

## **ECONOMY OF MOGAUNG REGION DURING THE KONBAUNG PERIOD\***

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### **Abstract**

Mogaung region is rich with natural resources, well fertile soil and suitable climate for agriculture. Therefore, in the old days the people there never worried about food, shelter and clothing. Most of the people were agriculturalist by birth and calling. Their main job was to grow paddy in plain by ways of irrigating the field or wet-land paddy growing system. Jade business appeared in the reign of King Badon. Chinese speculators explored and achieved good fortune from jade business, which flourished in the reign of King Mindon. Another trade was Indian Rubber which was produced by the hill-tribes. Myanmar Kings got a considerable amount of taxes and duties from it were not more than Indian Rubber. There was another buying and selling of general and household article among hill-tribes, Shan, Myanmar and Yunnan Chinese. The medium for the trade transaction was silver or gold, but barter system was used for the trifle business.

**Keywords:** paddy, Indian rubber, jade

### **Introduction**

This Paper is about economy of Mogaung region during the Konbaung period. The economy of Mogaung Region (now Kachin State) could have been divided into three main topics: firstly the agriculture for the self-sufficient, secondly Jade and Indian rubber production, and thirdly general trading with Chinese merchants in the Konbaung Period. The weather was fair enough for the paddy cultivation and orchard for the various fruits, but it was just for household use except paddy which was sold out surplus from own consumption. Jade was abundant in that region but local consumption was not much in those days and it was exported for China by the Chinese jade traders. Indian rubber was in a great demand from China. The general trading with China was based mainly upon jade and Indian rubber for export and household effect; textile and assorted food for import. The medium for the trade was based upon silver or gold and sometime and mostly for hill-tribes it

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was bartered. In this paper, it will be described about the paddy cultivation, Indian rubber trade and jade trade. Moreover, the economic relations between the native people and Chinese merchants were also described.

### Physical geography

Physical geography of that region appears three main ranges. Those are namely *Kumon* range, *Kauk Kwé* range and Jade mine range. *Kumon* range starts from Hkamti-Long and extend to the North of Mogaung, *Kauk Kwé* range starts from near Mogaung runs southwards up to the west bank of Ayeyawady river and the last one Jade mine range situates along the west of Mogaung river. Mogaung river starts from Hukaung and flows through Hukaung valley at the north-west of Mogaung. Then it turns south easterly to flow into Ayeyawady of North Latitude 24° 53'. Mogaung river is called by the local people as *Nam Kaung* stream up to Kamaing village.<sup>1</sup> As for the plains in this region were as follows:

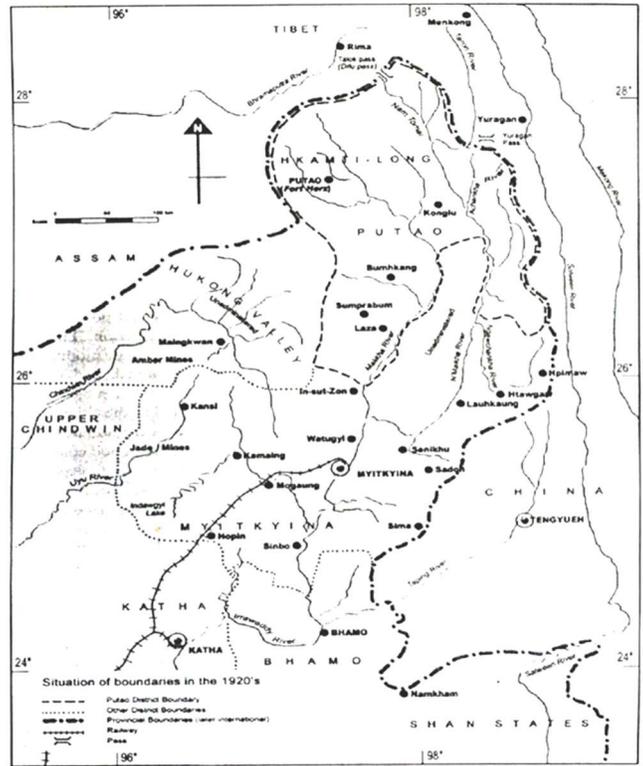
- (1)Putao valley along Malikha river
- (2)Hukaung valley along the rising place of Tanaikha or Chindwin river
- (3) Mogaung valley along Mogaung river
- (4)Ayeyawady river valley around Myitkyina and Waingmaw.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (a) Sir George Scott & Joseph Dantremer, *Burma British Rule*, Trans: by Sir George Scott, London, Fisher Unwin, 1916, 131-2 (Hereafter cited as: Scott & Dantremer, 1916).

