4 Tracking Routes

Imperial Competition in the Late-nineteenth Century
Burma-China Borderlands

Gunnel Cederlöf

Abstract
For many past centuries, the Shan-Dai territories have been crossed by communication routes allowing low- and high-tide flows of pilgrims, diplomats, and the most valuable goods to move. This chapter in detail studies events in the late 19th century when British and Qing imperial forces sought to gain control of the movements and value of these flows. The effects of the Panthay Revolt in Yunnan together with a diminished Burmese kingdom resulted in unexpected opportunities for a British expedition to make their first journey ever between Bhamo in northern Burma and Momein (today: Tengchong) in Yunnan in 1868. By using the documentation generated by this expedition, this study traces a complex social web of relations that travellers on these routes had to negotiate.

Keywords: Burma, Yunnan, trade, borderlands, imperial history, flows

An unusual expedition, including an odd mix of men, travelled across the large and rugged mountain terrain between the Kingdom of Burma and the Yunnan Province of imperial China in 1868. It was the first British expedition to enter Yunnan and return to Burma by this route. Before setting off from Bhamo in north Burma, the political agent of Mandalay, Major Edward B. Sladen, who led the group, anticipated an easy walk that was made safe by Burmese royal letters. Sladen was soon disproved: the war between Burma and the British East India Company in 1853 had resulted in a large loss of land for the king of Burma, which he had refused to acknowledge by not signing the peace treaty. Bhamo was outside the British realms, and the British governor general discouraged Sladen, arguing that the enterprise

Cederlöf, Gunnel, and Willem van Schendel (eds), Flows and Frictions in Trans-Himalayan Spaces: Histories of Networking and Border Crossing. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2022
DOI: 10.5117/9789463724371_CH04
was too dangerous. However, by identifying the overland route into Yunnan, European merchants expected to get access to China’s most lucrative markets, and the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce put in the necessary funds.¹

In the mid- to late nineteenth century, three empires – the Qing, the British, and the French – were fast closing in on this mountain region. The Qing aimed to quell a rebellion in western Yunnan that had been under Panthay control since the outbreak in 1857, and the French wanted to beat the British in securing a route into Yunnan from their territories in Laos. Squeezed in between, the many small Shan-Dai polities in the mountain tracts came under immense pressure. Yet without their assistance, no one could make the journey across their territories. Sladen’s fortunes depended on his ability to forge relations with the men controlling the route and its entry points, and this task was more complicated than he had foreseen. Before 1868, only a few brief journeys in the southern mountain tracts had been made in 1829-36.² No British reports on travel in the Shan-Dai territories reflected the dynamism of travelling, so Sladen lacked crucial information. Sladen and his party arrived at Bhamo with the royal letters in support of the expedition, but they were halfway into the hills before they realized that royal and imperial seals had little influence here. On their return from Yunnan, they believed they had secured future safe communications. They could not have been more mistaken; these territories were not the kind of channel for trade to which they only needed access. The social landscape was as complex as the physical one, and the grid of pathways fluctuated with political and environmental realities.

This chapter targets flows in order to enquire into how passage was made possible between the important hubs of wealth and markets in Burma and Yunnan. By studying the flows, we will better understand the social

¹I am immensely grateful to Jianxiong Ma for discussions and for sharing his work and experiences with me, including the translation of certain documents. I also wish to thank Christian Daniels and Dan Smyer Yü for their contributions to my knowledge of Yunnan and the Shan-Dai region, and to Dan for introducing me to Trans-Himalayan studies, sharing conceptual ideas, and joining me on fieldwork in 2018. I am also indebted to my colleagues in the ‘India-China Corridor’ project, Willem van Schendel, Mandy Sadan, Arupjyoti Saikia, and Dan Smyer Yü. My thanks also to Zhang Xilu, Li Donghong, Li Yunxia, Wang Yu, Zhengli Mu, and Nicole. The project has been funded by the Swedish Research Council. This study and its key arguments were presented in an early version of this text at the conference ‘Flows and Friction in Trans-Himalayan Spaces’, organized by the project at the Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Sweden, 2019. Comments from the participants have been helpful.

²The officers Richardson and McLeod respectively travelled from Moumein at the mouth of the Salween River, Richardson to Laos, Siam, and Karenni in 1829, 1834, and 1836; McLeod to Laos, Siam, and Kengtung in 1836. Thaung, ‘British Interest’, pp. 48, 68, 119.
geography of mobility in the Shan-Dai region and its interdependence on and relationship with its powerful neighbours. The natural conditions were challenging for the passage of caravans, and the drivers required knowledge, experience, and skill. Yet they would not necessarily take the least physically demanding paths. Political realities, economic and kinship relations, and violent conflicts influenced which routes were chosen. As will be argued, while natural and social phenomena conditioned such a dynamic geography, flows and motion constituted it. The movement of people, animals, and items, and all the knowledge, relationships, status, and perceptions attached to them have nurtured the social geography of the Shan-Dai lands and merged with the social relations of places. In this perspective, flows are relative to space in contrast to being determined by absolute space. They intersect and integrate an anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic nexus.3

The extraordinary political circumstances during which the mission took place resulted in many reports and communications with dense narrative descriptions and strategic discussions. Here we can discern the complex negotiations and trivial disputes that determined the thoroughfare as seen from the perspective of the British members of the expedition and the merchant community and British civil and military administration with whom they communicated. British, Burmese, and Chinese officials also voiced their opinions about the state of affairs in various items of correspondence. The Shan-Dai polities, too, left traces in written documents, either indirectly when cited or referred to by the Qing, Burmese, or British administrations or, in closer encounters, in notes during this and following expeditions. Communication on route was filtered through translation, and the identity of the translators sometimes played key roles. There are also important collections of documents from the Shan-Dai polities’ internal administration, which have survived in British archives. They were once taken as part of intelligence during British military expeditions to force the sawbwas to submit to British rule. For example, the James George Scott collection includes correspondence between the sawbwas in the southern polities who discussed between themselves strategies and alliances with which to confront the approaching British troops.4

To label the polities ‘Shan-Dai’ reflects their frontier character as represented in language. ‘Shan’ in Burmese and ‘Dai’ in Dai language denote the majority population. Also, before the Shan-Dai hills were divided by

