

**Burmese Teak Traders:
Migrant Entrepreneurs in Northern Siam, c. 1850-1930**

Thanyarat Apiwong
Faculty of Humanities
Chiang Mai University
Thailand

Abstract

Historians have often emphasized Burmese exclusion from 'modern' economic activity and instead focused on the activities of British Indian subjects during the period of colonial rule. The impression given is that British Burmese subjects struggled to find themselves in modern entrepreneurial roles. However, this is not the case in the teak industry. The role of Burmese entrepreneurs as teak traders in colonial Burma was more important than Indian entrepreneurs. Burmese teak traders were hired as contractors by both European firms and the colonial Forest Department. In the late nineteenth century, Burmese traders started moving between Burma and Siam to play a crucial role in the teak business in Northern Siam as teak forests were rapidly depleted on British colonial soil. Burmese teak traders made use of their legal status as British subjects to support and protect their business interests in Siam. They obtained a privileged status in living as British-protected migrants in Siam. This paper argues that the nature of teak extraction determined the indispensability of Burmese cooptation, and meant that the industry could be as equally shaped by the Burmese as by the British. It also reflects the dynamic generated by a colonized state's proximity to a political unit of informal empire, and how these political differences can be manipulated by non-state actors on the ground.

Keywords: Northern Siam, Burma/Myanmar, Burmese migrant, Burmese entrepreneur, Teak

Introduction

The marginalization of the Burmese under colonial rule has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Studies such as those of J. S. Furnivall (1948), Michael Adas (1974), and Robert Taylor (1987) have argued that the Burmese were economically marginalized by Europeans, Indians, and Chinese under the colonial system. The Burmese were at the bottom of the social hierarchy in British Burma because they could not compete with these migrant groups within their own country. But the economic status of Burmese migrants who lived outside British Burma has received little notice. The stories of Burmese who traveled to a foreign country as migrants to seek economic opportunity have been neglected. Although British Burma was an important element in stimulating Siamese economic growth, especially in northern Siam, historians have seldom appreciated the role of Burmese migrants as entrepreneurs in Siam during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is plenty of evidence that under British rule, Burmese migrants moved back and forth between British Burma and Siam becoming prominent entrepreneurs in northern Siam. They not only played a crucial

role in facilitating the teak business, acting as middlemen between the British and local populations in Siam, but they also served to create the networks that bound the sinews of informal empire, between Siam and colonial Burma, together.

This paper draws primarily on a range of archival documents in Thailand and the United Kingdom, oral accounts and the material culture of Buddhist monasteries in northern Siam, which were patronized by Burmese migrants, to construct an analysis of the relationship between Burmese teak traders and the local northern Siamese community.

This paper will argue that the nature of teak extraction in northern Siam determined the indispensability of Burmese cooptation, and meant that the industry could be as equally shaped by the Burmese as by the British. It also reflects the dynamic generated by a colonized state's proximity to a political unit of informal empire, and how these political differences could be manipulated by non-state actors on the ground. The paper is divided into three sections. Firstly, the transformation of the relationship between Siam and Burma will be examined. Secondly, the role of British and Burmese as teak entrepreneurs in Siam will be explored. Finally, the ways in which Burmese entrepreneurs helped to shape the local political, economic and social environment in Siam's northern periphery will be recounted.

The Changing Relationship: From Warfare to Trade

Prior to the nineteenth century, the relationship between Siam (the *Thai* Central Chao Phraya Basin state) and Burma (the *Burman* dominated Irrawaddy Basin state) was mainly shaped by warfare. Both kingdoms had launched attacks on each other with the principal aim of capturing people to populate their territories and meet their growing labor needs. For example, large numbers of war captives from Siam were resettled in Burma after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1569 and 1767 respectively (Sunait, 2007; Pamaree, 2010). The northern Tai *mueang*, designated Lanna, often called Lao, and traditionally centered on Chiang Mai (what became 'northern Siam') was a zone of frequent contestation between the two and had at times been a tributary state of Siam, at times a tributary of Burma. Parts of Lanna were recurrently depopulated by Burmese authorities after it had been conquered by the Burmese and remained under its sway for more than two centuries (1558-1774). Nonetheless, historians of Lanna have rarely mentioned the settlement of people in the other direction, *from* Burma, into northern Siam during this period (Sarassawadee, 2015; Laddawan, 2002).

