

Asia Research Institute

Working Paper Series

No. 30

Military Campaigns against Yunnan: A Global Analysis

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September 2004



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Military Campaigns against Yunnan: A Global Analysis¹

Bin Yang

Introduction

Yunnan is a province in southwest China where twenty-five state-designated ethnicities live. It neighbors Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and Tibet, and is not far from Thailand and India. Historically, the area called Yunnan was home to many non-Chinese tribes, polities, and powerful kingdoms including Nanzhao (mid-seventh century – 902) and Dali (937-1253). Geographic factors such as jungles, mountains, and rivers as well as a very diverse biological environment that hosted many diseases, constituted natural barriers between China and Yunnan. The Jinsha River (Upper Yangzi) in particular contributed geographically to Yunnan's relative separation from China proper and enhanced the difficulty of military campaigns from the northern states. All these elements, however, failed to suppress the ambition and desire of invaders, and could not stop Yunnan's eventual subjugation to China.

The Chinese began to invade Yunnan as early as the second century BCE. However, until the Mongol invasion in the mid-thirteenth century, no Chinese conquest was able to hold Yunnan, although at times Chinese forces were able to occupy parts of it temporarily. Then why did the Chinese not give up their intentions, especially after they had suffered great losses? Why did they not learn lessons from their previous disastrous failures? More importantly, why did the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century move their cavalry to Yunnan, mainly a sub-tropical /tropical area that was such an alien terrain for their Central Asian horses?

¹ This article is a version of Chapter 3 in my dissertation. I am grateful to Dr. Geoff Wade for his comments and suggestions.

To answer these questions, we have to examine Yunnan and China in a global perspective. We need to examine how Yunnan's geographical location gave rise to foreign interest, and how the strategic significance of Yunnan pushed players within Eastern Eurasia to take this area seriously. This article will review foreign military conquests of Yunnan from the Warring State Period (475-222 BCE) to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in a global context. I attempt to emphasize the background and reasons for these campaigns instead of specific processes. I argue that to understand the transformation of Yunnan from a non-Chinese area into part of China, an approach either from China or from Yunnan is inadequate. Indeed it was power struggles within the eastern Eurasian continent that determined the fate of Yunnan to a large degree.

Yunnan and China's First Unification

Yunnan's strategic role in Chinese politics can be observed from as early as the Warring States period when the Qin state expanded. The Warring States period, a chaotic time, witnessed frequent wars between Qin and other kingdoms in north China. By contrast, there was only one kingdom in south China on the list of the seven rivals in that period: that was the Chu kingdom. Chu, located in the middle Yangzi River region, was a giant kingdom with a sophisticated culture that later greatly contributed to the splendor of Chinese civilization. Chu's influence on neighboring regimes reached as far south as Guangdong, as far east as the Yue kingdom, and as far west as Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan. Chu at times participated in the inter-state politics, especially during the fourth century BCE when it was probably stronger than any

other state. The king of Chu once inquired about the Zhou *ding*,² not only revealing his ambition, but also suggesting the power of Chu. Indeed, Chu posed a serious challenge to Qin's expansion project, as was realized by some Qin officials.³ Consequently clashes broke out between the two rivals when the Qin began its southern expansion.

By the late fourth century BCE, the Qin had conquered the Ba kingdom and Shu kingdom, located around today's Sichuan and Chongqing. However, Qin's efforts did not stop there. Zhang Ruo, Governor (*taishou*) of Shu Jun, further subjected Southwestern "barbarians" south to the Jinsha River in 285 BCE, and established an administrative hierarchical unit.⁴ For the sake of communication and ultimate control, Li Bin, who was well known for his construction of the Dujiangyan, a giant dam near Chengdu that has lasted until today, built a road to the Zuo area.⁵ Chang An, another Qin official, extended this road that was named *Wuchi dao* (five-foot Road),⁶ probably the earliest official road of the Southwestern Silk Road.

Qin's expansion constituted a severe threat to the Chu, because originally Chu held much influence over these areas. It is said that the Ba and Shu kingdoms were built by people from Chu.⁷ Although Chu had cultural, economic, and probably ethnic relations with the Ba and Shu, it did not exert administrative authority over these entities. However, the arrival of the Qin power drove the Chu to launch new

² *Ding* was a three-legged pot, symbolizing the legitimacy of Zhou lordship. One King of Chu asked for the Zhou *Ding*, an action that was regarded as extremely rude. The term "*wending* (asking for the *Ding*)" hence referred to the ambition to replace the existing ruler or to unify China.

³ *Hua Yang Guo Zhi* (*HYGZ hereafter*), juan 3, in *Yunnan Shiliao Congkan* (*Series of Historical Documents on Yunnan*, *YNSLCK hereafter*) 1:265.

⁴ *HYGZ*, juan 3, in *YNSLCK* 1:265.

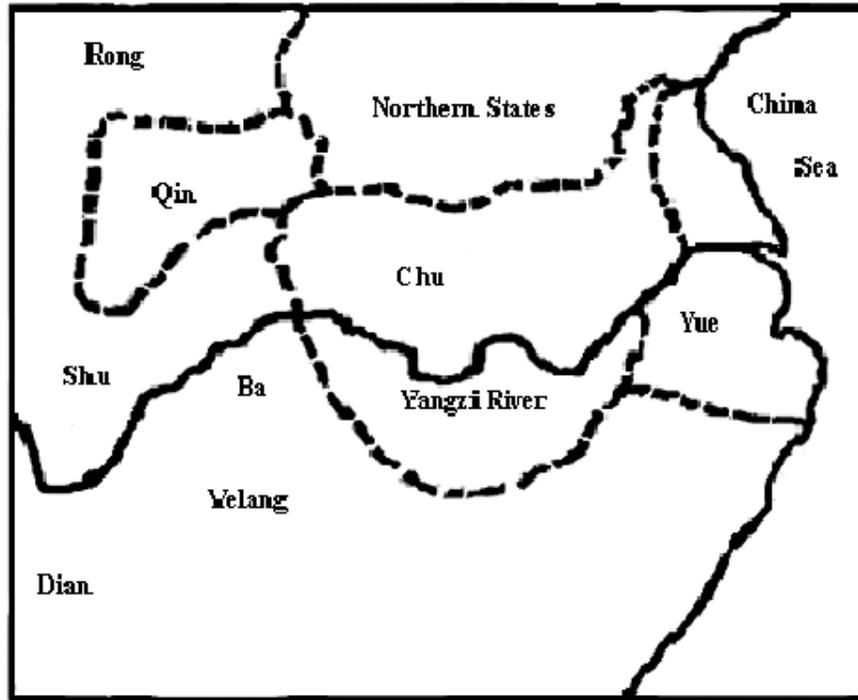
⁵ *HYGZ*, juan 3, in *YNSLCK* 1:265.

⁶ *Shi Ji* (*SJ hereafter*), juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:4.

⁷ Deng Tingliang, "Chuyi Ruba Wangshu Shuo (On the Descendants of Chu Entering Ba and Ruling Shu)," in Zhang Zhengming Ed, *Chushi Luncong* (*Collected Works on Chu History*), Hubei Renmin Chubanshe, 1984.

strikes into these areas. A major strategic military move of Chu was the campaign of Zhuang Qiao against the Dian Kingdom in central Yunnan.

Map 1.1: Relative Locations of Dian, Qin, and Chu



In 279, BCE, Zhuang Qiao, a Chu general, passed through Guizhou, and ended his long march into the Dian Lake region.⁸ Zhuang Qiao took over the Dian kingdom, and claimed himself, the King of Dian (*Dianwang*).⁹ However, he and his soldiers had to stay there since the Qin army blocked their way home. Zhuang's descendants continued to rule the Dian kingdom until the Han conquest about 150 years later.

⁸ A few scholars insisted that Zhuang Qiao actually was *Dao Zhi* (Rebel *Zhi*), a famous rebel under the Chu. See Ma Yao *Yunnan Jianshi* (*A Concise History of Yunnan*), 1991.

⁹ For historical sources of Zhuang Qiao, see *SJ* juan 116, in *YNSLCK*, 1:4; *HYZZ*, juan 4, in *YNSLCK* 1:251.

The southern expansion of Qin was explained as a unification project, as it claimed that “taking the Shu kingdom means taking Chu; and if Chu is taken, All-Under-Heaven is unified (*de Shu ze de Chu, Chu wang ze tianxia bing yi*).”¹⁰ Zhuang Qiao’s campaign was aimed at threatening Qin’s Sichuan so as to check the Qin’s military advance into the Chu area. It is under such circumstances that Yunnan was brought into the multi-state struggle. Though Chu’s goal was not fulfilled, Yunnan’s geographical importance for the unification of China into an imperial state was revealed for the first time.

The relation between Yunnan and the emergence of China’s first imperial empire established a pattern for Yunnan’s involvement in Chinese history. Yunnan was involved in Chinese history mostly when China either faced an external or internal emergency. The struggles among the Western Han, the Southern Yue, and the Xiongnu were the second historical event that brought part of Yunnan under Han China’s authority.

The Western Han and the “Rediscovery” of Yunnan

The collapse of the Qin Empire in 207 BCE threw China into a chaotic period with the result that Yunnan was left unattended until the end of second century BCE.

Charles Backus was overly optimistic when he concluded that “the Han court was content with a non-interventionist policy toward Yunnan and even granted an official seal to the King of Tien [Dian], symbolizing that peaceful relationship.”¹¹ He seems to have overlooked military campaigns launched by the Han against the many kingdoms around south and southwest China. The king of Dian was lucky to escape

¹⁰ *HYZZ*, juan 3, in *YNSLCK* 1:265.

¹¹ Charles Backus, *Nanzhao and Tang’s Southwestern Frontier*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

the slaughter, only by his decision to give up his resistance and surrender. During its early years, the Han court lacked much information on Yunnan until the report of Zhang Qian in 122 BCE. Furthermore, the Han dynasty was busy reviving the dilapidated economy and trying its best to keep peace with the Xiongnu.

The Han state was by no means non-interventionist. When Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Western Han, found that a rebel prince had fled and allied with the Xiongnu, he immediately led an army of 300,000 soldiers to confront the Xiongnu cavalry, resulting in one of the most humiliating defeats in his life. Unable to handle the Xiongnu, the Han decided to buy peace. With the *Heqin* policy, the Han court used Chinese assets and princesses in exchange for the stopping of the Xiongnu attacks. In short, the Han paid tribute to the “barbarians” to secure peace.

The Han campaign against the Southwestern “barbarians” was not economically motivated.¹² Yu Yingshi emphasizes the interplay between expansion and trade in frontier areas of the Han dynasty. Trade between the Southwestern “barbarians” and Sichuan was prosperous, but it was neither the trade nor the wealth of the Southwestern “barbarians” that attracted the Han court.¹³ Indeed, the Han court barely noticed this fact, partially because local merchants in Sichuan intentionally kept it a secret.¹⁴ Hence, trade did not serve as the main motive for the Han campaign into the Southwest. Rather, it was Han China’s expansion to both the south and the north that brought the Southwestern “barbarians” into the considerations of Emperor

¹² In his classic study, Yu Yingshi examined the interaction between trade and the Han expansion on the frontiers. My study of Yunnan does not deny the close relationship between trade and Chinese expansion, but the Han expansion into the Southwest was not trade-oriented. Yu Yingshi, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, University of California Press, 1967; and Yu Yingshi, “Han Foreign Relations,” in Denis Twitchett & Michael Loewe edited *The Cambridge History of China, Volume I: The Ch’in and Han Empire, 221 B. C. –A.D. 220*, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, & Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 457.

¹³ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:4; *SJ*, juan 129, in *YNSLCK* 1: 12; Yu Yingshi 1967, 7.

¹⁴ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:4.

Wu. Put simply, it was the strategic location of the Southwestern “barbarians” that gave rise to the Han’s interest and conquest.

