The Sao Hpa administration of baan/mong in Mong Tai or the Shan States

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Sao Noan Oo (Nel Adams)

Abstract

This paper traces the history of administration in the Shan States from ancient times to 1962. The Tais are descendents of an ancient race that existed thousands of years ago in China. During the early turbulent periods in China the Tais migrated into several parts of Southeast Asia, settling along the river valleys to cultivate wet rice for their livelihood. They also brought with them their sociopolitical organization of baan/mong with the Sao Hpas as their leader. In 1886 the Shan States were annexed by Britain but were autonomous. In 1922, they became the Federated Shan States, with established law, order, and peace. In 1947 the Federated Shan States became a Shan State as equal partners with Burma Proper and other ethnic States to ask Britain for independence. In 1958 the Sao Hpas surrendered their power to the Shan State Government and in 1962 they were put in prison, and the Shan State became a country forcibly occupied by the Burmese Military.

Introduction

My intention in writing this paper is not to write another version of Tai history but to find out more about the Sao Hpa administration of baan/mong and trace the course of its history. The Sao Hpas (Sawbwas) were Tai princes, each of whom ruled over a small principality or mong in ancient times until 1958.

The Sao Hpas and their people are said to belong to the Tai race, and be a sub-group of Tai Yai. The Tai migrated from China into several parts of Southeast Asia during the early periods of history. Most Tai Yai migrated and settled on the Shan plateau in the northeastern part of Burma, called Mong Tai or Shan States.

According to Terrein de Lacouperie, Chinese sources revealed that the cradle of the Tai race lays in the Kunlun Mountains, north of Szechuan and south of Shensi in China Proper. Most probably they lived along the river valleys and gradually followed the rivers, the Yangtse Cang, the Lan Cang or the Me Khong, and the Nu Cang or the Salween or the Nam Khong and settled in different parts of China, particularly in southern Yunnan and surrounding provinces. During the turbulent years in China they migrated further south.

During the Qin Dynasty in 221–206 BC, the Chinese invaded several Tai principalities or mongs. These principalities, each ruled by a Chao (Sao) were annexed and placed under Chinese rule causing one of the earliest waves of Tai migration southwards. During those early periods, the Tais founded ancient cities such as Ta Gong, Mong Gong, Baan Maw in the north of Burma, and Ong Paung (or Hsipaw), Hsenwi, and Mongnai in Mongtai on the Shan Plateau. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), China expanded to incorporate areas originally occupied by the Tais. In 650 AD the Tais rebelled and succeeded in forming the kingdom of Nanchao by the union of several Chao states. But when China was in conflict with Tibet and needed an ally, it accepted Nanchao’s existence through a treaty of friendship. By the thirteenth century AD, different groups of Tais were occupying a large portion of Southeast Asia, and Nanchao expanded its power to include these areas. Professor E. H. Parker was the first Sinologist to discover the relationship between Nanchao and the modern Shan States or the mongs. This lasted until the advent of the Mongols under Kublai Khan who conquered the whole of China and the Nanchao kingdom. Nanchao was said to be destroyed in 1253 AD. During the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), the Nanchao kingdom again broke up into several small principalities governed by feudal princes, called Chao Fa or Sao Hpa.

The center of power for these principalities was at Mong Mao, in the area of the Mao River, with its capital at Ruili in Yunnan. This kingdom, known as the Mao Long kingdom, was ruled by a series of kings who in turn were suzerain over semi-autonomous smaller mongs. Some mongs are still in existence in Southern Yunnan, such as Sip Saung Panna while others are scattered in different parts of Southeast Asia, but their political and social
organization has altered over the years. In contrast, on the Shan Plateau the Tai Yai people adhered to the Tai traditional system of governing until 1959.

When the Tai Yai first migrated into the Shan Plateau they formed several small communities. The communities grew into a village called waan or baan along the river valleys. Several villages collectively became a principality. Steadily the Tai established an abundance of principalities or mongs, varying in size and importance. As in ancient tradition, a mong was looked after by the Sao Hpa, a hereditary prince. The administration of a mong was made of the Sao Hpa, and a council of ministers lead by the Sao Hpa’s heir, the Kemmong. Lower down, the administration was done largely through a circle of heings or headmen who were directly responsible to the Sao Hpa or in some cases elected by the people.

