CHAPTER TEN

LAND ROUTES TO CHINA THROUGH BURMA AND COMMODITIES OF TRADE

ROUTING

The Bhamo-Yunnan Route

The parallel mountain ranges and deep river beds (1) between Burma and Yunnan account for the fact that communication between the two remained in most primitive state till World War II. The Burma Road (2) was constructed on the mule-track which, for centuries, had been the line of communication between Burma and Yunnan thus linking India with China, the two mighty cultures of Asia. (3) Braving the formidable natural barriers, the caravans of traders on their surprisingly indefatigable little ponies or on foot plodded from Yunnan to Burma and vice versa. (4)

(1) Yunnan is a south-western province of China. It fell to the Chinese Communist armies in 1950.

(2) The Burma Road was constructed in 1937-38 on the old mule-track but it starts from Lashio instead of Bhamo from where the mule-track started. From Lashio in Burma this road is extended up to Chungking, the War-time capital of China situated on the upper Yangtze: F. Tennyson Jesse, Burma Road (London, 1946) pp. 173-74.

(3) V.G. Nair, China and Burma Interpreted (Madras 1947), Appendix II, p. 135.

For all the caravans proceeding eastward to Yunnan from Burma, the starting point was Bhamo, situated on the upper Irrawaddy. Till the War, this city was considered as one of the greatest emporiums of the East. It was a small stockade town with a few hundred houses occupied chiefly by the Chinese, Kachins, the Shan traders and a few Burmese officials. Hence inhabited by people of different nationalities, Bhamo was a place of great importance and interest. For centuries the traders and soldiers used this city for commerce and war respectively while travelling from China to India and vice versa. The importance of Bhamo is all the more increased due to its situation on the confluence of Irrawaddy and Tai-ping river, a tributary of Irrawaddy.

(5) Foreign Department, Political B., Aug. 1861, No. 542.

(6) Patrick Fitzgerald, 'The Yunnan-Burma Road', JRGS (March, 1940), Vol. 95, No. 3, p. 162;

In 1884, the Chinese and the Kachins both attacked Bhamo. They almost completely destroyed the city but could not retain their hold on it due to the difficulties of communications: T.R. Tregear, A Geography of China (London, 1965), p. 231; also see Upper Burma Gazetteer, Vol. I, Pt. I, (Kungoon, 1900), p. 231.
After leaving Bhamo the route goes along the Taiping river which is navigable by boats, and even small steamers can go up to Myothit, (7) the next village on this route. Hence from Bhamo to Myothit the Taiping river forms a natural and fair-weather road. Myothit, the next village is situated at an elevation of 1,370 feet. (8) It was quite risky to move due to the Kachin settlements along the route. Actually the Burmese and Shan traders of the district of Bhamo greatly feared the Kachins of Myothit and Nampaung valley. The traders were the victims of excessive blackmail which the Kachins levied on all who passed through their territory. (9) Actually, beyond Bhamo no village, Burman or Shan, could survive without putting itself under the protection of some chieftain in the adjacent hills. (10)

(7) SITS (1912-13)
(10) Ibid., p. 357.
From Myothit starts the hilly march upto Nam-paung, a small stream. (11) This thirty yard wide stream forms the boundary between Burma and China. (12) After crossing this stream the traveller reaches the next village called Manwaing. Before the advent of Chinese administration in the region the route between Nam-paung stream and Manwaing was controlled by the Panthays or the Chinese Muhammadans. (13) These Panthays had small forts along the route at different intervals. In these forts like Shi-ti and Pong-si, (14) they used to raise and command a band of men of their own tribe to escort the trading caravans through this part of the Kachin country on payment of stipulated dues by the traders. After the Panthay rebellion when the Chinese

(11) Chinese name for this stream is Hung-Ma-No: SSH (1912-13).

(12) Since 1950, the entire land of Yunnan beyond this stream has been conquered by China and Chinese administration has been imposed on it. Dr. Thaung, op. cit., p. 474; JRG£L Vol. 95, No. 3 (March, 1940), pp. 162-63.


