



Study on *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period(1430-1784)



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[*Abstract*]

This study on *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period from the 15th to 18th centuries attempts to demonstrate how the kings of Mrauk U or royal officials tried to claim this legitimating model of kingship and how they accepted this model of kingship and under what conditions the legitimate order of this model was lost. Vital to the adaptation of *Mahāsammata* model of kingship in the Mrauk U period is the claim that Mrauk U's rulers were direct lineal descendants of the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata* and thence the clan of *Gotama* Buddha, *Sākiya* clan. This ideological model of kingship has a recognizable effect on the political stability of Mrauk U kingdom. While the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship performed as a belief of legitimizing kingship within the arena of royal court, the kings of Mrauk U tried to perform the related models of *Mahāsammata*, the ideal models of Buddhist kingship as *dhammarāja* and a *cakkavatti*. However, the conditions that fail to maintain the *Mahāsammata* model

of kingship saw the weakening of the other related models of kingship, which eventually led to the decline of the kingdom.

Keywords: Mrauk U's ruler, *Mahāsammata* Model of kingship

I . Introduction

Mrauk U¹⁾ was the capital of Rakhine for over three centuries till 1784. In 1430, the kingdom of Mrauk U was founded by King Min Saw Mon. The city is located around the Bay of Bengal via the Kaladan River and its tributary, the Theinganadi. Mrauk U occupies a lowland area within a series of parallel ranges trending northwest, commanding the Lemro and the Kaladan valleys. The city was defended by massive walls and ramparts build between the ridges, moats created by damming the streams between the ridges, and immense tanks to its north, south and east (Collis 1923: 244-25) (Thin Kyi 1970:1-3). In the middle of the fifteenth century, a thriving kingship of Mrauk U dynasty grew more and more powerful and pushed military expeditions up to Chittagong. The reign of King Min Bin (c. 1531-1553) marked a culminating point in the history of the kingdom. The king not only fortified the city of Mrauk U but also led military expeditions against Bengal. At the end of the sixteenth century, propitious circumstances also led King Min Razagri (c.1593-16120) to launch an invasion of Lower Myanmar. Therefore, in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Rakhine assumed the role of a regional power that represented a challenge to its two bigger neighbors, Lower Myanmar in the east and Bengal in the west. After 1634, Mrauk U entered its decline. Usurpations became the rule. The kingship of the country became weaker until its annexation in 1784.

The study of Mrauk U period of over three hundred and fifty

1) After the annexation of Rakhine by the British, they moved the administrative center of Rakhine to Akyab (Sittwe). In the 19th century the city was usually known as Mrohaung or "the old city". The name "Mrauk U" was restored in 1979.

years reveals a lot about how the strong kingdom emerged based on its kingship model that shaped the political development of the state. Despite some research by scholars on the monarchical history of Rakhine in Mrauk U Period (1430-1784), the way the kings in Mrauk U Period were initiated and legitimated by the way of kingship was not properly described. The overall images that emerge from some researches of Rakhine monarchical history in Mrauk U Period suggest key ideas about the rise and fall of the kings, their campaigns to Bengal and Lower Myanmar (Bago), their religious deeds, and their relations with Bengal, Portugal and Dutch. However, when power was established and diffused it was difficult to lead by force alone. Some kinds of ideology functions to sustain the legitimacy of kingship. In legitimating some ideological functions, some symbolisms, ceremonial rites and legitimizing myths were introduced to initiate the legitimizing models. However, according to Max Weber, the validity of a legitimate order is ultimately based on the consent of or voluntary obedience of followers or subjects. The validity is achieved only when followers accept, believe in or grant the claims for legitimacy (Weber 1968: 31-32). Weber's theory of "validity of a legitimate order" has been largely accepted in the modern theory of legitimation. I am, however, hesitant to agree that this validity of a legitimate order is agreeable with the legitimizing models of kingship practiced in the kingdom of Rakhine in the 15th to 18th centuries. This arouses me to investigate: (1) how the kings of Mrauk U or royal officials tried to claim the legitimizing model of kingship by introducing the legitimizing myths which are also key elements of legitimation, (2) how they accepted this legitimizing model of kingship and their actual purpose in introducing such legitimizing model of kingship?, (3) the conditions that led to the legitimate order's loss of legitimacy?

