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ARTICLES

Resistance as a Category in Southeast Asian Cultural History
: A Millenarian Revolt in Colonial Burma

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Introduction

Millenarianism has held an important place in the study of religion and society.[1] Although the concept might refer to idealized expectations of a future golden age coinciding with the appearance of extraordinary figures, studies have demonstrated that a wide range of meanings might be considered in its application.[2] In Buddhist studies, these prophesized circumstances were most often associated with the imminent appearance of Maitreya (the future Buddha), who is believed will renew the religion established by Sakyamuni Gotama Buddha after five thousand years.[3] Throughout Buddhist Asia, the ways in which

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1) Michael Barkun, "Millenarianism in the Modern World", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1974.

2) Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages,* Oxford University Press, 1990; Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements,* W. W. Norton and Co., 1959; Ian C. Jarvie, "Theories of Cargo Cults: A Critical Analysis", *Oceania* 27, 1957, 249-63; Brian Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium*, Heinemann, 1973. David Ownby, "Chinese Millenarian Traditions: The Formative Age", *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 104, No. 5, 1999.

3) See Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Ch. 5 for a comprehensive examination of the idea of millenarianism in a Theravada Buddhist context and specifically for the idea of Maitreya in the Pali literature. For adaptations of millenarian themes in a South and Southeast Asian context see Kitsiri Malagoda,

these and other ideas were articulated varied according to their respective historical contexts. As a result, the role of Maitreya has drawn considerable attention from a wide variety of disciplinary and cultural perspectives, enriching our understanding of the conceptual world within which Buddhist communities lived and expressed their hopes for change, salvation, purity, and protest.[4] In the interdisciplinary field of Southeast Asian studies, millenarianism has also found resonance in several historical settings, particularly within the context of anti-colonial rebellions and peasant movements.[5] These studies explored resistance uprisings through the prism of millenarianism in attempt to illustrate the ways in which communities of Southeast Asians responded and conceptualized their encounters with European/American colonialism. In the history of Myanmar (Burma), the Saya San Rebellion 1930-1932 has been considered by some to be the quintessential case of such a revolt, linking pre-colonial beliefs in Maitreya (Metteya) with anti-colonial movements in the 19th and 20th centuries.[6] Like kings of old who alledgedly claimed to be "the" future buddha of this eon, Saya San also tapped into this millenial expectation by linking his persona and legitimacy as rebel leader to the figure of Maitreya, in order to usher in a new age independent of British rule.[7] This Burmese example, like cases in Vietnam, Thailand, the

"Millennialism in Relation to Buddhism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12, 1970, 424-441; John C. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown, Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka*, Oxford University Press, 1991; John S. Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia*, Princeton University Press, 1992; Lamotte, Etienne, *History of Indian Buddhism*, Peeters Press, Louvain, 1988.

4) Sponberg, A & Hardacre, Helen (eds). *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

5) For a thorough exploration of this theme, see Nicholas Tarling (ed), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. Ⅱ, Chapter 4, "Religion and Anti-Colonial Movements" by Reynaldo C. Ileto which also includes an annotated bibliography.

6) In addition to Tarling, see Emanual Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds for the Burmese Revolution,* The Hague, 1965, and Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order*, University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

7) This study extends the critique led by Steven Collins in his seminal *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. See especially pp. 378-383 and pp. 395-413.

Philippines, and Java, argued for the persistence of particular cultural forms, values, and terms that enabled (mainly) rural Southeast Asians to interpret and frame the encounter with colonialism through their own vocabularly of resistance. For a generation of scholars, anti- colonial resistance was a category through which enduring local belief-systems, symbols, and rituals of the region could be explored and studied. In many respects, millenarianism in British Burma was regarded as one expression of a Buddhism that had existed for centuries.

This paper aims to problematize this millenarian reading of the Saya San Rebellion by re-examining the evidential foundation upon which it is based. In doing so, this essay will consider three broad issues: the prescriptive influence of counter-insurgency law and colonial ethnography as it related to producing knowledge about the Saya San Rebellion; the different ways in which the categories of religion and kingship were treated by colonial officials and area-studies scholars; and finally, colonialism's role in the historical construction of resistance movements in British Burma and Southeast Asia.[8] Although the category of Burmese millenial resistance has been linked to pre-colonial belief-systems, this study seeks to explore the ways in which the current interpretation of the Saya San Rebellion as one such movement was a product of colonial knowledge production.[9]

8) This paper draws from the issues brought forth in Donald S. Lopez (ed), *Curators of the Buddha: the Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, University of Chicago Press, 1996 and Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions or How European Univeralism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

9) There is an ample record of pre-colonial millenarian beliefs that have been studied outside the framework of rebellion. Classical kingship in Pagan reveals belief in Maitreya Buddha, as often recorded in donative inscriptions (see Michael Aung-Thwin, 1985). Five-sided pagodas, such as the Dhammyazika, can only be found in ancient Pagan, which has been linked to the fifth Buddha of our world cycle (See Pierre Pichard, 1991). Several folk-Buddhist beliefs involving special medicine-men/forest monks have been connected to the Maitryea tradition (see Mendleson, 1961), while stories of Buddhist saints, such as Shin Upago and Shin Male, are also connected to the future period of Maitreya (see John Strong, 1992.) King Bodawpaya in the late 18th century was said to have claimed to be Maitreya but evidence does not support this account (see Steven Collins, 1998).

Historical Setting

Despite its original classification as the "Burma Rebellion", post-colonial scholars coined the series of uprisings that erupted in the outlying districts of Rangoon in December 1930 after its alleged leader Saya San, signalling the emphasis and importance attributed to the ex-monk/medicine man who was charged with organizing the resistance movement that would eventually spread from Lower Burma into the northern regions of the province.[10] The official narrative (which would continue to influence the historiography and understanding of the rebellion seventy years later) identified Saya San as the peasant leader who had reportedly revived the ancient symbols of Burmese kingship in order to inspire the peasantry to move against the colonial state. Operating through a network of village associations that he and his lieutenants had founded, Saya San convinced his followers that he would restore the Burmese monarchy as their new king and revitalize the Buddhist religion which had been in decline since the annexation of the country in 1886.[11] Peasant cultivators, already frustrated by the drop in paddy prices, the privatisation of communal forestry lands, and the increasing demand of state taxes, were quick to respond to Saya San's ideological campaign that presented a mixture of anti-tax rhetoric, familiar Buddhist prophesies, and invulnerability rituals. Despite Saya San's capture, trial and execution in November 1931, the rebellion continued until it finally dissolved into seemingly random incidents of banditry and crime. By the end of the insurrection, 1,300 rebels had been killed and up to 9,000 had surrendered.[12]

10) John Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, Cornell University Press, 1958, p. 309. Cady is possibly the first to use "Saya San Rebellion" in his seminal history.

11) See Michael Aung-Thwin, "The British Pacification of Burma: Order Without Meaning," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, XVI, No. 2, 1985, 245-261.

12) The basic structure and details for the official narrative can be found in Government of Burma, L/PJ/6/2020, Burma Rebellion General File (BRGF), Ralph Clarence Morris, *Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion 1930-1932*, 1934. This is the confidential Blue-book on the rebellion that scholars have used as a primary source to authenticate the official narrative.

To Burma officials, Saya San personified a reoccurring pattern in Burmese history, the periodic rise of a pretender-king (referred to by colonial sources incorrectly as a *min-laung*) who would rally nostalgic peasants in hope of resurrecting the Burmese monarchy. This explanation was based on a 1914 civil service manual that described and predicted how future insurrections in Burma would occur, which in fact served as the rationale underlying counter-insurgency policy during the events of 1930-32.[13] Reports throughout 1931 would seek to present Saya San as a *minlaung*, implying that the uprising was a normative feature of Burmese peasant behaviour, as the "Burman" was seen to be "by nature a restless subject" and prone to "credulity".[14] This assessment cast Burmese peasants as unable to conceptualize political authority and dialogue in terms other than through Burmese kingship, which was intricately connected to the preservation and protection of Buddhist institutions.[15] Burmese kings, drawing from established Asokan models of authority, drew their legitimacy as protectors of the Buddhist faith which often manifested itself through periodic patronage of temples, monasteries, textual production, and ritual festivals.[16] During the rebellion however, officials de-emphasized the role of Buddhism in favour of accentuating the superstitious and inherently criminal nature of the rebels; their use of invulnerability tattoos, amulets, oath water, and chants as a means of characterizing and festishizing the alleged political motivations for the uprising.[17] This Rebellion Ethnology, which would emerge through the documentation projects and the legal apparatus of the colonial state, relegated the