In the late eighteenth century, from 1774, the Lanna nobility joined the Bangkok-based King Taksin (r.1767-1782) in driving out the Burmese from their *mueang*, placing them once more in the Siamese orbit. With dependent tributary status reconstituted, the King of Siam in Bangkok gained authority to appoint local chiefs (*Chao*) to rule the city-states in what became Northern Siam, including Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Nan and Phrae. In turn, the local rulers were responsible for preserving the security of the frontiers and collecting manpower from neighboring territories in order to restore the towns and increase their populations. This policy of forced settlements was continued through the reigns of the first three Chakri kings. It became known in Thai as "*kep phak sai sa kep kha sai muang*" (*Put vegetables into baskets, and people into towns*) (Kraisri, 1965). Volker Grabowsky suggests that campaigns of forced settlement by capturing people in Burma to settle in northern Siam started in 1782, shortly after King Rama I (r.1782-1809) had founded the Chakri dynasty. The rulers in northern

Siam played a significant role in preserving the frontiers and collecting manpower from neighboring territories such as Chiang Tung, Muang Sat and Muang Yong (Grabowsky, 1999).

The violent relationship between Siam and Burma gradually declined after British forces defeated Burma in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826). In 1826, King Bagyidaw (r.1819-1837) was forced to sign the Treaty of Yandabo and cede Arakan and Tenasserim to the British. Within a decade, the British government had developed access to the teak forests in Tenasserim for logging. Moulmein became a center for the teak industry and shipbuilding in British Burma and Southeast Asia, which also exported teak to the European market. It was estimated that Moulmein exported around 50 to 200 tons of teak; and eighteen ships were built during 1830 to 1836. The British continued using teak for shipbuilding, which gradually increased to as much as 4,527 tons (Grabowsky and Turton, 2003, p. 88; Bryant, 1997, p. 27). European timber merchants hired local Burmese as laborers and contractors to extract teak from the forests. These Burmese workers were paid advances for cutting trees in order to collect a specified amount of teak for delivery to the European timber firms. The Burmese could generate high incomes as teak contractors. They not only worked for the British timber traders but also for the Forest Department of British Burma as they wanted to maximize the output of teak logs. For this reason, the best teak tracts in Lower Burma were rapidly exhausted by the late 1840s (Bryant, 1997, pp. 27-30). The Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852 extended commercially exploitable forested areas under British rule. After the war of 1852, the British government annexed Yangon and Pegu. The British authorities now governed Lower Burma that included Arakan, Tenasserim, Pegu and Yangon and extended the teak extraction areas to Pegu. This led some timber merchants to move to neighboring territories near the Salween River and Northern Siam. British control over Burmese teak reserves was sealed by the conquest of Upper Burma following the Anglo-Burmese War of 1885, which in turn stimulated demand for teak logs from northern Siam. The conquest also brought the entire population within the boundaries of the newly constituted political entity of 'British Burma' a province of the Bengal Presidency, under British crown rule. This meant that, potentially, the entire population, regardless of ethnicity, could now claim or be designated 'British subject' status.

From the 1840s, the relationship between Siam and Burma had changed from traditional warfare to one based on modern commerce. The growth of the teak industry in British Burma subsequently influenced the relationship between Burma and Siam. One reason was that the policy of forcibly repopulating northern Siam was ended in the 1840s (Wyatt and Aroonrat, 1995, pp.140-184). A further reason was that forests in northern Siam became a significant global teak extraction source with its export route to Moulmein. In the 1840s, the high demand for teak logs in Lower Burma stimulated the emergence of a modern teak trade in northern Siam. The abundance of teak in northern Siam attracted timber merchants to the area to start their own teak enterprises. They crossed the border from British Burma into northern Siam in order to invest in the forestry business. Forests in northern Siam were located near the Salween River from whence it was possible to float teak logs down to the port of Kado in Moulmein.