II. *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period

The study of existing Rakhine historical sources shows that like the other Theravada Buddhist societies of Southeast Asia, pre-Buddhist origin myths linked monarchies to a solar spirit, tracing royal

descent from the clan of Gotama Buddha. From here, and thence the first Buddhistic- king of the world,- *Mahāsammata* and the consequent model of kingship can also be traced. Most of the major Rakhine chronicles of the early and late 18th century and the early 19th century, as in Myanmar chronicles, opens with the beginning of the universe, the creation of the world, and the appearance of *Mahāsammata*. In the epilogue of *Nga Mi Rakhine Razawin* and *Rakhine Razawin Gri*, it is stated:

.... (The chronicle) will state the lineal descendants of *Mahāsammata* who ruled the golden kingdom of Rakhine.... Nga Mi (cir. 1837-1844: 3), *Rakhine Razawin Gri* (1851: 2a).

Min Razagri Sartam, which comes down to us from the early 17th Century, also provided some information about the sacred geography of India that relates related Buddha and pre-Buddhist origin myths of the monarchy to the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata*. A solar spirit yielded to claims of royal descent from the clan of Gotama Buddha, the *Sākiya* clan. At the start of this *Sartam*, the author *Amat Korangri*²⁾ Maha Zeya Thein mentioned the number of Buddhas who attained Buddhahood and the name of the places where they attained it. (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 2a-b). Then, he described the number of kings from the First King *Mahāsammata* to Prince *Siddhattha* (Later Gotama Buddha). After describing this, he revealed the sacred geography of *Majjhima* Taik³⁾ and the kingdoms from which he tried to connect the kings of the kingdoms of *Majjihima* Taik, who consequently established the cities in Rakhine. Maha Zeya Thein explicated several narratives of the founding of Dwarawaddy by the Vasu Deva brothers⁴⁾, Vesāli by Brahmin Thu Diriya⁵⁾, and Dhannyawady by Marayu⁶⁾ (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 2b-4a).

Min Razagri Sartam continued to provide a legitimizing

2) Korangri' is one of the chief four ministers of Mrauk U court.

3) The country of Central India.

4) The nephews of Tansa king from Majjihima Taik.

5) the brother-in-law of Vesu Deva brothers.

6) Son of King Ajjana from Kaꝑi.lawat.

model for the Rakhine kingship by demonstrating a fuller elaboration of the genealogy of a clearer lineage from *Mahāsammata* to the Rakhine kings, through the intermediary of the solar race of the *Sākiya* clan with the *Abhirāja* myth, which comprised the three faces of the palm leaf. The myth begins with the war between the King Daragu of the Pinsala country, a kingdom of northern India, and King *Abhirāja*, who is said to have led *Abhirāja*'s migrations to Myanmar proper. This *Sākiya* clan king *Abhirāja* moved to Upper Myanmar and allegedly founded the city of Tagaung. His elder son Kan-rāja -gri surrendered the throne to his younger brother Kan-rāja-nge, moved to Rakhine where he founded the city of Kyaukpadaung and married a princess from the dynasty of Marayu, the founder of Dhanyawaddy (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 4b-5b). The mythic connection by way of marriage of the son of the *Sākiya* - clan king of India, *Abhirāja* and the Rakhine princess, establishes that the Rakhine kings are of direct lineal descent of the *Mahāsammata*. (Charney 2003: 187)

Although a caste system has not emerged in Southeast Asian society, with the emergence of more complex political formations enabled, elite families to maintain their positions at the top of the social ladder, claiming that Mrauk U's rulers were descendants of the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata*, and because of this, also related to the clan of Gotama Buddha, the *Sākiya* clan.

