THE INFLUENCE OF THE BURMESE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES ON THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF BURMA

An outline of the regime's shift towards disciplined democracy and the influence it had on the ability of Aung San Suu Kyi to start the process of democratization.

Abstract:
Aung San Suu Kyi is a symbolic and cosmopolitan norm entrepreneur, which has been promoting democracy in Burma from 1988. This status made her popular among the Burmese and appealed to the United States. The popularity became apparent when Aung San Suu Kyi's party won the elections in 1990. However, despite this victory she was unable to start the process of democratization until 2010. This thesis will argue that this was the result of the historical and context culture which in 1990 influenced the military regime in such a way that the elite perceived the promotion for democracy as a threat to their political power and reduced the openness and responsiveness to the democratic norm of the political opportunity structures. In 2010 the historical context changed, as a result of the increased Chinese influence, which became uncomfortable for the Burmese regime. In order to remain in power they realized that they had to find a new ally to support their military regime. This ally was found in the United States, but their support came at a prize; the regime had to democratize. Due to the cultural context which had remained the same, the regime only defected to the idea of democracy, instead of changing its attitude towards the democratic norm. Subsequently, contested elections were organized of which the regime acknowledged the results and consequently this led to the start of the process of democratization.

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Table of content

Introduction

According to Dahl, democracy enables a large variety of positive effects on the governance and population of a state (1998). For example, it prevents cruel and authoritarian rule, encourages prosperity and guarantees fundamental (human) rights (Dahl 1998). Sen argues that it is because of these beneficial effects, that democracy is internationally acknowledged as the most favorable form of governance (1999, 11).

At the end of the 1980s, this realization has led to many uprisings in states without democratic government (Kopstein 2000). Similar demonstrations were visible in Burma in 1988, led by Aung San Suu Kyi (Freedom House 2013). In spite of this and notwithstanding the fact that her party won the elections in 1990, the political top rank did not accept the democratic norm which she promoted until after the elections in 2010. This remarkable phenomenon raises the question: Which factors explain why Aung San Suu Kyi was unable to start the process of democratization in 1990 and made this start possible in 2010? This thesis will examine how the political opportunity structures in 2010 had changed in such a way that, unlike in 1990, the democratic norm was accepted by the Burmese political elite and the process of democratization had been started. To determine the (causal) relationship between the domestic structures and the process of democratization, a historical approach within a method of 'process tracing' will be used. This method allows involving the analysis, description and interpretation of the relevant Burmese historical and cultural context, which affected the political opportunity structures (McNabb 2010).

The results of this research will lead to more elaborate insights into the mechanisms used by 'norm-entrepreneurs' to promote democratization. Also, hopefully, these results will contribute to the overview of the factors which are necessary to enable a 'norm-entrepreneur' to succeed in the promotion of democracy. Furthermore, this research could possibly have a social relevance by giving more insight into changing other authoritarian states to democratic states.

The setup of this thesis is as follows. Preliminarily, a theoretical framework will be provided, starting with the constructivist approach, followed by a definition of democracy and closed with a discussion on the diffusion and promotion of norms. Subsequently, the political opportunity structures will be defined, as well as the influence they have had on the promotion of democracy. Thereafter, this thesis will set out the historical and cultural context of Burma leading up to the elections in 1990 and the constraints they posed on the democratization. Afterwards, the same will be done in the period leading up to the elections in 2010. In this section, it will also be explained how these contexts positively influenced the start of the process of democratization. Finally, the capstone of this thesis will be provided, containing summarization and discussion on the explanatory factors behind the start of democratization in Burma, and its future.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Constructivism

In this thesis a social constructivism framework will be applied. Constructivism emphasizes the interaction between states and the social context this creates, which in turn determines states' identities (Chandler 2013, 218). This theory has developed since the fall of communism and has evolved into several 'generations' over the years. The first generation prioritized the constitution of norms. The second generation

however, focused on the diffusion of norms through norm entrepreneurs (Chandler 2013, 219- 221). According to Acharya, both these views have a number of shortcomings (2004, 242-243). They ignore the role of the domestic institutional context and do not fully acknowledge other existing norms deeply rooted within a culture or history of a state (Acharya 2004, 242-243). Therefore, a third generation was developed in the 2000's, which aimed to take norms within the institutional, cultural and historical context of the state into account (Chandler 2013, 216-222). This thesis will be in line with this last generation. First of all however, the definition of norm will be elaborated.

Norms are meanings or expectations which are shared and which implicates the understanding of the 'logic of appropriateness'; meaning, norms define appropriate and acceptable behavior (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 897; Katzenstein 1996, 1-32). According to McFaul and Dahl, an example of a norm is democracy (2004, 149; 1998). Although often shared, democracy has a large variety of definitions (Collier and Levitsky 1997). One of these definitions is created by Wright, who defined democracy on the basis of research conducted among countries which are transitioning from military regime to democratic rule (2008, 226-227). He concluded that these countries all conducted contested elections (Wright 2008, 226-227). Such elections are elections which are not completely free and fair and of which the process is influenced by the regime, although the results of such elections are not pre-determined by the regime (Wright 2008, 226-227). Wright further argues that, because the countries have this overarching aspect and are the transitioning face of democracy, a minimal definition of democracy should be used (2008, 226-227). This overlaps with the definition of Schumpeter, who merely focuses on democracy as a system in which elections are conducted (Schumpeter 1943). This thesis will combine Schumpeter's definition with the definition of Dahl to emphasize that the mere conducting of elections is insufficient to determine whether a country has transitioned to a democratic system. In order to classify a state as such, the regime also has to acknowledge the results of these elections. This combination leads to the following definition: Democracy is a political system in which the citizens can choose their political leader in reoccurring elections and the government responds to the preferences of its citizens (Schumpeter 1943).

