 1400s. Then, finally in the late 1430s, they ventured upon an eastward incursion into Chinese territory, which would provoke Ming counterattacks and eventually lead to the *Sanzheng Luchuan*, a series of large-scale battles fought between Ming, Mao, other Tay and Burman armies throughout the 1440s.[51]

During the war, the leader of the Sä clan died and his sons and family, from the country of their origins, fled downhill across the Irrawaddy River to Mäng Yang (Mohnyin), which would become their new homeland. In the end, a peace pact was concluded between the Chinese commander and the new Mao lord. A stone tablet to mark the boundary was erected, which stated, "Not before the stone is rotten and the river has dried up are you all allowed to cross [the Irrawaddy]" (Liew 2008: 365). Thereafter, the House of Sä would confine itself to the west of the Irrawaddy for nearly a half century, rather surprisingly very faithful to the vow.[52] Indeed, not only the Sä clan, but other Tay powers also attempted very few, if any, incursions into Yunnan after 1450.

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migration of the Han population into the southwestern corner of the empire. The rapid and grand demographic change in the neighboring region was a likely cause of the Sä invasion into Chinese territory.

[50] Actually, the Sä clan did not give up its expansionist policy; they simply turned the direction of expedition from the east, Yunnan, to the south, Upper Burma. As a result, according to a Chinese account, the Avan king complained about Mao incursions into his territory and asked for Ming intervention, whereby Chinese envoys who left valuable first-hand records of the Tay, the *Baiyizhuan*, were sent to Ava and Mäng Mao in the late 1390s (Jiang 1980: 127).

[51] Although it has been historically called the *Sanzheng Luchuan* [Three Punitive Campaigns against Luchuan (Mäng Mao)], actually "there were four campaigns launched" (Liew 2008: 370). William Atwell associates the Mao insurrection with the "great depression" on a global scale in the mid-15th century, which was caused by climatic changes, natural disasters, and notably, a silver contraction due to the shutdown of Chinese silver mines by the Ming (2002: 98n). This is fairly possible, as overland Sino-India trade of Yunnan silver via Mäng Mao was one of the main economic sources of the Sä clan (cf. Kirigaya 2015a: 255-6). Furthermore, as observed by the Ming envoys in the late 1390s, silver was the key medium of transaction in the Tay world (Jiang 1980: 78). Desperately in need of silver, the Sä clan made incursions into Chinese territory to take over Yunnanese mines that had been closed by the Ming in the 1430s.

[52] The Sä leaders probably came to realize that they might not lose, but could never win nor gain a piece of land from China, as they were no match for the superior Ming military.

Replacing the Sä clan now deported deep into the upper Irrawaddy area, the royal house of Mäng Mit would grow in geoeconomic and political importance and figure dominantly in the Chinese historical record on the Tay world.[53] While a local chronicle of Mäng Mit dates its foundation to time immemorial (MMY: 72), the ruby-producing domain began to attract Chinese attention in the 1450s,[54] when a Ming eunuch, in search of gems, secretly supported Nang Hannong, the queen of Mäng Mit, in her attempt to obtain Chinese endorsement for an independence from Sënwi (Hsenwi), the "largest Pacification Commission in the early Ming" (GEM: 180-1).[55] As this story suggests, the sudden emergence and prominence of Mäng Mit is undoubtedly ascribable to the wealth derived from gem trade. With huge profits from "treasure mines," Nang Hannong set out on a series of incursions into neighboring Tay domains, while successfully bribing Ming court officials to avert a punitive expedition and to establish an independent Pacification Office (*Anfusi*) at Mäng Mit in 1484.

The profit from rubies also enabled Mäng Mit to smuggle Chinese-style firearms and attract mercenaries, native and Chinese.[56] Therefore, expansionary warfare could be relentlessly carried out throughout the 1480s and into the early 1490s, which virtually forced the once powerful Tay polity of Sënwi into extinction. Finally in 1494 a Ming punitive expedition was dispatched with reinforcements from Mäng Wan (Longchuan), Mäng Ti (Nandian), and Mäng Na (Ganyu), and further joined by a Mäng Yang force. For the first time since the end of the *Sanzheng Luchuan* in 1449, did Mäng Yang troops venture upon an eastbound march across the Irrawaddy (*MSL Xiaozong*: 2608-13).[57] The combined forces then laid siege to Bhamo, an important

[53] The following account of Mäng Mit basically follows GEM (179-83).

[54] To reiterate, the MMY notes (123) that Mäng Mit came to be known by the Chinese and Burmans when ruby mines were discovered in its territory during the reign of Sänganpha (1414-1432).

[55] Accounts about this royal lady are found in both Chinese and Tay records, including chronicles of Sënwi and Ungpöng (better known as Sipö/Hsipaw), while MMY bears no information. Her story in the Sënwi chronicle has it that Nang Hannong (Nang Khamhung in Tay) was a daughter of the Sënwi *caopha* (lit. lord of the sky; *sawbwa* in Burmese) and married Säwaypha, possibly *caopha* of Sipö (Camyi 1959: 38; Renoo 2007: 319-25). The account of Nang Khamhung in the Sënwi chronicle basically agrees with the Chinese source, except Säwaypha was a "tribal headman of Mäng Mit," then under the control of Sënwi (MS: 8146). Meanwhile the Ungpöng chronicle describes her as a daughter of the Lord of Loi Long, or Tawng Peng, and as a queen of the Sipö *caopha*, Säcömpha (r.1487-1539) (Mu 1948: 18a). Both Tay chronicles agree that Nang Khamhung belonged to the ruling house of Sipö. According to the Ungpöng chronicle (10b), the city of Mäng Mit was originally established by a Sipö king as a second capital during the cold season. No reference to this relationship can be found in the MMY that claims a long genealogy of Mäng Mit sovereigns.

[56] In 1480 the Ming government had already issued a ban on trade between imperial subjects in southwestern Yunnan and native "barbarians," in which the former exchanged contraband, such as weapons and gunpowder, with gems (*MSL Xianzong*: 3491-2). This ban does not seem to have been very effective, as similar bans and reports were followed in 1491, 1499, and 1506 (*MSL Xiaozong*: 1013-4, 2722-4; *Wuzong*: 312).

