

# Yunnan: China's Gateway to ASEAN and SAARC

by Abdul Awal Mintoo

*Other than ice covered mountain peaks, valuable rain forest, magnificent lakes, turbulent rivers and tributaries, deep valleys, spectacular gorges, hot springs, it has Grottoes, the earth mound forest and another wonder of nature — the Stone forest.*



By 220 AD important silk trade route opened up. One branch of the route passed through Myanmar and India via Yunnan. This route used to be known as the Southern Silk Route. Han Emperor's wish to control the silk trade brought the second Chinese invasion of Yunnan. Failing to cross the formidable mountain they eventually withdrew. Yunnan continued to be on its own course as independent country ruled by tribal chiefs. Until the 8th century six chiefs ruled Yunnan. In 732 AD one of the chiefs invited other five to a banquet. As they all got drunk the wooden banquet hall were set on fire killing them all. The triumphant prince then declared himself NANZHAO — the Prince of south. His capital was Kunming. Later kingdom of Dali captured Kunming and made it a secondary capital while Yunnan was ruled from Dali. At present Dali is the second biggest city of Yunnan and centre of trade with Burma, India and Tibet. Until 1253 Yunnan was a strong and independent kingdom at par with Tibet and China. Its two warring neighbours.

The kingdom came to an end in 1253 when Kublai Khan led his mighty army of 100,000 troops and invaded China. Yunnan was first to fall to the Mongol. He staged a dress rehearsal at Dali and went on to conquer whole of China helped by Muslims from Persia and Central Asia as his allies. Firmly establishing the Yuan Dynasty in "Dadu" or "as it is now known as 'Beijing' he sent part of his fierce troops to Yunnan as a watchdog. As the Mongol invaded Yunnan most of the Dai population fled to west and south leaving Yunnan virtually empty. Muslim settlers were helpful to repopulate the area including helping Dai people back to Yunnan. In 1271 Mongol Emperor officially declared Yunnan as a province of Yuan Kingdom. Thus officially Yunnan became a part of China. Kunming was declared as its capital instead of Dali. For 130 years Yunnan was ruled by Muslims. By 1368 Yuan dynasty established by Kublai Khan fell to rebel leader Zhu Yuanzhang, an orphan and a Buddhist Novice. He established the Ming Dynasty to rule China for next 300 years.

Yunnan was the last area to hold out. Chinese forces of Ming

permitted to construct rail line from Hanoi to Yunnan to trade with mineral-rich Yunnan and Britain got concession to open trade through Burma.

During World War II when Japan invaded China and occupied the east coast, government agencies and armament factories were shifted to Yunnan. Refugees fleeing eastern China found shelter here. Fresh ideas with new population came in and much progress were made since then. Allied forces stationed in China got their supplies through Burma. War convinced the old population supported by the newly arrived Chinese from the east that Yunnan's best interest can be served only with China and thus there were no resistance to Chairman Mao's liberation forces.

**The Greatest Chinese Muslim**

From the Han dynasty Chinese emperors used to employ young people as eunuch in the palace and in the imperial court. Traditionally, their role was to serve the Emperor, Prince, Princess and in harem of the imperial palace where no other adult male was allowed to enter other than the emperor. In the late years of Ming dynasty imperial court and palaces employed about 70,000 to 100,000 eunuchs. One such Eunuch was a Muslim boy named Ma Ho alias San Bao, a descendant of an early Mongol governor. His father and grand father both made the pilgrimage to Mecca and performed the Hajj. He heard a lot of story about oceans beyond China from his father and grandfather. Thus navigation had become an ideal to which he aspired. About 60 Km south-west of Kunming situated the small town of Kunyang where this greatest Muslim Chinese was born in 1371. In 1381 only at the age of 10 while he was playing in a fishing boat in Dianchi lake near the besieged city of Kunming and dreaming to be a sailor, Ming troops captured everyone including him and taken as prisoner. Lucky enough, he was made a eunuch, to serve Zhu Li, the fourth son of the Ming emperor. Known as San Bao the eunuch, he managed to please the Prince so much that by the age of 20 he was made a junior officer in the army. His abilities won him many influential friends in the Imperial Court. Because no one with the surname of Ma could be allowed in the high places of the Imperial court the emperor bestowed Ma Ho alias San Bao a new surname of Zheng He. When Zhu Li launched the rebellion to seize power he had shown his greatest talent and helped Zhu Li to win the war and become the emperor. Zheng He was appointed as the Imperial Eunuch in the Royal Court with enormous power and prestige.

