

## MYANMAR'S TRANSITION AND IT'S PROTEST MOVEMENTS

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**Abstract:** In the last two years, Myanmar has made remarkable progress in its transition to democracy. The new President Thein Sein has implemented far-reaching reforms that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Myanmar is now *the* destination for international political and business leaders. Up until 2010, the global media focused on the popular protests that regularly erupted, and the state reaction, which invariably involved soldiers shooting down citizens. External protest movements also developed in and across Western countries. How do we now assess the influence of these protest movements, both domestically in relation to the current state-initiated reforms, and internationally, in relation to the easing of sanctions? This research will re-evaluate the twenty-plus years of Myanmar-related protest movements, as well as examine the response of external protest movements to the current reforms.

### INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1980s, the third wave of democratizations surged across the shores of East Asia. In the mid-1980s Taiwan undertook serious democratic reform, in 1986 in the Philippines Marcos was overthrown by “people power”, in 1987 South Korea held its first Presidential elections, in 1988 “people power” seemed to be on the verge of overthrowing the government in Burma, and in 1989 a pro-democracy demonstration erupted in Tiananmen Square in the People’s Republic of China. With the end of the Cold War, this wave then swept across Central and Eastern Europe. While this wave left in its wake various shades of democracy in different countries, “people power” in Burma was not successful in ousting the government, and instead, the Burmese military, *tatmadaw*, took direct control of the state and put down the demonstrations at an estimated loss of 3000 lives. Indeed, in the 20-plus years since then, the image of soldiers shooting protestors on the streets of the capital Yangon has entered the popular consciousness of citizens of our steadily globalizing society. Despite the closed society and polity of Burma, the global mass media, social networking services and the internet in general, is awash with such images. The issue of human rights and democracy in Burma/ Myanmar has become as high-profile as the anti-Apartheid movement once was. States in the West have responded to both the periodic violent crackdowns in Myanmar, and to the pressure from their own civil society, by implementing increasingly strict sanctions against Myanmar. Despite these sanctions, and despite the demonstrations that periodically erupted in Myanmar, the military remained firmly in power. In fact, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the *tatmadaw* consolidated their power by reaching ceasefire agreements with most of the ethnic minority insurgent groups (some of which had been fighting the state since independence in 1948), and by increasingly dominating both the state and the economy. Importantly for this study, the continued and increasing oppression of civil society activity in Myanmar was another factor that enabled the *tatmadaw* to strengthen their position.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the *tatmadaw* claimed that they were merely providing a stable foundation for a transition to democracy, and that once this foundation had been laid, a transition could begin. Despite this, most Burma/Myanmar watchers counter-claimed that there existed no evidence for any democratization process. However, in 2008, a new constitution was adopted after being approved in a nationwide referendum. General elections were held in 2010, and while these were far from “free or fair”, they did bring into office the new President Thein Sein, who has since instigated a previously unimaginable number of sweeping reforms. A large number of

political prisoners have been released, which was a long-time demand of the international community, a National Human Rights Commission has been established, independent Trade Union Laws have been passed, press censorship has been drastically reduced, and in the words of long-time Myanmar scholar Robert Taylor, there is a “more open approach to government” (2012, p. 222). In the 2012 by-elections, the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 43 seats in parliament, one of which was won by Aung San Suu Kyi. The international community, and the Western states that had instigated sanctions against Myanmar, have responded cautiously, yet positively to this transition. In 2012 both the EU and the US eased their sanctions, and deepened their engagement with Myanmar. It seems therefore, that democratic transition in Myanmar has begun.

While on the one hand, it is certainly not implausible to state that the *tatmadaw* have been the architects and instigators of the democratic transition, this does not mean that civil society has played no part. Even a military dictatorship responds to civil society activism. Even though in the case of Myanmar, this response has sometimes been violent repression, the current *tatmadaw*-enabled transition is giving the population what the protestors have long demanded- democracy. It would seem reasonable to assume that the *tatmadaw* have concluded that some type of democracy will serve their interests, and indeed, the *tatmadaw* themselves call this “disciplined-democracy”. So, what role has civil society and social movements in particular played in the process of democratization in Myanmar? Whilst we must assume that the answer to this question is not zero, to what extent have social/ protest movements been able to influence this process? These protest movements have emerged and developed both internally in Myanmar, and externally, in foreign countries. Of course, we must assume that there is some linkage, but what is the depth and breadth of such linkages? How have such social movements been able to affect government policy and facilitate the democratization process?