The responsibility of a heing was to see to the upkeep of his village and the welfare of his villagers, and to lead and organize religious and social functions. Administratively, he was responsible for the registration of population and households, and for collecting taxes. According to the custom of the village he had the power to pass judgment and resolve minor disputes between villagers. Criminals who committed greater crimes, like murder and rape had to be taken to the town to be judged and sentenced at the Sao Hpa’s administrative office. The heing and village elders together formed the village council. Whenever there was an important meeting, like electing a new headman or a council member, it was compulsory for a member of every household to be present. Voting was done by raising of a hand. In a Shan village the villagers formed a very close-knit community. All took part in the running of the day-to-day communal work, and in helping each other when needed. Buddhist religion and customary laws played a significant and fundamental part in the social order of Shan society. A written form of the laws became an official customary law or code of conduct, called the Dhammasat.

The people had great respect and regards for the Sao Hpa and vice versa. As D. K Wyatt wrote in Thailand: A Short History, “the relationship between the two was advantageous to both the Sao Hpa and the people: the Sao Hpa relied on the people for
manpower and their loyalty and the people in return for his protection and leadership." Under the Sao Hpas, the Tai peoples enjoyed considerable freedom. They had the right to own properties and lands, and to choose their own religion. Older generations of Sao Hpas like the ancient rulers had many wives and so there existed jealousy and competition amongst the wives and between the children of different wives.

After the death of the great Hso Khan Hpa, the Mao kings continued to rule peacefully and quietly for some time. According to Ney Elias, a Mao king, named Chao-Hom-Hpa II reigned for an extraordinary period of eighty-eight years from 1516 to 1604. He administered his country so successfully that it enjoyed a state of prosperity never before attained. This principality probably included the Shan mong on the Shan Plateau and areas around the frontiers of Yunnan.

The Tais in Lower Burma

The Shans dominated most of Lower Burma from the thirteenth century to nearly the end of the sixteenth as founders and rulers of the Pangya, Sagaing, and Ava kingdoms. The Tais in Lower Burma did not follow the traditional Tai society of baan/mong ruled by Sao Hpas; instead they adopted the organization set up by the royal house of Pagan, rule by kings. Later by intermarrying with the royal house of Pagan and the Mon ruling families, the Shan kings and their descendants became assimilated into the Burman and Mon societies and lost their Tai identity.

Tributary to the Burmese kings

After the collapse of the Nam Mao Long dynasty, during the latter part of the sixteenth century AD, the Shan mong became tributary to the Burmese king, Bayinnaung. After his reign, successive Burmese kings in Lower Burma were engaged in warfare with the Mons, the Arakanese, and later the British. The Shans on the plateau were left to their own demise, except for having to send tribute to the kings, or supply contingents when they needed to attack Siam or fight against Chinese soldiers. This changed during the Kobaung dynasty (1752–1885), when Alaungpaya (1752—60),
the first king of the dynasty, made a policy to have more control over the Shan States. The Sao Hpas had to be loyal, to send tribute, to supply contingents in times of war and rebellion, to pay tax to the king and the royal household, to send their young sons and daughters to the court of Ava as hostages for their loyalty, and to rule over their individual states, without interference from the central government, but with approval by the king.

Although the policy stated that the Sao Hpas had the right to govern their own mong, the Shan States were not free from the interference of the court of Ava. Big states were divided into many smaller states, and leaders of these states were nominated by the court of Ava with the titles of Myosa, Ngewgynmu, or Myo-ok. The Sao Hpas of the Shan States differed in their stance towards the policy of the court of Ava. Those who dared to resist were deposed and punished; others submitted because they were afraid of reprisal not only on themselves but also on their relatives and people. A few Sao Hpas submitted in return for favor and reward. Khun Lek, the Sao Hpa of Laikha, was made the commander-in-chief to lead and command other Sao Hpas to fight against the Karenni; his son, Khun Shwe Ok Kha, led the Sao Hpas and contingents to fight for the kings. Forty-five percent of Bodawpaya’s (1782–1819) imperial army was made of Shan contingents.