3 This study and its key arguments build on Cederlöf, ‘Tracking Routes’.
4 Scott was posted in the Shan polities (states) from 1886-1910, advancing from assistant commissioner to superintendent. Cambridge University Library, Manuscripts and University Archives, Scott Collection. The sawbwas’ letters dated 1885-96 and many without a date.
a hard political border between Qing China and British-controlled Burma in 1900, these polities were under the influence of the Chinese Empire and the kingdom of Burma. Both governments appointed and recognized the heads of the polities – the *sawbwas* – within their realms, and they expected loyalty in return. An old border dating from the Ming Dynasty, marked by eight ‘gates’, had cut through the western part of the hills, but there was no hard political border. Seen across time, the reach of the two strong powers shifted. Sladen’s records show how the shadow of the two giants faded away the further into the hills the caravan arrived.5

The Shan-Dai region had been embedded in state and imperial competition for centuries. Located in between the Irrawaddy River in Burma and Yunnan’s high plateau, it hosted a web of communication routes. These were the millennium-old southwestern branch of the Silk Road network that connected Chinese trade with the Indian Ocean ports. The most valuable goods were transported in the north, between Bhamo on the Irrawaddy and Dali via Momein6 in western Yunnan. Sladen called it ‘a commercial highway’.7 Research within the larger region, between northeast India and Yunnan via Burma, has generated important studies that have targeted the marginality and frontier character of tracts such as the Shan-Dai hills. Whether as a ‘borderland’, ‘frontier zone’, ‘buffer zone’, ‘middle ground’, or ‘non-state space’, their analytical location has depended on the faraway political centre of states. Even though these concepts share a critique of state-centred or nation-state-centred analyses by highlighting the peripheral areas as societies with their own centres and social life, the concepts identify them by their dependent relationship with a state, enclosing their geopolitical edge as a scar through the social body.

Jianxiong Ma and Charles Patterson Giersch engage in understanding this complexity in their research of the hill tracts. Both speak of ‘borderlands’ as regions without settled borders, which is a somewhat unusual definition within borderland studies in Asia that mostly presupposes a region cut apart by a hard political border. Giersch emphasizes the lack of political boundaries and argues that even though the Qing state claimed territories, there were no borders. For Ma, the formation of a frontier is the key question.

---

6 Momein in the Dai language was also Tengyueh in Chinese. Today, Tengchong. The British reports used the Dai name until the fall of the Panthay rebellion in 1873.
In contrast to Giersch, he claims that borders have been in place and have multiplied ever since the Qing state's bureaucratic reforms in the early eighteenth century. The Qing state's southwestern frontier was ‘a crossroads and cultural transition ground between Tibet, [the] inner provinces in China, and Southeast Asian states’. With a long temporal perspective, Ma dates the beginning of the historical process that shaped the integration of the Shan-Dai polities into the Qing state to the 1720s and the conflicts over one of the most important minerals, salt. He argues that the mutually constitutive processes of state penetration and the local communities' reactions and their reconstruction of identities and cultural systems, together shaped ‘frontier formation’. Ma makes a point of emphasizing this long-term integration and formation of cultural subjectivity in opposition to James C. Scott’s claim that people escaped into the hills away from aggressive state encroachments.8

Giersch takes inspiration from North American scholarship when he introduces Richard White’s term ‘middle ground’ into analysis of the Shan-Dai territories. The middle ground is a social rather than physical space, and Giersch focuses on the interaction within the frontier, among people and between them and the ‘newcomers’. He writes that these are ‘places of fluid cultural and economic exchange where acculturation and the creation of hybrid political institutions were contingent on local conditions.’9 Richard White's term shares ideas with Mary Louise Pratt’s concept ‘contact zone’ – their texts were published only one year apart. Pratt’s concept is intended for a historicized approach to analysing travel writing, as ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination’.10 The ‘contact zone’ as the ‘middle ground’ aims to reveal the logic of meetings between two in all ways different people who need to find common ground in order to communicate, and therefore adjust and adapt. White’s concept has a sense of manipulation, as when one party wants to subdue the other into meeting its own intentions, but lacks compelling force. Pratt’s concept foregrounds ‘the interactive, improvisational dimensions … easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination’. The study of such interactions is included in the meaning of Gunlög Fur’s concept ‘concurrences’, when complementary or conflicting occurrences (as in meetings of counterparts) represent multiple voices, expressing ‘concurrent

---

9 Giersch, Asian Borderlands, pp. 3–4, 7.
10 Pratt, Imperial Eyes, p. 4.
claims on geographical, temporal, political, and moral spaces.’ They intersect at the same time and place, as rivals and competitors, representing different ontologies yet in communication with each other and they become entangled. All three concepts carry a dimension of meetings between people who are unknown to each other.’ Ma, on the other hand, argues that the two – the people in the Qing state and the Shan-Dai polities – knew each other well from nearly two centuries of integration that involved adjustment and the formation of new identities on the frontier. Therefore, to him, ‘middle ground’ becomes a flat concept that cannot accommodate the historical dynamic of political resistance against the Qing state’s encroachments in order to control local resources. If there ever was a middle ground of Qing and Shan-Dai encounters, it was long gone by the time of the first British attempts at entering the hills.12

A small observation should also be made on the perspectives represented in historical research. Until now, scholars have tended to enter into the study of the Shan-Dai region either from British Burma and its records or from imperial China and its subordinate governor’s bureaucracies. The present nation-state border as well as language proficiency set limits. However, we have now reached a point where our individual limitations as scholars can be overcome by benefitting from the small but growing body of research from both sides of such boundaries.

**Expanding imperial control**

Qing and Burmese influence in the Shan-Dai region followed different trajectories. Burma’s imperial ambitions, including wars on China in the north, Siam in the south, and Assam and Manipur in the west, came to a definite end when they were defeated by the British East India Company’s (EIC) troops in 1826. In the nineteenth century, piece by piece, in three successive wars Burma lost its territories to the British. After the second war, in 1853, the EIC controlled all coastal areas and the delta almost as far north as the Burmese capital Mandalay. The company intended to secure land routes from India, across Burma, to form a stronghold in the markets in Yunnan. Qing rule in Yunnan had roots in the Ming administration, which formed tributary relations with the polities in westernmost Yunnan, west

---


12 Ma, ‘Salt’, p. 1640.
of the Ailao Mountain Range. For a long time, to the imperial rulers, these mountains marked a boundary between the state and the barbarian and wild tracts in the Shan-Dai territories towards Burma.13

