

Burma's Schizophrenic Transition

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In April 2013, one year after the election to the Myanmar (Burma) Union Parliament of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi - described by Barack Obama as a "democratic icon" during his meeting with her in Rangoon on 19th November 2012¹ - Burma's democratic transition does not appear to be as smooth and uncomplicated as many observers had suggested, or at least hoped. In her personal transition from charismatic opposition leader to politician and, perhaps, future presidential candidate she has come under a deal of criticism for her compromising attitude with her former military jailers. Now, as a member of the political establishment and with the distinct possibility of her party, the National League for Democracy, winning the legislative elections planned for 2015, she has shown herself sensitive to the daily concerns of her electorate and less prone to taking principled stances. In Burma, as after the Arab Spring, the lifting of a repressive state apparatus has had collateral effects. To use the title of Aung San Suu Kyi's collection of essays, the people of Burma may now be freed from fear, but, for a small minority, this means a freedom to hate with ancestral animosities based on ethnic and religious difference finding renewed expression. The ending of censorship, the freeing of the Internet and, since the end of March 2013, the licensing of over twelve daily newspapers has provided a wide space for public discussion eagerly embraced by a burgeoning civil society. Yet amongst the voices being heard on You Tube is that of U Wirathu, a 45 year old monk from the Muasoyein Monastery in Mandalay, who has launched his "969" campaign encouraging Burmese Buddhists to boycott Muslim businesses and communities. Wirathu, apparently without irony, describes himself as a "Burmese bin Laden"². In a country where 50 years of military rule and an Orwellian stifling of free expression has meant that rumours are taken as facts, it has been suggested that Wirathu is an instrument of hardliners, or what we shall describe as reactionaries, in the military and other "obscure forces"³. Certainly if one is looking for a possible conspiracy, continued unrest such as to threaten national sovereignty and lead to a disintegration of the Burmese Union, would provide an ostensibly legitimate pretext for the military to resume power. Under Chapter 1, section 40c, and Chapter 11, section 417, 418 of the 2008 Constitution the "Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services has the right to take over and exercise State sovereign power", once the President has declared a state of emergency⁴. A similar legal coup d'Etat has already occurred once in 1958 when the elected Prime Minister, U Nu, invited the military under Ne win to take power.

Such a fear arises because of the enormous challenges in what will be a rather lengthy transition. In Burma/Myanmar progressives are attempting to undertake political reforms, economic reforms and a process of national reconciliation at the same time. This is unheralded in Asia. In South Korea and Taiwan, held as examples of successful transformations, major structural economic reforms preceded democratisation. In Indonesia, it could be argued that the economic transformation undertaken during the 30 years of the New Order regime, in particular those leading to the emergence of a middle class, set the stage for its own demise in 1998. Nevertheless, in the first few years of post-reformasi Indonesia, the lifting of a repressive apparatus was accompanied by serious inter-ethnic conflict and the search for an effective model of governance for a multi-ethnic society continues to be a work in progress. In Burma that process has barely begun.

Understanding the Transformations in Burma

A fully democratic and socially and economically developed Burma is not inevitable and the worst is always possible. While a degree of pessimism over developments is understandable, however if the dynamics of the present transition are examined more closely, there are reasons to be cautiously

optimistic. As a preliminary the reasons for the extraordinary changes of the last two years need to be assessed, the complexity of the changes needs to be acknowledged and the different roles of the actors involved taken into account.

On 30th March 2011, the military junta that had governed Burma/Myanmar for 23 years since the coup d'Etat of September 1988 was officially disbanded. The former Prime Minister of the junta, Thein Sein, was elected President, by the new Parliament convened in congress, while the former Chief of the Armed Forces, Thura Shwe Mann was elected speaker of the Lower House. Both of these individuals were themselves former generals as were their vice presidents and most of the members of the government. The appointment of a civilianized government was itself a consequence of the elections held in November 2010, which saw the convening in January 2011 of a bicameral parliament, comprising the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives), with 440 seats, and the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities), with 224 seats. In these elections boycotted by Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD and considered rigged, the military backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won the overwhelming majority of the seats. Moreover under the 2008 constitution a quarter of all seats are reserved for the military, a provision modelled on that in the Indonesian parliament during the New Order period. As in Indonesia the special role and prerogatives of the military were justified as emanating from its dual role: meeting external threats, but, above all, as the guarantee of national unity and national development. It should be noted that Aung San Suu Kyi, both during her period under house arrest and today, has been willing to acknowledge the special place of the military in Burma.