Like Chiang Mai, Mongnai and Kengtung suffered the most in the Shan States because each state was used as a base for a Burmese garrison and local administration. These principalities were once prosperous, but they suffered tremendously from Burmese oppression and misgovernment. The people also suffered from exactions of Burmese soldiery. The principalities became depopulated. In 1804, when Chiang Mai attacked the Burmese forces in Kengtung, Sao Mahakanan’s sympathy being with Chiang Mai, he led his army against the Burmese at Mongloi and Mongyang. Burmese forces from Mongnai and Tai contingents from the plateau were sent to attack the Chiang Mai army and Sao Mahakanan’s men. When the Chiang Mai forces retreated, Sao Mahakanan escaped to Chiang Hsen where his relatives were, but his senior officer Dao Ghamvang and followers submitted to the Burmese army. Being the rightful heir to rule Kengtung, Sao
Mahakanan later thought if he stayed on in Chiang Hsen he would be abandoning his state and people, who needed him, so he returned to Kengtung to face the consequences. King Bodawpaya must have realized that he desperately needed Kengtung’s support so he allowed Sao Mahakanan to rule over his state of Kengtung.

When Mindon was king (1853–78), Hkun Gyi, the Sao Hpa of Mongnai, sent two of his daughters to the court of Ava; then he was popular and had some influence at the Burmese court. But when King Thibaw, Mindon’s son, came to the throne, the Sao Hpa’s popularity declined, especially after he offered an ugly niece to the king. Kengtawng, a town of Mongnai principality, was made a separate mong, and an ex-monk, Twet Nga Lu, was appointed as its ruler without the consent of the Sao Hpa. This created animosity between the king and the Sao Hpa, who was summoned to appear before the Burmese council of ministers. Having foreseen his fate, the Sao Hpa led a rebellion against the Burmese, killing Burman officers and soldiers in Mongnai. A large Burmese force from Mandalay was sent to Mongnai to curb the rebellion. Contingents from every Shan mong were ordered to join the force. The whole of Mongnai principality was devastated. The Sao Hpa of Mongnai, joined by Mongnawng, Mongpawn and Lawksawk, escaped to Kengtung to make plans to overthrow Thibaw.

The British colonial period

In 1985, after fighting three Anglo-Burmese Wars, the British completed the conquest of Burma Proper. The British decided to rule Burma Proper directly under British India. In 1887, after conquering Burma Proper the British decided to annex the Shan State to end anarchy in the Shan States, to protect the region from becoming a refuge for people from Burma Proper, and to prevent the French, Chinese or Siam having influence on the Shan States.

Scott was appointed assistant superintendent under Hildebrand. The British established their fort at a town near Yawngwe, under Colonel Stedman. When he arrived in the Shan States, Scott found the country in chaos. After Mindon died, the Shan State revolted against King Thibaw in 1878–85. The Sao Hpas of Mongnai, Mong Nawng, Mong Pawn, and Lawksawk fled
to Kengtung, then returned with the Burmese Limbin prince as their leader and formed “the Limbin confederacy” to overthrow Thibaw. Another group of Shan Sao Hpas—Laikha, Mongkung, and Kesi-Mansam—picked another Burmese prince to lead them. These two groups fought against each other, adding to further devastation of the Shan States.

From Fort Stedman, Scott and the British army led by Colonel Stedman took Mandalay and within four months completed the annexation of the Shan States. All the Sao Hpas except the Sao Hpa of Lawksawk, Sao Weng, accepted British rule, and each received a sanad or letter of appointment. Khun Nu, a former Sao Hpa of Tampak who had refused to collect exorbitant taxes from the people and had been deposed by King Thibaw, acted as an interpreter and negotiator between the British and the Sao Hpas. Scott highly recommended him to fill the seat of Lawksawk, vacated by Sao Weng.

In the northern Shan States, there was anarchy. Kachin invaded Hsenwi, and two claimants fought to become the Hsenwi Sao Hpa. After the destruction of the Mao kingdom, Hsenwi was the largest and most influential mong. Sang Hsi, encouraged by the Burmese, rebelled against the Sao Hpa, Naw Hpa. Sang Hsi was made a commander-in-chief to attack Kengtung. Naw Hpa was summoned to Mandalay and imprisoned but later reinstated. He failed to pacify the Kachins and suppress the rebels led by Sang His’s lieutenant and son-in-law, Hkun Sang Tone Hoong. Naw Hpa was summoned to Mandalay again but sent his son, Naw Mong, in his stead. Naw Mong was imprisoned in Mandalay until the British arrived.