Evidence from Thai archival documents records that, in 1842, the Chief of Chiang Mai, on behalf of local chiefs in Lampang, Lamphun and Tak, sent a letter to King Rama III (r.1824-1851) asking permission to sell teak logs to Mon and Burman merchants, who held British subject status from

Moulmein. The king did not see teak forests as an important commodity and he allowed local chiefs, who had obtained the right to exploit the forests by dint of their position, to continue selling teak logs to British Burmese subjects as they had done before 1842 (*"Khanakammakan"*, 1999, pp. 71-72). From this date, Mon and Burman merchants, who were formally British subjects from Moulmein, started purchasing teak logs beyond the boundaries of their province in independent northern Siam. It was in this new cross-border context that British Burmese subjects became teak entrepreneurs, playing a significant role in exporting teak logs from northern Siam to British Burma. News of a successful teak business brought more migrants from British Burma to pursue their own economic opportunities in northern Siam, extending to the activities of gem mining and textile trading.

Establishing Teak Business

By the mid-nineteenth century, the expansion of teak forest extraction had moved across the border into northern Siam, pioneered by Burmese entrepreneurs. The cross border timber encouraged a growing commercial economy in the borderlands between British Burma and northern Siam. From 1835, teak logs were floated down the Salween River from northern Siam to Moulmein (Brailey, 1986, p. 8). Bangkok started taking a share in the down-river floatation of teak logs from 1851; the teak was floated down the Ping River, which joined the Chao Phraya River further downstream (Hallett, 1890, p. 103).

Although, as much of the literature has stressed, the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Siam and Great Britain (signed at Bangkok, April 18, 1855 and known as the 'Bowring Treaty') opened the country to Western capital markets and created the conditions that stimulated trade in primary goods, such as teak, on an unprecedented scale, the northern Siam teak trade had been developed before the Bowring Treaty. When the Siamese government signed the Bowring Treaty, it allowed European merchants to trade freely in all Siamese seaports and reside in Bangkok. The treaty, however, did not extend to the tributary states of Siam. British Burmese subjects were not lawfully allowed to trade in Siam until the treaty was signed in 1856.⁵ In practice, Burmese teak traders could set themselves up as teak contractors in northern Siam to supply teak logs for the British firms in British Burma long before the Treaty of 1856 was issued. This is because they were better equipped, socially and culturally, to build personal connections with local chiefs in northern states whereas the Europeans were not.

By the 1850s, northern Siamese teak production had become the most important export commodity from the region and the most important source of the local chiefs' income. Although the chiefs lacked the skills, extended networks and possibly the motivation to extract teak on a commercial scale by themselves, they had the authority to grant teak concessions. This involved receiving an amount of money from those Burmese timber merchants who in exchange received the concessions. Although it is difficult to determine the actual income of the local chiefs from the teak forests, the quantity of teak exports give some indication of the chiefs' revenue from this source. The amount of teak timber production in northern Siam was considerable, being continually exported to British Burma reflecting the possibility of high returns for the concession providers. From 1856 to 1859, it

⁵ See the Bowring Treaty of 1855 and Article I in the Agreement Supplementary of 1856.

was reported that 21,300 tons of teak had been extracted from Burmese forests (British Burma and Upper Burma) whereas Siam exported 51,800 tons of teak to Burma. From 1880 to 1884, teak production from northern Siam was as high as 135,200 tons while Burma teak log production amounted to merely 67,000 tons (Office of the Prime Minister, 1957, p. 8).

Local northern chiefs allowed Burmese entrepreneurs and European timber firms to dominate the areas of potential logging concessions. McGilvary, an American missionary who lived in Chiang Mai for more than forty years (1867-1910), noted that:

The Burmese of Moulmein, who were British subjects, had skill in working out the timber, which the Lao [northern Siam] had not. With money and valuable presents they tempted the Lao rulers, who formerly had absolute authority over the forests, to grant them concessions to cut the timber and market it in Bangkok (McGilvary, 1912, p. 192).

It was crucial for Burmese teak traders to build good connections with the chiefs (*Chao*). The simplest way to persuade the chiefs to grant a lease was to submit themselves to Siamese law as Siamese subjects under the jurisdiction of the local chiefs, in order to develop trust and build working relationships. Building good relationships with local chiefs who owned the commercial forested areas was the most important step for conducting the teak business in the early years. Crucially, the local chiefs possessed the right to grant teak concessions to British Burmese migrants independently of Bangkok.

From the 1880s, the European timber companies started playing an important role in the teak industry in Siam. The Borneo Company Limited (BCL) was the first European company to officially establish a teak logging operation in 1888. The Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation (BBTC) arrived in the 1890s. British companies were dominant comprising four out of six logging companies. The four British companies were the Borneo Company Limited, the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, the Siam Forest Company Limited, and the Louis T. Leonowens Company Limited. The Danish owned East Asiatic Company Limited and the French owned the French East Asiatic Company Limited comprised the other two (Le May, 1926; Suphawat & Takeda, 2007, p. 126).