[57] The *MSL* is a mine of information on the history of Southeast Asia as a whole, let alone Tay polities. Those without access to it or knowledge of Classical Chinese should consult Geoff Wade's English translation ubiquitously available on the Internet (2005).

foothold of Mäng Mit for the riverine traffic on the Irrawaddy. Mäng Yang seized and controlled the emporium until the early 1500s.[58] Thereafter, toward the end of the 1490s, Mäng Mit's power and influence were "gradually waning" (*MSL Xiaozong*: 2738).[59]

The city of Bhamo and its vicinity had been contested since the early 1470s by several powers, such as Sënwi, Mäng Wan, Mäng Mit, Mäng Yang, and Ava, in the quest for its commercial prosperity.[60] A Chinese record of 1503 retrospectively states that Bhamo and its environs had originally belonged to Sënwi, and then during the Zhenghua reign period (1465-1487), Mäng Mit annexed the area (*MSL Xiaozong*: 3591). Meanwhile a local history of Bhamo tells that the city had been governed by ministers appointed by and sent from Mäng Mit from 1202 until 1470, when it finally became a semi-autonomous domain as the lord of Mäng Mit enfeoffed it to his son (Elias: 58).[61] These accounts suggest that the area around Bhamo, blessed with the intensifying Sino-Burma-Tay trade, experienced economic growth at the time. Then, toward the end of the 15th century, Mäng Yang came to occupy Bhamo, either in 1494 or 1497, as we have seen above (*MSL Xiaozong*: 2723, 3591).[62]

While few mentions of Kaungzin are found in the Chinese literature after the 1480s, Bhamo first registered in a Ming document in 1499, when a Chinese official reported, "Nowhere else can compare with it [Bhamo and its environs] in terms of its profits from trade" (GEM: 186), and, "This is why Silu [*caopha* of Mäng Yang] does not withdraw [from Bhamo despite our] repeated conciliatory attempts" (*MSL Xiaozong*: 2723). The same official also noted, "All the utensils needed by the foreign countries come from there [Bhamo]," and, "Many fugitives from Jiangxi and Dali in Yunnan flee there" (GEM: 186). Therefore, the replacement of Kaungzin by Bhamo in the *MSL* entries from this period on probably derives from the increasingly important

[58] This is the first mention of Bhamo by the contemporary Chinese (and Burmese) record. Bhamo, Manmö (or Wanmö) in Tay (lit. Village of Pot), "implies that it was originally a *potter's village*" (GUBSS, pt. II, v. I: 56). For a detailed account of the 1494 battle, see MGNY (313-6).

[59] The deaths of Nang Hannong in the early 1490s (at the latest) and Sidie in the late 1490s (at the latest), which invited succession conflicts in the ruling house of Mäng Mit, were responsible for the decline.

[60] The vicinity includes Kaungzin, "one mile west of Bhamo," a small village in the late 19th century (GUBSS, pt II, v. I: 68). G. H. Luce, however, questions this location and instead locates it near Kaungton, a little down the Irrawaddy from Bhamo (1959: 49). In either case, Bhamo and Kaungzin were neighbors. Ever since its first appearance in the Burmese epigraphy in 1237, the strategic importance of Kaungzin, with its location on the Sino-Burma frontier, had been recognized by the Pagan monarch who entrusted the city to the highest official, *Maha-saman-kri* (Luce 1959: 49; SMK III: 92).

[61] Although the historical accuracy of the local account is, as always, rather questionable, this story is similar to the one told in a 17th century Chinese record (Gu 1966, v. 32: 9b) that relates that Bhamo had been originally a part of Mäng Mit, then its chief grew stronger and became an autonomous power. Burmese chronicles, in a passage referring to an episode in 1511, say that Bhamo was a district of Sipö, to which a Mäng Yang army laid siege in retaliation for Sipö's alliance with Ava (UK II: 116; HMN II: 126).

[62] The record of 1499 dates Mäng Yang's occupation of Bhamo to 1494, while that of 1503 dates it to 1497.

role of Bhamo as a supplier of utensils, certainly including "pots," for the increasing population of the region.

Not only criminals, but even some Chinese agents, sent by the Yunnan government to reprimand the "barbarians," plotted to make profits by trading contraband and leaking intelligence, and one ended up becoming the right-hand man of the native ruler (*MSL Xiaozong*: 2723). Similar cases of illicit trade between imperial officials and the natives at Tengchong, a garrison town on the frontier, were reported in 1480 and 1491, in which even firearms were allegedly smuggled (*MSL Xianzong*: 3491; *Xiaozong*: 1018). Despite these repeated imperial bans on illegal traffic, the trend continued, though not in Tengchong but in Bhamo. In the last resort, a Chinese official proposed direct imperial rule over Bhamo by transferring the gubernatorial office from Tengchong down to Bhamo (*MSL Xiaozong*: 2723).[63] Indeed, with its "incomparable profits from trade," the riverine city, "where 'land routes and waterways converge'" (GEM: 186), was flourishing and attractive to all the parties concerned.

In the first years of the 16th century Mäng Yang was still occupying Bhamo. Yunnanese officials on the front proposed, twice, in 1501 and 1502, to form an alliance with "barbarian" forces from Ava, Mäng Mit, Mäng Na (Ganyu), Mäng Ti (Nandian), and Mäng Wan (Longchuan) for a joint campaign against Mäng Yang (*MSL Xiaozong*: 3036, 3259-60).[64] Both proposals were rejected by the central government, as it was reluctant to engage in total warfare with a powerful barbarian domain in the remote corner of the empire.[65] Therefore, diplomatic measures were taken to conciliate the Sä lord of Mäng Yang to call off the garrison at Bhamo. The Chinese attempt somehow succeeded in 1503, because Mäng Yang was beginning to turn its military direction away from the riverine city to the heartland of Burma, thus "now encroaching more upon Ava's territories" (GEM: 185).[66] Consequently, the end of the confrontation over Bhamo did not bring peace to the Sino-Burma-Tay borderlands, but rather began an era of tumult that involved several Tay powers waging war on, or allying with, Ava.[67]

It also marked the end of Chinese involvement, military and diplomatic, in southwestern "barbarian" affairs, which is partially due to the change in imperial foreign policy. As Ming China "had lost interest in tributary missions as instrument of control" (Wang 1998: 324) by the time of the Zhengde reign (1506-1521), the number of tribute missions sent from the countries of Southeast Asia, including those of the

[63] A similar proposal was made in 1503 to fill the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of Mäng Yang troops from Bhamo (*MSL Xiaozong*: 3592).

[64] One of the Chinese military plans was aimed at a simultaneous march to Mäng Yang: Avan troops proceeding northward via Myedu to Tingzhang (Htihkyaing) on the western frontier; and Mäng Mit forces taking Bhamo on the eastern frontier.

[65] The officially stated reason was that Mäng Yang had yet to trespass across the imperial boundary, and still maintained its admiration for the Middle Kingdom.

[66] Fernquest, too, concludes (MGNY: 318), "Warfare [with the Ming] drops sharply from this point [1503] on and warfare to the south against Ava starts to become more important."