Sen argues that it is internationally acknowledged, that the aspects of democracy as mentioned above could have beneficial effects on the governance and human rights of a country (1999, 11). Therefore, the democratic norm is being spread to countries which are non-democratic (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). In the following section the diffusion of a norm will be explained both on the international and national level.

2.2 Norm emergence and acceptance

First, the diffusion of a norm on the *international* level. According to Finnemore and Sikkink the international diffusion of a norm happens in three stages (1998, 895). The first stage is the international norm *emergence* (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 901). After the norm is accepted by a critical mass of states; a tipping-point has been reached. When this leads to the acceptance of the norm by more and more countries, the second stage of norm *acceptance* has been reached (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 902). Subsequently, the norm diffusion enters the third stage which involves norm *internalization*. This internalization entails the incorporation of the democratic norm within the states (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 895).

Second, the diffusion of a norm on the *national* level. As argued by Risse, the first stage of national norm *emergence* can be reached when the democratic norm appeals to the top ranks of the non-democratic political system of the state receiving the norm (1994, 208-210). Once these elites redefine appropriate behavior, the threshold for the 'tipping-point' is reached (Gladwell 2000, 12; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). When this point is reached, the elite start to accept the norm more and more as their own and thus the state enters the second stage of norm *acceptance* (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 895). The last stage of norm *internalization* can be reached when the top echelon does not only alter its attitude towards the norm, but also conducts policy in line with the international norm (Risse 1994). This last stage will not be further explored, because this thesis focuses on the start of the democratic transition. Instead, the emphasis in this thesis will be placed on the first stage and the beginning of the second stage.

2.3 The norm entrepreneur and the promotion of democracy

In order for a state to reach the stage of norm emergence and subsequent norm acceptance, the norm has to be introduced to the country. Goddard and Finnemore and Sikkink both developed theories in which this introduction is done by an actor who "has strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community" (Goddard 2009, 251; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 896). All three consider these "strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior" norms. Therefore, they argue that the actor can be seen as a 'norm-entrepreneur' (1998, 896; 2009, 251).

Goddard emphasizes that an entrepreneur is not a simply a powerful actor or a successful political leader; he or she has no political power of their own, but does have the capacity to promote a norm (2009, 251). Finnemore and Sikkink argue that norm entrepreneurs can call attention to certain issues by 'framing' the issue (1998, 897). Framing is defined as putting the norm into a frame in which it appeals to the broader public understanding and to political top rank (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 897; Checkel 2001, 562).

According to Keck and Sikkink and defined by Checkel the main mechanism to appeal and convince the population and political top rank to change their attitude towards a norm is 'persuasion' (1999, 95; 2001, 562). While convincing them, a 'norm-entrepreneur' does not impose the norm on the population and the elite, but only provides the means to enable them to change their minds (Checkel 2001, 562). Hereto, a combination of logical arguments and emotion is used (Checkel 2001, 562; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 914-915). Due to this complexity Keck and Sikkink developed a typology to further specify the mechanism (1999, 95). The first type is 'information politics', the second 'symbolic politics', the third 'leverage politics and the fourth type 'accountability politics' (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 95).

Through *information politics*, a norm entrepreneur tries, by means of informative resources (for example media and speeches), to inform the population about the democratic norm (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96). Keck and Sikkink argue that this enlargers the legitimacy of the entrepreneur, because the norm entrepreneur can use these forums to convince the population of the importance that their government should accept the norm as its own and should conduct policy in accordance with this norm (1999,96). Thereby, the support for the norm promotion could be enlarged and thus his or her legitimacy (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96). Moreover, the entrepreneur provides the international community with information about the domestic

situation (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96). Spreading the information on the international level helps to create awareness for the domestic situation, which could give more support to the norm entrepreneur and give more salience to the norm for the domestic elite (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96).

Keck and Sikkink argue that a norm entrepreneur can also appeal and therefore persuade the international level by becoming the symbol of the norm (1999, 96). This could be done by calling upon his or her individual stories and actions in order to identify his- or herself with the norm (Keck and Sikkink, 1999, 96). Using *symbolic politics* aims at creating awareness among the international community and once this is created and the symbolic status is large enough, the norm entrepreneur can influence the international community to pressure the top ranks of a domestic state to accept the norm (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97).

If an entrepreneur is able to reach powerful international actors, he or she can also seek to exert leverage over these actors (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97). Keck and Sikkink call this mechanism "*leverage politics*" and differentiates between two types, material and moral leverage (1999, 95-97). *Material* leverage can be used as long as the elite are unwilling to change their attitude towards the norm (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97). In this way, the non-adapted behavior of the elite can be held against the international perception of appropriate and acceptable behavior (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97). This leverage could lead the international community to cut off military and economic aid or encourage the community to impose an economic embargo (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97). Often a norm entrepreneur cannot deploy this kind of leverage, because material leverage requires a) the international community to have an interest to pressure the domestic elite to change and b) for the domestic state to be responsive to international pressure (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97).