(14) Pongsi is the same as 'Ponsee' mentioned by Captain Bladen. It is forty miles from Bhamo: Foreign Department, Political A, Aug. 1868, Nos. 42-43.
Government took over the administration of Yunnan in 1873, it appointed officers and garrisoned the forts by the men of Trade Protection Levy. These troops were paid out of the dues exacted from the traders, and thus they cost the Government nothing. In return for these dues the safety of the trading caravans was guaranteed while passing through the Kachin hills up to Burma border, and anything looted on the road was made up to them by the Government, the amount being deducted from the soldier's pay. Consequently, the trade continued trickling into Burma through this route.\footnote{\textit{\textbf{15}}} But such an arrangement was not very satisfactory and the route was not safe.

When the British annexed Upper Burma in 1855, they found that this route by way of Taiping and Manwaing was not free from disturbances.\footnote{\textit{\textbf{16}}} The Kachins made several attacks on caravans, and the

\footnote{\textit{\textbf{15}}} H. R. Davies, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 30-31; Dr. Thaung, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 474-75; Anderson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 299; Also see A. Fytche; \textit{op. cit.}, p. 97.


Captain Sladen, when he visited this village in 1867, named it as Manwyne: \textit{Foreign Department, Political A.}, Aug. 1868, No. 43.
Shan traders were the victims. (17) Moreover, at that time China was trying to extend these forts up to Mampaung. Hence in 1861, a British post was also built on the west bank of the Mampaung, and was garrisoned by one hundred men of the fourth Burma Battalion to check the Chinese advance. (18) Several other arrangements were made for regulating the trade traffic. The rates of caravan tolls were fixed and it was arranged that the sums collected would be divided among the Kachin chiefs who had formerly been levying such dues. The establishment of the post resulted in complete safety for caravans on the British side. (19)

Manwaing was the inland end of the hill road connecting the navigable tributaries of Irrawaddy with the plains along the T'eng Yueh road. (20) From Manwaing to Mang-Na, a distance some thirty miles

(18) Ibid., p. 357.
(19) Ibid., p. 358.
(20) JlTa (1912-13).
higher up, the Taiping was again navigable. (21) The river divided the region into two Shan States which were ruled by the San-ta (Chan-ta) Shans along the left bank of the Taiping, and the Kan-ai (Hong-Na) Shans on the right bank of the Taiping. (22)

At Mong-Na another road from Nan-Kham in the South and Sinlumkaba also joins the main routes to T'eng-Yueh. (23) It is at Mong-Na that the caravan track deviates towards north-east while the Taiping goes up the north. After leaving the Taiping, the track goes along another tributary of the Taiping river named Nam-ti and after passing several villages the route reaches T'eng-Yueh. (24)

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(22) S.I.T. (1912-13)


(24) The original name of 'T'eng-Yueh', given by the Shans who inhabited it before the arrival of the Chinese, was Mong Myen. The European pronounced it as Mong, which is merely the corruption of the original Burmese name. Mong Myen: John Anderson, op.cit., p. 233; R.R. Davies, op. cit., p. 45.
Teng-Yueh, at a distance of three miles from the lost village Ho-ti (4,170 feet). (25) It is situated at the lake plateau though there is no lake now. Actually the lake plateaux of Yunnan are as characteristics of the country as the river gorges and mountain ranges. That is why all the famous cities along this route were built on the lake plateaux. Though many of the lakes are now dried up, yet the cities retain the names derived from those lakes. T'eng Yueh was the first walled city in China from the Burma border. (26) at an elevation of 5,555 feet, (27) and was the first

(25) Slid (1912-13)

(26) T'eng Yueh is generally famous for three things, viz., the waterfall which is very beautiful; the city wall which does not enclose the city; and the Ma-An-shan, the only extinct volcano in China. But it is surprising that the town of T'eng-Yueh was built almost entirely outside the wall, within which there were only few Government buildings and temples unto early twenties. It seems that by that time T'eng-Yueh was the Chinese stronghold, and the local Shan populace were either not allowed or did not wish to live inside the fortress.