13) Government of Burma, L/PJ/6/2020, BRGF, B.S. Carey, *Hints for the Guidance of Civil Officers in the Event of Outbreak in Burma*, (1914) and reprinted in 1931.
14) Ibid.
15) See Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, University of Hawaii Press, 1985, Ch. 3 and Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds...*Chs. 20-21.
16) Ibid.
17) William Pietz, "The Fetish of Civilization: Sacrificial Blood and Monetary Debt", *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology*, Peter Pels and Oscar Saleming (eds), University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Burmese to certain forms of traditional behavior that would capture the corrective instincts of post-colonial scholars who would later insert Buddhist millenarianism into the understanding of the rebellion as a means of connecting it with "a legitimate" world religion.[18] Their reinterpretation through the glaze of millenarianism was meant to intervene in the original casting of the Rebellion Ethnology by producing a new one, partly the result of the field's new found directive towards writing "autonomous history".[19]

Much of the interest in millenarian understandings of anti-colonial rebellions in Southeast Asian Studies coincided with the important theoretical concerns raised by John Smail in 1960.[20] Smail's seminal article called for the writing and conceptualization of an "autonomous history" of modern Southeast Asia that placed emphasis on utilizing internal criteria---categories, periods, narratives, and contexts---for the writing of the region's history. For nearly thirty years, scholars had struggled with the problem of "modernity" and its association with colonialism, which had dominated the way in which events, categories, and

18) I suggest elsewhere (Aung-Thwin, 2003) that this ethnology was connected to the issue of Burma's separation from India, which was a contentious issue at the time amongst nationalist leaders and colonial administrators. It appears that the portrayal of the Burmese peasant population in this manner was used to bolster the perception that the Burmese were not ready to enjoy the political reforms promised to Indian nationalists. See Cady, *A History of Modern Burma,* Ch. 9 for the issues surrounding the separation issue. Similarly, the focus on Buddhism rather than "superstition" seems reminiscent of 19th century constructions of Buddhism in India by scholar-officials who saw it as being more textual stable than Hinduism. See Donald Lopez, *Curators of the Buddha*, University of Chicago Press, 1995.

19) John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian History,* Vol. 2, No. 2, 1961.

20) See comments in Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context 800*-1830, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 9-15 and Laurie Sears (ed) *Autonomous Histories Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John Smail*, University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph No. 11, 1993. The genesis for the autonomous approach most likely began in the 1930s and 1940s, with some observers beginning to question the emphasis on external mechanisms marking the dynamism of the region's history. See J.C. van Leur's *Indonesian Trade and Society*, The Hague, 1955. The use of millenarianism as an approach in European historiography most likely had a similar influence on areas-specialists in their understanding of peasant revolts.

processes had been studied by regional specialists. Rebellions were often written as "interruptions" in the progressive narratives of the colonial state while the categories of analysis reflected the political-economic priorities of colonial officials, a perspective that nationalist historians failed to address adequately.[21] These ideas urged scholars to consider the Saya San Rebellion from a perspective outside the framework and narratives of British colonial history. Scholars such as Emanual Sarkisyanz (and later Michael Adas, a student of John Smail), would eventually reconsider the uprising as one chapter within the much longer context Burmese Buddhism, highlighting the way in which religious concepts provided a vocabulary for conceptualizing changes brought forth by the British colonial state. Seen from this vantage point, Burmese millenarianism could explain why peasants followed Saya San to their deaths, how references to kingship provided motivation for resistance, and how colonialism was interpreted by the majority of villagers in Burma. In this light, rebels were not motivated by simplistic notions of resurrecting the monarchy, but by the possibility of ushering in the golden age of Maitreya, where the religion, the world, society, and their individual spiritual potential would be renewed. To peasants, the loss of the monarchy, the decay of Buddhist institutions, economic hardship, and the erosion of village social networks were seen as the conditions of decline that would precede the rise of a new king (a cakkavartin) that would either pave the way for or become the Future Buddha. This casting of a Buddhist future was significant in that it infused a sophisticated and complex conceptual doctrine into the worldview of the Burmese peasant which had otherwise been characterized as only "superstition, plain and simple".[22] For many in Southeast Asian studies, this exciting approach to resistant movements provided Southeast Asian history with the local

[21] See Smail's arguments on the important issue of "moral perspective", 1960.
[22] Quoted from G.E. Harvey, an unsympathetic colonial historian in his *British Rule in Burma 1824-1942*, Faber & Faber, 1946, p. 73.

agency that was previously denied by colonial and nationalist historiographical traditions by embracing the power and potential of local knowledge.[23)]

In retrospect, the millenarian interpretation of the Saya San rebellion might be regarded as an important moment in the history of Burmese Buddhism, peasant anti-colonial rebellions, and in the historiography of modern Southeast Asia for it has been an important case study within all three fields of study. In time however, scholars such as James C. Scott and even Michael Adas eventually departed from the study of major rebellions to study “everyday” forms of resistance and “avoidance protest”, signalling perhaps a premature closure to the study of such large-scale movements.[24)] Yet, with the growth of theoretical discussions on the production of colonial knowledge, the ethnography of the archive, and the anthropology of colonial society being made in South Asian studies, similar calls in Southeast Asian studies have been raised to return our gaze towards the colonial period in a similar manner. We are now extremely cognizant of the way in which our categories, sources, and narratives that were produced and preserved through the institutions of the state were ultimately connected to the approaches in which post-colonial scholars conceptualized their subjects.[25)] This paper proposes to reconstruct these connections between colonial modes of knowing and the scholarship that evolved from it by returning to how the narrative of the Saya San rebellion and the millenarian understanding of it were constructed through particular counter-insurgency legislative acts, special

23) Robert Solomon's "The Saya San Rebellion", *Modern Asian Studies*, 1969, pp. 209-223 explored traditional elements in a nationalist context as opposed to an autonomous "Burmese" one, see further arguments below.

24) See James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*, Yale University Press 1985; Michael Adas, "From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Pre-colonial and Colonial Southeast Asia", in Nicholas B. Dirks, Colonialism and Culture, The Comparative Studies in Society and History Book Series, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

25) Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British India*, Princeton University Press, 1996.

rebellion tribunals, and the codifying procedures of the archives. It will be argued that scholars who first proposed a millenarian understanding of the rebellion relied on the official narrative which was founded on an unreliable and problematic evidential foundation, originating in the trial of Saya San. In doing so, scholars unknowingly contributed to the original Rebellion Ethnology by embellishing its features as opposed to providing an "autonomous" version that they hoped might supplant it. By employing a genealogical approach to the narrative's sources, this paper will historicize the rebellion's millenarian reading and the ethnologies that produced it.

Genealogy of a Narrative

The narrative of the Saya San Rebellion and the *minlaung* model it espoused is normally traced back to official reports that were compiled during and shortly after the uprising ended.[26] Most historians, including Emanual Sarkisyanz and Michael Adas, cite the confidential blue-book report *The Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion 1930-1932* (1934) as their source for this event.[27] Existing scholarship on the Saya San Rebellion has concentrated on explaining and interpreting the rebellion, a demonstration of how influential the official report seemed to be in directing and influencing the nature of the discourse.[28] This was due in part to the observation that while the

26) See for example, Government of Burma, Burma Rebellion Files, L/PJ/6/2020, *Report on the Rebellion in Burma Up to 3rd May, 1931*, Command Paper, 3900, (1931); *Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion 1930-1932* (1934), *Report on Recent Rebellions in Burma*, Police Document, 9th May (1931); *The Rebellion in Burma, April 1931-March 1932*, 13th September (1931); *Causes of the Tharrawaddy Rebellion*, 26th March (1931).

27) Hereafter referred to as *OCBR*.

28) Robert Taylor, *The State in Burma*, Univ. of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1987; John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958; U Maung Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1980; Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion...*, *The Burma Delta* (1974), The Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1979; E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, The Hague/Martinus Nijhoff, Netherlands, 1965; Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, Columbia Univ. Press, New York and London, 1967;

report contained factual material, it portrayed the official "British" osition on the rebellion, one that was open to critique by subsequent commentators who hoped to broaden what was deemed a "colonial" perspective. More importantly, the report's interpretation of events, which was framed within a set of binary oppositions (superstition vs. rational, traditional vs. modern, political vs. economic), compelled scholars to respond utilizing similar conceptual pairings, mirroring not only the polemical structures of the report's contentions, but often recycling the same categories of comparison.[29] The resulting studies of the Saya San Rebellion are direct descendants from this official report, not only in the way the report was used to secure their interpretations as a primary source, but in the way that the document set into motion the manner in which scholars would come to think about the rebellion, both in structure and in content.

For example, Sarkisyanz's *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (1965) relied on the same sequence of events and characteristics of the narrative that were introduced in the *OCBR*, adjusting only the interpretation of the *minlaung* model discussed above. While the official version relegated the causes of the rebellion as an expression of political motivations on the part of Saya San and superstitious mob mentality on the part of the peasants, Sarkisyanz contextualized the economic crisis enveloping the agricultural sectors of the economy in Buddhist terms---arguing that the conditions were

Patricia Herbert, *The Hsaya San Rebellion (1930-1932) Reappraised*, Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Working Papers No. 27, Melbourne, Australia, 1982; Harry Benda, "Peasant movements in colonial Southeast Asia," *Asian Studies*, 3 (1965): 420-434; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven and London, Yale Univ. Press, 1976; Albert D. Moscotti, *British Policy and the National Movement in Burma (1917-1937)*, University of Hawaii Press, Asian Studies at Hawaii, No.11, 1974 and Parimal Ghosh, *Brave Men of the Hills: Rebellion and Resistance in Burma 1824-1932*, Hurst & Co., London, 2000.

