

## The Kingdom of Arakan in the Indian Ocean Commerce (AD 1430 – 1666)

Aye Chan<sup>\*</sup>

### I. Introduction

The present day Rakhine State in the Union of Myanmar was formerly known as the “kingdom of Arakan” to the traders of Indian Ocean commerce since the arrival of Europeans in Southeast Asia. However, the kingdom had had an independent history for nearly two millennia till the Burmese conquest in 1785. Research on the Arakanese history has been almost untouched until the last decade of the twentieth century. Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s conclusion in his book, *Portuguese Empire in Asia (1500-1700)*, published in 1993 was that “the sheer existence of an independent Arakanese kingdom over several centuries is virtually ignored by Southeast Asian historians.”<sup>1)</sup> Although agriculture was an economic mainstay of that self-sustained country, it began to get involved in the Indian Ocean trade as a maritime kingdom in the Age of Commerce (AD1450-1680) as the period was defined by Anthony Reid (Reid 1993). The contacts with Indian Ocean commerce and Perso-Islamic traditions were closely

\* Professor, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan.  
xqbf1pdn@kanda.kuis.ac.jp

<sup>1)</sup> I am deeply grateful to Professor Jacques P. Leider of the Ecole Francaise d’Extreme Orient, Paris, for sharing this reference from his article, “These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names,” posted on [www.efeo.fr](http://www.efeo.fr).

combined with intrusive forces that shaped the Arakanese polity and society for more than three centuries. This study explores the political, economic and social structures of the kingdom during the reign of the Mrauk-U Dynasty until it lost its control over Chittagong, the chief port and major commercial center in the Bay of Bengal in AD 1666.

## II. Arakan: The Geographical Setting and Economic Background

There is a large chain of mountain ranges running south from the Tibetan Plateau and sloping down to the Gulf of Martaban in the Indian Ocean. The southern part of it is called Arakan (Rakhine) Roma and it separates the present-day Rakhine State from the Irrawaddy Valley, which was the heartland of the Burmese (Myanmar) Empires. Today the Rakhine coastal strip, lying along the eastern shore of the Bay of Bengal, forms the Rakhine State of the Union of Myanmar. In the north, there are a few low ridges that radiate from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in modern Bangladesh. The Rivers, Mayu, Kaladan and Lemro flow between the ridges and carry silt to form a delta at their mouths. The silt also coalesces into alluvial flood plains on the banks of each river. The average annual rainfall for the last century has been 5080 millimeters. It has been observed that even the low-lying lands though not fed with much water and silt from the adjoining higher lands, provide a high crop yield.

Having kept themselves from the other Tibeto-Burman races in the Irrawaddy (Ayeyawady) Valley for many centuries the Arakanese have a long, independent and autonomous history. The kingdom was called “Arakkhadesa” in a Sanskrit inscription of the AD tenth century that was found in its old capital city, Wethali (Vesali). The Greco-Egyptian geographer, Ptolemy calls the country “Argyre” meaning ‘the silver land’ in his “Geography” written in the second century AD. However,

since the beginning of its history, the kingdom has never been an isolated society. Its contacts with India by land and sea encouraged the kingdom to adopt a system of government, to have a variety of belief systems, and to develop its literature, art and architecture.

The archeological evidence supports the assertion that there had been a sea route from south India to the northern Arakan coast from the fourth century to seventh century AD. That route met in the Gulf of Martaban with another sea route that ran south along the Tenasserim coast. After sailing around the Malay Peninsula by that sea route, ships entered the Gulf of Siam.<sup>2)</sup> The Indian, Persian and Arab traders used this route to trade with both Mainland and Island Southeast Asia until the end of the fifteenth century and later the Portuguese and the Dutch followed the same route in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Arakanese people call themselves “Rakhine.” However, they are called “Magh” or “Mugh” by the peoples of the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent, especially by the Bengalis who have had cultural and political contacts with them throughout the history. The Venician traveler Nicolo Di Conti, likely to be the first European to visit Arakan in the late 1420s calls the country the “Rachani” in his travelogue and says that Ramu, the city in the southern part of the present-day Cox’s Bazaar district of Bangladesh was under occupation of Arakanese (Carnignani 1971: 34; Harvey 1967: 140). Quoting contemporary Portuguese sources, Henry Yule, an expert of Colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, writes:

“It is called by some Portuguese Orrakan, by others among them

<sup>2)</sup> The Chinese Buddhist monk I Ching, in the seventh century AD, reached northeast India by this route. Most of the ships sailing northward along the Arakan coast were destined for the famous port of the Ganges Delta, Tamaralipati (Tamluk) that is mentioned in the famous Anandacandra Sanskrit Inscription of Arakan (Gutman. 1976: 6-7). Tamluk is the town of Tilograma, located by Ptolemy between the Kamberikhom and Pseudostomon and may likely be identified with either Kotalipara or Gauranadi Upazita in the Barisal District of modern Bangladesh (Rashid 1991:130. Also see E.H Johnston. 1945. “Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, XI ii: 357-385.London University.

Arrakaon and by some again Rakan” (Yule 1985: 34).

The famous Bengali poet of the seventeenth century, Daulat Qazi, in his collection of Bengali Poems, “*Sati Maina*,” writes about the Arakanese kingdom:

“To the East of the River Kanafuli there is a palace, “*Roshang City*” by name, like the heaven. There rules the glorious king of Maghada descent, a follower of the Buddha (Haq 2005: 12).

In this poem “Roshang” is clearly again the corrupted Bengali pronunciation for “*Rakhine*.” In Bengali literature it is certain that “derives from the term.” Mabud Khan, a Bangladeshi anthropologist, explains that it has been proved beyond a doubt that the modern name Arakan is derived from a transformation of the word “Rakhine.” Through linguistic analysis he explains that the term “Rakhine” is a metamorphosis of the Tibeto-Burman word “Ruang, meaning Arakan.” He adds that there are a lot of examples to prove that “Ruang,” “Rosang” and “Rokam,” the three most widely used words in old Bengali literature mean “Arakan” (Mabud Khan 1978: 22-27; Majid 2005: 42-43).