(b) J.G. Scott, *Gazetteer Upper Burma and Shan States, Part I, Vol.I*, (In five volume) (Assisted by J.P.Hardiman), Rangoon, Government Printing, Burma, 1900, 21 (Hereafter cited as: Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.I*, 1900)

<sup>2</sup> Min Yu Swe, *Guide to travel in Ottra Plain: Kachin Land*, Yangon, Shwe Parabike Publication, 1998, 1 (Hereafter cited as : Min Yu Swe, 1998)



Map of Mogaung Region

Source: Sai Aung Tun, 2009, 172

The above valleys are the cultivable lands for that region. Those places are well fertile by the alluvial loam which is suitable for the tropical and subtropical plants. The climate favours especially for the fruit trees.<sup>3</sup>

The annual precipitation in the northernmost parts of this region gets 160 inches for the whole year. But the rainfall decreases gradually to the south till 80 inches of rainfall round the year. Temperature in the plain is 55° F for

<sup>3</sup> W.A.Hertz, *Burma Gazetteer: Myitkyina District, Vol.A*, Rangoon, Government Printing, Reprint, 1960, 25 (Hereafter cited as: Hertz, *Vol.A*, 1960)

the lowest and 98° F for the highest. But it differs from place to place. Some places on the hills freeze in the coldest times.<sup>4</sup>

### Agriculture

Shan, Shan-Bamar and *Kadu*, *Kanan* who lived in the plains earned their living by agriculture. Amongst the agriculture they mostly liked to cultivate paddy. They usually established the new paddy fields wherever they arrived at a new place. Their staple food is rice. So they always were thinking and inventing the new techniques and new instruments for paddy cultivation. Traditionally, they had got the system of wet-rice cultivation.<sup>5</sup> Cultivation of paddy by that way was also called *Yele* (or) lowland paddy cultivation.<sup>6</sup>

Other way of paddy cultivation was called “*Lé Pok*” cultivation method. Latter method of paddy cultivation started in February or March, harvested in December and paddy yielded twelve to twenty baskets for each plot which had broadcasted one basket of paddy seed.<sup>7</sup> The areas, south of Mogaung up to Mohnyin, Kamaing village to the north and Indawgyi to the west cultivated rice constantly.<sup>8</sup> The areas to the east of Mogaung cultivated rice as well. *Sinbo* village also, cultivated paddy by the methods of *Yele* and hill-side cultivation.<sup>9</sup>

Hkamti-Long, the northernmost part of Mogaung region, locates between North Latitudes 27° and 28° and between East Longitudes 97° and 98°. That place is today Putao Township and once it was called Hkamti-Long by the Shan. The people who lived there were Shan and Shan-Bamar called themselves Great Shan or Shan-gyi and Assamese called them

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<sup>4</sup> Min Yu Swe, 1998, 1

<sup>5</sup> Sai Aung Tun, *History of The Shan State: From Its origin to 1962*, Bangkok, O.S Printing House, 2009, 42-43. (Hereafter cited as: Sai Aung Tun, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Hertz, *Vol.A*, 1960, 105

<sup>7</sup> J.G. Scott, *Gazetteer Upper Burma and Shan States, Part I, Vol.II*, Rangoon, Government Printing, Burma, 1900, 355-6 (Hereafter cited as: Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900)

<sup>8</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.I*, 1900, 201.

<sup>9</sup> J.G. Scott, *Gazetteer Upper Burma and Shan States, Part II, Vol.III*, (In five volume), Rangoon, Government Printing, Burma, 1901, 171 (Hereafter cited as: Scott, *GUBSS, Part II, Vol.III*, 1901)



Elephant ploughing

Source: Sai Aung Tun, 2009, 43

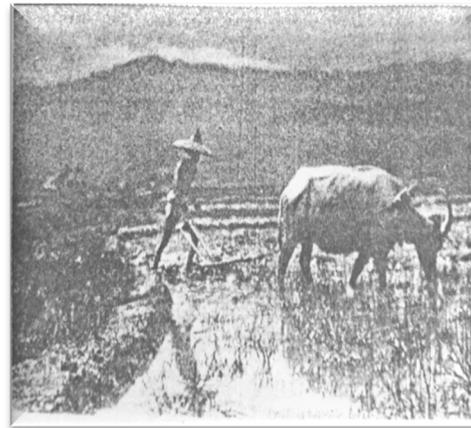
and harvested in July. For the second crop, it was planted in May and harvested in August. For the last crop of the year; it was grown as wet-land paddy, in the raining season.<sup>12</sup>

