

From this short history of the Panthay Muslims, you can see the terrible death and destruction a minority of Muslims (they are about 1.5% of China's population) can bring to the land which they emigrated to. And, also, you can see that when the Muslims were defeated, the local people - fed up with the death and destruction that they had to endure - burned the mosques and drove the Muslims away. And now, the Muslims in Burma/Myanmar - although only about 4% of the population - may be creating another such disaster for themselves, and especially for the other people in Burma - the Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and the many hilltribe peoples.

THE PANTHAY MUSLIMS:

Silk Road to Yunnan, eventually to Burma

Panthay (Burmese: ပန်ဆေးလူမျိုး) is a term used to refer to the predominantly Muslim Hui people of China, who eventually migrated from China into Burma. The name *Panthay* is a Burmese word, which is said to be identical with the Shan word *Pang hse*. It was the name by which the Burmese called the Chinese Muslim traders who came with caravans to Burma from the neighboring Chinese province of Yunnan. In Burma, they predominantly reside in Upper



(northern) Burma, particularly Mandalay, and Shan State towns. While Muslims (all types) make up about 4% of the population of the country, the Panthay Muslims in Shan State (where most Panthay are) are most likely much less than 4%.

The *Panthay* migrated to Yunnan Province, and other parts of China around the 1400s, as traders along the Silk Road caravan routes. They became excellent long distant traders and virtually dominated the southern spur caravan route that connected to Yunnan - and from there to Burma. As the French and British arrived at the fringes of Yunnan, they found the caravan network of the region dominated by these Chinese Muslims.



The merchandise they traded included silk, tea, metal utensils, clothing, walnuts, opium, wax, preserved fruits and foods, and dried meat. Goods from Burma included raw cotton, raw silk, amber, jade, rubies, betel-nuts, tobacco and gold-leaf. Burmese merchandise was often transported up the Irrawaddy River to Bhamo, sold to Chinese merchants, and loaded onto mules in caravans of between 50-100 mules, with 10-15 'drivers'.

The Panthay Rebellion (1856–1873) in Yunnan, China

Things were not always harmonious in Yunnan, and in other parts of China. Between 1648 and 1878, there were ten uprisings, by the Muslims, in various parts of China, totaling millions of Chinese killed, and then millions of Muslims killed when the Chinese Imperial Army would come to crush the rebellion and reestablish order.

The last big Muslim uprising is known as the **Panthay Rebellion**, (known in Chinese sources as the **Du Wenxiu Rebellion**), which began, in 1853, after a conflict between Han Chinese and Hui/Panthay Chinese Muslim tin miners. In the following year, the Chinese suppressed the revolt, and massacred many Muslims. However, the religious hatred of the Panthay Muslims was aroused, and, as well, there were anti-Muslim riots by many Chinese who were fed up with the Muslims for bringing about so much death and destruction, and many mosques, homes, and shops of the Muslims were burned and destroyed.

Then, the Panthay Muslims, with a widespread desire for revenge against those who 'insulted' their religion, plotted a large and well-planned uprising.

The rebellion started as silver mine workers of Li'nanxian village in Yunnan rose up against the Chinese. The Chinese Governor of Yunnan sent an urgent appeal to the central government in Beijing for troops, however, the Imperial Government was burdened by many problems in various parts of the sprawling empire. They underestimated and sent a force that was not big enough. The Muslims were victorious and caused them to retreat. Afterwards, the Muslims were quickly conquering villages, towns, and city after city. The homes and buildings were pillaged and looted, the male populations were massacred, and the Chinese women were prizes for the Muslim fighters who could do anything they wish with the women.

The ancient holy city of Tali-fu (Dali) was captured in 1857, and the Muslims declared themselves a separate political entity from China. The rebels identified their nation as **Pingnan Guo** (Chinese 平南国) which translates literally as 'Pacified Southern Country'.

Du Wenxiu, leader of the Panthay/Hui Muslims, made Dali his capital and assumed the regal title of *Sulayman ibn `Abd ar-Rahman*, and was also known as *Qa'id Jami al-Muslimin* ('Leader of the Community of Muslims') He was known more simply as **Sultan Suleiman**.

Among other rules and edicts, he banned pork - which is the most common meat among Chinese - and mandated the use of Arabic language in his sultanate. The eight years from 1860 to 1868 were the glory days of the Sultanate. The Muslims had either taken or destroyed 40 towns and around 100 villages. Muslim rebel forces besieged the large, and old, city of Kunming repeatedly: in 1857, 1861, 1863, and 1868, but were not able to conquer it.

During this period, Sultan Suleiman, on his way to Mecca as a pilgrim, visited Rangoon, and from there went to Calcutta where he had a chance to see the power of the British.

Sultan Suleiman, saw the opportunity and future advantage of having a Chinese Muslim mosque in the Burmese King's (King Mindon) capital of Mandalay. He sent one of his senior military officers, as his special envoy, to Mandalay with the important mission of constructing the mosque. The mosque took about two years to finish and was opened in 1868.



