

The Persistence of Military Rule: The case study of Myanmar

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Abstract

In an era of declining military involvement in politics, Myanmar's military remains as a politically active military both as a regime and as an elite political actor across the World. After 22 years as a pure military regime from 1988 to 2010, Myanmar's military introduced a tutelary system in which they can enjoy institutional autonomy and independence, control over security portfolios, veto power over constitutional changes, 25% of an unelected seat in Parliament and inhibiting prosecution for past crimes (the 2008 constitution Myanmar). Why did Myanmar's military survive and remain in politics even after the political transition? How did the junta manage to have control over the democratic institutions? This thesis will account for reasons for military persistence of the military's domination in politics and argue that the longevity of the military as a regime and as a domain actor in Myanmar can be pinned on attributions of two factors: the strength and unity of the military and the Burmese Buddhist culture. Culture may be a controversial topic to account for the military's actions in the perspective of normative assumptions; however, it is a necessary factor in explaining the strength of the military and the absence of significant pro-democracy movements in Myanmar which can threaten military rule.

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To my Aunty Myint

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GLOSSARY

NLD	National League for Democracy
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
BSPP	Burma Socialist Program Party
MEC	Myanmar Economic Corporation
MEHL	Myanmar Economic Holding Limited
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Introduction

In the third wave of democratization, because of poverty, inequality, poor economic performance and people's expectation of general election, the legitimacy of authoritarian regime decrease. As a result, the democratization process is relatively fast and easy, in contrast to the first and second waves (Huntington, 1991). On the other hand, Schedler (2002) argues that we should not forget that the democratization process also can end up with authoritarian manipulations. This argument was correct, and the authoritarian leaders – in Hungary, Thailand, Egypt, Turkey, Myanmar, etc.- manipulate and exploit the democratic institutions to strengthen their autocratic rule. However, most of the works of literature agree that the role of the military in politics is no longer dominant under a democratic framework. Instead of a pure military or authoritarian regime, a new form regime-type, Competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way), Democracy with adjectives (Collier and Levitsky), electoral democracy (Schendler 2006), embedded and defective democracies (Merkel 2004)-with combined characteristics of authoritarian and democratic regimes - emerged after the third wave of democratization ended in the 1990s. Despite the fact, in Myanmar, the military has complete control over the democratic institutions with unelected seats in the Parliament and remains the veto player of the political institutions.

Most of the literature on the military study explains when and how military coups occurred and how the prolonged presence of the military in politics has ended after the cold war. Therefore, thus far, studies about the military as a regime and political players are much related to democratization and why military regimes have the shortest life sperm (Geddes 2003, Gandhi 2008, Geddes, Wright & Frantz 2014, Kim & Kroeger (2017). Scholars offer different theoretical explanations for fragility and instability of military regimes; power struggle and

endogenous threat, leader's insecurity, the lack of political parties and institutional power to keep law and order without relying on sheer force of violence and repression (Debs 2006, Gandhi & Przeworski 2007, Lai & Slater 2006 and Magaloni 2008). All these explanations miss explaining Myanmar's case where the military lasted 22 years as a pure military regime without facing another military coup nor replaced by another authoritarian regime from 1988 to 2010. In 2010, it successfully managed to rule the country with a tutelary system.

Myanmar case is not necessarily unique if we consider the time before third-wave democratization (Huntington 1991). In Chile, the military regime lasted 17 years (1973-1990), in Panama 21 (1968-1989) years and Paraguay for more than three decades (1954-1989). However, those military regimes ended in third wave democratization, and Myanmar's military regime only started in 1988 amidst the popular massive democratization movement. At the time when Myanmar's military regime emerged, the democratization and "return to the barracks" literature have already developed different theoretical explanations such as urbanization, the professionalization of the military, the degree of political institutionalization, the increasing presence of civil society organizations, the role the of the middle class, the economic crisis or the international leverage, (Routledge 1992, 1-18, Macmillan 1990, 3-21) to explain the difficult nature of military as a political actor after democratization period. Myanmar's puzzle remains comprehensively unanswered how the military could have resisted the democratization wave and lasted 22 years as a pure military regime and still a domain actor in the political arena.

An only a limited number of scholars have studied the persistence of Myanmar's military rule. Hlaing (2004 & 2006) and Than (1993, p 24-63 & 2004) examined the Military's internal structure, the historical legacy of military and interactions between the military junta and opposition parties, ethnic armed groups and argued that military rule in Myanmar continues

because the military could have eliminated all potential internal threats which could end up as another military coup and is always the most organized institution. However, both of these approaches failed to explain why the military has become the strongest and most organized institution and why the oppositions were weak. Although the military can be responsible for oppositions' fragmentations, it is contradicted with democratization theory. Because although theories said relying only on repressive apparatus could lead to democratization (Debs 2006, Gandhi & Przeworski 2007, Lai & Slater 2006 and Magaloni 2008), there were limited number of mass demonstrations in Myanmar during the military regime from 1988 to 2010.

Another explanation is related to an ongoing civil war, which has born along with independence in 1947. Because of insurgencies and ethnic armed groups, the role of the military becomes more important than any of its rivals. However, this explanation has an endogenous problem and did not consider the possibility that the military is the main reason for civil war and ethnic conflicts. While acknowledging the value of different explanations and contributions of different scholars, existing studies on Myanmar's politics fail to provide a systematic explanation of the long presence of military in Myanmar's politics regardless of its unpopularity.

This thesis will try to fill in the gap of existing studies of Myanmar's military by analyzing why there was a limited number of mass demonstrations. I will also examine if there were internal splits and power struggles within the military institution, which could lead to a military coup and bring down the regime, and if so, how could military junta have managed to prevent them. In the first chapter, I will briefly discuss the conceptualization of regime types and fragility of military regimes and define terms for "persistence of military domination in politics". In the second chapter, I will present the theoretical framework, research question(s)

and hypothesis of the thesis. Historical background of Myanmar and empirical analysis will be in the third and fourth chapters.

In doing so, both the historical institutionalist approach and cultural relativistic understanding are fundamental. Putnam (1993, 7-8) argues that institutions that embody “rules and standard operating procedures” shape the decisions and behaviors of political actors. Moreover, institutions are also shaped by history since they are “enduring legacies of the past political struggles” (Thelen 1999, 388). The cultural relativistic understanding is required to explain the persistence of Myanmar’s military rule from both “internal threat” and a limited number of mass demonstrations regardless of repression and unpopularity from “outside threat”. I will examine Myanmar’s people understanding of democracy, how it is different from western normative assumptions of democracy and how that understanding impacts on country’s political and social mechanisms. Details will be discussed in the following theoretical framework and methodology section.

Chapter 1. Defining terms and main concepts

1.1 Defining terms: Presence of the military in Myanmar politics

Before discussing the theoretical framework for its persistence in Myanmar's politics, I will clarify more about Myanmar's current tutelary system. Myanmar has been under different forms of military rules for almost fifty years since 1962. After the successful military coup in 1988, the leader of the coup established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), later renamed as State Peace and Development Council and rule the country with a military dictatorship until 2010. In 2010, a domain democracy (Merkel 2004) system was activated, and the military junta are ruling the county with a constitutional grantee which includes institutional autonomy, control over security portfolios, veto power over constitutional changes, 25% of an unelected seat in Parliament and inhibiting prosecution for past crimes (the 2008 constitution Myanmar).

The Commander in Chief is authorized to appoint a 25% seat allocated in the national Parliaments.¹ Moreover, the commander in chief nominates one of the three presidential candidates who is not required to be an elected MP while the other two candidates are. Any major constitutional amendment will be required a 75% + 1 military vote and have to hold a national referendum.

There are other constitutional authorities that help the military to overpower its oppositions. For example, according to Article (201) of the 2008 constitution, the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC), the highest executive body consist of (11) members- 5 of them are active-duty military officers– can declare a state of emergency either locally or nationwide. In other words, the 2008 constitution grants a legal channel to the military to impose direct military rule.

¹ Myanmar is constitutionally federal state and has two parliament at national level: Pyi Thu Hluttaw (lower house) and A Myo Thar Hluttaw (upper house)

In the following section, I will briefly discuss regime types and the fragility of military regimes before building theories for my thesis.

1.2 Regime types: Beyond democracy and authoritarianism

In political science, the conventional conceptualization of regime types: democracy and authoritarian (Przeworski 2000), are no longer sufficient. After the Cold war, the number of authoritarian regimes has democratized and held general elections with multiple parties. However, along with those democratic features, the persistence of authoritarian characteristics also remains and poses significant challenges to conceptualize the regime type. Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995 & 1998) argue that “The boundary between democratic and non-democratic is sometimes a blurred and imperfect one, and beyond it lies a much broader range of variation in political systems”. As a result of this, scholars created a new concept of a hybrid regime where a combination of democratic and autocratic elements can be found. Therefore, after the third wave of the democratization period, the study of hybrid regimes became the major field in political science studies.

There are several types of hybrid regimes that lead to different conceptualizations; hegemonic party-system (Diamond et al., 1995), illiberal democracies (Zakaria, 1997), competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2002), embedded and defective democracies (Merkel, 2004) and electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2002, Case, 2011). Among these conceptualizations, Merkel’s typology of tutelary/domain democracy is suited most to Myanmar’s current political situation. Merkel (2004) develops the typologies of defective democracies – exclusive democracy, illiberal democracy, delegative democracy and tutelary democracy – and provides an analysis of the causes and features of the different four outcomes. His research shows that path of modernization, level of modernization, economic trends, social capital and civil society as the main causes of hybridity, defective democracy (Merkel 2004).