For 300 years China had been extending its seaborne power importing various materials from different parts of Asia. The art of ship building and navigation reached their height during the early Ming Dynasty. In 1405, the Ming Emperor appointed him the Chief Diplomat and Commander in Chief of all missions to the western seas. He took 62 ships carrying 27,800 men — the biggest naval fleet in the whole world at that time. Between 1405 and 1433 in a span of 28 years he has commanded seven far-flung voyages that took him to the Indian Ocean, Arabia, Persia and East Africa, covering 30 countries which are known today as Kampuchea, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea etc. In the history of navigation this was a pioneering record.

After returning from successful third trip in 1411 he visited his birth place Kunyang in Yunnan. His father died one year after he was taken as prisoner without knowing exactly what happened to his young son. He erected a tomb in honour of his father known as Tomb (Mazar) of Ma Hajji, visited by Chinese of all faith even today. Zheng He's family member continued to flourish in Kunyang and Kunming for centuries until they fled the Muslim rebellion led by Du Wenxiu. As the rebellion was crushed by the Chinese many were killed, others fled elsewhere. As they fled, tombstone was buried in the ground of the Mazar area to be rediscovered only in 1984 and erected again. When I visited the Mazar I

found many Chinese reading the story carefully and praying for salvation of his soul.

Zheng He visited every major port of south and south-east Asia including Chittagong on his fourth voyage. While returning he brought with him 30 envoys from different countries, states, kingdoms and regions to forge diplomatic relations with China and pay homage to Emperor. After six years on his sixth voyage he took them all back home. Zheng He's voyages and discoveries helped China to remain as a maritime power of Asia for next hundred years. It encouraged Chinese emigrants to settle in foreign countries where Chinese communities have flourished ever since. All seven voyages were successful and without mishap. Zheng He kept logs and details of all his voyages. His atlases, charts and logs bequeathed a priceless record to the world and made maritime history. All these records are collected and kept in archives of military achievements in China. These long voyages were undertaken almost 100 years before Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan. He died in 1435 but is still honoured throughout China.

In Chinese communities of south-east Asia stories about Zheng He are told again and again. His kinsman are now distributed in many parts of China as well as in Thailand. Every year on the Eid-ul-Fitr descendants of Ma Hajji come to Kunyang to remember their great ancestor.

Yunnan — its natural beauty, turbulent history, snow peak mountains, tropical rain forest, lush jungles, miracle stone forest, hot springs, magnificent lakes, gorgeous flowers, abundance of wild animals, famous aromatic and medicinal plants, plentiful of fruits, finest tea, so many natural resources, gorges, mighty rivers, fertile lands, healthy climate, ideal location as the China's gateway to south and south-east Asia, large minority nationalities, their colourful costumes, music, folklore and finally the friendliness of its people have combined to make it one of Asia's most attractive areas.

**Dali** — 360 Km south-west of Kunming, the second biggest city of Yunnan has been in the forefront of China's trade with south and south-east Asia for centuries. Both China-Burma highway and Yunnan-Tibet highway pass through Dali. Once the ESCAP planned Asian highway is built and linked up, there will be no difficulty to reach Dali and Kunming from Bangladesh. Presently Kunming is connected with Thailand via Chiangmai and Burma via Mandalay. Bangladesh should connect itself with Burma via Sylhet and Chittagong. From Sylhet via Shilchar (Assam) and Imphal (Manipur) to Mandalay will be a shorter route. From Imphal to Mandalay there already exists a road connection. Thailand is now making another feasibility study to build new highway from Nan, Thailand to Kunming via Laos. China and Burma already agreed to build a deepwater port in Arakan near Akyab which will connect Yunnan directly to sea. With the completion of the Asian highway it may be possible by the Chinese to use even Chittagong Port some day which will be very beneficial to our economy.