29) See for example, Cady (1958), Sarkisyanz (1965), Benda (1972), Scott (1976), Adas (1979), Herbert (1982) and Ghosh (2000). The traditional-modern framing was a particularly entrenched element that originated within the *OCBR*.

conceptualized as the end of the world before which an Ideal Ruler and Future Buddha would appear to set things right. Saya San was rumoured to be the Setkya-Min (cakkavartin) the universal conqueror who would prepare the way for Maitreya Buddha (or in some traditions become Maitreya).[30] Following the basic structure and causal focus of the *minlaung* interpretation articulated in the report, Sarkisyanz reiterated that Saya San built his palace on a sacred mountain, re-enacted the traditional coronation ceremony, and issued royal proclamations---only this time it was accomplished within the context of Buddhist millenarian beliefs which had been missing in the official version. Fourteen years later, Michael Adas would pick up where Sarkisyanz left off; extending the millenarian explanation to other colonial revolts that included the Saya San rebellion.[31] Whereas Sarkisyanz emphasized a Buddhist millenarian tradition specific to Burma, Adas sought to establish a formulaic pattern that occurred amongst several different cultural settings that all highlighted the importance and role of a prophetic figure in the organization of the rebellion.[32] Repeating the identical narrative that was first delineated in the *OCBR*, Adas reinforced the context that Sarkisyanz first suggested but added more details available to him through official documents and sources not previously referred to in the earlier work.[33] In essence, both scholars appropriated the Rebellion Ethnology that made kingship the primary characteristic but made it more complex,

30) Sarkisyanz, p. 161. It is important to note that the citation for this association with the Setkya Min directs us to Maurice Collis's *Trials in Burma* (1938), a secondary source that relied on the *OCBR* for its narrative, raising questions about its reliability as a source and the claim that relies on it. There are many problems with this source as discussed elsewhere (Maitrii Aung-Thwin, 2003) but suffice it to say that the accounts in *Trials in Burma* have been treated as if the author personally viewed the events he describes but in fact the author wrote this after he left Burma in spring 1931 and after the report was published (1934). The notion that Saya San was seen as a Setkya Min thus needs further documentary evidence.

31) Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion*, 1979.

32) Adas, Ch. 4.

33) One such source, the "diary" of Saya San was cited to demonstrate his aspirations of kingship. This document and the circumstances of it entering the evidential record will be explored below.

more sophisticated, and more legitimate (in terms of peasant agency) by casting millenarian Buddhism into the hopes and motivations of Burmese peasants. Clearly the two scholars regarded Saya San as being “more than a mortal king”, much more than the typical *minlaung* he was set up to be by colonial officials. Yet their analysis of the rebellion depended on the veracity of the report’s facts, evidence, and conclusions that the rebellion was about resurrecting the monarchy.[34)] Thus, the structure and content of the *OCBR*’s narrative provided scholars with a departure point from which they could engage and interpret the narrative of the Saya San Rebellion. The urge to interpret the rebellion led scholars away from noticing a troubling characteristic in the sources most closely associated with the rebellion narrative.

Upon a closer review of the official report, it is clear that the document is not a primary source that authenticates the facts within the Saya San Rebellion narrative (as it has been used) as much as it is a compilation of data from earlier reports with extracts from judicial records that chronicled the proceedings of the Special Rebellion Tribunals, which were formed to process captured rebels. Moreover, these judicial passages reveal another peculiarity in that they were copied verbatim from Judgement summaries, which contained only the prosecution’s arguments in the trial of Saya San. In other words, the report’s sequence of events was a recycled version of those first presented by the prosecution before the Special Rebellion Tribunal. The report preserved the narrative of the rebellion, it did not produce it.[35)]

34) Ibid. p. 102. Patricia Hebert (1982) was the first to question this reading of the rebellion, suggesting that the evidence towards this "royal" image of Saya San deserved reconsidering. Based on the same body of evidence and narrative, she suggests persuasively that the rebellion might be considered a "modern" movement.

35) I use primary source to mean those sources which are most able to validate or confirm an event having occurred. For purposes of this paper, it would refer to documents, materials, or witness testimony that can be reliably traced to having first referred to the events under scrutiny. It is realized however, that there is always a "secondary" quality to most documents found in the archive and a

Citing the report (as evidence) to authenticate the sequence of events was only part of the problem; the report's narrative was essentially the commemoration of the prosecution's argument which had been codified and textualized by the process of archiving the event. The trail of documents should have led scholars to at least cite the Judgement Summaries, rather than the report, as some of the closest sources to the rebellion narrative. With the notable exceptions of Michael Adas, Patricia Herbert, Oliver B. Pollak, and Kenji Ino, few scholars have cited the judicial records associated with the trial of Saya San and no one has examined these proceedings to examine the historical and legal environment in which the Saya San story came to be formed.[36] Yet the basis for the millenarian interpretation (and indeed all other interpretations) is directly connected to the findings and narrative that emerged from the trial, which produced the original evidential record that was later codified and classified in archival documents. Rather than treating the official report as the starting point of the millenarian interpretation, one might consider it as an earlier version, whose origins lay within the legal and legislative arms of the colonial leviathan.

The Rebellion Archive

In fact, the official report is one small moment in the formation of the "the rebellion archive". Comprised of almost four thousand documents brought together in what has been titled "Burma Rebellion Files", the documents "produce, adjudicate, organize and maintain the discourses

"secondary discourse," to quote Dirks (1999), to which these sources are almost always attached.

36) To clarify the difference between Patricia Herbert's influential study of the Saya San Rebellion with mine: her study seeks to unravel the traditional colouring that has accompanied previous interpretations and to show how Western political forms of mobilization, exemplified by the Galon Wuthanu Athins, demonstrate a "modern" character to the uprising. I discuss and problematize the very narrative upon which her provocative study stands.

that become available as the primary texts" for rebellion in Burma.[37)]Covering the whole series of uprisings that occurred between 1930 and 1934, the files contain telegrams, reports, legislative proceedings, newspaper clippings, hand-written memos, letters, ordinances, press releases, and judicial records dealing with the rebellion. The *OCBR* was one such document within a particular sequence of documents (L/PJ/6/2020) that covered the administrative understanding of the rebellion in its textualized form. Other sequences of documents focused on the legislative acts that produced the emergency powers acquired by the Burma Government during the rebellion while nearly one thousand documents dealt with the many trials administered by the Special Rebellion Tribunal, itself a product of special legislation.[38)] In whole, the Burma Rebellion Files represent an administrative outcome of the counter-insurgency policies initiated by the colonial state.[39)] In this manner the archives become an "epistemological site", part of the process in the construction of knowledge.[40)] A clear example of this rendering can be found in the jurisprudence origins of the Saya San rebellion, seen exclusively through the special legislative and judicial documentation.

Legislative and Judicial Settings

The Special Rebellion Tribunals which oversaw the processing of captured rebels were fundamentally connected to the way in which the

37) Nicholas B. Dirks, "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History", in Brian Keith Axel, *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 58.

38) L/PJ/6/2022, Burma Rebellion Files, Special Tribunal Rebellion Trials Nos. 1-5. For the counter-insurgency legislation, see L/PJ/6/2021, BRF, Frames 614-619, Emergency Powers Ordinance.

39) Nicholas B. Dirks, "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History", in Brian Keith Axel, *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Duke University Press, 2002, pg. 48.

40) Ann L. Stoler, "Developing Historical Negatives: Race and the (Modernist) Visions of a Colonial State" in Brian Keith Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Duke University Press, 2002.

evidential record and the narrative of the rebellion were first constructed. Although the passage of the Emergency Powers Ordinance, the Criminal Law Amendment, and the Rebellion Trials Ordinance were heavily debated in the local legislature (and resisted by opposition members), the colonial government secured the authority to detain suspects without trial, to deny the right of habeas corpus, and most importantly, to form their own Tribunals that were tailored specifically to handle cases dealing with terrorism. As one Burma official commented, such courts would be able to "stop the activity of leaders of whose guilt they are convinced of but of which they cannot produce sufficient evidence to secure conviction in the courts".[41] The tribunals were granted extraordinary powers of judicial procedure as these courts were designed to legally assimilate the large number of rebels taken under custody into the system. Not only were preliminary hearings eliminated (which would normally determine whether a case had any merit in being heard) but special rules of admitting evidence were provided that would normally be restricted in the civil courts. The powers conferred by the proposed bill were promised to be directed only to those "whom there is reason to believe that they are members of a terrorist party in Burma or are acting in furtherance of terrorist movement". [42] Of course, by being placed within the jurisdiction of these courts tended to suggest that one's identity had already been established. The connection of this legislation to the eventual narrative that emerged out of the trial of Saya San is significant in that it prescribed the conditions for and the manner in which the evidential record would be established.