During his studies, only Chile, Ecuador and Indonesia were under the domain category, and another domain democracy is unexpected since the military rule is the shortest form of the regime and more likely to democratize than other types of authoritarian regimes (Gandhi 2008). In this thesis, since I will analyze the persistence of military rule in Myanmar, both as a regime and domain actor from 1988 to the present, I will use the term military rule.

1.3 Fragility of military regime/rule

Although existing literature reveals the fragility of military rule, theoretical explanations for military regime instability is different. Geddes (2003) argues the hat fragility and instability of military regimes can be explained by either military officers' preferences for preserving the unity or corporate interests of the military. Moreover, she argues that the nature of military institution can be exposed to internal splits, which can lead to a military coup and the end of the regime. She categorized two types of military regime: personalist and collegial military rule. The first type is rule by "one-man rule", while the later one is ruled by the military institution where power resides in senior members of the military. Geddes, Frantz & Wright (2014) argues that collegial military regime types are more exposed to fragility and instability than personalistic military regime type since disagreements, power struggles, and splits can come up from the military executive body. In a personalistic military regime, a single military junta controls all the decision-making process and can prevent potential security threat (Geddes, Frantz & Wright 2014).

There is another assumption that soldiers will return to their original place, the barracks, once their reason for coups or other specific objectives is attained. Military intervention in politics and the country's business is not exceptional in the world political arena. Huntington (1991) argues that soldiers do not have the intention to remain in politics and thus initiate the political transition once the political orders are restored. However, this assumption sees the

military as a “national defenses provider” and military officers as a selfless national guardian. However, this assumption was outdated in the contemporary era since militaries in today’s World identify themselves more than the defense provider and as national security protector (Fitch 1980). Therefore, it is naive to claim that the military regime has a short lifespan since they will go back to the barracks.

The third explanation for the fragility of the military regime is the democratization wave. Geddes (2003) argues that it is challenging to neutralize threats from regime opponents and democratic movement without having a political party. According to her, the lack of political parties is another factor to account for the fragility of a military regime. She explains in time of economic crisis; the military regime has fewer resources to overcome since the military is only trained for defense mechanism. From her perspective, having political parties offer resources to face political and economic challenges. Therefore, military leaders tend to democratize and secure a political place more than any other authoritarian regimes. By doing so, they can also prevent potential bad fate. (Gandhu & Przeworski 2007 & Magaloni 2008)

In short, two reasons – internal threat and external threat can account for the fragility of military regimes. Myanmar’s military regime (1988-2010) can be classified as a collegial military regime; however, Geddes’ differentiation of collegial and personalist military regime types is not necessarily important in analyzing Myanmar’s military persistence in politics. Even among the two types of military regime, it is argued that collegial regime types have a shorter lifespan. Myanmar’s military lasts more than 20 years as a collegial military regime type.

1.4 Explaining longevity of the military regime

Thinking military as an organizational institution had been little studied by scholars not only for Myanmar case particularly but also in global level. Accordingly, Stepan drew the attention of scholars, politicians and activists to questions that were overlooked, such as, “How is and what are the groups dynamics within the military? How united or divided are the military

units? How can these dynamics and differences favor or hinder the transition process?” and introduced a landmark concept on civil-military relationship study. Stepan (1973) explained the military’s role to a “new professionalism”, which was a new finding from Huntington’s (1957) idea of a non-political political, professional military. Stepan’s argument can be summarized as the following.

Huntington’s classical definition of military professionalism is that the military’s fundamental duty is to protect from external threats and conduct warfare; thus, its professionalization is incompatible with social and political roles. Therefore, professionalization depoliticizes the military. Although Stepan partly accepted this argument, he developed a new concept. In Latin America, the primary mission of the military is not external warfare but internal. As a result, soldiers are not only skilled in military affairs but also trained for wider social, economic and political arenas. Therefore, when internal security concern is the military’s main matter, professionalization politicizes the military, in contrast to Huntington’s argument and even encourages its role expansion. (Stepan 1973 p 47-65) Myanmar’s military believes that regular political interventions are their duties as they identify themselves as the guardian of the State. Therefore, Stepan’s new professionalism approach is appropriate to examine the longevity of Myanmar’s military.

By analyzing military regimes in Latin America, Stepan studied the reciprocal relations between the power of the State and the power of society which Stepan categorized as “political society” and “civil society”. Stepan (1985) argued that if the military can secure a high degree of political and economic autonomy, it is likely to maintain the regime. Stepan (1988) defined state as

“the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive system that attempts not only to manage the state apparatus but to structure relations between civil

and public power and to structure many crucial relationships within civil and political society” (Stepan 1988, p 4)

In this way, bureaucratic and coercive systems become autonomous as they seek relations with and between civil society and political society.

The role of the National Security Doctrine is also a necessary requirement to defend and propagate the new professionalism trend in Latin America. (Stepan 1973). Essentially, Stepan paid attention to five factors: doctrine, internal stability and security, economic development, new professionalism and society. Stepan’s theory is, a change in threat type – from external to internal- leads to changes in the content of doctrines, then this changes in doctrines lead to the transformation of new professionalism and this new professionalism shifts the role of the military in society from soldiers to politicians. With Stepan’s argument of new professionalism and civil-military relationship, the persistence of Myanmar’s military can be explained since successive Myanmar’s military put tremendous effort to be autonomous. Myanmar’s analysts and scholars even argue that Myanmar’s military functions as a “state within a state” (Smith 2003, Holliday 2011))

Chapter 2. Explaining the Myanmar's puzzle

2.1 The Puzzle in brief

After Geddes (2003) provides a finding that military regimes are the most unstable and fragile authoritarian regime type, a couple of follow-up studies confirm her argument - military regimes have a shorter lifespan than another form of autocratic rules and are likely to democratize (Gandhi 2008, Geddes, Wright & Frantz 2014, Debs 2016). However, regardless of its unpopularity, Myanmar's military regime lasted 22 years from 1988 and 2010 and still remains in politics as a tutelary actor after the democratic transition in 2010. When the military coup happened in 1988, scholars and democratic oppositions thought it would not last long since it came to power under the name of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) by brutally cracking down the popular 1988 countrywide protests against the military-led dictatorship regime. Thus, the persistence of Myanmar's military makes this thesis's puzzle, and I will investigate explanatory variables to examine the domination of the military in Myanmar's politics.

2.2 Theory building for the persistence of Myanmar's military rule

There are two types of threats to a military regime's stability: internal, which come from power struggles and disagreements among senior generals and external. In a more detailed explanation for external threat, it is challenging for the military junta to manage political and economic issues or manage the country and society without coercive means. Geddes explained that it is because of the lack of a political party. Having a political party can address both internal and external threats since a political party can provide two major advantages to military junta: making power-sharing commitments/deal with oppositions and access to the state's resources (Gandhi 2008, Gandhi & Przeworski 2007). In spite of theories stating that the military regime has the shortest lifespan among autocratic regimes, Myanmar's

military shows its persistence in Myanmar's political arena since 1988 as a pure military regime for 22 years and as a domain actor till now.

This thesis will account for factors contributing to the persistence of military regime in Myanmar from 1988 to 2010. Two-sided explanation – culture and strength of the military - will be required to explain how military junta has prevented both internal threat - why there is a limited number of internal power frictions and external threat - why there are not a significant number of popular mass demonstrations and protests regardless of military's unpopularity and repressive rule. In doing so, I will use cultural relativism, and historical institutionalism approaches. Considering culture as a controversial topic to account for or explain military's actions, scholars pay less systematic attention. Thwin (2001, 483-505) argues, "Various cultures have substantive and meaningful differences in terms of beliefs and values, based on equally substantive differences in assumptions regarding perceptions of time, power, legitimacy, salvation and ultimate reality". From this perspective, culture can be critically argued – or systemically analyzed -as an explanatory variable for the persistence of Myanmar's military rule.

I argue that Myanmar's people fear of chaos over tyranny and understanding of political legitimacy plays a significant role in the reason behind the lack of mass protests during over two decades of military rule. In terms of "the strength", it will be argued that Myanmar's military has always been the most organized institution and getting more unified as the military rule continues. Even the major democratic opposition party, the National League for Democracy (, NLD) is not matched in terms of strength, unity and organized institution.

The existing studies explained the strength and unity of Myanmar's military from rationalism, culturalism, agency framework and formal institutionalism perspectives (Myoe 1998, Steinberg 2001, Selth 2002 and Jagan 2004). I argue these perspectives are not sufficiently enough to explain Myanmar's puzzle, and only a historical institutionalist approach

can explain why the military has been the most organized institution in the country and why the other actors are weak. I elaborate more on why other perspectives are not enough.

Geddes (1994, 7-8) argues that politicians are rational maximizers and follow their personal interests. Rationalist scholars argue that politicians were united when that unity could bring the goal they were pursuing. These arguments are mostly made from the oppositions (Hlaing 2009). Rationalist argument may be true in general, and politicians often make decisions based on rational calculations; however, these arguments fail to explain why there were no serious problems coming up from military officers who were forced to retire from their offices.