The Han court did not notice the Southwest “Barbarians” until it attempted to take over the Southern Yue kingdom (*Nanyue*) that was centered on Guangdong. The Qin Empire (221 BCE- 207 BCE) had previously set up three prefectures in southern coastal areas including modern Guangdong, Guangxi, and northern Vietnam. Zhao Tuo, an officer of the Nanhai (South Sea) prefecture, had proclaimed himself as the Martial King of the Southern Yue (*Nanyue Wuwang*) after the collapse of the Qin Empire. The Southern Yue had a close relationship with the Yelang kingdom, with the Zangke River serving as a convenient transportation route between them.

While the Han court pursued the *Heqin* policy with the Xiongnu, it also recognized Zhao Tuo as the King of Southern Yue (*Nanyue Wang*), realizing peace on both the northern and southern frontiers. The title *Nanyue Wang* indeed suggests a real autonomy of the Southern Yue rather than it being subjected to the Han authority. When Emperor Wu ascended the throne, the Han had become prosperous, and the young ambitious emperor made up his mind to resolve the Xiongnu problem and that of other neighboring regimes that menaced or had the capacity to threaten his empire. In the south, the Southern Yue became the major target.

When Tang Meng, the Han envoy, visited the Southern Yue, he was given some *chu* berry sauce and found that it was transported here through the Zangke River by the Yelang people.¹⁵ When Tang Meng returned to Chang’an, the capital of the Han dynasty, he questioned a merchant of Shu and was informed that the river was wide enough to move an army along. So Tang Meng suggested that troops be

¹⁵ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

transported in ships along the Zangke River to attack the Southern Yue.¹⁶ The emperor approved this plan. It was recorded that, taking many gifts, Tang Meng led troops, and “persuaded” the King of Yelang to become a subject of the Han court. The Han thereupon established Jianwei prefecture in the region. To prepare for the upcoming campaign against the Southern Yue, the Han court mobilized thousands of people to repair the Bo Road and extend it to the Zangke River. Almost at the same time, Emperor Wu had dispatched Sima Xiangru to “persuade” the Qiong and Zuo peoples to accept Chinese rule. The Qiong and Zuo peoples were labeled as “Western Barbarians (*Xiyi*),” while the Yelang people were known as “Southern Barbarians (*Nanyi*).”¹⁷ Their subjection paved the way for the Han’s southern campaign.

A military campaign to take over the Southern Yue looked the most likely. Unexpectedly, in 126 BCE, Emperor Wu decided to give up the “Western Barbarians,” and kept only two counties in the Southern “barbarian” area, a retreat from previous initiatives.¹⁸ As a result, the first stage of Han efforts only reached the marginal area of today’s Yunnan. The Han did not create direct contacts with the Dian kingdom in central Yunnan, much less the Kunming tribe in the Dali area.

The Han dynasty was forced to cancel its southern campaign for two reasons. The first was the enormous expenditure of road building. Huge numbers of local people were conscripted into this program, and a great deal of money and materials was spent.¹⁹ While the Han was rich enough to complete such an undertaking, local complaints and resistance caused the Han court to reconsider, since Han control over the Southwestern “barbarians” was new and tenuous. The second and decisive reason

¹⁶ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

¹⁷ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

¹⁸ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

¹⁹ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

was not local but international, that is, the Xiongnu threat in the north. Emperor Wu had made up his mind to pay full attention to and comprehensively solve the Xiongnu issue (*zhuanli shi Xiongnu*).²⁰ Ambitious as he was, he knew it was too dangerous to fight two wars at the same time.

In 138 BCE, Emperor Wu dispatched the well-known Zhang Qian mission, aimed at allying the Yuezhi people who had been driven by the Xiongnu from the Hexi Corridor to the Western Region. This mission foreshadowed a change in Han policy regarding the Xiongnu. Soon Emperor Wu ended the *Heqin* policy and clashes between the Han and the Xiongnu increased and intensified. Nevertheless, the Han dynasty had been in a defensive position until 127 BCE when its army succeeded in taking back the He'nan area that had been under Xiongnu control for over seventy years since the fall of the Qin. This victory enhanced Han confidence, and Emperor Wu planned a long-distance campaign, reversing the defensive posture of the Han military. It was in the following year (126 BCE) that we see the Han retreat from the south, a strategic retreat for its northern advance.

Therefore, Han China's frontier policy was a national strategy. The southern frontiers were closely associated with their northern counterparts, which were confirmed by the later Han military projects. While the northern campaign temporarily marked a pause in the southern regions, the Xiongnu issue eventually led to Han China's march to the Southwestern "barbarians" when Zhang Qian returned from Central Asia.

On his return Zhang Qian told Emperor Wu that India was southeast of Bactria and not far from the Shu area and that Shu products had reached Daxia (Bactria) through India. Hence in 122 BCE Emperor Wu dispatched four envoys to locate the

²⁰ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

road from Shu through India to Daxia (Bactria), an alternative access to Central Asia. The envoys were blocked by the Kunming people in the Erhai region but learned that some 1,000 or more *li* to the west there was a state called Dianyue whose people rode elephants and that merchants from Shu sometimes secretly went there with their goods to trade. It is in this way that the Han state, while searching for a route to Central Asia, for the first time came into contact with the kingdom of Dian.²¹

Obviously the Han exploration of the Southwestern “barbarians” was primarily not for seeking wealth, but for its military strategy, locating an alternative route to Central Asia and completing a siege to pincer the Xiongnu.²² Sima Qian’s writings totally confirmed this point:

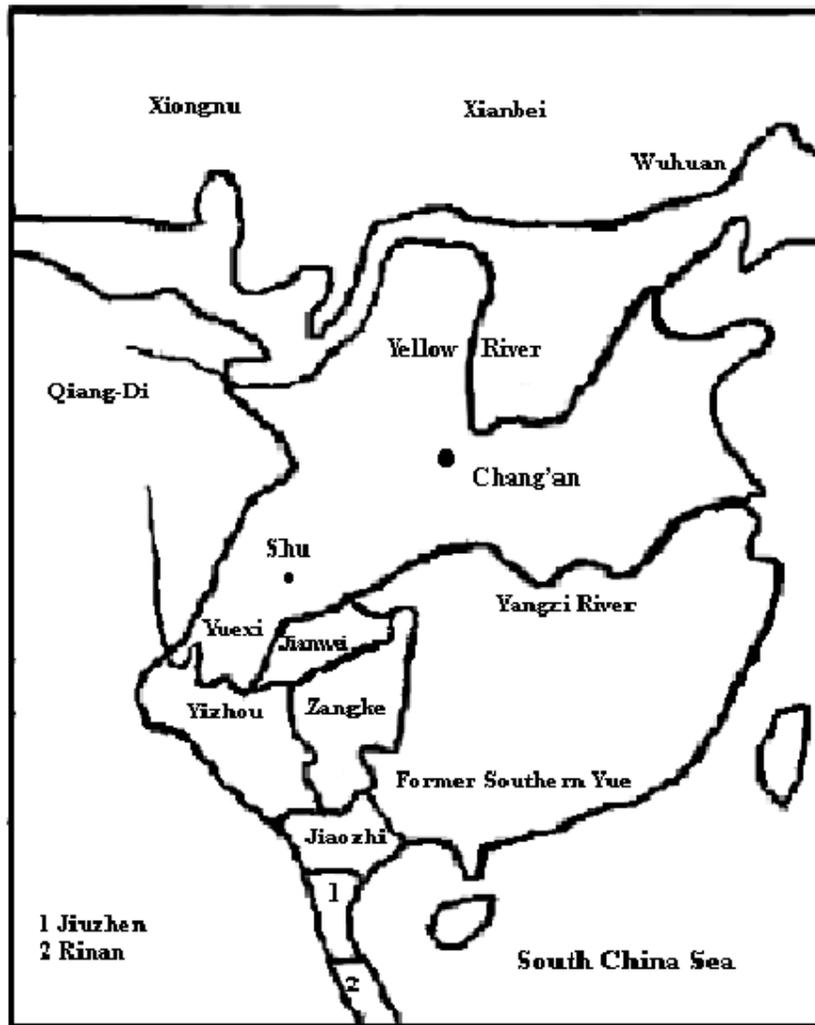
In order to seek the road to Daxia, the Han court started to communicate with the Dian kingdom. In the beginning, the Han court attempted to pave the way to the Southwestern Barbarians. It cost a great deal and the road could not be smoothed, so it was cancelled. When Zhang Qian said that this road might connect Daxia, however, the Han resumed dealing with the Southwestern Barbarians.²³

²¹ *SJ*, juan 123, in *YNSLCK* 1:11.

²² Japanese scholars have noticed the close relationship between China’s Central Asian policy and its advance into the Southwest, see Yoshimi Fujisawa, “Biruma Unnan ruto to tozai bunka no koryu (the Burma-Yunnan Transportation Route and East-West Cultural Contacts: The Cultural Origins of Nanzhao),” *Iwate Shigaku Kenkyu*, no. 25, 1953, 10-21. It is interesting that a Tang source states that the Kunming regime and the Xiongnu reportedly were brotherly states (*xiongdiguo*). See *Tang Huiyao*, juan 98, in *YNSLCK* 1:460.

²³ *SJ*, juan 123, in *YNSLCK* 1:11.

Map 1.2: Yunnan (Yizhou) in the Western Han Period (Late Second Century BCE)



It is hard to imagine such a large and ambitious military plan in early imperial China over 2,000 years ago, but all the facts point to Emperor Wu's unprecedented blueprint.²⁴ Trade and local wealth sometimes attracted the Han's advancement along the frontier regions,²⁵ but originally neither trade nor wealth served as the main reason for Han exploration of the Southwestern "barbarians." Instead the geographical

²⁴ Later the Tang court designed a similar strategy to contain Tibet.

²⁵ For example, Emperor Wu's desire for Blood Horses led to a long distance campaign in the Western Regions in 104 BCE.

location of the Southwestern “barbarians”, first as a way to the Southern Yue, and then as a shortcut to Central Asia, gave rise to the Han’s interest.

To gain access to Central Asia through Yunnan, Emperor Wu planned an expedition against the Southwestern “barbarians,” as the man-made Lake Kunming (*Kunmingchi*) was dug in 120 BCE in Chang’an so that Han soldiers could train in this lake that was modeled as Lake Erhai.²⁶ Then again, the climax of the Sino-Xiongnu War in the following decade distracted the Han’s interest from the Southwest “barbarians.” Two large-scale long-distance campaigns against the Xiongnu were launched between 122 BCE and 119 BCE, and the war proceeded to Han China’s advantage. Military conflicts moved from Han China’s frontiers to the Western Regions after the Western Han had taken the Hexi Corridor, and the Xiongnu fled northward. Though the war continued, the Xiongnu was greatly weakened, and unable to launch further large scale invasions. Indeed, military disadvantage led to and enhanced internal tensions and finally, the Xiongnu faced internal conflicts and were divided into two groups.

When the Xiongnu were driven northward, and the northern frontiers were stabilized, the Han court turned back to the south. In 112 BCE, the Han launched a southern campaign to “pacify” the Southern Yue and the Southern “barbarians” were ordered to join the campaign. Probably afraid that the fall of Southern Yue would bring about nothing but the loss of his regime, a native chieftain of Qielan (*qielan jun*) in Jianwei Prefecture rebelled, killing the Han envoy and Governor of Jianwei prefecture.²⁷ However, the following year after the Southern Yue had been taken, the

²⁶ *SJ*, juan 30, in *YNSLCK* 1: 13.

²⁷ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:5.

Han army took over Yelang, Qiong, and Zuo, and two prefectures of Yuexi and Shenli were created.²⁸

After the Western Han assumed control over the Southern “Barbarians” and Western “Barbarians”, the Dian and other “barbarians” naturally became the next targets. Two years later in 109 BCE, the Han conquered the Laojin and Mimo peoples.²⁹ Under military pressure, the King of Dian surrendered. His territory was placed under the new prefecture of Yizhou.³⁰ By the end of the second century BCE, the Han had reached central Yunnan and part of west Yunnan, dividing the Southwest “barbarian” area into the four prefectures of Jianwei, Zangke, Yuexi, and Yizhou. In short, much of present day Yunnan was under the Western Han.

