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The Mandalay Economy: Upper Burma's External Trade, c. 1850–90

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Much research on the modern economy of Southeast Asia in general, and on Burma in particular, has strongly emphasized the chasm between the precolonial era and a colonial period during which disruptive outside forces transformed state and society. Even though recent work on early modern Southeast Asia has largely destroyed the notion of static continuity by referring to signs of dynamic change and expansion, interpretations of the early nineteenth century have mostly been under the negative impression of the eventual fate of many Southeast Asian polities, that is, foreign takeover. Historical writing on Burma exemplifies this tendency. Great Britain assumed control over Lower Burma, including all of the seaboard, after two wars in 1824–6 and 1852–3, and Upper Burma was annexed in 1886. To a marked degree, this time has been characterized as one of disintegration and collapse: not only did the Burmese dynasty fail to deflect increasingly severe British commercial and political pressures, to which it eventually succumbed, but the loss of political independence was preceded by the breakdown of production and trade.

This dissertation sets out to see the period not through the perspective of annexation, but in its own terms. Based on a wide range of Burmese manuscripts and publications, British government files, business papers, and statistics collected in Burma, India, and Great Britain, it is argued that strong internal dynamics interconnected with vivid responses to external market opportunities. The ensuing steep expansion of external trade enhanced and reshaped preexisting trends towards commercialization and monetization and towards a more pronounced spatial division of labor and diversification of output. Upper Burma's inhabitants increasingly combined rice production for their own needs with employment in handicrafts and forestry, growing cash crops, and rearing cattle for export to Lower Burma, the Shan States, Yunnan, and overseas. Returns from exports, together with the cash released from seasonal labor in Lower Burma, paid for imports of rice, provisions, and growing amounts of manufactures. Such a flexible economic strategy allowed to respond to improving terms of trade and seems to have improved Upper Burma's purchasing power.

These trends were closely connected with changes in the political economy. Under the double impact of external (British) pressures and royal reformist zeal, the kingdom experienced moderate institutional change, which led to the removal of some barriers to traffic and enhanced the protection of property. While this helped to boost commodity trade, it did not generate stability and trust sufficient to attract much long-term foreign investment. One partial exception was teak forestry, where elaborate contracts and concessions were developed over time and honored to such a degree as to warrant substantial sums to be invested. At the same time, royal monopolies often excluded independent merchants. In response, the traders of Burmese, European, Chinese, Indian, and Persian extraction adopted different strategies of full or selective cooperation with the king, whereas some insisted on purely private business. Thereby, each group sought to maximize the advantage drawn from its specific material resources and culturally-shaped business skills. The same considerations influenced their varying stance towards British consular support and mixed Anglo-Burmese jurisdiction.

Hence, Upper Burma developed in a dynamic way, but much different from the contemporaneous transformation of Lower Burma into an export-oriented monocrop economy under British law.

Oil in Burma: The Extraction of “Earth-Oil” to 1914

Ph.D. dissertation, University of Queensland, May 1999.

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This thesis is an in-depth study of the earth-oil industry of Burma until 1914. The focus is principally upon the establishment of the modern commercial oil industry and the difficulties it faced. However, the earlier industry on which the modern industry was founded, is also surveyed. This indigenous industry had been established for centuries. In the beginning, oil was first obtained from seepages and soaks; later oil wells were hand-dug nearby Yenangyaung, ‘creek of stinking water’, in Central Burma.

What has been established in this thesis is that an extensive indigenous oil industry existed at Yenangyaung. Although not as productive an industry as previously believed, these hand-dug wells supplied riverine Burma with earth-oil. This unrefined oil was much-desired and was used as a preservative for wooden buildings and monasteries, for the caulking of multifarious boats, and as a cheap, but smoky illuminant. Indications are that the oil was even exported to India.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of the pre-colonial industry was that the ‘Reserves’ of Twingon and Beme, the location of the hand-dug wells, were in the hands of a group of hereditary owners, known as *twinzayo*; usually considered to be twenty-four in number, they controlled the industry. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, King Mindon became involved in the industry, which then became a royal monopoly.

In particular, this thesis explores the later relationship between the *twinzayo* and the *twinza*, (well-owners, with no hereditary claims on the Reserve), and the British administration. On three separate occasions, the British administration upheld the rights of *twinzayo*. First, in 1886, again in 1893, and on the third occasion, in 1908 when an inquiry was held to investigate the condition of the *Twinza* Reserves. In the early colonial years,

well-sites were sold. However, after 1906, companies began to lease sites from *twinzayo* and *twinza* alike. Payment of royalty on production enabled this group to retain a financial interest in their well-sites and many benefited considerably from this measure.