When this last requirement is fulfilled and the elite promise that they are willing to change their attitude, the state can be held accountable to this promise (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 201; 1999, 97-98). Keck and Sikkink define this leverage as *moral* leverage, which entails that both the norm entrepreneur and the international community can push the state to act according to the principles which they are willing to accept (1998, 201). When the state demonstrates a changed attitude towards the norm, it might not change its policy (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97). As argued by Keck and Sikkink, the state might only change its attitude, hoping to divert the international attention (1999, 97). At the same time however, this altered attitude provides the international community and the norm entrepreneur with the opportunity to hold the state accountable for the principles they have endorsed and thereby provide the means for the fourth type of persuasion, *accountability* politics (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97).

2.4 1. Political opportunity structures

Although a norm entrepreneur can influence the attitude of the political elite, as stated by the third generation of constructivism, he or she is not independent of the political system (Cox 1987, 395; Joseph 2008, 115). Whether these actors are more influenced by the structure or vice versa has stimulated a structure/agency debate which revolves around the issue within political science of how the (causal) relationship between structure and agency is constituted (Joseph 2008, 115; Shilling, 543). The direction of this causal relationship has led to the creation of many models; on the one hand models which explain the

causal relationship in terms of structure influencing agency, and on the other hand models which explain the causality in the opposite direction (Wight 1999, 109-142). This thesis will follow the reasoning of Cox, Bhaskar and Joseph, which maintains that structures influence agency because these structures already exist for agents to use (1987, 395; 1989, 34-35; 2008, 115-116).

These structures can be viewed as 'political opportunity structures'. Political opportunity structures are described by Kitschelt and Risse as the political regime or institutional configurations of the state, its historical precedents, and the political culture that influences appropriate behavior and decision-making of the political elite (1986, 58-62; 1994, 209). These structures influence the ability of the norm entrepreneur to promote the norm by enabling and constraining the mechanisms the entrepreneur can use (Cox 1987, 395; Joseph 2008, 115-116; Archer 1995, 106; Kitschelt 1986, 61-62; Risse 1994, 208-210).

2.4.2 Openness and responsiveness

Kitschelt argues that the structures influence the choice of mechanisms used by the norm entrepreneur and their effectiveness to a certain extent through their openness to the norm entrepreneur and their responsiveness to the norm (Cox 1987, 395; Joseph 2008, 115-116; Archer 1995, 106; Kitschelt 1986, 61-62; Risse 1994, 208-210). *Openness* influences the extent to which the entrepreneur can access the necessary informative resources to mobilize the domestic population and inform the international community about the domestic situation (Kitschelt 1986, 61-63). *Responsiveness* entails the extent to which the top ranks of the opportunity structures are able and willing to accept the norm as their own and adapt their policy accordingly (Kitschelt 1986, 61-63). As a result, the opportunity structures regulate the access to the domestic and international public sphere (Kitschelt 1986, 61-62; Risse 1994, 208-210).

According to Kitschelt, when structures are closed and non-responsive, a norm entrepreneur is not able to use other informative resources (Kitschelt 1986, 61-62). Closedness and responsiveness are determined by four factors: (a) the number of political parties, which restricts the amount of effectively articulated demand (b) the capacity of legislatures to independently develop and control policy (c) the intermediation between interest groups and the government and d) the aggregation of new demands (Kitschelt 1986, 63). The result of closedness and non-responsiveness is that the norm entrepreneur cannot access the domestic population or the international community to call upon stories to intensify her symbolic status or to act freely (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96). This makes it difficult for the entrepreneur to effectively use information politics or symbolic politics. Additionally, as a result of the closed and non-responsive political sphere, the elite do not change their policy and do not value their international image. This therefore also hampers the usage of leverage politics and accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96; Kitschelt 1986, 61-62).

Contrarily, when the structures are open, the elite are more willing to allow the entrepreneur to promote the democratic norm through informative means and therefore more able to inform the domestic population and the international community (Kitschelt 1986, 61-62). The entrepreneur can also use symbolic politics, because he or she is then more likely to intensify her identification with the norm and thereby his or her symbolic status is more likely to increase (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96). When the openness of the

political opportunity structures entails that the top rank of the structures values their international identity, the entrepreneur might seek leverage over a powerful international actor (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97). If this succeeds and the elite start to change their attitude, it might even become possible for the norm entrepreneur to perform accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 97-98).

2.5 Elite learning and elite defection

According to Tilly and Putnam, the historical precedents and the political culture of the political opportunity structures make the elites subject to 'path dependency' (1994, 270; 1997, 7-8). This idea entails that the order in which changes within the political opportunity structures occur, enable or constrain further change (Tilly 1994, 270). Changes within the structure are the results of strategic choices made by the elites. Therefore, one strategic choice determines if other choices can or cannot be made (Hay and Wincott 1998, 956; March 1978). The strategic aspect of these choices is composed of two aspects; (a) the direct effect of the choice on the policy of domestic structure and (b) strategic learning of the elite directly involved in the decision-making. This latter aspect entails that the elites consider whether the choices are favorable to realize their personal goals or the goals of the domestic structure (Hay and Wincott 1998, 956; March 1978).

Both these aspects are taken into account when the elite have to consort with the promotion of the norm entrepreneur. In a closed political system the promotion of the norm could pose a threat (Beissinger 2007, 69). Especially a democratic norm is threating, because it directly endangers the political position of those in the non-democratic regime. According to Beissinger this threat creates a lesson for the top rank that additional institutional measures need to be made to prevent the entrepreneur from further deploying the promotion of a norm, in order to prevent the top echelon from losing their power (2007, 69). This process of 'elite learning' does not lead to a change in the attitude towards the norm or to a change in the domestic policy (Beissinger 2007, 69).