Anthony Reid asserts that the early modern period witnessed the rise of many states that have defined Southeast Asia’s modern identities. He adds that the new military techniques, introduced by the expansion of commerce were also a factor (Reid 1993: 14-15). In the case of Arakan the cultural interactions strengthened the newly formed kingdom under the new dynasty. Suniti B. Qanungo, a Bangladeshi authority on the history of Chittagong writes:

“The relation between Chittagong and Arakan is influenced by geographical, ethnological, cultural and historical considerations.

From about 1580 [?] until 1666 AD, nearly a century, Chittagong was under almost uninterrupted Arakanese rule which is undoubtedly an important period marked by momentous events. During this period a company of eight sovereigns successively ruled Arakan along with

Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts with full despotic power. All of them were not of same caliber; some were good soldiers and conquerors, who defied a great continental powerlike the Mughal Empire and an expansionist power like the Burmese Empire (Qanungo 1988a: 232).<sup>3)</sup>

The Arakanese today feel unsafe because of demographic expansion and ethnic pressure from the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh. However, from the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Rakhine kings conquered Chittagong many times and established their administrations there. To their western neighbors the Rakhine people were marauders who oftend evastated their country in the age that they call in Bengali “Moger Mulluk” (The Arakanese Age of Anarchy). In fact, the Chittagong and Cox’s Bazaar Divisions of modern Bangladesh which separated after the independence of Bangladesh were known as Chittagong Zila and situated adjacent to Arakan. There had been cultural, commercial and political connections between southeastern Bengal and Arakan since the opening centuries of the Christian era (Qanungo 1988b: 12). Although the Islamic world had pushed its frontier eastward in the Indian subcontinent, it failed to make inroads into the Buddhist kingdom of Arakan, and the Muslim traders of Gujarat found the sea route to Sumatra passing over the Arakan coast in the closing decade of the thirteenth century. French historian Jacques Leider suggests:

“The kind of *frontiers* that are central to our investigations of Arakanese history and cultures are first of all less than rigid ethnic-linguistic frontiers that allow us to distinguish a predominantly Tibeto-Burman zone and Indo-Aryan zone (Leider 2005).”

Although the Bengal posed a threat to Arakan after the Muslim conquest of it in 1203 AD, Arakanese kings brought Chittagong under

<sup>3)</sup> Qanungo does not refer to any source materials on his periodization of the Arakanese rule over Chittagong. However we can say with certainty that the city was annexed into Arakan by King Minbin around AD 1540. In 1541 King Min Bin issued the coin with his titles as “Chittagong Min Bin Thinkhaya” in Burmese on the obverse and “Zabauk Shah” in Persian scripts on the reverse.

their sway in the first half of the sixteenth century and their domain in southeast Bengal lasted until 1666 AD. Even after the Mughal conquest of Chittagong, the Delhi's suzerainty could not be extended as far south as Ramu (Panwah as the Arakanese called it). Only after the British colonial rule was established the southern part as far south as to the bank of the Naaf River was incorporated as the territory of the British East India Company. Thus, it is clear that the sharp demarcation of the boundary between Bengal and Arakan by the British was followed by the Bengali ethnic expansion into the area that the records of the East India Company call the wholly waste land lying to the right of the bank of the river (Qanungo 1988b: 12-15).

### III. The Formation of State under the Mrauk-U Dynasty (AD 1430 - 1785)

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the political conflict between the Burman kingdom of Ava and the Mon kingdom of Hanthawaddy, over the control of the Irrawaddy Valley and the prosperous ports on the coast caused political chaos in Arakan. The country became the western front of the Ava-Hanthawaddy War (1386~1422), and for nearly two decades Ava and Hanthawaddy were involved in a struggle to bring the Arakan coastal strip under their control (UK I: 405-408). It is said that the last Arakanese king of the Lemro dynasty of Arakan (AD 1018~1406), Naramekhla, fled to take refuge in Gaur, the capital of the Sultanate of Bengal in 1406, and the Lemro dynasty came to an end (Sandamala Linkara II 1931: 1-2).<sup>4)</sup>

<sup>4)</sup> The story of Naramekhla's exile in Gaur is refuted by French scholar Jacques Leider and myself Jacques Leider in his paper read to the Arakan History Workshop, Bangkok (November 2-3, 2005) points out that the story in its most elaborate form appears only in the Chronicler Nga Mai's Mahayazawingyi (a palm-leaf manuscript), found on the accession of the Rangoon University Central Library and the British Library, London. That account is clearly a made-up story, which was interpolated

The following Arakanese epigraph gives the oath which the Arakanese king had to take as vassal king of the Monking, Razadirit.

“The great and just king (*taramin*) of Rakhine takes this firm oath. I say that as long as I have life I shall never plan destruction of my lord, Razadirit.”<sup>5)</sup>

Although the Sultanate of Bengal became a menace to Arakan in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, by pushing the Islamic frontier to the east. On the other hand we can also say that the Bengal under Mughal rule played an important role in the making of a powerful Arakanese kingdom under a new dynasty in the early fifteenth century. Narameikhla founded the city of Mrauk-U in AD 1430, and it remained the capital of the kingdom until the Burmese conquest in 1785. Some Muslim retainers are said to have been brought from Bengal by the king. There is convincing evidence, namely the Persian Stone Inscription and Santikan Mosque, of the existence of a small Muslim community in Mrauk-U from the outset.<sup>6)</sup> These people became the earliest Muslim settlers in the Buddhist Kingdom of Arakan, and it is certain that there was a close relation between the retainers and the king, although we cannot exactly say what role they played in the restoration of Narameikhla to the throne. Thenceforth, the influence of Perso-Islamic conventions in the system of government was conspicuous in Arakanese history. Narameikhla took only a new Arakanese (Rakhine) reign title as King Min Saw Mon

into the Arakanese chronicle in the 1840s only after the British annexation of Arakan into British India. Arthur Phayre, the first deputy commissioner of Arakan, later picked up this story in his writings (Phayre 1844:23-52). The former chronicles and contemporary Bengali sources are completely silent about any asylum taken by the king of Arakan. The whole story is rather doubtful. Probably Narameikhla was in self-imposed exile in Southeastern Bengal, where Arakanese (Rakhine) people had lived since the eleventh century.