The Ailao Mountains run northwest to southeast, from about 100 kilometres south of the commercial and political centre of Dali and 400 kilometres towards Laos. When the Qing state expanded beyond these mountains in the eighteenth century, its priorities were strategically guided by the location of mines, trade, and markets.14 Through an administrative reform in 1746, counties were introduced into most of Yunnan where the region became known as the ‘interior’. Exterior to this administration were the Shan-Dai polities where the native chiefs were replaced. These changes were paralleled by large-scale immigration of Han people into Yunnan that dramatically changed the demography, and the Han became the numerically dominant population in the province. In 1775-1850, Yunnan’s population rose from four to ten million – an increase far above the China average. It worked to push native communities away from central Yunnan, westwards and southwards, beyond the Ailao Mountains and into the Shan-Dai region. The tensions that followed generated two large revolts, which resulted in the formation of polities that were autonomous of the Qing state. The Panthay revolt was crucial to Sladen’s fortunes.15

The British intention to enter China from the western overland route was a consequence of the EIC’s increasing control of territory east of the river Brahmaputra up to Burma’s western borders – an area of small kingdoms and lively marketplaces. Back in 1817, Felix Carey in the service of the Raja of Cachar observed that high-value goods from Burma and China used to enter Bengal via Cachar. ‘... [C]ertainly then it must follow

13 As a criticism of dominant Chinese historiography that concludes that the war was a success for China, Yingcong Dai presents a radically different conclusion by comparing Chinese and Burmese correspondence and reports. Cederlöf, Founding an Empire, pp. 86-87, 91; Dai, ‘Disguised Defeat’, pp. 55-61, 66-67; Cederlöf, ‘Seeking China’s Back Door’, pp. 130-133; Mangrai, Shan States, pp. 24, 44-45.
15 Taking account of the uncertainties of demographic statistics, James Lee estimates that the population in Yunnan increased from 4 to 10 million in 1775-1850. The annual growth of population density rose from an all-China average of 7/1,000 (1775) to 10/1,000 (1785) and 20/1,000 (1795). Industry and cities were the first to grow, and more peripheral agrarian areas expanded later. Compared to decreasing mortality and increasing fertility, net immigration was largely the reason for the net increase in population. The two major revolts in Yunnan generated the autonomous regions of the Pignan State in the Panthay revolt 1857-73 and the Five Buddha districts in the Luohei Mountains, with a peak period in 1790-1890. Ma, ‘Marriage’; Atwill, Chinese Sultanate, p. 6; Ma, ‘Rise’, pp. 5-6; Lee, ‘Food Supply’, pp. 729-731, 42; Ma, ‘Shaping’, pp. 70-71; Ma, ‘Salt’, p. 1639.
that these important articles of commerce, might be procured at a much cheaper rate than what we now get them from the Burmans who dispose of these articles to our merchants from their different sea ports, at a very enormous profit.\textsuperscript{16} When the EIC lost its two last monopolies in 1833, the Charter Acts that had given them sole rights to trade in tea and trade with China, access to this alternative route into China became urgent. Forcing the king of Burma to accept an agreement that protected and promoted trade between north Burma and the British Empire (1862) and, one year before Sladen’s departure, an agreement with more far-reaching concessions that crippled Burma’s control of trade, the commercial community in Rangoon acted even more aggressively. Through their initiatives to block American and French merchant interests, also without a peace treaty with Burma, the country was landlocked. Globally speaking, it was an unprecedented period of British imperial conquest.\textsuperscript{17} The balance of power in the Burma-Yunnan borderlands did not shift dramatically until the end of the third Anglo-Burmese war in 1885. As a result, all Burmese territories came under British rule, and the powerful Qing and British empires came face to face in the intermediary Shan-Dai territories in the border negotiations that followed. Yet in spite of sovereign claims, neither the British nor the Qing state exercised control over the territories that separated them.\textsuperscript{18}

The Shan-Dai region comprised a number of small polities that had their political and economic centres in flat oblong basins, \textit{bazi}.\textsuperscript{19} These basins were farmlands surrounded by mountains. A polity’s main village, regular marts, and almost all towns were located here, whereas its realm extended east to west into the hills. Three main, parallel routes connected the lowlands at Bhamo with Yunnan’s high plateau. The morphology made the basins run in the direction northeast-southwest, and the geological formation forced travellers to advance on the hillsides, along the watercourses in the narrow valleys, bordered by steep hill ranges on either side of the paths. All routes passed via valleys and basins, and passage, depended on the sawbwas. Without agreements confirmed beforehand, passage was hazardous. The

\textsuperscript{16} National Archives of India, FPP, 14 May 1832, No. 81, in Bhattacharjee, \textit{Trade}, pp. 34-35.
\textsuperscript{18} The officers Richardson and McLeod respectively travelled from Moumein at the mouth of the Salween River, Richardson to Laos, Siam, and Karenni in 1829, 1834, and 1836, McLeod to Laos, Siam, and Kengtung in 1836. Thaung, ‘British Interest’, pp. 48, 68, 119, 310.
\textsuperscript{19} See Ma’s chapter in this volume, pp. 54-55.
routes crossed boundaries between different polities and alliances of which Sladen and his fellow officers were only vaguely aware.  

Ma’s meticulous work on the organisation of the Shan-Dai polities reveals the unique integration of the exercise of imperial bureaucratic control with the marriage relations between the individual ruling families. Intermarriage linked the daughter of one sawbwa to the son of another, which reduced conflicts, especially because the sawbwa’s wife controlled the imperial stamp. Without this stamp printed on documents, decisions were not valid. As noted, the polities were not ethnic entities. The British placed people within racial hierarchies, as closed ethnic communities according to the racial theories of the time, which caused misunderstandings.

The Panthay revolt drastically changed conditions for travel, as the officers on route were slow to realize. Not only had the social organisation, tied into Qing administration, been cut off from the Qing state; with the Qing government replaced by the Panthay, Han Chinese merchants were unable to travel, and their merchant community in Bhamo was disconnected from Yunnan. Their connection with Yunnanese trade was now relocated further south, via Mandalay, and they sought support from the Burmese authorities. The Panthay revolt had a decisive influence on the success of Sladen’s expedition to Momein – the headquarters of the Panthay governor, the Tah-sa-kon Lee Guo Lun. The expedition in fact took place at the peak of the rebellion. Close to its outbreak, in 1855, trade between Bhamo and Momein was calculated to be worth half a million pounds sterling – a substantial flow that had now receded to a mere trickle. The Burmese court feared that the British would enter Burma from its Indian territories in Assam and take control of Chinese trade via Bhamo. However, the revolt had put a complete stop to the caravans between Bhamo and Momein, and one of Sladen’s tasks was to find out why.