In Mrauk U society, the description of *Amyo-lei-pa* or the four main divisions of the classes can be found. One of the orders of Min Raza Gri promulgated that:

The lineage of kings descended from *Mahāsammata* ancestry were called the *Kshatriyas* (*Sākiya*); the rich people who served near the kings and do mercantile business were called the *Maha Thala* (*Vaishyas*); the *Brahmas*, who only conducted the procedures of coronation for the king were called *Beiktheik* and avoided learning astrology and fortune telling; ... the *Sudras* ... performed as astrologers, fortune-tellers, physicians, merchants, fishermen, hunters, blacksmiths; elephants and horses herders were named as *Amyo-lei-pa*. (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 34a)

The Mrauk U's four-class and the caste system of Indian society are slightly different. The Indian society placed the *Brahmans* and the *Kshatriyas* as the two higher social classes (Majumdar 1965: 46) while the Mrauk U's society placed the king as the highest class and the rich people who served near the kings and do mercantile business called the *Maha Thala* (*Vaishyas*) as second in rank. It also and placed the *Brahmans* as the third in rank. In Indian society, the *Brahmans* were more powerful and prestige, and are often pitted against was increased immensely and contested to the ruling class or the *Kshatriyas* (*Sākiya*) (Majumdar 1965: 46). The royal families or the members of *Kshatriyas* however remained the highest class in Mrauk U society.

It must be noted that the king and the court officials claimed the legitimacy of *Mahāsammata* ancestry and the relation to the clan of Gotama Buddha in the Mrauk U period by introducing the associated sacred geography of India, as well as the connections of the lineage of Rakhine kings with that of kings of Majjhima Taik, who allegedly related with the first king of the world, *Mahāsammata*. It also used the legitimizing myth of *Abhirāja* and the description of *Amyo-lei-pa* or the four main divisions of the classes. In one occasion, Maha Zeya Thein, the minister of King Min Razagri, formally related to King Min Razagri (c. 1593-1612) that the Rakhine kings are direct descendants of *Mahāsammata Wuntha* (the genealogy of *Mahāsammata*) and the *Sākiya* clan kings, and had never broken their lineal connection (Kawisara 1787: 54a).

Regarding the process of claiming the legitimacy of *Mahāsammata* and the *Sākiya* clan kings, and the acceptance or granting of the claim, Weber proposed some challenges: How does "the validity of a legitimate order" maintain for the subjects or followers the acceptability or believability of claims for legitimacy? , What are the conditions of losing legitimacy?

Since existing Rakhine historiographic writings, like other Myanmar chronicles, generally centred on kings, we are not able to figure out the response of the subjects to the claim of

legitimacy. However, it is noted that the court officials were the chief organizers to support this claim. Regarding lineal descent, the chronicles in the Rakhine tradition mentioned that King Min Bin (c.1531-1555) assumed that he has descended from the *Mahāsammata* *Varisa Sakya Sākiya* lineage, and that their lineage was nobler than others (Kawisāra 1787: 28b). The court officials adhered to the claim of legitimacy because this helped maintain influence, position and power.

The formulation of the *Mahāsammata* lineage appears to be deeply rooted in Mrauk U's ruling class, as well as in court officials, which made non-royals ineligible to the throne. It is stated that beginning the reign of the first king of the world, King *Mahāsammata*, the *Sākiya* clan insulted themselves from mixed marriage and marriage with other groups or clans. An analysis of the royal successions during the early and middle of the Mrauk U dynasty shows that most of the kings who reigned from 1430 until 1638 were the legitimate nominees as being *Einshee Min* (heir-apparents) and were broadly accepted as eligible persons to the throne. The royal succession of the said period was hereditary⁷⁾ in keeping with the desire to maintain the lineage of *Mahāsammata*. It is evident that the claim for legitimacy of the *Mahāsammata* and the *Sākiya* clan kings in the Mrauk U period was treated as "valid" by the royals, and helped maintain political stability among the ruling elite families.