<sup>5)</sup> Pareintaung Laymyethna Pagoda Inscription, Mrauk-U, the Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum I-44:1

<sup>6)</sup> The Persian inscription has not yet been thoroughly deciphered. I was twice on the site, doing fieldwork. The mosque is too small to let more than ten people in answer to their prayer. I am deeply grateful to Pamela Gutman of the Australian National University, an art historian of ancient Arakan, for her comment on my workshop paper. She thinks the Santikan remains appear to be later to that date.

(r.1430-1433), but his successors, though Buddhists, bore Islamic titles for more than two centuries. King Min Khari (r.1433 - 1459) ascended the throne after the death of Min Saw Mon, and took the Islamic title AliKhan and occupied the City of Ramu in Southeast Bengal (Kawithara 1968: 1-6).<sup>7)</sup> The territorial expansion of Arakanese kings began. Min Saw Mon's successors practiced the tradition of adopting purely Muslim proper reign titles. Bengali historian Habibullah writes:

“Bengal's influence was not confined to coins and royal titles only. From the end of the sixteenth century, when the writings of the Bengali poets Daulat Qazi and Aloul began to supply a good deal of information concerning Arakan, some of the offices in the court and the government to some extent appeared to have been held by Bengali Muslims. It was to the patronage extended by the Arakanese court that we owe some of the notable Bengali works of the medieval period” (Habibullah 1945: 35).

Islamicization of the Chittagong region was still in process even at the time of the Mughal Conquest in AD 1666. Until then the southern part of Chittagong province had been a multi-tribal area. Some Bengali scholars assert that some Arakanese (Rakhine) people had been living in the southeastern part of the Chittagong District around Ramu since before the Arakanese finally established administration in the whole Chittagong province in the early sixteenth century (Sattar 1971: 233; Habibullah 1945: 34). King Ba Saw Pru (r. 1459~1482), known by the Islamic title as Kalima Shah, attacked Chittagong and annexed some adjacent territories into his kingdom. The contemporary court bard Adu Min Nyo eulogizes King Ba Saw Pru in his famous poems, *Rakhine Minthami Eigyin* as follows:

“King Ba Saw Pru gained utmost power through his charisma and wisdom. He, like a god was recognized as the overlord of many

<sup>7)</sup> There is an ambiguity between the account of Nicolo Di Conti and that of Arakanese chroniclers. Conti is likely to mean that when he visited Ramu in the 1420s the city was inhabited by the bulk of the Arakanese population.



kingdoms. He marched to Chittagong. Thither the Maramar soldiers he brought crossed the river in throng. Those who revolted, including heretic Bengali along with the Thet (Chakma) and Mrung (Tripuri) were defeated with the weapons like thunderbolt.” (Stanza 34)

The contemporary inscription of Sultan Rasti Khan (r.AD 1473 - 74) found in Bengal describes the recovery of some frontier territories by the Sultanate from the Arakanese occupation (Habibullah 1945: 35). There was a triangular struggle for the possession of Chittagong between Bengal, Arakan and the Hindu kingdom of Tripura for nearly four decades in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

The prosperous city of Catagaon (Chittagong), described by the Arab merchants as a great port, remained independent under the administration of the local merchant-princes during the greater part of the fifteenth century (Tibbetts 1981: 381). When the Portuguese arrived, they called the city “Porto Piqueno” or “Porto Grande,” the “Little Heaven” or the “Great Heaven.” They noted that the traffic and commerce of that city always had great momentum and, at that time, commerce was flourishing (Yule 1985: 727~728).

Though not a contemporary source, Alexander Hamilton in the middle of the seventeenth century also describes in his travelogue the triangular struggle for the city, and says that after continuous fighting, Chittagong fell into the hands of the Arakanese (Hamilton 1930: 15 -17). The king of Tripura occupied the city in 1512 and in the same year, the sultan of Bengal and his army defeated the Tripuris. In spite of incessant Arakanese attacks on the city, the Portuguese accounts mention that Chittagong remained under the control of the sultan of Gaur until 1538. Finally, King Minbin (r. 1531-1553) of Arakan annexed the city and its surrounding areas to his kingdom (Sandamala Linkara II 1931: 62 -63).

About AD 1540-41, Chittagong was definitely under Arakanese rule. The influx of Perso-Islamic and European conventions invigorated

the socio-political institutions of the kingdom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shortly after the capture of Chittagong, King Min Bin struck a coin in his name with the Arakanese title “Chittagong Min Bin Thinkhaya,” in Arakanese on the obverse and the Muslim designation, “Zabuk Shah,” on the reverse in Arabic scripts (British Museum, London 1920: 10-14-107; 1921: 6-4-8 and 5-8-29). Thenceforward Chittagong disappeared from the Bengal and Islamic historical records of India until it was again conquered by the Mughal governor of Bengal Shayista Khan in 1666 (Habibullah 1945: 36).

After the conquest of Chittagong, the Thet (Sak or Chakma) king submitted to King Min Bin and sent his daughter to marry the king (Sandamala Linkara II 1931: 58-59). As Charney has noted, the intermarriage between the royal and elite clans promoted unity through blood and kinship ties (Charney 1999: 57). A contemporary Arakanese inscription of 1581 tells of King Min Bin not only bringing Chittagong under Arakanese sway, but also conquering the Thet (Chakma) and Mrun (Tripuri) domains.<sup>8)</sup>

As it is claimed in the Arakanese chronicles and contemporary inscriptions during the reign of King Min Bin, the Tripura State of modern India and the Thet (Chakma) domain in Chittagong Division of present-day Bangladesh were incorporated into the kingdom of Arakan. In the Irrawaddy Valley of Burma, when the Mon Kingdom of Hanthawaddy was defeated by King Tabinshwehti (r. 1531-1550) of Toungoo, Min Khaung, the ruler of Pyi (Prome), who was the vassal king of Hanthawaddy, sent his sister to marry King Min Bin and to form an alliance with the Arakanese king. She was known in Arakanese history as Queen Tazaung. This relationship between Mrauk-U and Prome was the reason of Taungoo invasion of Arakan in 1545. The city was besieged by the army of two great Burmese warriors, Tabinshwehti and Bayinnaung. After intense fighting near the

<sup>8)</sup> Galonetaung Inscription (BE 947), Galone Taung pagoda, Minbya. 7-8.

royal capital, the Burmese invaders were defeated. Both the Arakanese and Burmese chronicles mention the use of European firearms such as the Seinbyaung (cannon) and Myatabu (musket), by both sides (Hmannan II: 235).