Hsenwi was later divided into two principalities. North Hsenwi was given to Khun Sang Tone Hung, son-in-law of the rebel who challenged the Sao Hpa; South Hsenwi or Mongyai was given to Naw Mong who was the rightful heir. At Mongyai the northern Sao Hpas assembled to receive their sanads. After careful consideration the British decided to annex Kengtung and treat it like other Shan States. Monglun, one of the Wa states which had been tributary to Hsenwi, became part of British Shan State, while the rest of the Wa country was left on its own. Kokang remained tributary to Hsenwi, but with no interference in its internal affairs.
To complete the pacification of the Shan States, the British carried out negotiations with the Chinese, Siamese and French to demarcate the boundaries of their territories. Britain proposed to limit its frontier at the Mekong by transferring Keng Cheng with its capital Mong Sing to Thailand. But later, Mong Sing was given to the French. In the Lao-Burma treaty of 1889, the British and the French agreed to leave the Mekong as the boundary between the two countries. Mong Hung and Mong Lem were given to China.

After the demarcation of the boundaries had been completed, the Federated Shan States formed almost one quarter of the entire area of Burma. Besides the Tai or Shan, the population of the Shan States was made of eleven national groups: Akha, Danu, Intha, Kachin, Kayan, Kokang, Lahu, Lisu, Palaung, Pa-O, Wa and other smaller communities. Although the Tai Yai (Shans) dominated in the Shan States, both politically and numerically, they had never assimilated other groups. As a result, cultural pluralism existed throughout the Shan States. The Shan States was now made up of thirty-four principalities or mongs.

When he visited Kengtung in 1888 Scott found that the rule of a Sao Hpa was subject to traditional customs and ministerial advice, which limited his power. A ruler who attempted to bypass custom faced removal and even death. The Sao Hpa of Hopong was chased out of his state by the people in 1855 for his misrule.

**British administration in the Shan States**

The British thought that the Shan States would be more stable if ruled indirectly through the Sao Hpas, with the British acting as paramount power. This way would also reduce the cost of administration. The Sao Hpas in turn requested never to be put under the Burmans or Indians, to have their status as hereditary ruling princes confirmed, and to be allowed to keep their customary laws. They also wanted an independent Shan State under the British crown. Laws for the Shan States were made by legislative councils until October 1922 when the Federated Shan States was formed. Craddock, the lieutenant governor of Burma, had proposed the idea of a federation to the Sao Hpas and to the government of British India in 1920. At first the Sao Hpas were
suspicious that the formation of a federation would weaken their status. Several representations to modify British policies in the Shan States were taken to London by two delegates. Changes were made to meet the Sao Hpas’ grievances but the British were unwilling to diminish their own paramount power. Although they were not fully satisfied, the Sao Hpas accepted the decision of the British and remained loyal. They realized that they were better off than under the Burmese Kings.

To develop the Shan States into a federation, every state had to be a member. An advisory council of twenty out of the forty-four Sao Hpas was formed, with the commissioner as its president. Although without any legislative power, the council was consulted in connection with the extension of legislation to the Shan States by local government, and in discussing the budget. The Federation of the Shan States was a sort of sub-province with finances distinct from those of Burma Proper and under a distinct form of administration.

The commissioner held the powers of the High Court for the Shan States except when the proceedings were against European or British subjects. In the Federated Shan States, civil, criminal and revenue administration was laid down by the Burma Law Act, 1898, the same as in Upper Burma. In matters not covered by enactments, the law to be administered in each state was the customary law of the state, as long as it was in accordance with justice, equity, and good conscience, and not opposed to the law enforced in the rest of British India.

It was proposed that in 1935 Burma Proper was to be separated from India and become a province under the British crown. This would have significant ramifications for both the Shan States and Burma Proper. Therefore in 1930, the Sao Hpa of Yawngwhe, Sao Shwe Thaikhe, and Kyemmong of Hsipaw, Sao On Kya, were elected to go to London to represent the Shan States in the second round table conference. Besides the Shans there were several Indians and Burmese delegates at the round table.