The next section will introduce the theoretical framework for this study. The following section will use a number of case studies from post-1988 Burma/Myanmar to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant theories. It will also provide some case studies of very recent protest movements in Myanmar to highlight the changes in civil-state relations that have resulted from the transition to democracy.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Civil Society is that sphere of human activity that is neither public (carried out under the auspices of the state), nor economic (carried out in the pursuit of profit or financial gain). In this way, civil society is referred to as the “third sector”. Although its parameters are highly contested, for the purpose of this study, it is possible to place social movements and protest movements within the sphere of civil society. A compelling case has been put forward by social scientists such as Almond and Verba (1989, p. 29-30) that civil society and its institutions play a critical role in a democracy. They posit that civil society institutions contribute to the creation, and reinforce the consolidation of the democratic political culture. Putman (2000, p. 288) added to this positive view of civil society institutions by stating that they contribute to the formation of *social capital* (trust and shared values) that underpins democracy. However, both these studies focused mainly on economically developed mature democracies. How does civil society fair in developing countries? Civil society in non-democracies is obviously in a very different position than that in democracies. Equally, civil society in newly independent states operates in a very different environment to those in a state with a 1000-year old legal system. While civil society can curb state power (Haynes, 1997, p. 16), this is much more difficult and dangerous in countries with autocratic regimes (Myanmar being a

case in point). In developing countries, there are a number of factors that affect the capacity of civil society to counter state power. The cohesiveness or level of social capital will be an important factor that affects the ability to mobilise citizens. The countries level of development will obviously affect the capacity of individuals and institutions to undertake collective action. It will affect the scope and scale of collective action that civil society is able to perform. The length of time since independence, and the extent of religious and ethnic schisms in the country are also important factors that determine the capacity of civil society to counter state power. Importantly for this study, all of these four factors are important in determining the potential of civil society to carry out collective action in Myanmar. With a 2012 Human Development Index of 0.498, Myanmar is one of the least developed countries in Asia, it has undergone almost continual and widespread ethnic violence since formal independence in 1948, and as such, it is still in the infant stages of state building. While civil society “action groups are at the forefront of efforts to democratize Third World societies” (Haynes, 1997, p. 5), a key question for this research is to determine whether or not this is the case in the democratization of Myanmar.

Social movements/ protest movements are a type of collective action that is neither coerced (by the state), nor financially rewarded (by the market). As the third sector, social movements and protest movements are often most easily identifiable because of their position vis-à-vis either institutions of the state or institutions of the market, meaning that it is most often their confrontation with, or resistance to the forces of the state or the market that characterize a social/ protest movement. Indeed, the defining feature of social/ protest movements is their adversarial position to the status quo and the powerful stakeholders that uphold and benefit from it. In the previously mentioned study, Almond and Verba (1998, p. 18) identified the *participant political culture* in which individuals are oriented towards an activist role of the self in the polity. Although this political culture will take time to develop, and newly independent states that are in their infancy can ill afford to encourage civil society to take up an adversarial role to the state. Such adversarial actions will likely appear to the architects of the state as conflicting with their own efforts of state building.

So, why do citizens form groups to protest? As with all types of collective action, there is recognition by participants that their goal is only achievable through a group effort. In this way, citizens perceive that the cost of participation is outweighed by the potential benefit. Or to put it another way, the cost of participation, which under certain regimes may be potentially very high in terms of personal safety, is outweighed by the perceived benefit, which may be as low as the ability to continue to exist. Jeff Haynes calls these groups, “action groups”, and argues that the common background for action groups in developing countries is generally grim economic performances and demands for political space. Members of such action groups, “consciously link their personal struggle with the creation of democratic and just society” (Haynes, 1997, p. 5). Uphoff says these groups are “channels for promoting economic and social development, [or] contributing to democratization of the economy, society and polity” (1993, p. 618).