[67] Chinese records describe the region at the time, "Various native chiefs advance and retreat in diverse and confusing ways" (*Ming Shi*: 8148), and "Various barbarians, such as Mäng Yang, Ava, Mäng Mit, Sënwi, and Mäng Nai, are vengefully killing each other" (*MSL Wuzong*: 808).

western mainland, rapidly decreased. This is reflected in the sharp contrast between the amount of *MSL* materials on Southeast Asia before and after 1503 (324n).[68] Therefore, a Chinese record of 1508 reported that currently neither Ava nor Tay lords were sending tribute though regulated to once in three years (*MSL Wuzong*: 993).[69]

Parallel to the decreasing Sino-Tay diplomatic contact, frontier official posts assigned the mission to procure gems from the Tay realm were eventually abolished in Tengchong and the capital of Yunnan (GEM: 172-3; MGNY: 317-8). What led to this decision to return to the former non-interventionist policy and the rapid decrease in Chinese interest in tributary mission is not exactly known.[70] Yet, one thing is clear: "Before 1503, there was endemic warfare [between the Ming forces and those of Tay] and after that there is hardly any " (MGNY: 310). As China was undergoing a major transformation from the late 15th century, the Middle Kingdom of the early 16th century was no longer what it had been a century earlier when most countries of Southeast Asia frequently sent tribute. The "China factor" that had the major impact on the 15th century Tay world would become less tangible in the following century.[71] The acknowledgement of Chinese authority and centrality by Tay powers on the imperial periphery, expressed symbolically and nominally in the tributary relationship, was becoming increasingly weaker and, to some extent, irrelevant to the regional context. There certainly was a "significant shift" from an overland to lowland, or even maritime orientation, in the political and commercial aspirations of the Tay.[72] Drawing strength from a century of intensive military and commercial contact with Ming China, the Tay had now grown confident and powerful enough to openly challenge Burman supremacy in the central valleys of the Irrawaddy.

[68] For example, LZ spends on Tay and Burma affairs some eighteen pages for the years 1480-1503, while only three pages for the period 1504-1530 (910-32; cf. MGNY: 310-11).

[69] A century earlier, in the first decade of the 15th century, southwestern "barbarian" lords, especially the *caopha* of Sënwi, sent tribute almost every year to the Yongle emperor, who "knew that most tribute missions would not come to China if there were no profits to be made," and thus "had to make these missions worthwhile" (Wang 1998: 320). By the beginning of the 16th century, tribute missions had become unprofitable, as the imperial coffers, now far smaller than a century earlier, could not afford to make them worthwhile.

[70] Atwell notes (2002: 102), "Observers at the time and modern scholars have seen the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as a time of profound economic, social, and cultural change in China." Those profound changes Ming China was experiencing probably affected the imperial decision. In addition, as seen above, the meager imperial coffers did not allow the court to prepare luxurious return gifts to tribute missions.

[71] While the official involvement, diplomatic and military, of Ming China in the southwestern "barbarian" affairs came to an end, at a local level interactions between the natives and Chinese probably continued to increase throughout the 16th century, as a result of the mass migration of the Han population into Yunnan, further down to Bhamo.

[72] As successors to the Burman kings of Ava whose "economic interests . . . became increasingly oriented toward the coast" (Lieberman 1984: 28), Tay leaders also inherited this orientation, as shown below.

Tay encroachments into the Irrawaddy Basin

By the early 16th century, the influence of oceanic trade had deeply penetrated into the interior world to the extent that a Chinese monograph on Yunnan compiled in 1510 lists pepper (with refined tin) as one of the two famed local produce of Sënwi, a highland Tay country far from the coast blessed with the Age of Commerce (Zhou 1990, v. 14: 3a).[73] Pepper, not grown in Sënwi, was one of the commodities foreign merchants shipped to Ava (Pires 1944: 111), whence it was brought to the Tay Hills by native peddlers. The Chinese account suggests that Sënwi imported a large amount of pepper. Meanwhile, Ava at the time was an "exceeding great city . . . inhabited by wealthy merchants where there is much trade in valuable precious stones, rubies and spinels" (Barbosa 1918: 159). It was this flourishing capital of Upper Burma which Caolong,[74] the lord of Mäng Yang, was advancing on in the first decades of the 16th century.

Mäng Yang had at least two military advantages over Ava: its easy access to Chinese firearms and mercenaries. As seen above, imperial bans on the smuggling of China-made firearms, more advanced than those of the Indian Ocean type employed in Upper Burma at the time, were recorded in the 1490s (*MSL Xiaozong*: 1018, 2723).[75] Furthermore, with weapons came Chinese officials and criminals, who became the Tay lord's advisors and soldiers. With human and material reinforcements from China,[76] an interior upland polity with the limited demographic and technological base would eventually win over its counterpart of the extensive lowland river valleys.

Although no source, Burmese, Chinese, or Tay, specifies motives behind Mäng Yang's southward incursion into Ava's territory, it was primarily affected by commercial factors derived from the Age of Commerce.[77] In as much as Bhamo's "incomparable

[73] Likewise, "white wool cloth" and "big cloth of Indian Ocean [probably made of cotton]," both being imports, are referred to as the local product of Ava in the same monograph and the late 16th century one (Zhou 1990, v. 14: 4b; XNY: 64a).

[74] He is called "Silu" in Chinese, and "Salon" in Burmese. As chroniclers of Burma use "sa" in stead of "tha," his Tay name should be Cao Long (lit. Great Lord), not Sä Long (lit. Great Tiger).

[75] Mongol-derived gunpowder technology had already been introduced to the Tay world in the late 13th century (Kirigaya 2015a: 245). Ming-made firearms were brought to the region in the late 1390s (Sun 2003: 501; *MSL Hongwu*: 3679).

[76] In that sense, through private interactions, the "China factor" was still at work in the Tay world.

[77] It is not very likely that the Tay encroachment into the Irrawaddy Basin was a continuation of an earlier "general southward movement of Tai-speaking peoples" (Lieberman 1984: 25). Historically, they also made incursions westward into Assam and eastward (backward?) into Yunnan. In any case, the "theory of a Tai Southern Advance" (Fernquest 2006: 31) does not help explain the dynamism of the Tay encroachment into the Burmese heartland, merely reducing it to the nature of a hill people. Actually, the theory is intimately and exclusively associated with a perspective from Bangkok, the city of maritime commerce and the capital of a nation-state founded by the Thai, the only Tai-speaking people who made a centuries-long southern advance all the way down to the seashore. Meanwhile, Fernquest raises three possible explanations of the Tay encroachment, including control of trade routes (MGNY: 354-6). However, as "there is always the danger that historical speculation based on thin evidence is mistaken for historical fact" (356), he refrains from exploring the issue.

profits from trade" attracted Caolong, who neglected repeated Chinese admonitions to withdraw his garrison troops,[78] it must have been Ava's exceeding wealth derived from "much trade in valuable precious stones" that redirected the focus of the Mäng Yang army onto the Irrawaddy Basin. As "maritime wealth [of Lower Burma] was the chief lure" for the kings of landlocked Toungoo to seize Pegu (Lieberman 2003: 151),[79] so was that of Ava for a lord of the highland principality. Commercial motives for the southern campaign are reflected in the grand design of the military expedition to, and political domination over, Ava by Mäng Yang, as shown below.