Building on Weberian theory, Putnam (1993), Fukuyama (1995), Huntington (1996) and Harrison (1997) argue that cultural traditions are remarkably enduring and contribute to major social and political behaviors of their societies of today. Steinberg (2001, 50-52) explains that the culturalist approach put focus on “the continuity of the traditional attitudes toward power as personalized and information as power”. Scholars who analyzed from a culturalist perspective put focus on the importance of powerful political figure in Myanmar’s factional and power struggles. They argue that formal institutions in post-colonial Myanmar have always been weak (Selth 2002, 263-278) and only informal institutional practices such as patron-client relationship dominant within Myanmar’s government institutions. This argument makes the institutionalist scholars’(Selth 2002 & Myoe 1998) arguments –by initiating reforms with promotions and rewards by the ruling military junta make the military united and strong - insufficient. However, culturalist scholars pay more attention to how the powerful figures – military junta- tried to keep their place rather than why the military remained as the strongest institution of the country.

Scholars who used the agency framework to explain Myanmar’s military persistence in politics argued that the military government lasted and remained united because soft-liners had

lost the power struggle and only hardliners had left within the government (Jagan 2004). However, they neglect the facts that not all senior junta who had remained in the government were hardliners (Hlaing 2009). On the other hand, from institutionalist perspectives, institutions shape behaviors of political actors and institutions are also shaped by history. Institutions help us to understand the behaviors of political actors, and once institutions are set, actors follow the logic of that system (Thelen 1999, p 392-393).

This thesis tries to fill in the gap of existing literature on the persistence of Myanmar's military by examining why there were limited numbers of mass protests and no major split that could bring the regime. Following the cultural relativistic and historical institutionalist approach, the culture of the mass in Myanmar, historical traditions within the military's structure, the ongoing civil war, ethos, organizational structure of the military and junta's interactions with opposition parties and ethnic armed groups and other major societal actors. The dynamic and relationship between the regime and opposition parties, ethnic armed groups, the general public and pro-democracy exile group, will be extensively analyzed.

2.1 Research Question and hypothesis

Based on the theoretical discussion of the fragility of the military regime and Myanmar's case above, this thesis aims to answer 1) **Why did Myanmar's military regime last 22 years and still remain in politics as a domain actor?** To answer this question, I tackle other related questions: 2) how did the junta manage to have control over the democratic institutions? 3) Why there were a limited number of mass protest regardless of the military's unpopularity? 4) Why internal splits and tensions within military institution did not lead to the end of the military regime?

Here, I hypothesis that Myanmar's military lasts for more than two decades because it is the most united and organized institution in Myanmar and thus could have eliminated internal frictions and threats that could lead to regime change. In other words, Myanmar's people fear

of chaos over tyranny, belief in the doctrine of “Karma”,² and understanding of political legitimacy plays a significant role in the reason behind the lack of mass protests during over two decades of military rule.

2.2 Method

In this study, I use process tracing. Process tracing can explain the causal relationship between isolated explanatory variables (Collier 2011) and the response variable. George and McKeown (1985, p35) provide the earliest explicit definitions of process-tracing that PT is used to analyze within-case to evaluate causal processes. According to George and McKeown, process-tracing does not only compare different variables in each case but also investigates and explains the process of how and why the final outcomes have occurred. In other words, various preliminary conditions are translated into particular outcomes (1985, p35). Therefore, the process-tracing method allows both hypotheses testing and generating, unlike the statical method.

Therefore, the process-tracing method will permit me to unfold the various events or situations and analyze the result of each event, and their interconnectivity to another event since this method combines theories, chronological events and comparison. This methodological approach is specifically well suited to analyze the longevity of Myanmar’s military regime because it focuses on casual conditions, counterfactual analysis, configurations and mechanisms to answer “why” and “how” questions. Process tracing’s central elements of path dependency, critical junctures, periodization, sequential and situational interplay between casual conditions and mechanisms will be applied to analyze to argue this thesis’s main argument of why and how the Myanmar military has survived over 20 years.

² Believing in reincarnation, both good and bad happening to human beings are consequences of their actions in the past or past lives (Walton 2017, 2)

In order to understand the historical legacy of Myanmar's military and development of the shifting relationship among different societies, particularly the Business community, the state and the military, process tracing method is necessary. By using the process-tracing method, I will firstly theorize about causal mechanisms linking causes: path dependency, culture, events and outcomes; secondly, I analyze the empirical manifestations of each cause, and finally, I briefly compare findings of my studies to Thailand and Sri Lanka cases.

2.3 Analysis

This thesis covers the period from 1988 to 2010 by focusing on a chronological path-dependency that traces the institutional evolution of Myanmar's military and identifies how it searched to strategically reposition itself vis-à-vis society. Thus, I examine how the ability of Myanmar's military regime in overcoming the economic hardship and Western sanctions, the post-1988 modernization and institutionalization of the military and the informal state-society relations to measure the strength of Myanmar's military. In addition, the historical traditions of the military's structure, the ongoing civil war, ethos, organizational structure of the military and junta's interactions with opposition parties and ethnic armed groups and other major societal actors need significant attention.

To argue culture as an explanatory variable, I analyze the Buddhist culture as Buddhist constitutes 88% of the country population (2014 census). There is another reason for analyzing the Buddhist culture only. In Myanmar, since the independence, power is concentrated in the center, among Burmes Buddhist population, and centralization was also a defining factor for all different governments (Steinberg 2007). Therefore, I will examine what the hegemonic discourses among the Buddhist population are, how Buddhists perceive the autocratic rulers,

to what extent they accept the regime's justification and propaganda, and their understandings of democracy and legitimacy are also examined. I use semi-structured in-depth interviews, archival research and existing literature to analyze my explanatory variable.

Scholars ignore the cultural factor in explaining the strength, unity and longevity of the military rule in Myanmar. While Burmese Buddhist culture-whether or not democracy is compatible with Myanmar's political culture and legitimate form of rule-is not the main analysis of this thesis, I argue that it is important to pay comprehensive attention to the culturally specific mindset of a county which has been isolated from the shared cultural values, political ideology and assumptions of the West.

Until now, the cultural question still remains to be tackled in a study of contemporary Myanmar politics. Not only in Myanmar but in other Buddhist countries' governments - Thailand and Sri Lanka, sought to promote their authority, extend their supporting patronage networks and cement their image as a regime that supported and protected Buddhism (Schober 1997). Having said that, not only Myanmar's consecutive governments but also many Burmese Buddhists believe Myanmar as the stronghold of the authentic and pure doctrinal of Theravada Buddhism³. This mentality contributes a lot to today's Myanmar political and social circumstances. This section will be discussed more in chapter (4).

For analysis, I conduct focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with senior members of major political parties, members of civil society organizations and influential monks in Myanmar. Traditionally raised as a Buddhist and a person who closely followed Myanmar's political affairs, I can easily identify the key

³ There are two major schools in Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana. The main difference between two branches is that in Mahayana, the Buddha of the future plays a vital role and not in Theravada, which focuses on the teaching of Gautama Buddha. A Buddha is a human being who has attained wisdom, in Buddhism, an ideal state of intellectual and ethnical perfection through human endeavors. (an interview with a Buddhist monk)

informants. I also use the snowball sampling method to find out possible key informants who are less well-known.

2.4 Limitations

This thesis investigates the persistence of military dominance in Myanmar's politics from historical institutionalism in addition to a cultural relativist approach. Culture plays a significant role in the explanation of the path dependency in the context of historical institutionalism in Myanmar. However, I generalize and use only Buddhist culture and do not include the culture of other ethnic and religious communities. Another limitation is time and resource to explore ethnos and the role of international community factors in a more detailed perspective. However, these will be briefly investigated in the analysis section.

Chapter 3. Historical Background of Myanmar's Military

3.1 Soldiers or politicians?

Militaries in countries that have been under colonial rule played a significant role in independent struggles, and politics is not a non-related arena for them (Finer 1975). Myanmar's military has been actively involved in politics and state affairs as a major actor since the late 1950s. It started its roots in politics, emerged as a revolutionary army against the British during second World War and thus, it was formed with politicized young men. (Callahan 2003, Hlaing 2004&2009) Therefore the military junta mythologized their role in the independence struggle and now see themselves as guardians of the State. After independence in 1948, the military was closely involved in the struggles to maintain law and order and preserve the national sovereignty of the 'newly formed' State. By the mid to late 1950s, the junta had established the military as an autonomous power centre, to some extent, to which governments were beholden. Myanmar's military defended the new rulers against challengers and who rejected (or wanted to change) the territorial boundaries of the newly formed state, in spite those boundaries were demarcated by the colony British (Maw 1968). Therefore, it is not surprising that there were disputes by some ethnic groups who found themselves arbitrarily incorporated into one State as minorities. Therefore, since the independence from the British in 1948, Myanmar has faced post-colonial challenges such as ethnic insurgencies, separatist movements and the communist threat (Than 2012).

Because the country was extremely divided after the British departure, state-building and security became the prioritized issues that allowed Myanmar's military to play the role of the guardian. Fearing armed attacks from the communist forces and ethnic insurgencies across the country, prime minister U Nu urged the military as an interim caretaker in 1958 (Callahan 2003, 184-185). The military managed to hold general elections in 1960 and returned to the

barracks. Yet, ethnic insurgencies continued to intensify since there was no collective agreement for the national identity (Hlaing 2013) and the military coup led by general Nay Win took back control of the country in 1962. As will be discussed, Nay Win continued to reorganize politics in an autocratic direction. He abolished the 1947-1948 Constitution, eliminated Parliament, disallowed political parties, detained government ministers, including prime minister U Nu and persecuted non-Burmese ethnic segments. Since Nay Win's period, Myanmar's military has become a bureaucratized, centralized and organized institution that was fully able to defeat any type of challenges to its state security rivals. (Callahan 2003, 204).