Although administrative units were set up in the Dian area, the King of Dian retained his position. He was given the title Prince Dian (*Dianwang*), with the Seal of Prince of Dian (*Dianwang zhi yin*).³¹ Han China’s reorganization of local chieftains contributed to the local stability and in the long run helped to establish Chinese control. It was for the first time in Southwest China that a kind of frontier policy was launched. To a great extent, late imperial and modern China benefited from this policy and continued to develop this approach.

The last period of the Western Han witnessed many rebellions in the Southwest. In the first century CE when the Eastern Han (25-220 CE) consolidated its power, it not only resumed but expanded central control in the Southwest. In 51 CE, Xianli - a chief of the Ailao people - “voluntarily” subjected his people to the Eastern Han.³² In 69, Liuniao - the King of Ailao - sent his son to the Han court,

²⁸ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1: 5-6; *SJ*, juan 123, in *YNSLCK* 1:11.

²⁹ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:6.

³⁰ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:6.

³¹ *SJ*, juan 116, in *YNSLCK* 1:6.

³² *Hou Han Shu (History of the Eastern Han Dynasty, HHS hereafter)*, juan 86, in *YNSLCK* 1:59.

“asking to be imperial subjects”.³³ As a result, Yongchang prefecture was established, which brought west and southwest Yunnan under Han authority.

The Southern Expedition by Zhuge Liang

At the beginning of the third century, three kingdoms emerged and took the place of the Eastern Han. The Shu or Shu-Han Kingdom established by Liu Bei was based on the Ba and Shu area in modern Sichuan; the Wu kingdom controlled Jiangnan and south beyond; and north China was dominated by the Wei Kingdom. Since Wei was relatively powerful, Shu and Wu at times allied against the northern pressure, while they fought one another in the south when the northern threat was temporarily checked.

The Southwestern “barbarian” area was labeled Nanzhong/Ningzhou from the early third century until the sixth century. Normally Nanzhong was under the authority of Shu, but native chieftains (*yishuai*) and large clans (*daxing*) took advantage of the central chaos and became real rulers. Yizhou prefecture was controlled by Yong Kai; Zhu Bao ruled Zangke, Gao Dingyuan took over Yuexi,³⁴ while Yongchang was under Lü Kai who was still loyal to the Shu-Han court.³⁵ Jiaozhi (Annam) was headed by Shi Xie who was nominally under the authority of Wu. Through Shi Xie, Yong Kai exchanged missions with Wu.³⁶ Yong attempted to use Wu to consolidate his semi-independence while Wu saw it as an opportunity to expand its influence into Nanzhong, threatening the rear base of Shu. In addition, the control of Nanzhong would also help him gain access to some valuable resources such

³³ *HHS*, juan 86, in *YNSLCK* 1: 60. The above imperial records were rhetoric of Sino-centrism.

³⁴ *San Guo Zhi*(*Records of the Three Kingdoms*, *SGZ* hereafter), *Shu Shu* (*The Shu Book*), juan 3, in *YNSLCK* 1:107-108.

³⁵ *SGZ*, *Shu Shu*, juan 13, in *YNSLCK* 1:106

³⁶ *SGZ*, *Wu Shu*, juan 4, in *YNSLCK* 1: 124; *SGZ*, *Shu Shu*, juan 13, in *YNSLCK* 1:106

as horses that were not available in the Wu kingdom. Hence, while the Shu assigned officials to Nanzhong,³⁷ Wu also tried the same tactics to claim sovereignty, assigning Yong Kai to be the governor of Yongchang,³⁸ and Liu Chan as governor of Yizhou.³⁹

The threat of these native chieftains in Nanzhong became the primary concern of Zhuge Liang, the Prime Minister (*Chengxiang*) of Shu. As the true decision-maker of Shu, he had devised Shu's national strategy: allying with Wu and launching a northern expedition. To this end, Shu needed to keep peaceful relationships with western and southwestern peoples to consolidate the rear and avoid fighting two wars. However, the rebellion in Nanzhong not only jeopardized this national strategy, but also provided a good opportunity for Wei and Wu. Pacifying Nanzhong was a priority and utmost necessity.

³⁷ Li Hui, a Shu official, while holding the position of Laixiang Military governor, was also assigned as prefect of Jiaozhou (*jiaozhou cishi*), although Jiaozhou was under Wu's nominal control. See *SGZ, Shu Shu*, juan 13, in *YNSLCK* 1:104.

³⁸ *SGZ, Shu Shu*, juan 13, in *YNSLCK* 1: 104 &106.

³⁹ Liu Zhang, Liu Chan's father, formerly occupied the Ba and Shu area. When he invited Liu Bei to help defend the northern threat, Liu Bei usurped power and made Sichuan his base. See *SGZ, Shu Shu*, juan 1, in *YNSLCK* 1:107.

Map 1.3: Yunnan in the Three Kingdom Period (220-265)



Thus, in 225 when Zhuge Liang managed to restore the Shu-Wu alliance, he launched the Southern Expedition (*nanzheng*). While using force, Zhuge Liang realized the limitation of military victory. His strategy in the expedition was peaceful comfort (*hefu*), to win the support of those local leaders and peoples.⁴⁰ While he mercilessly destroyed and killed those formidable rebels, he left much space for local leaders to turn to Shu. The classic case was his treatment of Meng Huo, a native chieftain. It was said that Zhuge captured Meng seven times and released him seven

⁴⁰ *Zi Zhi Tong Jian (ZZTJ hereafter)*, juan 70, in *YNSLCK* 1:614; *Taiping Yulan*, juan 720, in *YNSLCK* 2:289.

times.⁴¹ Through this process, Zhuge Liang won the respect and loyalty of Meng Huo and other local elites. As a result, Nanzhong was pacified.

Nanzhong was not only crucial to the Shu's national strategy, but also served as a material base for Zhuge Liang's six northern expeditions. Horses, gold, silver, furs, taxes and other local products were all important for Shu's military campaigns. Furthermore, native forces were recruited into Shu's army and they fought in those expeditions.⁴² In short, Shu's exploration of Yunnan was unprecedented. The role of Nanzhong in the Three Kingdom Period somewhat repeated its significance in the Qin-Chu interaction, as contending rivals all sought to hold Yunnan for their expansion projects.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms: Nanzhao, Tang China and Tibet

In 263, Wei conquered Shu. Two years later, Wei was replaced by Jin. In 279, the state of Jin conquered the Wu regime and unified China. From then on, Nanzhong remained mainly under the control of native chieftains (*yishuai*) and large clans (*daxing*).

The native chieftains and large clans emerged at the end of the Eastern Han. By the mid-fourth century, the Cuan family controlled Nanzhong, or Ningzhou.⁴³ Under the Cuans, there were many autonomous native chieftains and clans. In 589, the Sui dynasty united China, and the Cuans submitted a tributary mission but the brutality of Sui officials and soldiers caused local rebellions. In 597 and 602, the Sui

⁴¹ HYGZ, juan 4, in *YNSLCK* 1:253; ZZTJ, juan 70, in *YNSLCK* 1:614.

⁴² HYGZ, juan 4, in *YNSLCK* 1:254; ZZTJ, juan 70, in *YNSLCK* 1:614.

⁴³ For discussions of the Cuans, see Yuan Shuwu, "Cuan Shijia (the Cuan Clan)" and "Cuan hou zhi Dian (Post-Cuan Yunnan)", in *YNSLCK* 1: 338-349; Fang Guoyu, *Fang Guoyu Wenji (Works of Fang Guoyu)*, 2001, 2: 35; and Backus 1981, 7-8.

launched two campaigns against the Cuan,⁴⁴ and Cuan Wan, the chief of the clan, was executed while his sons were taken and settled in Chang'an, the Sui capital.⁴⁵ As a result, Cuan power was decisively destroyed, which in turn facilitated the rise of other local chiefs and large clans.

The short-lived Sui dynasty did not establish its own authority in the region as it finally gave up Nanzhong, resulting in Yunnan no longer having communications with China (*yu Zhongguo jue*).⁴⁶ Before the rise and dominance of the Nanzhao kingdom around Yunnan in the eighth century, many local tribes, clans, peoples and other kinds of entities sprang up. Around Lake Erhai, namely the Dali area, there emerged six Zhao: Mengsui, Yuexi, Langqiong, Dengdan, Shilang, and Mengshe. “Zhao” was an indigenous non-Chinese language term, meaning “king” or “kingdom.”⁴⁷ Among the six regimes Mengshe was located south of the other five, so it was called Nanzhao (the Southern Kingdom). Besides the six regimes, there were other short-lived small local powers. Around the Dian Lake were Xicuan (Western Cuan) and Dongcuan (Eastern Cuan). In addition, many other peoples and polities existed, such as the so-called Jinchi (Gold Teeth), Heichi (Black Teeth), Puzi, Moxie, Jiu and so on.⁴⁸ It was Nanzhao that finally subjected the others, and

⁴⁴ For the Sui expeditions, see Backus 1981; Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:1-9. The Sui's military advance in the Southwest was not an exception. At the same time, the Sui moved to almost all its frontiers. Campaigns against Korea, and Linyi (Champa, located in Southern and Central Vietnam) were also launched as well.

⁴⁵ *ZZTJ*, juan 188, in *YNSLCK* 1: 624.

⁴⁶ *Taiping Yulan*, juan 791, in *YNSLCK* 1:334.

⁴⁷ Some sources state eight regimes. For the six or eight regimes, see Fan Chuo *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:22-31; Fan Guoyu 2001, 2:25-31.

⁴⁸ For these peoples, see You Zhong, *Yunnan Minzushi (History of Yunnan Ethnic Groups)*, Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 1994; Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:10-35; 36-41; 42-79.

competed with the powerful and classic empires such as Tang China and Tubo (Tibet). The belligerence of Nanzhao was even noticed by contemporary Arabs.⁴⁹

The Nanzhao kingdom was the golden age of Yunnan. Much research has been done on it both within and outside of China. Wang Jilin's *A study on the Nanzhao-Tang China Relationship*⁵⁰ and Charles Backus's *The Nanzhao Kingdom and Tang China's Southwestern Frontier* is the major contributions. However, the study of the Nanzhao-Tang-Tibet triangular relationship has generally been represented by the stimulus-response formula, a paradigm in Chinese scholarship. Thereby, the initiative and vigor of Yunnan as a whole and Nanzhao as a thriving regime have been much discounted.

As soon as the Tang dynasty replaced the Sui, it attempted to extend its suzerainty to the Southwest.⁵¹ The Tang Empire's strategy was to sponsor and create alliances with native chieftains. Such a policy while acknowledging local power, at least put a rein on local elites, and provided the basis for further penetration. In addition, the cost was much lighter than the use of force that would have been a financial burden to the new court.

The first move by the Tang was to release Cuan Hong whose father had been beheaded and who himself had been held hostage in Chang'an for some sixteen years. Cuan was appointed as the prefect (*Cishi*) of Kunzhou (*Kunming*), and at the same

⁴⁹ Mu Genglai, Wen jiang, & Huang Zhuohan, *Zhongguoyindu Jianwenlu (Travel Accounts of China and India)*, Trans. from *Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde, redigee en 851, texte etabli, traduit et commente par*, Paris, 1948, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2001, 14.

⁵⁰ Wang Jilin, *Tangdai Nanzhao yu Litang Guanxi zhi Yanjiu (A Study on the Nanzhao-Tang Relationship)*, Taipei: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1976.

⁵¹ For Tang China's foreign strategy and relations, see, for example, Pan Yihong, "Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors," dissertation, West Washington University, 1997.

time, diplomatic officials were sent to “comfort and persuade” other local chieftains.⁵² The case of Cuan had an expected effect, with many native leaders sending tributary missions to the Tang court or promising their submissions, and being rewarded with imperial titles and gifts.