One branch of traditional social movement theory also attempted to explain the emergence according to the mobilization of resources. According to this theory, the previously outlined grievances or hardships are not sufficient, in themselves, to explain the emergence of social movements. Instead, economic factors that determine the ability of social movements to mobilize and distribute resources, as in a market-based institution, are determinate factors. However, resource mobilization theory is more applicable to industrialized societies, such as the United States (McCarthy and Zald, 2001, p. 533) and therefore may be less useful for analyzing the social/protest movements in Myanmar, or its globalized pro-democracy social movement. Yet another

string of traditional social movement theory argues that the success or failure of a social movement will be determined by the “politics of opportunities”, whereby political elites control the process and so cause change, thereby “giving” political space that allows social movements to then affect change. The opportunities are determined by the political process that is controlled by the political elites. In their seminal work, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly focus on the dynamics of “contentious politics” that determine “political opportunities” (2001, p. 4). As previously mentioned, while it seems like the *tatmadaw* have been the sole architects and implementers of the transition to democracy in Myanmar, it would be incongruous to conclude that protest movements played no part. Dale argues that the case of the Free Burma movement showed that civil society and political society do not exist in separate vacuums. To be discussed in more detail in the next section, the Free Burma (social) movement could influence political actors and alter the boundaries of the political discourse (Dale, 2011, p. 14). To determine what influence social movements/protest movements have, it is necessary to look at the “politics of influence”, which is the link between civil and political society. While decision makers or policymakers are firmly located within the sphere of political society, what influence can civil society exert?

New social movement theory responded to the transformation in social movements away from economic concerns and towards, for example, environmental issues and the peace movement. These social movements drew their membership from the new middle classes and are concerned with the politics of inclusion and the politics of identity. New social movements are defined as social networks of supporters rather than composing of formal members (Buechler, 2000, p. 46). However, again, the social movements that have been studied within the framework of new social movement theory are concentrated in economically-developed countries. They do not include those social movements that are transnational in terms of transcending borders between developed and developing countries. Dale further criticises such approaches because such new social movements do not engage the state or other political organisations because of an assumption that they will inevitably co-opt the social movement (Dale, 2011, p. 13). In this way, new social movement theory does not account for the possibility of a “politics of influence”, the interplay between policymakers and civil society, in which social movements are able to influence the decision-making process.

Dale argues that the Burmese pro-democracy movement, from an early stage in its development, consciously transformed itself into a transnational social movement. This transnational social movement utilized new technologies, and new social arrangements/networks that had developed as a result of globalization. The Free Burma transnational social movement employed what Michael Peter Smith calls a “transnationalist discourse” of globalization (Dale, 2011, p. 15). In this way, it became part of the anti-globalization movement, seeking to challenge this power [globalization] by “pushing for different rules and by building different ideological understandings” (Dale, 2011, p. 21). This transnationalist discourse challenged the binary distinction between the nation-state and globalization. Regardless of the processes and impacts of globalization that may or may not eventually render the state redundant, the state is still an important actor. Borders, sovereignty and national identity are still important. But, the state and globalization are not mutually inclusive. One is not opposite to the other, and there is not a perpetual state of conflict between the two. The state and transnational practices and processes (that are globalization) are interacting and shaping each other. So, while states may be supporting the overseas operations of *their* private corporations, or may be falling back on the principle of sovereignty (and non-interference in domestic affairs) as a mask for falling short of global norms, civil society actors are building networks that transcend national borders, overcome nationalism and reshape identity and community, thereby creating a new transnational space for collective action.

The transnational networks stimulated a “boomerang pattern” of influence, whereby the domestic NGOs/action groups bypass their state and seek out international partners to pressure the state from outside (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 12). Obviously, this was the case in Myanmar because the state would not negotiate with civil society groups. So, domestic civil society actors consciously created transnational networks that pressured other states (US, Europe, etc) to apply pressure/ sanctions to the Myanmar state.

The following section will apply the previously outlined theories to a number of case studies in a chronological order beginning with the initial protests of 1988 and ending with the most recent protests of 2012 and early 2013. Very simply put, this will begin with a domestic perspective, then shift through to a transnational framework, and finally arrive back at the Burmese domestic situation.