The Siamese government established the Royal Forestry Department in 1896 to conserve forests and control the teak business in northern Siam. From this time, a majority of teak logs were being diverted down the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok instead of the Salween River to Moulmein. According to the numbers of teak logging operations during 1896-1925, it was estimated that 81 percent of teak production was being transported along the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok whereas merely 16 percent was floated down the Salween River to Moulmein in Burma, and 3 percent was sent down to Saigon in Chochin China (Suehiro 1996, 30; Suphawat & Takeda, 2007, p. 126)

Nevertheless, Burmese entrepreneurs came to play a crucial role as teak contractors for the British timber companies. The European firms, as new traders in Chiang Mai, contracted Burmese teak traders to extract teak logs for them because these Burmese entrepreneurs had long-experience in conducting the timber business in northern Siam. The Borneo Company, for example, had 40 Burmese contractors among its 47 contractors in the 1910s (Jungle Diaries, 1913).

Making Personal Ties

As pioneers, Burmese entrepreneurs had opened a modern commercial teak industry in northern Siam. Their success had brought Europeans but also increased the flow of British Burmese migrants into the region. It was observed that the majority of British subjects in northern Siam comprised Burmese teak merchants. Robert Gray mentioned in 1922 that:

The Burmese form the preponderating majority and are the richest and most influential section of our community owing to their long and intimate connection with the Big British teak firms like the Bombay Burma Corporation, Borneo Company, Anglo-Siam Corporation, and Messrs. L.T. Leonowens Limited (IOR/R/PS/11/230, 27 December 1922).

One of the most successful teak merchants, Htun Kyaw who was a leading Burmese entrepreneur, was widely known and highly respected in Moulmein (Wright, 1910, p. 382). Htun Kyaw conducted the teak business with a network of friends based in Moulmein. He crossed the border to Chiang Mai in order to extend their business to teak logging. In the 1860s, Htun Kyaw started receiving a forest concession from *Chao Kawilorot* the Chief of Chiang Mai (r.1856-1870). He continued winning the teak concession for the Muang Yuam Forest in Chiang Mai until the early twentieth century. Htun Kyaw not only received a teak concession from the Chief, but also secured financial support from *Chao Ubonwanna*, the daughter of *Chao Kawilorot*. This reflected the pattern of involvement of local chiefs in the modern teak business: concessionary award combined with joint capital investment with the Burmese entrepreneurs in the venture. All of his teak logs were floated down the Salween River to Moulmein in order to sell to the British teak companies there. Htun Kyaw became a favorite business partner of *Chao Kawilorot*. He was appointed the title "*Phraya sri song muang ratchamaitri*" (NA, R.5 M 16.1, 27 November 1882; Daw Mya, personal communication, 2013). His title meant the man who represented the friendship of two cities, Chiang Mai and Moulmein.

Another prominent northern Siam teak entrepreneur was Pan Nyo. He was born in Moulmein and arrived in Chiang Mai in the 1870s in order to pursue a teak business venture. As with Htun Kyaw, Pan Nyo married local women and built a close relationship with local chiefs. This social cultivation brought him a teak concession from the Chief of Chiang Mai, *Chao Inthawichayanon* (r.1873-1896). In the 1880s, he started working as a teak entrepreneur with financial support from *Chao Ubonwanna*. Pan Nyo received a teak concession for extracting teak from forests at Mae Pham and Mae Phoi, located on the outskirts of Chiang Mai (Srisuda, personal communication, 2013; Chotima, 2018). These teak logs were floated along the Salween River to Moulmein and the majority of teak logs were later transported down the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok. Pan Nyo, for example, was a prominent contractor for European firms. Most of his timber was sold to the BCL and to the BBTC.

Burmese entrepreneurs like Tun Kyaw and Pan Nyo were able to outcompete other entrepreneurs. This was not only because they had direct links to the networks of Burmese teak traders in British Burma, who were connected to the British firms and teak market in Moulmein, but also because they had built good connections with local chiefs, the Burmese community and the British teak companies based in Siam. It was recorded that:

The forests have been leased to large British Companies, who maintain experienced European agents on the spot. Those men have naturally a greater regard for the quality of the timber extracted and for the restrictions imposed by the leases than was formerly the case when the timber output was largely in the hands of Burmese foresters, working under contract with money-leaders in Upper Burma, whose sole aim was to obtain the largest possible quantity of timber without regard to size or quality (BL, IOR/L/PS/20/166, 1905).