Buffalos, oxen and elephants were used in the agricultural works besides human labourers were also hired. At the early times of British annexation, labour charges for the whole paddy growing seasons was forty to forty-five baskets of paddy for one labourer. For a female labourer who transplanted the paddy seedlings was to be paid eight annas (one anna = the sixteenth part of a rupee) per day.<sup>13</sup>

It was not expected to spend much amount of expenditure for cultivation. The whole family member and domestic animal used to work cultivation together,<sup>14</sup> field labourer hiring in the old days was not very

Bor Hkamti.<sup>10</sup> In that area elephants were used to plough the fields. It is able to finish one or two acres per day by fixing two or three plough behind an elephant.<sup>11</sup>

In Hukaung area, paddy was grown three times a year. First time, paddy was planted in April



Buffalos ploughing

Source: Milne, 1910, 150

<sup>10</sup> J.G. Scott, *Gazetteer Upper Burma and Shan States, Part II, Vol.I*, Rangoon, Government Printing, Burma, 1901, 123 (Hereafter cited as: Scott, *GUBSS, Part II, Vol.I*, 1901)

<sup>11</sup> Sai Aung Tun, 2009, 43

<sup>12</sup> Kawlu Ma Naung, A.T.M, *The History of The Kachins of the Hukawng Vally*. (Trans & notes by J.L. Leyden), Bombay, H.W. Smithe India Press, no date. 64 (Hereafter cited as: Kawlu, *Kachins*)

<sup>13</sup> Hertz, *Vol A*, 1960, 10

<sup>14</sup> Sai Aung Tun, 2009, 42

common. On the other hand, collective farming and to help each other alternatively was the usual habits in those days. Buffalos and elephants were mostly used in the cultivation jobs because those animals were stronger and more durable than the bullocks, and Shans were familiar with and clever to handle them.

Paddy was enough for consumption in the plains and surplus of paddy was sold to the hilly regions.<sup>15</sup> Mr. Thomas Spears sent the price list of paddy to Arthur Phayre, in 18 March 1854 was follows:

- (1) Area in the south of Amarapura was 60 Kyats per 100 baskets
- (2) Village near Amaraapura was 50-57 Kyats per 100 baskets
- (3) Chindwin region, surrounding area of Moksobo was 52 Kyats per 100 baskets
- (4) Neighbouring area of Bhamo was 50 Kyats per 100 baskets<sup>16</sup>

It was possible to say that the prices were for the new crop of the year 1854. But C.H.E Adamson said that the price of paddy was 100 Kyats for 100 baskets and four Kyats per basket of rice in 1886 at Kamaing village, Mogaung Township.<sup>17</sup> The duration from 30 January 1889 to 4 May 1889 while the fighting appeared between the British army and Kachin rebels, 639 houses and 509000 lbs (227.5 tons) of paddy at 46 villages were burnt down. That was one of the points to estimate the yield of paddy in that region.<sup>18</sup> The amount of paddy which was burnt and destroyed even at the beginning of British occupation, while the country was in turmoil, was not a small amount. By that fact, it was able to estimate the agricultural condition and the size of its production. Paddy was cultivated in 30133 acres of the total cultivatable

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<sup>15</sup> Hertz, *Vol A*, 1960, 106

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Kyaw Win, *Introduction to Konbaung*, Yangon, Yarpyae Press, 2006, 73 (Hereafter cited as: Dr. Kyaw Win, 2006)

<sup>17</sup> C.H.E. Adamson, *A Short Account of An Expedition to the Jade Mines in Upper Burma in 1887-1888*, with a map, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, J Bell and Co., 1889, 41 (Hereafter cited as: Adamson, 1889)

<sup>18</sup> Hertz, *Vol A*, 1960, 42-48

land, 30774 acres, in Myitkyina district by the British Government's record which was compiled in the year of 1901-02.<sup>19</sup>

Other crops were grown, besides paddy, the major crops of that region. They were namely sweet potato, yam, beans (except ground-nut), and artichoke and eggplant.<sup>20</sup> Captain Hanney who arrived at amber mines area found that the tea plants were planted in that area. Similarly, he also had seen lemon and citron trees were grown well there.<sup>21</sup> Local people planted these vegetables and fruit just enough for their home consumption. At Sinbo village, the native people grew papayas, guavas, jack-fruits and pumpkins in their orchard.<sup>22</sup> Native Indian planted some sugar cane in their yard. Tobacco, both Havana and Virginia had been grown successfully in that area. Because of excellent soil and favourable climate for agriculture, the people in Mogaung region were able to obtain benefit as much as they could afford. Hertz remarked as follows: "This district can therefore never suffer from scarcity or famine, and it is more than able to maintain its population."<sup>23</sup>

