CHAPTER NINE

OVERLAND TRADE WITH CHINA THROUGH BURMA

Trade through Burma up to 1852

In Burma so far as her indigenous produce was concerned the teak wood for ship building was the only consideration which induced the Company to establish factories at Negrais in 1753. (1) Apart from teak wood Burma produced nothing which could attract the European entrepreneur and be in demand in Europe. (2) But it was the silk and tea of China imported into Burma through land route, which drew British attention.

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(1) Negrais was a small island on the south-west of Irrawaddy delta. Before 1743 the British, the French and the Dutch had factories at Syriam five miles to the south of Rangoon. During the Mon rebellion in 1743, these factories were destroyed by the rebels. Hence in 1753 the British again established a factory at Negrais.


towards Burma. The British came to know that large caravans of oxen and ponies were carrying silk, tea and other merchandise between China and Burma through the Bhamo-Yunnan route. Hence if the Company wanted to use this back-door to China it was necessary to establish friendly and commercial relations with the ruler of Burma. With this idea in mind Lord Cornwallis, while sending Captain Welsh to Assam in 1792, also sent a private merchant Captain Sorrel on a semi-official visit to Burma to seek for certain concessions for British traders. Apparently, it was the friendly reception of Captain Sorrel in Burma which encouraged Sir John Shore (1795–98) to hope for better results through an official approach.

In 1795 Captain Michael Symes was sent to Burma to negotiate a commercial treaty with the Burmese Government and to obtain permission for Company's agent to


(5) Ibid.


(7) For Symes' account of this mission see: *Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava sent by the Governor General of India in 1795* (3 Vols., London, 1800).
reside at Rangoon to supervise the British Trade. (8) Byrnes was successful in obtaining permission for Company's agent to reside at Rangoon (9) and Captain Cox (10) was appointed to represent the British at Rangoon. He resumed his duties in Oct. 1796 and stayed there for two years. Unfortunately, while at Rangoon Cox had many unpleasant experiences and was not very optimistic about the trade prospects. (11) He reported that:

The commercial concessions brought back by Byrnes were not worth the paper they were written on; they had all been infringed. (12)

But due to his pre-occupations in Mysore and Assam, Lord Wellesely (1793-1805) could not pay due attention to this problem. Though four

(8) Ibid., Appendix III of Vol. II, pp. 336-58
(9) Ibid., pp. 336-38.
(10) For Captain Cox's account of Burma see: Captain Hiram Cox, Journal of a Resident in the Burman Empire (London, 1821).
(11) Cox was given a clear indication that it was beneath the dignity of the court of Ava to treat on terms of equality with the representative of a mere Governor-General: D.G.B. Hall, A History of South East Asia (London, 1964), p. 559.
(12) Foreign Department, Political Consultations, 2 March 1798, No. 5.
more missions in 1802, 1627, 1809 and 1811 were sent to negotiate commercial treaty with Burma, yet they failed to persuade the Burmese ruler to sign a commercial treaty or to establish diplomatic relations.

It was only after the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) and the treaty of Yandaboo in Nov. 1826 that a commercial treaty was signed between the ruler of Burma and the British. The treaty provided for stationing a British Resident at Ava, the capital of Burma, and John Crawfurd was appointed as the first British Resident at Ava. Crawfurd stayed at Ava for less than two years, and was replaced by another Resident.

(14) Later three missions of 1803, 1809 and 1811 were sent to Burma under Captain Canning.
(15) Foreign Department, Political A, 20 Feb. 1824, No. 7
(17) Ibid, pp. 216-20; Also see: Intra, Appendix, B, pp. 261-63.
(18) However, while at Ava, Crawfurd felt that to stay there or to appoint a permanent Resident at Ava was inexpedient. According to him 'a Resident, no less than 1200 miles distant by water from Calcutta, would occupy a position little better than honourable confinement'.