A crucial factor in their success was the enjoyment of British protection in Siam. The legal status of British Burmese subjects developed through several treaties between the British and Siamese governments. The status of British Burmese subjects was clearly recognized in the Chiang Mai Treaties. The first Chiang Mai Treaty of 1874 and the second Chiang Mai Treaty of 1883 were signed in order to promote commerce between British Burma and Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang. These were the major sources for the teak industry. The main objective of these treaties was to protect the security of British subjects who were instrumental in carrying on the trade between British Burma and northern Siam (HCPP, 1874, 1883).

The economic status of Burmese migrants was different in Siam to that which they held in British Burma. As mentioned earlier, the Burmese, as opposed to Indian migrants, were at the bottom of the social or economic hierarchy in British Burma because they were unable to develop an economic status like other immigrants in their own country. They were subordinated to immigrants like Europeans, Indians and the Chinese. In contrast, in Siam, Burmese migrants were not placed at the bottom of a socioeconomic hierarchy. Burmese teak workers were usually given higher positions than local Thais and the Khamus. This is because Burmese laborers were skilled workers who sometimes represented Burmese contractors, and were able to communicate with inspectors from European firms.

Burmese migrants frequently forged links with the local community by marrying local women. They would then be automatically accepted as a local. According to a local custom, an alien-male who married a local woman became a subject to his wife's chief (Rattanaporn, 1989, p.26). These local women usually were the slaves (*that*) of the chiefs. Therefore, they not only became Siamese subjects after marriage but also developed a closer connection to the chiefs. Sometimes, the chiefs were married to the daughters of Burmese teak entrepreneurs, in local areas, who then supported their sons-in-laws' careers in the teak business.

Constructing Buddhist monasteries was a powerful means of creating direct and solid bonds to a local community in northern Siam and to the Burmese people both in Siam and Burma. Prominent Burmese traders patronized monasteries, sponsoring their construction, in order to place themselves in the heart of local society. They often donated funds to monasteries that were built by the chiefs as well as supporting or renovating older monasteries. Pan Nyo, for example, was among the main donors, which also included the Chief of Chiang Mai, Chao Inthawichayanon, toward the renovation of Saen Fang Monastery in 1887 (An Inscription in Wat Saen Fang).

As already noted, although European timber companies dominated the teak industry, Burmese teak entrepreneurs were needed as teak contractors for the European companies. Their role middlemen between the British firms and local chiefs who owned the forests to extract teak forests became indispensable. The British companies paid financial support to Burmese-led teak logging operations in order to meet their demand for teak. Concessions passed to the European firms after 1883 and although these firms now owned the concessions, the Burmese contractors continued to work for them in order to extract the teak in the first place. This sub-contracting process involved advancing money to the former Burmese teak merchants as capital required for teak extraction on the agreement that they had to sell all the timber acquired to the company.

Teak Entrepreneurs: Headmen of Burmese Migrants

It is difficult to establish the actual number of *British* Burmese who lived in northern Siam. The British Consulate officers reported that a large number of British Burmese subjects were dispersed throughout northern Siam. H. Fitzmaurice estimated several thousand British Burmese subjects as noted in his consular report of 1923:

There are considerable communities of Burmese, Toungsoo, Karen and Indian British subjects, the three first mentioned including many forest contractors and employees of the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, Limited... The bulk of British subjects in this region are, naturally, Shans and Burmese. It is impossible to give any accurate guess at their number (BL, IOR/L/PS/ 11/230/, February 1923).

In 1884, the British Consulate attempted to register the British Burmese population of Northern Siam. British Consul in Chiang Mai, W.R.D Beckett, reported that they started registering British Burmese subjects in the town of Chiang Mai and eighty British Burmese subjects duly came to register at the British Consulate. In 1902, the number of registered Burmese migrants increased to 3,400 persons (BL, IOR/L/PS/10/96, 17 December 1903). Pierre Orts, who was Belgian assistant legal advisor to the King of Siam, visited Chiang Mai in 1907. Orts estimated that more than 5,000 Burmese migrants inhabited the town of Chiang Mai. According to him, they worked as foresters, traders and laborers (Phitsanu, 1996, p.76). From 1900 to 1930, the British Consulate endeavored to register the British Burmese subjects through consular tours throughout the districts of northern Siam. They were only able to register a few hundred in a district. Headmen in these areas often informed the registrars that many thousands of Burmese migrants inhabited their communities (BL, IOR/L/PS/11/230, February 1930).

