

# **A Shan Settlement in the Hkamti Long Area**

**Sai Aung Tun**

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Nobody would have imagined that there would be a Tai ethnic settlement in the remote northernmost part of Myanmar in the region of **Hkami Long** around the township of **Putāo**. But there is one. There is township called Putāo which has also been the Capital of the region. Putāo is in fact known to the Hkamti Shans as **Pu Taung**. Pu Taung is a village, a couple of miles from Putāo named after an old-aged pious Hkamti Shan who organized his ethnic group to settle there which later to be known as the Tai Hkamti. His name could not be properly pronounced by the non-Hkamti Shan. As a result, it came to be known as Putāo for the British **Pu-Tar-O** for the Myanmar people.

Putāo has become the centre of interest because of its Fort which was called "Fort-Hertz." It was constructed by the British after the annexation of Myanmar to defend the British interests in that area. During the British administration Mr. W.A. Hertz (CIS) was assigned as the first Resident of Putāo. The Fort was named "Fort-Hertz" in his honour. The construction of the fort started from the base of a mountain range in the north side of Putāo and it stretch up along the upward slope to the highest point of the range. If someone from the summit looks down at the base of the fort, a vast area of cultivated land and paddy fields could be clearly seen. The perpetual flowing of the **Nampalak** creek in the snake-like curves and bands is also very picturesque and scenic. An old military barrack and some rusty armouries are still lying inside the fort and a bungalow built by the British can also be seen at the site. It is now taken over by the Myanmar Naing Ngan Police Force Department, with a Police Station and outposts established in an around the Fort.

The location of Putāo is between 26.47 and 28.55 of the North Latitude and 96.93 and 97.45 of the East Longitude. It is situated at about 1,200 feet above sea level. The plain of Putāo is about 35 miles from north to south and about 25 miles from East to West. The whole area is estimated to be about 2105 square miles and the plain is quite fertile and suitable for cultivation of various vegetable crops. According to the 1967 census there were 80,000 people of multi-national races living together in the Hkamti Long region. Hkamti Long is also a Shan name which means, "Geat Place of Gold." Hkamti Long is geographically close to the neighbouring frontiers of China, Tibet and India. Therefore, the Hkamti Shans in the past could have travelled to these countries through passes in caravans or on foot.

The Tai Ethnic immigrants were the first people to settle in this area. As to when these people migrated to this area is very difficult to ascertain. It could have been earlier than those Shans who invaded Assam and established the Kingdom of Ahom. Hkamti Shans even joined the Sao Sam Tar army to annex Assam. Sao Sam Long Hpa was the Shan chief who founded the city of Mong Kawng (Mogaung in Myanmar) in North Myanmar which now is in the Kachin State.

The Eight Principalities established by the Hkamti Saohpas are:

1. Lokhun
2. Mansi
3. Lonkyein
4. Mansehkun
5. Mannu
6. Langdao
7. Mongyak
8. Langnu

The Hkamti Shans believe that the following people were the famous founders and rulers of the Principalities:

1. Aik-Sa Lon-Mon (founder)
2. Salon Samparla (founder)
3. Salon Hka-Kyam (founder)
4. Sao Win Laik (Saohpa/Chief)
5. Sao Han Hkan (Saohpa/Chief)
6. Sao Han Win (Saohpa/Chief)
7. Sao Win Hay (Saohpa/Chief)
8. Sao Lwan Long (Saohpa/Chief)
9. Sao Lwan Nwe (Saohpa/Chief)
10. Sao Salon-Sa-Kyam (Saohpa/Chief)

From the Hkamti Long area the Tai Hkamti spread out their new settlements to Assam, Bhramaputra plain in India, to Sinkalin Hkamti, Homalin, Kale Wa, Hsaung-Sup along the Chindwin river and to Mong Kwang (mogaung), Mong Yang (Monyin), Waing Hso (Wuntho), Hom Mark Lang (Homalin), Indawgyi, Myitkyina in Kachin State. They are mostly cultivators and all Hkamti Shans are very pious Buddhists. They are very quiet and peaceful people. Being geographically isolated, the Hkamti Shans are very conservative and stick to traditions and old customs, resisting modern lifestyle.

By profession the Hkamti Shans are well known for their skills in capturing wild elephants for war purpose in the past and for commercial reason in the present. There are four methods in capturing wild elephants:

1. Kheddah or Kyone Method
2. Mela-Shikar or Kyaw Hpan Method
3. Decoy Method
4. Immobilization Method

Due to their peculiar environment condition the Hkamti Shans favour the second method, Mela-Shikar or Kyaw-Hpan.

Communication to Hkamti Long or Putāo is very difficult. Due to heavy rains motor road cannot withstand the impact of rains, erosion and landslides. Putāo is accessible only through air route. All rounds modern development projects are now underway to help the people in the Hkamti area get a glimpse of modern civilization of technology and media networks.

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