For Crawfurd's account of his Residency at Ava see: John Crawfurd, Journal of an Embassy from Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in year, 1827 (London, 1829).
In 1829 Henry Burney was appointed as British Resident at Ava. His services in Burma (1829-37) proved to be a boon for the British and the Indian traders living in Burma. He did all that he could to protect the traders and their interests. Consequently, trade between India and Burma flourished during this period. But the Company was interested more in using Burma as a thoroughfare to China than in the 'tentative, fluctuating and mainly unsuccessful' indigenous trade of Burma.

During the Residentship of Burney, no opportunity was lost in acquiring knowledge of the topography of the routes from Burma to China. Undoubtedly Burney's appointment at Burma opened a new chapter in the history of exploration of Burma-China routes. The adventurers like R.B. Pemberton, Dr. Richardson, Captain

(19) For a detailed study of Crawfurd and Burney's Residentship, based on India Office Records see; W.S. Desai, History of British Residency in Burma 1823-40 (Rangoon, 1939).


(21) R.B. Pemberton travelled overland to Ava in 1830. He collected information about the country lying between Burma and Yunnan. For his account see; R.B. Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India (Calcutta, 1835).

(22) Dr. Richardson made his way overland to Shwebo in 1831. For his account see: JRAS, Vols. VIII and IX (1839, 1840).
S. F. Hannay (23) and W. Griffith (24) etc. collected important information regarding the trade transactions between Burma and Yunnan, the south-western province of China.

When Captain Hannay visited Bhamo in 1835, he found that trade between Ava and the Upper districts was the sole monopoly of the Chinese. The Burmese who had obtained special permission to ascend the river above the 'chowki' of Tsampaynago were allowed to trade with China. No foreigners were, however, permitted to ascend the river above that 'chowki'. At that time some two hundred Chinese traders were living at Bhamo and had the monopoly of all the overland trade between Bhamo and Yunnan. These Chinese informed Hannay about the direct trade route to Yunnan through the Taiping river and through many other passes between Bhamo and Yunnan. (25)

(23) Captain S. F. Hannay made an important journey from Ava to Hukong valley in 1835, cf. S. F. Hannay, Sketch of the Sinsphos or the Kakhvans of Burma and the position of the Tribe as regards Bhamo and the Inland Trade of the Irrawaddy with Yunnan etc. (Calcutta, 1847).


but unfortunately, the palace revolution of Burma in 1837\(^{(26)}\) led to the withdrawal of British Resident from Ava.\(^{(27)}\) After that some abortive attempts were made by the Company to establish commercial relations with the Shan states and through them with the western provinces of China.\(^{(28)}\) But nothing substantial could be done due to the outbreak of second war of Burma in 1852.

**Commerce Treaty of 1862**

After the second Anglo-Burma war frontier peace was established and friendly relations were promoted between Rangoon and Ava. Major Arthur Phayre was appointed the first Commissioner of Pegu. In

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\(^{(26)}\) In 1837, Prince Tharawaddy the younger brother of Bagyidaw, the ruler of Burma, revolted and usurped power.

\(^{(27)}\) Tharawaddy refused to be bound by the treaty of Yandaboo and did not recognise the British Resident at Ava as an Officer. Hence Burney left Burma in July 1837. J. S. Desai, *op. cit.* (1939), p. 96.

\(^{(28)}\) *Political Despatch from the Court of Directors, 4 June 1851, No. 19.*
August 1855 along with Henry Yule and a staff of fifteen men, Phayre went to Amarpura capital of Upper Burma. (29) The main object of Phayre's mission to Burma was to persuade Mindon to sign a commercial treaty and to encourage the trade with Yunnan through Burma. (30) But Phayre failed in his mission as he could not persuade the Burmese ruler to sign a commercial treaty. (31)

However, while at Pegu Phayre tried to collect information about the line of communication between Burma and Yunnan. In August 1861, he sent a memorandum to his Government informing them about the trade transactions between the capital of Burma and the


the province of Yunnan. He informed that:

Until last five years large caravans used annually to come to Amarpoora, but in consequence of the Panthay (32) disturbances in Yunnan, the trade had been stopped or found its way to Burma by circuitous routes in small caravans (33).