Today tourism is becoming one of the main foreign exchange earners of Yunnan. Usually tourists coming to Thailand and Burma are packaging with Yunnan. If Bangladesh can develop a plan to reach these European, American and Japanese tourists to make them aware about Cox's Bazar sea beach I am sure they will be bewildered because Yunnan's mountains, Mandalaya's plainland and the magnificent beach of Cox's Bazar will be together will be a tourist's dream. Mandalaya is only 260 miles from Chittagong by air. Government should encourage private airlines to open the route between Chittagong or Cox's Bazar and Mandalaya just like smaller airlines are operating between Mandalaya and Chiang Mai. In the absence of any historical monuments, archaeological sites, mountains, temples or much of tourist spots, packaging with Yunnan and Burma can be Bangladesh's major hope to attract the foreign tourists.

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YUNNAN — the sixth largest of China's 27 provinces is a true multinational province. It is the homeland of 26 nationalities. Han Chinese are the majority — almost 67 per cent. The balance 33 per cent or about 12 million comprise 25 minority nationalities — which constitute almost one-sixth of the total minority nationalities of China. They are the Yi, Bai, Hani, Zhuang, Dai, Miao, Lisu, Hui (Muslims), Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Yao, Tibetan, Jingpo, Bulang, Pumi, Nu, Achang, Deang, Junuo, Shui, Buyi, Mongolian, Dulong and Man.

This geographically varied land is not only the homeland of the greatest number of the China's minority nationalities, but also the homeland of half of China's plant and animal species. Of 30,000 plants of China 18,000 are found here. It contains 2700 species of trees, 300 species of aromatic plants, 1000 species of medicinal plants and 2100 species of ornamental plants. It is the home of renowned flowers Azaleas and rhododendrons. Yunnan's camellia is the best in the world. It is the important base of production for natural aromatics and Chinese medicine.

Yunnan is the homeland of largest varieties — almost 50 per cent — of wild animals found in China. Among them are 230 species of beasts, 310 species of birds, 130 species of reptiles and 300 species of fresh water fish. As many as 89 species of animals are now under state protection because being rarely and under threat of extinction.

Yunnan — the province of mystery, beauty, picturesque sights and affluence is also very rich in mineral resources of the 140 types of valuable minerals known to mankind today. 118 types are available in Yunnan. Ninety per cent of total non-ferrous resources of China are found here. It has abundant reserve of iron ore, magnesite, diatomite, gypsum, marble, lead, zinc, germanium, tin, indium, platinum, zirconium, habite, sylvite, ignite, copper, nickel, phosphorous, merrillite, arsenum. It has a history of mining tin for 400 years.

No wonder, Yunnan — meaning the "South of the Clouds" — is also well known for its mild climate year round. At an elevation of 1890 m (6200 ft) its capital Kunming is called the "Spring City". The average elevation of Yunnan is 2000 meters. The highest point is Kagebo Peak 6740 meters (22,000 ft) while the lowest point is 76.4 meters (250 ft) and offer cool respite during the summer.

In addition to be known as the land of minority nationalities, it also enjoys the titles of Kingdom of Plants, Kingdom of Animals and Kingdom of Non-ferrous Metals. Geographically varied Yunnan covers an area of 3,94,000 sq km and has a population of 36 million. It borders a long 4061 km with

Laos, Vietnam and Burma. Its terrain is as widely divergent as tropical rain forest and lush jungles bordering Laos and Vietnam and towering icy mountains adjoining south Burma and Tibet.

Geologically, Yunnan is an offshoot of Tibet. Mighty range of eastern Himalayas fan south to Yunnan from Tibet. Fertile lake basins lie in geological faults on the plateau. Among 40 lakes, Dianchi around Kunming, Erhai around Dali and Fuxian lake are the largest. The red soil produces rice in abundance and year round vegetables. Tea that are produced in Yunnan is considered to be best in China. Among food crops rice, wheat and corn are staples. In addition it is one of largest producers of tea, sugar and tobacco. Because of pleasant climate it produces also the largest varieties of fruits ranging from tropical, sub-tropical and of frigid zone species. Ten per cent of China's total timber reserve is in Yunnan.