The British government transplanted a modified variant of the village system operating in Burma to manage the Burmese community under the British authorities in Siam. A headman or *thugyi* was appointed as the leader of British Burmese community. The headman would help the British Consul to control, and was responsible for the Siam-based Burmese community. The Vice-Consular officer officially appointed a headman, based upon the decision of members of the community. A headman could be anyone who was respected and admired by a community of British Burmese subjects. The most important qualifications were a good reputation, strong financial status, popular among

members of the community and, most importantly of all, being on good terms with the Siamese authorities (BL, IOR/L/PS/10/99/1, February 1912).

Most of the Burmese headmen in northern Siam were prosperous teak entrepreneurs who supported social activities in the local community. Headmen did not receive a salary although their duties consumed their time and money. They were merely accorded an honorable social status by the British authorities by dint of their service as headmen of a community of British subjects. The position was not limited to Burmans; a member of any of the ethnic groups inhabiting British Burma, including Shan, Mon, Taungthu and Karen, who, equally as British Burmese subjects, could be appointed headman. The headmen had limited powers from the British consul designed to preserve peace and order among those British subjects in his charge. They were able to consider issues among British Burmese subjects and report information in the local community to the British consuls. These headmen also helped the Siamese authorities in collecting the poll tax from British Burmese subjects in their towns (BL, IOR/L/PS/20/166, 1905). Serving as headman was a means to build a good reputation for being generous as well as wealthy, this in turn would secure that person's economic position. For this reason, a teak trader often sought to keep the position permanently.

The British Vice-Consul often appointed a headman while he was visiting British Burmese subject communities. In July 1896, Beckett visited Nan and appointed Sang Wiya, a Shan, as headman of British Burmese subjects in Nan. Sang Wiya had a duty to help the British Consul of Chiang Mai, to be responsible for the British Burmese subjects in Nan, and considered minor legal disputes between the British Burmese subjects who lived in Nan (NA, R5 M 35/14, 21 July 1895). According to the report of the consular tour of 1913, Maung Nu, a Burman, was appointed as the headman at Nan. It was noted that Maung Nu was qualified for the position because he was a wealthy teak trader. Not only was he able to read and understand English in order to communicate with the British authorities, but he could also speak Thai (BL, IOR/L/PS/11/52, P1616/ 1913).

Siamese state officials refused to recognize the headmen on a legal basis. They were always reluctant to cooperate with the British Consuls in their desire to appointment headmen, and refused to offer suggestions on potential candidates. Ultimately, the Siamese government could not approve of the position of headmen in Siam as it undermined its general policy of centralizing authority in Bangkok and securing its sovereignty as a modern state. Another significant reason was that the government was concerned that the French Consuls would want to appoint the headmen for the French subjects in Siam if the government visibly gave support to the appointment of British subjects as local headmen (NA, R5 M 35/14, 8 June 1895). In fact, the Siamese government saw logic in having a system of 'foreign' headmen as they assisted the Siamese authorities in collecting the capitation tax from British Burmese subjects and preserving order in the Burmese community (BL, IOR/L/PS/20/166, 1905).

Burmese Migrants and the Forestry Service

The Siamese government planned to conserve the teak reserves, avoiding exhaustion as had been the case in parts of Burma, and at the same time avoiding tensions with voracious European firms by hiring a European as the head of a projected Siamese Forestry Department. Prince Damrong Ratchanuphap, the Minister of the Interior, suggested that a European who enjoyed the confidence

of timber merchants could be hired in order to reduce the discord between the timber companies and the Siamese government. The government not only searched for someone who was familiar with the problems of the teak industry but also wanted to form a Forestry Department on a western model. Prince Damrong therefore asked the British Consulate for suggestions for an English forestry officer to help Siam establish a forestry department (NA, M. 16.1/2, 1 May 1896). Additionally, Prince Damrong's turn to the British was probably also because he had been impressed by the British colonial government's solution to the problems of forest management in British Burma.