Patrick Fitzgerald, op.cit., p. 172.

Chinese settlement on this route. The city itself took a small share of trade. But situated as it was on the cross roads of Shamo, Sadon, Myitkyina in the west and north-west and China in the east, it was an important transit centre for trade just like Leh in Ladakh. It was mostly a transit trade which passed through this fortress town. Most of the trade was in opium because in this district an opium pipe was a necessity for most of the Chinese. (28)

From T'eng-Yueh to village Kan-lan-Chai (29) or Yeh-tan-Chai, (30) there are steep ascents and descents of about two thousand feet in the valley of river Shweli. Here Shweli is named by the Chinese as Loong-Kai or Loong-Chiang (which means the dragon river). Shweli is at an elevation of

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(28) There was a common saying among the Chinese during the 19th century that the 'opium pipe is the only weapon, the Chinese soldiers know how to handle'. Co-incidently the word Ch'iang was used both for a gun and for an opium pipe: H.R.Davies, op. cit., p. 51. Ch'iang can be interpreted as Chou-Yan (抽煙) which means to smoke a cigarette.

(29) H.R.Davies, op. cit., p. 52.

4,570 feet. (31) The Shans named this river as Nan-Yang and while it reaches the Keng-How plains, it is named as the Nam-How river. (32)

The Shweli was crossed by one of the famous iron chain suspension bridges (33) After crossing the Shweli by this bridge and before reaching the Panthay village T'ai-Pingpu, which is situated at an elevation of 7,370 feet, (34) the route traverses a pass named 'Fang-K'ou' pass, which means 'the pass of the wind'. (35) Before 1873 this pass served as a gate between the boundaries of T'eng-Yueh and Yung-Chang. (36)

(31) Ibid., p. 214.
(32) H.R. Davies, op. cit., p. 53.
(33) There was quite a number of these bridges in western China before China took whole of Yunnan in 1950. For details of these bridges and their construction see Ibid., p. 53; and R. Logan Jack, op. cit., p. 212.
(34) SITC (1912-13).
(35) H.R. Davies, op. cit., p. 54.
It is surprising that Logan Jack has not mentioned any such pass when he was coming down from T'ai-Ping P'u to Shweli bridge see: Logan Jack, op. cit., p. 212.
(36) H.R. Davies, op. cit., p. 54.
After crossing the Feng-Kou pass, the next stage of this route is the valley of Salween, which was named Lu-Chiang and Nam Hkong by the Chinese and the Shans respectively. This river was crossed by a bridge of two spans. (37) However, before the World War II, the repair of the bridges in this part of Yunnan was not undertaken by the Chinese Government and the cost of repair was collected through subscriptions from the merchants of T'eng-Yueh. (38)

The Salween like other Yunnanese rivers is unfit for navigation. The climate and vegetation across the Salween is altogether different from those of T'eng-Yueh region. Before the Chinese took over Yunnan, this valley was inhabited by the Shans who were ruled by the Sawbaw or chief. This valley was practically the northern limit of the Shan territory though there were few more scattered villages in the northern Salween valley.

The next important town after crossing the Salween is Yung-Chang or Pao-shan. This town played

(37) Ibid., p. 55.
(38) Ibid., p. 55.
a very important role during the Panthay rebellion, and remained the theatre of war for more than three years. (39) Moreover, this was the largest city between Burma border and Kunming (40) during the 19th century. But for Manchus Pao-shan being quite remote was only a suitable place for political exiles, mostly from the Nanking region of China. (41) The Manchus were not very much interested in land trade with Burma through this village. Hence Pao-shan lost its previous importance for trade during their rule. (42)

From Pao-shan, after ascending and descending the zig-zag paths of the usual bare hills of the valley, the route reaches the Meiling river which is unnavigable here as it flows through wall-like hills. There is absolutely no level ground in the valley. (43) After crossing the river by another iron-chain suspension bridge, the route enters Yung-Ping-hsien plains.