### Indian Rubber

Another business of Mogaung region was Indian rubber trading. Indian rubber (*Ficus Elastica*) was no need to plant; it grew naturally in the forests of that region. Especially in Hukaung valley and upper parts of *Nam Kaung* river (or Mogaung river) where there were the altitude of 2000 feet to 3000 feet above sea level. The heights of those trees were about 200 feet and girth round the outside of their aerial roots of 100 to 130 feet.<sup>24</sup> Those were not the same as the rubber trees which were planted in lower Myanmar. Latter called in common names as *Kyetpaung* or *Kawbat* and the botanical name is *Hevea*

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<sup>19</sup> *Burma Gazetteer, Myitkyina District, Vol.B., Including Town and Village Census Tables No.28*, Rangoon, Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1913, 11 (Hereafter cited as: *Myitkyina, Vol B*, 1913)

<sup>20</sup> Scott & Dantremer, 1916, 109

<sup>21</sup> (a) Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 290

(b) Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, London, The Cresset Press, MCMLXII, 90 (Hereafter cited as: Woodman, MCMLXII)

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part II, Vol.III*, 1901, 171

<sup>23</sup> Hertz, *Vol A*, 1960, 104, 108

<sup>24</sup> (a) Hertz, *Vol A*, 1960, 111

(b) Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol II*, 1900, 325

brasiliensis.<sup>25</sup> Native people took the sap of Indian rubber by scraping its bark with a knife. Kingdom Ward described in his book “In Farthest Burma” that “We saw many trees criss-crossed all over with V-shaped incisions made to tap the latex, some so exhausted that they already dead.”<sup>26</sup>

It was not found in gregariously, scattered 200 yards to 300 yards and found 48 trees per acre in average. Big Indian rubber trees were found at *Loima* hill and the headwaters of Nam Kaung river.<sup>27</sup> The native people carried out the rubber balls by mules to *Laban* village. Thence they brought it to Mogaung by boats. About 1907, the price of rubber was kyats 2.8.0 per 100 viss at Laban, but local one viss was 1½ actual viss. The traders did their business by paying tax to the Kachin chiefs of Hukaung valley and amber mine area.<sup>28</sup> Most of the buyers were Chinese and they used to buy in barter system. They went to the uphill villages by mule to change rubber with piece goods, blankets, *pasos*, kerchiefs, yarn, blades, salt, matches, kerosene oil, cheroots, tobacco, and tinned-milk.<sup>29</sup> Native of Kamaing village participated as middlemen between the Kachin and Chinese, or as the boatmen to convey the Indian rubber.<sup>30</sup> Having been bought the rubber, sometimes Kachin workers brought rubber balls by boat and raft down the river *Indaw*.<sup>31</sup>

However, in Konbaung period, the sector of rubber trade was not negligible by seeing following comparison of its duty collection. The Tariff of 1883, expressed to collect duty on rubber trade at Mogaung and Bhamo areas.<sup>32</sup> A man called *Let Wut* and his Chinese group got the right to collect

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<sup>25</sup> W. John. Kress, et.al, *A Checklist of the Trees, Shrubs, Herbs and Climbers of Myanmar*, Washington D.C., Department of National Museum of Natural History, 2003, 231 (Hereafter cited as: Kress et.al, 2003)

<sup>26</sup> F. Kingdom Ward (Captain), *In Farthest Burma*, London, Seeley, Service and Co. Limited, 1921, 265 (Hereafter cited as: Ward, 1921)

<sup>27</sup> (a) Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 325

(b) Rev.O Hanson, *The Kachins: Their Customs and Traditions*, Yangon, Americam Baptist Mission Press, F.O.Phinney, Supt. 1913, 38 (Hereafter cited as: Hanson, 1913)