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Arakan's relations with the Second Burmese Empire under the Toungoo dynasty were hostile rather than friendly. After the conquest of Siam, the Burmese emperor Bayinnaung sent an expedition to conquer Arakan in 1580. The short lived Burmese Empire with its capital Hanthawady in the coastal region wanted to reduce the maritime power of Arakan. However, the expedition ended in failure (UK III: 88-89). After that, a Burmese mission from Hanthawaddy arrived in the Mughal court to establish a common cause against the king of Arakan but the outcome of this mission is not known (Qanungo 1988: 234).

In the reign of King Naradhipati (Min Razagri) (r. 1593-1612), the Arakanese kingdom reached the climax of its power in the Bay of Bengal. Manrique, though writing three decades later, says that Naradhipati sent spy missions to investigate the prosperous trade between Hanthawaddy and the Southeast Asian archipelago, including the Malay Peninsula (Manrique 1927: 251). Naradhipati conquered Hanthawaddy, the royal capital of the Burmese empire under the Toungoo dynasty in the year 1600, and the cultural heritages of the Mon, Thai and Burmese filtered through into the Arakanese civilization. One of the main motivations of the Arakanese conquest of Hanthawaddy was to extend Arakanese power over the sea route between the Bay of Bengal and the Gulf of Martaban. Manrique says that the Arakanese navy consisted of two hundred gunboats that blocked the coastal Burmese Capital (Manrique I 1927: 267). Michael Charney writes:

“Utilizing revenue from Muslim trade connections and the agricultural And human resources of Dannyawaddy Delta, Naramekhla's Successors

in the space of a century and a half, constructed a maritime trading state which, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, encompassed not only the entire eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal up to the Tripura, but also the Lower Burma coast from Cape Nagrais to what is now Moulmein” (Charney 1998: 186).

King Naradipati’s two successors, Waradhamma Raza (Min Khamaung) (r. 1612-1622) and Thirithudhamma Raza (r. 1622-1638), proved themselves able kings, not only defending their western frontiers, but also occasionally invading the Irrawaddy Delta. However, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Mughal Empire had extended its eastern frontier to Bengal and posed a threat to the Buddhist kingdom of Arakan.

#### IV. Economic Development

The leading historian of Southeast Asia, Victor Lieberman, explains how the littoral states on the mainland benefited far more directly from the expansion of international trade (Lieberman 1993: 219). The kingdom of Arakan under the Mrauk-U dynasty entered a golden age for about a century, from the reign of King Min Bin to the death of King Thiri Thudhamma Raza (r. 1622 - 1638). The Arakanese control of Chittagong coincided with the age of expansion of the Indian Ocean trade in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the contemporary Arakanese sources the kingdom is always described as the “Rakkhapura Kingdom with many ports in its territory and dominion over twelve cities in Bengal” (Kawithara 44b-4-45a).<sup>9)</sup>

The Arakanese naval force became powerful and commanded the Bay with ships and cannons supplied by the Portuguese. Mrauk-U became a commercial center in the Bay with its chief port, Baungdut,

<sup>9)</sup> “*Rakkhapura Naingngan Thinbawseik-amyar hnint Kular-hsenhitmyo.*”

as the base of itinerant merchants from Europe, the Middle East, India and the Southeast Asian Archipelago. Arakan maintained commercial contacts with both the Indian Sub-continent and the Southeast Asian Archipelago. It was also reported that there were some problems in Arakan's relations with Golkonda because of Mrauk-U's aggressive commercial policy (Charney 1999: 189). The royal capital seems to have been a cosmopolitan city in the seventeenth century. If we are to rely on the account of Sabastien Manrique, Mrauk-U city in the early 1630s had a population of 160,000 people. Manrique even exalted the splendors of Mrauk-U, saying the city resembled Venice (Manrique I 1927: 217-218). We have contemporary records to support this historical fact. Aloul, a Bengali Court Bard in Mrauk-U, writes in his poem, "Saiful Maluk."

"Thus we see people from every country, hearing the magnificence of Roshang, took shelter under the king. Arabian Egyptian Michiri, Turkish Shami, Habsi (African?), Hindi Kamarupi the Assamese, Ahopai Khotanchari (?), Malaya Bari from Achi (Acheh), Kuchi (Kochin), and Karnataka are there. Countless Sheiks, Soiyadja, Mughal, Patham (Afghan) warriors, Rajput (Indians), and Hindus of various nationalities are among them. Avai (Burmese), Siamese, Tripuri, Kuki, are also to be named. Armenian, Olandaz (Dutch), Engaraj (English), Castiman (?), and many races including Portuguese are also living here (Haq 1935: 12)"<sup>10</sup>

However, we cannot say with certainty that there was a stable, large and permanent Muslim community settled around the capital city during the early Mrauk-U period. Most of the Muslims in Mrauk-U until the early seventeenth century lived as temporary visitors. There had been some Muslim gentry in the core of the society formed by the

<sup>10</sup> This poem is translated from Bengali into English by Maung Sein Pru. He is presently engaged in GRAUS, a local NGO based in Cittagong Hills Tract, Bangladesh. *Arakan Research Journal of Bangladesh*, Vol. III p.4. He can be reached at himavanti05@yahoo.com.

elite Muslim women in the royal harem, and some Muslim men, after being castrated, served kings as eunuchs at the royal palace. However, there is no shred of evidence of proselytizing of the native people into Islam (Charney 1999: 151).