With the installation of the government the sixth of the steps in the "Seven-Step Roadmap towards a Discipline Flourishing Democracy" first publicly announced in August 2003 by then Prime Minister, and former head of Military Intelligence, General Khin Nyunt⁵ had been achieved. Despite, or perhaps because, of its status as a pariah regime the military junta had successfully, from their point of view, imposed the pace of change and the nature of the change. Yet the question remains as to why the military were willing to loosen their grip on power. Understanding these underlying motives is one of the keys to assessing the viability of the changes since. In a recent article, Min Zin and Brian Joseph suggest five interrelated factors⁶. The first of these is the retirement and withdrawal to a monastery of the last of the military dictators Than Shwe, which opened a political space for other senior officers to come to the fore. In this regard, by spreading power across institutions and playing his successors one against each other, Tan Shwe would make sure that none of them would amass sufficient power to turn later against himself and his children, as was the case with the former dictator Ne Win. The second factor was that the cost of dependence on China economically, militarily and even politically had become too high, both in regard to a population with a long tradition of anti-Chinese xenophobia and in relation to Burma's fellow members of ASEAN. Joining ASEAN in 1997 was both a way of acquiring legitimacy⁷ and, along with overtures to India and Thailand, a way of attenuating this reliance. It is to be noted that, in response to popular opinion, President Thein Sein suspended the building of the Chinese built and Chinese funded Myistone hydroelectric project on the Irrawaddy begun in 2006: 80% of the electricity generated was to be exported to Yunnan. The pressure of popular opinion seems also to have played a part in the third factor, namely the realisation, at least amongst some of the senior military leadership, that they could no longer simply rely on repression and violence to maintain their hold on power. In 2007 the military had failed to understand the level of discontent in Burmese society. In initially brutally surprising a peaceful demonstration by Buddhist monks they ignited a nationwide uprising that required even more repression to be ended. However, unlike in 1988, the repression of the Saffron Revolution of 2007 was broadcast live on overseas television with images returning to Burma. For a regime that had tried to instrumentalize Buddhism to sustain its rule, the cost in terms of losing its last remaining elements of legitimacy was high. Within the military it would appear that a number of senior officers felt remorse and vowed not to have to resort to such tactics again⁸.

The last two factors - namely that of concerns about falling behind its neighbours and that of reengaging with the West - are interconnected. During the 1990s and especially after joining ASEAN, Burmese officials became clearly aware of how much Burma lagged behind its neighbours. If Burma was to become one of the "flying geese" in following the Asian developmental schema then it would need a global engagement. From a comparative perspective a more cynical interpretation we would suggest is that, like their military peers in Thailand and Indonesia before them, senior military leaders and their cronies decided that giving up direct rule and instituting democratic reforms would provide them with greater of their wealth and opportunities for even greater enrichment. Moving from kleptocracy to entrepreneurship would also mean their position, both in Burmese society and internationally, would become more secure. However, for Burma to develop the country would need

to reengage with the West, a re-engagement which would also contribute to balancing the influence of China. Whether or not the imposition of Western sanctions contributed to this outcome is a moot point. In determining if external pressures contributed to the democratic transition in Burma we would argue that, both the “good cop” approach of ASEAN (i.e. constructive engagement with not so gentle, private, encouragements to change) and the “bad cop” approach of the US, the EU and other Western countries (i.e. sanctions), combined, were important. This being said, as argued above, internal factors within Burma outweigh external ones.