Panthay Mosque (清真寺; Qīngzhēn Sì), Mandalay

The Sultanate's power began to decline after in the years just after 1868. In those years the Chinese Imperial Government succeeded in settling some of it's issues in parts of China, and the government reinvigorated itself and regained it's strength. Finally, they were determined to retake the land that the Muslims had conquered. A large Imperial Army was formed and trained and eventually was on it's way to conquer the Pingnan Guo Sultanate. By 1872, town after town fell under well-organized attacks made by the imperial troops. Dali itself was surrounded and under a long siege by the Imperial Chinese Army. Sultan Suleiman was becoming desperate. He turned to the British for military assistance. He had seen the British might in India on his pilgrimage to Mecca some years earlier, and was impressed by it. Britain was the only western power with whom the Sultanate was on friendly terms with (up to then) and had contacts with. The Sultan also had the hubris to think that British would even want to assist him.

He sent his adopted son, Prince Hassan, to England, with a personal letter to Queen Victoria, requesting British military assistance, however, the British politely, but firmly, refused to intervene militarily in Yunnan against Peking. The mission failed, and well before Prince Hassan returned, Dali was captured by the Imperial troops in January 1873, and Sultan Suleiman was killed.

The Imperial Government had waged an all-out war against the Panthay/Hui Muslims and also had the help of French artillery experts. With a highly trained and disciplined fighting force, numerical superiority, and advanced artillery, the Imperial Army was unstoppable for the ill-equipped and ally-less Panthay Muslims. Thus, in less than 20 years from its rise, the power of the Panthay Muslims in Yunnan collapsed. The death toll was staggering - around one million people were killed. For a period of perhaps ten to fifteen years following the collapse of the Panthay Muslim Rebellion, the Panthay minority was widely discriminated

against by the Chinese, especially in the western areas bordering Burma. Once again, the Chinese were fed up with the Muslims for bringing about so much death and destruction, and subsequently many mosques, homes, and shops of the Muslims were burned and destroyed. Wholesale massacres of Muslims followed. Many fled with their families across the Burmese border and took refuge in the Wa State where, about 1875, they set up the exclusively



Panthay town of Panglong. During these years the refugee Panthay who were in Burma, but still close to the border with China, gradually established themselves in their traditional callings – as merchants, caravaners, miners, restaurateurs, smugglers and mercenaries.

Capture of Dali, the capital of the Pingnan Guo Sultanate

Impact on Burma

The rebellion had a significant negative impact on the Burmese Konbaung Dynasty (1782-1885). After losing lower Burma to the British in 1826, Burma lost access to vast tracts of rice-growing land, but at least it could import rice from Yunnan. During the Panthay Rebellion, the Burmese kingdom - not wishing to upset China - agreed to refuse trade with the Pingnan Guo rebels in accordance with China's demands. Without the ability to import rice from China, Burma was then forced to import rice from the British - which ironically was actually from the lower part of Burma that the British had annexed from the Burmese Kingdom! In addition, the Burmese economy had relied heavily on cotton exports to China, and because of China's demands to not trade with the Pingnan Guo Sultanate, Burma suddenly could not sell the lucrative commodity - cotton - to the vast Chinese market.

King Mindon and the Panthay Muslims

Panthay Muslims started to settle in the royal capital of Mandalay, Burma, particularly during the reign of King Mindon (1853-1879). Although their number was small, a few of them got into the royal court as jade-assessors. They lived in the Chinatown part of Mandalay along with non-Muslim Chinese. The non-Muslim Chinese had started settling in Mandalay considerably earlier than the Panthay and were more established, with their own bank, companies, warehouses and, organized social life. Some of them were also jade-assessors in the royal court. Rivalry between the Chinese and Panthay jade-assessors led to fighting, resulting in a number of deaths. King Mindon did not really know about the religious and social differences between the Muslim Panthay Chinese and the non-Muslim Chinese. He had treated the two more or less alike. But after the violence between them, the king wisely separated them, mandating each group to live at opposite sides of Mandalay.

Panthay Muslims in Burma

The demise of the Sultanate had shattered the hopes of all the Panthay for their own Islamic kingdom in Yunnan. The bloody retaliation against them, by the Chinese who suffered from their destructive rebellion, made many Panthay decide to flee China - if they could - and the Panthay who were outside Yunnan realized they should give up any plans to go back to Yunnan. After the mass exodus from Yunnan, the number of Panthay residing in Mandalay increased. The new arrivals, usually families, came by way of Bhamo or via the Wa State.

Over the next thirty or so years the Panthays of Panglong continued to prosper, though by the early 1920s a feud had begun to develop between them and the neighboring Wa (who were generally Buddhist) which erupted into the local 'Wa Panthay War' in 1926. The Panthay were victorious and their dominance over the trade routes of the region was reinforced. In addition to legitimate trading, the Panthay of Panglong were securely in charge of the opium business in the region now commonly known as the Golden Triangle. The Panthay organized large, well-armed, long-distance caravans to transport the drugs far into Siam, Laos, Tonkin (Vietnam) and Yunnan, and these were often financed by wealthy Singaporean Chinese.

Meanwhile, other Panthay moved further into Burma, as miners exploiting the ruby mines of Mogok, the silver mines of Namtu, and the jade mines of Hpakant. Panthay restaurateurs and innkeepers, merchants and traders settled in towns of Shan and Kachin States – mainly Lashio, Taunggyi, Kengtung, Pyin-Oo-Lwin, Mogok, Bhamo, and Myitkyina.