The Sao Hpas submitted a memorandum to Wedgewood Benn, who was then the secretary of state for India (1929–31), requesting that:

1. The administration of the Shan States be distinct from
Burma Proper;
   2. The right to rule their own states, independent of Burmese control;
   3. Ancient rights, customs, religion and privileges remained unaltered; or altered only by mutual consent;
   4. Hereditary rights of Sao Hpas should be acknowledged and safeguarded by the British Government;
   5. Finance and any assessments should be addressed solely by the Sao Hpas without dictation by the British Officers;
   6. That they would not be placed in all Burma Federation without their consent.

The Burman delegates had different ideas. They hoped that reformed Burma Proper in 1935 would have dominion over all territories of Burma including the Shan States. The Burmese delegates tried to cause conflict between the Shan delegates and the British government. U Pyu suggested that the Sao Hpas were being treated like puppets by the British; what the Sao Hpas really wanted was to rule over their own people, independent of the British. U Maung Gyi thought that the Sao Hpas might opt out to take a place in the Upper House under the same constitution of Burma proper, while U Chit Hlaing insinuated that the Sao Hpas were not speaking out openly because they were afraid of reprisal from the British officers back in the Shan States. The Sao Hpas strongly refuted this claim.

The British noticed that the Sao Hpas were susceptible to pressure and manipulation exerted on them by the more adroit Burmans, and that the Shan delegates did not perform well in advancing their cause. Mr. de Glanville, representative of British commerce in Burma, had already forewarned the governor of Burma and Mr. Claque (commissioner of the Shan States 1931–36) that this was likely to happen. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Stewart, under-secretary of India (1930–40), declared that a federation of the Shan States with Burma Proper could not be operative at this period because the Shans were too politically backward to have any place in a democratically governed Burma. This information was also passed on to the Sao Hpa of Yawnghwe by Lord Russell.

By 1935, the Federated Shan States (FSS) had its own
commissioner who maintained his office in Taunggyi, the capital of the FSS. The federation brought all the Sao Hpas together, making regulation and assessment of revenue easier. It also centralized the federal budget, covering expenditure on public works, medical administration, forestry, education, agriculture, and police. Out of the revenue collected in each state, 35 percent was contributed to the federal budget. The Sao Hpa received a fixed salary of 25 percent, and the rest of the revenue was used for internal administration, including the salary of ministers and officers. In order to promote education and progress, the first government school, “The Shan Chiefs’ School” was built in Taunggyi, for the families of the Sao Hpas and their ministers. This was followed by a government school, a medical center, and a small post office in the capital town of each state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Administration of the Federated Shan State, 1922–42</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner (also president)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent and assistant-superintendent for north and south divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Sao Hpas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Sao Hpas: Shan States Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal traditional administration of Sao Hpas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each Sao Hpa:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyemong + ministers = council of ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sao Hpa Awn or Myosa, look after smaller mong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heing or pyiah, look after arng (several baans)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kying kang or kye, look after baan or village</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village council</td>
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<td>Elders</td>
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<td>Villagers</td>
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After P. C. Fogarty became the commissioner of the Shan State in 1938, the earlier hostility of the Sao Hpas towards the federation was replaced by a new spirit of cooperation owing to greater input by the Sao Hpas on matter concerning the Shan States. Cochrane, one of the superintendents of the Shan States, believed that during 1922–42, the federation was successful in accomplishing the goals
that the British set for it. They believed that the Shan chiefs as a class realized their responsibility for good administration in their states and advancement for their peoples. During British rule, the Shan States enjoyed relative peace and tranquility with an absence of state-directed violence against the local population. The British introduced law and order into the Shan States, and the Sao Hpas ruled by their conscience.

The Japanese occupation

Change for progress takes time. Just as the Sao Hpas were making some progress under the guidance of the British, the pattern was interrupted by World War II. In 1942, the Japanese invaded Southeast Asia including the Shan States. The Japanese decided to adopt the traditional method of administration, and the Sao Hpas were allowed to rule over their people, but with the following changes:

1. The administration would be under the military, and consist of Japanese officials;
2. The Shan States administration should have jurisdiction over the Sao Hpas;
3. The Japanese language should be encouraged to spread all over the country.