(40) another name of Kunming is Yunnan-fu.
(41) Patrick Fitzgerald, op.cit., p. 171.
(42) Ibid.; H.R. Davies, op.cit., p. 58.
(43) SITS (1912-13).
During 19th century, this region was inhabited chiefly by the Lolos. (44) Here the T'sang-Shan mountains are the finest range of all the Yunnanese mountains. This 14,000 feet high range connects the Yung-ping plains with the Yang-pi-city.

From Yang-pi to Hsia-Kuan is a deep descent. (45) Upto 19th century, Hsia Kuan was a great fortress on the cross-roads of the caravans from east, west and south. This fortress was the gate and the only passage to Ta-li, the ancient capital of Yunnan. The Burma road as well as the tea-road to Tibet passed through this fortress.

Ta-li is ten miles up Hsia-Kuan and the latter guards Ta-li to all intents and purposes. Hence it is not surprising that the Ta-li plateau, situated on the south-west of lake Er-hai from very early times was considered as an ideal seat for the kings. After the rebellion in 1873, Ta-li was connected by a branch-road with the main road, and another branch

(44) For the details about this tribe see:

road from Ta-li connected it with the border town of Tibet i.e. Li-Chiang. (46)

Ta-li was once the capital of the kingdom of Nan-Chao for more than thousand years, and later of the Panthays from 1855-1873. (47) It is the most beautiful city of Yunnan and is still known all over China as the source of the famous Ta-li marble, pieces of which were even dragged to Peking to adorn the forbidden city. (48)

It seems that before the Chinese took over Yunnan, Ta-li was the seat of the ruler of Yunnan who administered the commercial city of Hsia Kuan from here. Hsia Kuan is situated on the direct line of the Burma road and was once a prosperous town. All the merchants used to stay there for commercial transactions. Hsia-Kuan and Ta-li were like Leh in Ladakh the entrepot of whole caravan traffic between


China and Burma through Yunnan.

On Chinese side a caravan started from Yangtse above Ch'ungking and was taken to Chao-T'ung in northern Yunnan in twenty days. Another fifteen days journey would bring it to K'unming or Yunnanfu. From Kunming, Ta-li men took the caravans to Hsia Kuan in thirteen days. From Hsia Kuan another set of muleteers usually Muslims from the Ta-li district, used to bring it to T'eng-Yueh in fourteen days. The last leap of seven days down to Bhamo was undertaken by T'eng-Yueh men whose mules were accustomed to the heat of the Burmese plains. (49)

Thus the commodities of China, especially silk and tea used to travel a distance of 600 miles to reach Bhamo in 70 days. It was probably one of the longest pack routes. (50) The caravan traffic on this route was surprisingly heavy considering the immense distance covered and very few towns along the road. This route remained in operation till the World War II.

(49) Patrick Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 169.
(50) Ibid., p. 170.
However, there are some other routes also which connected Burma with Yunnan. There is a route from Myitkyina to T'eng-Yueh via Sadon and Seema. This route was regularly used by the Upper Irrawaddy traders. (51)

From Bhamo another route which joins the main caravan route at Nampaung, is via Sinlumkaba and Lwejebum. It is actually a good bridle path upto the border and thence on becomes a rough country track. (52)

Besides, in the northern Shan hills from Lashio there is a good bridle path upto the Chinese border at Hsawn Peng. Though it is the most difficult route between Burma and Yunnan, yet it is important from the strategic point of view. The war time Burma Road was therefore constructed along this track. After clearing Bhamo of the Japanese on 15 Dec. 1944, the first motor convoy passed over the Burma border into China on 28 Jan. 1945. It was for the first time in history that wheels moved across the north-east frontier from India to China converting the trade route into a military route. (53)