Although its control was nominal, Tang China gradually extended its power and influence into Yunnan. In 621, the frontier prefecture of Yunnan was established and it was replaced by the Yaozhou Military Governorship (*Yaozhou Dudufu*) in 664CE.⁵³ The capital city was Yaoan, which was very close to the Lake Erhai area. This administrative unit symbolized the Tang’s achievements and foreshadowed its plan to bring western Yunnan under direct administration. By the mid-seventh century, Tang China had established over 170 departments (*zhou*) and counties (*xian*) in the Southwest.⁵⁴ In addition, the establishment of Annam Protectorate, Rongzhou *Dudufu* (capital in Yibin, Sichuan), and Qianzhou *Dudufu* (capital in Pengshui, Sichuan) completed an encirclement of Yunnan. Indeed, in 648, Tang China launched an expedition against the Songwai “Barbarians” and Xierhe “Barbarians”, mainly in the Lake Erhai area.⁵⁵

The Tang military expedition was to some extent a response to the proposal by Liu Boying, a military governor. Liu pointed out that although the local peoples were sometimes submissive they did rebel at other times. Hence, he thought an expedition against them was necessary. However, if the above reason for a long-distance campaign was a direct and immediate response to a local situation, Liu also repeated

⁵² *Xin Tang Shu* (*The New History of the Tang Dynasty*, *XTS hereafter*), juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:403; *Tong Dian*, juan 187, in *YNSLCK* 1:451; *Tang Huiyao*, juan 98, in *YNSLCK* 1:460.

⁵³ *Jiu Tang Shu* (*Old History of the Tang Dynasty*), juan 4, in *YNSLCK* 1:351; *Tang Huiyao*, juan 73, in *YNSLCK* 1:457-8.

⁵⁴ Fang Guoyu, *Zhongguo Xi'nan Lishi Dili Kaoshi* (*Historical and Geographical Examinations of Southwest China*), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987, Vol. 1, 265.

⁵⁵ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:406-407.

Zhang Qian's suggestion to the Han court centuries before by stating that communication between China and India (*Tianzhu*) through the Lake Erhai area could be established.⁵⁶ Again, the critical geographical location of Yunnan gave rise to Chinese interest. While wealth and trade were probably major reasons for Tang's interest as Backus suggests, military consideration should not be overlooked, since the early Tang was expanding into Central Asia just as the Han court had done.

Obviously Tang China would have put much energy into reducing local autonomy and enhance its authority in the Southwest, had the Tibet empire not arisen and threatened the Tang frontiers from northwest to southwest. Just like during the Han period, Central Asian power struggles again determined China's southwestern frontier policy. The only difference was that at this time Nanzhao, a Yunnan-based regime, played a very active and dynamic role in international politics.

Scholars of China tend to use Chinese sources on Nanzhao to describe how the Nanzhao rulers admired Tang China, how Tang China influenced or civilized Nanzhao, and how Tang China made use of Nanzhao to contain and defend Tibetan invasions. Therefore, a nationalist story of the Tang-Nanzhao alliance has been invented in the PRC to illustrate how local peoples (ethnic minorities) loved Chinese culture. While the Nanzhao people left little about their early history, fortunately Tibetan sources provide the other story, describing a cultural/marriage/military alliance between Nanzhao and Tibet in which Tibet dominated the relationship.⁵⁷

Tibetan sources found in the Dunhuang Caves recorded that *Vdus-srong-mang-po-rje*

⁵⁶ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:406-407; *ZZTJ*, juan 199, in *YNSLCK* 1:626.

⁵⁷ Chen Nan, "Tubo yu Nanzhao ji Erhezhuman Guanxi Congkao (Studies of the Relationship between Tibet, Nanzhao, and the Erhai barbarians)," in Chen Nan *Zangshi Congkao (Studies of Tibetan History)*, Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1998, 110-148; Ruey Yih-Fu, "Tangdai Nanzhao yu Tubo (The Relations between Nanzhao and Tubo in the Tang Period)," in *China: The Nation and Some Aspects of its Culture: A Collection of Selected Essays with Anthropological Approaches (Zhonguo Minzu jiqi Wenhua Lungao)*, Vol.1, Yen Wen Publication. CO., LTD, 353-370.

(Khri-vdus-srong-btsan), king of Tibet (676-704CE) led an expedition to the Erhai Lake region and died there, and his son probably married a princess of Nanzhao.⁵⁸ A Tibetan inscription tablet found in Lijiang reveals the submission of a Nanzhao prince or king himself to Tibet before the mid-eighth century.⁵⁹ This relationship is confirmed by a source in the Tibetan chronicles found in the Dunhuang caves that state that Nanzhao (Vjang) was under Tibet's administration.⁶⁰ Such a close relationship might account for that fact that Tibet did not intervene in Nanzhao's campaigns against other local regimes that were also Tibet's vassals.⁶¹

While the Tibetan story contrasts with and opposes Chinese claims, it is, as a matter of fact, Tibetan-centered, just like the Chinese accounts are Sino-centric. In both versions, Nanzhao is seen as passive and dominated by its powerful neighbor. A Nanzhao-based history that I have attempted to construct considers both stories while attempting to weed out subjective aspects. Examining the two versions, one cannot help asking why Nanzhao allied itself with Tang China at one time and Tibet at another time, or both at the same time. A close reading and comparison of these sources indeed leads to a dynamic and insightful Nanzhao that deftly took advantage of diverse circumstances to serve its utmost interests.

By the second half of the seventh century, the power of Nanzhao was impressive. It is recorded that Zhang-le-jin-qiu, the king of Baizi kingdom (*Baizi guo*) had to abdicate and Xi-nu-luo, first ruler of Nanzhao, replaced him.⁶² However,

⁵⁸ Chen Nan 116-120. For Tibet's expedition and influence in the Dali area, also see Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:149-156.

⁵⁹ Wang Rao, "Yunnan Lijiang Tubobei Shidu Zaji (Notes on Old Tibetan Inscription Found in Lijiang Yunnan)," in *Tang Yanjiu (Studies on the Tang Dynasty)*, Beijing: Beijing University Press, Vol.7, 2001, 421-427.

⁶⁰ Chen Nan 116-120.

⁶¹ This relationship is suggested in *Man Shu* and *XTS*. See *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:23-4; *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:401-2.

⁶² See *Nanzhao Yeshi*, in *YNSLCK* 4:774-5.

Nanzhao originally was not the most powerful. Polities such as the Mengsui and Yuexi kingdoms were relatively stronger. This power transfer (probably just a legend), whether peaceful as claimed or indeed violent, ushered in the expansion of Nanzhao in the Erhai area. Here arise two questions: why did the Tang choose to support Nanzhao? Next, what forces accounted for the quick growth of Nanzhao power? Chinese scholars usually seek economic productivity to explain internal development,⁶³ but geographic location seems more important. Probably it was trade that brought wealth and power to Nanzhao,⁶⁴ because Nanzhao was located the furthest south, and thus controlled the Southwest Silk Road that passed mainly through the Erhai area. Geographical location also helped Nanzhao check Tibetan influence. By the mid-seventh century, Tibet had already expanded its influence over the Erhai Lake region. All of the local regimes were more or less in contact with Tibet. However, since Nanzhao was located in the far south, it may have been able to resist Tibetan control better than others. That is why it was seen by Tang China as the best candidate to contain Tibetan expansion.

On the other hand, a favorable location was certainly not the whole story. The Mengsui Zhao was only several kilometers from Nanzhao. As they were both located in the Dali plain, the distance would not have made any difference, had the Tibetans invaded. Therefore, there may be other factors, for example, the Nanzhao rulers and their political strategy.

Chinese scholars often list the loyalty of Nanzhao to the Tang as the critical, if not the only reason, for Tang support,⁶⁵ but Nanzhao's contacts with Tibet were

⁶³ You Zhong 1994, 130; Wang Zhonghan, *Zhongguo Minzushi (History of Chinese Ethnic Groups)*, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehuikexue Chubanshe, 1994, 375.

⁶⁴ Backus 57.

⁶⁵ Ma Yao 1991, 83-4; You Zhong 1994, 130.

frequently recorded in the Tibetan chronicles from the late seventh century onward.⁶⁶ Clearly Nanzhao was playing games between the two powerful neighbors as it managed to please both of them, winning Tang support and Tibet's non-involvement in its unification project.

The incorporation of the other five *zhao* into the Nanzhao polity revealed the political wisdom of the Nanzhao rulers. Nanzhao applied a classic Chinese strategy, namely, making peace with those faraway while attacking its neighbors (*yuan jiao jin gong*) that were pursued by the Qin Empire in its expansion project. Under such a strategy, Nanzhao succeeded in bringing the Erhai Lake area under its authority by the 730s.⁶⁷ In 738, the Tang granted the Nanzhao ruler Pi-luo-ge the title “*Yunnan Wang*” (Prince of Yunnan), as recognition of his achievement and authority over the western portion of modern Yunnan. However, Pi-luo-ge - an ambitious man - was not satisfied with what he held in hand. He turned his attention to eastern Yunnan, which, to a large degree, led to the break-up of the Nanzhao-Tang alliance.

Many Cuan chieftains emerged in eastern Yunnan following the Sui campaign. Nominally accepting Tang's authority, they were in fact independent. Both the Tang and Nanzhao were interested in the Cuans. For the Tang, the Cuan area was a key element in its connections with the Annam Protectorate. Furthermore, control of the Cuan area could check Nanzhao on the one hand, and contain the Tibetan threat and probably support Tang in counter-attacking on the other hand. In addition, salt production in the Cuan area produced large profits. Although Nanzhao and the Cuans had ethnic/tribal relations, Nanzhao was salivating to take over the salt profit, and expand its power to eastern Yunnan. Pi-luo-ge demonstrated his wisdom by

⁶⁶ Chen Nan; Backus 70.

⁶⁷ See Wang Jilin; Backus; and Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:104-118.

taking advantage of both Tang China and the Cuans, and finally incorporating eastern Yunnan.

Tang China made an active move against the Cuans in the 740s. The main goal was to take control of the so-called Butou Road. The road was named after the town Butou where the road ended on the China-Annam border.⁶⁸ This road indeed was part of the Yunnan-Annam communication route and had been in use for a long period. Since it connected the two military governors of Annam and Rongzhou (Yibin, Sichuan), control of this road would have much increased Tang presence in the frontier region and improved communications. If the Annam-Sichuan connection was consolidated, not only would the Tang's southwest frontier be stabilized, but the encirclement of Yunnan would be completed.

In the process of taking control of the road, the Chinese also captured rich salt wells near the Anning fortress. The Anning fortress was located east of Lake Dian and towards the Dali plain. Its strategic importance was self-evident, since it was crucial for both the Tang's western advancement and Nanzhao's eastern expansion. To the Cuans, an active Tang presence was disastrous. The Cuans not only lost their profit but also for the first time taxes and labor levies was imposed upon them. Understandably, the Cuans rebelled, took back the Anning fortress and destroyed it. Again, the Tang court followed the conventional wisdom, using barbarians against barbarians, and Pi-luo-ge was asked to intervene both by the Tang and by the Cuans.⁶⁹

The internal divisions among the Cuans provided a good opportunity for Nanzhao. One widow of a Cuan ruler reportedly asked Pi-luo-ge to intervene after

⁶⁸ The location of Butou has been hotly debated. See Fang Guoyu 2001, 2: 669-84.

⁶⁹ *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:32; *XTS*, juan 222, *YNSLCK* 1:403-404.

her husband had been killed in the chaos.⁷⁰ Pi-luo-ge took advantage of this situation, playing one side against the other, and finally dispatching an army. In so doing, Nanzhao established its authority over the Cuans. In 748, Ge-luo-feng, Pi-luo-ge's son, resettled over 200,000 families to Yongchang. As a result, the Cuan area was depopulated and weakened. By the 750s, Nanzhao had succeeded in incorporating eastern Yunnan into its empire and become a potential rival to Tang China. The following period inevitably saw conflict between Tang China and Nanzhao.