In 1524, after the conquest of Myedu, the "northern garrison town . . . that guarded the important irrigation districts in the Mu river valley to the north of Ava" (MGNY: 292), the victorious Mäng Yang army marched down to Sagaing, the old Burman capital once plundered by Caolong's legendary ancestor some 160 years earlier.[80] Sagaing was easily taken and, according to the chronicle account, temples and houses were burnt down by the northern Tay. As the old capital was barely separated from Ava by the Irrawaddy, Caolong, just like his glorious ancestor, could have immediately crossed the river to mount a final assault on, or lay siege to Ava. However, the *caopha* of Mäng Yang decided to make a further southward march, taking the land route along the right bank of the Irrawaddy. He subdued town after town, more than ten in total, almost without exchanging fire until he reached a stockade near Prome. Faced with a large army with superior firearms, Thado-minsaw, lord of Prome, had little choice but to ally himself with, or more precisely became subject to, his Tay counterpart.[81] Caolong and Thado-minsaw together advanced on Ava, which they took with relative ease in 1525. Then,

[78] According to a Ming report, Mäng Yang, prohibited by the Chinese to cross the Irrawaddy eastward, began to reveal its aspiration to seize Kaungzin (hence profits from riverine trade) in the late 1470s (*MSL Xianzong*: 3436). This move was affected to some extent by the decrease in the volume of Sino-India trade via the territory of Mäng Yang. In addition to the rapid increase in "China's trade with the Middle East and the Mediterranean after about 1470" (Atwell 2002: 102), which must have changed patterns and trends in overland trade with India, the decrease was also caused by the decline of Yunnanese silver supply. The *Ming Shi* (1971), quoting an official report of 1500, states, "Among nine silver mines in Yunnan, four have long been exhausted." Not only the key exchange medium in the Tay world, silver was also the primary export item to Bengal from Yunnan (Deyell 1983; Bing 2004: 301-4). Mäng Yang desperately needed an alternate source of commercial revenue, which led to the aspiration for Kaungzin, and ultimately to the occupation of Bhamo in the 1490s. Fernquest also points out the decrease in the volume of Sino-Tay trade, which "reduced the value to the Shans of occupying trade entrepots such as Bhamo" (MGNY: 317).

[79] Similarly, the Aung-Thwins remark (2012: 134), "The 'Age of Commerce' in Southeast Asia was an important factor in Toungoo's initial decision for moving to Lower Myanmar, establishing Pegu as its capital."

[80] Note that Mäng Yang had yet to lose interest in Bhamo as the northern Tay troops laid siege to the riverine city while fighting Burman forces on the southern front at the entrance of the Mu River valley in 1511. According to Burmese chronicles (UK II: 116; HMN II: 126), Bhamo was a district of Sipö, a "steadfast ally of Ava" (MGNY: 298). The following story of Mäng Yang's southern march and seizure of Ava with its aftermath is based on the UK (II: 120-34) and HMN (II: 129-40), unless otherwise noted. See also MGNY (336-48) for a relevant, detailed account.

[81] According to the chronicle (UK II: 121; cf. MGNY: 336), Caolong and Thado-minsaw agreed that the former would only take good horses and elephants as prizes of war while the latter the throne upon the conquest of Ava.

as previously promised, the lord of Prome was placed on the Avan throne, and Caolong rounded up good horses and elephants and headed home. Soon afterward (three days after the departure of Caolong), however, Thado-minsaw left Ava for Prome for unclear reasons, and the ex-Avan king, helped by the *caopha* of Sipö, immediately returned to fill the power vacuum. Consequently, Caolong had to repeat a long expedition down to the Irrawaddy Basin, and again conquered Ava, where he crowned his son, Thohanbwa in 1527.[82]

The long southward march by Mäng Yang troops through the Central Plain to Prome, far from their home in the northern highlands, was the southernmost campaign the Tay had ever known. An intermediary riverine port-city,[83] Prome was, from an Upper Burma perspective, the gateway to Lower Burma seaports, especially Bassein in the Irrawaddy Delta, as well as to "Arakan (thence to the Bay of Bengal)" (Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012: 131).[84] With the middle reaches of the Irrawaddy between Sagaing and Prome under control, therefore, Caolong secured dominance over the vital riverine traffic and, by extension, access to the Bay of Bengal via Arakan and Lower Burma.[85] Furthermore, he effectively blockaded Ava, an emporium on the Irrawaddy, thereby detaching the Burman capital from the commercial network centered at the coast that brought firearms of Indian Ocean type, and from military assistance of other Burman towns located to the west of the Irrawaddy.[86] The long campaign along the main artery of the western mainland was thus strategically well designed and indeed very successful in eroding the economic and military bases of the Upper Burma capital.[87] The victorious, long southward march to Prome by the Mäng Yang troops clearly reflects Caolong's prospects of commercial and political relations

[82] The *Zatadawpon-yazawin* (41), "the second oldest chronicle of Burma that has survived" (Aung-Thwin 1998: 169n), refers to Caolong, instead of his son, Thohanbwa, as a ruler of Ava from 1526/27-1541/42, while later chronicles, UK and HMN, claim it was Thohanbwa who assumed the Avan throne. I follow the UK and HMN.

[83] About a century later, the VOC established one of its four Burma factories at Prome, a "key town on the Irrawaddy and an important center for timber and planks" (DEIC: 88).

[84] Arakan's relationship, by land and water, with the cities along the Irrawaddy must have been fairly intimate, as Pires mistook Ava for a city of Arakan (1944: 96). "Two principal overland routes through the Arakan Yoma are the Taunggup and the Am passes" (Raymond 1999: 90). The former route connected Prome with Arakanese ports on the Bay of Bengal. When Nicolo Conti visited Ava in the 1430s, he followed one of these passes from Arakan. Given his one-month journey by boat to Ava, he perhaps set sail from Prome up the Irrawaddy (Conti 1974: 10-11). Bassein was described by Pires as a major Mon port, along with Dagon and Martaban, open to Indian Ocean commerce (1944: 97-8).

[85] To reiterate, the long march to Prome was never spurred by the historical southward movement of the Tay.

[86] Caolong, who agreed to cede the throne of Ava to Thado-minsaw, might well have been watchful of a possible Arakan-Prome, or Pegu-Prome alliance for the rescue of, or conquest of Ava, as these powers shared commercial interests in the gem trade with Upper Burma. A decade later, when the military strength of Toungoo grew truly threatening to the neighboring states, these alliances became a realistic option.