2.1. Models of Kingship Related to *Mahāsammata* Model

In *Myanmar Min Ok-Chok Pon Sartam (The Administration of Myanmar Kings)*, "*Mahāsammata*" is defined as a "king appointed by popular consent" (Tin 1965: 2). Similar definitions are given to "*Mahāsammata*" as "acclaimed by the many" or , "the great elect". Tambiah (1976: 93-94). Tambiah remarked that *Mahāsammata's* election and "acclamation by the many" seemed to indicate that his "elective" status implied a "democratic" and "contractual theory"

7) There are a few things about the struggle for successions which need to be mentioned; Min Pa (c.1531-1555) and Min Phalaung (c.1571-1593) were the strong contenders with the royal blood who willfully took the throne by filling in vacuums in power. (*Min Razagri Sartam* 1775: 21a, 23 b).

of kingship in the sense propounded by Rousseau. Tambiah (1989: 107). As far as the history of Rakhine, especially Mrauk U Period (c.1430-1784) is examined, there were no kings in Mrauk U period, who were democratically elected by the will of the people, but only succeeded hereditarily according to kinship. The early pre-Buddhist or Brahmanical theory of *Mahāsammata*, its so-called “contractual theory of kingship” and “the great” did not seem to apply in Mrauk U’s legitimizing model of *Mahāsammata* but rather claimed that Mrauk U’s rulers were descendants of the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata* and thence also related the clan of Gotama Buddha, *Sākiya*. However, the legitimizing model of *Mahāsammata* did not intend to be utilized for the above-mentioned purpose alone. The early and middle period of Mrauk U’s kings tried to use another aspect of *Mahāsammata*, that of being a man who “charms others by the Norm (*dhamma*) and whose virtues clearly marked out as the chief among men”. Tambiah suggests that this aspect of the *Mahāsammata* links up with other canonical formulations of the ideal Buddhist king such as being a righteous king, a *dhammarāja*, an upholder of “morality” and as a *cakkavatti* (universal ruler). Tambiah (1989: 107).

The first king who took the title of *Dhamarāja* in the Mrauk U period was Min Bin (c.1531-1553) whose Brahmanic title was *Srisūriya Canda Mahā Dhammarāja* (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 121a). In the ideology of the *dhamarāja*, the Mrauk U’s kings portrayed themselves as more than providers of political power. Like Asoka, he sought to provide moral order as well. In terms of spiritual redistribution, the Mrauk U’s kings continually demonstrated their role as the chief patron and purifier of the religion. Temple building in the Mrauk U period was usual. Most of the rulers of Mrauk U period were in the habit of building pagodas and shrines throughout the Mrauk U period (1430-1784) (Pamela Gutman 2002: 163-175). The maintenance of *Samgha* and the cultivation of *vinaya*⁸⁾ are essential tasks of the *dhamarāja* king. On the controversy of the *araññavāsī* and *gāmvāsī* monk, the monk *Dhammasāmi*, spiritual adviser of King Min Razagri

8) the disciplines of monkhood.

told the king that the Lord Buddha himself could not discipline the monks who did not observe the full set of the *vinaya* rules. For that reason, he relegated the *sāsana* (religion) into the hands of the powerful kings. From then on, it was the duty of these kings to maintain the order of the *Sangha* (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 33b; Leider 2003:108). Religious integrity was maintained by purification. In its Theravada school, Buddhism was not only prophesied to last only 5,000 years; it was the function of the *Dhamarāja* to ensure, as Asoka had done, to maintain the *Sangha's* purity. During the reign of King Min Razagri (c.1593-1612), the *araññvāsī* monks maintained a strict observance of the *vinaya*, opposing the practice of the so called *gāmaṃvāsī* monks. The *gāmaṃvāsī* monks are described as *alajjī*, or shameless monks; they were also known as *pwé kyaung* who mix with the villagers, eat their food and make their own Pāli scriptures. King Min Razagri meted extreme the punishment against these monks who respected the *vinaya*. He arrested monks, marked them with tattoos and put them in various royal service groups, such as elephants and horse guards. (Min Razagri Sardam -36b-37a).