The clash seems to have been the result of both local interests and court politics.⁷¹ The Cuan area provided a direct access to Annam and thus the South Sea where international trade was very profitable. Probably this was the main reason that local Tang officials could not tolerate the presence of Nanzhao in the Cuan area. Zhang Qiantuo, governor of Yaozhou, reportedly made excessive demands on Ge-luo-feng, and it is said that he even insulted Ge-luo-feng's wife.⁷² Ge-luo-feng tried his best to appeal to the Tang court, but his petitions failed, which forced him to pursue force. In 750, Nanzhao attacked and captured Yaozhou. The following year saw a Tang campaign led by Xianyu Zhongtong, the regional commander of Jiannan. Ge-luo-feng possibly regarded the previous incident as personal vengeance, and apparently sought peace. He stated, "large Tibetan armies are right now present on the frontiers. If you do not accept my proposal, I have to turn my allegiance to Tibet, and Yunnan will no longer belong to the Tang."⁷³ Xianyu Zhongtong detained the

⁷⁰ For the detail of Nanzhao-Cuan-Tang conflict, see Fan Chuo *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:32-3; *XTS*, juan 222, *YNSLCK* 1:403-404; Wang Jilin 191-6; and Backus 61-7.

⁷¹ See Backus 64; 69. Yang Guozhong, the brother of Concubine Yang (Yang Guifei) attempted to utilize the Southwestern campaign to enhance his voice in the court. Madame Yang was the favourite wife of the emperor.

⁷² *JTS*, juan 197, in *YNSLCK* 1:374; *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:389.

⁷³ *JTS*, juan 197, in *YNSCLK* 1: 374; *XTS*, juan 216, in *YNSLCK* 1:6; juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:389-390.

Nanzhao envoys, and turned down the appeal, but his expedition turned into a disaster for Tang forces.

On hearing the negative response, Nanzhao immediately turned to Tibet. Tibet was glad to see the conflict between Nanzhao and the Tang, and welcomed Nanzhao's tributary envoy. With the exchange of envoys, their alliance was formally established. Tibet and Nanzhao agreed to be "fraternal states (*xiongdi zhiguo*);" Ge-luo-feng was given the titles "*zangpuzhong*" (younger brother) and "eastern emperor (*dongdi*)" with a gold seal.⁷⁴ Hence, Tibet managed to establish its authority over Nanzhao.

The Tang court did not give up after one failure. In 753, another expedition was prepared, but this was also defeated by Nanzhao.⁷⁵ In 754, the Tang organized a large army of more than 100,000 troops that advanced to the Dali plain, resulting only in their slaughter. It is said that few Tang soldiers survived, and even Li Mi, the Tang general, drowned himself.⁷⁶ This campaign was the Tang's last major military project in the Southwest. Indeed, this campaign had an extremely negative effect on the Tang, speeding the weakening of central authority over local military governors. The Tang court had lost some of its best soldiers just before the greatest rebellion it was to face. The following year saw the An Lushan Rebellion that exhausted the Tang Empire. Consequently, Tang China no longer had the ability or desire to deal with an aggressive Nanzhao.

The second half of the eighth century witnessed the unprecedented expansion by Nanzhao. Since its northern frontier faced no threat, Nanzhao turned to its other

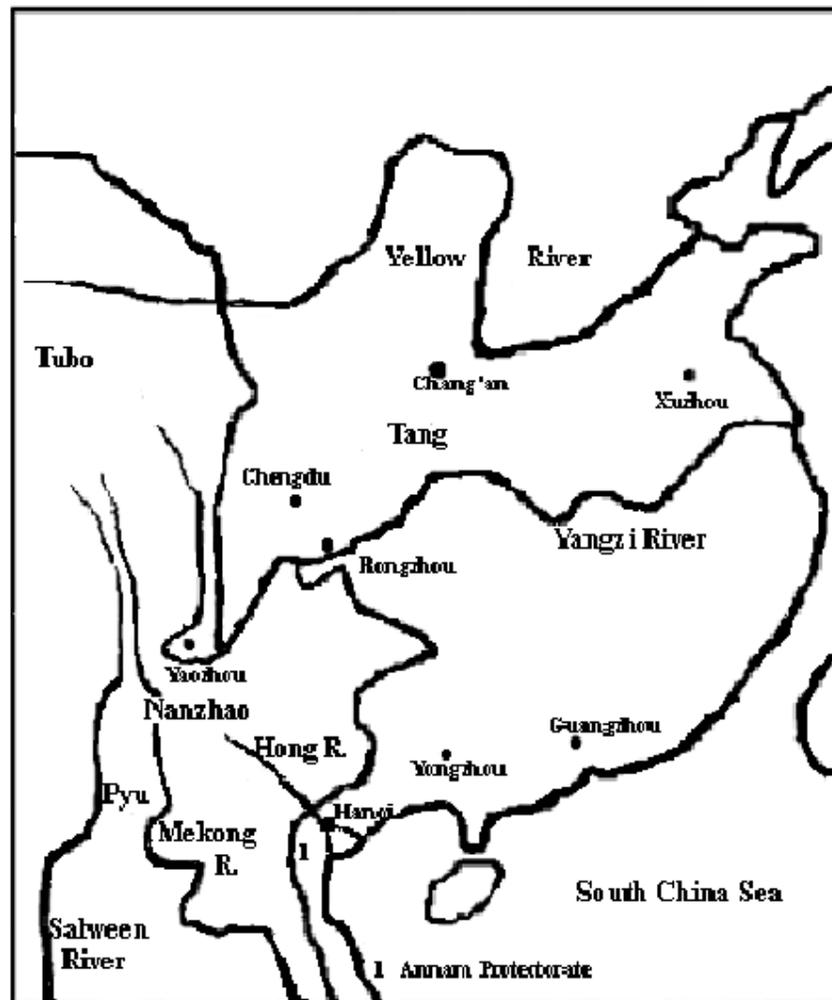
⁷⁴ *JTS*, juan 197, in *YNSCLK* 1: 374; *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:389-390.

⁷⁵ *Nanzhao Dehuabei*, in *YNSLCK* 2:380.

⁷⁶ *JTS*, juan 197, in *YNSCLK* 1: 374; *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:390; *Nanzhao Dehuabei*, in *YNSLCK* 2:380

neighboring ethno-entities.⁷⁷ By 794, when Nanzhao and Tang China resumed their previous alliance, Nanzhao had, in the north, reached the north bank of the Jinsha River; in the east, it was in control of the Cuan area; and in the south and southwest, it had expanded and reached today's Burma, imposing a tributary system upon local peoples.

Map 1.4: Nanzhao and Its World



⁷⁷ On Nanzhao's expansion, see Fan Chuo *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:1-78-83; *Nanzhao Dehuabei*, in *YNSLCK* 2:380-81; Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:122-136.

The growing power of Nanzhao increased its tension with Tibet. The alliance between Nanzhao and Tibet was unequal. Although Tibet supported Nanzhao's war against Tang China, and bestowed honorable titles on the Nanzhao rulers, Nanzhao paid a heavy price to win this support. Tibet demanded all kinds of taxes and levies, and the Nanzhao army was summoned to join Tibet's battles in Central Asia.⁷⁸ It is true that Nanzhao was of great importance for the prolonged conflict between Tibet and China.⁷⁹

To contain Nanzhao, Tibet held several strategic fortresses on Nanzhao's northwestern frontiers. The most famous was the Iron Bridge that probably was the first suspension iron bridge in the world. A military fort was established there by Tibet (*Shenchuan Dudu*), as a potential threat to the Dali plain, the center of Nanzhao. Additionally, the remnant rulers of the five Zhao were kept in Shenchuan Protectorate, also as a potential threat to Nanzhao.⁸⁰ All the above revealed Tibet's containment and exploitation of Nanzhao, which in turn resulted in complaints from Nanzhao and its eventual decision to break the alliance.

The alliance between Nanzhao and Tibet was to a large degree a response to the Tang. Likewise, the break down of this alliance can be accredited to the subsequent active attitude and invitations of the Tang Empire. Through its alliance with Nanzhao prior to the 750s, Tang China was able to concentrate on the struggle in the northwest and the west. However, after the 750s, the situation totally changed. Allying with Nanzhao, Tibetan cavalry challenged Tang's long frontiers from its

⁷⁸ *ZZTJ*, juan 233, juan 234, in *YNSLCK* 1: 633-5; Backus 82; Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages*, Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987, 141. *ZZTJ* (juan 234) states that Tibet asked for a relief of 10,000 from Nanzhao, as it lost greatly in the war against the Uighurs. This implies that Nanzhao force had been dispatched to fight in Central Asia.

⁷⁹ Beckwith 141.

⁸⁰ Yi-mou-xun listed all these factors in his letter to the Tang; see *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:389-91.

southwest to its northwest. As a result, Tibet managed to expand its frontiers to the suburbs of Chang'an. In 763, the Tibetan army captured Chang'an, and the Nanzhao army was probably involved in this battle.⁸¹

Eventually, Tang China managed to stop Tibet's advances. In 779, the Tang army achieved a significant victory over the Tibetan-Nanzhao alliance in Sichuan. This success resulted in some major changes among the three empires. First, the Tang and Tibet subsequently entered a relatively peaceful period. Conflicts on the frontiers decreased; negotiations were resumed, ending in the 783 treaty of border demarcation. Second, the loss in this war increased Nanzhao-Tibetan tensions. Yi-mou-xun, the Nanzhao ruler, moved his capital to Dali City, a signal of his concern and cautiousness.⁸² Finally, Tibet took back titles bestowed on the Nanzhao king, and degraded the already unequal relationship. Yi-mou-xun was granted a new title, *Ridongwang*, or "king of the region east of the Sun."⁸³ As a result, mistrust and conflicts increased.

It was in such an international situation that the Tang court began pursuing a new frontier strategy. Li Pi, a Tang minister, suggested to the Emperor that an alliance among the Tang, Uighurs, Turks (*Tujue*), Nanzhao, India (*Tianzhu*), and Arabs (*Dashi*) against Tibet be established. This plan was very similar to what Emperor Wu of the Western Han attempted when handling the Xiongnu.⁸⁴ With such an alliance, Tang China could complete an encirclement and Tibet would become distracted and no longer be able to concentrate on China. Li Pi pointed out that the most crucial allies indeed were the Uighurs and Nanzhao. He emphasized that

⁸¹ Beckwith 141.

⁸² *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:390.

⁸³ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:390

⁸⁴ *ZZTJ*, juan 233, in *YNSLCK* 1:633.

through an alliance with Nanzhao, Tibet's right arm would be cut off. Li's suggestion again was an application of "using barbarians against barbarians" and a new version of Han China's proposal of allying with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu.

The cooperation between the Uighurs and Tang China was soon completed when the Tang court agreed to have a princess marry the Uighur Khan. However, it took longer to resume the Tang-Nanzhao alliance. The major figure who completed this project was Wei Gao. Wei Gao was appointed as the governor of Jiannan in 785 and remained so until his death in 805. During the two decades as the commander on Sichuan frontier, Wei Gao adeptly exploited local forces to contain, and on many occasions defeat Tibetan invasions. Thereby, the Sichuan frontier was stabilized. More importantly, Wei Gao successfully implemented the Tang strategy by increasing and utilizing the tension and mistrust between Nanzhao and Tibet, and finally established an alignment with Nanzhao.