During their presence in the Shan States, the Japanese forbade the Burmese Independent Army to enter the Shan States. In September 1943, the Japanese gave Burma Proper under Dr. Ba Maw’s government its sham independence, and ceded the Shan States to Burma with the exception of Kengtung and Mongpan which was incorporated into Siam. Near the end of World War II, non-Burman ethnic soldiers under the command of British and American armies, fought fierce battles against the fleeing Japanese soldiers. Many Sao Hpas secretly escaped to safer villages, and some fled as far as Bhamo, fearing that the Japanese would use them as a bargaining chip.

The drastic changing phase of politics in the Shan State

As always in a time of turmoil and uncertainty some people were looking to take advantage of the situation for their own ends,
particularly in large towns like Taunggyi, Lashio, Hsipaw and Namkham. Soon after World War II, strong nationalism was spreading in Burma Proper, and penetrated into the Shan States. Shan activists greatly influenced by the Burmese AFPFL set up the Shan People’s Freedom League (SPFL) with the aim of getting rid of colonialism and feudalism. When the British reoccupied, the FSS was placed under the charge of two residents while the position of the commissioner was absorbed into those of the director of the frontier areas, with headquarters in Rangoon. The central executive councils of the federation, originally in Taunggyi, were abolished. This was a setback for the Shan States.

The Sao Hpas formed their own executive council including the representative of the peoples. This was followed by the formation of Supreme Council of the United Hill People (SCOUHP). In March 1946, the Sao Hpas along with Chin and Kachin leaders held a conference at Panglong to discuss how, as members of SCOUHP, they could work together for the advancement of the economy and politics in their countries. The conference was attended by several interested delegates from Burma Proper. After general discussions, delegates gave speeches. Thakin Nu hit out against the British and accused them of separating the hill peoples from the Burmans. A British officer got up and questioned, “What has the Burmans ever done for the hill peoples to win their love and trust?” U Saw, a member from Myo Chit, tried to win the hill leaders over to join his party with promises and proposals. Mr. H. N. C. Stephens, the director of the Frontier Administration, spoke on behalf of the frontier areas: “We are inclined to think that people who try to make unreal things real or to bluff the public are the ones who are responsible for the misunderstanding, suspicion and discord. If the Burmese will realise the situation and try to amend their past faults, we see no reason why there cannot be a real united Federated State of Burma. What we ask the Burmans to do is to be realistic and examine the facts. .... We do not see that there is anything to be gained by blaming the British for faults which lie here in Burmese hearts.” The Shan, Kachin, and Chin discussed among themselves and were at this time very uncertain whether they were ready to join the Burmans for independence.
Although having won the war, Great Britain had to rebuild her economy and country damaged by German bombs. She was more than willing to grant the Burmese people their independence. As far as Burma Proper and the frontier regions were concerned, she agreed that a union between the Shan States and Burma Proper was the goal, subject to two conditions: one, the peoples in the frontier regions must indicate that they were willing to unite; two, the economic and political standard must be on the same level as those in Burma Proper. Until this were the case, the British felt that they had a moral obligation to “the peoples of the Frontier areas.”

Bogyoke Aungsan was the Burmese AFPFL leader negotiating with the British government for Burma’s independence. When in London, he told the then prime minister, Clement Atlee, that he was also representing the frontier areas. When the Sao Hpas heard this they immediately sent a telegram to the British government, indicating that the Sao Hpas had not authorized Bogyoke Aungsan to be a spokesperson for the frontier states. A second Panglong Conference was held in February 1947, as part of a large festival hosted by the Shan Sao Hpas. Kachin and Chin leaders were invited, along with other interested delegates. The Burman politicians were headed by Bogyoke Aungsan, who had previously met with some leading Sao Hpas. He suggested to them that it would be advantageous to all if the other ethnic states were to join with Burma Proper as equal partners and ask the British for joint independence at the same time. The Shan people chose their national anthem and national flag on 7 February 1947.