(52) Ibid., p. 55; Also see Major C.M. Enriquez, A Burmese Arcady (London, 1923), pp. 114-15.
Until the first half of nineteenth century there was a lucrative trade between Burma and China through Yunnan. The merchandise worth more than two lakhs of pounds (54) was annually exported to China via the land route between Burma and Yunnan (55). The commodities were transported up the Irrawaddy in large boats as far as Bhamo, where these were bartered at common mart (or jee) for Chinese goods brought by the Chinese merchants. The latter then conveyed the commodities into Chinese dominions by mules and oxen by that land route. (56) It is noteworthy that only certain kinds of goods were suitable for transportation on this route; that which must not be easily breakable; that which must not spoil on the way; and that which were able to stand all the jolts and jerks on the road. (57)

(56) Victor Purcell, op. cit., p. 78.
However, notwithstanding the difficulties of the route large caravans of three to four hundred oxen, and others of two thousand ponies carrying silk and other merchandise plied between Yunnan and Bhamo. (58) Even in 1795 when Captain Symes visited Burma, an extensive trade was carried on through the Bhamo-Yunnan land route. (59) Unfortunately, no statistical data of trade between Burma and Yunnan is available as in the case of Ladakh trade.

**IMPORTS**

The principal articles of import from China into Burma were livestock, gold, silver, tobacco, vermilion, tin, lead, sulphur, alum, walnuts, groundnuts, musk, furs, honey, bees-wax, opium, silk, jade, tea, orpiment, carpets and copper etc. Some of the important items of imports are described here in detail.

**Livestock**

Mules, ponies and buffaloes were imported into Burma, because, they were quite cheap in the Chinese

(58) Victor Purcell, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-73.

province of Yunnan and fetched good price in Burma. (60)

Gold

Chinese gold was always in considerable demand in Burma, chiefly in the form of gold-leaf to gild the pagodas of Burma. The maximum supply came from China through Shamo-Yunnan route. (61) Gold was also imported in small ingots. But the ingots were less in value owing to the uncertainty in the estimation of their quality. (62)

Silver

Most of the silver came from the territories occupied by the Kachin tribe on the border of Burma. (63)

Sulphur and Alum

Most of the sulphur and alum was extracted from the hot-springs which were found all over the province of Yunnan. (64)

(62) Memorandum of Clement William on British Trade with China, Foreign Department, Political A. May 165, No. 299.
(63) Ibid., L.W. Shakespear, op. cit., pp. 171-78.
(64) H.R. Davies, op. cit., p. 315.
Musk and Furs

These were brought from the Tibetan part of Yunnan. (65)

Opium

Upto the end of the 19th century a large amount of opium was produced in Yunnan. Since the production was far beyond the requirements of the province, it was exported to the neighbouring countries. (66) But the Yunnan opium was not upto the standard of Indian quality and sometimes it was adulterated by the Shans and the Kachins. Even then a large amount was imported into Assam. (67)

Silk

Though silk was also imported from Assam yet the Chinese silk was quite in demand among the high-ups of Burma. Since silk was likely to suffer damage due to the long carriage overland, it was packed with much care. It was first packed in ordinary paper, and then in an oiled paper. The bundle was then rapped by

(65) Ibid., p. 317.
(66) Ibid.
(67) Foreign Department, Political A., May 1865, No. 299.
cotton cloth and finally it was packed in baskets lined with bamboo petals. Last of all a coarse carpet was thrown over the load of each pack animal. (68)

Tea

Most of the tea of Yunnan came from Keng-Hung Valley to the east of Mekong river. It was made into disc-shaped cakes, each disc weighing twenty tickals. (69) seven of the discs piled together were called 'tung' which was sold at about Rs. 6 \( \frac{1}{2} \) each. (70)

Orpiment

Orpiment from the Yunnan mines was of an excellent quality. (71)

Copper

Copper was abundantly produced in Yunnan and was very much in demand in Burma. (72)