To the five factors listed above we would add a sixth one of a cultural and religious nature. Much has been made of the former dictator Tan Shwe's concern with astrology and numerology⁹, however these beliefs are but elements in a particular Buddhist world view. Perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight, Tan Shwe's concern with Buddhism during the period of the junta was not just instrumentalization, but also linked to an underlying personal belief system. This would be in keeping with his childhood as the son of poor landless farmers living in Kyaukse, in an isolated community in central Burma. Moreover as the ultimate Bamar parvenu, Tan Shwe had achieved a monument to his own posterity in the building of the new capital of Naypidaw at a cost of some 2% of Burmese GDP. On the parade ground of the new capital, larger than life statues of supposedly Burma's former kings are designed to convey his and the Tatmadaw's royal lineage with the great dynasties of the past¹⁰. Tan Shwe, like many retirees (sic) in Burma, including his formerly imprisoned Prime Minister, Kim Nyunt, has now withdrawn to a monastery to undertake the meritorious acts so lacking in his past and to enter into a new phase in the mandala of his personal existence. In this new phase, all indications are that he has definitely abandoned political life and, it is rumoured, is impervious to the calls of some reactionaries for him to intervene. A Weltanschauung derived from Theravada Buddhism transcends much of political life in Burma, for Tan Shwe it would appear, as indeed it does so manifestly for Aung San Suu Kyi.

The “Two Burmas”: One to be Reformed, the Other to?

Our insistence on the importance of the Theravada Buddhist elements as important within the factors leading to the institution of reforms, is also central to understanding the dynamics at play today. Religion in Burma is not simply a matter of personal belief; it is intimately linked, or to be more exact, is portrayed as intimately linked with questions of ethnic identity. The junta functioned under the slogan of “Amya, Batha Thathana”, which roughly translates as “one race (Bamar), one language (Burmese, Myanama-sa) and one religion (Buddhism)”. It would be difficult to imagine a conception of nation more far removed say, from the motto on the Indonesian coat of arms “Unity in Diversity”. Given such a mindset, was an all-embracing process of political, social and economic reform possible actually on the agenda of the generals and ex-generals who loosened their grip? The evidence would suggest that this was not, and is probably not, the case. Underlying the tacit bargain between the hardliners, conservatives and reformers in the junta and, it could be added, in the cooperation and sharing of responsibilities with the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi, is the notion of two Burmas, one central, the other peripheral. The first of these “Burmas” is the Bamar heartland, the home to 68-70% of the population. The other “Burma” is that where the territorially domiciled minorities - the most important of whom are the Shan (9%), Karen/Kayin (6%) Arakanses/Rakhine (5%), Mon (2%) and Kachin (2%) - form the majority of the population¹¹.

The Bamar sense of superiority, indeed racism is not simply an attribute of the military and their coteries. The ethnic disturbances of July and November 2012 in Rakhine State against the Rohingyas, who are considered as illegal aliens, and against other Muslims (ostensibly Burmese citizens) in March 2013 would suggest that such a sentiment is more widespread than has been previously acknowledged. Indeed, Maung Zarni, the veteran founder of the Free Burma Coalition in the United Kingdom has confessed in his blog:

“Like millions of my fellow Buddhist Burmese, I grew up as a proud racist. For much of my life growing up in the heartland of Burma, Mandalay, I mistook what I came to understand years later as racism to be the patriotism of Burmese Buddhists... For nationalists, the cliché to be Burmese is to be Buddhist is still a given, especially those in the ruling military clique”¹².

During the period of British colonial rule - especially after the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 - the Bamar heartland and the peripheral areas were administered quite differently. After separation from India in the Government of Burma Act (1935), Burma was *de facto* governed in two distinct ways: a form of limited self-government in Ministerial Burma, essentially the Bamar heartland and Rakhine, and forms of tutelage in the Frontier or Excluded Areas and the “Native States”¹³.

Observing the changes in Burma today these twofold schema remains salient, for the political and economic reforms essentially concern this Bamar heartland, while in the “other Burma” the situation remains much as it was prior to 2010 with the military in control. The question arises is this by accident or design? An interpretation we would offer, one however that requires confirmation, is that with the end of the military dictatorship an understanding was reached in the peripheral areas the military would be free to continue to control and they, and their coteries, could continue to draw substantial economic benefits from this role. However, on the other hand, in today’s equivalent of Ministerial Burma significant political and economic reforms would be undertaken, ones that would reduce the power and influence of the military. In our view, Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy became *de facto* parties to this accord in having their party re-registered and entering Parliament after the bi-elections of April 2012. This is not to suggest that they entered into a Faustian bargain, but rather that the Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD see issues of national reconciliation and the establishment of some form of federalism as having to be addressed in the longer term once democratic consolidation in the Bamar heartland. Given their need for a high degree of acquiescence in their activities from the military, such an approach could be seen as politically astute.