## A PROTEST MOVEMENT EMERGES

If one looks at the Burmese domestic pro-democracy protest movement separately (from its foreign component), then it would likely seem most logical to conclude that it has been a failure. Throughout the 1990s/early 2000s, the *tatmadaw* have been firmly in control of the state and the transition process. While this does not ignore the likely possibility that the *tatmadaw* have, at least to some extent, been responding to pressure from the populace, as expressed by their demonstrations, the *tatmadaw* resolutely and unwaveringly retained the mind-set that it was only they that could maintain the integrity of the nation. On the surface at least, there seemed no avenue through which a domestic protest movement could exert influence on the *tatmadaw*. The 8-8-88 protests were crushed by the military, with considerable loss of life. Many demonstrators were either imprisoned or fled the country. Protests erupted in 1996, and again the military easily suppressed the demonstrations and remained in power. The 2007 so-called Saffron Revolution was not a revolution in any way, in that the *tatmadaw* again suppressed the demonstrations. Even the revered Buddhist monks were treated no differently. All during this time, the *tatmadaw* stuck to their timetable for transition, and would not be swayed by domestic or foreign pressure alike. Even after the new constitution was adopted in 2008, it seemed to most observers that nothing was ever going to change. However, this domestic component of the protest movement should not be viewed separately from the foreign components, and in this way the Burmese pro-democracy protest movement is truly transnational. While the aforementioned demonstrations occurred in Myanmar, this does not mean that they have no transnational element. For example, the existence of foreign media in Yangon at the time of the demonstrations means that the audience is global. While the demonstrators are protesting against some injustice perpetuated by the state, they are appealing to the global norms of a transnational audience. The protests are an example of “symbolic politics” in that “transnationally coordinated symbolic protests [are] designed to evoke a state response that demonstrates to an international audience its willingness to use repressive measures that can be easily exploited by activists in transnational media campaigns throughout the world” (Dale, 2011, p. 66).

Kurt Schock, in his comparative analysis of the people power movements in the Philippines and Burma, uses political process theory to explain how “political opportunity”, resulting from the emergence of elite divisions and influential allies, from variations in spells of violent repression/relative freedom, and from changes in media freedom and information flows, facilitated the emergence and continuation of the protest movement, and determined its eventual success or failure (Schock, 2004, p. 370). In this way, it was the action, or the absence of concerted action by elites that created the perception of political opportunities that the protestors then used to create the space for collective action. For example, Bertil Lintner argues that the recommendation

to the BSPP Congress by Ne Win to have a referendum on a multi-party political system (which was turned down by the Congress) provided a focus for the pro-democracy movement that it had not previously had (Lintner, 1995, p. 90). This announcement provided the protestors with a political opportunity because it was perceived to be an opening up of the political space. However, it also provided a symbol, democracy that would endow further cohesion to the movement, and give it an international voice.

As an example of the importance of global media, BBC reports by Christopher Guinness provided both a voice for the protest movement and had a “tremendous impact on the morale of the Burmese people” (Lintner, 1995, p. 91). It was through the BBC that the upcoming All Burma Student Union (ABSU) general strike was announced, causing a popular upwelling of support and mobilizing large numbers. Dale argues that this transnational feature to the protest movement provided a crucial impetus to the 8-8-88 “people power” protests, as well as mobilizing support from overseas Burmese (Dale, 2011, p. 81-2). Needless to say, the *tatmadaw* came to view Guinness and the BBC as orchestrators of the protest movement, and this perception of the potentially damaging impact of foreign interference was to remain an enduring one.

The uprising that later transformed into the popular pro-democracy movement of 8-8-88 began as a protest against economic hardship caused by the mismanagement of the economy by the authoritarian one-party system headed by Ne Win (Win, 2010, p. 23). In this way, we can see the emergence of the social/ protest movement as a traditional social movement that was triggered by economic hardships, and it is only later that protestors identify democracy as the cure for their countries’ economic ills. Such “relative deprivation” explanations for the emergence of social movements would fall into the realm of traditional social movement theory. Democracy was seen as being merely the best way to solve their nation’s difficulties, rather than as an end in and of itself.

While Lintner argues that the 8-8-88 pro-democracy movement was a grassroots movements because it initially lacked a formal hierarchical leadership structure, there were considerable informal networks being built by protestors (All Burma Student Union, “citizen committees”, etc)(Lintner, 1995, p. 90-92). As previously explained, informal networks are a feature of new social movements rather than traditional ones. Dale argues that this was the same in 2010, “networks connect like-minded activists to one another through a complex web of personal relationships, small group interactions, meetings in private homes, and religious ritual” (Dale, 2011, p. 71). Importantly of course, by 2010, these networks had become transnational.