<sup>28</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 328

<sup>29</sup> Hertz, *Vol A*, 1960, 115

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 287

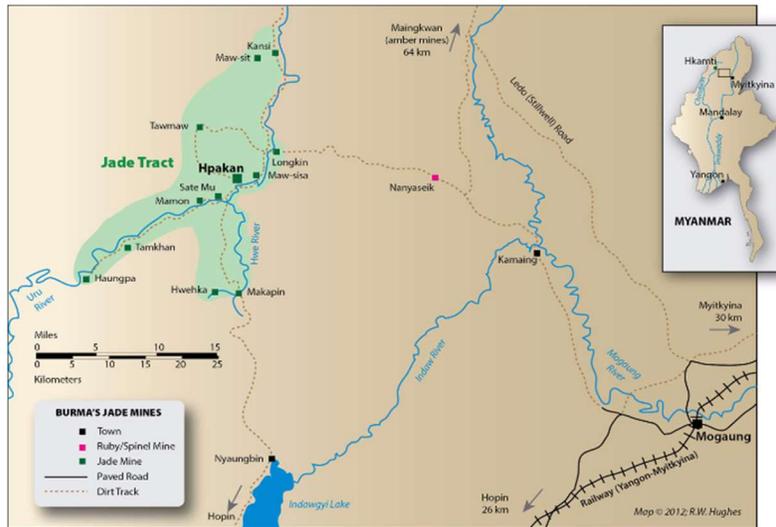
<sup>31</sup> Adamson, 1889, 60

<sup>32</sup> Ma Kyan, *Revenue Affair in Konbaung Period*, Yangon, Monywa Press, 2009, 142 (Hereafter cited as: Kyan, 2009)

rubber duty for the year of 1883-84 with a payment of kyats 60,000.<sup>33</sup> Major portion of rubber duty was got from Mogaung forest. Because, Scott described in his book “*GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*” that Mogaung rubber duty was kyats 40,000 for the year of 1884. In the same year, Mogaung jade duty was only kyats 5800.<sup>34</sup> In comparison, it was found that rubber duty was seven times of jade duty. Therefore, rubber business was competed with jade business in those days in Mogaung region. Jade was well-known, but rubber trade was important in duty aspect, because it earned more duty in late Konbaung period.

### Jade

Another major business in that region was jade mining and trading business. In the early days Chinese had found jade between North Latitude 25° 28' and 25° 52' and between East Longitude 96° 7' and 96° 24' where *Phakant*, *Lonkin*, and *Tawmaw* of Mogaung Township situated.<sup>35</sup>



**Jade mines map**

Source: [www.lotus-gemology.com](http://www.lotus-gemology.com)

<sup>33</sup> Daw Kyan, *Final Episode of the Kingdom of Myanmar*, Yangon, State Historical Department Sarpay Beikman, 1978, 201-2 (Hereafter cited as: Kyan, 1978)

<sup>34</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 425

<sup>35</sup> *Culture and Traditional Customs of National Tribes: Kachin*, Yangon, Burma, Socialist Programme Party, 1967, 15 (Hereafter cited as: *Culture: Kachin*, 1967)

After Sino-Myanmar peace treaty of 1769; Chinese jade trader, miners and jade cutters came into the jade mines more than before.<sup>36</sup> In 1784 Chinese entrepreneurs found the quality jade on the right side of *Uru* river.<sup>37</sup>

Jade boulders were found also at *Mamon* jade mines. Jade was possible to produce along Uru river bank to reach at *Sanka* village.<sup>38</sup> *Uru Seywa*: namely (1) *Haungpa* (2) *Kwan-hé* (3) *Sésin* (4) *Shwe-twin* (5) *Man-tan* (6) *Lé-Sé* (7) *Hmaw-Sé* (8) *Man-hé* (9) *Pha-tin* (10) *Man-Sein*, produced superior quality jade stones.<sup>39</sup>

Chinese knew the quality of jade well and gave special consideration. They had concerned jade trade generation by generation. Only the Chinese did



Imperial Jade

Source: Beauty of Myanmar  
Jade facebook.com

cutting and polishing the jade in those days. Stones for finger rings, brooches, bracelets and drinking cups were made from jade. Chinese believed that jade had medical virtue and mostly used the jade containers to put their food.<sup>40</sup> Therefore principal buyers of the jade were Chinese merchants from Momein (now Teng Chong). They came in to buy jade by crossing Yunnan border to reach *Talawgyi* and they continued to the jade mine.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese came into the mine at the end of rainy season. But they did not remain in the district when the monsoon came back. Jade stones were extracted by the elephants to the *Nam Kaung* stream, because Kachin leaders displeased the Shan or Chinese merchants to enter their area. The traders conveyed the jade stone by floating

<sup>36</sup> Dr.Khin Maung Nyunt, "History of Myanmar Jade Trade till 1938", *Selected Writings of Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, Yangon*, Myanmar Historical Commission, University Press, 2004, 22 (Hereafter cited as: Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, 2004)

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Kyaw Win, 2006, 62

<sup>38</sup> A.W.G. Bleek, "Jadite in the Kachin Hills", *Records of The Geological Survey of India, Volume XXXVI*, Calcutta, Govern of India, 1908, 255-6 (Hereafter cited as: Bleek, 1908)

<sup>39</sup> Min Yu Swe, 1998, 47

<sup>40</sup> Woodman, MCMLXII, 90

<sup>41</sup> Min Yu Swe, 1998, 54

on the raft to reach Mogaung. Mogaung became the centre of jade trade where buying and selling of rough jade stones were made at *Shwe tone Chone*,<sup>42</sup> the opposite bank of Mogaung.<sup>43</sup> Shwe tone Chone appeared to be the given name in those days. But investigations for that place was failed, even the local elder persons could not point out the place where it was.<sup>44</sup>