The outbreak of the rebellion was preceded by a long and violent crescendo, caused by rising tension from the immigration of people from overcrowded villages in central China who established themselves in Yunnan’s lucrative trade and mining business, and on agrarian lands. Whereas the Qing rulers were Manchu, most of the immigrants were Han. Han people had deep roots in Yunnan, too, but the forceful newcomers became an economic and political challenge to the native population, including the resident Han. Over time, localized Han lineage-associations formed a political system,
and a Han identity took shape. The Han merchants thereby found a way to control business across long distances. Before the rebellion, the Han merchant network connected places as far apart as central Yunnan and Mandalay via the intermediary Shan-Dai polities. A few decades later, the network had a global reach.\textsuperscript{22}

The word Panthay originated in Burma, referring to Muslims living in Yunnan, where they were known as Hui. This community controlled the caravan trade on which merchants depended. The rebellion was ultimately triggered when violence between Han and Hui groups culminated in a massacre of the Hui population at Kunming in 1856. During the expedition’s stay in Momein in 1868, the Panthay governor let Sladen know that Panthay forces had taken Kunming. Soon after the expedition left, the rebellion began to decline under the reinforced pressure of the Qing army.\textsuperscript{23}

By the time Sladen set out from Bhamo, all trade flows had dried up. Blockages emerged from imperial competition, warfare, and uncertainties following the formation of the Panthay government in Dali. The Panthay now controlled the entry points in western Yunnan to the routes for the most valuable goods. In the longer perspective, lasting only fifteen years, the revolt can be seen as an exception in Yunnan’s history. Paradoxically, it helps us to trace the missing flows and the mechanisms that controlled them. The hill societies were not immobile entities but were influenced by the flows of people, animals, and goods that crossed the hills and, on the way, integrated into markets and social life. Like seasonal clockwork, caravans in the long-distance trade and diplomatic missions passed through the polities. We need to observe how these flows of people and caravans – arriving, staying for a while, and leaving – impacted on the place. We can observe this, for example, in the case of one of the passages along the Bhamo-Momein routes that had the reputation of having places where ‘trade flourished to such an extent that the caravan fires at the successive halting stations were never extinguished.’\textsuperscript{24} We can sense the intensive life around those fireplaces, with the mule drivers and people from nearby places gathering together, eating, smoking, exchanging news, trading local items, haggling over prices, getting ready to sleep, or packing up to leave. The flows and the places mutually nurtured each other’s social worlds.


The caravan-flows moving from place to place and stopping at the caravan fires – these ‘halting stations’ also being the life worlds of people dwelling there, receiving caravans and seeing them off. To say ‘halting station’ is to keep to the social lexicon of the caravans. These were places for people on the move. They were also places for food vendors, craftsmen, local traders, and stable keepers. Products from the nearby villages and intra-regional trade arrived here too. The busy halting stations were constituent parts of towns or villages within the Shan-Dai polities and integrated into their socio-political organisation, the trade internal to the hills, the webs of kinship, and the religious universe.

Routes and caravans

Before we follow Sladen’s trail, we need to identify the main routes between Bhamo and Momein. The northern path between the two towns was known as the Ponlyne or the Zanda25 Basin route. It followed the Taping River, a tributary to the Irrawaddy that discharged into this river north of Bhamo. Following the Taping upstream, midway into the hills, the narrow valley in the lower hills opened up into the large Zanda Basin from where there was a steep climb towards the next basin and onwards to Momein. The Zanda route was separated by the Shamaloung mountain range in the south from the central Hotha Basin, known as the Embassy route. This route followed the Namsa River, a tributary that discharged into the Taping some 60 kilometres northeast of Bhamo as the crow flies, or about 80 kilometres on foot. The diplomatic missions between Yunnan and northern Burma travelled along this route. The third and southernmost route was the Sawadee route, named after the place on the Irrawaddy south of Bhamo, from where it originated. It followed the Nam-wan River upstream through the Muangwan Basin. Caravan drivers who chose this route would aim for Yongchang in Yunnan, and thereby never pass Momein on their way to Dali.26

The journey along the basins was physically less challenging than travelling in the intermediary forested valleys where the climbs were steep and paths narrow. Travel eastwards included a total climb of 1,500 metres from

25 (盏达), ‘Sanda’ in the British reports, today: Yingjiang.
Map 4.1 Communication routes between Bhamo and Momein, and the four zones, late 19th century

Drawn by Laurie Whiddon
Bhamo at about 100 metres above sea level to Momein at more than 1,600 metres. Comparing the British expeditions’ notes on distances with satellite imagery may help explain the constantly higher numbers in the notes. Measuring stretches on foot across steep climbs may have exaggerated the geographical distances.

Nature contributed to facilitating and obstructing flows. These flows followed the seasons, travelling from October to March. In the summers, from April onwards, the routes were almost impassable, and the caravan drivers feared the fevers in the lowlands. The members of Sladen’s expedition regretted many times that they had left Bhamo on 26 February to return on 5 September, travelling throughout the entire duration of the monsoon.27

The reason for being famed as the ‘commercial highway’ is reflected in estimates of the scale of the caravans. With the exception of the Panthay rebellion, 30,000 mules were reported to pass via this route every year. The caravans were led and sometimes also owned by a caravan headman, a ‘ma-kuo-t’ou’ who paid muleteers, the ‘mafu’, to drive the animals. Long-distance trade across Yunnan and into Laos, Siam, Burma, Sichuan, and Tibet depended on them. A caravan could comprise from 50 up to 500 mules. The more, the safer, for fear of robbery. One caravan assembled many small contracts and involved several mule owners. A few large owners in Yunnan possessed several hundred mules, whereas a common owner had between 70 and 80 animals. But this, too, was exceptional. Most owners were able to send their goods with 2-3 mules within a large caravan to a distant market. These caravans merged with the many travellers who moved goods within the mountains. They created a pulse through the basins, simultaneously being part of a larger, even global, world of commerce and competition, and being integrated into the social and economic life of the Shan-Dai polities. The communication routes as such were thereby deeply embedded in the society that channelled them. As in Martin Saxer’s term ‘pathways’:

A pathway is thus not just another word for trade route ... Life along a pathway is shaped by things, stories, rumors, and people passing through – by motion, or by flows, if you will. However, a pathway is neither just another word for flow. While shaped by motion, pathways are also conditioned by terrain, infrastructure and environmental factors like climate and weather.28

We need to observe that whereas the caravan drivers were mostly Hui and sometimes Han, the businessmen were often Han whose influence rested on their lineage associations. During the Panthay rebellion, these businessmen, such as the Yang lineage in Yun, were destroyed. The fact that they recovered quickly after the rebellion had been crushed reflected the strength of the political system represented by the associations. In the longer perspective, British rule in Burma contributed to transform western Yunnan and the Dai polities from being tributary to Qing rule to becoming dependent on the increasingly successful Han gentry and the British commercial entrepreneurs.29

The caravan economy also rested on breeding and keeping strong mules. They were known to be hardy, intelligent, docile, and well trained for pack work. Ponies were also bred in Yunnan, but they were not strong enough to walk in the rugged terrain in the western part of the province, loaded with heavy burdens. Nor would ponies last long in the heat of Burma’s lowlands and they were therefore mainly used for riding. Mules on the other hand could carry up to 90 kilogrammes and walk stages of 16-40 kilometres before being replaced by fresh animals. Sladen and his companions experienced the muleteers’ daily routine of feeding their mules before dawn with unhusked rice and thereafter watering them. After loading the mules, the caravan set off. At noon, the mules were unloaded, unsaddled, and turned loose to graze on the mountain side for an hour or so before entering the next stage of the journey. Once they had arrived at the day’s destination, the animals were fed and watered, and either tethered close together for the night or stabled if a ‘horse-inn’ was available. Mostly, however, routines did not proceed this smoothly; delaying, haggling, and endless argumentation prevented departure.30

Four zones

Close observations of daily events during the expedition are available in the British members’ diaries, reports, and correspondence. Sladen’s report also includes a large number of incoming letters, including some from Burmese, Chinese, and Panthay officials. The British members were

30 Examples of such delays are 1 and 2 March 1868, at Tsitkaw on the Taping River. Anderson, Report, pp. 242-243; Willoughby, Report, pp. 3-6, 22.
John Anderson, a medical doctor, naturalist, and the conservator of the Indian Museum at Calcutta; the engineer Captain J. M. Williams; the commercial representative captain Alexander Bowers; and the political agent of Mandalay Major Edward B. Sladen who was also in charge of the expedition. We may note the importance of these men, the empire's handymen, the soldier-merchants, the explorers, and the officers on scientific missions. Irrespective of whether their observations were right or wrong, they had bearing on the British government's judgements and decisions in India and Burma. The first expedition's reports became important guides for the subsequent one in 1875. Sladen's party consisted of 80-90 men including Theodore Stewart, a commercial representative who joined during the return journey; the interpreters F. N. Burn, Choung Zan Moung Mo, and Moung Shwe Yah; Jamadar Mahomed Ali Khan; soldiers of the Rangoon and Prome Police force; and the Shan caravan drivers and their mules.31

During the journey, Sladen's party encountered boundaries that we can think of as four zones. They were invisible to the survey members who struggled to understand the many obstacles on the way, but they were clear to everyone else. These were not fixed zones. As we shall see, they were temporally and spatially directed by social relations and natural conditions. Travelling from Bhamo, the party entered the first zone after a short boat ride up the Taping. The Shan-Dai polities were here under Jinghpaw sawbwas. Burmese influence in 1868 seems to have reached all the way up to the bottom of the Zanda Basin. This was where they entered the second zone. From here on, the sawbwas were Shan-Dai, and the Qing state had historically strong relations to the polities. The third zone began with a steep ascent up to Mauphoo (also: Maofu) and reached as far as the bottom of the next basin, Nantian. The war had created this zone, and the polities were headed by members of the Han community. Originally, they were Ming garrison-settlements that had entered the organisation of the Shan-Dai polities under Qing rule. They were now loyal to the Qing state and they sided with the Qing and the Burmese rulers against the Panthay and their allies.32 The fourth zone comprised the Nantian Basin up to Momein. This zone was controlled by the Panthay. We will return to these zones in a while.

One of the grave mistakes the British officials made was to assume the existence of long-term stability and fixed relations between the Burmese and Qing states, and the Shan-Dai polities. Occasionally, the notion of the ‘princely states’ in India resonates in reports where the polities are called ‘states’. They were certain of the Panthay government’s longevity and calculated how to accommodate trade with the Panthay regime in the long term. British-authored documents do not reflect any significant awareness of the micro-politics with shifting loyalties and changing relations of power that were influenced by disputes in the hills and the lowlands. In Burma’s eastern lowlands, conflicts between Burmese officials and Shan and Jinghpaw sawbwas often escalated into violence. The lowlands were frequently raided, and Jinghpaw people were not welcome in Bhamo. They were disarmed at the city gates, and if they had come without permission, they risked getting killed. The Jinghpaw were also prevented from performing their religious ceremonies in and near Bhamo. Sladen noted that selling and buying bamboo, bullocks, and buffaloes that were necessary for an important offering, were barred. Apparently, the Jinghpaw experienced boundaries that targeted them selectively, and they responded by not following orders that originated from among the Burmese.

The British, too, were not welcome in Bhamo, but in contrast to the Jinghpaw, they were treated with a feast, invited by the Chinese merchant community. Still ignorant of the hurdles piling up before them, they arrived into Bhamo harbour in grand style but found the town a ruin of its former prosperity. The Chinese community was disconnected from its closest link to Yunnan, and the absence of long-distance trade had reduced the town to poverty. Neither the Burmese government officials nor the Chinese merchants wanted British competition in the Yunnan trade, so they discouraged them from entering the hills. It was said to be a ‘wild goose chase’ with hill tracts filled with armed robbers. At the party, Sladen was introduced to one of the Jinghpaw sawbwas. The Ponlyne sawbwa had remained silent as he was forced to act as a Burmese pawn. But once on their own, the

---

33 Until the British conquered all of Burma, they argued that the Shan states were sovereign as a buffer against Qing China. This terminology disappeared as soon as the polities came under British rule.