[87] So effective and impressive was the operation, it would be followed, in a reverse direction, by Toungoo dynasts decades later.

with the regions below, and his good understanding of the geopolitical configuration of Burma.[88] This is rather surprising given his northern highland origin. With the accumulation of commercial intelligence, a ruler of the deep interior country became familiar with the affairs of Upper and Lower Burma, and beyond.

Caolong's second expedition to Prome in 1532, itself revealing his adherence to the riverine port-city, also suggests the concerns of the northern Tay lord with trade. Burmese chronicles imply that Caolong advanced to Prome to punish its lord, successor to Thado-minsaw, for the disloyalty of his predecessor who broke his word to carry out his duty for Caolong. The veracity of this story is questionable, as Thado-minsaw's betrayal, withdrawal from Ava without permission from Caolong, had taken place seven years earlier, and he had been dead for five years. The motive of the sudden attack on Prome must have lain elsewhere. Since the new lord of Prome, realizing that his troops were no match for the northern Tay counterparts, immediately surrendered to Caolong, Prome had little intention or capacity to militarily threaten Ava. The most effective way available for Prome, a bottleneck on the Irrawaddy, to irritate Ava was to deny it access to Lower Burma and Arakan, as Prome would actually attempt in the first years of the 17th century (Lieberman 1984: 59-60). The decline of imports, especially Indian textiles highly in demand by the people of Upper Burma and the Tay Highlands alike, was the likely cause for the punitive expedition against Prome.[89]

Caolong's orientation toward commerce is also indicated in his attempt at permanent occupation of the throne of the Dry Zone,[90] an unprecedented act in Tay history.[91] Establishing political control over the "heartland" of Burma was an

[88] Southward orientation of the northern Tay is also reflected in the change of Chinese description of Mäng Yang's realm. A mid-17th century Chinese record states that to the south the territory of Mäng Yang reaches the boundary of Masa (Manipur or Mizoram?), connected to the Western Ocean, i.e. Indian Ocean (Gu 1966 v. 32: 4b). Meanwhile, the *Yunnan Zhi*, monograph on Yunnan compiled around 1510, well before Caolong's annexation of Ava, simply relates that the southern boundary of Mäng Yang touches upon *Mian* (Burma), with no reference to its connection with the maritime region (Zhou 1990 v. 14: 3a).

[89] When denied access by Prome to Lower Burma, Nyaungyan Min, the king of Ava, "ordered the construction of roads across the mountains to Arakan . . . so that . . . Ava could obtain 'high-quality textiles from lands across the ocean'" (Lieberman 1984: 60). Lieberman adds (60n), "Presumably Nyaungyan Min's imports were sold through a royal monopoly and/or used within the court." Contrary to the Burman practice, Caolong probably did not monopolize trade, as shown below. Meanwhile, among gifts of gratitude from the Burman king to the *caopha* of Sipö for his support in the defense of Ava in 1525, and among tributary and apologetic gifts from two lords of Prome, Thado-minsaw and his successor, to Caolong in 1525 and 1532, foreign-made fabrics were the primary (actually almost only) item to be listed (UK II: 121, 126, 133; HMN II: 130, 134, 140). "High-quality textiles" from abroad were highly valued by the Tay.

[90] As stated above, according to chronicles, Caolong told Thado-minsaw that he would be content to only take good horses and elephants, while ceding the Avan throne to the lord of Prome. However, the historical veracity of this episode is again rather dubious, as it raises the question of what the second attack on already pillaged Ava where Caolong enthroned his own son was for. It is hardly believable that all those battles fought by Caolong were only for war animals. A reasonable surmise would be that Caolong wanted his protégé on the Avan throne to control the capital area politically and commercially.

[91] Caolong's celebrated ancestor, who sacked the twin Burman capitals in the 1360s, returned to his

inevitable task for the northern Tay to maintain safe, smooth traffic of the Irrawaddy, which was a prerequisite for controlling terms of trade with regions downriver to the coast and upriver to Bhamo and beyond, including Mäng Yang itself. Caolong may well have allowed foreign ships to sail up the Irrawaddy beyond Ava, thereby letting a free flow of imported commodities, particularly "high-quality textiles from lands across the ocean," to Bhamo and other Tay domains.[92] A Chinese memorial of 1530, written three years after the fall of Ava, thus states that Mäng Mit, deriving large profits from mining gems, had access to vessels of Indian Ocean type on its boundary (*MSL Shizong*: 2570-1). The report indicates that foreign merchants were allowed to frequent ports along the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy, such as Tagaung, Katha, Kaungzin and Bhamo, where they could directly deal with the natives.

As the above case of Mäng Mit shows, direct control over Ava, an emporium on the "extraordinary navigable" Irrawaddy (AOC II: 54), the main north-south artery that connected the Tay Hills to the Central Plain, accelerated a lowland orientation of Tay domains, thereby "effectively integrating Shan areas into an economy centered on the Irrawaddy Basin" (Lieberman 2003: 146). Hence, with the Tay takeover of the Upper Burma capital, the Dry Zone and Tay Highlands were politically and economically unified. The unification in turn transformed the Hill-Dry Zone-Coast "tripartism" (Aung-Thwin 2011: 7) that had been operational in the western mainland for two centuries into a dualism, Upper and Lower Burma, based on the "economic symbiosis" (5). As successors to Burman kings of Ava who had "ended up preserving the *status quo* [in the political and military relationship between Ava and Pegu]" (5), the Tay leaders too were unwilling to conquer the maritime areas of Lower Burma. The task of territorial unification of the western mainland was taken up by the Toungoo dynasts, who appreciated the fullest advantage of their southern location closer to the coast more favorably blessed with the Age of Commerce in the beginning of its peak period.

Pacification of the Tay highlands by Toungoo dynasts

In 1538 King Tabinshweihti of Toungoo attacked Pegu, the commercial and political center of the coastal Mon world.[93] The attack on the internationally famous entrepot was, as stated above, apparently driven by commercial and military prospects: deriving

inland home without founding a dynasty (Kirigaya 2015a: 259).

[92] Burman kings of Ava, like their Nyaungyan successors, very likely imposed a monopoly on trade in textiles imported from the coast and restricted the amount of textiles exported to the Tay realm. Furthermore, they probably forbade foreigners to "traverse Burmese territory to Bhamo" (DEIC: 177). When asked by the Dutch to allow an opening of a trading post in Bhamo in 1682, the Nyaungyan king replied that "such a request was unprecedented. It was public knowledge that from time immemorial and in accordance with strictly observed Burmese laws, no foreigners were permitted beyond a day's travel from Ava" (177). Hence, "they had to entrust their goods and trade to Burmese merchants who did have permission to travel to Bhamo" (100). The ban observed from time immemorial was temporarily lifted while the Tay occupied the Avan throne, as they had no reason to favor "Burmese" merchants over foreigners.