Most of the mighty rivers originating in Himalayas channel through immensely deep canyons of Yunnan. The Salween, the Makong, the Red and the Yangzi flows side by side and at places barely 50 miles apart. These large and mighty rivers and their tributaries form six water systems in Yunnan and in addition 180 rivers and tributaries flow turbulently between the mountains, gorges and valleys to Burma, Laos, Kampuchea, Vietnam, Thailand and through other parts of China to South China Sea and Bay of Bengal. One of the largest gorge of the world namely Tiger Leaping Gorge is in Yunnan. From top to the water surface it measures 3900 meter (12,700 ft).

Other than ice covered mountain peaks, valuable rain forest, magnificent lakes, turbulent rivers and tributaries, deep valleys, spectacular gorges, hot springs, it has Grottoes, the earth mound forest and another wonder of nature — the Stone forest.

There is no recorded history to show how Yunnan became populated or how its people lived. For the first thousand years of China's recorded history it was known only as a savage region inhabited by a large number of non-Chinese aborigine peoples. In 1955 a sophisticated Bronze-age culture was discovered. Tomb excavations unearthed thousands of artifacts dating back 1200 BC. Weapons, drums, silver, jade, paintings and other materials described in details the daily life of those people. They practiced advance methods of agriculture.

Recorded history shows that about 339 BC Prince of the Yangzi river valley sent his General Zhuang Qiao to conquer Yunnan. The campaign lasted 10 years. When the general found his return route were cut off by rivals he declared himself the king and set up the Kingdom of Dian. For two centuries his descendants ruled the kingdom.

## The World Cup Fever That Was

Naeem Mohaiemen writes from New York

*For the England-Argentina "sudden-death" match, well over two hundred people gathered in front of each television set. People began spilling into the streets and drawing more curious onlookers.*

A few weeks back, a colleague walked over to my office, shaking his head and smiling: "You crazy Bangladeshis!"

Puzzled, I reached over for the newspaper he was carrying. It was a local paper, open to the "Sports" section. Buried in the middle was a story about soccer fever around the world. The story talked about guards posted at a Bangladesh power station, in fear of angry fans who might retaliate if electricity went out during a World Cup match. My friend shook his head — he was not a soccer fan, and this level of fanatical devotion mystified him.

I proceeded to tell him more stories: about students demonstrating to postpone exams ahead of the World Cup, about older men who have had heart attacks while watching a game, about the Bangladesh parliament's heated censure motion against the referee who penalized Maradona. He was baffled, nothing in his years of watching basketball and baseball had equipped him to comprehend a sport with that level of audience participation.

While the US famously remains one of soccer's last frontiers, things are changing. The 1994 World Cup was the opening volley of an invasion of American shores. 1998 ushered in a higher level of enthusiasm for the sport — especially in a cosmopolitan and diverse city like New York.

For the last month, I had been treating myself to outdoor viewing of this fine sport. Several large screen televisions had been installed around the HBO building, and in adjoining Bryant Park — a block away from Times Square. During the initial matches, about 70-80 spectators showed up for each match. This was at 3 PM, right in the middle of the business day. Interestingly, the televisions alternated between showing Wimbledon and the World Cup — the crowd for the World Cup was easily double that for Wimbledon.

Finally, for the England-Argentina "sudden-death" match, well over two hundred people gathered in front of each television set. People began spilling into the streets and drawing more curious onlookers. The audience was primarily new immigrants, especially those from Africa and Latin America — but in addition, there were sprinkles of the Mayflower aristocrats, Asians and, of course, European expatriates. Over in Grand Central Termi-

nal, two large screen televisions were set up in the main ticket area. But halfway through the match they had to shut off the sets as the crowds were getting too large and blocking off the ticket booth. This crowd also came over to our park spot. Finally, even newspaper photographers showed up to take pictures of the crowds.