[41] L/PJ/6/2021, BRF, Frames 343-344, W. Johnston, Legal Advisor, Docket, Public and Judicial Department, January 11th 1931.

[42] L/PJ/6/2021, BRF, Frame 275-278, Telegram, G/I Home Department, to S/SI February 2nd 1931.

Two provisions permitting the Special Tribunal to make only a memorandum of the “substance of the evidence” and for determining “the procedures of Special Tribunals,” were two outstanding examples of legislative power that would affect the trial of Saya San, the formation of the narrative, and eventually the way in which it would be interpreted.[43] Eliminating the requirement to compile a complete transcript and thorough recording of the evidence in the judgement summaries effectively determined the shape the *historical* record would take, seen clearly in how the official report only contained these brief passages. In addition, the court documents that serve as the foundation for subsequent reports only contained the prosecution’s arguments and evidence because that was precisely what the Rebellion Trials Ordinance directed the Tribunal to do. The reliance on these very same sources by administrators who compiled the official report illustrates how legislative, legal, and documentation offices were all involved in the production of what would become a “primary” historical source. Thus, the character of the legislation that formed and guided the procedures of the Tribunal was the basis for the peculiar way in which evidence from the trial of Saya San entered the legal record and was eventually preserved for future reference.

The four judicial documents most relevant to the construction of the *Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion 1930-1932*, were two Judgement Summaries, an Appellate Judgement, and a Judgement Order, the latter being a review of the procedures and findings found in the appeal.[44] These proceedings provide a summary and reconstruction

43) My emphasis. L/PJ/6/2021, BRF, Frame 495, Extract from Martial Law Ordinance, February 12th 1931.

44) See Burma Rebellion Files, L/PJ/6/2022, Judgment Summary, 29th September 1931. Special Tribunal Case No. 5, King-Emperor vs. Saya San, 28th September 1931; Judgement Appeal, No. 1121 of 1931, Special Tribunal Case No. 5, 29th September 1931; Judgement Order, Criminal Appeal No. 1121 of 1931, Special Tribunal Case No. 5, 11th October, 1931; and Judgement Summary, 19th October 1931. Special Tribunal Case No. 4 of 1931, King-Emperor vs. Saya San and Others, 28th August 1931.

of the Saya San trial on the basis of the evidence and arguments submitted by the prosecution. Passages from these documents were cut and pasted into the text of the report to act as "evidence" for the arguments being made about Saya San. These passages were generally direct quotations from the prosecution or remarks by the presiding Tribunal. Thus, the findings summarized in the four judicial documents covering the Saya San trial were merely transferred to the final official report on the Rebellion. Although the report would include the narratives of rebel outbreaks in several districts, they were all connected to and reliant upon the grand narrative involving Saya San.

This initial connection between the *OCBR* and the judicial documents raises some important points. Leaving aside for the moment that the narrative was constructed in an inherently adversarial environment (where guilt or innocence, not historical accuracy was the concern), it is interesting to note that the history of the Saya San Rebellion was based, in part, on the prosecution's intentions to convict the man they believed to be the instigator of the rebellion. Even if the proceedings had included a record of the defence's case, the problem of reconstructing events to reach a preconceived end (in this case innocence) would still remain imbedded within the narrative.[45] What is interesting beyond that which is included or excluded in the judicial summaries is how they are used as "sources" in the report's text. They help authenticate and legitimate the report's narrative by referring to its legal past and specifically to the opinions and observations of the judges most intimately involved in the trial. In the end, this codification of what was essentially the prosecution's reconstruction of events would aid in deflecting the attention of historians from the evidence

45) I suspect that this is why there has never appeared an alternative "narrative" or alternative "evidence" in the history of the Saya San Rebellion. There has been only one record, one body of evidence, and one perspective from which to base any other view.

and arguments closest to the narrative's formation. An examination of the prosecution's case will provide an opportunity to review the legal record as well as to historicize the particular setting in which the narrative and its sources were crafted.

Prosecuting Kingship

Although the record is virtually silent as to how Saya San's lawyers defended him in the course of the trial, the judicial summaries provide a clear picture of how both the prosecution and the Special Tribunal were responsible for constructing and validating the narrative about the Saya San Rebellion. The proceedings reveal that the Tribunal was a significant influence in casting the narrative's final shape, for they had the power to accept or deny what would and what would not be admitted as evidence. The ramifications of this role to the history of the Saya San narrative and the millenarian interpretation that evolved from it cannot be over-emphasized: by dictating what would be admitted as evidence in the course of the trial, the tribunal was actually determining the content and character of the archival record. From this standpoint, the arguments substantiating the legal admissibility of the evidential record would also have the effect of establishing its historical relevance as well.[46] In short, the legal evidence of the trial became the primary evidence in the history of the Saya San Rebellion while the case's narrative (which emphasized the supernatural) provided scholars with an interpretation towards which they could infuse a Buddhist explanation.

46) The decisions of the Tribunal not only set precedence for "future audiences," (Sarat and Kearns, 1999) but for future historians as well, since the available sources would consist only of the evidentiary record that the judges accepted and included in their summaries.

The thrust of the prosecution's case aimed to demonstrate how Saya San re-enacted the patterns described in the *minlaung* model and how he had planned and conspired to rebel through his Galon Associations (Galon Wunthanu Athin), a village-based assemblage of political cells that were allegedly linked to the preparation of the rebellion. These nationalist associations were part of a growing network of political organizations that developed in the 1920s and 30s that were designed to connect and coordinate rural leaders with urban strategists; effectively creating an alternative (and perhaps threatening) channel for voicing political concerns.[47] Perhaps seeing these developments as a threat to its own political institutions, the colonial government sought to connect these grass-roots organizations to the rebellion, even securing powers to censure them for alleged involvement in its spread.[48] As a consequence, the prosecution's case might be seen as an attempt to curb the progressive momentum of these associations by linking them to more traditional patterns and images.

In terms of its structure, the case might be divided into two broad arguments, one that focused on Saya San's attempts to install himself as king and the second that claimed that the Galon organizations were a front for the rebellion. In doing so the prosecution attempted to condense into a single explanation the somewhat bifurcated picture that colonial reports had constructed for the rebellion thus far; that the rebellion was typical of the minlaung tradition and yet it was exhibiting "modern" forms of political organization. By smoothing over these contradictions and linking the two arguments, the prosecution was able to create a single traditional face for the rebellion while

47) U Maung Maung, *Burmese Nationalist Movements*, Kiscadale, 1989; Herbert, 1982; R. Taylor, 1987.

48) L/PJ/6/2021, BRF 573-4, 575. Secret Telegram, Government of India (G/I), Home Department (H/D), to Secretary of State for India (S/SI), repeating from Government of Burma (G/B), 16th May 1931.

providing the means to criminalize the growing networks of village associations that were being perceived as a threat to the colonial political structures in place. Prosecution lawyers hoped to establish that Saya San had had the idea for rebellion two years before the December 1930 by connecting the conspiracy to rebel with the formation of the village associations.[49]

Most of the evidence directed towards this point came in the form of witness testimony, which was introduced by the prosecution.[50] One witness, San Pe, told the Tribunal that Saya San had lived with his family for ten years and had given him a membership card that stated:

> Enlistment ticket No. 1587---Maung Sein Aye, aged 25 years, has been recognized as a member of (A) Company, on his taking oath that he will abide by the rule of the Galon Organization [Dated] The 9th Lazan of Pyatho (27th December 1930) [signed] Thupannaka Galuna Raja.[51]

Another witness, Tun U, testified that in the late summer of 1930, Saya San had ordered the printing of 5000 similar cards resembling the example given by San Pe. These cards played a significant role in the case against Saya San for they allegedly refer for the first time, to a "royal" title, *Thupannaka Galuna Raja* or King of the Galons. The Galon or Garuda was a mythical bird in Southeast Asia that was often

49) See Maitrii Aung-Thwin, "Genealogy of a Rebellion Narrative" (2003), for an analysis of this evidence.

50) Due to the fast-track nature of the Special Rebellion Tribunals, the defence did not have time to secure witnesses on their own behalf, they could only cross-examine the prosecution's witnesses. In addition, the defence claimed that witnesses would not come forward to testify on behalf of the defendant for fear of being implicated with the rebellion. See, L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frame 679, Judgement Order.

51) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Judgement Summary, Special Tribunal Case No. 5, King Emperor vs. Saya San, 28th August, 1931, [dated] 29th September, 1931.

pitted against the Naga (snake), similar to the association between the fox and the hound. Members of the organization were said to have tattooed the image of the Galon defeating the Naga upon themselves, a symbol that reflected Burmese intentions to defeat the British. In the prosecution's estimation, the Galon/Naga motif symbolized *the very idea* of rebellion. The membership card, according to the prosecution, illustrated not only Saya San's rank as founder of the Galon Village Associations, but it signalled his self-image as *king* and his intention to use Burmese Kingship as an ideological platform from which to launch his revolt.[52] Interestingly, the Garuda is not a traditional symbol connected to the monarchy (like the peacock) as it is in other Southeast Asian contexts. Due to the authenticating powers of the legal setting, this image of the Garuda being known as a symbol of rebellion persisted, draining the rebellion ethnology of any possible Buddhist meaning.[53]

In their effort to link Saya San to the formative stages of the rebellion as well as to establish his "royal" motives, the prosecution had to demonstrate that the Galon Associations were the political wing of the rebellion. Drawing upon colonial knowledge of Burmese rituals, mythology, and medicinal practices, the government lawyers melded together an argument that not only came to criminalize aspects of Burmese culture, but one that would endure into contemporary scholarship as the discourse through which these features would be discussed. They chose specifically to focus on the symbol of the Garuda/

[52] Yet if one looks at the original document, the text also includes the term *Thammada,* which can mean "president". It is interesting that the official report, after having referred to this piece of evidence, excludes the term in its text. See also Patricia Herbert's comments regarding Saya San's use of this term in her inspirational study, *The Hsaya San Rebellion (1930-1932): Reappraised,* Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Working Papers No. 27, Monash University, Melbourne, 1982.

[53] For some reason the Galon image has been ignored by proponents of the millenarian explanation. At any rate, the lack of Buddhist elements in the official record prompted scholars to consider them.

Naga and the act of tattooing, as a large number of detainees were found wearing tattoos. Although the practice of tattooing in Burma had a wide and varied tradition (such as a means of identifying with one's service group) the British attempted to argue that the act of tattooing and specifically the tattooing of the Galon's defeat of the Naga was purely an initiation ritual that Saya San undertook as part of his recruitment into the rebel associations.[54] The prosecution attempted to argue that the choice of the symbol for the Galon Organization and their tattoos was hardly a coincidence, for the symbol of the Galon defeating the Naga triggered the "hereditary lawlessness and contempt of authority" in the "ignorant, gullible and superstitious" villagers who associated themselves with the Galon and the Naga with the British.[55] Thus, the *legal* connection between the Galon Association and the rebellion rested upon an *anthropological* interpretation of tattooing as a practice and the Galon as a symbol of revolt.

The prosecution's argument relied on oral evidence presented in an earlier rebellion trial (Special Rebellion Case No. 1 of 1931) in which a prosecution witness, Po Yon, testified the following:

> I asked Po Htin why he had the "gallon" mark tattooed on his arm. He said that those people bearing these tattoo-marks would fight the Government when the Government servants came to demand capitation-taxes and land revenue. "Galon" is the symbol of victory over

54) Crown service members, soldiers, religious bondsmen, craftsmen, and even those monks who failed their exams, were said to receive a special tattoo during the Konbaung period. See Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: Origins of Modern Burma*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1985, p.90 and Than Tun's translation of the Royal Orders of Burma, Vol. V.; and Nicola Tannenbaum, "Tattoos: Invulnerability and Power in Shan Cosmology", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1987.

55) There are some references to the Galon (Garuda)/Naga symbol in Southeast Asian Buddhist literature, especially in reference to the legend of the Buddhist Saint Upago (Upagupta). See John Strong, *The Legend of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in Northern India and Southeast Asia*, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 183, 187-189, 191, 204.

> the "Naga". The "Naga" represents foreigners, such as the English, the French, the Italiens [sic], and the Russians. It is said that if a man has a "gallon" tattoo mark on him he becomes invulnerable, and the shot fired at him become[s] coloured flour.[56]

The defence countered that the Galon tattoo represented a prophylactic against snakebite, which drew criticism from the British High Justice, until U Ba U, a Burmese member of the Tribunal supposedly said to Judge Cunliffe:

> Judge, if you think that a man who has a tattoo mark on him should be presumed a rebel, I think I had better get down from the bench and take my seat along those accused in the dock. See my tattoo marks…Judge, you may think we are childish in our belief, but we all believe, especially the villagers, that these tattoo marks render us immune to snake bite.[57]

Even though the prosecution's explanation for the meaning of the Galon symbol depended on hearsay testimony and despite the fact that the meaning and depiction of the tattoo image was in question (the tattoo only showed a Galon, not the Naga), Po Htin's deposition was deemed sufficient enough to prove that the Galon Village Associations were the political and administrative wing of the rebellion. Thus, testimony and evidence referring to meetings of the village organizations automatically were categorized as signalling rebel activity.[58]

56) *Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion, (1930-1932),* pg. 3.

57) Ba U, *My Burma:* The *Autobiography of a President*, Taplinger Publishing Co. Inc., NY, 1958, pp.110-111. These statements cannot be confirmed in the Judgement summaries related to the trial.

58) This is despite the fact that the formation of village organizations (*wunthanu athins*) were a legal and highly effective way that urban and rural nationalist groups were able to communicate with each other. Through the colonial government's counter-insurgency program, many such village associations were censured and shut down.

In fact, tattooing was considered evidence of the rebellion's coherency and organization. Outbreaks in different districts were linked to the Galon Association and Saya San because "the symbol adopted by the Htandaw Rebels was that of the galon, in the same form as the marks found in Tharrawaddy".[59] Yet, when the prosecution came upon conflicting evidence that contradicted their Galon paradigm (if one accepts that interpreting the meaning of a tattoo is reliable evidence in the first place) they rationalized their evidence to fit the theory. In one instance, the Special Tribunal found it

> a curious thing however that we have not found a single "galon" tattoo mark on any one of the accused…It seems, therefore, to us quite likely that the "galon" mark had been now definitely abandoned. The actual tattoo marks of which we have been supplied with the list are of a varied and puzzling character. The evidence with regard to their signification is conflicting. *It is difficult to find an outstanding common factor among them;* but it may be noticed that the "necklace design" is found on a very large number of the people accused. We are of the opinion that this necklace design was part of a symbol adopted by the rebels indicating sympathy with the enrolment [sic] in the rebels' forces.[60]

Not only is it troubling that the Tribunal was intentionally looking for coherency through tattooing, but they adjusted the argument (on behalf of the prosecution!) and chose an arbitrary tattoo (the necklace) to fit the prosecution's preconceived theory that the rebellion was

59) *Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion, (1930-1932)*, pg. 3 and L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, 498, Memorandum, G/I to G/B, May 25th 1932. New Delhi officials commented in one case that "The evidence on which they were convicted was mainly in regard to tattooing", revealing the extent to which the activity had been criminalized.

60) Italics are my emphasis. L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Judgement Order, Criminal Appeal No. 1121 of 1931, Special Tribunal Case No. 5, 11th October, 1931.

connected to this cultural practise. Although this adaptation of the necklace design actually dislodged Po Yon's testimony linking the Galon tattoo to the village associations, out of this methodological dilemma sprang the idea that it was the very act of tattooing---not of a specific design---that would become "a well known concomitant of rebellion in Burma".[61)]

Once these meetings were established as preparation for the rebellion, witnesses were brought forth to testify about the nature of their planning activities. For example, witness Po Aung deposed that both he and Saya San had been members of U Soe Thein's branch of the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA) and that in December 1930, he received a letter from Saya San instructing him to meet at Saya Sa's house in the village of Shwenakwin, whereupon Saya San addressed those at the meeting and said "People are now getting into trouble with the capitation tax. We must collect men and loot guns and rise in rebellion".[62)] Po Aung's testimony was corroborated by another witness, Ba Aye, who heard the same alleged speech. In all, two witnesses testified that Saya San had ordered membership cards for the accused rebellion organization and two witnesses stated that Saya San had openly discussed rebelling against the British. From what can be gleaned from the judicial summaries, the defence conceded that the meeting took place but denied that rebellion was the subject of discussion or planning. The tribunal was faced with deciding whose testimony was more credible, Saya San's or the prosecution's witnesses. Expectedly, the judges chose to believe the approvers on the issue that instigating rebellion was the subject of discussion at the Shwenakwin meeting. In their ruling on Ba Aye's testimony, the tribunal concluded that

61) *Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion 1930-1932*, pg.3.
62) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frame 653. Judgement Order, Criminal Appeal No. 1121 of 1931, Special Tribunal Case No. 5, 11th October, 1931.