3.2 The pathways to Politically active military (1962-1988)

Military rule during Nay Win's era was a pivotal factor that determined the persistence and unity of the military both as a regime and institution during its continued control in Myanmar's political realm. Nay Win's military regime created its own party, the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) and introduced a Burmese way of socialism which combined an oppressive military dictatorship with socialist economic policies aimed at defeating communist ideology and all ethnic insurrections (Callahan 2003, 204-215). The period of caretaker government was mostly regarded in a positive light considering the military was perceived as competent and effective in overcoming destabilizing factors that had haunted the country since the independence (Holiday 2011, 45-46, Thant 2007, 284-285). Nay Win clearly saw this opportunity and the military's capacity as the most effective ruler and protector of the country, having historically developed and advanced from its earlier anti-British and anti-Japanese credits to becoming active political actors of the State (Callahan 2003, 196-210).

During Nay Win's Burmese Socialist Program Party's rule, Nay Win advanced a coherent hierarchical military regime and institutionalized both formal and informal mechanisms which will remain as a "united and organized organization which can remain

stable from internal threats” (Maung 1998, Hlaing 2009). He repositioned the military a year before the 1962 coup by removing officers who seemed to be potential threats, which led some officers to resign from their military positions or assign overseas diplomatic assignments by prime minister U Nu. Additionally, he reorganized the order of the state vis-à-vis societal actors such as non-military elites, politicians and bureaucratic by limiting their access to the state. (Callahan 2003, 197-202, Win 2008, 1021-1022). For those reasons, despite some internal purges of senior members and whole branches of the military, which will be discussed in the empirical analysis section, the Myanmar military continues to maintain its institutional stability. (Min 2008).

Adopting Linz and Stepan’s (1966, 40-42) analysis on four dimensions of a regime – pluralism, ideology, leadership and mobilization, BSPP’s early years could be categorized as an attempted arrested totalitarian regime with a failed result to have absolute control over its people. Reasons for categorizing the BSPP regime as an arrested totalitarian regime are the following.

Firstly, BSPP was only responsive to the preferences of the military junta and oppressed ruthlessly and silenced the oppositions – students, activists and ethnic leaders -who criticized its rule (Callahan 2003, Boudreau 2004). The killing of anti-coup students, destruction of the historic Yangon University Student Union Building⁴ and brutal response to all who had disagreed with the rule of BSPP were symbols of its anti-pluralism characteristic. In addition, Nay Win abolished all parties in 1964, and only the BSPP remained as the de facto party, later legitimized as de jure political party. (Hlaing 2007, 155). Party’s membership was only comprised of military and labors in the nationalized industries in its era. (Taylor 2009, 319).

⁴Yangon University Student Union building was a symbol of anti-colonial struggle where anti-colonial demonstrations and nationalistic movement have happened since the 1920s.

Secondly, to legitimize the rule of BSPP, Nay Win led military regime developed its own ideology, the Burmese Way to Socialism, as the ground principles for economic and political policies (Silverstein 1963, 716-722, Hlaing 2003, 6-14, 2009). As results, all legal forms of private properties and businesses were eliminated and nationalized (Silverstein 1963, 716-722). In 1964, all private businesses, including small merchants and shops, were nationalized. (Shwe 1985, 55).

Thirdly, although BSPP was a hierarchical military regime, the leadership was centered on general Nay Win. During the rule of the BSPP regime, promotion and advancement of position in the military was based neither seniority nor meritocracy but based on the patron-client relationship, particularly to those considered faithful and/or close to Nay Win (Hlaing 2009). It is said that Nay Win's ultimate authority as the head of State and regime was not necessarily questioned till the end of his rule. (Taylor 2009)

Lastly, the BSPP regime tried to control the private lives of its citizens and regulate many popular activities such as prohibiting horse racing, music and beauty contests, gambling and football matches which were assumed to be unethical and immoral in Nay Win's perception (Taylor 2009, 297-298). The BSPP regime demolished other the post-colonial societal structure and pluralism in order to continue implementing the Burmese way of Socialist policies; attacking traditional believes of Burmese people⁵, removing Buddhism as the state religion and oppressing the Buddhist monk association ⁶. In addition, the BSPP regime implemented new policies in education to stop the spreading of the liberal democracy concepts. This is examined by expelling of foreign scholarship programs including American Ford, Fulbright and the Asia Foundations scholarships, introducing new textbooks published by the

⁵ Across Myanmar, traditional Nat (spirits) worshipping was popular and Nay Win severely oppressed that tradition (Taylor 2009)

⁶ Burmese monks association – Sanga is another strong institution in Myanmar like the military and the role of monks in independent struggles and post-colonial period were always important (Tayllor 2009, Holliday 2010)

government in 1963. All private schools were also nationalized by 1963. (Smith 1965, 295, Taylor 2009, 297-298, Holiday 2010, 50). In this way, Nay Win's BSPP regime could have been able to shut down the country from outside influence completely and promoted its own cultural activities. However, attempts to achieve complete control over the country – governance, economics and people only ended up with a massive economic failure. Less than ten years after the nationalization of all private businesses in Myanmar, the economy started to be unstable. (Hlaing 2003).

3.3 Unsuccessful attempts for economic recovery and collapse of the BSPP

The pitfalls from the nationalization of private business would push away Nay Win's BSPP government from its arrested totalitarian attempts and readjusting BSPP, co-opting and relaxation of exclusive its party membership to some non-state actors became a sample survival way for the regime. However, some senior members were committed to the ongoing socialist ways, and they have disagreed with the idea of tolerating non-state forces. They were retired or forced to leave, and finally, only those who did not have core ideological values or beliefs were left in the BSPP government (Hlaing 2003, 30-38). At the beginning of the 1970s, the BSPP clearly differentiate its two roles: the military as an institution and the military as a government. Yet, the military was the backbone of the BSPP. Twenty senior military generals have retired and became civilian members of the BSPP government (Hlaing 2003). As another step, party membership was expanded to the public, and BSPP became the only de jure socialist mass party while Nay Win still served as party chairman and president. Therefore, although the BSPP was the ruler of the State and Myanmar was a socialist one-party state theoretically, both power and authority were in Nay Win's hand. Based on charismatic personal influence on the military and party, he was able to manage all potential power rivals under control. (Charney 2009, p 134, Hlaing 2003, Taylor 2009, p 317).

Furthermore, Nay Win tried to cure the economic failure of the BSPP's early economic policies as he realized the need to reallocate private businesses. In 1971, the BSPP liberalized some economic policies with the intention of building an industrialized socialist state. However, limited technical, political and financial knowledge made the BSPP regime adopt the typical autocratic measure in the political arena while allowing some level of tolerance to social and economic arenas. (Steinberg 1982, 165, Hlaing 2003, Taylor 2009, 302-345). The BSPP put effort to correct the hostile relationship with the Buddhist monks and expanded its party membership. At the beginning of the 1980s, the BSPP has reached more than two million party members and became a mass-based political party. (Taylor 2009, 318-319).

The BSPP's efforts to rebuild the failed economy created some vacuum for business society, especially the black-market community. The black marketers sponsored the cost of the BSPP regime's state activities, such as the building of new schools, hospitals and supporting state's ceremonies. Hlaing (2003) estimates that, during the BSPP's regime, "more than 90% of the population had to rely on the black market for about 80% of their basic need". (Hlaing 2003, 24-49). Apart from tolerating the black-market community, Nay Win's government re-invited foreign direct investments for natural resources and offshore gas exploring, requesting loans from the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (Hlaing 2003) as a means to reduce the budget deficit. On the other hand, the BSPP kept its iron fist rule and remained as a politically repressive regime.

The collapse of Nay Win's socialist government was unavoidable when the BSPP regime sought to control the black market by demonetizing the banknotes, which accounted for nearly 80 per cent of the country's money circulation with no compensation at all. (Hlaing 2003, Irrawaddy news 2019). Not only the mass but also the bureaucratic and civil servants, including the police and the soldiers started nationwide demonstrations against the BSPP in

1987. An internal coup was followed in 1988 led by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC,) and Myanmar was returned back to the direct military rule. (Hlaing 2003, Taylor 2009). In brief, Nay Win's rule was characterized by socialist economic policies – isolationism and politically oppressed - totalitarianism. Nevertheless, during Nay Win's socialist regime, the military was able to bring stability in the majority of the Burmese regions, which were under communist threats, and it was able to expand its geographical reach. (Callahan 2003, Taylor 2009, 344-382).

Despite the economic failure, Nay Win's BSPP rule opened some spaces for continued military dominance in Myanmar. By the end of the BSPP government, Myanmar's military already had the ultimate power was the main actor in the decision-making process of the state. However, it has failed the socialist economic policies such as the nationalizing of private businesses from big corporate to small department stores (Hlaing 2009) and tolerating of a rampant illegal black-market led the military to re-evaluate its role vis-à-vis, societal actors.