Jade

The Mogoung district of Yunnan produced all the jade imported into Burma. (73)

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(68) Ibid; Also see John Crawford, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-53.
(69) 100 tickals were equal to 1.616 kilos. Joseph Dautremer, *op.cit.*, p. 294; Foreign Department, *Political A.*, May 1865, No. 299.
(72) Foreign Department, *Political A.*, May 1865, No. 299.
(73) L.W. Shakespear, *op.cit.*, 178-79.
Cotton

Cotton was by far the most important article of Burma's export to Yunnan. The whole population of Yunnan wore cotton clothes, and yet practically no cotton was grown in the province, because, the greater part of Yunnan is too cold to admit the crop being cultivated. Though in some parts of the Kachin hills a little cotton was grown, yet it was hardly enough for their own consumption. Hence whole of Yunnan was dependent on Burma for cotton. It was imported from Burma mostly as raw cotton yarn and in small quantity as cotton cloth. The cotton yarn was woven into cloth in Yunnan. Raw cotton was also a necessity as in winter the Chinese wore wadded coats for warmth. (74)

Salt

No salt was produced in Yunnan and it was imported from Burma and Tibet. All the tribes, wild and tame, living around Bhamo were dependent on Burma salt and a large quantity found its way to Yunnan. At Bhamo the average rate of salt in 1865 was about equal

(74) Foreign Department, Political A., May 1865, No. 299.
Rice

Burma is well-known for its production of rice, and the surplus used to be exported to the neighbouring countries. (76)

Precious Stones

Centuries of mining have not exhausted. Burma's store of the finest stone like rubies. It is believed that the Black Prince's ruby among the British crown jewels came from Burma in medieval times. The most famous gem is the 'Peace Ruby'. It was found on Armistice Day of 1918, and was sold for £800 per carat in the rough condition. It was weighed forty-two carats when mined. (77)

Apart from the foresaid articles feathers of bluejay (78) and of king fisher (79) were quite in demand in China. These feathers were to ornament the
the Chinese dresses and bridal coronals. Hence the Burmese hunters went all the way to India in search of such feathers. A small quantity of British woollens, and broad-cloth were also in demand in China and Yunnan. Other articles of export were sapphire, deer's horns, ivory and amber. (80)

However, the Burmese like the Chinese had no coins before the British occupation of Burma in 1885. Silver in bullion and lead were then the current monies of the country. (81) 'Tickal' or 'Kiat' was the most common piece of silver in circulation. The people were quite expert in ascertaining the weight, purity and standard of the money. The Burmese merchants had first their money examined from the Paymon (Banker). Every merchant had a Paymon with whom he lodged all his cash. The Paymon used to get a fixed commission of one per cent, in consideration of which, he was responsible for the quality and quantity of what went through his hands. (82)

(81) Michael Symes, op. cit., p. 379.
The trade between Yunnan and Burma was quite lucrative until the nineteenth century. But the mid-century political changes were quite impeditive for trade. Firstly, cotton was declared as royal monopoly in 1854 which greatly affected the trade transactions between the Chinese and Burmese merchants at Bhamo. Secondly, the Panthay's rebelled in Yunnan in 1853-54 and their war-like activities continued till 1873 when the rebellious sultan of Yunnan was finally defeated by the Chinese. These disturbances greatly hampered the free flow of trade. Inter alia, the intervening tribes like Shans and Kachins were also creating hindrance by their heavy demand of transit duties and other charges.

Consequently, the Anglo-Burman commercial treaties of 1862(83) and 1867(84) to enhance the Bhamo-Yunnan overland trade proved far less effective. The British enthusiasm to revive this route was cooled down, particularly after the murder of Margary, the British Agent who tried to cross the Burma-China boundary in 1875. It was only after the annexation of Burma in 1885 that the British once again tried to revive trade by this route between Burma and China.

(83) See supra, pp. 189, 265-269, appendix C.
(84) See supra, p. 204.