> He is a very resolute person. Probably he is a scoundrel. But he was, in our view, in the innermost counsels of the persons who fomented the rebellion. The first time he gave evidence before us was last April, and he has given evidence in all the rebellion cases before us. We believed him then and so did the Court of Appeal. We have accepted his evidence in all these cases.[63]

In reference to Po Aung, they observed:

> Po Aung is a very different character. He is a timid person, and we think he was brought to this rebellion because he was a friend of Saya San in Kamamo. He was, in our view, thoroughly afraid of Saya San and his organization. His evidence however is clear and straightforward.[64]

The Tribunal's criteria for accepting the testimony of the prosecution witnesses exemplifies the type of reasoning that went into the creation of the legal record. Ba Aye's testimony was accepted on the grounds that the Tribunal determined "in their view" that he was in the "innermost counsels of the rebellion," a conclusion that had not been established by the prosecution or evident in the witness's statement. More curiously, Ba Aye had apparently appeared before the court before, as a prosecution witness against other defendants, as he had agreed to the terms of amnesty offered by the government. His frequent appearances as a prosecution witness and the acceptance of his testimonies in past cases seemed enough to establish his credibility. Similarly, Po Aung's testimony was accepted on the unsubstantiated inference (on the part of the Tribunal) that he was Saya San's "friend" who was thoroughly "frightened" of the alleged leader. In both instances,

63) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frame 654.
64) Ibid.

the witness testimony was accepted on decisions reached by the Tribunal that were independent of any specific argument presented by the prosecution. Thus, the fact that Saya San planned and organized the rebellion through the formation of the Galon Village Organizations as early as 1928 is based in part on two witnesses whose credibility was established not by the prosecution, but by the judges of the Special Tribunal. Whether or not Po Aung and Ba Aye were credible witnesses or actually present in the first place are actually minor points. More crucial to the ethnology of the rebellion narrative is recognizing the way in which this element of the Saya San story became entrenched within the historical record through the legal processes of the Special Rebellion Tribunals.

The Tribunal's special procedural flexibility, evident in the deliberation of the prosecution's opening arguments, became fully obvious as the case turned to reconstructing the events associated with the outbreak of the rebellion in 1930. Whereas the early direction of the trial had dealt with pre-1930 planning, the main thrust of the case dwelt on establishing the traditional character of Saya San and demonstrating his aspirations to rebuild and claim the defunct Burmese monarchy.

The prosecution hoped to show that between the months of October and December 1930, Saya San began holding coronation ceremonies, in order to consecrate his identity as the new King of Burma and to recruit and inspire peasant soldiers. The entire character of the prosecution's case and indeed the history that stemmed from it, hinges upon the arguments and evidence that were presented to demonstrate Saya San's kingship. Interestingly enough, the whole case rested on the testimony of a single witness and the admissibility of one curious document.

Maung Chone, a prosecution witness, claimed to have been a part of Saya San's retinue which convened on the 28th of October (1930) at the Pagoda in Taungnyogale Village. He recounted that,

> All of us who went with Saya San sat down in a row including Saya San except Tun Lin and Yan Lin. They stood up and held a white flag each with the figure of a "gallon" and "naga" painted thereon. Then Saya Daing read something. After he had read it "May there be victory, may there be victory".[65)]

Besides there being only one witness in the record to testify on this alleged event, the Tribunal and the Appellate Court deemed the event "somewhat in the nature of a coronation".[66)] This is especially troubling, for nothing in the description suggests that the event even resembled a traditional coronation ceremony.[67)] Yet, both judicial summaries and the appellate documents indicate that it was the Tribunal, not even the prosecution, who reached this conclusion. Although the issue at that point in the trial was whether or not the event took place, noticing how it was classified is important because it illustrates the way in which the Tribunal presumed what the nature of the ceremony was and the role Saya San was to play within it. And all from a single witness, whose ambiguous testimony was deemed admissible on the Tribunal's determination that "this man is an extremely stupid man and too foolish to be able to have made up the story which he tells.[68)]

65) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frames 670-671, Judgment Order, October 11th, 1931.
66) Ibid.
67) Maurice Collis's description of the coronation ceremony in his *Trials in Burma* (1938) should not be considered seriously as a primary source for this particular event (as some scholars have done) since the author was not a witness to these events and may have based his description on official reports released before his departure from Burma in spring of 1931. On page 217, Collis even reveals that he examined a "court judgement" as a basis for his description.
68) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frame 671, October 11, 1931.

The prosecution attempted to support Maung Chone's testimony with what they claimed was Saya San's diary, the final piece in the puzzle that would tie their case together. Although the records do not indicate whether or not the document presented was ever shown to be a diary in the western sense of the term (for keeping a diary is not a characteristic of Burmese culture) Saya San is reported to have denied that the "diary" was his. Consequently, the issue of identifying what it was apparently was not raised and the Tribunal turned to determining whether or not the diary was the authentic diary of Saya San.

The prosecution introduced an expert witness to establish the author of the diary by calling in Mr. Ghosal, Principal of the Insein Detective School. Mr Ghosal was asked to compare the writing of the diary with a written statement known to be Saya San's. In his comparison, Mr. Ghosal testified that the diary was surely Saya San's for "whenever the writer of this diary makes a letter containing a circle he draws it in a peculiar manner, and he finds the same characteristic in the letters of the appellant".[69] Yet, neither the defence, nor historians for that matter, equestioned the expertise of Mr. Ghosal, even though his credentials as a handwriting expert rested only on his personal assurances and despite the fact that he could neither read nor speak a word of Burmese, which has its own techniques and procedures for writing characters.[70] Mr Ghosal's deficiency in Burmese was downplayed by the prosecution, which stated that an expert could identify characteristics of a written language even though "the expert is ignorant of that language".[71] The Tribunal agreed that his testimony

69) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frame 681. Judgement Order, Appeal No. 1121 of 1931, October 11th 1931.

70) Consider, for those familiar with the writing of Burmese, how the proper method of "walone" is supposed to be written. See John Okell's *Introduction to the Script*, Volume Ⅲ, Center for Southeast Asian Studies Publications, Northern Illinois.

71) L/PJ/6/2022, BRF, Frame 681, Judgement Order, Appeal No. 1121, October 11, 1931.

on the handwriting was admissible “provided the expert understands sufficient [sic] of the script to know what the writer of any document was trying to reproduce on paper”.[72] Yet this argument, which was introduced by the Tribunal (who was supposed to be hearing positions, not introducing them), assumed a priori that the alleged writer was known when the issue was whether Mr. Ghosal was a reliable expert witness, not whether he could determine what was being written. Nevertheless, Mr. Ghosal’s expertise was accepted and his testimony was admitted into the record that the diary was Saya San’s.

Perhaps to belay any concerns about Mr. Ghosal’s inability to read Burmese, the diary was also examined

> by members of the Tribunal, two of whom were well acquainted with Burmese…the diary was accepted by the Tribunal as the genuine diary (of Saya San) both on the general appearance in handwriting and by internal evidence which it contains.[73]

Maung Ba, the presiding appellate Judge, concurred with his colleagues and commented in his review,

> I have compared the writing in the diary, Ex. J, with the writings in those exhibits (B, B1, D, D1, and F). I also consider that there is a striking similarity between those writings. I therefore hold that the entries in the diary are in Saya San’s handwriting. I also agree with the Special Tribunal that this diary showed inherent possibility of its truthfulness.[74]

72) Ibid.

73) L/PJ/2022, BRF, Judgement Order, Criminal Appeal No. 1121 of 1931, Special Tribunal Case, No. 5, October 11th, 1931.

74) L/PJ/2022, BRF, Frame 659, Appeal No. 1121 of 1931, Special Case No. 5, September 29th, 1931.

Consequently, on the partial basis of Mr. Ghosal's, the Tribunal's and one Appellate Judge's self-declared expertise in handwriting, the diary was deemed to be Saya San's and entered into the record. The other factor contributing to the diary's admissibility and declaration of "authenticity" was the opinion of the Tribunal that found that

> The very fact that this document is an exact confirmation of certain evidence relating to certain ceremonies spoke[n] of by the prosecution, showed the inherent possibility of its truthfulness. The diary can be regarded as the type of mind (Saya San) possessed and the type of action and method (Saya San) advocated.[75)]

The Tribunal's statement regarding the authenticity of the diary is troubling, for it reveals a peculiar circularity. The Tribunal opined that since the internal details (within a not-yet-authenticated diary) made reference to events whose own verification depended on whether the diary's authenticity could be established, then the document should be considered genuine. In short, the admissibility of the diary into the evidentiary record was accepted on the grounds that it contained information that seemed to corroborate the prosecution's story. Incredibly, upon this ruling rests the weight of the prosecution's case and the entire narrative of the Saya San Rebellion. The original diary has yet to be located, yet its status as a source has remained fundamental to the cohesiveness of the narrative and the millenarian interpretation that evolved from it.[76)]

75) L/PJ/2022, BRF, Judgement Summary. Patricia Herbert, who accepts the diary as being authentic, examined a copy of the diary (published in Bandoola Journal) and suggests that the use of third person (with a royal honorific) may indicate Saya San being "ambivalent" or even "embarrassed" in using the normative traditional royal style. Her point was to propose that the royal characterization of Saya San might be over-emphasized.

76) Scholars, including the author, have only had access to Burmese language copies of the diary (found in journals and newspapers) or translated versions found in British documents (Judgement Summaries). Extracts of the diary were released by the colonial police and Criminal Investigation Department to local newspapers.