After the *tatmadaw* seized power in 1988, and suppressed the domestic pro-democracy movement, there was little option left except to seek assistance elsewhere, meaning overseas, and it was here that the movement for democracy in Burma became truly transnational.

#### A TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT COALESCES

So, while the protest movement within Myanmar was unable to effect change domestically, how did the overseas protest movement fair? Since about 1994, Burma’s pro-democracy activists had created transnational networks linking grassroots movements in East and West, as well as in Global North and South. These networks have organized transnational campaigns, with state and non-state actors (NGOs and INGOs) around the globe. Activists who had previously worked on the anti-apartheid campaign or the free-Tibet campaign became involved in the Burmese pro-democracy movement. While the selective purchasing laws were originally made by activists from the Free

Burma campaign and attorneys in Massachusetts, they quickly garnered support from the NLD and ASSK, as well as from seven Nobel Prize laureates who had attended the 1993 fact finding mission to the border regions of Burma. This section will use the case study of the selective purchasing laws enacted by the state of Massachusetts to illustrate the transnational character of the movement. Interaction between the Burmese pro-democracy movement and the International Labour Organization (ILO) will provide further support to this.

In 1994, student activist at Harvard University successfully passed student resolutions in the student government that affected Harvard University's investments in Burma. This spread to other campuses across the US, and these Free Burma student associations formed the early building blocks of the Free Burma social movement. Simon Billenness, who had assisted the students at Harvard University, also approached Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing (who had introduced selective purchasing laws against apartheid South Africa- which were the model for the similar laws against Myanmar). In the same way as the student associations, advocates of the laws said their purpose was to improve the human rights situation in Burma (Dale, 2011, p. 106).

The selective purchasing campaign led to the creation of new laws (in 30 municipalities and Massachusetts) that preventing the state government or municipality from doing business with any company that did business with the Myanmar state. Following on from this, a total of 23 local governments, including the cities of New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, passed similar laws. Four Australian municipal governments also passed Burma laws. The social movement that campaigned for these laws linked activists in the US, and other developed countries, with those in Myanmar. Membership of the transnational campaign of the Free Burma movement included local state and municipal governments in the US, non-state actors, regional governing bodies, such as the EU, NGOs throughout East and Southeast Asia, INGOs, etc. (Dale, 2011, p. 11). Activists in Burma monitored the operations of foreign corporations in Burma, and transmitted such information across the transnational network.

The results of the Free Burma campaign were impressive. The following US based corporations are examples of those that withdrew from Burma; Compaq, Hewlett-Packard, Apple, Disney, Pepsi, Federal Express, Canon, Kodak, Motorola, Levi-Straus, Macy's, Eddie Bauer, Chanel, Proctor and Gamble, and Caterpillar. Non-US corporations also withdrew; Guinness, Evian, Toyota, British Airways, Fuji, Sony, and Siemens. All cited the Massachusetts Burma law or fear of negative publicity that it channelled towards corporations as the reason for pulling out (Dale, 111), and for this reason "these laws successfully influenced corporations to abandon their business operations in Myanmar" (Dale, 2011, p. 9).

The Free Burma's selective purchasing campaign ended up in the Supreme Court. Corporations took the state of Massachusetts to court saying that states could not conduct foreign policy. The US Supreme Court struck down the State of Massachusetts Burma Law on the grounds that it interfered with the intentions of the federal Burma Law that was passed in May 1997. However, despite being trumped by the federal law, the selective purchasing laws were a success in forcing corporations to divest from Myanmar. Why was this?