Actors in the Reform Process in Today’s “Ministerial Burma”

One year after the end of military rule and the establishment of a civilianized, if not civilian government, the consensus view amongst the best informed and most perceptive foreign academic observers of Burma was that the reforms are largely “top down”¹⁴. However, another year further on, we need to include in the “top” Aung San Suu Kyi and, since 1st April 2012, other members of the “loyal” opposition, and then take cognisance of the way in which civil society groups, the media and the extra-parliamentary opposition, such as the 88 Generation, have seized on the opening of new areas of political space.

The significant political and economic reforms that, potentially at least, will over the course of time profoundly impact on everyday life in the Bamar heartland have been initiated from the top, by President Thein Sein and a relatively small group of reformist ex-generals assisted by some elements of the civilian bureaucracy. While the military is that often described in the media as divided between “hardliners” and “reformists” (or soft liners), with the latter now on the ascendancy, a threefold division may be more appropriate. Other than the dichotomy between the reformists around Thein Sein and a rump of reactionaries (difficult to number and name), who have never accepted handing power to a civilian administration, there is, perhaps, a larger group of conservatives. In the original sense of the term, these conservatives are willing to tolerate a much greater sphere for civilian rule as long as the prestige and prerogatives of the military are not threatened and they and their cronies can conserve their own privileges¹⁵. In our view, the free hand given to the military outside of today’s “Ministerial Burma” is an attempt to placate this third group.

Where does Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy fit in the present political reform landscape? Some indication of her role is reflected in the speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 28th September by President Thein Sein, in which he congratulated her for the honours she had received and lauded her role in enhancing the political legitimacy brought by the reform process¹⁶. Implicit in this, and other declarations, is the role of Aung San Suu Kyi as the key to bringing Burma back into the global community. For example she, and she alone, has the capacity to convince Western countries to permanently drop their sanctions and to provide significant amounts of aid to consolidate the political and economic reforms being put in place by the government. Her credibility is also being harnessed as a mediator, for example as the head of the Commission of Investigation into land-grabbing and violence against opponents of an expansion of a copper mine project in northwest Burma some 60 kilometres from Mandalay in November 2012. The project is a joint venture between the army-owned Union Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd and Wanbao Company, a subsidiary of a Chinese arms manufacturer. In mediating, Aung San Suu Kyi sought a middle way in acknowledging the economic importance of the project, while seeking fairer treatment of those expropriated from their land.

After fifty years of military rule we have, in a sense, a government of national unity, something many countries have experienced in periods of transition. However, to fully understand the role of Aung San Suu Kyi, we need to look again into Burma’s unique political culture. In traditional Bamar society there are two conceptions of power. The first, *ana*, implies coercion and force and is seen as being

essentially masculine. The second, *awza*, can be translated as influence, moral authority and/or charisma¹⁷. What appears to be lacking in this schema is a Weberian notion of bureaucratic, legal, impersonal and rational power. In Burma, power was traditionally seen as largely personal and its conquest a zero sum game. It could be argued that in the present schema of the duopoly of Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi we have a synthesis between *ana* and *awza*. When Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma in 1989 she was accorded by her supporters the status of *minlaung*, roughly translated as embryo or imminent king.

One actor that has just begun to receive the attention due is the Union Parliament in the new capital Naypidaw and, in particular its Lower House, the *Pyithu Hluttaw*¹⁸. With a quarter of its membership reserved for the military and the vast majority of the other MPs coming from the Union Solidarity and Development Party, the proxy party of Myanmar's former generals initially derided as a rubber stamp. Two factors can explain this burgeoning role. The first is institutional momentum: simply the change in profession from military officer to MP engenders new priorities, with further empowerment no longer based on the ability to coerce but on using the political process. In particular the creation of parliamentary committees has provided a forum to criticize both the government and the military¹⁹. For example, the multiparty Land Investigations Committee have challenged flagrant or suspicious land grabbing by the military and their cronies. The entry of Aung San Suu Kyi and the 42 other NLD MPs along with MPs from the ethnic minorities has provided a boost to this momentum. Aung San Suu Kyi herself has been made head of a Parliamentary Committee on the Rule of Law and Stability and saw her first motion in parliament concerning the University of Rangoon overwhelmingly supported.