The trial of Saya San is an intriguing focus of study because it reveals how a preconceived narrative was fashioned and modified within the procedural and methodological boundaries of the Special Tribunal System to fit the circumstances of the 1930 uprising. Exploring how this narrative was validated within a particular legal setting exposes how evidence was presented and qualified to support the history of the Saya San Rebellion. In addition, examining the prosecution's case discloses how a particular view of Burmese history (constant rebellions, periodic appearances of pretenders to the throne) and the *minlaung* idea played a singular role in the legal construction of Saya San's criminality.[77] He was considered part of a longer, chaotic, narrative of Burmese history that was attempting to "replay" itself in the face of modernization.[78] The implication of the government's position was that the Burmese or at least those taking part in the rebellion, were not capable of participating in the political reforms being introduced in India, urban Rangoon, and in other colonial cities. Yet, Burmese peasants were in fact employing the very modes of political organization that the British were claiming (through the tone and character of the rebellion narrative) were not being embraced by rural populations.[79] The network and utilization of *wunthanu*

The text within the document is extremely vague and though references are made towards elements of Burmese kingship, there is nothing within it that can conclusively refer to a millenarian tradition as Adas has maintained.

77) Similarly, Henk Schulte Nordholt (Pels and Salemink,1999) suggests that much of traditional Bali was invented by colonial administrators eager to "find" Old Java in Southern Bali and projected many characteristics, such as imagined Hindu-Javanese legal principles, into Balinese society.

78) I borrow from Ileto, who suggests that the rebellion of 1896 had been constructed by American educators as a history of the "already happened" or as an echo of European history in an "Oriental setting". Although the interpretation of the Saya San rebellion seems to be a repetition of early Burmese revolts, it would be interesting to investigate, at another time, whether other contexts, such as the so-called Sepoy Mutiny or possibly the Moplah Rebellion (Southern India) might have informed British readings of the Burmese movements. See Ileto, (1999).

79) Patricia Herbert shows that the Wunthanu Athins, the nationalist village associations which were being used as an alternate conduit to the political network established by the British, were a qualitative break from the *minlaung* inspired uprisings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in that the imagery tactics, and messages they employed were not derived from pre-annexation traditions.

*athin*s (nationalist village associations) clearly indicate that the political landscape of Burma in the 1930s was of a varied nature and more complicated than the prosecution and the findings of the Special Tribunal permitted. The rebellion narrative was a smoothing over of these contradictions within Burmese politics, for it created a clear distinction between the civil administration and the Galon village networks by linking the latter with traditional Burma.[80)]

This incongruence with British norms, this inability to engage in the workings of the colonial state by using the recognized language, institutions, and procedures of the authorities is exemplified in the arguments and evidence produced in Saya San's trial. Material and testimonial evidence was used to establish not only the traditional character of the rebellion but also the very nature of Burmese political expression. To Rangoon officials, the message was clear: the Burmese peasantry could not articulate protest or dissatisfaction in a language other than through rebellion. In a predictable manner, the prosecution fashioned a case that presented that Saya San as leading a rebellion of superstitious peasants, duped into believing that he could protect them with invulnerability tattoos and spells as only a King of Burma and "quack doctor" might do. In a sense, the very idea of political leadership in Burma was relegated to being understood only within the traditions and imagery of Burmese Kingship, with the exception of those communities participating within the machinery of the colonial administration. Urban leaders within the Burma Legislative Council were compelled to establish their distance from the rebellion by supporting counter-insurgency legislation, not only to avoid being labelled a rebellion sympathizer, but to reassert their progressive beliefs in the political process.[81)] Since the narrative implied that Saya San

80) In addition, the narrative obscures and confines the growth of these nationalist associations to a setting that does not take into account similar processes occurring throughout Asia. See Roger Thompson, "Lessons of Defeat: Transforming the Qing State after the Boxer Rebellion, Modern Asian Studie, 37, 4 (2003), pp. 769-773.

81) L/PJ/6/2021, BRF, Frames 403-422, Extract of Proceedings from the Burma Legislative Council, 31st August to 7th September, 1931.

and other rural leaders were informed and constrained by their restrictive history and culture, urban politicians struggled to defend their constituencies while at the same time disassociate themselves from those characterizations. In affect, the narrative of the rebellion drove a wedge between urban and rural political groups, perhaps a desired effect for worried colonial officials. The criminalization of Burmese culture, as seen in the stigmatising of tattooing, exemplifies the manner in which a common practice became part of the rebel profile. Tattooing was taken out of its cultural context and bounded to a particular temporal, spatial, and legal reality that was informed by ideas of rebellion and revolt. Specifically, the Galon, a symbol that had a long and varied tradition in Southeast Asia, was soon confined by legal definitions to represent the very concept of rebellion in Burma. In sum, Burmese culture was being manufactured at the trial as much as Saya San was the focus of the proceedings. For the entire case rested on evidence and arguments that implied that the very seeds for rebellion, the very root of the unrest, and the periodic terrorism that characterized the early 1930s could be located within the traditions, values, and history of the Burmese.

From this vantage point, the trial of Saya San might even be seen as a site for the production of knowledge, in that Burmese culture was codified, materialized, and standardized in the archive of the court.[82] The special procedures, allowances, and flexibility afforded to the prosecution by the Tribunal point to a legal system that enabled knowledge about the rebellion to be carefully accumulated, sanitized, and controlled. The language of law and the methodology of litigation managed the various facets of Burmese culture that were brought under court examination which smoothed over their meanings to correspond

82) Courts have been considered as archives in that their records serve "as the materialization of memory". (Sarat and Kearn, 1999).

to the accepted version of events.[83)] Special Rebellion Tribunal judges determined what would be allowed into the evidential record, effectively deciding what would and especially what would not become the basis for subsequent reports that would eventually end up as "historical" documents in the archives. The narrative about the Saya San Rebellion could not have been shaped in any other way than as it arrived, considering the theatre and script in which it was constructed. In essence, the trial was as much a performance of counter-insurgency policy as it was a site for producing counter-insurgency knowledge.

The Rebellion Ethnology and its Preservation

By cooperating to present Saya San and his followers as being consumed by their inability to envision a future that did not involve a return to their traditional past, the prosecution and the tribunal successfully created a template that relegated rural communities as being impervious to the "modern" and even Buddhist world. On the surface, the trial did not focus on the criminalization of Buddhism as official documents directed attention to historically agitated regions and the restless disposition of rural communities who were easily swayed by "fomenters" of rebellion.[84)] Perhaps in attempt to avoid upsetting moderate Burmese in the legislature as well as observers in New Delhi and London, the Rangoon government treaded carefully when it came to connecting Buddhism to the rebellion, choosing to blame the rebellion on "ex-monks" and "political pongyis".[85)] This

83) Law was used in Dutch colonial Indonesia to interpret and construct culture as well. The "adat law approach" used juridical concepts to record local customs and institutions. Henk Schulte Nordholt (in Pales and Salemink,1999) suggests that the legalist approach, which stressed formal rules and institutions, directed the focus of research as well as informed interpretations of change and continuity.

84) L/PJ/6/2020, *OCBR*, 1934. Tharrawaddy, the district which experienced the first sign of violence, was presented as a historically rebellious region, attracting "pretenders" and agitators from "time immemorial".

85) BRF 573-4, 575. Secret Telegram, G/I, H/D, to S/SI, rpt from G/B, 16th May 1931. At the same time, officials were under the impression that monks were potential threats and sought special powers to detain them.

caricature of Burmese political sensibilities made kingship, tattooing, and superstition---rather than Buddhism---the primary categories through which the rebellion would be remembered and considered, artificially separating these elements from the broader cultural context in which they were understood. Through the legislation that produced the tribunals and through the trial procedures that crafted the final shape of the prosecutions' case, an ethnology of rebellion was cast and memorialized in the seemingly neutral environment of the colonial archive.[86] When scholars returned to this narrative, their perspectives and interests focused on reinterpreting the tone and presentation of this ethnology, sometimes adding extra layers of meaning to the original score or in other cases distilling its original features.

Following independence in 1948, home scholars, sensitive to the rebellion's original depiction and anxious to incorporate the event into the national narrative, portrayed Saya San as an early nationalist leader who led the rebellion on an account of economic destitution that drove otherwise sensible peasants to violence.[87] Scholars abroad who were interested in "proto-nationalism" and class-based movements would eventually follow this course of analysis, finding in the Burmese example economic motivations for the cause of the rebellion, draining the cultural meanings engrained in the sources they consulted.[88] This

86) Nicholas B. Dirks, "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History", in Brian Keith Axel, *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 54.

87) This approach, a rekindling of arguments that stemmed from legislative debates between opposition and government benches, was also duplicated in the *OCBR*, which argued that the rebellion was caused by political factors over economic ones. The terms through which the rebellion was constructed was unintentionally maintained by subsequent scholarship.