The Mrauk-U court continuously attempted to control the provincial rulers so that they could not misappropriate the flow of material and human resources to the center. The control of the economy by the king was handled by the traditional rights of mandate. Warfare or coercion was often used to maintain the centripetal movement of state and wealth. The king was theoretically not only the ultimate owner of all the land and water but also of the produce that came from the land. Even land endowment to (the Buddhist Church) could not be performed without the permission of the king.<sup>11)</sup>

All the contemporary sources reveal not only labor intensive methods of rice cultivation, but also agricultural technology such as the building of dams and embankments along the lowland of the riversides and the use of animal feces as fertilizer, introduced from Bengal. The Mughal historian Shiabuddin Talish writes that after the slave raids in Bengal, only the Portuguese pirates sold their prisoners, but the Arakanese employed all their captives in agriculture and other kinds of services (Talish 1907: 422). Thus the workforce in the agricultural sector was increased. Rice was grown both for export and local consumption. Animal husbandry was jointly developed with agriculture.

The central government set up the direct exploitation of forest produce such as aromatic woods, lak, ivory and beeswax, which were traded for luxuries from India and China (Hamilton 1930: 11-12). The urbanization of Mrauk-U, Chittagong, Ramee and Sandoway expanded the volume of trade and production. The demand for food, textiles, and utensils brought rapid growth to local trade as well. Rice became the

<sup>11)</sup> Hsinwngyi Pagoda Inscription (BE 918), Hsinwngyi Pagoda, Pyin Yaung Village, Mauk-U Township 8-9; Kalaka Pagoda Inscription (BE 907), Kalaka Pagoda, Mrauk-U 1-2.

main export and the court was concerned about the control of agricultural produce. The textile industry developed under the royal patronage, and new industrial techniques seem to have been introduced from India.

Although the bulk of Arakanese folk formed an agricultural society, the court became involved in the maritime trade. Some Arakanse (Rakhine) people became seafarers and started trading with neighboring countries and marauding in the Ganges. While Burma and Siam used alloyed metal and silver instead of money in trade, Arakan began minting coins to be used as currency. Accordingly, this production of coins accelerated the development of markets and made the system of taxation more efficient. Phrases such as "*kwanthee hnit-uyin tanga hnitse*"<sup>12</sup>) (Literally meaning, "Two betel nut gardens that cost twenty coins") and "... *phura thunsuute thaw mrey gamin-thudhipri go tanga lese*,"<sup>13</sup>) meaning "the land for building three pagodas was bought for forty coins" appear in contemporary inscriptions. Alongside the Arakanese silver coins, the Dutch records say that the coins of the Mughal Empire. "Tangas" were also in use at the Arakanese ports throughout the last sixteenth and early seventeenth century (Hall 1960: 80). Manique illustrates the marketing of goods in Marauk-U:

"A large swiftly flowing river traverses the city, separating out into many branches throughout its area. Most of its streets, therefore, were navigable by large and small vessels which were the principal means of traffic, both public and private. Along these watery roads they carried for sale every kind of substance, rice, locally made wines, meat, fish salted and dried, ghi, vegetables, fruits and other articles of food; besides this, various articles of merchandise and of household use. All these things were sold at very cheap rates, especially comestible. There were besides these advantages many places called bazaars in which the

<sup>12</sup>) Zundat Letya Pyanchi Inscriptio (BE 984), Ratana Man Aung Pagoda, Mrauk-U 13-14

<sup>13</sup>) Abhithinsa Inscriptio (A), Gananchaptaung Pagoda, Mrauk-U 20-21

same articles could be obtained (Manrique I 1927: 205)

In reference to Dutch records, D.G.E. Hall explains that the direct trade between Batavia and Maruk-U was much greater in Bulk than trade via the Coromandel Coast (Hall 1960: 80). It is obvious that the VOC and Muslim traders from both India and the East Indies played an important role in the maritime trade with Arakan.

The commercial success of the Dutch in seventeenth century Southeast Asia resulted in the burgeoning of the slave trade in the Bay of Bengal. The successors of King Min Bin deployed 750 Portuguese mercenaries in Dianga on the west bank of the Kanafuli River, opposite the city of Chittagong. The Mughal Emperor Jehangir also allowed Portuguese soldiers to be stationed at Hugli in Bengal. Chittagong and Hugli became twin commercial cities where goods from China and Malacca (Melaka) were bartered for Indian produces (Hamilton II 1930: 11-12).

Because of the demand for slaves, the Portuguese and Arakanese pirates often raided the Ganges Delta and sold the captives into slavery. A contemporary French traveler, Francois Bernier, wrote in his travelogue that the well armed Portuguese and Arakanese pirates sometimes sailed up the delta approximately 120 miles from the coast. Sometimes inhabitants of entire villages were captured and sold as slaves and all the properties in the villages were looted. The Mughal naval force stationed at Dhaka could do very little to defend the frontier. Sometimes only four or five ships of Arakanese and Portuguese pirates, he adds, could destroy fourteen or fifteen gunboats of Mughal forces (Bernier 1916: 173-175).

When the Mughal Emperor Shah Jihan destroyed the Portuguese force in Hugli in 1632, Chittagong and Mrauk-U remained the only slave markets for the Dutch. The eyewitness, Manrique noted that in the five years between 1630 and 1635 the pirates brought 18,000 people to be sold in Mrauk-U (Manrique II 1927: 286). The Dutch East



India Company records report that the best slaves, such as craftsmen, dancers, and scribes with artistic and technical skills, were all taken as the king's share (Hall 1960: 82). Arakan, after losing Chittagong, its commercial center in the Bay and the Ganges Delta, which was the main source of slaves, consequently became merely an agricultural country and also lost its past splendors in the late seventeenth century. After that decline Bengal under the effective control of the Mughal provincial government was no more the land of plunder for the Portuguese and Arakanese pirates.