The selective purchasing laws were a type of boycott, in that the municipal authorities passed laws to boycott companies that were doing business in/with Myanmar. In effect, the corporations had to choose between doing business in Myanmar and doing business with the municipality involved. However, it is probably that the corporations involved also considered other factors when deciding whether to do business in Myanmar or with the municipality involved. James Jasper argues that boycotts can be successful because they rely on "companion tactics", whereby the boycott is accompanied by some type of protest. The boycotts therefore "provide mechanisms for collective moral voice" (Jasper, 1997, p. 267) and it is this moral outrage that brings media attention and bad publicity to the target. Because of this, Jasper observes, "boycotts can attain their goals even

without reducing consumer demand for the targeted product” (Jasper, 1997, p. 264). In this way, it is the companion tactics, not the boycott, that embarrass the corporate decision makers. In this way, the selective purchasing laws were merely a legal formalization of the companion tactics employed by the protest movement. As such, the selective purchasing laws added to its appeal/ attractiveness and reaffirmed its legitimacy as a “just cause”.

Steinberg, a long-time scholar of Burma affairs, has described the influence of civil society on US foreign policy as follows; “Spurred by an effective lobby of democracy and human rights groups and expatriate Burmese, the United States [government] essentially has allowed its policy towards Myanmar to be made by Aung San Suu Kyi...” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 117). This means that there exists a transnational network that links the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar with the US-based lobby groups, and that these lobby groups exert such influence as to “make” US policy towards Myanmar. As an example of this, Steinberg asserts that the US decision to bring Myanmar to the UNSC as a threat to regional security, despite the anticipated veto’s by both China and Russia, and despite objections from Myanmar’s neighbours, “was more to satisfy internal US pressure groups than to effect change” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 119). This could be interpreted to mean that even though the US government did not expect any positive result, it took action as a “symbolic gesture” to placate a domestic constituency.

Protest movements are also an appeal to justice in that they are protests against injustice. In his book entitled “Ending Forced Labour in Myanmar”, Richard Horsey describes the work of the ILO in ending forced labor in Myanmar in the early 2000s. While the government attempted to intimidate, even imprison, citizens that filed complaints with the ILO office in Yangon, a number of citizens continued to do so. While they did this as an appeal to justice, because they understood that the potential consequences of opposing the regime were severe, such actions can be considered as “a protest” (Horsey, 2011, p. 1). Importantly, these citizens were appealing to an international norm (of human rights) that was yet to be recognised by their state. In this way, there existed a transnationalist discourse that linked those citizens living in Myanmar with the evolving international human rights norms. According to Horsey, “activists played a significant role in pushing the Myanmar issue higher up the international agenda. For example, the Geneva-based Burma Peace Foundation... .. played a significant informal role in pushing the Myanmar issue within the ILO” (2011, p. 29). The Foundation compiled huge dossiers of information (in 1994 a 600-page dossier, in 1995 a 1,200-page dossier, and in 1997 a 2,000-page dossier), that were submitted to the ILO’s Commission on forced labor in Myanmar. This information was collected by activists within Myanmar and was sent through the transnational network to Geneva. According to the Burma Peace Foundation, “the point in putting all these documents on forced labor together is to create a blunt instrument with which to beat the skeptical into submission and demonstrate the persistent and wide-scale nature of the abuse” (Burma Peace, 1995). It seems this is a clear case of the existence of the politics of influence, whereby private, civil society actors can influence public policy up to the point in which it is openly admitted by a public official. “Without the efforts of these groups [such as the Burma Peace Foundation], it is likely that the Myanmar case would not have been as well known, or as well documented and it may have taken much longer to get serious attention in organizations like the ILO...” (Horsey, 2011, p. 29).

There seems to be no doubt that the Burmese pro-democracy social movement has played an influential role in the foreign policymaking process of the US and in the policymaking process of the ILO. The transnational nature of the social movement also used state legal apparatus and the associated boycotts to pressure corporations to divest from Myanmar. The following section will use two case studies from Myanmar to



further highlight the transnational nature of the pro-democracy social movement, as well as to illuminate the transition (in terms of state-societal relations) that Myanmar is now undergoing.

#### FULL CIRCLE: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS COME HOME

In 1997, the Canadian mining company Ivanhoe Mines entered a joint venture with the Myanmar government to operate the Monywa Copper Mine in the Letpadaung region of Sagaing Division in central Myanmar. A March 2003 press release from Ivanhoe quoted then deputy chairman Ed Flood saying that “Letpadaung is widely recognized as one of the best undeveloped copper projects in the world,” seeming to indicate the attractiveness and profitability of the venture. However, in 2007, Ivanhoe transferred ownership of its 50% stake in Myanmar Ivanhoe Copper Company Limited (MICCL) to the independent Monywa Trust. The other 50% was owned by the *tatmadaw*-controlled Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings, which had long been a specific target of Western sanctions against Myanmar. In August 2011 Ivanhoe acknowledged receiving \$103 million for the sale of its stake to Norinco (China North Industries Corporation), one of China’s largest state-owned industries. So, why did Ivanhoe, renamed Turquoise Hill Resources in 2012, sell its stake in the Monywa Mines?