Already by 1885, prior to annexation, British agents were importing crude oil from Yenangyaung to Lower Burma where the product was refined into kerosene for local use, competing against the imported American product. As well, a market in India for kerosene was established, and, after annexation of Upper Burma, India was established as Burma's 'natural market'. The growth of this important export industry is followed and examined. During this period, Burmese kerosene and other petroleum by-products faced vicious competition in India from international oil giants, like Standard Oil, Shell and Royal Dutch, and establishment of this market was not an easy task. How the gutsy little Burmah Oil Company, Burma's premier oil company, a minnow compared with its rivals, succeeded, is a modern 'David and Goliath' encounter. However, Burmah Oil was fortunate to have the support of the British Admiralty, which was about to transform the Royal Navy from coal to fuel-oil powered vessels.

Astonishing as it may seem, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Burma oil fields were the only major oil producer in the British Empire. The fields therefore became of great strategic importance to the British. To maintain this oil supply exclusively for the Empire, the government of India excluded non-British companies or British companies with a predominance of non-British shareholders from operations on the Burma fields.

During the first years of the colonial period, Burmah Oil was alone on the fields or faced minimal competition. In retrospect, it is possible to perceive that the failure of a commercial oil industry in Arakan, prior to Upper Burma's annexation, may have deterred early investors from Yenangyaung. The high hopes held for the Arakan industry were never achieved. Oil was present but not in sufficient quantities to repay investment.

The study of this industry has many aspects. The difficulties of establishing a modern oil industry on the foundation of an earlier one, which, for many years continued to work side by side with the modern industry, are portrayed; the importance of the burgeoning Indian market to the growth of the modern Burmese oil industry is stressed. As well, this thesis presents proof that a capital-poor nation like Burma must rely on foreign investment to develop capital-intensive industries.

Les Temples Excavés de la Colline de Po Win en Birmanie Centrale: Architecture, Sculpture et Peintures murales

(The Excavated Temples of Po Win Taung in Central Burma : Architecture, Sculpture and Murals)

Ph.D. dissertation, Paris Sorbonne III, March 1999

ANNE-MAY CHEW

Po Win Taung is an archeological site unique in Burma. It is located about 40 km from Monywa, in the northwest area of Central Burma. The hill of Po Win is a huge, multi-level religious complex with more than 800 excavations chiselled out of soft sandstone rock.

These rock-cut caves, which vary from a simple meditation cell to an imposing temple, are decorated in low and high reliefs on the facades. Some entrances are flanked by human or animal sculptures in the round. The grottoes which contain numerous statues of various positions (sitting, standing, reclining) are carved from the rock. More than 100 cave-temples are adorned with paintings illustrating traditional scenes such as the 28 Buddha of the Past, previous lives of Buddha Gotama and the Life of Buddha as well as scenes of daily life.

The majority of the artistic works of Po Win Taung date from the second Ava period (16th-18th centuries) designated as “Nyaung Yan” style as it started under the reign of the King Nyaung Yan (1597-1605). The paintings of Nyaung Yan style depict different sources of inspiration (Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, Siamese, Muslim and European). The works on Mandalay style of the colonial period can also be found at Po Win Taung (last quarter of 19th till mid 20th centuries). The artistic treasures of Po Win Taung show a profound syncretism harmonizing local pre-buddhist beliefs and the fundamental teachings of Theravâda Buddhism.

374 pages, 224 color photos, 77 pages of drawings

Where Jambudipa and Islamdom Converged: Religious Change and the Emergence of Buddhist Communalism in Early Modern Arakan (Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, May 1999.

MICHAEL W. CHARNEY

The historian of Southeast Asian Buddhism faces many questions regarding Buddhist identity. Using the case study of Arakan (western Burma), two critical questions are pursued in this dissertation: why did Theravada Buddhism emerge as a religious identity for the majority of Arakanese and why did this religious identity develop into Burmese–Buddhist religious communalism? The prevailing literature regarding Arakanese history accepts uncritically a primordialist view of an ever–present Buddhist religious identity in Arakan from the pre-fifteenth century, that this religious identity was the chief means of collective action Arakanese throughout the early modern period, and that it always involved social exclusion of Muslims. After examining Burmese–language palm–leaf manuscripts from collections in Burma and the British Library, published royal orders and court treatises, and contemporaneous Portuguese and other foreign accounts, I concluded that these assumptions are incorrect. Burmese Buddhist communalism was clearly a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and generally did not define group action in preceding centuries.

This dissertation makes two inter–related arguments. First, the Burmese Buddhist religious identity developed from a complex array of influences. Ecological, climatological, social, economic, and political factors all played important roles in determining the direction of and response to religious developments. Thus, Theravada Buddhism was not the ancient and monolithic religious identity that some have interpreted it to be. Rather, the Buddhist religious identity as it has emerged today developed gradually, and primarily from

the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, during the periods of Burman and British rule. This was true also of the Arakanese Muslim identity. Second, Burmese–Buddhist communalism developed out of competition between Muslims and Buddhists for new agricultural lands and attempts to survive on shrinking land plots in the British colonial economy. British colonial authorities also reduced the vitality of patron client relationships which meant the emergence of religious leaders as organizers of rural communities for collective action.