

Book Review

Democratisation of Myanmar

Reviewed by Patricia Ordóñez de Pablos, The University of Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain

Having visited Myanmar several times in the few last years and being interested in Myanmar challenges today, when heard about the publication of the book “Democratisation of Myanmar” in 2016, I was anxious to get a copy.

The analysis of Myanmar transition to democracy and the circumstances in which this transition takes places has attracted attention and interest for a wide variety of reasons. The fact that Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi is the leader of this process against the powerful military elite has increased the international curiosity even more.

In the last decades Myanmar suffered many tumultuous events (early 1960’s, late 1980’s) and many things happened till the November 2015 elections and now (2017). The author of the book will help readers to understand the factors and circumstances that contributed to Myanmar transition from military rule for almost five decades to the situation now, with Htin Kyaw as President of the Union of Myanmar from March 30, 2016. Aung San Suu Kyi serves as State Counsellor of Myanmar and leader of the ruling National League for Democracy. The book finishes its analysis before the 2015 elections but the insights provided will shed light to interpret and understand the results of the polls.

The book is structured in 6 chapters. Introduction provides a review of literature of political science on democratization, democratic transition and democratic consolidation, discusses existing gaps on democratic transition works and explores the main drivers that triggered democratic transition in Myanmar.

Chapter 1 *Political developments since independence* analyses the history of Myanmar (formation of Union of Myanmar, the process of achieving independence in 1948, the parliamentary democracy period, insurgency problems, the military coup back in 1962, military intervention in Myanmar’s politics, etc.) to provide clues to understand the change from democracy to military rule in the country.

Chapter 2 *Role of civil society* examines the historical concept of civil society, its role and status since Myanmar’s independence on January 4, 1948, under different regimes. Among other interesting topics, it explores the role of civil society both inside Myanmar and across the borders, Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and how civil society

groups were organized and responded to this natural disaster, the role of students and social media.

Chapter 3 *Power elites* focuses on the role of Myanmar elites before 1990, in 2010 elections and after them. Among others, the authors focus on U-Nu led AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League), Ne Win-led BSPP (Burma Socialist Program Party), Than Shwe-led SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) and the future winner of Myanmar 2015 elections, the NLD (National League for Democracy) led by Nobel Prize Aung San Suu Kyi,

Chapter 4 *Influence of external agencies* discusses the role of these agencies (sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union, the involvement of China, India, United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and analyses the effectiveness of sanctions imposed on the country.

Chapter 5 *Institutional effects* explores the role of several institutions with an important role in Myanmar: the National Convention, the initiatives of the military towards democracy in 2013, the big Buddhist monks community, the entrenchment of the military role, the 2010 election, the 2012 by election and the first steps of the parliamentary democracy.

The author of the book is Nehginpao Kipgen, an assistant professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, whose area of expertise is South Asia and Southeast Asia, with specialization on Burma/Myanmar. He published singled-authored books in Routledge, Oxford University Press and Ruby Press; as well as peer-reviewed academic articles and articles in various international newspapers and magazines.

Who will find useful reading this book? Academics, researchers and students interested in Asian and Southeast Asian Studies, democratization processes, democratic transitions, political process and peace and conflict studies, especially concerned with Myanmar.

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Nehginpao Kipgen

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