88) See Htin Aung's *A History of Burma* (1976), Maung Maung's *From Sangha to Laity* (1980), U Chit Maung's "The Real Origins and Causes of the Burma Rebellion" in Ma Ma Lei's *Gyane Gyaw Thu Lolu,* (1968), and *Taungthu Lethama Aedawpon*, Burma Historical Commission (1965). Scholars who followed these arguments include Michael Adas's early work *The Burma Delta* (1974) and perhaps James C. Scott's *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1977), even though the latter explored much more than can be discussed here. For a recent version of this genre, see Ian Brown, "the Economic Crisis and Rebellion in Rural Burma in the Early1930s", R. Minami, K.S. Kim and M. Falkus (eds). *Growth, Distribution and Political Change: Asia and the Wider World,* Macmillan, 1999.

trend was soon reversed by studies that attempted to understand Burmese nationalism through Buddhism, a cautious but important step that introduced religion as a possible framework for examining Saya San.[89] All along, the structure of the official narrative and the character of the Rebellion Ethnology remained intact. Finally, as mentioned above, scholars such as Sarkisyanz, Adas, and (later) Reynaldo C. Ileto, working within a field that sought an "autonomous history" of Southeast Asia, began to consider the rebellion and its narrative of kingship primarily through millenarian Buddhism, injecting new meanings, new symbols, and new futures into a Rebellion Ethnology that had previously lacked such religious substance. Until fairly recently, the rebellion narrative remained surprisingly intact, bolstered by its new "autonomous" ethnology. While British officials had cast Buddhism out of its *minlaung* explanation, scholars attempted to recast the rebellion within a new Buddhist future.

Although the present paper seeks to historicize the making of the Saya San narrative and a specific interpretation it fostered, it also seeks to explore the implications of this genealogy to the historiography of Southeast Asian studies and specifically towards the legacy of the autonomous history school that contributed unintentionally to the rendering of the Rebellion Ethnology. One of the attractions towards writing and autonomous history of modern Southeast Asian history was that it sought to place the region's peoples, perspectives, categories, and contexts in the foreground of our academic gaze, reversing (we hoped) the way in which colonial and nationalist narratives had been constructed. The problem highlighted above is that

[89] Notable examples include Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 107; E. Michael Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma: a Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership*, Cornell University Press, 1975, pp. 206-209; and Robert Solomon's "Saya San and the Burmese Rebellion", *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 3, 1969, pp. 209-223.

this reversal never really took place in the case of the Saya San Rebellion as the original narrative about kingship---which was produced within a particular legal and legislative context---produced a particular narrative whose institutional origins and evidential foundations were eventually forgotten, dissolving “at each stage of collection, transcription, translation, and canonization”.[90] Emboldened in part by Smail’s urgings, scholars attempted to “read against the grain” in order to find Southeast Asian religion within the Burma Rebellion Files, not considering that the terms and categories within the relevant documents were an outcome of counter-insurgency priorities. In this regard, the autonomous readings of the Saya San rebellion actually compliment colonial constructions of that history rather than fundamentally contesting their structure and form.

Given recent overtures to historicize the colonial archive, it appears that we are once again pushing “Southeast Asia” into the margins, stressing European understandings of the region even as we attempt to problematize that very gaze. It is not the intention of this paper to congratulate the British for “creating” the notion of Burmese kingship or to suggest that scholars created the millenarian tradition, but rather to highlight how these contemporary understandings of the rebellion were connected to the particular colonial settings that produced the archive. In addition, theoretical approaches were associated with this genealogy by relying on the sources that actually enabled their critiques. Showing cultural continuity between millenarian traditions in ancient Myanmar with anti-colonial rebellions in the 20th century appealed directly to the sensibilities of specialists who wanted to illustrate the dynamism and resilience of Southeast Asian traditions.[91]

90) Dirks, quoted in Axel, p. 54.

91) Michael Adas, “Bandits, Monks, and Pretender Kings: Patterns of Peasant Resistance and Protest in Colonial Burma, 1826-1941, *Power and Protest in the Countryside: Rural Unrest in Asia, Europe, and Latin America*, ed. R. P. Walker and S.E. Guggenheim, 1982, pp. 76-77.

For these scholars, religion provided the category through which rural Myanmar in the 1930s was epistemologically constructed. Though writing from a different context, these scholars might be considered within the same "community of interpretation" as their sources, terms of inquiry and narrative usage were surprisingly congruent.[92] Archives enabled colonial officials to cast future interpretations of the rebellion by leaving an evidential record that inspired scholars to cast futures back into the past.

It appears that multiple understandings of the rebellion, both by participants and by later commentators, can still be explored within and without the archive. For instance, separate trial records of rebels report that reveal similar evidential inconsistencies that were apparent in the case of Saya San. Preliminary research with these documents suggest that the grand meta-narrative connecting these movements to Saya San were also contrived as different motivations, patron-client relations, political circumstances, and local concerns characterized these cases in question. In some instances political figures who were part of the urban nationalist scene inspired different forms of protest among the peasantry, not merely the blind devotion to resurrecting the monarchy as claimed by the Rebellion Ethnology. Oral testimony reveals very different memories of the rebellion, especially from those communities working with the colonial authorities and those politicians that connected their causes to the effort of the rebellions. While autonomous historical method suggested an essential "Southeast Asian" perspective, we must consider that even within the context of the rural "peasantry", a category that was itself enabled by colonial knowledge, their existed competing notions of leadership, motivations, allegiance, and purpose amongst those who participated in the rebellion

92) Stanley Fish, "Working on the Chain Gang: Interpretation in Law and Literature", *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*, Duke University Press, 1989.

and amongst those who witnessed it. Furthermore, the categories that relegated peasant consciousness to particular forms of political expression contradicts the evidence of the period, which indicate that rural leaders were in fact engaging with the very urban forms of mobilization and nationalist platforms that rebellion ethnologies denied them.[93] By historicizing the archival record and the narratives it produced, we can reconstruct the process through which colonial knowledge was reified by the scholarship that was enabled by it. It is towards reconstructing the institutional, archival, and social contexts of those narratives where we might cast our future research.

Key Words : Burma, Nationalism, Saya San, Revolt, Maitreya

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93) Patricia Herbert urged us to consider the growth and importance of the wunthanu associations, which served as networks linking rural and urban nationalist interests. See her work "The Hsaya San Rebellion Reappraised", 1982.

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<국문초록>

동남아 문화사의 한 범주로서의 ‘저항’ : 식민지 버마의 천년왕국 봉기

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식민지하 동남아 천년왕국 운동에 대한 오늘날의 해석들은 그 주체인 농민들을 식민주의를 개념화하고 저항하는 동기와 조건 그리고 상징을 제공하는 토착 지식의 전수자로 간주한다. 종말론과 저항에 대한 관심의 대부분은 농민연구나 지역연구 학자들로부터 유래하며, 이들은 봉기에 대한 과거의 묘사들이 토착의 정신세계를 간과했거나 국가이념을 저항세력들의 결집원리로 과대 포장한 것에 주의를 기울인다. 천년왕국 봉기에 관한 글들에서 제공하는 해석들은 동남아 신념체계에 관한 독립적인 관점을 제공할 뿐만 아니라, 인식론적 측면에서 식민지국가들을 이와 같은 전통에서 단절시키고 있다. 영국 식민지하에서 최대의 농민반란인 서야쌍 봉기(1930-1932)는 오늘날 이와 같은 천년왕국 운동의 정수를 보여주는 사례로 간주된다. 학자들은 수천 명의 농민들로 하여금 버마인의 권위를 되찾고, 불교를 회복시키며, 식민통치로 인해 낳은 사회-경제적 부조리를 일소시킬 그들의 왕으로 믿게 만든 한 농부의 흥미로운 이야기를 묘사하고 있다. 일련의 반란이 미신에 의해 추동되었다고 간주한 식민지 관찰자들과는 달리 이후의 역사가들은 그 반란이 불교를 재건하고 태평성대로 인도할 미래부처인 미륵불의 현신에 대한 믿음의 표현이라고 해석했다. 이러한 학자들에게 서야쌍 봉기는 어떻게 동남아 사람들의 감수성이 식민지의 사회-경제적 압력 속에서도 지속되었으며, 상좌불교의 예언이 토착의 문화적 토양에 얼마나 깊이 내재해 있는지를 말해주는 사례였다. 경험적 관점에서 본 글은 서야쌍 봉기의 근원을 재해석함으로써 천년왕국 봉기에 관한 글들이 대부분 식민지적 문서화 작업과 종교를

과장되고 세속화된 화술로 믿게 하려고 지역연구자들의 산물임을 밝히고 있다. 개념적 관점에서 본고는 버마에서 일어난 천년왕국 운동의 역사적 구성에 대한 식민주의의 역할을 보다 면밀히 관찰하였다. 또한 식민지법, 학문, 그리고 식민지하 버마 농촌에서 발생한 종교적 저항에 대한 우리들의 이해를 상호 연결하는 인식론적 관계를 탐구했다. 그리하여 본고는 천년왕국 해석이 이 시기에 공존했던 다른 유형의 불교정치적 형태를 어떻게 왜곡했는가를 밝히고 있다.

주제어 : 버마, 식민주의, 서야쌍, 봉기, 미륵불