(32) The Panthays or the Pansees, as they were called, were the Muslims of Yunnan. In 1856 they founded their kingdom at Ta-li, the chief city of Yunnan. These Muslims seemed to have suffered, what they deemed oppression or persecution. Being a handful in the midst of their Buddhist fellow subjects they had to fly 'en-masse' to the jungles and hills, whence they commenced a dacoity war on the Chinese villages and towns: *Upper Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 607.

By sixties the 'war had become a struggle that devastated the country, destroyed the commerce and rendered the life and property utterly insecure': *Foreign Department, Political A.*, May 1865, No. 299.

Secondly, these panthays conducted the trade between Burma and China for many generations through the well-known ambassador's route (i.e. Bhamo-Yunnan route). But these disorders in Yunnan greatly affected the caravan trade. For further details about the Panthays see Loshe Yegar, 'The Panthays of Burma and Yunnan', *Journal South-East Asian History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March, 1965), pp. 56-73.

(33) *Foreign Department, Political B.*, Aug. 1861, No. 452.
Phayre pointed out that it was certain that there used to be a very good trade between Burma and Yunnan by way of Bhamo. (34) and, he was hopeful that the British merchants might no doubt participate in the trade when reopened and increase it if the king of Burma consented to allow them to reside or have agents at Bhamo (35).

Phayre further informed that the entire trade was carried on chiefly through Chinese merchants, originally from Yunnan but now settled in Bhamo or Ava. Phayre expected much opposition from these merchants. He said that:

They would dislike foreign merchants coming into the market ... the Burmese too would not like foreigners being settled at Bhamo, or going towards the frontier. Still if some advantages were offered to the King of Burma he might be induced to enter into arrangement on the subject ... the offer to allow the free export of rice would be very tempting to him .... (36)

(34) According to British estimate the value of the Yunnan-Burma trade, which passed through Bhamo before 1854, was about half a million pounds: Albert Fytch, Burma Past and Present (2 Vols. London, 1878), Vol. II p. 97.

(35) Ibid.

(36) Foreign Department, Political B, Aug. 1361, No.452.
The British wanted to revive the Bhamo-Yunnan trade, because, by that time they had full control over southern Burma(37) and were very much interested in silk, tea and gold leaves of China. Inter alia, the British wanted to exploit the inner regions of China as a market for their own merchandise, especially the opium.(38) Also, the revival of Burma-Yunnan trade under British control could make British Burma into the most flourishing districts of the Indian empire. Moreover, it was due to the pressure of British merchants who wanted to open China's back-door that the British Government again instructed Phayre in 1862 to look for ways and means to re-open the trade routes to Yunnan.(39)

In 1862, the Province of Burma was formed by the amalgamation of three divisions i.e. Pegu, Arakan and Tenasserin. Phayre became its first High Commissioner. As such, he made two more visits to Burmese capital,

(37) Northern Burma was conquered by the British during the third Anglo-Burma war in 1885.

(38) *Foreign Department, Political A, Dec. 1862, No.382.*

(39) *Political Despatch to Secretary of State, 3 June 1862, No. 69.*
Mandalay. In his second mission to Burma in 1862, Phayre attempted to persuade King Mindon to agree to a commercial treaty and to abolish or reduce the frontier duties, so that trade might be opened with Upper Burma and regions beyond. (41)

Besides, Phayre suggested his own Government to link Burma with the western provinces of China either by telegraph or by tramway. But the scheme was considered to be premature and was rejected, (42) as most of the province of Yunnan, which connected Burma with China was then in turmoil due to Panthay rebellion. Hence Phayre was instructed to keep his attention directed to the prospects of trade with Western China and to avail of every favourable opportunity to obtain the knowledge of the relative advantages of the several routes which had been suggested for tapping the commerce of China. (43)

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(41) Ibid., p. 48.