The British colonial government successfully introduced scientific forestry to manage the commercial system of timber extraction, slowing a rapid decline in forested areas in British Burma (Bryant, 1994, p.228). Dietrich Brandis, the German botanist who had worked for the Forest Department in India, was appointed as Superintendent of Forests in Pegu in 1856. He founded the Burma Forest Department and employed scientific knowledge to forestry management in Burma. The Forest Department attempted to control and protect forested areas through the imposition of strict regulation. The government selected Reserved Forest areas, made settlements of rights and demarcation. Additionally, the working of the forests was transferred to the government account and the appointment of Forestry Officers made a definite impact on the success of the protective policy and in examining the state of the Reserved Forests (Stebbing, n.d., p.72).

For this reason, the Siamese government preferred the British Burma model to other European colonial states. This was probably because the species of forest resources in northern Siam were similar to the forest resources in British Burma. Moreover, the forestry officials from British Burma had experience in working with the Burmese and British timber firms. The experiences would be helpful in dealing with those who worked in Siam. Most of the teak industry in northern Siam was in the hands of the British Burmese subjects and the British companies. From the viewpoint of the British government, requests to help Siam in its Forestry policy represented an advantageous opportunity. The British were able to extend their idea of forest management to Siamese sovereign territory, indirectly offering important assurances to British interests and British subjects who were familiar with forest management in British Burma. As it was noted in a letter of Mr. de Bunsen to the Indian government, "the preservation of the Siamese teak forests is a British Interest [*sic*], the control of which should not be allowed to pass into foreign hands as it is likely to do if Siam is obliged to resort to Germany for the assistance which it would prefer to receive from an English officer" (as cited in Ramsay, 1971, pp.138-139).

The British Indian government offered some of its forestry officials from the Burma Forest Department for work in the Siamese government. Herbert Slade who was the former Deputy Conservator of Forest in British Burma was selected. Although forestry management in Siam was mainly influenced by knowledge and techniques developed in the British system, forestry knowledge from British Burma was significant for the development of forestry education in Siam. British forestry officials who previously worked for the Forest Department in British Burma were hired to work for the Siamese government. Some of the Burmese staff were also brought back to work for the British forestry officials in Siam.

The Siamese government established the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) in the Ministry of Interior in 1896. Herbert Slade was appointed the first Conservator of Forests from 1896 to 1901.⁶ Slade reformed the management of forested areas in northern Siam. He started using forestry regulations to control the extraction of timber and reformed the system of granting concessions. In 1909, W. F. Lloyd who was the Conservator of the department from 1905 to 1923, brought the Dietrich Brandis system, which had been used successfully in British Burma, to manage forest resources. The system divided forest areas into two portions, one open and one closed. It would be harvested over fifteen years each. Under the British Burma system, the Royal Forest Department (RFD) could increase its royalties while gaining greater control over the teak forests. Additionally, the system seemed to extend the commercial opportunities for British timber firms in accessing the forest concessions. The Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, which arrived in the 1890s, soon became the most influential company in the region. It was granted the concessions for half of the forested areas around northern Siam, which meant that the majority of teak logging concessions had been granted to European timber firms. They operated 85 percent of all teak logging leases granted from 1896 to 1930 (Suphawat & Takeda, 2007). Perhaps crucially, the new system of forest management reduced the power of the northern local chiefs, who lost independent control over concession allocation, to the central government of Siam.

The former forestry officials from British Burma not only brought a modern scientific forestry approach and a skilled staff who previously worked for the forestry departments of British India and Burma, but also took personnel from British Burma to join their work in Siam. Both British and Burmese were hired for the Royal Forest Department. The Burmese forestry officials who could communicate in both English and Burmese languages were crucially helpful for the RFD in communicating with the Burmese teak entrepreneurs and foresters who worked for the timber companies around Northern Siam. U Aung Thein, for example, who was a native of Toungoo in Burma was hired to work for the RFD in the early 1900s. He had worked closely with Prince Damrong, the Ministry of Interior, for the Royal Forest Department and in the translation of the Chronicle of the Thai wars with the Burmese into English. Aung Thein was promoted to a high rank in the forestry service. He received the official title of *Luang Phraison Salarak* and was promoted to *Phra Phraison Salarak* before he retired from the Royal Forest Department in 1929 (Damrong, 2001, pp. x-xiii).