The Panglong Agreement, February 1947

At Panglong, Bogyoke Aungsan dominated the conference. In his speech, he sounded so genuinely sincere that the Shan, Kachin, and Chin leaders put their trust in him and decided to enter into partnership with the Burmans and ask the British for joint independence. On 12 February 1947, the Shan, Kachin, and Chin leaders, the non-Burman alliance, and the Burmans represented by Bogyoke Aungsan signed the Panglong Agreement in which the most important principles were that all member states would have equal status, privileges, and rights, and that the hill states would
have full autonomy and the right of secession from the union at any time after attaining independence. The frontier leaders also agreed to cooperate with the Burmans in forming an executive council to draft a constitution.

In May 1947, the Shan people elected members of the State Council, which consisted of the thirty-three Sao Hpas and thirty-three members from the people. Twenty-one of these were elected to draft the Shan State constitution that would conform with the Union Constitution. Bogyoke Aungsan led the executive members, including the Sao Hpa of Mongpawn, to negotiate with the British for joint independence, and to draft the constitution. But before the constitution was written Bogyoke Aungsan and his colleagues, including the Sao Hpa of Mongpawn, were assassinated.

Aungsan was succeeded by U Nu. U Nu’s priority was to continue to negotiate with Britain for independence as quickly as possible. He said that if there should be any defect in the constitution it could be amended after independence. The
constitution was completed and the Federal Union of Burma gained independence from the British on 4 January 1948. U Nu became the prime minister and Sao Shwe Thaikhe the first president of the Union. U Nu and his AFPFL party, along with other representatives of ethnic states, formed the government and adopted a democratic parliamentary system. U Nu’s government ran smoothly for a short period, but politically there were troubles ahead. The AFPFL broke into two, and the anti-U Nu portion turned communist and went underground. They recruited the Wa and Kokang who became entrenched along the border areas of the Shan State. The Karens did not get the independence they wanted, went underground, and fought against the Burma Union Army in 1948–49. Trouble also occurred in parts of the Shan States.

In 1950, the Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang fled to the Shan States to escape Communist China, creating further complications not only for Burma but also for the Chinese Communists and the Americans, eventually bringing the UN into play. A Kachin, Captain Naw Seng, led his battalion into revolt against the Union Government and joined the Karen.

In 1952, the Union president, U Ba U, declared martial law, followed by militarization of politics in the Shan States. The Sao Hpasa’s administration became unworkable. By that time the Union army was well organized under Ne Win and although they withdrew in 1954 they had already established a firm foothold in the Shan States. An army training camp was built in Ba Htoo Myo, in the principality of Lawksawk. Sao Kya Saing, the last Sao Hpa of Hsipaw, was later taken there, interrogated, and killed. In the Shan States, Burmese soldiers were now present everywhere, harassing Shan citizens.

After 1958, more and more ethnic armed groups rose against the Union army due to their mistreatment of citizens. Shan youths took to the jungle and many joined Khun Hsa, the Chinese/Shan drug warlord who promised to drive Burmese soldiers out of the Shan State. The Shan, Kachin, and other ethnic governments were also not happy with the way the Federal Union was developing. The Shan members of parliament realized that the Federal Union of Burma was running a unitary organization instead of a federal one. Unlike the rest of the constituent states, Burma Proper was not a
member state but part of the Union Government and this provided Burma Proper with the power of the union over other states.

The Panglong Agreement of 1947 and constitutional guarantees were not honored. The Sao Hpas recognized that if the Union was to survive the constitution had to be amended. The Sao Hpas and other leaders had several meetings and came up with the proposals to transform the unitary union into a genuine federal union. By this time the Shan people were also divided into two groups. One group consisted of the elite, middle class, and business people, about five to ten percent of the population, mostly living in big cities. They set up parties like the Ya-la-pa-la, the Pa-O and several others, which were anti-Sao Hpas. Ninety percent of the population was pro-Sao Hpas, but these were mainly country folk who knew nothing about politics. Due to lack of foresight, activists in the Shan States, influenced by Burman nationalists, got rid of British colonialism and the Sao Hpas, only to be replaced by a series of military dictatorial governments.