[93] The following story is based on the UK (II: 131-51, 168-278) and HMN (II: 138-59, 187-290), unless otherwise noted.

huge profits from oceanic trade,[94] and securing direct access to European firearms recently introduced by the Portuguese to the coastal cities of Southeast Asia.[95] The defeated Mon king fled to Prome, resorting to the Burman lord of the riverine city, his brother-in-law, who in turn asked Thohanbwa, the Tay king of Ava, for military assistance.[96] Thus, this battle over Prome involved Burman, Mon, and Tay crowns, who jointly fought against another Burman lord of Toungoo. Each of the three leaders in alliance represented Lower, Middle, and Upper Burma (including Tay Hills), which were commercially connected by a trade network along the Irrawaddy, and thus shared common economic interests. The sudden annexation of Pegu by Toungoo definitely alerted them that it would alter, or worse yet, break the "*status quo*" or the "economic symbiosis" preserved for centuries between Upper and Lower Burma. Commercial concerns were the principal factor to form this "multi-ethnic" alliance.[97] They failed to retake Pegu, allowing Toungoo's growing presence in the coastal sector.

In 1541 Tabinshweihti again attacked Prome. His repeated expeditions to the riverine emporium evoke those of Caolong's a decade earlier. Rather than a simple advance by land straight up to Ava through Toungoo, the new Peguan king, following the precedent set by the celebrated Tay conqueror, first attempted to dominate the lower-middle Irrawaddy traffic. This time, besides the Avan monarch, the lord of Prome also asked the Arakan king for aid. Arakan sent both an army and navy for the relief of Prome, which shows exactly how the coastal kingdom was connected, by land and water, with the commercial network along of the Irrawaddy.[98] From the Tay side came Thohanbwa and the lords of Mäng Yang, Mäng Mit and Sipö.[99] As seen above, Sipö had been a "steadfast ally of Ava" (MGNY: 298), faithfully supporting

[94] Thus, an early 17th century Chinese record aptly relates, "Rising from *Dongwu* [Toungoo], *Mangruiti* [Minshweihti; Tabinshweihti] took over maritime trade" (Qu 1979: 589). In the early 16th century, Varthema described the Peguan king as wearing "more rubies on him than the value of a very large city" and "having an (annual) income of about one million in gold" (1928: 82-3). In 1519 a commercial treaty was concluded between the Peguan king and the Portuguese, who then established a "factory or trade depot" at Martaban (Phayre 1998: 264).

[95] The above-mentioned Chinese record thus states, "In former times *Mian* [Burma] did not have firearms. Now they have obtained them" (Qu 1979: 619). For a general discussion of the evolution and introduction of firearms technology to Southeast Asia, see Andaya (1992: 379-94). For the effectiveness of European firearms in Toungoo campaigns to interior districts, see Lieberman (1984: 28-9; 2003: 152-3). Cesare Frederici in the late 1560s observed that the Peguan king (Bayinnaung) maintained "eighty thousand Harquebusses" (1905: 124), while Gasparo Balbi in 1583 noted that the king retained a "great store of Artillarie of all sorts" (1905: 159).

[96] The YT (II: 28) remarks that it was Thohanbwa's successor, the Sipö *caopha*, who came to Prome in response to the request. According to Phayre (1998: 88), Thohanbwa had a "deep hatred to the Burmese race," though there is no such a mention in the chronicles.

[97] Maung Htin Aung describes the lord of Prome as "half Burmese and half Shan" (1967: 107), thereby making the story suitable to, and understandable in, the ethno-paradigm of the historiography of Burma.

[98] As stated above, the Arakan relationship with cities along the Irrawaddy must have been fairly intimate.

[99] The YT (II: 38) says it was the Sipö *caopha*, now king of Ava, who, with *caophas* of Sumsai (Thonze), Lökcök (Yauksauk), and Nöngmwan (Naungmun), all in the eastern hills, came to Prome for its rescue.

the Burman monarch of Ava in battles against Mäng Yang for decades.[100] In other words, Mäng Yang and Sipö had been arch-enemies. Now, in the face of an immediate common threat far graver than their enmity, they somehow overcame the long-lasting antipathy.[101] Despite their concentrated effort, however, the allied forces were severely defeated by the Toungoo troops, who then conquered Prome.

In a commercially desperate situation without control over the Irrawaddy traffic and access to Lower Burma trade, Hkon Maing (probably Khun Mäng in Tay), formerly the *caopha* of Sipö, now the king of Ava, and other Tay lords of Mäng Yang, Bhamo, Mäng Mit, Mäng Nai, and Yönghoy united to retake Prome in 1543.[102] A half-century earlier (indeed throughout history), a united Tay front would have been impossible to form. While those northern principalities, such as Mäng Yang, Bhamo, and Mäng Mit, closer to the Chinese border, were more closely related to, and more substantially affected by the economic and political impact transmitted overland from Ming China, Mäng Nai and Yönghoy, located to the southeast of Ava, were separated from their northern brethren both geopolitically and economically, and more involved in the affairs of the lowland valleys of the Irrawaddy.[103] In short, other than the basic cultural traits, they shared little political and commercial interest with each other. However, as a result of intensive integration of the Tay world into an economy centered on the Dry Zone, those domains now shared a vested interest in terms and trends of trade with Lower Burma, which drove them into alliance.[104] Therefore, although the battle over Prome looks at first sight to be an ethnic conflict between Tay and Burman, it was in reality a battle between Upper and Lower Burma, each representing their own commercial interests and trade networks closely linked to the Irrawaddy.

Despite their unified determination, the united Tay forces were again repulsed by the Toungoo troops, because the war vessels of the latter were larger than those of

[100] The lord of Sipö was described by a Burman minister as a "close friend and ally" of his master, Narapati, the ex-king of Ava (UK II: 139; HMN II: 146). Ava and Sipö, through the trade in tea, must have maintained a close commercial relationship. Tea, vital to the diet of the Burmans, was grown in the Tay Hills, especially in the area to the north of Sipö unblessed with gem mines. A local chronicle records that a queen of a Sipö *caopha* was the daughter of the lord of Loi Long (Tawng Peng), the major tea-producing domain (Mu 1948: 18a). Tay tea, unlike tea from the Sipsong Panna region, was not highly appreciated by the Chinese. Thus, the bulk of the produce was exported to the Burmese lowlands, whence in turn came Indian textiles.

[101] Besides other possible means, Caolong's non-monopolistic policy toward trade in textiles imported by foreign ships might have also helped to conciliate the *caopha* of Sipö.

[102] The YT (II: 43) adds to this list the *caopha* of Mäng Köng (Mogaung). The summary of how Khun Mäng assumed the throne of Ava is as follows: When Thohanbwa was assassinated by frustrated Burman courtiers, their leader was recommended to succeed the vacant throne by Khun Mäng; however, that leader politely refused to take the throne himself and in turn asked Khun Mäng to come down from Sipö to be crowned at Ava. As Lieberman correctly affirms (2003: 135), "disjuncture between ethnicity and allegiance" is apparent in this case.