3.4 The 1988 military coup and a new form of military rule

The 1988 countrywide mass demonstrations and strikes were brutally cracked down by the SLORC and became an ugly history in Myanmar, the military institutionalized and transformed by modernization and expansion of its reach beyond the security sector, such as building an economic enterprise, defense service universities, national military museum with new senior members and commands. (Selth 2002). As Taylor (2009) argues, Myanmar's military became the state itself, and the distinction between the state, the military and the government became a blur.

The junta clearly saw the military as being the most suitable actor in taking over the failed BSPP government. Having learned both mistakes, lessons and strategies that the BSPP

have followed, the SLORC government became more practical in structure and policy, which included the elimination of the Burmese way of socialist ideology, reestablishing of civil-military relationship and civil bureaucracy since many bureaucratic staffs and officers joined the mass demonstrations in 1988. (Mutebi 2005, 153 & Taylor 2009, 383-404). The military took over the role of civil service, including assigning military officers in all bureaucratic departments. In this way, Myanmar's military became involved in delivering all civil services. In other words, the SLORC government replaced the socialist ideology with a pragmatic view of the relationship between the state and private capital and thus, the regime allowed the re-legitimizing of businesses, organizing social clubs, private foundations and other civic organizations. (Hlaing 2007, 143-171 & Taylor 2009)

In addition to reallowing private business, the SLORC/SPDC government could have brought the longest period of peace by signing ceasefires agreements with several ethnic armed groups while the BSPP government only relied on military forces to expand its geographical reach. (Hlaing 2007, 143-171 & Taylor 2009). Moreover, the regime also allowed limited pluralism in the society, of course, no- political affairs and which could not challenge the authority of the military. Therefore, there were many non-state actors and groups in the public arena during the SLORC/SPDC regime. (Hlaing 2009). Although the SLORC/SPDC regime has rebuilt its relationship with different actors of Myanmar's society – ethnic armed groups and business society, the regime remained politically repressive in nature.

To maintain the repressive authoritarian state, the military actively improved its organizational and administrative capacity by reserving the highest proportion of the national budget for the expansions of the members of the army, upgrading weaponry and firearms and new institutions, such as the military's own television station in addition to state's own one. (Myint-U 2007, 340 & Selth 2009, 281). The number of soldiers increased from 200,000 to

400,000 during the SLORC/SPDC regime and approximately to 500,000 until 2010. (Selth 2009, 281-286 & Holiday 2011, 72-73).

The military needed to seek alliances from different societal groups to finance its requirements of keeping the loyalty of soldiers and officers. As a result, the SLORC/SPDC sought to build patron-client capitalism with different civilian business partners and military officers. (Maung 2009, 163-190 & Turnell 2009, 635). This includes encouraging entrepreneurship, foreign direct investments and tourism. According to Holliday (2011, 68), the military's effort to build patronized relationship with business partners only caused more chaotic situations in the long run because of the junta's incapability to articulate an effective and efficient economic policy. Because the regime only could have brought economic growth by extracting natural resources and playing a role in the production and trafficking of illegal drug, which led to imposing of the sanctions by the western countries, especially the United States. (Lintner 1999, 414-422 & Holiday 2011, 68). Myanmar became the World's second most opium-producing and trading country after Afghanistan during the SPDC regime (Lintner 199, 411-422). Nevertheless, new elites emerged from patronized business relationships, played a significant role in the strength and persistence of military dominance in Myanmar.

One who makes an argument of the people's desire for democracy in Myanmar, the new business elite class, emerged during the SLORC/SPDC was indispensable. According to Hlaing (2007, 221), the business community of Myanmar – the cronies- contributed to almost 80% of the SLORC/SPDC's legitimating activities and supporting state-organized events between 1988 and 1998. By maintaining the patronage networks to legitimate the military's rules and activities, Myanmar has evolved to an authoritarian semi-corporatist military government from a failed arrested totalitarian during the SLORC/SPDC regime.

The military not only being able to have cease-fire agreements with different armed groups but also maintaining the patronize business relationship, the SLORC/SPDC government could have subordinated and suppressed its rivals in the political arena. Hlaing (2007) argues that the elite business community realized that regardless of the majority's dislike against the regime and public's favor towards democratic oppositions - particularly NLD- there was no likelihood of power transfer to democratic forces in Myanmar's politics. Thus, the business community tried to separate itself from opposition politics.

In this way, Myanmar's military has successfully maintained its unity and institutional capacity in addition to the supports from the business elites, which contributed to the persistence of military rule in Myanmar from 1988 to 2010.

Chapter 4: Empirical Analysis

4.1 Culture of Myanmar and persistence of military rule

In this chapter, I examine the culture of Myanmar's people and analyze if it is compatible with western assumptions of democracy. By applying western normative assumptions, several scholars argue that only true democracy – even if it is minimalist democracy- is the only possible way to achieve peace and development in Myanmar (Silverstein 1996,1998). However, neither what does it mean by “true democracy” is nor how to achieve it is clearly expressed. As is clear, the majority of academic studies of Myanmar and the media quickly make a division of good and evil -democracy as an ideal political system and universally accepted source of legitimacy and military rule as evil- without a throughout analysis of the country's traditionally accepted values and culture. These universalist assumptions ignore the Myanmar people's fear of chaos.

Having mentioned civil war and communist threats in Myanmar in the post-colonial period, the general public of Myanmar's substantial fear is chaos rather than the repressive authoritarian rule. This historically and culturally formed fear of chaos over tyranny among the public (though, of course, not all) is undermined in analyzing the persistence of Myanmar's military rule. Ruling elites exploit this fear- if not share the same fear – and plant a doctrine that security comes first before democracy.

4.1.1 Contemporary Burmese Buddhism

Before doing a deeper analysis of the Burmese Buddhist culture, I analyze the origin of the modern Burmese Buddhist culture briefly and explain how and why it is different from other Buddhist countries. Because a variety of the modern Burmese Buddhist culture and doctrines present a more complex picture that cannot be seen in other countries, and they are not even recognized by Buddhist authorities (Foxeus 2017). The reason behind these complex

and different phenomena needs to be paid more attention to since they reflect the interests of different stakeholders throughout history, identity politics, nationalism and power struggles.

There are two major divisions in Buddhism, Mahayana which is practiced in East Asian countries and Theravada, which is practiced in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Many Burmese Buddhists and the successive post-independence governments tend to believe that Theravada Buddhism, which is the stronghold of pure doctrinal Buddhism, is declining in other countries, and Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka are the only three countries that uphold the authentic values of Theravada Buddhism.⁷ From this belief, the concept of Buddha's Sasana⁸ becomes vital in Burmese Buddhism.

To clarify or define the contemporary is complicated. Foxeus (2016) argues that, from an anthropological impression, Sasana could refer to "Buddhism" as a social fact and mechanism – as institutionalized and grounded in society and incorporated by both the monastic community and laypeople. In the pre-colonial period, Sasana was integrated into and was therefore inseparable from a hierarchical social mechanism in the Bamar community and created the Burmese Buddhist identity (Kirichenko 2009, p.214). Then, this social mechanism was linked to a cosmological, political and economic framework based on Karma, believing in reincarnation, and assuming both good and bad happening to human beings are consequences of their actions in the past or past lives (Walton 2017) and morality which has been called a "galactic polity" (Tambiah 1976, Schober 2011) aka mandala system or core and periphery.

In all Buddhists' belief, the Buddha's Sasana will inevitably decline and eventually disappear from the World. (Forxeus 2016) According to my interviewee, Sasana will last for 5,000 years. However, different narratives of Sasana decline – positive and negative – were

⁷Interview with one of the influential monks (July 13, 2019)

⁸ The original concept of Sasana is threefold, Pariyatti-sasana (study of texts and textual knowledge), patipatti (practice of sila(morality), samadhi(concentration) and panna(wisdom)) and patiyedha-sasana (practice of the attainments of the enlightenment)

employed in the colonial and post-colonial periods in Myanmar to make sense in Buddhist terms of social mechanism. (Houtman 1990, Foxes 2011, Turner 2014) The moral duty to defend and promote Buddhism and Buddha's Sasana, aiming to prevent its decline, was assumed by the Burmese kings and later, this concept was perceived as the collective duty of all Buddhists since before the colonial period. The reincorporation of Buddha's Sasana into Buddhist polity becomes a symbolic relationship between the king and the laymen, the monastic community and the source of legitimacy for the king. (Smith 1965) Burmese kings sought to strengthen their kingdoms and royal legitimacy by promoting Buddhism and being the main patrons of Sasana. (Thant 2001, Charney 2006). As vital sources of legitimacy, Burmese kings also frequently conducted Sasana reforms to purify the monk institutions. (Foxeus 2016)

After losing the first and second Anglo-Burmese wars, King Mindon lost the entire lower part of Burma (Myanmar). Facing the threat of losing all territory, King Mindon initiated Sasana reform and appointed the authority for Sasana, Thathanabaing, the head of monks' (Sangha). That was the first establishment of an official Sangha institution. (Charney 2006) Being appointed by King Mindon, he had the duties to oversee both monastic disciplines and consult the king while enjoying the privileged position. Along with Sasana reforms, Buddhist educational institutions also emerged, and Buddhist monasteries became the main resources of providing basic literacy skills, basic knowledge of Buddhist literature and morality. (Krichenko 2009, 2010 and Liberman 2010) Scholars who studied Myanmar politics agree that well-organized reformist monastic forest orders and Sangha(monk) institution emerged during King Mindone's period. (Thant 2001, Charney 2006, Krichenko 2009 and 2010) However, after the

whole country was colonized by the British in 1885-1886, the Burmese monarchy was completely abolished and was ruled by the British Raj⁹.