The Sao Hpas were pressured by the Shan activists, the Union government, and the military. On 9 April 1959, they surrendered their power to the Shan State government. But still as members of parliament, the Sao Hpas continued to work on amendment of the constitution, to be submitted to parliament as soon as possible. In 1962, the Sao Hpas submitted their “Federal Proposals.” While the parliamentarians assembled to discuss the proposals, the army under Ne Win staged a coup and U Nu’s government and all Union parliamentarians, including the Shan Sao Hpas, were imprisoned. Ne Win also suspended the 1947 constitution and so nullified the Panglong Agreement which bound the member states. By destroying the constitution, Ne Win also destroyed the legal binding between the states. Each state was now independent, and the military had illegally occupied their homeland. This plunged the country into civil war and brought an end to the Sao Hpa administration in the Shan States.

Conclusion

In writing this paper, I have tried to compare incident in several relevant regions that occurred during the same period. But I found
there were a lot of discrepancies in the dates of the same incidents. I looked up maps and found the Kunlun Mountains, the probable "cradle of the Tai race." I was surprised to find this region to be the primary source of the three rivers, the Yangtse Cang, the Lan Cang or the Me Kong and the Nu Cang or the Salween or the Nam Khong. Like most people I thought that the Salween rises in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains in Tibet. I also found that a word with the same name or meaning is pronounced and spelt differently even when using Roman characters. The principality or mong in Shan is spelt mong, muerng, merng, or murng. It is even more difficult to recognize the word when the name of a person or town is written by other nationalities. In Burmese language, Sao Hpa became corrupted as Sawbwa; Laika as Lekya; Baan Maw as Bhamo; Sao as Saw.

When the British arrived in Burma they came into contact with the Burmans before the Shans. They got their first impression and information about the Shan States and its peoples from the Burmans. According to Rev. Cushing in his "Lecture on the Shans," the British did not realize that Burma was not only the country of the Burmans but a wonderful variety of peoples and races. The British officers learned the Burmese language first and adopted Burmese pronunciation for most Shan words and names of places.

Notes

1 My research on the early periods of the Tai Race, confined mainly to the Tai Yai, was based on the findings and views of the early Western writers, explorers and missionaries such as Dr. William Dodd, Professor Terrein de Lacouperie, Ney Elias, and E. H. Parker. The suggestion of Professor de Lacouperie that the cradle of the Tai race lies in the Kulon Shan (mountains) led me to look up this region in the Geographical map of the World, produced by Readers Digest, second edition, pages 98, 100. I found the Kulon Shan (mountain range) as a continuation of the more northern Tien Shan Range. The Kunlon range itself runs east-west along the northern boundary of the Tibetan Plateau, and continues across the northeastern provinces of China, south of Shensi and north of Szechuan.

During the thirty years of living amongst my people, the Tai Yai, I learned that they always chose to live along the river valleys of the Salween River and its many
tributaries. They were seldom found living away from alluvial lands. My question was, did the Tai Yai follow the Salween River before they finally settled in Yunnan and then on the Shan Plateau? On the same map, I traced the course of the Salween River from the Shan Plateau northwards. I found that not only the Salween has its primary source in the valley between the Kulon and the Tien Shan, but so did all the other great rivers of China. Other atlases show the same.

Does this mean that many thousands of years ago, the Tai people lived in the Kulon region, close to the source of the rivers? Over the years, for some unknown reasons, did they move southwards by following the course of the great rivers of China, the Nu Cang (Salween or Nhăm Khong), the Lan Cang (or Mekawng), the Yangtse Cang, and also the Yellow River?

Professor William Dodd wrote that the Tai were found in a wide area of China, including along the valleys of the Yangtse and the Yellow Rivers. Some other authors believe that the Tai were primarily found in the valleys of the Yangtse Cang and Haunghe or the Yellow River, from where they migrated to other southeastern provinces such as Yunnan. Since all the rivers have their primary source in the same region, could not these people move downwards along any of the four rivers and not follow one and the same route? A group might have followed the Nu Cang, a second group the Lan Cang and the third and forth, the Yangtse and the Yellow Rivers. Does this not answer the question why several linguistically connected people are found along the fertile valleys of all the four rivers?

The Tai Yai always include the yak dance (doe) when celebrating important occasions and this has been a tradition since time immemorial. Yaks were never found in the Shan State or in Yunnan. The inclusion of the yak dance in their culture must have been started by a generation who had seen the animal. It is possible the ancestral Tai had once lived in the northern most region of Asia, where yaks were numerous.
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