Mizzima News Agency, an Indian-based news company, and the Canadian Friends of Burma have been, according to Ivanhoe Mines, carrying out a “long running disinformation campaign” (Ivanhoe, 2010). Indeed, the contents of the Ivanhoe Mines website seems to indicate that Ivanhoe have spent considerable time and resources on countering the claims of others regarding the Monywa Mines. It has a large number of documents on its website (Turquoise Hill Resources) dedicated merely to denying the claims of others (Ivanhoe, the facts). This pressure has come from the protest movements (as shown by the efforts of Ivanhoe to deny their claims). The Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) is a NGO working for human rights and democracy in Myanmar, and it seems to be very closely connected to the Canadian Parliamentary Friends of Burma (PFOB). According to the CFOB the, “CFOB will continue to work closely with the multi-party group of Canadian Parliamentarians called, Parliamentary Friends of Burma (PFOB)”. Jason Kenney, a Canadian MP, acknowledged “the hard work” of the CFOB in a speech given at the official launching of the PFOB in 2007. It would be plausible to assume that these two organizations work closely together and are indeed more akin to partners. As in the case of the Free Burma movement, the case of the CFOB and the PFOB illustrate that civil society and political society do not exist in separate vacuums. The CFOB are able to influence political actors and alter the boundaries of the political discourse, and is therefore, another clear example of the existence of a “politics of influence”. In 2005, the Canadian parliament passed a resolution on Burma, calling for trade and investment sanctions, UNSC intervention, and “tangible support” for the Burmese democratic movement. Even though it was passed before their official launching, the nascent PFOB were the main driving force behind the passing of this resolution. Members of the PFOB were among those Canadian MPs that met with Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar in February 2013.

The CFOB calls the Monywa Mining project “an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe”, because of the open-pit mining technique. Since the “opening up” that has accompanied Myanmar’s transition, domestic news agencies in Myanmar have been reporting on the escalating protests at the mine (Oo, 2012). In November 2012 protests erupted over complaints that more than 3,100 hectares of land in the Letpadaung region had been confiscated to make way for the \$1bn expansion of the copper mine (Robinson,

2012). Importantly, while arrests had been made, the protests continued and intensified. In the same month, the Pyithu Hluttaw (Myanmar parliament) unanimously approved a motion to establish an independent commission to investigate the mining project. The parliament responded to the demands of civil society actors, and so would appear to be an example of a democratic process. Furthermore, it is evidence for the expansion of political space, the opening up of “political opportunities” that allow civil society actors to undertake collective action that then influences the political process. For this reason, the interaction between civil society and the political decision makers can be explained using “political process theory”. Does it also mean that Myanmar’s democratic transition is real and substantial?

In 2008, the Myanmar government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Italian-Thai Development Public Co. Ltd., and then in 2010, signed a 75-year operation agreement for the Dawei Development Project in southern Myanmar. According to initial estimates, the project, located about 20 miles from Dawei, will cost US\$ 58 billion, and will be completed in a number of phases. The first phase, costing approximately US\$ 8.6 billion, to be completed by 2014, was to include a deep-sea port, coal-fired power plants, an industrial zone, a highway and railroad. A 160-kilometre, six-lane road and railroad is also planned to connect with Kanchanaburi Province in Thailand through Yebyu Township, and will include oil and gas pipelines running alongside the route. As such, it will provide Thailand with a gateway to the Indian Ocean, and was dubbed by its developers, “the new global gateway of Indo-China” (Szep, 2012). However, in January 2012, the No. 2 Electrical Power Ministry Minister Khin Maung Soe said that a 4,000-megawatt coal-fired power plant project to be built in the Dawei special economic zone in southern Burma will be cancelled. “In fact, we took this decision after reading articles in the media, and we decided to stop this mega-project which would generate a huge amount of power. But we are still considering whether we should continue a small power plant project of 400 megawatts or not,” the minister said (Thet, 2012). Such local media would not, under the previous military government, have been allowed to write articles that criticized a government development project. In this way, it is evidence of the increased press freedoms, and it is further evidence of the increasing political space/opportunities that are available for Myanmar’s burgeoning civil society to undertake collective action/ protests. A Yangon-based representative of an environmental non-government organization described the project cancellation as “a massive victory for civil society campaigners” after their successful campaign against the Chinese-funded Myitsone dam in Myanmar’s north-east (Robinson, 2012). The Myitsone dam project was suspended by President Thein Sein in September 2011, in response to the “the people’s will”.