Of course, Rakhine rulers established their authority over former royal centers by building Buddhist edifices⁹⁾ in them as they did in their capital city (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 165a). Rakhine rulers also built pagodas and monasteries in new Buddhist communities in the countryside¹⁰⁾ (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 135b). By going into the countryside, royal patronage of Buddhism fostered the rural recognition of central authority. Local religious belief formed a potent field for establishing kingship. By building a pagoda or a shrine, a ruler connected the periphery to the royal center and connected himself with the sites of charismatic power in the local area. With the patronage of monks and monasteries, he portrayed himself as a great donor to the religion. The king was regarded as the lay head of

9) In 1622, King Srī *Sudhammarāja* visited the ancient city of Dhanyawaddy and renovated the pagodas, built by his grandfather King Min Phaloung and also put up other religious edifices.

10) King Min Phaloung (c.1571-1593) occupied the non-Buddhist community of Thet country and built religious edifices. He also made Thet people convert Buddhism.

Buddhism and the protector of *sāsanā*. (Charney 1999: 133)

The *dhamarāja* also upheld custom and civil law by ensuring that the *Dhammathat* (Civil Code) is followed, through by his exemplary behaviors and his active enforcement of it as by his active enforcement of it. Civil Law was not the concern of the king. Criminal Law, however, was his concern and it defined crimes against the state, and known formally as the *Rajathat*. Murder, theft, arson, and rebellion were in the domain of *Rajathat*.¹¹⁾ The Mrauk U king divided the judicial administration into specific offices. The most important ministers were Korangri¹²⁾, Pyisogri¹³⁾, Hsinkegri¹⁴⁾ and Dhapainggri¹⁵⁾. (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 30b)

The Dhapainggri was appointed as the supreme judge. As one of the chief four ministers of Mrauk U court, “Dhapainggri” which also means “the owner of the sword” ruled on meting out capital punishment or death sentences. The four courts were situated at the four corners of the capital, which made the judicial administration more accessible (Min Razagri Satam 1775: 10b, 26b).

As I have previously mentioned, the aspect of *Mahāsammata* model of kingship and the complex state of religious activities achieved ideal form in the bodhisattva tradition of Buddhist kingship (Koenig 1990: 65). In fact, the assumption of kingship is considered a step in progressing towards Buddhahood (Tun Aung Chain 2002:5). The chronicles of the Rakhine tradition mentioned how King Min Bin became a “*bodhisatta* who had matured in

11) *Traditional Statecraft in Southeast Asia*, a lecture by Dr. Kyaw Win (Secretary, Myanmar Historical Commission), Dagon University, from July7- July 28, 2009.

12) Korangri was not only in charge of the palace guards, Korans. Korangri also advised the king in the state affairs.

13) Pyesogri could be compared to a modern-day prime minister who in behalf of the king ruled the country when he is not in the palace.

14) The task of Hsinkegri was not only to supervise the elephants and elephant keepers but also to be in charge of royal hunting expedition in search of elephants.

15) The obligation of the Dhapaingri was to “serve as the consultant about the affairs of the state as a wise man of the law court”.

his past lives and compassionate to all even the enemies, ... he ever forgave King Tabinshwehti when came and invaded the land". (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 126a). The king was responsible for maintaining the religion's unity and purity, providing for its well-being and securing the arena within which good Buddhists could acquire merit and thus guarantee for themselves a better next life (Koenig 1990: 66-67). The Mrauk U rulers consistently relegated lands and laborers to Buddhist monasteries¹⁶⁾, built major religious edifices¹⁷⁾, and sought to obtain Buddhist ritual and sacramental objects, including religious texts (i.e. Tripitaka) (Min Razagri Satam: 25b).