Facing the increasing Tibetan threat, the Nanzhao ruler was also thinking of resuming the Tang-Nanzhao cooperation. Zheng Hui, a captured Tang official who had become a prime minister (*Qingping guan*) of Nanzhao, proposed an alliance with Tang China. He enhanced his argument by emphasizing the heavy demands made by Tibet and earlier friendly treatment by Tang China.⁸⁵ Zheng Hui was Yi-mou-xun's personal tutor and advisor and his words were thus very influential. In 793, Yi-mou-xun finally decided to accept China's olive branch. Considering Tibet's control and influence on local peoples, Yi-mou-xun sent three envoys through different routes to Chang'an to make sure that his intention was transmitted to the Tang court. One went through Sichuan, one passed through Guizhou, and the last took a route through Annam. All three routes were indeed parts of the Southwest Silk Road. In 794, Yi-

⁸⁵ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:390.

mou-xun received the Tang envoy, and the Nanzhao-Tang alliance was re-established.⁸⁶

At that time, Tibet had lost a large number of soldiers in its wars with the Uighurs who had already allied themselves with the Tang. So Tibet demanded that Nanzhao provide 10,000 soldiers. Yi-mou-xun agreed to send 5,000 men as reinforcements but a large Nanzhao army followed the reinforcements and a sudden and violent attack was launched against the Tibetan forces. Without any alert, the Tibetans were badly defeated. The Iron Bridge was taken by Nanzhao,⁸⁷ and as a result, Tibet's access to the Dali plain was blocked. In addition, with the crucial support of Nanzhao, the Tang army won one victory after another on the western and southwestern frontiers. Military losses, internal political turmoil and natural disasters made Tibet unable to confront the Tang and its allies. By the end of the eighth century Tibet was no longer a major threat to either the Tang dynasty or Nanzhao.

The victory of 794 was just the beginning of another round of Nanzhao expansion. Nanzhao immediately occupied the Tibetan-Nanzhao frontiers, and moved the descendants of the former five regimes to the Yongchang area. At the same time, Nanzhao likely tightened its suzerainty over the Pyu polity, because Xun-ge-quan, the son of Yi-mou-xun, assigned himself a new title, "*Biaoxin*", or the King of Pyu.⁸⁸ Such authority over Pyu can be discerned by the 802 Nanzhao tribute mission to the Tang court, as in this mission were included Pyu musicians and dancers.⁸⁹ The Pyu seemed not to be direct vassals of Tang China, but of Nanzhao.

⁸⁶ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:391.

⁸⁷ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:391.

⁸⁸ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:394.

⁸⁹ *Tang Huiyao*, juan 100, in *YNSLCK*, 1:465; *ZZTJ*, juan 236, in *YNSLCK* 1:636.

The first two decades of the ninth century were the honeymoon of the new Tang-Nanzhao relationship. Each year official embassies were exchanged. The Tang even established a school in Chengdu for Nanzhao royal youth. This project lasted almost half a century, and a large number of Nanzhao youth supposedly received Chinese education.⁹⁰ Other sources confirmed the special role of Nanzhao in the Tang court. The Tang suspended its court when the deaths of Nanzhao rulers were reported in 808 and again in 816.⁹¹ A Japanese monk noticed that Nanzhao was ranked first of the five foreign embassies to the Tang court in 839, ahead of Japan and others.⁹²

The peaceful relationship lasted over three decades until 829 when Nanzhao suddenly plundered the Tang's southwest frontiers. The Nanzhao army took over Qiongzhou, Rongzhou, and Suizhou, and entered Chengdu. When it retreated, hundreds of Sichuan people including skilled artisans were taken.⁹³ The 829 invasion started another round of Nanzhao expansion and the subsequent Sino-Nanzhao clashes lasted for several decades.⁹⁴ In 832, the Nanzhao army captured the capital of the Pyu kingdom in upper Burma, and over 3,000 Pyu people were moved to Zhidong.⁹⁵ Three years later, Nanzhao launched an expedition and destroyed the kingdom of Michen in lower Burma. Two to three thousand local captives were moved to the Lishui River in northwest Yunnan to pan for gold.⁹⁶ Nanzhao also attacked the Khmer peoples of Zhenla with its armies reaching the sea.⁹⁷ In addition, Nanzhao invaded Kunlunguo (Kunlun Kingdom) and Nuwangguo (Queen Kingdom), but was defeated

⁹⁰ *ZZTJ*, juan 249, in *YNSLCK* 1:640-41.

⁹¹ *Ce Fu Yuan Gui*, juan 976, in *YNSLCK* 2:301.

⁹² Edwin O. Reischauer (translator), *Enmin's Diary: the Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of Law*, New York: Ronald Press, 1955, 90.

⁹³ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:394-95, *ZZTJ*, juan 244, in *YNSLCK* 1:638. Later, about 4-5,000 people were returned by Nanzhao. See *ZZTJ*, juan 244, in *YNSLCK* 1:639.

⁹⁴ For the clash between Tang China and Nanzhao in the early ninth century, see Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:291-316.

⁹⁵ *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:80.

⁹⁶ *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:79.

⁹⁷ *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2:82.

on both occasions.⁹⁸ Generally speaking, Nanzhao was the most powerful kingdom in mainland Southeast Asia, and played an extremely active role in multi-state interactions.

As expected, the Tang-Nanzhao alignment eventually broken down in the mid-ninth century. Shi-long, the new ruler of Nanzhao adopted his own reign title rather than following the Chinese era, claimed himself emperor (*huangdi*), and renamed his country Dali Kingdom, symbolizing that Nanzhao refused to accept China's nominal suzerainty.⁹⁹

Nanzhao then further expanded into Guizhou, Guangxi, and Annam. In 859, Nanzhao captured Bozhou (Zhunyi) and this event expanded the Nanzhao-Tang clashes. When the Tang governor of Annam took Bozhou back in the following year, Nanzhao, with the help of native peoples, occupied the Annam capital when the Tang army moved to Bozhou. When the Tang forces returned, Nanzhao troops retreated from the Annam capital but attacked and plundered Yongzhou (Guangxi). Nanzhao's swift use of guerrilla warfare brought about tremendous hardship for the Tang defense. In the winter of 862, Nanzhao, allying with local groups, led an army of over 50,000 men to invade Annam. Cai Xi, the governor of Annam, not only lost Hanoi, but also his own life and those of his family members, although defenders in Hanoi carried out persistent resistance. It is reported that the Tang lost over 150,000 soldiers (either killed or captured by Nanzhao) in the two Annam battles.¹⁰⁰ Rather than simply plundering, this time Nanzhao decided to put Annam under its control. Over 20,000

⁹⁸ *Man Shu*, in *YNSLCK* 2: 80-2.

⁹⁹ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1: 395-6; *ZZTJ*, juan 249 in *YNSLCK* 1:641. This is different from the later Dali kingdom. The two "li" were different characters.

¹⁰⁰ For these battles, see *ZZTJ*, juan 249-250, in *YNSLCK* 1: 641-643; *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:395. This number of 150,000 probably is exaggerated. Fan Chuo survived the second attack, and left us *Man Shu*.

soldiers were left to defend Hanoi.¹⁰¹ Nanzhao's decision was probably made in consideration of the profit of the South Sea Trade.

In 864, Gao Pian - a very experienced general - was assigned by the Tang court to be the Governor of Annam. It was his outstanding military leadership that finally led to him retaking Annam and consolidating this frontier. The autumn of 866 saw Tang victory in Hanoi and soon all the Nanzhao forces were driven away.¹⁰² However, Tang China had no ability to attack Nanzhao because a decade-long war had resulted in economic disasters and popular unrest along these frontiers. While it was the army that defended Tang China, it was also the army that ignited a rebellion exhausting this empire.

In 862, some soldiers from Xuzhou, a city by the Grand Canal, were dispatched as reinforcements in the war against Nanzhao. Two years later, 3,000 of them were stationed in Guizhou (now Guilin, Guangxi). They were originally supposed to serve for three years, but their return was postponed in 868 when they had already served for 6 years. This time dissatisfaction and protest developed into a rebellion. Under the leadership of Pang Xun, these soldiers left their posts and marched to their hometowns.¹⁰³ Many peasants joined them during this long march. No sooner had Tang China suppressed the uprising than Huang Chao started his large rebellion that finally ended the Tang Empire.

While Nanzhao had been defeated in Annam, it still occasionally attacked Sichuan. In 869 for example, Shi-long - the king of Nanzhao - invaded Sichuan. Although facing Tang resistance, Nanzhao captured Jiazhou, Jianwei, Lizhou, Yazhou, Qiongzhou, and Meizhou. Again Chengdu was in danger but the Nanzhao army did

¹⁰¹ *ZZTJ*, juan 250, in *YNSLCK* 1:643.

¹⁰² *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:396; *ZZTJ*, juan 250, in *YNSLCK* 1:645.

¹⁰³ *XTS*, juan 148, in *YNSLCK* 1: 445-6; "Xi'nanyi Benmo", in *YNSLCK* 1: 682.

not march quickly. Plundering and robbery seemed to be their priority, which provided Tang officials with precious time to prepare. Shi-long decided to retreat after several bloody engagements probably because he and his army already had enough trophies to bring home.¹⁰⁴

In 874, Nanzhao again attacked Sichuan. The Tang court decided to move Gao Pian from Annam to Sichuan, expecting him to repeat his Annam victory. Gao Pian did in fact manage to retrieve a seemingly hopeless situation.¹⁰⁵ In 876, the Tang and Nanzhao exchanged missions and in the following year Shi-long died and his son Long-shun ascended the throne. Negotiations continued even as Nanzhao insisted on an equal status of brotherhood and requested a marriage alliance that caused a debate in the Tang court.¹⁰⁶ Finally, when Tang China faced the Huang Chao rebellion in 880, Emperor Xizong decided to accept Nanzhao's requests but it seems that the marriage never took place. It was being postponed again and again by the Tang court.¹⁰⁷ Nanzhao at the time was also weakened by the long-term war.¹⁰⁸ The two courts continued to exchange missions until the end of the ninth century.

In 902, Zheng Maisi - a grandson of Zheng Hui - murdered the child king of Nanzhao, and established a short-lived regime, ending powerful Nanzhao. Several years later, the Tang dynasty was also replaced by many kingdoms. By the early tenth century, Tibet, Nanzhao, and Tang China, three major players in the international stage, had all collapsed.

¹⁰⁴ For the 869 invasion, see *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:396-8; *ZZTJ*, juan 249, 252, in *YNSLCK* 1:646-49.

¹⁰⁵ For the 874 invasion, see *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:398-400; *ZZTJ*, juan 252, in *YNSLCK* 1:649-650.

¹⁰⁶ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:399-400; *ZZTJ*, juan 252-253, in *YNSLCK* 1:651-53.

¹⁰⁷ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:401; *ZZTJ*, juan 253, 255, in *YNSLCK* 1:653-654. For the marriage negotiation, see Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:317-323.

¹⁰⁸ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK* 1:398.

One of most intriguing question is to what degree Nanzhao contributed to the fall of the Tang. Imperial Chinese historians noticed the connection between Nanzhao, military rebellions, and the fall of the Tang Empire. They argued that it was the Nanzhao invasion that forced the Tang to re-post northern soldiers and extend their service terms. Thus, Nanzhao contributed to the Pang Xun rebellion that ignited the Huang Chao disaster. In *Xin Tang Shu (New History of the Tang Dynasty, thereafter XTS)*, Song historians concluded, “The Tang was ended by Huang Chao, but the foundation of disaster was laid at Guilin (*Tang wang yu Huang Chao, er huo jiyu Guilin*).”¹⁰⁹ Chen Yinke, a well-known contemporary scholar of Tang China, has demonstrated the interplay between foreign peoples (*waizu*) and internal administration (*neizheng*) by citing the Nanzhao case and the above Song statement;¹¹⁰ Xia Guangnan has stated that Nanzhao was the most important reason for Tang China’s collapse;¹¹¹ Backus thinks that the conclusion in *XTS* was exaggerated and distorted, but his comments are problematic. On the one hand, he points out that “it is true that the Nanzhao invasion of the south greatly exacerbated T’ang troubles...” and that “the Nanzhao kingdom did contribute a great deal to the dynasty’s decline.” Yet, on the other hand, he concludes that, “even indirectly, Nanzhao did not cause the fall of the T’ang.”¹¹² In sum, it is reasonable to say that, since Nanzhao had caused the Tang’s decline¹¹³ and had indirectly caused the Pang

¹⁰⁹ *XTS*, juan 222, in *YNSLCK*, 1:402.

¹¹⁰ Chen Yinke 1999, *Tangdai Zhengzhi Zhidushi Shulungao (A Draft of the Political System of the Tang Dynasty)*, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 155.

¹¹¹ Xia Guangnan 1968, *Yuandai Yunnan Shidi Congkao (Studies on Yunnan History and Geography in the Yuan Dynasty)*, Taipei: Zhonghua Shuju, 61.