Jade stones from mines were carried to *Namya-Kyouk-Seik*. That was a river port village formed with Shan quarter and Kachin quarter. Shan quarter had some small shops.<sup>45</sup> From that village first batch of jade stones were carried down Mogaung river to reach Sinbo village on the bank of Ayeyawady river, in 1805.<sup>46</sup>

Myanmar King's collectorate was established at Mogaung in 1806. One military officer and a troop of thirty soldiers stationed at the jade mines during the working season.<sup>47</sup>

Actually, the King's collectorate for the jade was at *Tapaw* village which was a day's journey by boat from Mogaung. Duty for the jade was collected 33 percent *ad valorem* and issued permits which granted no more tax in the Kingdom of Myanmar. It was needed to pay hereditary tax to Kachin chiefs. That tax was called *Manhumanta* (Shans taxes collected for Mineral deposits) and to pay ten percent of the value of jade which was over 100 kyats, for the stones valued less than 100 kyats were exempted.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, the Chinese merchants estimated that jade duty was not more than 6000 kyats for the early years. Jade duty yielded about 21000 kyats per year, in 1836-40, the fruitful years of jade trade. But it was estimated not more than 3000 kyats per year after those years.<sup>49</sup> Those estimations were

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<sup>42</sup> Than Tun, *Historical Travelogue* (three volume), Yangon, Pyaesone Pree, 2004, 301 (Hereafter cited as: Than Tun, 2004)

<sup>43</sup> Andrain Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, *The Stone of Heaven*, Boston, Little Brown and Company, 2002, 74-75 (Hereafter cited as: Levy & Scott, 2002)

<sup>44</sup> Interview: Daw Saw Kyi, Age 95, La / 73, A Lé Yat, Mogaung, 10.6.2017

<sup>45</sup> Adamson, 1889, 59

<sup>46</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 280-81

<sup>47</sup> (a) Than Tun, 2004, 301

(b) Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 281

<sup>48</sup> (a) Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, 2004, 24

(b) Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 281

<sup>49</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol.II*, 1900, 282

probably under estimation of the Chinese merchants. Therefore it was not easy to estimate the jade trade by looking the duty collected.

### Payin or Amber

At that time amber mining was also a rather good business at Mogaung region, Amber was found in the south-west corner of Hukaung valley and south of *Mayankwan* village. Actual amber mines reached down to the depth of 50 Fathom (300 feet or 90 meter) under ground level. Amber resin sometimes with a size of one foot long and six inches in thickness had lain in the hard blue clay.<sup>50</sup> It was the resin of pine trees which had lain under the ground for many years, became amber.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Griffith arrived at *Maing-Kwan* amber mine in 26 March 1837 and described as follows:

The article is much prized for ornaments by the Chinese and Singohos, but is never of much value, five rupees being a good price for a first-rate pair of earrings. MeinKhôn is visited by parties of Chinese for the purpose of procuring this article.<sup>52</sup>

Payin (or Amber) was found and produced at *Shinbon*, *Lajamaw* and *Kadut Kha* river.<sup>53</sup> Lajamaw village was at the upper part of *Mung Gawn* (Maing Kwan) river. The local chief was from the “*N’ Tawng Nawng*” Kachin sub-tribe. Najje Bum amber mines which located seven miles away from Maing-Kwan, was worked by the Shan from Yunnan and they submitted tributes to local Kachin chiefs.<sup>54</sup>

Payin or amber was used in Myanmar for many centuries as rosaries, beads, ear cylinders and Buddha statues. In Konbaung period, the price of amber was 25 kyats per viss (3.6 lb or 1.633 kg).<sup>55</sup> Today it is popular and

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<sup>50</sup> L.W. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burmah and North Eastern Frontier*, London, Mac Millian and Co., Limited 1914, 178-9 (Hereafter cited as: Shakespear, 1914)

<sup>51</sup> Min Gaung Oo, *To The Golden River of Northernmos Myanmar: Travel to Tanaikha-Chindwin-I*, Yangon, Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1986, 94 (Hereafter cited as: Min Gaung Oo, 1986)

<sup>52</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol. II*, 1900, 291

<sup>53</sup> *Culture: Kachin*, 1967, 15

<sup>54</sup> Kawlu, *Kachins*, 63

<sup>55</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part I, Vol. II*, 1900, 294

people believe that it can cure some diseases and good for relieving muscle pains and maintain nerves system. Some like to make ornaments as pendant or bracelets.