Conceptually related to the *dhammarāja* was the *cakkavatti*, the world conqueror or universal monarch. Rulers in Rakhine also legitimized themselves by relating to internationalist Indic and Buddhist norms. Min Pa (c.1531-1555), adopted the Sanskrit imperial title of "*Rajādirāja*", "king of kings" which are basically associated with "*cakkavatti*" or "world-conqueror":

Lord "*Rajādirāja*" who ruled India, Ayuzapura and Rakhapura, decreed that from the time of the first king of the world, *Mahāsammata*, the great grand king Thagara, Wathudeva... ruled over Rakhapura Taing in the west and (Slyet?) in the Northwest (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851:18a)

King Min Bin was the founder of the remarkable "Shit-thaung, 80,000 Images" shrine after the invasion of Bengal.¹⁸⁾ This massive Buddhist temple attributed to King Min Bin who saw himself as a "*cakkavatti*, world conqueror", was a monument to the kingdom's triumphed over the forces of Islam. At the four corners of the temple, the reliefs are interspersed with images in higher relief which appear to represent aspects of the *cakravartin* king as portrayed in the Buddhist texts on cosmology current at

16) The followers of the rebel prince Min Phalaung were donated as pagoda slaves at Ratanabon Phaya (5000 followers) and at Maha Muni (500 followers) (*Min Razagri Satam* 1775: 23b).

17) Building the remarkable Shit-thaung Shrine by King Min Pa in 1536 is the best example.

18) *Rakhine Razawin Gyi. Ti* - Obverse.

the time. Pamela Gutman suggests that these images in higher relief were possibly representing King Min Pa himself. Gutman (2002: 169-170). The corner figures all wear crowns and other ornaments and elaborate lower garments in the royal Rakhine fashion of the day. The figures have six arms, each carrying various divine attributes: the flywhisk, a disc, an elephant goad and so on <Figure 1>, all connected with the functions of power and protection. Gutman (2002: 169-170).

<Figure 1> King Min Bin



Note: Depicted as *cakkavati*, stands on *Ganesa*, holding the flywhisk, a disc sculptured at the interior corner of Shit-thaung Shrine, Mrauk U, Rakhine State.

Source: Photographed by author, April 27, 2007

While the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship legitimized rule within the arena of royal court, the kings of Mrauk U tried to perform the related models of *Mahāsammata*, the ideal model of Buddhist kingship as *dhamarāja* and a *cakkavatti*, by way of instituting a properly functioning judicial administration, of religious patronage, and acquiring merit and self-legitimacy as a *cakkavatti*.

2.2. The Decline of Mahāsammata Model of Kingship

The reign of King *Srī Sudhamarājā* (c.1622-1638) was hounded by the palace intrigue. His Chief Queen Nat Shin May kept a secret lover, Nga Kuthala, the appendage holder of Laungret. Nga Kuthala succeeded kill the king (Collis 1923: 236). Later on he also made Nat Shin May, poison her own son, Min Sanei, *Srī Sudhamarājā*'s heir (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 163 a-b). Nga Kuthala's attainment of the throne by the title of King Narapatigri was immediately challenged. The governor of Chittagong, the middle-son of King *Srī Sudhamarājā*, a legitimate successor to the throne, prepared to rise against Narapatigri. Narapatigri was not a part of royal family, and this caused a dissent among Mrauk U's royal elites and court officials. The ministers and court officials including Nga Lat Rone, a descendent of Maha Pyinnya Kyaw and Maha Zeya Thein fled to Kantha¹⁹). (Rakhine Ayedawbon 1787: 55b). The lineage of *Mahāsammata* or the *Sākīya* - Clan was said to have been severed by the usurper Nga Kuthala when he took the throne of Mrauk U. The episode of the succession of King Nga Kuthala *alias* Narapatigri was later described in *Vijaya Min Sit Aung Eigyin*²⁰) (*Eigyin of King Vijaya Rajā's Victory*) in this manner:

Since the beginning of the earth, Rakhine was ruled by the individuals from the lineage of future Buddhas , from the

19) Rakhine chronicles identified Kanthar as Chittagong.