When the political opportunity structures are open, this change towards norm embracement could occur. Risse, Ropp and Sikkink state that as an effect of the openness of the political opportunity structures, the value given to the international image of the political system increases (1999, 271). Beissinger argues that when this eventuates and the state is perceived negatively, the elite might fear that they will lose their power or endanger their interests (2007, 69). When they fear so, the elite defect to the democratic norm and eventually, it is possible that this leads to a change in the top ranks' attitude towards the democratic norm and a change in their policy (Checkel 1997, 479; Beissinger 2007, 69; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999, 271).

When the elite change their attitude, it means that the democratic norm appeals to the top rank and thereby the state enters into the first stage of norm emergence (Risse 1994, 208-2310). If this rank thereafter redefines appropriate behavior, the 'tipping-point' is reached and acceptance of the democratic norm by the elite has started (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 895).

In short, the diffusion of a norm happens, as Finnemore and Sikkink note, through 3 stages (1998). Whereas they have created a model for the international norm distribution, this thesis further explores the diffusion *within a state*. The emphasis lies on the dispersion of the democratic norm within a military state. The factors which explain why and how this democratic dispersal takes place are extracted. Hereby, the focus

lies on the openness and responsiveness of the political opportunity structures and the influence they have on the choice of norm entrepreneur's mechanisms. Hence, they explain the effect the norm entrepreneur has on the elite's attitude towards the democratic norm.

3. Research Methods

An empirical example of a country in which an attempt is made to diffuse the democratic norm, is Burma. During the Third Wave of Democratization, the military and socialistic regime of Burma was also affected by demonstrations that demanded a democratic government.[1] These demonstrations were led by Aung San Suu Kyi (Freedom House 2013). Aung San Suu Kyi is the most well-known promoter of democracy in Burma and can be regarded as a norm-entrepreneur (Bengtsson 2012). To reiterate, a ´norm entrepreneur´ is "an actor having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community and therefore deploys or invents ideas and information" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 896; Goddard 2009, 251).

First, Aung San Suu Kyi certainly has strong notions about democracy. These notions are stimulated by her father, who was a national hero who freed Burma from the British colonial rule and was a strong promoter of democracy (Bengtsson 2012; Silverstien 1996, 219). Bengtsson argues in his bibliography of Aung San Suu Kyi that this heritage ensured that she quickly attained popularity and was asked to take a leading role in the demonstrations for democracy in 1988 (2012).[2] Although she lived and worked outside of Burma during most of her life, she was still dedicated and determined to democratize Burma (Hlaing 2007, 361-362; Nobel Prize). The extent of her dedication to bring democracy in her country came to light when she became a leader of the demonstrations for human rights and fair elections in 1988 (Hlaing 2007, 362). Even when she was put under house arrest and her followers were imprisoned, she continued promoting democracy unfazed for the next 20 years (Hlaing 2007, 362).

Second, Aung San Suu Kyi deployed her promotion for democracy by providing information through meetings in front of her house (Hlaing 2007, 364; Callahan 1996, 160; Tonkin 2007, 43). Furthermore, she was informed the international media about the situation in Burma. The media paid attention to her, because she had a symbolic status, which was enforced by the house arrest and the Nobel Prize she received in 1991 (Hlaing 2007; Steinberg 2010, 181; Keck and Sikkink 1999, 96).

Consequently, Aung San Suu Kyi can indeed be seen as a norm entrepreneur, because, as Hlaing and Tonkin point out, she enlarged the emphasis on the promotion of the democratic norm and ensured that the Burmese dictatorial regime was noticed by the international community (2012; 2007, 37). Although Aung San Suu Kyi is cosmopolitan and symbolic and in spite of the fact that her party won the elections in 1990, the political top rank did not accept the democratic norm until after the elections in 2010. This remarkable phenomenon raises the question: What factors explain why Aung San Suu Kyi was unable to start the process of democratization in 1990 and made this start possible in 2010?

Following the reasoning of Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, rather than just the promotion of the norm, the

[1] This is pointed out by with Saskia Kunst from Burma Center Netherlands on 5 June 2013

[2] This finding is confirmed in the interview with Saskia Kunst from Burma Center Netherlands on 5 June 2013.

domestic political opportunity structures are sometimes needed to enable the spread of the democratic norm (1999, 271). By analogy of this reasoning, this thesis will examine if the political opportunity structures in 2010 changed in such a way, that unlike in 1990, the democratic norm was accepted by the Burmese political elite and the process of democratization started.

To conduct this research, the independent and dependent variables needed for the observation, ought to be determined for both the elections in 1990 and the elections in 2010. At both points in time, the independent variables are the political opportunity structures. The dependent variable is the start of the process of democratization. Using the reasoning of Wright and the combined definition of Schumpeter and Dahl as a guideline, the start of the process of democratization can be defined as a situation in which the first steps are taken towards a government which is at a minimal level responsive to the preferences of its citizens. These *first steps* entail the holding of one or multiple contested elections in which the citizens can choose their leader or representatives. A *minimal level of responsiveness* is achieved when the government does not pre-determine the results of the elections and accepts the results.

Establishing how this process started in Burma is done by the means of a historical approach. With this approach the (changes within) the political opportunity structures are analyzed from the moment Burma became independent in 1944, until the start of the process of democratization after the elections of 2010 (Porta and Keating 2008, 232). This form of 'process tracing' allows involving the analysis, description and interpretation of the relevant Burmese historical and cultural context, which affected the political opportunity structures (McNabb 2010). With this combination of research methods the effect of the political opportunity structures on the start of the process of democratization will be traced back.