Yet even in this assertive Parliament can be found the consequences of the arrangements left by the military junta. As mentioned above, when abandoning power, Tan Shwe made sure that none of his successors would be in a position to challenge his heritage, or to become as dominant as he had been. Thus, Thura Shwe Mann, the former joint Chief of Staff of the Burmese Armed Forces and third in the junta hierarchy - originally considered as "the only possible successor to Tan Shwe"²⁰ or once described in a cable from the US embassy in Rangoon as the "dictator-in-waiting"²¹ - was given instead, what appeared at the time as a consolation prize, the position of Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament. In the arrangements put in place by Tan Shwe, however, his successor as head of the Armed Forces, Senior General Min Aung Hliang was considered as lacking political ambitions with his independence also limited by having another general, Lieutenant General Wai Liun, as Minister of Defence. Thus, despite being relatively secure in what would seem to be a ceremonial position, Shwe Mann no longer had a power base directly in the military. Whether it was due to a genuine conversion to democratic forms, personal ambition, or to protect his family's business interests is a moot point, but on 7th February 2011, a week after his inauguration, he acknowledged the longstanding issue of corruption pervading the public sector and began strengthening the parliament as a counter power to that of the executive. With the present president, Thein Sien, suffering from poor health and clearly indicating he will only serve one term in office, Shwe Mann is widely believed to be positioning himself to be the presidential candidate of the USDP for the 2015 elections. In these developments can be seen parallels with political trajectories in Thailand and Indonesia in the recent past.

Finally, a much neglected actor, or rather actors, in Burma is civil society itself. Yet role of individuals and groups outside the political sphere has been underestimated for two reasons. The first of these is the disciplinary blinkers of a political science preoccupied with the State, exacerbated by a lack of dialogue with social anthropologists and social historians who, in the case of Burma, have been much closer to the pulse of this vibrant society²². The second, more understandable reason, is that under military rule there was very little space for expression or action outside of the military controlled State apparatus. The failure of the military regime to deal with the devastation of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, however, revealed a resilience and capacity in civil society that had gone unnoticed: individuals and groups in Rangoon and elsewhere organized the collection of aid to be taken to the stricken areas and, later, once the junta had lifted its veto, cooperated with international NGOs. On the political level the involvement of civil society sprang from the former junta's attempt to impose its own constitutional order prior to loosening its hold on power through the elections of 2010. As one social anthropologist has argued, "while the government of Myanmar started a transition from authoritarian rule in a very controlled manner, the emergence of a politically active civil society was triggered by active engagement in the electoral process and the constitutional debates preceding it"²³. A group of NGOs such as Myanmar Egress, the Yangon School of Political Science and the Pandita Institute joined with groups of informal organisations, such as "reading groups", to offer civic education and contribute to capacity building. The political space for

civil society has expanded dramatically, boosted by the end of censorship and the freeing of the media. However, these changes concern principally the urban areas of the Bamar heartland. On the periphery, and outside, say in the refugee camps in Thailand, the activities of civil society groups have unwittingly reinforced senses of ethno-religious difference²⁴ rather than a sense of membership of a Burmese nation in the making.

The Bumpy Road(map?) Ahead

Despite a series of successful ceasefires with some ethnic insurgent groups, combat still continues in the Kachin area. The Kachin Liberation Organization/Army, thanks to their relative economic autonomy, previous military successes and the support they receive across the border in Yunnan, is today the most reticent of all of the ethnic insurgent groups to lay down their arms and join in a national political process. Other ethnic insurgent groups may well be tempted to return to armed conflict if they fail to see any benefits from peaceful negotiations, such as an end to land-grabbing and an end to enforced Bamarisation of their cultures. Decentralisation so far has been shallow. While 14 state and regional Hluttaw parliaments have been created, they receive only 6% of the national budget to disburse²⁵, a case of “representation without taxation”! The Indonesian case mentioned above forcefully demonstrates that an allocation of resources that is considered equitable is a major key to maintaining unity in a decentralized polity.