[103] According to the chronicle account (UK II: 125; HMN II: 134), Mäng Nai and Yönghoy, among other unspecified Tay domains, seem to have been allies of Sipö that in turn was an ally of Ava in fighting Mäng Yang in the 1520s.

[104] Again, the non-monopolistic policy directed by Caolong and his successors at Ava might have contributed to conciliating the other Tay lords.

the former, and the latter employed cannons while the former had none (UK II: 140; HMN II: 147). The victorious Toungoo forces made a retaliatory northern expedition, extending the territory up to Pagan. Rulers of towns and fortresses along the Irrawaddy took refuge in Ava under a "Shan" lord, rather than surrendering to Toungoo forces led by their compatriot Burmans. Among these refugee rulers was Sithukyawhtin, former lord of Salin, a place located roughly intermediary between Ava and Prome along the Irrawaddy.[105] He seems to have enjoyed the personal favor of the Mäng Yang *caopha*, who supported him to be crowned at Sagaing in 1545.[106] Ava and Sagaing, two capitals in the "heartland" of Burma, existed in juxtaposition until 1551, when Sithukyawhtin crossed the Irrawaddy to mount a final assault on Ava. The ruler of Ava, heir to Khun Mäng and formerly the lord of Mäng Pai, fled the city without exchanging fire and turned to Bayinnaung who had just succeeded Tabinshweihti.[107]

Curiously, both Phayre and Harvey, precolonial Western historians of Burma, refer to Sithukyawhtin's "Shan" descent, although Burmese chronicles bear no information on his "ethnic" background.[108] This is because their "ethnic paradigm" of Burmese history is founded upon the assumption that the "Shan" have to fight against the Burmans, or vice versa, and should not support each other.[109] Sithukyawhtin must be "Shan," otherwise the *caopha* of Mäng Yang helping him to oust a "Shan" king from Ava is unexplainable. Something which had not concerned the authors of Burmese chronicles centuries earlier was unintelligible to Phayre and Harvey, as they had been born, educated, or trained during the "Springtime of Nations."[110] The difference in ethnicity (whatever it is) was a decisive factor in causing historical events in their ethnic paradigm.[111]

Sithukyawhtin reigned until 1555 when Bayinnaung, "the mightiest of all which have reigned in Pegu" (Pimenta 1905: 210), came to conquer Ava.[112] After pacifying

[105] A Burmese epigraph mentions that "Salin lord Sithu," with others, made donations to a Buddhist temple in commemoration of the victory over the *Shyam* (Shan) of Sipö who came to the vicinity of Ava in 1526/27 (SMK V: 124).

[106] Why the *caopha* of Mäng Yang helped Sithukyawhtin with the enthronement is unclear. However, the above-cited inscriptional evidence at least suggests that Sithukyawhtin once played an outstanding role when the Mäng Yang troops led by Caolong fought the Sipö army in the battle over Ava.

[107] Tabinsheihti was assassinated in 1550, leaving the throne open to contenders, among whom Bayinnaung rose to power. He pacified Toungoo and then, as a rule for the Peguan king, Prome, where he received the ex-Avan king (MKP: 106).

[108] Phayre describes Sithukyawhtin as a "son of the Shan chief of Mohnyin" (1998: 106), while Harvey depicts him as "Shan who held Salin" and the "last sawbwa [of Ava]" (1967: 109).

[109] Therefore, Maung Htin Aung relates (1967: 95), "[during the Mäng Yang-Ava war] Ava had been wooing Toungoo, trying to convince its king that out of a sense of nationalism he should support the Burmese dynasty at Ava." I did not find this passage in any of the Burmese chronicles on which he based his work.

[110] The "Springtime of Nations," according to Craig Calhoun, was during the mid-19th century (1997: 3).

[111] For an insightful criticism of "reification of ethnicity" in the study of Burmese history, see Aung-Thwin (1998: 146-7).

[112] According to Phayre (1998: 108), partly because of the "hatred the citizens [of Ava] bore to the

Ava's environs and organizing the northern defense at Myedu,[113] the lord of both the "Mon and Burman states" returned to Pegu to rest for the rainy season. He left Pegu the following year again for the pacification of worrisome Tay regimes,[114] of which his immediate target was Mäng Mit with its "ruby mines."[115] The campaign did not take long. In the newly conquered territory, Bayinnaung established pagodas with Burmese-oriented Buddhist practices, and regulated yearly tribute of ruby, gold, silver, and musk. Then the Toungoo troops descended the hill westward to the Irrawaddy, crossed it at the Htihkyain ferry, and advanced northward to Mäng Yang and Mäng Köng, where, after successful annexation, Bayinnaung made the same religious and tributary arrangements as in Mäng Mit and Sipö. Quite predictably the tribute list here included amber instead of ruby.[116]

The direction of Bayinnaung's campaign was a very rational choice based on commercial considerations.[117] Rather than marching up to Yönghoy, Mäng Pai and Mäng Nai, more immediate threats lying in the adjacent hills northeast of Toungoo, Bayinnaung gave strategic priority to the annexation of the Mäng Mit-Sipö and Mäng Yang-Mäng Köng regions, thereby securing control over rubies, amber, and musk, valuable export items attracting merchants from afar to his capital.[118] An epigraphic account emphasizes the religious aspect of this campaign, saying because the two domains of the heretic "Shans," i.e. Mäng Mit-Sipö and Mäng Yang-Mäng Köng, destroyed the place where the Religion had been established, i.e. Ava, Bayinnaung planned to put them under his "arm." Yet, his economic motive is also asserted by the claim in the same inscription that Bayinnaung conquered "ruby mines" (MKP: 107).

Shan king, a stubborn defense was not looked for."

[113] HHA states (352-3) that Bayinnaung, after the pacification of Ava, went on a northern campaign along the Irrawaddy to Kaungton, Kaungzin, and Bhamo, riverine trading towns near the Sino-Burmo-Tay boundaries. Economic motives were surely behind this campaign.

[114] A Yunnan official sent to settle a dispute between *caophas* of Sënwi and Mäng Wan (Longchuan) reported, "Chief of barbarous *Mian* named *Ruiti* [Shweihti] now lords it over Pegu and has ambition to swallow up [Sënwi and Mäng Wan] (Gu 1966 v. 32: 27a).

[115] A Mon inscription commemorating Bayinnaung's deeds specifically names "ruby mines," together with Mäng Mit and Sipö, which were conquered by the Burman monarch (MKP: 107). Cesare Frederici, who visited Pegu in the late 1560s, called Bayinnaung, "Lord of the Mines of Rubies, Saphirs, and Spinels" (1905: 125).