The British introduced not only modernization, a capitalist economy, bureaucratic and rationalized colonial state but also Christian missionary to Burma's society. This destroyed the existing social mechanism, hierarchical sociopolitical order and groups status among the Buddhist community: monks and laymen. Christian missionary schools replaced traditional Buddhist education, and monasteries became gradually irrelevant under the secular colonial government. Modern western education provided more career opportunities and better social status, and consequently, the role of the Buddhist monks increasingly faded, and they could not enjoy the privileges and respect that they have had in the pre-colonial period.

In the absence of patrons, the responsibility of defending the decline of Sasana fell into the hands of laymen, and Buddhist nationalism was awakened among the Burmese Buddhist society. (Foxeus 2016) Many Burmese believed that the Sasana was in danger and required protection. Consequently, Burmese people responded to colonial rule in three ways: rural militant rebellions, urban Buddhist associations and nationalist movement boycotting the Christian missionary schools (Foxeus 2016). In this way, Burmese Buddhist culture has been reincorporated again into Myanmar's socio-political mechanism.

When Burma (Myanmar) got independent from the British, U Nu, who adopted a hybrid ideology of modern millenarian forms and nationalist Buddhist socialism, became the first prime minister. (Sarkisyan 1965, Foxeus 2012) U Nu's Buddhist state was based on a parliamentary system combined with contemporary Burmese Buddhist ideology. He perceived himself as the role of foremost patron of Buddha Sasana and declared Buddhism as the state religion in 1961, assuming that Buddhism was to suffuse the entire nation, if not, at

⁹ British Raj was the direct British rule or rule by the British Crown over Indian subcontinent from 1858 to 1947.

least to the government. He implemented a state-led program to promote Buddhism and revive Sasana, which led the country to erupt into armed conflict with the Christian ethnic group, Kachin Independent Army.

Nay Win seized state power by a military coup and promulgated the “Burmese Way to Socialism” ideology in 1962. An anti-Western and secular state policy (Foxeus 2016) was activated in his regime period and thus withdrew state sponsorship for Buddhism. However, Nay Win realized that if the Sanga (monk) was not under control, it could lead to political instability and later supported scripturalist forms of Buddhism (Matthew 1993). SLORC-SPDC, which seized state power in 1988 from Nay Win’s socialist party, established an autocratic state Buddhism combining with U Nu’s modern millenarian forms and nationalist Buddhist socialism and Nay Win’s anti-Western attitude. In this way, preventing Sasana decline and promoting Buddhism became sources of their authority and legitimacy.

On these accounts, Buddhism is correlative with not

only national identity but also a leading source of social mechanism in post-colonial Myanmar until the current period. While the rhetoric of democratic values appears to be in the ascendancy in Myanmar, it is important to take into account that the Buddhist understanding of democracy – which will be analyzed in the following section- frequently diverge from liberal norms. I argue that the pre-colonial conservative values remain the same in the post-colonial era among Burmese Buddhists, and thus modernization process produced strong Buddhist identity and nationalism in Myanmar. Rather than democratic values, Burmese believe in traditional Buddhist doctrines because they assume preventing Sasana decline is the sole responsibility of a true Buddhist. Democratic values are not well established or properly presented among the Burmese Buddhist society. For them, democracy means an anti-military regime.

4.1.2 Buddhist doctrines and culture in post-colonial Myanmar

As I have mentioned above, 80% of Myanmar's population is Buddhist, and it is important to understand the political behaviors and mentality of the Buddhists regarding democracy and authoritarian rule. To clarify this, it is important to understand two fundamental doctrines of Myanmar Buddhist people, 1) Puthujjana, a term which describes humans' nature as ignorant, greedy and self-centred, and 2) Karma. Therefore, I argue Burmese Buddhists have fears of chaos, and throughout the history of Myanmar, Burmese Buddhist politics was built on a conception of humans as morally flawed and in need of authority for guidance. Having said that, it should not be assumed that all Buddhists have this kind of perception. I will explain why Burmese Buddhists' culture is different from other Buddhist countries in the following sections.

I asked two senior members of major political parties. Although they strongly disagreed on the military rule and expressed democracy is the only solution to bring sustainable peace in Myanmar, they presented a similar opinion as to the military when I asked how they think about the ongoing civil war. They support Myanmar's military's propaganda of three main national clauses, 1) no disintegration of the Union, 2) non-disintegration of national solidarity, and 3) perpetuation of Sovereignty (Than 2012) and agree on the need for the strong military presence of course under civilian control while mentioning the post-colonial situations.¹⁰ They see ethnic armed groups as a threat to security and agree to the use of military forces to address the security issue.¹¹ Neither the opposition parties nor the Burmese people, a major ethnic group, see Myanmar as an unfinished state which still needs a parallel work of nation-building and state-building (Hlaing 2013). Hence, those who reject or have desires to change the current territorial boundaries are perceived as a threat to national security and sovereignty. Therefore,

¹⁰ Interview with two senior members of a major political party (August 5, 2020)

¹¹ Interview with two senior members of a major political party (August 5, 2020)

ideologically, major democratic opposition parties do not have a much-contradicted view of the military.

In addition to fear of chaos, the doctrine of Karma also has a significant effect on Buddhist's political behaviors. According to Karma, an individual's present actions and status can be justified – and even understood and accepted (Walton 2017, 9). That means people's present circumstances – wealthy or poor, privileged or less privileged, being a ruler or a layman, etc. were, fully if not partially, conditioned by their actions in their previous lives. In other words, it is mostly believed that everyone shall pay back or receive what they have done in past lives, and thus people are destined to be poor or oppressed. I myself was raised to believe in Karma and to stay away from politics since my parents believe that rulers were destined to be rulers and their current bad deeds will be taken actions in their next lives.

All of my 16 interviewees believe in the doctrine of Karma, and some interviewees added “Mitta”¹² and “Dhamma”¹³ to our conversations.¹⁴ This added further implication to analyze Buddhist's culture and democracy. Buddhists, mostly monks, argued that Buddha's teachings are in line with democratic principles, such as human rights and morality (Walton 2017). One of the monks I interviewed said, Democracy means acting according to Dhamma. “If you have Dhamma, you will get democracy”. We did not get a true democracy because people's moralities are not strong enough.¹⁵ Yes, this kind of statement or perception is not uncommon among the Buddhists in Myanmar (although there is yet not a quantitative study to argue for or against the statement). Nonetheless, these doctrines of Karma and Dhamma led to a hegemonic discourse “people got a government they deserved” among laypeople in

¹² Mitta (according to Burmese translation) means loving-kindness

¹³ Dhamma (Taya) means having morals and laws (Walton 2017)

¹⁴ Interview with an influential political activist (August 16, 2019) and interview with a well-known female politician (July 13, 2019)

¹⁵ Interview with one of the influential monks at local level (July 13, 2019)

Myanmar. Accordingly, I argue that Myanmar's Buddhist operating principles support the view that politics is an elite practice.

Another complicated cultural discourse is "Mitta". Myanmar's iconic famous democracy leader Aung San Su Kyi, also once said, "society could improve through a spiritual revolution" by nonviolent resistance and moral reform at the grassroots level" (Mccarthy 2007, Schober 2011). In 1990, the military held a general election, and her party, National League for Democracy (NLD), won a landslide victory. However, the junta ignored the result, and Aung San Su Kyi was put under house arrest for a long period. During her house arrest time, she insisted on the doctrine of Mitta, loving and kindness and advised the public to choose nonviolent confrontation ways (McCarthy 2004, Schober 2011). Her remarks and thoughts regarding democracy and Buddhism brought some debates on the compatibility of Buddhism and democracy – more specifically, western ideologies- among scholars (Sarkisyanz 1965, Smith 1965).

Although many monks and democracy activists argue for the compatibility of Buddhism with democratic principles, in fact, the western definition of democracy is not in accordance with the core belief of Buddhists' cause and effect doctrine, which has a huge influence on Burmese Buddhists' political behaviors. In reverse, Burmese Buddhist's core principles even lead to the opposite of democratic principles and allow ruling elites to self-legitimize their rule: the need for a strong military presence for peace and security of the citizens. This discourse has been constructed in a large-scale propaganda project since after the 1962 military coup. A communist insurgency during U Nu's post-colonial government and the emergence of different ethnic armed groups in the North, East, South – East and West of the country contributed to a complete breakdown in law and order in Myanmar (Smith 1991, 27-28). The generals took advantage of these historic and chaotic situations and justified their rule as obligatory in maintaining law and order of the country. This simplistic propaganda was

always under-looked by Western-led paradigm studies. Silverstein (1998) once argued that the majority of Myanmar people continue to fight for freedom and democracy from tyranny.

I argue that this statement lacks understanding of the Buddhist's mindset - perception of Puthujjana, men as victims of greed, anger and ignorance, Karma, Metta and Dhamma. There was only one major mass demonstration in 2007 during 22 years of the military regime in Myanmar since 1988. After experiencing a series of political and constitutional crises (Hlaing 2009), in 1958, U Nu requested General Nay Win as a caretaker government and successive governments since then planted a systemic fear among Myanmar's Buddhist society. The long and ruthless civil war coupled with the doctrine of Puthujjana adds more to this well-established fear.