## V. The Structure of the State

The assumption of Muslim titles by seven of the forty-eight successors of King Min Saw Mon merely indicates the Arakanese domination of southeastern Bengal. For the Muslim subjects it was a humiliation to live in a Dar-Al Harb, the land ruled by an infidel, and they frequently rose in rebellion. However, there are some writings suggesting that these Arakanese kings were Muslims (Ba Tha 1959; Ba Tha 1960). B. Wagoner explains that the self-bestowed Muslim titles of the Hindu and Buddhist kings were aimed at keeping the Muslim subjects in their domains in harmony with the larger non-Muslim society:

“First, Islamicization refers to a political strategy, by means of which indigenous elites attempt to enhance their political status and authority through participation in the more ‘universal’ culture of Islam. Second, this participation is effected through the adoption of certain Islamic cultural form and practices, which, given the political nature of the process, largely pertain to the broad sphere of secular culture, as opposed to the narrower domain of formal religion. As such, the process of Islamicization has nothing to do with religious conversion or

syncretism... Finally... Islamicization does not necessarily occur at the expense of indigenous cultural traditions (Wagoner 1996: 854; Charney 1999: 73).

Although the Hindu Brahmans (Punnah) led the coronation ceremony of the king for the performance of the traditional ritual, Buddhism had been closely linked to the Arakanese kingship and society. It is undeniable that the Muslim titles of some Mrauk-U kings appear on the silver coins issued in Arakan. However title such as, *Tara-min*, *Min-tara* and *Dhammaraja* on the obverse of the coins and in the contemporary inscriptions testify that the kingship was theoretically based on the ideology of Theravada kingship of Southeast Asia and can be commonly defined as “the king who rules by Dhamma” or “Dhammaraja” (Ishii 1986, 45). In Stanley Tambiah’s definition, the king is the wielder of this worldly “Dhamma” and the preserver of the society in which the Brahmans (Punnah) served as subordinate functionaries. He also has the duty to protect and tend the members of the Sangha (the Community of Buddhist Monks) who are the seekers of higher truth (Tambiah 1976: 81-83). The Bengali poet Daulat Qazi extolls King Thirithudhamma Raza as follows:

“Name being Sri Sudhamma Raja is renowned for his justice. His power Is like the morning sun, famous in the world, protects the subjects like His own children...Justice and peace prevail across the land. One needs not fear another. All are fairly treated (Haq 1935: 8).”

However, the Muslims of Bengal under Arakanese rule knew the king of their country as an infidel and immoral despot. The Islamic literature of the Mughal court gives a different version that is clearly a reflection of the attitude of the Bengalis in Chittagong Province.

“Their religion is distinct from Islam and Hinduism. Barring their mothers, they can take all their women for their wives: for instance, a brother may marry his sister and their males do not grow beards (Salim 1975: 14-15).

The construction of splendid Buddhist temples such as Chitthaung and Dokekanthein in the Capital changed the cultural environment and engendered an atmospheric and emotional awe of the king. The Arakanese titles of the king, such as *Hsinbyushin* (Lord of White Elephant), *Min-Sakkrawate* (Universal Monarch) and *Maha-thamata Raza* (Great Elected King) are all paradigms of the theorized Dhammaraja cult of Theravada Buddhist kingship (Tambiah 1976: 81-83). The Five Symbolic Regalia (*Min-myauk-taza-ngabar*), the presence of the sacred Mahamuni Buddha Image in the realm, and the *Yattara* Bell in the Mahamuni temple on which the magic formulae were inscribed for the protection of the royal capital were symbolic of the power of sovereigns. The loyalty of the guardian nats (spirits), ownership of white elephants and victory in wars theoretically justified the king's *phun-tago* (charismatic glory). In the closing chapter of his travelogue, Manrique writes that King Thirithudhamma Raza (r. 1622-1638) planned a scheme to produce an elixir of immortality with the help of a Mohammedan sorcerer (Manrique 1927: 234-6). In this case he seems to have been misguided by a belief different from Buddhism.

At the coronation ceremony, the Arakanese kings formally espoused the Buddhist legitimacy and swore that they were ruling the realm according to the conventional Ten Rules of the Kings (*Min-kyint-tayar-sebar*), the Four Rules of Kindness (*Thingaha-tayar-laybar*), and the Seven Rules of Righteousness (*Aparihaniya-tayar-khunitpar*). The Ten Rules of the Kings were the following: (1) Religious offerings; (2) Observance of *Sila* (the five, eight or ten precepts); (3) Generous charity to the poor; (4) Honesty; (5) Gentility; (6) Austerity; (7) Control of Anger; (8) Pity for the people in distress; (9) Patience and (10) Not standing against the will of the people. The Four Rules of Kindness were as follows: (1) Not to collect taxes of more than one tenth of individual's total income; (2) Providing sufficient food and clothes to the people in royal service; (3) Financial loans or support to

those in need of assistance for running their businesses successfully; and (4) Speaking politely to officials and the people. Finally, the Seven Rules of Righteousness were the following: (1) To convene the council of ministers and councilors regularly to consult about the welfare of the people; (2) To rule in accordance with the customary and traditional laws practiced by the former righteous kings; (3) To give respect to wise men and conscientious people and seek advice from them; (4) Not to commit adultery; (5) To worship and give offerings to the guardian spirits (nats) of the country; (6) To take care of the monks who maintain and practice the teachings of Buddha by providing essentials to them; and (7) To establish friendly relations with neighboring kings and to have a high opinion of wise men in foreign countries (Kawithara 1964: 110-114). Almost all these rules were based on the teachings of Buddha.

The Arakanese kings of the Mrauk-U dynasty not only built grand temples and pagodas but also endowed the Buddhist monks with land and workers to supply food and services to the in the monasteries. Furthermore the laws given by them to the people were also based on the (the teaching of Buddha). An edict of King Naradhipati (Min Razagri) reads:

“The people of the kingdom should live only a good way of life... They must avoid theft, killing, having unlawful sex, ridiculing and insulting others, malevolent envy of other people’s good fortune, delighting in another person’s misfortune, wavering due to heresy etc...” (Min Razagri Satam 38-a-7-38b4)

King Naradhipati sent Zina Man Aung Sayadaw, the chief monk of (a sect of forest dwelling monks), to Sri Lanka from where he brought back the original Theravada scripture. The doctrine of (the town dwelling sect) was declared heathen in the kingdom (Min Razagri Satam 13b-5-8).