(42) Foreign Department, Political A., Dec. 1862, No. 382.

(43) Foreign Department, Political A., Dec. 1862, No. 382.
Phayre was also instructed to give information regarding the genuine produce of opium from the Yunnan province and its cost price. (44) Phayre went to Mandalay in Oct. 1862. He was received with much courtesy by the Burman Woonghees (ministers) (45), and the eight articles commercial treaty was signed by the ruler of Burma in Dec. 1862. (46) Though Phayre wanted to add one more article in this draft to secure the British position among the future competitors (47) but he was prevented to do so by his Government. (48)

According to this commercial Treaty of 1862, the British agreed to abolish duties on their side of the frontier within one year, while the Burmese Government agreed to do the same within four years. Mindon, the Burmese ruler, granted full permission

(44) According to Phayre the opium, which at that time was reaching Burma was not the produce of Yunnan province. Ibid.
(45) Foreign Department, Political A., Dec. 1862, Nos. 239-40
(46) For the terms of the treaty see infra, Appendix C, pp. 265-269.
(47) Phayre wanted to include that "... in case any other nation should secure more favourable terms, we may have the right to share the same ...". Foreign Department, Political A., Dec. 1862, No. 40.
(48) Foreign Department, Political A., July 1863, No. 48.
to the British subjects to trade in any part of his dominion. He even agreed to the appointment of British agent to reside at Mandalay. Thus according to the agreement the British abolished all customs on goods entering their territories from Upper Burma. Rice was allowed to be imported into Upper Burma duty free. Clement Williams was appointed as First British Agent at Mandalay. During his stay at Mandalay he became an enthusiast for the plans for overland trade with China through Burma. (49)

Williams persuaded King Mindon to allow him to survey the river route to Bhamo. As a result of his inquiries during his stay at Bhamo, he was able to submit a memorandum (50) to his Government in April 1864 regarding the prospects of trade with China via Bhamo. He also prepared three maps showing the routes from Bhamo to Yunnan. (51)

(49) Williams, while serving in Pegu, as Assistant Surgeon in Her Majesty’s 68th Regiment, spent a furlough in Mandalay in 1860-61, and managed to get friendly with the King of Burma. He was already in the good books of the ruler of Burma due to his previous adventure. Moreover he was the moving spirit behind Phayre’s initiative for Burma-Yunnan trade.

(50) For his Memorandum see: Foreign Department, Political, May 1865, Nos. 298-301.

(51) Out of these three maps, only one map is available in the National Archives of India, New Delhi, in file: Ibid, No. 301.
In his memorandum Williams anticipated that 'the ancient trade between Yunnan and Burma via Bhamo would be revived and the exchange between the manufactures of England and the products of China would be immediately increased. He was so definite in his pursuit that he said:

If any line to connect Burma with China is possible, it appears to me that this line is most so; if any line will pay, it must be this; if any line can be safe it must be this. Such a line will be, I firmly believe, the one ultimately adopted. Since it will be the shortest, the easiest, the safest and the cheapest route which follows the most frequented and oldest trade routes ... (52)

Williams went so far in his earnest that he declared that:

There are forty millions of people waiting to be clothed with British piece-goods and to be furnished with the handwoks of all the manufactures of England. They are ready to return silk, tea and the most valuable, useful and precious metals from mines. (53)

He concluded his memorandum with a most enthusiastic paragraph. He said:

With the opening of this new way to China, will be written a fresh page in our already glorious commercial history ... (54)

(52) Ibid. No. 299.
(53) Ibid.
(54) Ibid.
Thus these maps and memorandum submitted by Williams created much interest among the British authorities from the geographical and commercial point of view.