¹¹² Backus 145.

¹¹³ Gao Lishi, an influential eunuch, warned Emperor Xuanzong that the repeated losses of Tang soldiers in Yunnan would leave the Tang a defenseless situation against other frontiers generals. His words were ignored, but later they turned out to be true. Generals in northern frontiers represented by An Lushan held paramount military power. An rebelled soon, and forced Xuanzong to abdicate himself and flee to Sichuan, since the Tang court did not have a state army strong enough to defend

Xun Rebellion, it was one of the factors that led to the fall of the Tang, though mainly an indirect factor.

While the significance of Nanzhao in Chinese history has been recognized, its role in Southeast Asia should not be ignored. Gordon Luce, the prominent scholar of Burmese studies, pointed out that Nanzhao's attack and rule of the Pyu in upper Burma was extremely crucial to the subsequent formation of the Burmese kingdoms. The vacuum created by Nanzhao when it destroyed the Pyu provided the "proto-Burmans" with a golden opportunity to build their own kingdom.¹¹⁴ Many Chinese sources that recorded the military clashes between Nanzhao and Southeast Asian regimes also confirmed the influence of Nanzhao on the said region. In addition, Nanzhao's clash with the Tang in Annam definitely contributed to the independence of Dai Viet in the tenth century.

The discussions above suggest the possibility of a world-system analysis or a global approach. The close and frequent interactions among the three regimes probably qualify to be some aspects of a world-system. Studies of any one of the three kingdoms should be put in their international/global context. It may also yield some new dimensions if we treat Nanzhao, Tibet, Tang China, other Central Asian regimes, and probably the Arabs, and Indian kingdoms in one world, since their military, political, commercial, and cultural interactions were much more intensive than most people would imagine. A typical example is the case of music. In 794, during the reception of Tang envoys, Yi-mou-xun presented Central Asian musicians and dancers who had been gifts from the Tang court. Eight years later, Nanzhao

against the rebels. Hence, Tang's losses in Yunnan definitely increased its inability to handle internal crisis. See *XTS*, 206/5860.

¹¹⁴ G.H. Luce, "Old Kyaukse and the Coming of the Burmans," *Journal of Burma Research Society*, vol. 42, 1959, 76-80.

presented Chang'an people with Pyu music, dance, and songs. Bai Juyi, the famous poet, wrote several poems, exclusively praising the impressive Pyu performance.¹¹⁵

This single case certainly is not strong enough a proof in itself, but indeed many other interactions among these areas are underestimated or overlooked.

Of course we need to ponder on the types and frequency of interactions that create a World-System. I do not intend to argue for such a World-System consisting of Tang China, Nanzhao, Tibet, and other Central Asian regimes and beyond. What I am attempting to do here is to point out that the frequency of interactions in the so-called "ancient world" was sufficient to disqualify any national or regional approach, and instead requires a global approach.

The Tang's bitter experience with Nanzhao became a historical lesson for the future Chinese rulers. A belligerent Nanzhao deeply marked Chinese frontier history and rulers' minds. The Song dynasty, for example, was very cautious in dealing with the Dali kingdom, Nanzhao's successor in Yunnan.

Dali, Song China, and Central Asian Kingdoms

The first four decades after the end of Nanzhao saw a series of short-lived regimes until the Dali kingdom (937-1253 CE) was established by Duan Siping in 937.¹¹⁶ The Dali kingdom was contemporary with the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), just like Nanzhao paralleled Tang China.

Generally speaking, Dali inherited Nanzhao's territory but the Dali rulers were not as belligerent as those of Nanzhao. This is perhaps because they fully realized the

¹¹⁵ For Bai Juyi's poems about Nanzhao and Pyu, see *YNSLCK* 2:142-45.

¹¹⁶ Those regimes included "*Da Chang He Guo*" established by the Zhengs (902-928), "*Da Tian Xing Guo*" by the Zhaos (928-929), and "*Da Yi Ning Guo*" by the Yangs (929-936). For this period, see Fang Guoyu 2001 2:325-357.

negative effects of military campaigns or probably because they were pious converts of Buddhism.¹¹⁷ The relationship between Dali and Song China was restricted and not as complicated as during the Nanzhao times.¹¹⁸ Song China's restrained stance was made so by historical lessons and practical considerations. The image of Nanzhao as a trouble-maker was still in people's minds, and the Song rulers had compared risks with rewards of a campaign against Yunnan. When a Song general pacified Sichuan and asked for permission to take Yunnan, Zhao Kuangyin, the founding emperor of the Song ordered him to stop. A legend was frequently repeated in Chinese historical records that romanticized Zhao's decision: Zhao used a jade axe to demarcate a boundary line along the Dadu River on his imperial map.¹¹⁹ Such a story symbolizes that the Song court did not have any intention of taking steps to put Yunnan under its rule.

Enormous pressure from the northern frontier is another key to understanding the Song's attitude to Dali. The Song dynasty was not as strong militarily as the Tang, and its first concern was the Central Asian kingdoms. Northern Kingdoms such as the Xixia, the Liao, the Jin and the Mongols all pressured Song China to such an unprecedented degree that the Song was forced to give up Sino-centric principles and adopted a pragmatic attitude to deal with them. As happened in the Han period when Emperor Wu gave up his southwestern advance in order to concentrate on his northern campaign, the Song state developed a defensive policy on its southwest border, because it could not afford two dangerous frontiers or two wars at the same time.

¹¹⁷ Eight of the twenty-two emperors of the Dali kingdom retired to be monks, living out their last years in monasteries. Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:537.

¹¹⁸ For the Song-Dali communications, see Fang Guoyu 2001, 2:451-469.

¹¹⁹ Li Jing *Yunnan Zhilue*, in *YNSLCK3*: 126; *Nanzhao Yeshi (Wild History of Nanzhao)*, in *YNSLCK4*:784.

Once again, we see that the Great Wall frontier and the Southwestern frontier were closely linked and interacted.

Thus the international policy of the Song was to close the southwest frontier and isolate Dali, while paying primary attention to the northern frontiers. After all, the political and economic center of the Northern Song (960-1127) was in the Yellow River region. Therefore, it is reasonable that in the beginning the Northern Song was cautious when handling the Dali kingdom.

Historically, Yunnan and Sichuan had frequent exchanges, official or otherwise and the Dali kingdom showed a lot of interest in developing a relationship with Song China. On hearing the news that Sichuan was conquered by the Song in 965, the Dali ruler ordered its Jianchang (now Xichang, Sichuan) official to send them a congratulatory letter. Three years later, Dali again requested the Song court to establish relations.¹²⁰ Following these requests, the Song decided to provide big boats on the Dadu River for the Dali tribute missions in 982.¹²¹ Dali continued to dispatch tribute missions in 985, 989, 991, 997, 999, 1005, 1008, and 1038.¹²² On the other hand, the Song court kept refusing many of these tribute missions. Why did Dali desire to establish an official relationship with the Song? Perhaps history had also made the Dali rulers more aware. The belligerence of Nanzhao not only troubled the Tang Empire, but also weakened local peoples. By contrast, a peaceful frontier would benefit the stability and prosperity of Dali, as local trade between Yunnan and Sichuan was interdependent. Many Yunnan tribes were also either nomadic or engaged in husbandry, so they relied on agricultural products from Sichuan.

¹²⁰ *Zhidao Yunnan Lu*, in *YNSLCK* 1:177.

¹²¹ *Song Huiyao Jigao*, juan 192, in *YNSLCK* 1:518-9, juan 198, in *YNSLCK* 1:522.

¹²² Li You, *Songchao Shishi (Facts of the Song Dynasty)*, in Fang Guoyu, 2:452.

The eagerness of Dali to develop the Sino-Dali relationship contrasted sharply with the restrained attitude of the Song Empire, which was illustrated by the diplomatic exchanges in 989. This year the Dali ruler again asked for an imperial title, but the Song court while encouraging Dali to rule its own people tenderly, refused the request on the excuse that the Song was facing a drought and northern troubles.¹²³ This refusal seemed not to discourage the Dali court, since their missions kept arriving at the Song court. Finally in 1115, the Song court accepted Dali's request and a Dali embassy reached Kaifeng in 1117. Duan Heyu, the king of Dali kingdom, was granted many titles including King of Dali (*Daliguowang*).¹²⁴ As a result, a formal political relationship was established.

Political upgrading did not necessarily brought about the growth in trade. When some people suggested that markets be set up south of the Dadu River, the Song court asked Sichuan officials to investigate the possibility.¹²⁵ Perhaps because local officials did not want any trouble, they opposed the suggestion by citing Zhao Kuangyin's demarcation. They argued that the isolationist policy had brought peace to Sichuan for over 150 years and that the establishment of markets would open the gate and bring troubles to China.¹²⁶ Under the increasing pressure from the north, the Song's concerns grew as well. Hence, Dali's demand for increasing trade was overcome by the Song's concerns about security.

In 1127, the Jin kingdom captured Kaifeng, capital of the Northern Song, and the remnant Song rulers escaped to Jiangnan, starting the Southern Song dynasty with Hangzhou as its capital. Having been driven from the Yellow River to the Yangzi

¹²³ You Zhong 1994, 254.

¹²⁴ *Song Shi (History of the Song Dynasty)*, juan 488, in *YNSLCK* 1:478.

¹²⁵ *Song Shi*, juan 353, in *YNSLCK* 1:505.

¹²⁶ *Song Shi*, juan 353, in *YNSLCK* 1:505. Local officials also cited the case of Nanzhao to support the isolation policy, see *Song Shi*, juan 347, in *YNSLCK* 1:504-505.

River, the Song state was not sure whether the Jin cavalry could be checked. Terrified Song rulers further increased their alert over Dali, and again attempted to reduce China's connection with Dali.

Map 1.5: Dali and the Northern Song



In 1136, Duan Heyu dispatched a mission to the Southern Song, intending to continue the previous relationship. Among many tribute gifts were elephants that symbolized subordination, a Southeast Asian custom. The Song court understood its implication. Interestingly, Zhao Gou, the first emperor of the Southern Song,

accepted all other gifts but elephants, which means that he did not want Dali to keep a tributary relationship.¹²⁷ The Song's attitude was best revealed by a statement of Zhu Zhen, a scholar of the imperial academy. Zhu pointed out that keeping Dali in the middle, neither as the enemy nor the subject was the best measure to handle the "barbarians" (*yu kou bu de, yu chen bu de, zuide yurong shangce*).¹²⁸ However, military necessity drove Song China to open its gates to Dali, because the Dali kingdom cultivated a local animal that Song China did not produce but badly desired - the horse.

The Song's battles against the Xixia, the Liao, the Jin, and the Mongols required a large number of war-horses. Because the Song territory did not produce enough horses, a large number of war-horses were traded from nomadic peoples. During the Northern Song, war-horses could be obtained from northwestern frontiers and a small part might have come from tribute missions. For example, horses were always a major gift from Dali. In 1136, while the Song court refused elephants, it gladly accepted horses.

The loss of the Central Plains meant the loss of Song's access to northwestern horses. Jiangnan did not breed horses but the ongoing wars demanded them,¹²⁹ and the Jin cavalry was already much better. Fortunately, the Dali kingdom was famous for excellent horses. Hence, the Song state was left without any choice but to trade with Dali. International struggles, on the one hand, encouraged the Song to restrict its connections with Yunnan, but on the other hand, pushed the Song to trade with Yunnan.

¹²⁷ *Jianyan Yilai Xinian Yaolu*, juan 105, in *YNSLCK* 2:214; You Zhong 1994, 256.

¹²⁸ *Jianyan Yilai Xinian Yaolu*, juan105, in *YNSLCK* 2:214

¹²⁹ The Song government had tried to breed horses in the mid-Yangzi region, but the result was rather disappointing. Only about twenty horses were born over a decade and none of them was suitable for military purposes. See *Song Shi*, juan 198, in *YNSLCK* 1:500.