The king was the lord (owner) of all the subjects in his kingdom

and was declared , literally meaning “Lord of Life.” Charney asserts, “the evidence suggests otherwise: many of those [so-called Muslim] kings were highly devoted to Buddhism and permitted the exclusion of Muslims from the most important activities” (Charney 1999: 71). In the core area only Arakanese Buddhists were appointed domain rulers (Kawithara 132a-6-b-2). Manrique noted that there were Japanese Christians serving in the royal navy and that Mughal mercenaries, Peguan (Mon) and Burmese (Avan) soldiers served in the army (Manrique 1927: 128, 133, 161, 373-375). However, freedom of religion was allowed to all foreigners. Some contemporary inscriptions mention a Muslim saint sent by the king to Bengal as envoy.<sup>14</sup> The name, “Nan cway Maran Dom Camarinker,” that appears in the inscription of 1609 and refers to a minister of King Naradhipati, is clearly a Portuguese.<sup>15</sup> However, mosques were allowed to be built only in Baungdt, the port town, and the foreigners’ residence quarter of Mrauk-U (Sandamala Linkara II 1931: 56-58).

Political power was buttressed by control of the means of production mainly in agriculture. It was historically a system set up in an ideological framework. The codified rights of the king to grant land to the servants, and to allocate manpower where it was necessary played a pivotal role in maintaining the suzerainty in the hands of the ruler. Another edict says:

“Except for the king who owns all the land and water, no one possesses anybody among the people in his realm. Nobody has right to attain the ownership of someone as a slave by inheritance” (Min Razagri Satam 40b-3).

The administrative reforms in the Arkanese kingdom from the beginning of the Mrauk-U period, and especially the changes in the

<sup>14</sup> Fakeer, properly an indigent person...a Mohammedan religious mendicant (Yule 1985: 347) Thayet-Ok Urittaung Pagoda Inscription (BE 857), Thayet-Ok Urittaung Pagoda, Mrauk-U: 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Chidwin-gyaing Inscription (BE971), Chidwin-gyaing, Mrauk-U 5-7.

early seventeenth century, resembled contemporary developments in the central and provincial governance in the Burmese empire under the restored Toungoo dynasty (AD 1600-1752). The supporting pillars of the Arakanese kingship were the lord-vassal relationship between the Mrauk-U court and the provincial ruler, and the system of central administration in the nucleus area of Danyawaddy. The Danyawaddy (Kaladan and Lemro Valleys) became the core of the kingdom and Rammawaddy (Ramree Island), Meghawaddy (Cheduba Island) and Dwarawaddy (present-day Sandoway District), Thet/Sak Pray (Chakma Domain) and Mrun Pray (Tripua Domain) became peripheral provinces under the rule of hereditary princes. The prosperous port of Chittagong, as one of the main sources of revenue for the central government, became a territory under the special administration of autonomous rule: in the core area, the administration of (Royal Capital) was under control of the central government and the (towns), (islands), (hill tracts) and (village tracts) were administered by officials sent from the Mrauk-U court (Kyaw Win Oo 1996: 7-8).

## VI. Conclusion

Armed with the European weapons and invigorated by the benefits from the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean, Arakans, a small coastal kingdom, rose to the status of regional power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The influence of Islamic models was apparent through the function of cultural phenomena. This essay explores how the intrusive cultural forces developed side by side with the traditional religious patterns and what role they played in shaping the kingdom of Arakan in the early modern era.

Key Word : The Kingdom of Arakan, Mrauk-U Dynasty,

The Indian Ocean Commerce, Islam

**Bibliography**

Notes: The unlisted inscriptions have not yet been published in any collection of the Department of Archaeological Research of the Union of Myanmar. In case of citation, these inscriptions are referred to by the name under which they are known and registered by the Department of Archaeological Research (Mrauk-U) and their locations are given in the footnotes.

**Abbreviations**

UK: Kala, U. 1960. *Mahayazawingyi*. Volume I and II. Rangoon: Burma Research Society.

Hmannan: *Hmannan Mahayazawindawgyi*. Volume I, II and III. Rangoon: Pyigyimandine Press.

**Unlisted Stone Inscriptions**

Abithinsa Inscription. n.a. Gananchap-taung Pagoda, Mrauk-U.

Chidwin-gyaing Inscription. BE 971. Chidwin-gyaing, Mrauk-U.

Galonetaung Inscription. BE 947. Galonetaung Pagoda, Minba.

Hsinwungyi Pagoda Inscription. BE 918. Hsinwungyi Pagoda, Pyinyaung Village, Mrauk-U.

Kalaka Pagoda Inscription. BE 907. Kalaka Pagoda, Mrauk-U.

Pareintaung Laymyethna Pagoda Inscription. n.a. Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum.

Thayetok Urittaung Paoda Inscription. BE 857. Thayetok Urittaung Pagoda, Mrauk-U.

Zundat Letyapyanchi Inscription. BE 984. Ratana Manaung Pagoda, Mrauk-U.

**Other Primary and Secondary Sources**

Adu Min Nyo. 1965. *Rakhine Minthamee Eigyin*. Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press.

British Museum. 1920. *Arakanese Coins*. 10-14-107. London: British Museum.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1921. *Arakanese Coins*. 6-4-8 and 5-8-29. London: British Museum.

Ba Tha. 1959. Shah Shuja in Arakan. *The Guardian* 6(9): 26-28.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1960. Roewengyas in Arakan. *The Guardian* 7(5): 33-36.

Bernier, Francois. 1916. *Travels in Moghul Empire (AD 1656-1668)*. Archibald Constable and Vincent. A. Smith, trans. and eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carmignani, Renzo. 1971. *Birmania, Storia, Arte Civiltà*. Pisa: Giardini.