4. Historical and cultural context towards the 1990 elections

4.1 Restricted openness and responsiveness

As mentioned before, the political opportunity structures will be the focal point of this thesis. To recapitulate; the historical precedents and the political culture influence appropriate behavior of elite in the political system and as a result influence the opportunity structures (Kitschelt 1986, 58-62; Risse 1994, 209; Putnam 1993, 7-8). This is also the case for Burma. Therefore, an outline of the historical and cultural background contributes to understanding the Burmese political opportunity structures (Hlaing 2009, 274).

The history of modern Burma starts at its independence in 1948 (Silverstien 1996). From that moment until 1962 Burma was a parliamentary democracy (Silverstien 1996). This system ended with the military coup in 1962 led by General Ne Win (Silverstien 1996, 223). According to Silverstien and Keling, and as evidenced by the Revolutionary Council, he was of the opinion that a parliamentary democracy was insufficient to serve a socialist state (1996, 223; 2010, 133; 1962). Thereafter, Ne Win installed a military regime and from that moment on Polity IV Report and Asia Watch defined Burma as an un-free country, in which all human rights are neglected and freedom is restricted (1996, 224; 2010).

Subsequently, on the basis of the four factors of Kitschelt, the openness and responsiveness of the political system can be determined (1986, 63). First, Asia Watch notes that the number of political parties was restricted; Ne Win only allowed his military party, the "State Law and Order Restoration Council"

(SLORC)(1990). This complicates, if not makes it impossible, for those not aligned to the party, to effectively articulate demands (Kitschelt 1986, 63). Second, Silverstien, Keling and Diller point out that in 1974 the SLORC abrogated the constitution and proclaimed martial law, which removed all the legal restraints for the military regime (1996, 224; 2010, 133; 1962; 1993, 396; Kitschelt 1986 63). Third, Silverstien as well as Asia Watch, observed that the media was entirely owned and controlled by the SLORC; all publications in the media had to be submitted and screened by the Press Scrutiny Board and perceived anti-government activities were punishable by imprisoning or death (2001, 84; 1990). As a result, there was no intermediation between the criticizers of the regime and the regime itself (Kitschelt 1986, 63). Fourth, Silverstien argues that the SLORC only articulated the interests that were in line with the policy of the SLORC and therefore no other demands could be aggregated (Silverstien 1996, 224).

Consequently, it can be argued convincingly that the historical precedents influenced the 'political opportunity structures' in such a way that these structures became closed and nonresponsive to other demands than those of the regime (Silverstien 1996, 220).

Following the idea of Hlaing, alongside the historical precedents, the influence of the cultural context will be explored (2009, 274). Ne Win created a culture for the *Tatmadaw* (the Burmese military regime). This culture entailed a harmony principle, meaning that the party tried to avoid internal differences (Hlaing 2009, 274). Hlaing concluded from interviews with former SLORC officials that this culture was aimed at consolidating and enlarging the power of Ne Win and that those party members who would contest the work of colleagues would be sanctioned (2009, 275-277). According to Hlaing this conflict-avoiding culture determined which decisions were favorable for the party and thereby influenced the decision-making of the individuals (2009, 274-277). Following the arguments of Hay and Wincott, the culture thereby influenced the strategic choices, which entails that in order to prevent the party from dispersing and losing power, demands different from ideas of the SLORC were not allowed to enter the political sphere (1998; Hlaing 2009). As a result it can be argued that the de cultural context of 1962 reduced the openness and responsiveness of the political opportunity structures.

4.2 Threats to the political structure

In 1988 the SLORC had to cope with a number of changes. First, Ne Win was no longer able to rule the country, due to his mental instability (Steinberg 2001, 4; Keling et al 2010; Tonkin 2007, 37). His successor was General Saw Maung Maung. However, according to Steinberg, Keling and Tonkin, he could not control the government on a tight rein (2001, 4; 2010; 2007, 37). The interviews of Hlaing with close associates of the regime point out that this did not produce unrest within the SLORC because the party members still treated Ne Win as the supreme leader and thus continued to follow the rules of the *Tatmadaw* (2009, 278-287). Second, Burma had to deal with poor economic condition of the country, which led oil prices to raise abominably (Hlaing 2009, 278). Hlaing and Keling state that this led to nation-wide dissatisfaction about the economy (2009, 278; 2010, 133). Inspired by the multiple uprisings against authoritarian regimes at the time, this dissatisfaction led to demonstrations on the August 8, 1988.[3] Since the

[3] The influence of the multiple anti-communism uprisings mentioned during the interview with Saskia Kunst from Burma Center

martial law of 1974 was still in force, the regime had free reign to act with force against the protestors. Sundararaman also points out that the SLORC made a statement that the demonstrations were not legitimate, because the military had the right to legislative, administrative and judicial power (2013). This demonstrates that the political opportunity structures were non-responsive to the democratic norm.

The closedness of the opportunity structures was also demonstrated by the regime's reaction towards Aung San Suu Kyi. Among others, Aung San Suu Kyi had led the demonstration, and since she was strongly determined to promote the democratic reform, according to Tonkin and Keling, she turned the focus of the demonstration from a call for economic reform, to a call for political reform in terms of free and fair elections (Tonkin 2007, 34; Keling et al 2010, 141). Moreover, she started a political party: the "National League for Democracy" (NLD)(Bengtsson 2012; Silverstien 1996, 219). As revealed by the research of Tonkin, it was due this combination and the closedness of the opportunity structures that Aung San Suu Kyi was perceived as a threat to the unity and power of the military regime (2007, 39-50; Hlaing 2009, 277). Therefore, the regime decided in 1989 to exclude her from the public life by putting her under house arrest and to imprison many leaders of her party, thereby prohibiting Aung San Suu Kyi from deploying information politics (Amnesty International 1989; Tonkin 2007, 39-50).