20) *Vijarā Min Sit Aung Eigyin* was supposed to be written around 1710 AD. *Eigyin* are poetical works or songs, often tracing the genealogy of the person for which they were written.

lineage of *Mahāsammata*...However, when the queen of *Srī Sudhamarājā* ignorantly plotted with Nga Kuthala, the appendage holder of Laungret for the throne...(she and her) own son ... perished and the old tradition (the lineage of *Sākiya* clans) was broken. (The kingdom may be compared to a) falling star (when) the appendage holder of Laungret became king... (T)he lineage of the noble *Sākiya* clans (*Mahāsammata* lineage) and the elite court lineage...soon perished. Moreover, the tribe of Thet and Bengali from the western part of the kingdom also revolted, and the ceremonial procedures were (performed in the wrong way) (Rakhine Ayedawbon: 58b).

Nga Kuthala tried to connect the *Mahāsammata* lineage by claiming that he was not a commoner but the great grandson of King Min Bin. However, he was not supported by royal elite families and court officials. He was compelled to organize monks whom he could trust as his advisors. Upon the advice of monks, he further connected himself by building new pagoda and enshrining in them the relics of Buddha once offered by King Min Bin (Rakhine Ayedawbon 1787: 55b-56b). Though Narapatigri tried to reconstruct the lineal succession of *Mahāsammata* lineage and embodying the *dhamarāja* model by patronizing the religious activities, the resistance to Narapatigri's rule from members of the old royal family led to prolonged instability in the Rakhine kingdom. The lineage of King Narapatigri was continued and ended in 1710 AD. A *dhani gaung* (nipa palm appanage holder) named Ton Nyo became king, taking the name of Vijaya Rajā. King Vijaya also tried to claim to be a great grandson of King Narapatigri although he was commoner who became king. (Tejarama Inscription 1716: Lines 16-17). The king also tried to reconnect the lineage of the *Sākiya* clan, who had fled to Kanthar by inviting them to come to Rakhine kingdom. When the grandson of King *Srī Sudhamarājā*, Hla Aung arrived, Mrauk U King Vijaya arranged for his marriage with his daughter. However, Hla Aung went back to prevent his *Sākiya* clan from associating with King Vijaya. For over a decade, the Koran, the royal bodyguards, exerted an unprecedented influence over the royal court. They became king-makers and the

ascending on the throne depended on the sentiments of the Koran at any given time (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1787:170b).

<Figure 2> Coin of *Mahāsammata Raja* (c.1782-1784)



Obverse & Reverse: 1144 *She Nan Thakhin Mahāsammata Raja* [1144 M.E (1782 A.D), Lord of the Golden Palace *Mahāsammata Raja*] (Source: San Thar Aung 1978: 52).

<Figure 3> Another Coin of *Mahāsammata Raja* as *Agaw Punya Saw Raja* (c.1782-1784)



Obverse & Reverse: 1144 *Shwe Nan Thakhin Agaw Punya Saw Raja* [1144 M.E (1782 A.D), Lord of the Golden Palace *Agaw Punya Saw Raja*] (Source: San Thar Aung 1978: 53).