Paradoxically, given this need, a crushing victory by the National League for Democracy in the 2015 legislative elections could prove to be counterproductive. Under the first-past the post system bequeathed by the British, the least representative of all voting systems, a small majority in the overall vote could translate into a large monopoly of seats in the national parliament. This was the case in the 1990 elections when the NLD won 80% of all seats. Thus the International Crisis Group has suggested a change in the voting system to a form of proportional representation, so that those who find themselves in the minority, including potentially the present military-backed governing Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), as well as representatives of the different ethnic groups do not feel excluded from the political process. The reality of the political dynamics in Myanmar is that the conservatives within the Tatmadaw must at least acquiesce in the reforms, while the diminishing of the influence of the reactionaries must continue²⁶. In Burma, as in Indonesia after the end of the New Order regime, the question is what institutional prerequisites and capacities are required for democratisation to take root in an ethnically and religiously diverse polity, one in which ethnic and religious differences are linked to territorial claims. This requires negotiation and compromise. As expressed by two young engaged scholars in their appraisal of the democratic future: “Burma needs the rostrum and the ballot box, but it needs the bargaining table too”²⁷. Historically democracy in Asia has not necessarily been associated with the delivery of social goods and the improvement in the everyday life of people. In the Asian values rhetoric of the 1990s, democracy was seen as a luxury that could only be afforded when a country has reached a certain level of development. It was argued that during this initial period the rule of a best paternalistic, and at worst despotic regime is required. The imperative of growth and development remains. In a recent substantive report coming from the Brookings Institution it is asserted that “without economic improvements at the grass roots, political progress may founder”²⁸. Myanmar’s young urban population may be a long-term attribute, but in the short term there is a pressing need to find employment for this population most of whom have not received an adequate education nor the skills training required given the closing of educational institutions for lengthy periods and the general decline in educational standards. Moreover, 70% of Myanmar’s population live in rural areas, yet despite the declarations of the Thein Sein Administration when taking office, little so far has been done to improve land ownership, access to credit and improvements in infrastructure.

The Burmese government’s largest source of revenue is that derived from the export of natural gas. However, the sale of this gas and that of other natural resources (timber, precious stones) has under the former regime overwhelmingly benefited a few in the military and their cronies. The new government has signed the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative designed to bring transparency and equity in this area, but vested interests would seem to be hindering the effective application of the measures required. The question of an equitable exploitation of Burma’s rich natural resources not only involves social and environmental questions; it is also intensely political. The timber, precious stones and also potential hydroelectric resources are mainly found in the peripheral areas populated by ethnic minority groups. Control of these resources as well the drug trade has been a source of revenue both for the military and their cronies, but also for their

adversaries in the ethnic insurgencies. Resolving these political economy issues is at the heart of any process of national reconciliation. It may well be a prerequisite for undertaking the institutional reforms required for a federal system of government devolving significant power and autonomy to the states and territories. It remains to be seen whether the Bamar majority in the governing party, military and in the National League for Democracy will accept such an outcome in the near term. The bringing together of the “two Burmas” may simply have to wait.

This text has been written with **Vincent Camroux**, Programme Manager in a Burmese NGO in Rangoon concerned with capacity-building.