Charney, Michael. 1998. *Crisis and Reformation in a Maritime Kingdom of*

- Southeast Asia Forces of Instability and Political Disintegration in Western Burma (Arakan). *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. 41(2): 185-219.
- Charney, Michael. 1999. *Where Jambudipa and Islamdom Converged: Religious Change and the Emergence of Buddhist Communalism in Early Modern Arakans (Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)*. PhD Dissertation. University of Michigan.
- Gutman, Pamela. 1976. *Ancient Arakan*. PhD Dissertation. The Australian National University.
- Habibullah, A.B. 1945. Arakan in the Pre-Mughal History of Bengal. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*. 2: 33-38.
- Hall, D.G.E. 1960. *Studies in Dutch Relations with Arakan. Buma Research Society Fiftieth Anniversary Publication II*. Rangoon: Burma Research Society.
- Hamilton, Alexander. 1930. *A New Account of the East Indies II*. London: The Argonaut Press.
- Haq, Muhammad E. 1935. Arakan Rajsabhay Babgala Sahitya(1600-1700) [In Bengali, Bengali Literature in the Kings' Court of Arakan]. Kolkata: Phinix Printing.
- Harvey, G. E. 1967. *History of Burma*. London: Longman Green.
- Ishii, Yoneo. 1986. *Sngha, State and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*. Hawaii: Hawaii University Press.
- Johnston, E. H. 1944. Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 11: 357-385.
- Kala, U. 1960. *Mahayazawingyi* [In Burmese, The Great Chronicle]. Volumes I and II. Rangoon: Burma Research Society.
- Kawithara, Thiripawara. 1968. "Dannyawaddy Ayaydawpum" in *Myanmar-Minmyar-ayaydawpum*. Rangoon: Yarpyi Press.
- Khan, Abul Mabud. 1999. *The Majhs* [A Buddhist Community in Bangladesh]. Dhaka: Dhaka University Press.
- Kyaw Win Oo. 1996. *Mrauk-U Khethnaung Rakhine Thamaing* [In Burmese, A History of Arakan in the Later Mrauk-U Period, AD 1638-1784]. MA Thesis. Department of History, University of Yangon.
- Leider Jacques P. *These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names*. Posted on [www.efeo.fr](http://www.efeo.fr).
- Leider, Jacques P. 2005. Arakanese Studies: Challenges and Contested Issues: Mapping a Field of Historical and Cultural Research. A Paper Read in the Arakan History Workshop. Unpublished. Bangkok, November 2-3, 2005.
- Lieberman, Victor. 1993. Was the Seventeenth Century a Waterhed in Burmese



- History. *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief*. Anthony Reid, ed. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Luce, G. H. 1959. Old Kyaukse and the Coming of Burmans. *Journal of Burma Research Society*. 42: 75-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. *Phrases of Pre-Pagan Burma*. Volume I. New York: J. J. Augustin.
- Majid, Mustafa. 2005. *The Rakhines (Aborigines in Bangladesh)*. Dhaka: Mowla Brothers.
- Manrique, Sebastien. 1927. *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manripue 1629-1643 (Itinerario De Las Misiones Orientales)*. Ed. and Trans. by Lt. Col. Ekford and Father Hosten. London: Hakluyt Society.
- Min Razagri Satam (Palm Leaf Manuscript). Accession No. 1632. Rangoon: National Library.
- Phayre, A.P. 1844. On the History of Arakan. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*. 1: 23-52.
- Qanungo, Suniti Bhushan. 1988a. *A History of Chittagong*. Volume I. Reprint. Dhaka: Signet Library.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988b. *A History of Chittagong*. Volume II. Dhaka: Shanti Press.
- Rashid, Haroun Er. 1977. *Geography of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- Reid, Anthony. 1993. Introduction: A Time and A Place. *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief*. Anthony Reid, ed. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Salim, G. H. 1975. *Rizayu-s-Salatin [A History of Bangal]*. Abdul Salam, trans. Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-I.
- Sandamala Linkara II. 1931. *Rakhine Yazawinthitkyan [In Burmese, Rakhine New Chronicle]*. Volume I and II. Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press.
- Sattar, Abdus. 1971. *In the Sylvan Shadows*. Dhaka: Bangala Academy.
- Talish, Shiab-uddin. 1907. The Conquest of Chittagong, 1666 AD. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*. 3: 419 -425.
- Tambiah, S.J. 1977. *World Conquer and World Renouncer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wagoner, Phillip B. 1996. Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 55(4): 851 -880.
- Yule, Henry and A. C. Burnell, eds. 1986. *Hobson-Jobson*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<국문초록>

## 아라칸(여카잉) 왕국의 인도양 해상무역 (1430-1666년)

에창

일본 칸다외국어대학 교수

xqbfipdn@kanda.kuis.ac.jp

아라칸(여카잉) 왕국은 1785년 버마족의 정복 이전 거의 2천년에 가까운 독립적인 역사를 전개해왔다. 특히, 앤서니 리드가 주창하는 상업적 시대(AD 1450-1680)에 있어서 아라칸 왕국은 인도양의 교역에 본격적으로 개입함에 따라 이슬람 전통과 접촉하였고, 이러한 양상으로 인하여 3백년 이상 동안 아라칸 정체와 사회의 형성에 지대한 영향을 받게 되었다. 이슬람의 영향은 문화적 측면에서 이 지역에 분명한 색채를 보여주고 있다. 따라서 본 연구는 이슬람의 문화적 영향력이 기존의 전통적인 종교 패턴에 어떻게 미쳤는지 살펴보고, 1666년 벵갈만의 해상중심지였던 칩타공에 대한 통제력을 상실할 때까지의 아라칸 마웃우 왕조의 정치, 경제, 사회 구조 형성에 어떠한 역할을 담당하였는지 논해볼 것이다.

주제어 : 아라칸(여카잉) 왕국, 마웃우 왕조, 인도양 해상무역, 이슬람