5. Elite learning and diverting attention

Quickly after the regimes reaction to the widely spread demonstrations, the United States (US) urged the Burmese regime to install a civilian parliament and expressed its strong support for the democratization of Burma (Tonkin 2007, 39). This attention was, according to Steinberg, the result of Aung San Suu Kyi's cosmopolitan and symbolic appearance appealed to the United States (2010, 181). Following the arguments of Checkel, it can be argued that Aung San Suu Kyi deployed her status to perform symbolic politics in order to spread information about the domestic situation in Burma (2001, 560). This persuaded the US to put pressure on the military regime, which consisted of a stop of the aid program, the halt of military assistance and the halt of the narcotics program (Steinberg 2010, 181).

These sanctions, in combination with the large attention for democratization and improvement of human rights, posed a threat to the military regime (Diller 1993, 393). Diller argues that by 1990 this made the SLORC realize that in order to stay in power, the attention needed to be diverted, which is consistent with the elite learning process as defined by Beissinger (1993, 393; 2007, 69). This process led the SLORC to conduct three measures (Hlaing 2009, 288).

First, they created the impression that the wish for free and fair elections was granted (Tonkin 2007; Diller 1993). Subsequently, the non-responsiveness to the pressure of the US ensured that the second condition to deploy material leverage was not fulfilled (Diller 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998, 201; 1999, 97-98). Neither could Aung San Suu Kyi deploy moral leverage, because it seemed that the regime was practicing politics according to their altered attitude, thereby making it seem unnecessary for the US to pressure the SLORC.

Although the SLORC put Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest and prevented the NLD from running any real campaign, the elections were won by the NLD with 392 of the 485 seats in the assembly (Diller 1993, 397). Diller and Sundararaman argue that his showed the regime that Aung San Suu Kyi's symbolic politics was powerful and that this enforced the elite learning process (1993, 2013). Furthermore, Taylor argues that this led to the second measure to divert the attention (2012, 230). According to Diller, this was done by framing the restraints as an attempt to democratize Burma (1993). The measures included that the SLORC announced in the Declaration 1/90, that in order to fill the judicial vacuum created by the martial law, a new constitution needed to be drafted (Diller 1993, 397). This constitution would be drafted by both the SLORC and the NLD. However, only 90 of the 700 drafting-delegates were members of the NLD and were all carefully picked by the regime itself (Diller 1993, 400). Moreover, the information-minister Myo-Thant announced that it could take years to finish the constitution and that the constitution was a precondition for any power to be transferred to Aung San Suu Kyi or other member of the NLD (Diller 1993, 401; Tonkin 2007, 39). Additionaly, in 1992 Maung Maung resigned and Senior General Than Shwe became the chairman of the SLORC (Freedom House 2013). After that, Diller notes, the regime announced that it was essential for the harmony in Burma, that the constitution stressed and protected the leading role of the SLORC (Diller 1993, 401).

The third measure, the Seven-Point Roadmap to disciplined democracy was designed to enforce the second measure (Hlaing 2009, 288). Although the Roadmap's name suggests otherwise, Hlaing concludes from interviews with government officials that, the regime's attitude towards democracy had not changed; the interest of the SLORC remained securing their vested power (2009). Therefore, Hlaing concludes that the Roadmap was merely designed to deflect the international pressure and to ensure that the process towards democratization would only happen through a (very) gradual shift (Hlaing 2012, 204). These measures further closed the political opportunity structures for democratic promotion and thus impeded the entrance of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party to the political sphere.

Subsequently, Hlaing states that it can be argued that the historical and cultural context, translated in the *Tatmadaw*, determined the strategic choices for the members of the SLORC by emphasizing the importance of remaining harmonious (and in power) (2009, 279). The combination of this context, together with the threat posed by Aung San Suu Kyi and the US, created a process of elite learning. Consequently, this ensured that the political opportunity structures remained closed and non-responsive. It was therefore impossible for Aung San Suu Kyi to successfully deploy other mechanisms than symbolic politics to promote democracy (Hlaing 2007, 45). Consequently, the process of democratization could not start after the elections in 1990 (Diller 1993; Hlaing 2009).

6. Historical and cultural context towards the elections of 2010

6.1. Chinese investments

The continuation of the SLORC's power was challenged by the very poor Burmese economic conditions (Keling et al 2010, 141). These conditions made it necessary in 1988 for the regime to replace the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' with a more market-oriented economy, which opened the market to foreign

investors (Haacke 2010, 122; Keling et al 2010, 141). According to Haacke and Bert, the regime remained its focus on protecting its power and avoided political interference. Therefore the SPDC turned to China, because China shared these ideas about trade (Haacke 2010, 122; Bert 2004). China was willing to invest in Burma because it wanted to protect the sea lines through which the oil runs and to enlarge its influence in Southeast Asia (Bert 2007, 19-20).[4] Due to the fact that Burma was closed off from other international financial aid, China quickly became one of the largest investors and closest international partners of Burma (Myoe 2007, 120; Haacke 2010, 114; Keling et al 2010, 141).