In the early days of the department, all forestry officers were Europeans with just eleven officers in 1899. Shortly after 1900, the department started training Siamese to for staff positions. In 1904, this number increased to 24 officers, 9 of whom were Siamese. The department remained dominated by British forestry officers trained in colonial forestry until 1923. The Siamese government started sending Siamese students to be trained in India and Burma. Five of the Siamese officers, for example, had been trained in India and several students attended a forestry school in Burma in order to increase the number of Siamese staff for the department. By 1928, the department had a staff of 618, only a small number of whom were British (Pye, 2005, pp. 318-319).

⁶ Mr. H. Slade was the first Conservator of Forest (1896-1901), this was followed by Mr. W.F.L. Tottenham (1901-1902), and Mr. W.F. Lyod (1903-1912). Subsequently, Siamese forestry students were sent abroad to England, India and Burma.

British Burma became the main destination for Siamese students seeking to attend a forestry school. They came back to Siam and worked for the Forest Department in which they became prominent forestry officers. Some of them were promoted to the Conservator of Forests replacing the senior European officers (Kromphamai, 1980).

Some of the sons of Burmese teak entrepreneurs were interested in serving in the Royal Forest Department. Not only were Siamese sent to study forestry education in Burma, but the sons of Burmese teak traders in Siam were also granted scholarships to study at the Burma Forest School in Pyinmana. The sons of Burmese entrepreneurs who were educated in British Burma came to work as high-ranking officials for the Forestry Department of Siam. Relatively high educational attainment and ability in using several languages-English, Burmese, Thai and Lanna- allowed them to become prominent civil servants in the Thai state. According to the Memorandum on a visit to Phrae in March 1930, R. A. N. Hillyer, who was the Vice-Consul at Lampang, was impressed with the intelligence of *Luang* Nithet Thawankan who was the forestry officer at Phrae. *Luang* Nithet Thawankan was half-Burmese and his father was a prominent Burmese teak merchant in Chiang Mai. Hillyer noted that “he [*Luang* Nithet] speaks English very well and has an up-to date knowledge of Forestry. He struck me as an intelligent young man and keen on his job” (BL, IOR/L/PS/11/230, 20 March 1930).

Luang Nithet Thawankan (*Luang* Nithet) was the son of U Bwa, a teak trader from Moulmein, who married a local woman in Chiang Mai. *Luang* Nithet was born in 1889 in Chiang Mai. Being a son of a wealthy teak entrepreneur, *Luang* Nithet was fortunate enough to receive a good education. After finishing primary school in Chiang Mai, he was sent to attend an English school in Moulmein and Ceylon respectively. After graduation from a college in Ceylon, he came back to Chiang Mai. His command of the English language made it easy for him to gain employment as a civil servant in forestry while his family continued to work in the lumber business. With a family background in the lumber industry, a career in state forestry management was a natural progression. In 1913, *Luang* Nithet, who was then twenty-four, started working as a forestry officer for the Royal Forestry Department of Siam in Chiang Mai and moved around the Northern provinces. As he was fluent in English, Burmese and Thai, *Luang* Nithet was later sent to attend the Burma Forestry School at Pyinmana in British Burma in order to prepare him for work as a high-ranking official for the Forest Department in northern Siam (Wichian, 1984; Amnat, personal communication, 2013). Fluency in English and Burmese was an obvious advantage over his Siamese counterparts and enabled the offspring of this community, such as *Luang* Nithet, to ascend the Siamese social hierarchy.

Conclusion

Burmese migrants as teak entrepreneurs in northern Siam were needed to shape the teak industry. The cooperation of Burmese entrepreneurs was new and significant and succeeded in underpinning the growth of the British timber business. This represents a case of a non-state actor manipulating contingent legal arrangements, by using extra-territorial protection coupled with local customs and social techniques to gain an economic advantage outside of their home country. This illustrates how Burmese entrepreneurial activity was alive and well in the colonial era; and this particular activity reflects the importance of Burmese migrants to the economy of northern Siam but also the significance of *British* Burmese subjects in shaping the political relationship between Burma and Siam. Finally, Siam-based Burmese timber merchants contributed to the adoption of new scientific

forest management techniques in Siam, being in a unique position to transfer the techniques from British Burma to Siam.

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