In 1782, the last attempt to revitalize the *Mahāsammata* model was initiated by *Letwei Myan*²¹⁾, Thado Aung. He was local chief like his predecessors. Chronicle of the Rakhine

tradition state that he earned the title “*Mahāsammata*” because he was raised to the throne through the will of the people (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 203a) (Sanda-mala 1932: 297-298) <Figure 2>. However, it is also important to consider the legitimacy of *Letwei Myan Thado Aung* as *Mahāsammata* for two reasons. The first reason has to do with the time of Thado Aung’s succession in Rakhine kingdom. It was a chaotic time and there were many strong local contenders who could challenge the throne which also means that it is not improbable to win the support of the local elites (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 203b). The second reason mentioned in the chronicle of the Rakhine tradition something to do with how the Rakhine people welcomed the idea of Burmese forces from Amarapura arriving to restore law and order in Rakhine kingdom and install a good king (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 208a). Thus, it is not very improbable to assume that he earned “the validity of a legitimate order through the will of the people”. This may be changed when King *Mahāsammata* changed his title to “Agaw Punya Saw Raja” <Figure 3> upon the advice of a learned monk who told him that the title “*Mahāsammata*” should not be used since it is the noble title of the first king of the world. Apparently, the monks, who had been spiritual advisers of Mrauk U’s kings since the time of Narapatigri, considered *Letwei Myan Thado Aung* unworthy of the title as he was a commoner and not a descendant of *Mahāsammata* or the Sakya clan, or “the great elect” by the people. Thus, *Letwei Myan Thado Aung* or King *Mahāsammata* was not able to revive *Mahāsammata* model of kingship by which he intended to legitimize his position in that chaotic situation period in the kingdom.

III. Conclusion

In this study of Rakhine kingship during the Mrauk U period (1430-1784), the *Mahāsammata* Model of kinship played an

21) The minister who has to serve at the left side in the occasion of the royal audience. (Ashin Satkinda, “Zardi Wuntha Mawgun Sar”, *Rakhine Tazaung Magazine*, Vol.13., No.13, 1973-74, 141)

essential role in maintaining the political stability of kingdom. However, this model of kingship practiced in Mrauk U polity is not an exactly like pre-Buddhist *Mahāsammata* model of kingship. Mrauk U rulers, being despotic, neither followed the conception of the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship as “acclaimed by the many” nor the principle of the, “the great elect” or Weber’s modern theory of “validity of a legitimate order”. It is not improbable to adopt a “democratic” and “contractual theory’ of kingship” in a despotic kingdom. This ideological functioning of the *Mahāsammata* Model of kingship was mostly initiated by court officials and broadly accepted by royals and elite families. The process of claiming the legitimacy of the *Mahāsammata* and the *Sākiya* clan kings only concerned members of the royal court. Clearly, what the kingdom had is a horizontal process of “validation the legitimate order”. In claiming the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship, Mrauk U’s rulers claimed were direct lineal descents from the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata*, and consequently the clan of Gotama Buddha, the *Sākiya* clan. However, the ideological function of kingship could not sustain a kingdom. Though Mrauk U’s rulers did not adopt the conception of *Mahāsammata* as ‘great elect’, they tried to apply another concept of it as man who “charms others by the Norm (dhamma)”. In realizing this concept, they tried to embody the qualities of a righteous king, or a *dhamarāja*, an upholder of “morality” and as universal ruler or a *cakkavatti* all related to the concept of *Mahāsammata*.

Nga Kuthala’s usurpation of the throne caused to the decline of the ideological legitimizing model of the *Mahāsammata* kingship. Most members of royal families and court officials, who considered Nga Kuthala’s succession illegitimate fled from Mrauk U. The resistance of these old royal families from Kanthar (Chittagong) led to a prolonged instability of the royal court. When the ideological legitimizing model of kingship was lost, it was not possible to gain the support of the court elites; other practical legitimizing models of kingship also relatively weakened. The decline of the central kingship encouraged rural rebellion and warfare. Rakhine villages suffered from the decline of the

royal centers. There was also an increased were increasing competition among the local headmen in the rural communities. As the central court offered little protection to the rural Rakhine communities, the protection of the outlying villages was entirely in the hands of the local headmen. Thus, some headmen were unable to protect themselves began to seek the help of external rulers to bring order such as the Rakhine who sought help from the powerful kingdom of the Konbaung dynasty. On October 16, 1784, the Rakhine campaign started and was completed on January 2, 1785 (Than Tun 1986: 441).

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