Phayre, the High Commissioner, suggested Colonel Durand, Secretary to the Government of India, that the Memorandum should be published for the public information. He wanted to inform the private enterprisers that the direct trade with China through Burma was possible and, that too without any harassing restrictions, and subject only to a transit duty of one per cent 'ad valorem' on exports to China—at a very fair rate, but nil on imports.

Obviously, the trade prospects with Burma and through Burma with China appeared quite bright for the time being. Because the ruler of Burma through whose territories the trade passed to China, the Panthays

(55) Ibid, No. 298.

(56) The cessation of the trade through Bhamo-Yunnan route due to Panthay rebellion, was of considerable concern to King Mindon of Burma who realised its importance and value. Though Mindon wanted to befriend the Panthays for the free flow of trade, but he could not do so because he was an ally of the emperor of China. Hence he could not recognise the rebel Panthay chief as the Chief of Ta-li region, and have political and commercial relations with him. But he would not mind if a third party could do so to revive the traditional trade between Burma and Yunnan: Ibid.
who conducted the trade between Yunnan and Burma, and the Kachin tribe who were the masters of the passes into China, were fully alive to the importance and value of the transit trade and hence wanted to renew and protect it.

However, despite the willingness of the parties concerned and the enthusiasm and optimism of

(57) The Panthays were quite interested in the trade transactions between Bhamo and Yunnan. Therefore, they encouraged the Burmese and Shan tribes of the border areas to continue leading the trade caravans. They even protected the merchants who tried to do so, and would welcome them in many ways: John Anderson, Mandalay to Momien (London, 1876), pp. 241-42, 244.

(58) The Kachin tribe mastered the passes into China. They were fully alive to the fact that unless these passes are used by the traders no benefit could be reaped by them. Hence the enthusiast amongst the Kachins were ready to make roads across their districts to conduct any number of merchants safely to China. Secondly, they would not care whether the traders were English, Burmese or Chinese. They only wanted that the traders should pass through their districts and pay them their dues: Foreign Department, Political A. May 1365, No.299.

In fact these Kachins looked on the roads as source of income. That is why they cared for no one party or nation more than other. They were concerned with their own benefits only. Hence C. Williams suggested that 'the best payer will have their (Kachins) best goodwill': Ibid.
Williams, the Treaty of 1862 and Williams' suggestions failed to have the desired result. Though the British abolished the duties on their side of the frontier, yet the Burmese did not. As a matter of fact, Mindon could not afford to do so, firstly, because his revenues were hardly sufficient to meet his expenses. Secondly, King's monopoly of certain articles of trade was another obstacle, as the articles like timber and grain could be bought only through the royal brokers. Thirdly, though Mindon himself was indeed well disposed towards British traders, his officers had different attitude. Whenever the British agents attempted to explore upper Burma in order to discover the possibilities of trade there, the Burmese officers put obstacles in their way, and they looked British activities with fear and disfavour. Inter alia, the Paithay and Chinese skirmishes in Yunnan were the great obstacles for the free flow of commerce and for the implementation of the Treaty of 1862.

(59) J. Williams was very optimistic about the trade prospects with Burma and through Burma with China. Because 'the Burmese Government is now friendly one, inviting British trade, and not only willing to open the highway to China, but fully alive to the advantages, that commerce through his territory would confer, both on the monarch and his subjects'. Ibid.
It was only in Oct. 1865 that Captain E.B. Sladen, the new British Agent at Mandalay, informed his Government that:

Yunnan ... in all respects is quiet,
... anxious to cultivate relations and open trade with and through Burma (61)

Consequently, Phayre, the Chief Commissioner of British Burma and Sladen, his Agent at Mandalay were instructed by Lord Lawrence (1865-66), the Governor General of India to induce the Burmese ruler for the implementation of the treaty of 1862 by reducing frontier duties. (62)

Sladen earnestly brought before the Burmese minister the question of duties still levied on British goods. He explained the necessity for doing away with these duties entirely as promised in the Treaty of 1862. Sladen further hinted that if not done, the British might re-impose their duties which would necessarily entail ruin and misery upon a very large number of King's subjects. (63)

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(60) Captain E.B. Sladen succeeded C. Williams in Aug. 1865. Foreign Department, Political A., Dec. 1865, No. 25.