35 Captain Sladen's Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, paras 36-38, 45-48, 77-79, 89, Appendix, Letter from Captain E. B. Sladen, Political Agent, Mandalay, to Colonel Albert Fytche, Chief Commissioner, British Burma, and Agent to His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General, Bhamo 22 January 1868, p. ii.
sawbwa promised Sladen that he would procure mules and find caravan drivers locally, in the Shan villages.36

As they entered what we call the first zone, Sladen realized that here, away from Bhamo, the Jinghpaw sawbwas made decisions independently of the Burmese, and the deference he had witnessed disappeared. In these lower hills, the sawbwas were Jinghpaw who had adopted the hierarchical social organisation of the Shan-Dai polities. Mandy Sadan explains how the Jinghpaw areas in north Burma that were dominated by the Lahpai lineage, as part of a larger movement of people eastwards, extended their territories into the border zone of Yunnan to become entangled in the Panthay revolt. Sladen travelled in the company of the three most influential sawbwas, those of Ponlyne, Ponsee, and Saray. Day after day, Sladen complained about how the Jinghpaw cheated them, raised the price, and disappeared with the mules to enforce their unfair claims. His indignation seems rooted in a contractual logic, where the sawbwas broke agreements. However, in the first zone, the sawbwas acted as autonomous heads of polities both in relation to foreigners and to people subordinate to them. In the diary, disappearing mules, inflated mule hire, and vanishing luggage were recurring themes.37

Once they reached Ponsee, not far from the Zanda Basin, the expedition came to a complete halt. The sawbwas positively refused to bring them one step further. Burmese influence faded away at this point, and Jinghpaw sawbwas could not control the party inside the Zanda Basin. Sladen’s party was stranded for two months without guides, and all the mules were gone. Unable to understand why they could not advance, he wrote in his diary: ‘The proofs which I was able to produce in the King of Burma’s written proclamation, and the letters given to me by the Burmese Government previous to my departure from Mandalay, were as waste paper compared with facts as disclosed by Burmese officials themselves in our immediate neighbourhood.’ Away from Bhamo, Burmese representatives were loyal to the interests of the Governor of Bhamo, not to the king. Additionally, the Jinghpaw sawbwas warned Sladen about the ‘most infamous Chinese robber, Li-Hsieh-T’ai’, waiting for him just beyond Zanda Valley. The governor had ordered them to delay the mission and shirk their promises and, if

36 OIOC, Government of India, Foreign Department, Political, No. 39-41, 3 August 1868, Bhamo Expedition, Survey Report by Captain J. M. Williams, A.I.C.E., Engineer to the Expedition, 18 June 1868, para 10, 12. Captain Sladen’s Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, paras 49-51, 104, 106; and letter from Captain E. B. Sladen, Political Agent, Mandalay, to Colonel Albert Fytche, Chief Commissioner, British Burma, and Agent to His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General, No. 194, Mandalay, 25 September 1868, para 5.
37 Sadan, *Being and Becoming*, pp. 55, 103-106, 78-79.
necessary, kill the mission’s members. Yet even though Sladen elaborated on the possible alliances between the Jinghpaw, Burmese, and Chinese parties, he associated most of the daily difficulties with a lower level of development among the Jinghpaw compared to the Shan as between two separate ethnic groups. Not only were the Jinghpaw claimed to be treacherous when breaking agreements, they were also associated with dirt, drunkenness, and immorality. He never compared the relative poverty of the villages in the hills to those in the basins where there were cultivated fields, marketplaces, and more affluent temples and buildings.  

The influence of the translators’ work is evident in Sladen’s and Anderson’s reports. The word used to denote the Jinghpaw community was ‘Kakhyen’, in today’s transcription: Kachin. The British officers adopted not only this word from the non-Jinghpaw translators but also their explanations. The word ‘Kakhyen’ indicated barbarian people in forests and mountains, a people without civilisation. The one exception is when Anderson explained the language of some Jinghpaw men in the Zanda Basin, calling them Khung (Khaang), the Dai word for Kakhyen. The interpreters became filters in conversations and were in no way neutral to the expedition. Choung Zan Moung Mo, for example, was a village headman who had been assigned by the Burmese governor of Bhamo.  

The long halt at Ponsee is largely explained by the location of the place. The geography had political significance. Here the route from Bhamo arrived at a bifurcation with the Zanda Basin only a few kilometres ahead and the Embassy route turning towards the southern point of the Hotha Basin. The Panthay government had a hold on this route via the Hotha sawbwa, who had close relations with the Governor of Momein Lee Guo Lun – the sawbwa himself having ancestors in Yunnan. Ponsee’s importance did not only stem from its location at this intersection; this was also the place where high-value merchandise balanced between Burmese and Panthay control. As soon as the Panthay governor of Momein realized that the Burmese were close to succeeding in blocking the British from reaching Momein, he ordered the sawbwas to aid the expedition and to take the Embassy route. 

On seeing the turn of events, the Jinghpaw sawbwa of Saray grasped the opportunity and struck a personal deal with Sladen for escort, porters, and

38   Captain Sladen’s Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, paras 36-38, 45-48, 77-79, 89, 129, Appendix, letter from Captain E. B. Sladen, Political Agent, Mandalay, to Colonel Albert Fytche, Chief Commissioner, British Burma, and Agent to His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General, Bhamo 22 January 1868, p. ii. 
mules. He also kept a line of retreat open by sending his Chinese interpreter to Bhamo to find out the consequences of assisting the British party, in opposition to both Burmese and Chinese orders. The response was resolute. In the early morning, one week later, two Chinese men from Bhamo passed through the village together with the Bhamo government's secretary, the sawbwa's Chinese interpreter, and a party of fifty armed Burmese soldiers aiming for Saray. They claimed to be on their way to inspect silver-mining operations. It was, however, a powerful demonstration of the Burmese governor's and the Chinese merchants' hostility towards the expedition. On the following morning, the Saray sawbwa came to explain that he was prevented from giving any assistance. The Burmese officers sent small groups of soldiers into the Shan villages to condemn the mission and paid bribes to Jinghpaw men to carry off the ponies. The wife of Sladen's interpreter was held hostage at Bhamo to force her husband to leave the expedition. Meanwhile, the letter from the governor of Momein disappeared together with Sladen's clerk. The absconding clerk was later promoted to the position of Burmese royal detective. All sawbwas now turned against the mission, and Sladen saw the glue that held his expedition together beginning to dissolve. Soon he realized that there had never been much of a glue in the first place. The Saray sawbwa explained: ‘You will get no assistance from Burmans: they have repeatedly sent messages to tell me that you are not to go on. If you persist, we have been advised to make away with you in any way we please, and the reward offered is the appropriation of your property.’