As the project is a transnational one, it would seem natural that transnational networks exist within the protest movement against the Dawei project. Thai-based environmental NGOs have been very active in campaigning against the Dawei project. For example, three Bangkok-based civil society organizations Ecological Alert and Recovery–Thailand, Healthy Public Policy – Thailand, and Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance issued a joint statement expressing “grave concerns” over the Dawei Deep Seaport and Industrial Estate Development Project. In January 2013, cyclists of the Green Bike cycling group pedaled from Yangon to the Dawei area to raise awareness about the Dawei project and its environmental impact. The group and the crowds that turned out to support them are “indicative of the rapid rise of citizen activism in Myanmar” (Rhineland, 2013). Again, activities such as this reflect an expanded political space available for civil society to carry out collective action/ protest.

## CONCLUSION

So, has the third wave of democratization finally reached the shores of Myanmar? The answer to this question is most definitely, yes; a process of democratic transition has begun in Myanmar. Using political process theory, our case studies have showed that the political opportunities for civil society collective action have increased markedly. This means that the political space for non-state actors has expanded as would be expected during a period of democratic transition. Our case studies further show that this expansion of political space can be easily observed in an analysis of the content of media reporting. The media is now able to openly criticize government projects. Furthermore, we can see the emergence of a new politics of influence, whereby civil society actors, through a social movement, are able to exert influence over decision makers in the political sphere. This interaction between civil society and political society is regarded as a key process of a democratic system of government. Importantly however, has the emergence of these democratic processes merely resulted from the elite decision to reform the government system, or has it resulted from the interaction between the political and civil societies?

Because of the worldview and rationale of the *tatmadaw*, it is most logical to conclude that the input of domestic civil society on the process that led to the instigation of the transition in Myanmar was minimal. Whilst this does not mean that the *tatmadaw* did not initiate a transition to democracy because it knew that this was what the populace wanted, it does mean that the *tatmadaw* were in total control of the creation of the framework within which the transition to democracy would occur.

Contrasting to this, civil society in the states that enacted sanctions against Myanmar were very closely involved in the policy making process. Indeed, the case studies show that the protest movements were the instigators, the driving force behind the selective purchasing laws. These laws were merely one part of a boycott campaign that forced a large number of companies to divest from Myanmar. Our case studies have shown that the transnational social movement was influencing policy in North America (the selective purchasing laws and the 2005 Canadian Burma resolution), in Europe (at the ILO) and in Australia (the selective purchasing laws). However, whether or not this actually influenced the Myanmar government to initiate a transition to democracy is another matter entirely.

It may be said that, on the one side, in Myanmar, there was too little civil society involvement in the initial transition process, whilst on the other side, in Western states, there was too much involvement. In sanctioning states, the policy failed to take into consideration the strategic geopolitical imperative of countering the dramatic rise of Chinese influence in Myanmar, which was a stated objective of all regional state's engagement policies. It also stemmed from a collective failure to understand and properly articulate the inherent and considerable dangers of a hurried and poorly planned democratic transition. Connected to this, the policy was not built on an understanding of the worldview of the *tatmadaw*, and sought merely to demonise the Myanmar government as a *pariah* state. Because of this, the sanctions policy included no dialogue and this, by itself, rendered them utterly ineffective. If the sanctions are intended to encourage some change in the targets behaviour, then this policy must include some dialogue. There is no way for a sanctions policy to be effective if it does not include some avenue for communication. It will be perceived to be a belligerent act (a cheap attempt at regime change) by the intended target, and this will only stiffen resolve. The *tatmadaw* and the sanctions against Myanmar are a case in point.

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