Although there were two debates on the issue in the Song court in 1133 and 1136,¹³⁰ the desire for warhorses pushed the Song court to take the risk of opening its doors to the Dali Kingdom. A new administrative unit was set up in Yongzhou (now Nanning, Guangxi), namely, Horse Trade Office (*Maima Tijusi*) that was designed exclusively to purchase horses from the Dali kingdom. As stated above, horses from Dali were traded to the Northern Song, through both private and official trade channels, although the majority of war-horses in the Northern Song came from northwestern peoples. In Lizhou (now Hanyuan, Sichuan), a horse market was established at Tongshanzhai that supplied warhorses to the Song. In addition, the Northern Song was sometimes forced to expand its horse trade with Yunnan when the northwestern supply was blocked. For example, in 1074 the Song court publicly enlisted volunteers to enter Dali to purchase horses. Yang Zuo, a Sichuan local and Jinshi degree holder, sold his family assets, crossed mountains deep into the Dali territory, and asked local peoples to drive horses to trade. On hearing the news, local peoples drove a large number of horses to the Sichuan fortresses. Interestingly, local officials refused to trade, claiming that no person named Yang Zuo existed.¹³¹

Unlike during the Northern Song, the horse trade in the Southern Song was a crucial matter and a bureaucratic system was installed to meet the demand for horses while reducing the risks of the frontier trade. Many suggestions and regulations for horse-trading were raised and discussed in the court.¹³² Local officials were warned to keep a close eye on the trade. Soldiers were stationed in markets in case of any trouble. Even more revealing is the fact that it was Yongzhou in today's Guangxi rather than Sichuan that was chosen to open official markets. This was probably

¹³⁰ *Song Shi*, juan 488, 5835-6.

¹³¹ *Xu Zizhitongjian Changbian*, juan 267, in *YNSLCK*, 2:244-48.

¹³² *Song Huiyao Jigao*, juan 183, in *YNSLCK* 1:516; juan 197, in *YNSLCK* 1:521.

because Sichuan was too close to the north and it confronted Dali face to face, while in Guangxi and Guizhou many local ethnic peoples could form a buffer zone if any conflicts occurred. Furthermore, horse markets were restricted to a few fixed places, and horse-trading was not allowed anywhere else. In 1240, Meng Gong, the Governor of Sichuan, refused to open official markets in Sichuan, replying that since the Guangxi-Dali trade existed, trade through Sichuan was not necessary.¹³³

¹³³ *Song Shi*, juan 412, in *YNSLCK* 1:505.

Map 1.6: Dali and the Southern Song



Since the Dali horses were the only supply available for the Song cavalry, it is fair to conclude that the Dali horses played a crucial role for the Song in prolonging its existence for more than 150 years after the loss of the Yellow River plain. Hence, it may be argued that the Dali kingdom shaped the power struggle between the Central Asian kingdoms and the Jiangnan-based Song dynasty to a large degree. However, the role of Dali in those struggles was far more than just in the provision of horses. Indeed, the political exclusion policy of Song China not only resulted in the

loss of a potential ally in its war against the Jin and later the Mongols, but also to some degree left the Mongols a relative vacuum to conquer in order to complete the siege of the Southern Song.

The beginning of the thirteenth century witnessed dramatic changes in Central Asian political struggles. In 1234, the Mongol-Song alliance ended the Jin dynasty. While the Song court achieved the revenge for its former humiliation,¹³⁴ it did not expect that the Mongol's cavalry would, without a break, turn their horses to the south, and in 1235, the Mongol-Song war broke out. The Mongols, however, did not expect such a stubborn resistance from the Song. Bloody battles saw the frontline swing along the Yangzi River. Noticing that frontal assaults did not make much progress and the warfare was at a stalemate, Mongke, the Mongol Khan, decided to dispatch the Mongol cavalry to pacify the Dali kingdom so that the siege of the Southern Song could be completed.¹³⁵ In 1253, Khubilai led a long-distance expedition, his army crossing the Tibetan Plateau and arriving in Dali.¹³⁶ By 1254, the Dali kingdom was destroyed, and the Duan family had surrendered.

The conquest of Dali increased the Mongol forces, since the Mongols incorporated the local armies that were used to the local climate and topography. In fact, the Duan family not only helped the Mongols conquer Yunnan and China, but also Burma, and Annam. Uriyangkhadai, the Mongol general who took charge of

¹³⁴ Two Emperors of the Northern Song were captured by the Jin.

¹³⁵ *Yuan Shi (History of the Yuan Dynasty)*, juan 149, in *YNSLCK 2: 587*; Han Rulin Ed. *Yuanchao Shi (History of the Yuan Dynasty)*, vol. 1, Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1982, 183; Herbert Franke & Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6, Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*, Cambridge, London, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 405. Guo Baoyu indeed suggested this idea to Chinggis Khan. The defence of the Song along the Yangzi River was quite successful, considering the fact that Mongke himself died in the frontal attack in Sichuan in 1259 when the encirclement had been already completed.

¹³⁶ Interestingly, the long march of the Mongols was basically repeated by the Red Army in the twentieth century, only in the opposite direction. For the Mongol conquest of the Dali kingdom, see, for example, *Yuan Shi*, 121, in *YNSLCK 2:545-47*.

Yunnan, led an allied army to attack Annam in 1257 and the Tran dynasty of Annam surrendered in the next spring. More importantly, the occupation of Yunnan provided the Mongols with a base and access to the rear of the Southern Song.

Once Uriyangkhadaï succeeded in pacifying local resistance in Yunnan, Mongke started his full-scale war. In 1258, Mongke himself arrived in the Sichuan battle field while Khubilai and Taghachar, another Mongolian prince, led their armies attacking the middle and lower Yangzi. In conjunction, Uriyangkhadaï led his forces to invade Song territory from Yunnan, expecting to join Khubilai's force. Although the sudden death of Mongke alleviated the triple assault, the siege of the Song had begun. Twenty years later, the Mongols conquered all of China.

Imperial scholars noticed the strategic mistake made by the Song court. Ni Tui, a Qing scholar, pointed out that Song dynasty should not have pursued the isolationist policy against the Dali kingdom. Otherwise, an alliance could possibly have been established between Dali and the Song to defend themselves.¹³⁷ That was also why Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) decided to conquer Yunnan after he had driven the Mongols out of Beijing.

In conclusion, from the tenth to the thirteenth century, power struggles within eastern Eurasia ultimately influenced Yunnan, and Yunnan itself also had great effects on this dramatically changing world. Put another way, the Great Wall frontier and the Southwestern frontier of China interacted closely. Such interactions among these kingdoms and areas can hardly be fitted within the categories of national history or regional history. Not until a global or world-system perspective has been introduced, can Yunnan's global role be given an appropriate evaluation.

¹³⁷ Ni Tui (Qing), *Dianyun Linianzhuan*, annotated by Li Yan, Kunming: Yunnan Daxue Chubanshe, 1992, 184.

The Ming's Military Victory over Yunnan

In 1368, the Mongols retreated to the Mongol grassland, leaving Beijing to the Ming dynasty, but the Ming court was worried about Yunnan, since Yunnan was still under the Mongol's control. No sooner than Zhu Yuanzhang ascended the Ming throne had he dispatched his envoys to Yunnan, trying to persuade the Mongols to surrender. Five envoys were sent in 1369, 1370, 1372, 1374, and 1375. Several of them were killed and Zhu thus decided to use force.

Chinese states in the past rarely extended their administration into Yunnan effectively. Why did the Ming make such a big break with the past and decide to conquer Yunnan, a land filled with mountains, jungles, diseases, and different peoples, and a land where thousands of Chinese soldiers had died?

Map 1.7: Ming China



The prevalence of Neo-Confucianism was one reason. The Ming rulers, unlike the Song emperors, were instilled with this Sino-centric ideology. Underlying the ideological coat was probably the pragmatic consideration. Although the Ming Empire drove the Mongols out of the Central Plain, the Mongols were still occupying the Mongolian Grassland, and could launch southern expeditions at any time they wished. More importantly, the Mongols still occupied Yunnan. If the Mongols attacked Ming China both from the north and from the southwest, the Ming court would have battles on two fronts. Therefore, in the 1370s, the Ming dynasty was facing a situation that was similar to what the Southern Song failed to cope with when

Kublai Khan took over the Dali Kingdom. Such an international pattern pushed the Ming ruler to launch a campaign against Yunnan in order to avoid the fate of the Southern Song.

In 1383, Zhu Yuanzhang dispatched Fu Youde, Lan Yu and Mu Ying to lead an expedition of over 300,000 soldiers. Soon the Ming army occupied Kunming, and eastern Yunnan was occupied. However, the Duan family had been semi-autonomous in the Dali area under the Yuan dynasty and thought this was a good opportunity to resume its former independent status. When Fu Youde wrote to ask the Duans to surrender, Duan Shi, the chief of the Duans, cited historical experience to legitimize his claim of autonomy. He argued that the Dali area was a foreign kingdom during the Tang dynasty, and had been outside of the boundary demarcated by the jade axe during the Song period; furthermore, this region and its population were too small to be a prefecture of China, so there was no benefit for the Ming force to come, neither was there any loss if the Ming state gave up its military campaign. Duan Shi suggested that the Ming court follow the Tang and Song mode of management to rebuild a type of tribute relationship.¹³⁸ Fu ignored this response and repeated his request. Duan was annoyed, and threatened the Ming generals in the second letter. He emphasized that the geographic and biological advantages for the military defense of Dali were so great that the Ming would likely repeat the disaster of previous Chinese expeditions.¹³⁹ Fu was irritated and detained the Duan envoys. Duan Shi then wrote a third letter with a more “arrogant” tone. Fu realized that a peaceful negotiation did not work, so he launched an attack. The Duan power was eventually

¹³⁸ *YNSLCK* 4:549-552.

¹³⁹ *YNSLCK* 4: 549-552.

destroyed. However, rebellions led by local chieftains were not suppressed until a decade later.

The Ming expedition not only inherited the central control established by the Yuan, but also furthered and consolidated it. The Yuan dynasty began central administration over parts of Yunnan, but the Duan clan was still autonomous and controlled the Dali area. Since the Ming period, neither in the Dali area nor in the Dian Lake region has there been such a large and powerful regime. In conclusion, despite local rebellions from time to time, the Ming-Qing emperors put their primary attention and efforts on the fundamental goal of incorporating Yunnan into China economically and culturally. In so doing, they aimed to make Yunnan a permanent part of China.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can state that foreign military conquest of Yunnan generally resulted from global forces and international power struggles. Its geopolitical location made Yunnan significant, and sometimes crucial to power struggles in the eastern Asian continent.

The Qin and Chu kingdoms explored Yunnan in the fourth century BCE because of their competition in the southwest. The Han Empire advanced on the southwestern “barbarians” in the late second century BCE because of the Han’s relationships with the Southern Yue and the Xiongnu. The Shu and the Wu kingdoms competed in Yunnan (Nanzhong) in the third century because of their rivalry in South China and because of Yunnan’s connections with Vietnam. The interactions among Tang China, Tibet and Nanzhao were an example of international politics. Song China’s isolation of Dali resulted from the Song’s paramount concern with the

northern threat while the horse trade with Dali was also for the purpose of its military defense against the northern invasions. The Mongol conquest of Dali was aimed at surrounding the Southern Song. Ming China's decision to take over Yunnan was to avoid the fate of the Southern Song, fearing that the Mongols would repeat their thirteenth-century strategy. Therefore, before Yunnan became part of China, the northern states' interest in Yunnan was because of Yunnan's strategic location. In short, Yunnan's military subjection to imperial states (China and the Mongols) was a result of international power struggles.

The experience of Yunnan shows the transformation of this area in a broad context. Such a process cannot be accounted for either by national history or regional study paradigms. It calls for a global approach to border areas, as Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia all came together in the region of Yunnan.

Abbreviations

HYGZ -- *Hua Yang Guo Zhi* (華陽國志)

SJ -- *Shi Ji* (史記)

YSCK -- *Yunnan Shiliao Congkan* (雲南史料叢刊)

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