A week later, a lazy July 4 descended on New York. Determined to make the most of the quarter-finals, I dragged myself out of bed and sprinted over to St. Dymphnas Irish Pub to catch the second half with friends. The crowd here was entirely European. The bar tender was British, the punters were mostly French. But to my utter disappointment, especially given how early I had to wake up on a Saturday, it was a goal-less match. The French patrons stayed glued to the set, but we (the non-French contingent) could barely muster enough enthusiasm to stare at the screen. It is the "Penalty World Cup" as the bar tender

classic Brazil. Little jigs broke out after every goal; wild whooping, tambourines, yellow shirts in the air. Channel 4 News, and another cameraman from Univision showed up — to document our little Brazilian corner. Univision is a Spanish channel owned by former Clinton cabinet secretary, Henry Cisneros. Of the three channels carrying World Cup matches, UNIVISION was the leader over ABC and ESPN because of the announcer's famous "GOOOOOLLLLLL" yell — a particular favorite with New York's large Latino population.

We were not the only non-Brazilians there, there were two rip-roaring Irishmen sitting in front of us. One of them was a real character. We started talking about disgraced English player, David "Red Card" Beckham. Beckham was now in New York, afraid to go back to London. Our Irish friend informed us that he was staying at the posh Four Seasons Hotel, that he had tried to call him, but

are the first set of homegrown American soccer stars — not imports. As Stefan wrote, "Simply put, US soccer has a Michael Jordan. He probably didn't turn nine years old."

3) More Spanish speakers: Number of Americans of Spanish/Hispanic origin will be 41 million in 2010 — 14% of the population. Finally, a fan base large enough to grab marketer's attention.

4) Media Interest: In 1994, a Boston columnist said "soccer is the only sport that successfully combines terrorism, kickball and vomiting". Another Chicago writer called it a "silly foreign game". These "Ugly Americans" with their xenophobic views seem to have evaporated. 250 American journalists requested media credentials for this World Cup, compared to 13 in 1986.

5) Corporate America does care: In 1989, US Soccer Federation had 2 sponsors and a \$2 million budget. Now, there are 18 sponsors and a \$38 million budget. ABC and ESPN have

Reasons Soccer won't Catch On

1) Too many sports: "People don't understand what a crowded market you're trying to build into," said Alan Rothenberg, president of US Soccer Federation. By the time the World Cup final comes around, Americans have endured NBA and NHL finals, US Open Gold, Wimbledon, baseball's All-Star Game, NBA draft, the start of WNBA season, and numerous auto races. Fatigue sets in.

2) Michael Jordan doesn't wear cleats: US yet to produce world-wide soccer star. In a nation where winning is everything, nothing short of world domination will make general public take note.

3) Soccer at young age only: Soccer is now the second most popular participatory sport in the US after baseball — but only at a young age. Nine million Americans age 6-11 play soccer, but the number falls to five million when they hit the 12-17 age group.

4) Television: Soccer is TV-unfriendly for American couch potatoes. Huge field, players spread apart, no breaks in game, low scores. American TV-viewers are not used to this.

5) Corporate America doesn't care: The nationalist approach. Also known as, if-you-build-it-they-will-come. Nike and IMG have poured \$50 million into a program to identify the best players by age 13. But without years of a tradition, can the US plan its way to a world championship?

2) Mia Hamm, Eddie Pope, Brian McBride: Hamm is the best player in women's soccer worldwide. Pope and McBride

athletes of most other sports vomiting on the sidelines.

Another choice letter came from Joe Rodriguez of New Haven, who wrote: "Face it — soccer is the lingua franca of sports and has an enthusiastic following practically everywhere. It's time America got with the program and started taking it seriously... Basketball, the province of freaks, is played in Europe here and there, and baseball is popular in Cuba, parts of South America, Japan and Taiwan. Same for ice hockey. American football? Nobody even knows the rules outside of the US."

Quite a bit of rage in all those letters. After reading the responses, I concluded that it was not just assorted immigrants like myself that cared about soccer in the US. There are now numerous "homegrown" Americans who had become ardent followers, and woe to any ignorant writer who might dare to make light of the sport.