[116] Amber was the specialty of the region, and one of the items on which Nyaungyan Min declared a monopoly in 1600.

[117] As seen above, Bayinnaung's commercially motivated northern campaign to the upper Irrawaddy emporia, such as Bhamo, Kaungzin and Kaungton, soon after his conquest of Ava is mentioned by at least one source, a biographic account of Bayinnaung.

[118] John Huyghen van Linschoten, a late 16th century Dutch traveler, affirms, "Rubies, Safiers, and other stones . . . of the Countrie of Pegu are esteemed the finest, whereof there is great store . . . . daily brought out . . . into all places" (1883 v. I: 97; v. II: 140). Another contemporary description goes, "The fame of [Peguan king's] bounty . . . was spread over the world" (Balbi 1905: 158). European visitors to Pegu during the reign of Bayinnaung and his son listed, among the exports of Pegu, gold, silver, rubies, sapphires, spinels, musk, benzoin, tin, lead, copper, lac, long pepper, rice, wine (made of rice), and sugar, many of which, and indeed most luxurious ones, were from the Tay realm (Frederici 1905: 133; Fitch 1905: 192).

What he really wanted to put under his control was the Tay produce that attracted merchants even from Mecca. That is why Nyaungyan Min, son of Bayinnaung, declared a royal monopoly on the precious stones and amber with other items, following the precedent set by his celebrated father, soon after he had assumed the throne of Ava. Bayinnaung's political and religious unification of Lower and Upper Burma with the surrounding Tay Highlands was, therefore, not an inevitable outbreak of long "ethnic" enmity between Burman and Tay, but a logical outcome of the long-term economic trend, in which the three zones of the western mainland had already been commercially unified.

Conclusion

Historical research on Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce has been disproportionately concentrated on the major coastal powers open to oceanic trade, while contemporary political and commercial transformations in the interior of the mainland have been largely neglected by scholars with "maritime mentality." This article, while acknowledging that maritime commerce stimuli were *not* solely responsible for political and economic changes in western mainland Southeast Asia during the Age of Commerce, has attempted to discuss the implications of the global commercial expansion in the "long 16th century" for the southward Tay thrust, a missing piece in Anthony Reid's "total history." Echoing the late David Wyatt's subtle observation, truly was the highland Tay world "involved in the same sorts of global transformations as the major empires that surrounded it" (1999: 265).

Not really an uncivilized hill people whose economy was based on cultivating rice and plundering the wealthy lowland valleys, the highland Tay, a supplier of luxurious commodities for oceanic trade, actively involved themselves in the burgeoning trade that connected Upper and Lower Burma by the Irrawaddy. Initially drawing strength from intensive military and commercial contact with the Chinese, they eventually grew confident and powerful enough to challenge Burman supremacy in the Central Plain, which ultimately led to the fall of the capital of Upper Burma in 1527. The seizure of the Avan throne further accelerated the integration of the Tay into an economy centered on the Basin, whereby formerly dissociated highland Tay principalities came to share vested political and commercial interests. Therefore, when Bayinnaung, king of Lower Burma, took the capital of Upper Burma in the 1550s, the next destination of his expedition was naturally the highland Tay world, which was commercially and politically part and parcel of what he had already conquered.

The economic boom, which brought commercial prosperity to the interior, undeniably favored the coastal sector more by providing advanced firearms technology after the arrival of the Europeans in the early 16th century. A broad belt of the Tai-speaking peoples stretching along the boundary of China and mainland Southeast Asia had once been militarily superior to the lowlands, thanks to better access to Chinese military technology, conceivably far more advanced than that of Southeast Asia at the time. European firearms dramatically reversed this trend and the lowlands, with easier access to oceanic trade, began to gain superior military might over the highlands.

Thus, when the Toungoo dynasts, after their conquest of Lower Burma seaports in the mid-16th century, turned their military attention to the uplands, the Tay world was no match for the Burman conquerors equipped with advanced weapons and supported by alien mercenaries. The Age of Commerce, which had once led to the commercial-cum-political expansion of Tay principalities, ironically proved itself in the end primarily a maritime event by favoring a port-state that would sweep most parts of the Tai-speaking world of mainland Southeast Asia.

Lastly, returning to Wyatt's remark, not only the cis-Salween Tay, but also their eastern brethren of the trans-Salween world, such as Lan Na, Lan Sang, and Kengtung, were more or less affected by the burgeoning trade. Admittedly, economic records in the languages concerned are desperately scarce, which makes expansive research on the subject extremely difficult (cf. MGNY: 317; Aung-Thwin 1985: 113). However, for a truly total history of Southeast Asia, scholars should not confine themselves to the study of commercial centers along the seashore, and need to venture upon further exploration into the trends and patterns of trade in these upland Tai interstices during the Age of Commerce.

Abbreviations

AOC	Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*
Cœm	*Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Si Ayutthaya Chabap Phan Chanthanumat*
DEIC	Wil O. Dijk. *Seventeenth-Century Burma and the Dutch East India Company, 1634-1680*
GEM	Sun Laichen. "Shan Gems, Chinese Silver and the Rise of Shan Principalities in Northern Burma, c. 1450-1527"
GUBSS	J. George Scott and J. P. Hardiman. *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*
HHA	*Hanthawaddy Hsinbyushin Ayeidawpon*
HMN	*Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi*
IJAS	*International Journal of Asian Studies*
JAS	*Journal of Asian Studies*
JBRS	*Journal of the Burma Research Society*
JSEAS	*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*
JSS	*Journal of the Siam Society*
LNCH	Liew-Herres Foon Ming and Volker Grabowsky, *Lan Na in Chinese Historiography: Sino-Tai Relations as Reflected in the Yuan and Ming Sources*
LP	*Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Kao Chabap Luang Prasoetaksonnit*
LZ	Li Guoxiang, et al., eds. *Ming Shilu Leizhuan: Shewai Shiliao Juan*

MGNY	Jon Fernquest. "Min-gyi-nyo, the Shan Invasions of Ava (1524-27), and the Beginnings of Expansionary Warfare in Toungoo Burma: 1486-1539"
MKP	U Chit Thein, ed. and trans. *Sheihaung Mon Kyauksa Paungchok*
MMY	U Kemeindha. *Momeik Yazawindawthit*
MS	*Ming Shi*
MSL	*Ming Shilu*
PMP	*Phongsawadan Mon Phama*
SBBR	*SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*
SMK	Burma, Department of Archaeology. *Sheihaung Myanma Kyauksa-mya*
UK	U Kala. *Mahayazawingyi*
XNY	*Xinanyi Fengtuji*
YA	*Yaza-di-yaza Ayeidawpon*
YT	Twinthintaik Wun Maha Sithu. *Myanma Yazawin-thit*

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