- [1.](#) *International Herald Tribune*, November 2012. His official visit was the first ever by a US President.
- [2.](#) “Nationalist Monk U Wirathu Denies Role in anti-Muslim Unrest”, *The Irrawaddy*, 2nd April 2013.
- [3.](#) One report suggests that the 969 movement is being monitored and fuelled by hardliners close to the top of the Tatmadaw (military), who are using the movement to show they are capable of derailing the reform process if their interests are not protected. Quentin Gollier, “Myanmar’s ‘Guided Democracy’”, *Asia Sentinel*, 4th April 2023.
- [4.](#) Quoted in Bart Gaens “Political Change in Myanmar: Filtering the Murky Waters of ‘Disciplined Democracy’”, *Finnish Institute of International Affairs Working Paper*, 78, February 2013, p. 12.
- [5.](#) Renaud Egreteau, “Birmanie : la transition démocratique selon la junte”, *Critique internationale*, 24, juillet 2004, pp. 39-47.
- [6.](#) Min Zin and Brian Joseph, “The Democrat’s Opportunity”, *Journal of Democracy*, 23 (4), October 2012, pp. 104-118.
- [7.](#) Pavin Chachavalpongpun, “Burma as ASEAN Chair in 2014: Interests, Agendas and a Road to Redemption”, *Global Asia*, 7 (4), Winter 2012.
- [8.](#) Interview with a European diplomat, 26 March 2012.
- [9.](#) For example in the biography by Benedict Rogers Tan Shwe: *Unmasking Burma’s Tyrant*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010, p. 173
- [10.](#) Guy Lubeigt, *Nay Pyi Taw : Une résidence royale pour l’armée birmane*, Bangkok : IRASEC / Paris : Les Indes savantes, 2011.
- [11.](#) Renaud Egreteau, “Country Focus: Burma/Myanmar”, *Political Insights*, 3 (2), September 2012: 30-33.
- [12.](#) Accessed at www.e-ir.info/2012/09/12/growing-up [1] -a-proud-racist-in-burma
- [13.](#) Michael Charney, *A History of Modern Burma*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.36.
- [14.](#) Mary Callahan, “The Generals Loosen their Grip”, *Journal of Democracy*, 23 (4), October 2012: 120-131; Renaud Egreteau, “Country focus... loc. cit.”; Robert H. Taylor, “Myanmar: From Army Rule to Constitutional Rule”, *Asian Affairs*, 43 (2), July 2012:221-236. It is to be noted that these three authors have analysed prior to 2010 the attempts at state building by the military and thus see strong elements of continuity.
- [15.](#) A more facetious trilogy suggested to us in Rangoon is “Of the twenty most powerful individuals in the country, one third are reformists, one third are asleep and the last third are waiting to see!” Interview with a political activist in Rangoon, 28 March 2012
- [16.](#) Accessed at www.mizzima.com/research/8126-text-of-thein-seins-un-speech/ [2] on 30 March 2012.
- [17.](#) This interpretation and that which follows is owed to Jessica Harden, *The Authority of Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012, chap. 7.
- [18.](#) “Myanmar’s Parliament: Power Grab”, *The Economist*, 3rd November 2012; Tom Kean, “Myanmar’s parliament: From scorn to significance”, unpublished paper given at the 2013 Burma/Myanmar Update Conference, Australian National University Canberra, 15-16 March 2013.
- [19.](#) An excellent source of information in English on the activities of the Parliament are the *Political Monitors* published online weekly or fortnightly by the Brussels-based Euro-Burma Office. Available on www.euro-burma.eu.
- [20.](#) Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
- [21.](#) Wikileaks.org/cable/2007/03/07_RANGOON238.html. Retrieved 7th April 2013.

- [22](#). For example, Lois Desaine, “The Politics of Silence. Myanmar NGO’s Ethnic, Religious and Political Agenda”, *IRASEC Occasional Papers*, 17, 2011.
- [23](#). Michael Lidauer, “Democratic Dawn? Civil Society and Elections in Myanmar 2010-2012”, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2/2012, p. 96.
- [24](#). Renaud Egreteau, “Burma in Diaspora: A Preliminary Research Note on the Politics of Burmese Diasporic Communities in Asia”, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2/2012: 115-147.
- [25](#). Ian Holliday, “Myanmar in Reform 2012”, unpublished summary of the Symposium Proceedings, University of Hong Kong 18-20 June 2012.
- [26](#). International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon”, *Asia Report*, 238, 12 November 2012. Electoral reform as part of the constitutional reform required to advance the democratic process is now on the agenda in Yangon. See Kyle Lemargie, “The electoral reform discussion in Myanmar (Burma), unpublished paper given at the 2013 Burma/Myanmar Update Conference, Australian National University Canberra, 15-16 March 2013.
- [27](#). Min Zin and Brian Joseph, loc cit., p. 118.
- [28](#). Lex Rieffel “Myanmar’s economy confronts tough policy choices”, East Asia Forum 31st July 2012. (accessed at www.eastasiaforum.org [3]). The full report is Lex Rieffel, “The Myanmar Economy: Tough Choices”, *Brookings Institution Global Economy and Development Working Paper*, 51, September 2012.