(61) Ibid, No. 28.

(62) Ibid, No. 28.

Contrary to Sladen's expectations the Burmese evaded their promise of abolishing the duties by arguing that word 'duties' in the treaty referred to export duties only and not to the import duties. Hence ultimately Sladen had to suggest his Government that:

Under the spirit of the Treaty of 1862, the Burmese might be allowed to charge frontier duties until June 1867 .... to come to a final conclusion ... and, then other measures should be taken. (64)

However, nothing came out of these warnings and negotiations. Though the ruler of Burma was equally anxious to do away with the duties, but the Government was too poor to give up certain items of revenue until he could discover alternative corresponding source of income. Hence Sladen concluded that the 'Burmese would evade by all practicable means for some time to come at least anything like a favourable interpretation on their part of the Treaty of 1862'. (65)

In Nov. 1866 Phayre, the Chief Commissioner of British Burma again went unto Mandalay to negotiate

(64) Ibid, No. 26.

(65) Ibid.
another 'improved' commercial treaty with Mindon, the ruler of Burma. Though received with much courtesy and respect, he got a negative reply from the King with regard to signing another commercial treaty on account of the troubled state of affairs in the country due to the rebellion of Mindon's two sons. (66)

Besides, the King refused to reduce frontier duties or to surrender his monopolies on the plea that 'the country was impoverished owing to the recent troubles. (67) Hence in frustration, Phayre broke off negotiations and left Mandalay. (68) He suggested to his Government that 'on British side the duties might be reimposed'. But the British Government in India overruled such a proposal, as it was considered unwise to irritate the King. Instead, the Government decided that the problem should be solved by negotiations. In the meantime, Phayre retired and was succeeded by Albert Fytche as new Chief Commissioner of British Burma in December, 1866.

(67) Ibid.
(68) Ibid.
Commerce Treaty of 1867

After Phayre left Mandalay in early Dec. 1866, full one year drifted in negotiations. But the situation of trade still remained unsatisfactory due to the border duties. The Burmese Government though favourably disposed did not reduce the frontier duties because they failed to understand that a sensible reduction of duties would bring about decrease in prices and consequently, considerably increase the demand and volume of trade. The Burmese officials wondered as informed by Sladen that

... that though British Taxes were lighter than the Burmese, yet they got more revenues than the letter ... (69)

May be it was due to the spirit of conservatism on the part of the Burmese ruler that he apprehended more mischief than gain from generous intercourse with the Europeans or the discouragement of trade was regarded by the ruler as one of his principal safeguards against an overwhelming irruption of too grasping and indocile

Consequently, Colonel Fytche, the new Chief Commissioner visited Mandalay in 1867. His main object was to convince the ruler of Burma about the benefits of reducing the frontier duties, to open up trade with China via Bhamo and to despatch a trade mission via Bhamo to China. He wanted to discover the cause of the cessation of overland trade between Burma and China which was flourishing in 1855. Moreover, Colonel Fytche wanted to study the geography of the region between Burma and China.

When he reached Mandalay on 7th Oct. 1867, he was hospitably received by Mindon. Now the political

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(70) Sladen informed that Burmese officials from the King downwards, were very jealous indeed of association or intercourse as between themselves and the British agent. Even European residents had been warned against friendly visits to any by the Agent, and this warning was by an officer of the King, who said that, in giving this warning he was acting under the direct orders of the King, Ibid., No.28.


situation in Burma was completely changed as compared to the previous year. In 1866 Mindon flatly refused to enter into any further treaty relations with the British. But a year later (1867), he was willing to agree to any terms dictated by the British. The chief reason behind this change of mind was that two of Mindon's sons were in open revolt. They even had killed their own uncle and were now after Mindon himself. Hence Mindon badly needed British arms and help to quell the rebellion.