Another cultural factor that needs to be investigated is the Myanmar people's perception of 'legitimacy'. Whilst this thesis does not account for whether or not democracy is the most legitimate form of rule in Myanmar or measure legitimation strategies, considering social perception can be used as a 'manipulatable resource' (Suchman 1995, 574), I analyzed how Myanmar's people define legitimacy. It is argued that systematic and well-structured legitimations can allow authoritarian regimes to manipulate and steer the public's perception of legitimacy and contribute to the stability of the regime (Case 1995, 104).

The democratic theory's criterion of defining a government's legitimacy is not universal in Myanmar. When my 16 interviewees were asked, "How do you define legitimacy" I received four different categories of answers: 1) an elected government, 2) a government that helps their citizens, 3) a government that helps the poor and 4) a government which brings development to the area – meaning their hometown and state. What they meant by an elected government is a major popular opposition NLD. As I have mentioned above, in Myanmar, power is concentrated in the centre and Buddhist population, and successive governments tried

to respond to their demands only and needless to say, grievances in the ethnic area have been increasing. Only one of the participants said, in Myanmar's politics, there is a popular establishment of a good and evil discursive among the majority of the population; NLD as a given good and military as a given evil, and most of the people believed the regime change could automatically bring peace and development in spite that NLD does not have a different mindset from military junta regarding ethnic conflicts.¹⁶ In fact, western assumptions of democracy is not an issue for the majority of Myanmar people.

4.2 Strength and unity of Myanmar's military and persistence of military rule

The strength and unity of Myanmar's military have been evolving from an arrested totalitarian attempt to the most organized institution (Hlaing2005) in Myanmar despite international factions within the military, insurgents and ethnic armed groups. To analyze the military's strength and unity, I analyze the organizational culture of Myanmar's military, the power struggle between intelligence units and army, the relationship between the military and other important actors: ethnic armed groups, opposition groups, business groups, etc.

Huntington argued that unity and cohesiveness are highly valued in the military (1957, p 63), and military leaders perceived party politics as dividing sources of people (Huntington 1968, p137). One may consider Myanmar's military as a cohesive institution since it has not suffered any ideological competitions or ethnic divisions in more than 50 years. In post-colonial periods, leading political parties and politicians fought each other over ideological differences – socialism and communism – and generals assumed that the politicians were unable to solve the country's problems (Callahan 2003). The Burmese generals believed what Huntington (1968, p.136) has termed as “community without politics, agreement by

¹⁶ Interview with a student activist (July 17, 2019)

command”, stating that the military, the only institution that can bring peace and security, hold and govern the country effectively together, has a right to rule (Min 2008).

However, Myanmar’s military is not always a totally united institution, and rival internal groupings have occurred since the 1960s (Callahan 2007, p36), although they are not based on ideological or ethnic differences but rather personal groupings. Selth (2002, p267) states that Myanmar’s military is constructed with a fine balance between institutional and personal loyalties. I analyze the internal groupings from 1988 to 2010 and examine how the junta managed to overcome and manage to keep the regime.

As stated above, internal split or groupings within Myanmar’s military is based on personal loyalties to senior generals, loosely patron-client or Saya-Tapyit relations, in other words. The Burmese meaning of Saya is teacher and Tapyit is a pupil, and in military’s context, Saya refers to senior ranks, and Tapyit refers to junior ranks. This Saya-Tapyit relation starts when Saya is in regional battalion or headquarters commanders. (Hlaing 2005) Some senior military officers recruited their relatives or military from their personnel from their native towns to build their own crews. (Min 2008)

Despite tensions between military leaders and groupings within Myanmar’s military, unity has been somehow maintained throughout different periods for three reasons. Firstly, military leaders believe that the military is the one and only institution which can preserve national unity. Secondly, they have fears of transitional justice and punishments for past wrongdoings¹⁷. Military leaders fear that if the military is no longer the ruling authority, they could lose their privileges and be punished for their human right violations and corruptions. Lastly, the regime leader could have ended a long-standing internal fraction and getting more organized and stronger than any of its foes.

¹⁷ Interview with a local analyst and a journalist. Most of my interviewees preferred to be anonymous and did not want to be cited by name. Therefore, I only use vague references as an influential monk, analyst and journalist

4.2.1 Looking inside structural dynamics of Myanmar's military

Stepan (1988, p 13-22) argues that in many militaries, tensions between the militaries and intelligence services occurred because they are competing over intelligence services' degree of independence. In Myanmar, I argue, the groupings and tensions exist between infantry and intelligence as well as centre vs regionals commanders as a result of the Saya-Tapyit relation. The senior generals have purged second line generals to eliminate any threat to them and open the way for their Tapyits to move up. As consequences, junior officers can ensure both survival and career development by finding a strong Saya. Senior generals also promote their Tapyit to important and powerful positions to secure loyalty. In this situation, when there were frictions between regional and centre, military and intelligence services, senior general Than Shwe restructured the entire military (Myo 1998, Steinberg 2003, Hlaing 2004).

Tensions between the centre (the war office) and regional commanders have started in the mid-1990s. Reopening the country's economy and being able to sign several cease-fire agreements with different ethnic armed groups, regional commanders gained tremendous power and authority in both economic and political arenas and began operating like warlords (Selth 2002, p 262). This independent power of regional commanders – significant control over battlefields and resources in respective area-challenged the central, worrying that some of them could join hands together and challenge the central authority, and led to the reduced power of regional commanders. (Myoe 1996, Selth 2002 and Callahan 2003) As a result, the centre (War office) made attempts to restore central control over the regional commands. (Selth 2002)

4.2.2 Overcoming intra-military groupings and power frictions

Until 1995, the regional commanders were also a member of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the official name of the military government. In 1995, almost all SLORC members were assigned as ministers making them less powerful than regional commanders since they did not have direct command over any troops. In 1997, first-generation SLORC members ministers were charged with corruption, removed from posts and put under house arrest. Meanwhile, Than Shwe, the chief and chair of SLORC, continued to consolidate his power base together with Tapyit and renamed SLORC as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). New two regional commands and many new regional operation commands and military operation commands were set up to dilute the power of SPDC's regional commanders and to increase administrative efficiency. However, in 2001, there were 13 members in the SPDC and newly appointed regional commanders no longer able to enjoy SPDC's membership. In this way, Than Shwe has managed to dilute the power of both SPDC members(central) and regional commanders and consolidate power around himself. (Selth 2002, Callahan 2003, Hlaing 2004).

Another internal power friction was military vs intelligence units. According to Hlaing (2005, p 231-256), this power struggle occurred whenever the intelligence chief, Khin Nyunt, was appointed to an important position in the government. After the military coup in 1988, Khin Nyunt was appointed as Secretary (1) of the SLORC and became the most junior member. Being Secretary 1 and the head of intelligence units, Khin Nyunt was able to consolidate his power. As consequences, some senior military officers were irritated with the growing power of Khin Nyunt. Nonetheless, Khin Nyunt avoided direct confrontation with them and focused on policy-oriented matters, such as ceasefire agreements, health, education and international relations. However, there were reportedly disagreements and tension between Khin Nyunt and senior members of SLORC/SPDC from 1997 through to 2004. (Hlaing 2004)

Unlike Khin Nyunt, intelligence officers were extremely unpopular and seen as arrogant, corrupted and mean by most soldiers (Hlaing 2004, p 234). While regional commanders and his Saya-Tapyit network enjoyed a lot of privileges in their administration units, intelligence officers, especially at a local level, did not behave appropriately like their boss and pay proper respect to higher-ranked military officers. (Hlaing 2004, Min 2008). Since they controlled information, they solicit bribes from illegal businesses, and the amount of bribe they took was at least three to four times more than regular local policies or other administrative authorities. However, not all intelligence officers were corrupt. Senior officers who were in charge of diplomatic missions and ethnic issues were known to be competent, well-educated and generally clean (Hlaing 2004). Despite that, they also brought another type of tension. Those educated intelligence officers were known to think of themselves as superior and look down upon regular army officers, according to Hlaing (2004)

Although military generals did not want the growing power of Khin Nyunt and intelligence officers, for the sake of internal stability, Khin Nyunt was made the prime minister in 2002 because of his usefulness in ethnic affairs and international relations. Hlaing (2004) stated that SLORC/SPDC senior members thought that Khin Nyunt and his crew were needed to deal with the international community, ethnic minority groups and political opposition. The Muse incident, which led to the shutting down of Khin Nyunt's military intelligence units, occurred at the Sino-Myanmar border in 2004. When the regional commander of Muse received a compliant letter about corruption in 2004, he sent the tactical military unit to investigate the matter. However, intelligence officers refused to allow military units to conduct an investigation, and rumor said there was an exchange of fire between the two forces. (Hlaing 2004, Min 2008). Senior members of SPDC were irritated by this incident and asked Khin Nyunt to take action against his intelligence officers. However, Khin Nyunt sought to prove that regional commanders were also as corrupt as intelligence officers. As a leader of the

military regime, Than Shwe did not want to keep a strong and powerful fellow military officer who did not obey his order and caused instability in the government. The Muse incident led to the sacking of Khin Nyunt and disbanded the intelligence unit in 2004. (Hlaing 2004, Min 2008)

The dismissal of Khin Nyunt and dismantle of military intelligence brought an end to long-standing frictions between the military and intelligence units. Many analysts (Than 2001, Hlaing 2004, Min 2008, Dearn 2010) argue that Myanmar's military became more unified and organized, and the power structure of the military government stands only on the very top 5 of SPDC, who appear to be friendly and loyal to each other (Hlaing 2004). There were no significant frictions or power struggles within the military.