Rare Amber

Source: [www.realrareantiques.com](http://www.realrareantiques.com)

### **Trade**

The prices of the most important and the briskest commodities which were trading between Chinese and Myanmar merchants in 1868 at Mogaung and Bhamo regions were as follows:

- (1) Opium - Poppy plants which produce opium, were cultivated on the hills of that region. Kachin, Shan and Chinese consumed opium. Its price was twelve to fifteen kyats a viss at Bhamo.
- (2) Rice - There were varieties of colour and quality. Local people preferred red rice and fifteen annas per basket.
- (3) Paddy - Paddy was rarely sold. Kachin and other bought when their land inundated or failed. The price was nine annas per basket.
- (4) Tobacco - It was grown on the Kachin hill, Shan valleys<sup>56</sup> and alluvial lands, Sinbo, *Hnokkyo*, *Hmangin*, *Pinlon* and *Manpwa*

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<sup>56</sup> Captain A. Bowers, *Bhamo Expedition: Report on the Practicability of Re-opening the Trade Route between Burma and Western China*, Rangoon, American Mission Press, 1869, 120-21 (Bowers, 1869)

villages of Sinbo district which were included in Mogaung region cultivated it on the sand banks extensively and successfully. On the Hnokkyo Island it was broadcasted in October and transplanted in January or February. It was plucked in April till water increased in the river. There yielded 4000 viss per annum and the price were 22 to 25 kyats for 100 viss.<sup>57</sup>

- (5) Indigo - It was obtained from Shan villages, and used for dying. The price was eight annas per viss.
- (6) Jaggery - It was a favourite commodity for the native people and Chinese to prepare food. The supply was drawn entirely from Momein. The price was four annas per viss.
- (7) Betel-nut - It was in great demand in the Shan State and Momein. But the whole supply was from Lower Myanmar. The price was varied from twelve annas to one kyat per viss at Bhamo.
- (8) Cutch - It was mixed in chewing betel-nut and used in dying purpose. The price was eight annas per viss.<sup>58</sup>
- (9) Cowries - Kachin, Lisu and Palaung pleased to wear cowries. Shan also used sometimes. They liked it to use ornamentation and changed with their forest produce.
- (10) Beads and Trinkets - Those were useful in barter, Native tribes liked them very much.<sup>59</sup>

Kachin bartered pigs, fruits, potatoes and opium for salt, cowries, Turkey red cloth and white long cloth.<sup>60</sup>

The two most important articles of trade between China and Myanmar in those days were gold and opium. Gold was exposed in the market as gold leaf and small gold ingots. Gold leaf was more preferred to gold ingot

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<sup>57</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part II, Vol.III*, 1901, 171

<sup>58</sup> Bowers, 1869, 122-24

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 124

<sup>60</sup> Bowers, 1869, 19

because buyers were afraid of cheating and ingots were difficult to estimate its quality. So the value of gold ingot was eight annas less than the value of gold leaf per tical (unit of weight approx. 14 gm). The price of gold varied from ten to twenty ticals of silver for one tical of gold, but in 1863 it was 19 ticals of silver in average.<sup>61</sup>

Another article, opium was produced and sold by Kachin and Shan. But their products packed carelessly and often impure. Opium from China was packed with paper and labelled. It was attractive in the market. The price of opium from China was varying from ten to fifty ticals of silver, but the average prices were 20 ticals, 25 ticals and 30 ticals of silver per viss.<sup>62</sup>

About a thousand Chinese came down yearly with five hundred mules conveying pots, *Kawsaws* (or carpets), cloth, opium and spirits from *Mainгла* and *Santa* to jade mine area by crossing Waingmaw. But they did not sell their goods at Waingmaw or elsewhere. They conveyed them to reach the jade mines.<sup>63</sup> Among the Chinese merchants, jade mine workers had come along together because the eight Shan towns between Yunnan and Kachin mountains of Myanmar were thickly populated and cheap workers were available.<sup>64</sup>

Silk, Ceramic, Yarn, Polishing stone (to shine gems), Carpet, Furred jacket, Blanket, Straw hat, Assorted paper, Flints, Wax, Ham, Duck egg, Walnut, Cinnabar, Chinese traditional medicine, Tobacco pipes and other household goods were majority of imported commodities from China.<sup>65</sup> These were distributed from Bhamo to the whole Myanmar. After 1863, England made cloth, wool and cotton cloth were imported from Lower Myanmar. Cotton was exported to China<sup>66</sup> over one million pounds weight per year.