According to Bert, the aspirations of China to gain more economic control on Southeast Asia led China to encourage Burma to become a member of ASEAN in 1991(2004, 271). The regime was willing to do so because it would further increase the economic growth and reestablish its legitimacy in Southeast Asia (Bert 2004, 271). Katanyuu notes that the considered membership was perceived controversial by the US and the European Union (EU) because they perceived the consideration as an act legitimizing the Burmese regime. They therefore threatened the ASEAN with economic sanctions (2006, 842). In spite of these threats, Burma became a member in 1997 because, besides China, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines also had economic and political interests in Burma (Katanyuu 2006, 830-836).

As soon as Burma became a member, the regime started to attempt to increase its legitimacy by changing its name from the State Law and Order Restoration Council into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (Steinberg 2010, 181). However, this change towards a more democratic name was not accompanied by a real democratic change, causing the United States to pose a trade embargo on Burma (Steinberg 2010, 181). Myoe argues that China took advantage of this economic vacuum and became the largest economic power in Burma (2007, 19-20).[5]

Besides the economic benefits provided for by China, Haacke argues that China gave Burma political support (Hlaing 2010, 119). According to Hlaing, the SPDC tried to improve the political assistance as an assurance for their political power (2010, 119). This political support translated in the support for the way the SPDC handled Aung San Suu Kyi, the support for the Roadmap of Democratization in 2003, and the open opposition to the idea of the EU and US to pose more sanctions on Burma in 2006 (Haacke 2010, 120). This political protection ensured that the military regime, despite the international pressure to release Aung San Suu Kyi, could continue her house arrest constraining her promotion for democracy (Haacke 2010, 121; Hlaing 2012, 204). Moreover, the Chinese economic support effectuated that the impact of trade embargo was close to zero and thus ensured that the political opportunity structures could remain closed and non-responsive to the democratic norm without serious consequences (Haacke 2010, 121; Hlaing 2012, 204).

6.2 Chinese Political influence

The combination of the political and economic support made the SPDC more and more dependent on China. According to Hlaing, the regime felt uncomfortable with this position, because it realized that the

[4] This finding of Bert is confirmed during the interview with Saskia Kunst from Burma Center Netherlands on 5 June 2013.

[5] This finding of Myoe is confirmed during the interview with Saskia Kunst from Burma Center Netherlands on 5 June 2013.

Chinese support would come at a prize (2012, 204). Li, a Chinese scholar, notes that the military regime always distrusted any external power, including China (2008, 123). According to Li, this is the result of two aspects. First the *Tatmadaw* in which the elite have been socialized to focus on protecting the harmony within the party and avoid the entrance of outside influences (2008, 123). Second, according to the interviews conducted by Haacke, the distrust is also the result of the different interests of China and Burma; China wanted to enforce its economic position and Burma wanted to protect its political interests (2010, 122). This tension grew when China could not stop the economic sanctions posed by the EU in 2006 (Haacke 2010, 120). As a result of these sanctions, Burma could not conduct trade with other countries than China, making China almost completely dependent on Chinese investments and trade (Haacke 2010, 120). Steinberg points out that as a result of this position, the regime feared that China domination would lead to public unrest, which eventually could turn the population against the regime (2001, 234). By 2007, the historical context had changed substantially, causing the need for changes in the political opportunity structures.

The precise changes will be determined by the cultural context. This context had not changed; the *Tatmadaw* culture was still present. By 2008, the regime had protected its political position through the constitution which was installed in a referendum which was held only three days after the cyclone Nargis had caused enormous damage in Burma (Freedom House 2013).[6] The constitution stated that a quarter of the seats in legislatures were to be reserved for the military and that the military members have the right to nominate one of the three presidential candidates. Also, all members of the regime were to have immunity for official acts and criticism of the constitution would be punishable by 20 years in prison (Freedom House 2013).

With their political power securely protected the regime then become able to find a counterbalance to China without large consequence to their power.[7] The regime found this counterbalance when Secretary of State Hilary Clinton announced a change in the US 'Burma Policy' (Haacke 2010, 130). Haacke states that the SPDC had send signals that it was interested in improving the bilateral ties between the US and Burma (2010, 130). These signals included that in 2009, Burma had invited Stephen Blake, Director of the Office for Mainland Southeast Asia, to visit Burma (2010, 130). This resulted in the announcement of the US that it was prepared to engage in constructive engagement (Freedom House 2013).

7. Counter balance and defection

As a result of this counterbalance, the need for China's political support reduced. However, accompanying this, the need to give in to the demands of the US increased (Haacke 2010). Subsequently, the SPDC realized that if it wanted to remain in power, it had to be more open and responsive to the democratic norm (Hlaing 2012, 204-205). This slightly more open and responsive political opportunity structures led to a process of elite defection (Beissinger 2007, 69). Subsequently, the regime announced to organize elections for 2010 in which the NLD was allowed to contest and promised to reduce the house arrest of Aung San Suu

[6] This finding is confirmed during the interview with Saskia Kunst from Burma Center Netherlands on 5 June 2013.

[7] This is an interpretation of Saskia Kunst from Burma Center Netherlands on 5 June 2013.

Kyi by half (Hlaing 2012, 204-205). According to Hlaing, the regime hereby seemingly changed their attitude towards the democratic norm.

Seemingly, because, they ensured, in accordance with the Roadmap to Democracy, that any change would go slow and was directed by the regime (2012, 204-205). This entailed that Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest was extended with 18 months, restraining her possibilities to actively deploy any mechanism to promote democracy or her party (Freedom House 2013). Furthermore, the constitution of 2008 ensured that a quarter of the seats would go to the military. Hlaing concludes from a survey that the Burmese knew beforehand that the regime would win the elections (Hlaing 2012, 204-205). Combining these elements, the elections could be defined as contested elections as described by Wright (2008 226-227). The contested elections are, to reiterate, the first steps of the start of the process of democratization.

