

Thesis Title Lan Na Politics under Burmese Rule during the Years
Author Miss Laddawan Saeslay
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Examining Committee:

Dr. M.R.	Rujaya	Abhakorn	Chairman
Dr.	Thanet	Charoenmuang	member
Assist. Prof.	Usanee	Thongchai	member

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to study the changes in Lan Na politics and government under the Burmese rule from A.D. 1558-1774. This study uses the data taken from the translations in Thai and English of the primary historical documents, ie Lan Na, Burmese and European documents.

The result of the study shows that the changes in the states of the upper region of Southeast Asia, whether they were the political demise of the Mang Rai dynasty, the expansion of the Toungoo dynasty into the region including Lan Na, and the conduct of government policy in Lan Na, were brought about partly by the commercial adjustments that took place in Southeast Asia from the 15th to 17th centuries.

There was a certain amount of continuity in the Lan Na political system from the times of the Mang Rai dynasty which was

characterized by a high degree of political decentralization. The search for economic gains from commercial prosperity by the local rulers made it impossible for Chiang Mai to be the real political centre of Lan Na. The kings of the Mang Rai dynasty had to depend on the power of the nobility who always had the rights to select and depose them.

The Burmese had the clear economic, political and military objectives: the control over the trade routes, the natural resources, the man-power and the strategic locations in the area between the Salween and the Mekong rivers. Great importance was attached to Chiang Mai and Chiang Saen, but as the Burmese empire was widespread covering several ethnic groups, with the Mons as the main group who did not want to be under Burmese domination, political fragmentation was always present. Whenever a Burmese king became weak, as during the years 1600-1614, 1660-1664, and 1715-1752, the political factions in the various muang in Lan Na would declare their independence from both the Burmese and Chiang Mai. At the same time, Chiang Mai would turn to pay homage to the kings of Ayutthaya. Whenever the central government in Burma became stronger again, Lan Na would be drawn into the Burmese political system once more.

Before the late 17th century, the Burmese kings would elevate the status of the Chiang Mai rulers as tributary kings above those of other rulers in Lan Na who could still keep their rights and pri-

privileges, but during the latter part of the Nyaungyan dynasty, that is after 1664, the Burmese court made Chiang Mai and Lan Na directly under the central government. The rulers were appointed either as "Myo Wun" or "Myothugyi" to facilitate the mobilization of man-power and the collection of economic benefits.

The periodic disruptions of the Burmese rule in Lan Na made it possible for the decentralized system of the Mang Rai dynasty to continue, but the lowering of the indigenous rulers' political status to become Burmese court officials in the 17th century resulted in their loss of economic control in their areas. When the central power failed, the Burmese nobility took over from the king, leading to the harsh extraction of local taxes in return for favors and better appointments. These unpopular measures forced some Lan Na political leaders to reject the rulers' and at times accepted holy men or charismatic monks as their political leaders instead.

In addition, at the beginning of the 18th century the Burmese officials' conflicts of economic interests with some of the local Lan Na leaders, such as Phaya Cha Ban in Chiang Mai and Phaya Kawila in Lampang, led these indigenous rulers to ally with King Taksin of Thonburi in their effort to drive out the Burmese from Lan Na in 1774.