A commercial treaty was signed on 25th Oct. 1867 by Colonel Fytche on the British side and the Pukhan Wunghee on the Burmese side. According to this treaty, firstly, the Burmese King abandoned all his monopolies save those on rubies and timber. Secondly, the duties on all goods passing between the two frontiers of Burma were reduced to five per cent 'ad valorem' for ten years. Thirdly, free trade in gold and silver was to be permitted. King Mindon also granted certain extra territorial rights to the British, whereby the Resident was invested with full jurisdiction in civil cases between British subjects in the capital, while those between British subjects and Burmese were to be

(74) Ibid., p. 62.
decided by a mixed court comprised of the Resident and a Burmese officer of high rank. Besides, the British Agents were to sit as observers in Burmese custom houses and vice versa. (75)

Inter alia, Mindon was allowed to buy firearms in British territory. And, the Burmese ruler engaged not to enter into any negotiations or communications of any kind with any foreign power except with the previous consent of the British. (76) Moreover, to re-establish the extinct Bhamo-Yunnan trade, the Burmese ruler promised to help the exploring party which was to go from Bhamo to Yunnan under Captain Sladen. Mindon enthusiastically said that he would send Sladen all the way to China. (77) He issued a Royal edict to direct all his officials 'not to impede in any way, but to further progress of the English party by every means in their power'. (78) Moreover, a British Resident at Bhamo was sanctioned and Mindon gave permission for British steamers to

(75) Foreign Department, Political A, Feb. 1858, No. 28.
(76) Ibid.
(77) Foreign Department, Political A, Feb. 1858, No. 54.
(78) Ibid.
navigate the Irrawaddy upto and beyond Mandalay. (70)

Apparently, in British eyes these later concessions were far more important than the terms of the treaty itself. The real objective of the British was China through a shorter and direct route via Shamo, because, it was a period of tremendous activity on the part of the three powers viz. Britain, France and U.S.A. The Suez Canal was nearing completion and Britain and France were keenly competing for trade with China. The British, therefore, were anxiously probing for a shorter route to the Middle Kingdom. (82)

An exploring party under Captain Sladen, (81) British Resident at Mandalay and Political Officer at Shamo was sent in Jan. 1868 to cross the Burmese frontier and to proceed to Tali fu, the Panther capital in China. (82)

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(70) Foreign Department, Political A, March 1868, No.39.
(81) Captain Sladen's party was partly financed by the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce and partly by the Government: Ibid, p. 121.
(82) Foreign Department, Political A, Feb. 1868, No. 55; Also Ibid, No. 28.
The party consisted of Captain Sladen as leader, Captain Williams, Dr. Anderson and Messrs. Bower and Stewart. They were instructed to enquire into the condition and prospects of trade between Burma and China; to explore the routes between Bhama and Yunnan with a view to opening up the most direct and shortest route to China; and to suggest ways and means for the promotion of commerce with that country.

The party left Mandalay on 13th Jan. 1868 and reached Bhama on 1st Jan. 1868 by a royal steamer. Though the expedition had been launched with the consent and approval of the Burmese ruler, yet Sladen found that at Bhama the Burmese officials and Chinese merchants tried their best to frustrate the plans of the expedition. These merchants regarded "any attempt to infringe their Bhama-Yunnan trade monopoly with extreme disapproval". Hence they did their best to prevent the Kachin and Shan

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See his account: John Anderson, Mandalay to Loomain: A Narrative of two Expeditions to Western China of 1868 and 1874 under Colonel E.B. Sladen and Colonel Horace Browne (London, 1876).

Foreign Department, Political A, March 1868, No. 86.