In this turmoil, Sladen kept to his wait-and-see strategy, and, eventually, it paid off. The Panthay governor sent a message that he intended to meet Sladen in person at the northern end of the Zanda Basin. This sufficed to convince the sawbwas to allow the expedition to advance, as they knew the trying consequences of having Panthay troops passing through their villages. They blamed the past fifteen years' fights and raids on the Panthay and were eager to have the trade route re-opened. The Panthay governor, too, wanted trade re-established and a trade agreement with the British drawn up. And so, Sladen was able enter into the second zone, the Zanda Basin.

40 The government secretary at Bhamo, the Tsayay-daungyee. Captain Sladen's Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, paras 103, 119-120, 128-133, 137, 9 March, p. 56, and Appendix S. Translation of a statement made by Moung Moh, Kakhyen Interpreter, resident of Bhamo, on 27 November 1868.

Competition for the commercial flows

Zanda had a long history of imperial administration, dating back to the fifteenth century. Arriving from the southwest, a traveller passed through a well-ordered society, and, unlike the northern part of the basin, it was untouched by the war.\(^{42}\) [T]he whole valley area teemed with villages, and was alive with a population which had laid out and conjoined every available acre into one vast garden of fertility and wealth, according to Anderson. People were mainly Shan, Han, and Jinghpaw, and the mix of languages spoken in the basin reflected the intense commerce and flow of goods and people that connected the basin with neighbouring and distant places. Flows of refugees had arrived from places of war in Yunnan. Describing ‘a perfect babel’, Anderson listed Shan, Poloung, Lisu, a form of Mandarin Chinese spoken in Yunnan, and a Jinghpaw dialect with ‘a remarkable affinity to Burmese’ spoken by the Khung (Jinghpaw). The continuous movement of people, animals, and goods not only nurtured commerce but constituted flows of knowledge, ideas, and associations of all kinds. Political and religious ideas and affiliations travelled both with diplomatic missions and with the nuns in the powerful sawbwas’ wives’ courts. Sladen always asked for an audience with the sawbwa gadaw in each polity’s main town. These flows made a powerful mobile social geography.\(^{43}\)

Sladen calculated the size of the population from the number of households. Larger towns amounted to 1,200 houses and average villages 50. The sawbwa of Mynela in the south would thereby be the head of about 25,000 individuals, and the ten polities in the northern Shan-Dai territories would together amount to a quarter of a million people. The figure may give us an indication but is quite unreliable. Imperial influence was present in the payment of tribute. Mynela annually sent 5,000 baskets of paddy to the Panthay government – an amount equal to what they paid under the Qing regime.\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) Ma, ‘Dowry’. Captain Sladen’s Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, para 208.


\(^{44}\) The Northern Shan polities amounted to ten according to the Shan and eight according to the Burmese. The eastern ones were Mynechai, Mynechon, Sayfan, Mynemaw, and Mynewun, and the western ones were Hotha, Latha, Mynela, Zanda, and Mynetee. They were located in four basins: (1. the Zanda Basin) Mynela, Zanda, and Mynetee, (2. the Hotha Basin) Hotha and Latha, (3. the Mynewan Basin) Sayfan and Mynewun, and (4) Mynechai, Mynechon, and Mynemaw. A sawbwa was described as having a government of four men who drew a fixed
Sladen’s message to the sawbwas was that the British monarch, represented by a minister at the court of Peking, would address the imperial government for the restoration of trade. Panthay sovereignty ought to be recognized by the Qing, which would secure peace and restore Shan prosperity. He further claimed that it was ‘not uncommon’ for Shan sawbwas in states adjacent to British Burma to submit to British rule and, immediately contradicting himself, that the British were not interested in more territory but in trade. His ultimate promise was to influence the Panthay governor not to attack the Shan polities anymore. An overly optimistic and not entirely true assessment of the situation. 45

The polities in the different basins competed for the trade flows, and the Zanda Valley’s neighbour, the sawbwa of Hotha, was eager to establish the Embassy route as the only highway. Once Sladen was set to leave Zanda, the Hotha sawbwa grasped the opportunity and turned up with 150 mules loaded with cotton for Momein. He joined the caravan and kept Sladen busy with descriptions of the Hotha Basin’s commercial advantages and shorter route, and the dangers of choosing the Zanda or Sawadee routes. On Sladen’s return journey through the Hotha Basin, the sawbwa even suggested a system of credits for the duration of the war. Sladen concluded that that route would make the Hotha sawbwa chief trader and he suspected double-dealing when realizing the sawbwa’s involvement in the conspiracy to destroy his expedition at Ponsee. 46

Without knowing it, the Europeans got a first glimpse of the intra-hill control of trade when they reached Karahokha, a town at the northern end of the Zanda Valley that was under the control of the sawbwa of Nantian, as a branch of that polity. They noticed the large Chinese population and the lively central mart where the road was flanked by Chinese shops. Fully up and running, the whole roadway would be occupied by stalls in which butchers, bakers, druggists, and jacks-of-all-trades ran thriving businesses. But their Shan guides steered them away from the town, not mentioning its link to Han commerce, only claiming the caravan would get stuck in the crowds. 48
Ever since Bhamo, reports had arrived about the movements of Li-Hsieh-Tāi, his name meaning Brigadier Li. He was one of the seven chieftains, or Han sawbwas, close to Momein who were loyal to the Qing state and had rebelled against the Panthay regime. They controlled the hill passes from the Zanda Basin up to the higher placed basin, Nantian. Sladen soon adopted the terminology and called them alternatively ‘robber chiefs’ or ‘Chinese brigands’. Mauphoo was one of the natural bottlenecks on the route, which could only be reached after a steep climb up a narrow valley. It was a customs point under Qing authority and, before the Panthay captured Momein, it was linked to this town. This was the place of such intense caravan trade that the fires were never extinguished. Geography and politics here also applied a squeeze on the trade flows through hefty duties or, as now, caused a complete blockage. However, the Panthay governor made short work of the ambush party, eager to get Sladen to Momein. When the caravan finally arrived at Mauphoo, the bodies were still scattered on the ground from when the Panthay had attacked with 5,000 men, claiming to have killed 300 and driven away the others. Sladen’s confusion was complete when they entered Nantian and were entertained as the governor’s guests by two of the Han sawbwas who had quickly transferred their allegiance to the governor. Later, when the Panthay were defeated, these Han sawbwas returned their loyalty to the Qing government and Li-Hsieh-Tāi was appointed Commissioner over the Shan-Dai polities.

