



Panglong or the Three Kings?

By Harn Yawnghwe

Why is it important that the 21st Century Panglong Conference acknowledges the fact that the Republic of the Union of Myanmar was founded by the peoples of the Chin and Kachin Hills; the Federated Shan States; the independent Karenni States; and British Burma?

This is because in the prevailing general public view, the Union of Myanmar is a continuation of the three Burman Empires founded by King Anawratha, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya. In this version of history, the Burman empire founded by these warrior kings was disrupted by the advent of British colonial power. It is claimed that the British divided up the nation into various components in order to divide and rule. So General Aung San re-united all the components of this great nation at Panglong.



Giant statues of King Anawratha, Bayinnaung and Alaungpaya in Naypyitaw

This viewpoint was actively propagated by the Tatmadaw under successive dictatorships. In some circles, the period after independence in 1948 is known as the 4th Burman Empire. Even the preamble of the 2008 Constitution advocates this view by stating that, *We, the National people have been living in unity and oneness, setting up an independent sovereign State and standing tall with pride. Due to colonial intrusion, the Nation lost her sovereign power in 1885.*

This actually applies only to the majority Burman kingdom. The Mon *Hanthawaddy* kingdom lost its sovereignty to the Burman in 1757 and the Rakhine *Mrauk-U* kingdom in 1785. The Chin, Kachin, Karenni and the Shan were never totally subjugated but engaged in fluctuating relationships with successive Burman kingdoms. Under the British they became protectorates or Frontier Areas.

King Anawratha conquered the Mon and some parts of Shan. He ruled from 1044 to 1077, a period of 33 years. Three hundred years later, King Bayinnaung conquered India's Manipur, Kachin, some of Shan, Mon, Karen, Karenni, Chiang Mai and Ayuthaya in Thailand. He ruled from 1552-1581, a period of 29 years. Two hundred years after that King Alaungpaya conquered Assam, Chin, Rakhine, Kachin, some of Shan, Karen, Karenni, Chiang Mai and Bangkok. He ruled from 1752-1760, eight years.

So, is the Republic of the Union of Myanmar a product of the three warrior kings or of the 1947 Panglong Agreement? If the three kings, the nation was founded on conquest and subjugation. If Panglong, the nation was founded on a spirit of cooperation and equality. The seven-decade civil war may go through a period of relative peace but it will not end until these two opposite visions of the nation are reconciled. The 21st Century Panglong Conference needs to seriously consider this question.