The World Cup finals came on a Sunday. The key question for the entire weekend was, where do we watch the game? There were a few dozen bars and restaurants showing the final on their large-screen televisions. But our group of friends were evenly divided between French and Brazilian supporters — neutral territory was the order of the day. In the end, we chose an all-American "sports bar", with soccer incongruously competing with a baseball match on one of the smaller television sets. As always, soccer remains a game of contrasts — both on screen and off. In a France most recently besieged by Le Pen's anti-immigrant hysteria and anti-Muslim remarks by cultural icons like Brigitte Bardot, we were treated to the sight of a victorious Black-French player running onto the field with the tricolor. And of course there was Zidane — in a Paris where French children spit on Algerians, an Algerian boy from the poor neighborhoods ended up the biggest hero of the day.

On that Sunday, New York also experienced some of soccer's egalitarian side-effects. In bars with television sets, a curious mixture of audience gathered. Black, brown, and white faces sitting together — even if only for a day. Investment bankers, corporate sharks, taxi drivers, newspaper stand owners, and students; immigrants and blue bloods — all mixing it up in the multi-racial democracy of soccer.

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kept telling us. Happily, the Irish breakfast was good, and that kept our mind off the game.

Match over, we rounded up some other friends and took the subway uptown to Cabana Carica, one of numerous Brazilian restaurants on 46th Street (which has the secondary street sign of "Little Brazil"). Anirudha Das, our only friend who speaks Portuguese and Spanish, was our passport to Cabana. By speaking native-tongue, he ensured we got decent spots — wedged against the glass door, since all bar-stools and tables had been taken over long ago. The restaurant was packed! People kept coming in and getting turned away by the bartender. Finally he posted a herchman outside to turn people away.

Denmark scored the first goal, and a funeral pallor settled over the room. You would not think this was the famous Latin-American audience — everyone looked shell-shocked. But then came the equalizer, and from then on the room was

"David was not taking calls." "And well might he hide," said the Irishman. "Otherwise someone in London might shoot him, just like Andres Escobar in Colombia."

After the match is over, we walk out — all the restaurants are discharging fans waving the flag. Cries of "Brasil!" everywhere. Clearly the celebrations will continue into the evening.

Meanwhile, what did the US media make of all this? There had been a steady stream of interesting articles. Some naive, some ignorant, some surprisingly well-rounded. The coverage began on June 16 with the VILLAGE VOICE's amusing, tongue-in-cheek parody entitled "Why the US will win the World Cup". Needless to say, none of the Voice's optimistic predictions came true!

On a more serious note, Stefan Fatsis of the WALL STREET JOURNAL (June 12) listed reasons for and against soccer catching on in the US. Here were some of the more salient points in his piece:

Reasons Soccer will Catch On

1) We're America. We Can Do It: The nationalist approach. Also known as, if-you-build-it-they-will-come. Nike and IMG have poured \$50 million into a program to identify the best players by age 13. But without years of a tradition, can the US plan its way to a world championship?

2) Mia Hamm, Eddie Pope, Brian McBride: Hamm is the best player in women's soccer worldwide. Pope and McBride

230 hours of coverage for this World Cup, showing every single game. Nike will spend \$120 million over the next eight years.

Still, not every American is converted, yet. The columnist Andy Slavka wrote a particularly obnoxious article in the NY PRESS, complaining about "effeminate white Europeans" in New York, watching a game that he considers pathetic — with "dainty" players who keep falling over every few minutes. Enthusiastic fans punched back with a barrage of anti-Slavka letters to the newspaper. The best rebuttal came from Jason Theater of Manhattan. Tackling Slavka's idea that most soccer fans are "white", and that the players are "dainty", Jason wrote: "You can find ardent World Cup viewers everywhere in New York City. Many came recently from Tunisia, Mexico, Cameroon, Colombia, Korea, Brazil, Nigeria, etc.... Those 'dainties' who play can keep going for 90 continuous minutes of game that would leave

## Celebrating 150 Years of Feminism

**Induction ceremony at The National Woman's Hall of Fame, which this year welcomed US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright into its list of honorees; Forum 98, an academic meeting convened to assess progress made and future steps needed in the US women's movement; and the annual conference of the National Organization of Women (NOW), which drafted a Declaration of Sentiments for the 21st Century.**

NOW, working with the Feminist Majority, also plans to lobby in the US Congress for a National Women's Equality Act.

NOW is also developing "a much broader focus" that calls for support of women in Afghanistan.

— WFS/News Network