After uneventful days crossing the Nantian Basin they arrived at Momein, somewhat reduced due to robbery but received in grand style. Governor Lee Guo Lun went out of his way to show support for the British plans to reopen the trade route and connect commerce in Momein with the British ports at Rangoon and Pegu. Sladen’s assessment of the Panthay was positive and optimistic. Violence in Yunnan was blamed on the Qing, who were called marauders who harassed and molested the peaceful Panthay. On leaving, Lee Guo Lun and Sladen exchanged official seals. Sladen wrote that using them would ‘give an impress of reality to our correspondence and secure us mutually against fraud and imposition’. However, he should have paid

50 The other two were Leooq-wanfan, the most powerful of seven rebelling polities, and Thoung-wet-shein, the head of Mauton between Nantian and Momein. Captain Sladen’s Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, paras 152-155, 290. Coryton and Margary, ‘Trade Routes’, pp. 289-290. Information on Qing customs points from communication with Jianxiong Ma.
51 Captain Sladen’s Report, in OIOC, Expedition to China, E. B. Sladen, 1868, paras 319, 325-329, 6.6, 6.7, and 30 June 1868, and pages 115 and 160.
more attention to the governor’s preparation for their departure. Messages went out to remove blockages on the road and to check for information of ambush parties. The sawbwas of Nantian, Mynela, Zanda, and Hotha received instructions to prepare for the expedition’s arrival, and the sawbwa of Hotha again accompanied them and steered them into the Hotha Basin. Three hundred Panthay soldiers escorted the party as far as Mynela. Sladen may have succeeded in reaching Momein and returning to Bhamo, but he failed to break the code of how to do it. Members of the next expedition in 1875 paid with their lives for this omission. At that time, the British officers saw the growing trade flows on the Bhamo-Momein route, after the suppression of the Panthay, as an opportunity. Chinese firms in Rangoon established branches at Bhamo, and the Burmese government ran steamers between this port and Mandalay. The recently sanctioned Rangoon and Irrawaddy State Railway was regarded as proof of the British government’s forceful initiative to reach the inland markets, and the route was ‘destined to develop far beyond its condition at any previous point in history.’

But the British failed to understand the effects on the Shan-Dai communication routes of having the Qing government and, in effect, the Han merchants back in power in Yunnan. In 1875, the king of Burma first advised the new expedition to take the Bhamo-Momein route, but when he received news that the Qing government wanted renewed diplomatic ties, he told the British to cancel the journey altogether. When they nonetheless went ahead, arguing that they already knew the route, a harder border between Burma and China had arisen in the hills, and the mission became fatal.

However, in 1875, this border was still negotiable, and it would continue to change. It was not until the geopolitical border between China and British Burma was fixed in 1900 that the Shan-Dai polities’ room for negotiation crumbled. Analytically, the modern notion of hard nation-state borders that are characteristic of many important works in borderland studies is of no help here. However, we may ask whether the complex events that foreshadowed the hard border of 1900 may contribute a more dynamic approach in borderland analysis. The Shan-Dai polities were not a borderland, as an entity, cut apart by a geopolitical border, but a complex society of dynamically altering borders in the plural form, selectively creating obstacles to people travelling here. A traveller had to navigate the intertwined relationship of social and

52 Ibid., 6 June 1868 (p. 134); 7 July 1868 (pp. 143, 146). Coryton and Margary, ‘Trade Routes’, pp. 289-290.
53 Coryton and Margary, ‘Trade Routes’, p. 270.
natural geographies – the anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic conditions. The jagged morphology forced flows in particular directions, and the dry and wet seasons conditioned the annual low and high tides of long-distance communication. Similarly, the socio-political life in the separate Shan-Dai societies influenced the flows since the sawbwas controlled the basins through which the flows passed. The basin societies were also interdependent through kinship and competition. Simultaneously, the polities had to balance the pressures of the stronger powers – Qing China, the kingdom of Burma increasingly replaced by British Burma, and, temporarily, the Panthay regime. These anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic circumstances continuously changed over time, which simultaneously altered the conditions for the region’s social geography that channelled flows.

The British had a very selective reason for chasing information about the flows: they were seeking the most valuable current, only having eyes for profitable goods on a world market. However, they noticed in passing the many other currents, such as the trade internal to the hills, the religious institutional and theological influences as in the well-travelled and knowledgeable nuns, the inter-marriage of sawbwa families, and the devastating effects of armies. Material and immaterial value of the flows integrated into the basin societies, nurturing and altering them. Simultaneously, value and politics originating within the polities also joined the flows along the communication routes and spread across short or long distances. Information flowed quickly between the basins as the sawbwas’ correspondence in the southern polities show, and the sawbwas tried to attract the valuable commodity flows into their own realms. The absence of flows during the Panthay-Qing conflict drained the northern Shan-Dai societies of energy. When we follow the flows, the analysis will not be determined by the social or natural geography or the place, but it will observe how flows contributed to constituting places.

The obstacles, blockages, and friction, causing flows to slow or pass in other directions, stand out in situations when the most valuable flows disappear from a particular area. Sladen’s expedition entered right into such a void. They struggled daily to negotiate with their guides but occasionally hit a wall that their guides were also unable to pass. Such boundaries are explained by the alliances that crossed the social geography. Sawbwas negotiated alliances with each other and were under the influence of the neighbouring strong powers. Both the kingdom of Burma and the Qing state controlled the sawbwas by demanding services and tributes. When the Panthay entered into this equation, they tried to adopt the Qing administration’s procedures. It resulted in dynamically changing zones of control and influence.
References


Ma, Jianxiong. ‘The Dowry Land System and Chieftains of Shan-Dai Borderlands between Yunnan and Burmese Kingdoms from the Ming to the Qing Dynasties: The Construction of a Decentralized Institution in the Frontier’. In *The India-China Corridor workshop ‘Between Yunnan and Bengal: Process geographies in the making of Modern Asia’*. Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, China, 17–19 April 2018.


**About the author**

Gunnell Cederlöf, Professor of History at Linnaeus University, Sweden, and member of the Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies. She studies environmental, legal, and colonial history in India and South Asia. Publications include *Founding an Empire on India’s North-Eastern Frontiers, 1790-1840* (2014), *Landscapes and the Law* (2008) and *Ecological Nationalisms* (2006 with K. Sivaramakrishnan).