However, in order to argue that the process of democratization has truly begun, the second condition also needs to be fulfilled. To reiterate, this condition entails that the government did not pre-determine the results of the elections and accepted the results. This happened after the elections were won by the military party the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) with 76 percent of the seats and with Thein Sein as the president (Hlaing 2012, 204-205). Six days after the elections, the president released Aung San Suu Kyi and, according to Hlaing, entered into dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss how and in which policy areas they could cooperate (Freedom House 2013; 2012, 206-209). Furthermore, President Sein demonstrated that the democratic norm appealed to him by redefining appropriate behavior. Resultantly, he demonstrated his acceptance of the democratic norm by shedding his military uniform, registering civil candidates, ensuring that the power would no longer be concentrated in one person or agency (by providing the parliament with the function of 'checks and balances') and by ending the propaganda and censure in the newspapers (Freedom House 2013; Hlaing 2012, 205). Hereby, the regime demonstrated that it acknowledged certain aspects of democracy and that it had changed its attitude towards democracy. Therefore, it can be argued convincingly that at this point, the process of democratization had reached the 'tipping-point' and that it had truly entered into the stage of norm *acceptance*.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the historical context - due to threatening Chinese position - influenced the regime to make alterations within their political structures. However, the content and speed of these changes were still determined by an unchanged cultural context in which protecting the regime's political power remained the primary interest. Resultantly, the elite did not completely *accept* the democratic norm, but rather *defected* to this norm. Subsequently however, this defection slightly increased the openness and responsiveness of the political opportunity structures. However, as demonstrated, small changes may have large rippling effects. Since these small changes led to contested elections of which the results were recognized, the changes were sufficient for Burma to fulfill the conditions for the start of the process of democratization.

8. Discussion

This thesis tried to answer the question: Which factors explain why Aung San Suu Kyi was unable to start the process of democratization in 1990 and made this start possible in 2010? In analogy of the

reasoning of Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, the domestic political opportunity structures within Burma were further explored. It has been determined whether the political opportunity structures in 2010 changed in such a way, that unlike in 1990, the democratic norm had been accepted by the Burmese political elite, causing the start of the process of democratization (1999, 271). The research performed demonstrated that the influence of the historical and cultural context influences the openness and responsiveness of the political opportunity structures to the democratic norm. The openness determines which resources the norm entrepreneur can access and thus which mechanisms the entrepreneur can use to promote democracy. The responsiveness of the opportunity structures determines what effect this promotion has on the attitude of the elite towards the democratic norm.

In 1990 the historical and cultural context, the *Tatmadaw,* influenced appropriate behavior and the strategic choices in such a way that the elite perceived the democratic demand as a threat to their political power. As a result, the SLORC closed the structures and restrained Aung San Suu Kyi and her party in the promotion for democracy. Further, the non-responsiveness also made the regime insensitive to the outside pressure to accept the democratic norm. Consequently, an elite learning process took place, which meant that the international attention was diverted by seemingly democratic changes, which were solely conducted to stay in power.

In 2010, this interests remained of crucial importance for the military regime. In other words; the cultural context had not changed. However, the historical context did change; the Chinese economic and political influence became too large for the regimes to be comfortable with. As a result, China was perceived as a threat to the regime's political power. The regime therefore ensured its power in the constitution of 2008 and started looking for allies who could function as a counterbalance to the Chinese political threat. This balance was found in the support of the US, but it did not come without consequences. A change of allies meant a change of attitude, in this case particularly regarding the democratic norm. Due to the fact that the *Tatmadaw* culture was still present however, the regime merely defected to this norm, instead of accepting it wholesome. Resultantly, Aung San Suu Kyi was still under house arrest, unable to actively promote democracy or her party. Moreover, the election results were controlled in order to ensure the continuation of military power. After the elections, the tipping-point was reached when Aung San Suu Kyi was released from prison and allowed to enter into dialogue about the policy with the current president. Subsequently, democratic reforms were conducted. Consequently, it can be argued convincingly that the start of the process of democratization had begun.

Optimists argue that indeed this is the case because in 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi became a member of parliament. Furthermore, the media, internet and economy became more liberalized and political prisoners were released (Freedom House 2013). Pessimists argue that Burma still has lot off difficulties to overcome because the regime still violates human rights on a regular basis, especially when repressing the insurrection of ethnic minorities (Freedome House).

Regardless of these differences of opinion, the continued democratization would be beneficial to the Burmese and should therefore be stimulated (Sen 1999). How this should be done depends on what determines the start of the process of democratization. This thesis has argued that the political opportunity

structures are possibly one of the most determining factors, at least as exemplified in Burma.

Steinberg and Hlaing share this idea and argue that in order to democratize a country, attention should be paid to the political opportunity structures and that the only way to change these structures is by persuading the elite to gradually shift to democracy (2010; 2012). According to them, this persuasion can be done by the international community (Hlaing 2012; Steinberg 2010). This idea has been partly exemplified by the findings of this thesis because it demonstrates the influence of China and the US on Burma. Therefore, it can be argued that more attention should be paid on how the international actors have played a role in the Burmese process of democratization. Subsequently, this angle could possibly provide more elaborate insights into the explanatory factors behind the process of democratization and could therefore contribute to answering the central question of this thesis: What factors explain why Aung San Suu Kyi was unable to start the process of democratization in 1990 and made this start possible in 2010?

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