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<sup>61</sup> Clement William, *Through Burmah to Western China, being Notes of a Journey in 1863*, Edinburgh, William Blackwood and Sons, MDCCCLXVIII, 34 (Hereafter cited as: William, MDCCCLXVIII)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 35

<sup>63</sup> Scott, *GUBSS, Part II, Vol.III*, 1901, 331

<sup>64</sup> William, MDCCCLXVIII, 31

<sup>65</sup> U Tin, *Document Relating to the Administration of the Myanmar Kings and Penal Law or Royal order of Bodawpaya, Volume V*, Yangon, Ministry of Culture, Department of Cultural Institute, 1983, 5 (U Tin, 1983)

<sup>66</sup> William, MDCCCLXVIII, 35

Bhamo was at the centre of trade and commerce in those days. People from everywhere all over Upper Myanmar gathered there for buying and selling. Trade volume in the year 1885-86 was raised up to nine hundred thousand kyats, at Bhamo. The value of the goods which were imported from China was one hundred and twenty thousand kyats. Trade volume of the whole country, Upper Myanmar, was estimated over 8.6 million. That was not a small amount for that time being.<sup>67</sup>

Jade and Indian rubber, the major products of Mogaung region, were also exported to China by the Chinese merchants. Therefore they had provided large warehouses for their cargo at Bhamo.<sup>68</sup> According to the localities, peddlers carrying goods on their shoulders or hawkers wandered to sell their goods and sometimes they conveyed by boats or by bullock carts. They reached many towns and villages even in the hilly regions. They had to pay taxes, as for the entrance fees to the respective local chiefs.<sup>69</sup>



Shan Traders

Source: Shakespear, 1914, 164

Local products from *Tamu*, *Khan-pat*, *Maing-Kaing*, *Maing-Nyaung* and *Uru* ten villages, namely bee-wax, elephant tusks, Indian rubber, jade and pa-yin or amber were carried and sold at *Kin-dat* and *Yu-wa* on the bank of

<sup>67</sup> Daw Kyan, *Situation of Myanmar 1885-86*, Yangon, Sarpay Beikman Press, 1978, 30-31 (Hereafter cited as: Kyan, 1978)

<sup>68</sup> William, MDCCCLXVIII, 84

<sup>69</sup> Dr. Toe Hla, *Konbaung, the Golden Country of Alaungmintaya*, second edition, Yangon, Thaukky Press, 2002, 191.

Chindwin river. Jade trade in those ports, in the year 1885-1886 was valued over one hundred thousand kyats. The values of products from Mogaung were carried and sold at Bhamo in that year was as follows:<sup>70</sup>

Valuable jade stones	- 150,000 kyats
Pa-yin or amber	- 5000 kyats
Elephant tusk	- 6500 kyats
Bee-wax	- 1000 kyats
<hr/>	
Total	- 162500 kayts

The economy of Mogaung region depended upon the internal affairs of China. If it was unrest, the trade would have to stop. So, in 1841 the first Anglo-Chinese Opium War, 1850 Taiping rebellion and 1857 Panthay rebellion slowed down the trade between China and Myanmar.<sup>71</sup> Consequently those affected the economy of Mogaung region as well.

Dawson described in “Gazetteer Bhamo District” that “...expect for the first twelve years of preceding 1868, the routes were generally opened and large quantities of cotton and other goods continued to be exported”.<sup>72</sup>

### **Conclusion**

During the Konbaung period, Mogaung region was flourished by producing jade and Indian rubber in a wide scale and it had enough food by paddy cultivation. Local people used Chinese household goods and clothing which were imported from China via Bhamo. They made business with other forest produce just for home consumption. Native tribes were simple and honest, they contented their lives and livelihood was peaceful and most of them were not interested in trading, they concerned as brokers or labourer for the Chinese merchants. Chinese merchant accumulated great fortune by exploiting from the jade and Indian rubber trade and from the import goods as well. However, Mogaung was the trade centre at that time and thrived with

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<sup>70</sup> Kyan, 1978, 31, 206

<sup>71</sup> Hertz, Vol A, 1960, 121

<sup>72</sup> G.W. Dawson, *Burma Gazetteer: The Bhamo District*, (reprint), Rangoon, Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, 1960, 19.

the buyer and seller from China. In modern days the communication and transportation were more promoted and the trade practices were changed for the jade trade business. So, the trade centre move to Mandalay and Yangon. Indian rubber trade was substituted by the rubber which produced in lower Myanmar. Amber trade was popular in the year 2000s and it was also centred in Mandalay and Yangon. Therefore, Mogaung was no more crowded and merely became a transit town for those trades.

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#### **Interview**

Saw Kyi, Daw, Age 95, A Lé Yat, Mogaung, 10.5.2017