Chiefs to approach the party, though these Chiefs were anxious to enrich themselves by helping the British in their commercial venture. (87)

At such a crucial moment Sladen's great stroke of policy was the opening of direct communication with Sultan Suleiman, the Muhammadan ruler of the rebel Government of Yunnan. When it was made known that the Muhammadan Government was in favour of the advance of the expedition and that Sladen was on a 'diplomatic venture', the difficulties vanished like smoke, (88) and Sladen was able to reach T'eng Yeh (Komein) without much opposition.

Nevertheless, Sladen was not destined to visit Ta-li or to travel further in Yunnan. At T'eng Yuch, Sladen came to know that the Chinese bandits were active along the road between T'eng Yuch and Ta-li and travelling on this road was very dangerous. Hence, Sladen had to conduct all the commercial negotiations with the Governor of T'eng Yuch who was the representative of the Sultan of Ta-li. (89)

(87) Ibid.
(88) Foreign Department, Political A, Aug. 1868, Nos. 42-43.
Sladen undertook that the British Government would immediately send a trade caravan to Yunnan and the Government of T'eng Yueh would guarantee the safety of the convoy during its journey from Bhamo. They also agreed about the taxes and customs to be levied upon the trade convoys. (90) Later on, however, letters were received from the Panthay Government of Ta-li confirming Sultan's desire to establish friendly relations with the British Government, and to assist in developing mutual trade. (91) Sladen's party left T'eng Yueh in mid-July 1868 and reached Mandalay in Sep. 1868.

However, for several years the British did nothing to implement the trade agreement concluded by Captain Sladen. It was due to the reason that news were constantly reaching Rangoon regarding the nefarious activities of bandits on the routes between Bhamo and Ta-li which made travelling extremely dangerous. In spite of the Panthay endeavours to clear the routes of the banditry (92), it was difficult to induce the merchants to take the risk.


(91) Fytche, op.cit., p. 109; Anderson, op.cit., p.246; Dr. Thaung, op.cit., pp. 480-481.

(92) From time to time British sent few rifles to the Governor of T'eng Yueh. See: Dorothy Woodman, The making of Burma (London, 1962), p. 190.
Besides, Sladen's optimism about the opening of traditional Bhamo-Yunnan route rested upon the stability of strong and independent Panthay Government. (93) But the latter started crumbling before the Imperial forces of China. Towards the end of 1871, Sultan Suleiman of Ta-li was besieged in his Capital by the Chinese forces. His son and successor Hussan went to the British to seek British aid and intervention in order to avoid the elimination of the Ta-li Sultanate. (94) But Lord Mayo (1869-72) was not prepared to help the Panthays against China. (95) Hence in 1874 Ta-li fell to the Chinese and the Sultan was killed. (96)

The collapse of the Panthay rebellion was followed by a gradual increase in traffic between Yunnan and Burma. (97) In 1875 Lord Salisbury appointed a British mission under Colonel Browne to proceed from Bhamo to Shanghai. In order to obviate difficulties, Mr. Augustus Raymond Margary of the Consular Service

(93) Fytch, op. cit., op. 117, 302.
in China was instructed to proceed overland to Bhamo to prepare the way for mission's adventure. Hence Margary started from Shanghai in Aug. 1874, and reached Bhamo via Ta-li in Jan. 1875.

Thus, Margary was the first British to traverse the country between Ta-li and T'eng Yueh. In early Feb. 1875 Browne's mission left Bhamo for its overland march to Shanghai. Margary pushed ahead to make arrangements for the mission. But he was murdered at Hanwyne, half way to T'eng Yueh on 29 Feb. 1875. Consequently, the Browne's mission had to retrace its steps. Though an enquiry mission under Colborne Baber was sent in Nov. 1875 to enquire into the causes of Margary's assassination, yet nothing substantial came out of these adventures. Moreover, with the advent of King Thibaw on the Burmese throne in 1876, British relations with that Government were severely strained and the British resident had to be withdrawn from Mandalay in 1879. Hence Margary's expedition was the last attempt made during the period of the Burmese kingship to penetrate China through Bhamo route.