4.2.3 Analyzing Strength and Unity of Myanmar's military (1988-2010)

Although military regimes tend to fatigue and get insecure because of internal power struggles, Myanmar's military did not collapse from internal power struggles, and it remained as the most organized institution. While organizational structure accounts for its longevity, other historical and cultural factors helped enshrine notions of loyalty, patriotism and discipline within the military. When combined with new professionalism and modernization, SLORC/SPDC regime was in a stronger position than the BSPP military regime at any time during its rule.

As explained elsewhere, Myanmar's military tradition has its origins in pre and post-colonial periods, and the junta mythologized their role as guardians and warriors of the State. Since Myanmar's military emerged with an interception of Japan, it features Japanese wartime elements of "highly centralized control, fixed discipline, obedience, unquestioning to orders and strong respect to seniors" and can be described as a British structure with a Japanese heart. (Myoe 2009, p 205). According to Hlaing (2003, p 8), when Nay Win staged a military

coup in 1962, Myanmar's people were disappointed in both political and economic conditions and thus even welcomed the coup, believing that the military would return to the barracks.

Junta believed that Myanmar's military was the only institution that can bring peace and stability and solve ethnic armed conflicts threatening the sovereignty of the State. Stepan (1973, p 51) argued that the weaker the civilian government is to handle internal security, it is more likely that the military will adopt new professionalism. This is applicable to Myanmar's case. Myanmar's military became politized, and politics was militarized deeply during Nay Win's BSPP regime. Undoubtedly, the military expanded its authority to the ethnic armed groups-controlled area. (Callahan 2003) After BSPP, the military became rapidly modernized and expanded – establishing military-owned enterprises, universities, museum and new military commands - during SLORC/SPDC regime, as well as its geographical reach and became a “state within a state” (Selth 2002, Fink 2009). Indeed, it is not possible to differentiate the state, the government and the military during SLORC/SPDC era.

Throughout BSPP and SLORC, military officers have learned that being loyal and non-threatening policy was important to remain in their positions. According to (2009, p 277), a military officer stated that if they fought with each other, they would be viewed as troublemakers. Therefore, there has never been major friction in Myanmar's military, which could lead to the collapse of the regime and endure the Third Wave Democratization era. Myanmar's military's organizational culture has two major features; the Sayar-Tapyit relationship, where senior officers take good care of their members and non-threatening posture. However, this culture somehow created a multipolar situation within the military. Than Shwe, SLORC/SPDC regime leader, was aware of this and re-enshrined.

The 2007 Saffron revolution was the test for the unity and strength of Myanmar's military. In mid-August 2007, there was a spike in fuel prices which led to large-scale demonstrations and protests across the country, led by thousands of Buddhist monks. Since

after the 1988 people's uprising, 2007 Saffron was the only anti-government nationwide protests. Although Myanmar's military-built discourses of protector of State and Buddhism, soldiers were not reluctant to shoot monks during crackdowns and revolution was subdued within few weeks. As Hlaing (2009, p 279) stated, a soldier during his interview answered that "if he were ordered by his seniors to hang himself, he would do it". By contrast, the strongest opposition to the military regime, National League for Democracy (NLD), has weakened since 1990 in the absence of Aung San Su Kyi, who was under house arrest. Hlaing (2004, p 240-244) argued that the reason behind the weakening of NLD was not solely because of repression but a combination of "repression and cooptation strategies" and NLD's internal disagreements among caretakers of the party.

Looking back to the origins of NLD, it was founded with a combination of intellectual group, ex-Brigadier and ex-commander group. The Ex-brigadier group was later voted out of the party after some members were accused of being communists. However, many people assumed that there were no major divisions with NLD since Aung San Su Kyi was the leader, according to Hlaing (2007, p365). In fact, there was a major difference between the two groups. The intellectual group led by Aung San Su Kyi preferred a confrontation approach in the early 1990s and the other group had a different opinion about that. (Hlaing 2005, p 239-241). Major Chit Khine, an ex-military commander group, reportedly disapproved of the confrontation approach, and he criticized NLD for the lack of contingency plan. (Hlaing 2005). As Thwin (2001, p 501) states, ex-commander group, who advocated the non-confrontation approach has received economic benefit, which could have led them to enjoy the status quo. In this way, a new societal group, the business community, which could strengthen the regime has emerged.

It was understandable that the government could not finance their state-building and legitimating activities by themselves. The business community played an important role in

increasing the military's strength and unity. When SLORC/SPDC took control of the country, the regime reopened the market economy and legalized formerly illegal economic businesses. By doing so, the state could exert more control and monitor over business community effectively. For example, allowing private export and import activities and legalizing border trades. According to Hlaing (2007, p 219), between 1989 and 1991, the cost of sponsoring to promote Buddhism amounted to more than 400 million Kyats, proximately 60 million US dollars. The cost increased year by year, and in the first half of the 1990s, the cost of religious activities reached two billion Kyats [100 million US dollar]. (Hlaing 2007, p 218-219) This reflected that the relation between the state and business community was not win-lose. Major Chit Khine, who was s former NLD senior member from an ex-commander group, became one of the richest businessmen during SLORC/SPDC era.

Another factor that strengthened SLORC/SPDC regime's power was the western sanction. In order to promote the prospect of democratization in Myanmar, western countries, especially the US and the EU, set sanctions. Analysts argued that despite sanctions had limited efficacy in Myanmar in the 1990s, because of Aung San Su Kyi's and exile activists call for sanctions, the US and EU increased more sanctions in 1995. In 1997, the US imposed a ban on all new investments; in 2003, a blanket import ban followed by freezing individuals' assets and restricting financial services with Myanmar. The Eu only imposed targeted sanctions at senior military officers and their associates. (Taylor 2007, p 466-467 and Pedersen 2008, p 222). However, the attempt to promote democratization by imposing sanctions on Myanmar during SLORC/SPDC failed because of two reasons. First, there was neither private business tycoons nor wealthy military individuals because of the BSPP's "Burmese Way to Socialism" policy. Therefore, sanctions did not affect significantly political and business elites. Another reason is, the legitimizing costs of SLORC/SPDC, such as infrastructural development, promoting Buddhism and historical sites, did not rely on foreign investment (Hlaing 2004, p 245). Thus,

imposing sanctions did not have significant negative effects on the military elite but rather on the general population. Secondly, because of the cultural mindset of military officers – believing that the military is the guardian of the State and western countries are trying to insult Myanmar’s sovereignty- it boosted the bunker mentality. (Pedersen 2008, p 222).

According to Hlaing (2004, p 245), over 50 international corporations withdrew their investment, and many others stayed away from Myanmar. Pedersen (2008, p 234) calculates 375,000 jobs were lost after the US import ban in 2003, and it significantly affected the livelihoods of many families. Meanwhile, the military junta survived and became even stronger by doing deals with China, India, Thailand and other ASEAN countries. The availability of extracting natural resources reduced the negative impact of US and EU sanctions on the SLORC/SPDC regime. Therefore, western economic sanctions undermined general public penalized the poor more than it hurt the military regime. According to Kingston (2008, p31), foreign exchange reserves raised to \$2billion, which is a 20-fold increase compared to 1987 from deals with China, India and Thailand.

Myanmar’s military perceives western sanctions as a new form of colonialism sees pro-democracy activists as foreign agents working to establish the Western culture, which will destroy the Burmese cultural value. (Pedersen 2008, p222) Thus, the attempt to bring democratization led Myanmar to become a more isolated country, pushed closer to China and even contributed to the regime’s longevity. Thant (2006, p 344) argues, sanctions were counter-productive and dangerous in almost every way. As Hlaing argues, the state is not always a unitary actor, and different social groups have different interactions with the state. Thus, state-society relations of Myanmar should not be considered a zero-sum game. (Hlaing 2007, p 254). Indeed, some interactions between state and society during SLORC/SPDC period contributed to the strength and persistence of the military. According to Hlaing (2007, p 221), between 1988 and 1999, 80% of funding for state legitimating activities came from the business

community, although these state-business relations were also patron-client networks. Both the state and business society relied on each other to operate.

Nevertheless, the way in which SLORC/SPDC regime came to power did reflect its reliance on the business community. Junta constantly tried to act like a regime which could make the citizen proud of their country, by promoting Buddhism, creating myth, reviving old traditions and by taking initiatives for better performances of the national sports teams. They renovated historical sites and pagodas, provided special awards for monks and nuns who passed religious tests and examinations. They brought a tooth relic of Buddhi from China twice in 1994 and 1996 for public homage. They opened universities of Buddhism and of culture. But all these activities were part of the junta's plan to control politically active monks. (Hlaing 2007, p 220).

To be sure, not all businesses supported the military regime nor opposed the democratic parties. According to Hlaing (2007), many important business owners made financial contributions to the lead opposition party, NLD, in late 1989 to until 1990 general elections. Therefore, the intention of contributions could be because they wanted to secure their opportunities once NLD won the election. As expected, NLD won a landslide victory; however, the military did not transfer power to NLD. After that, businesspeople distanced themselves from the NLD party. (Hlaing 2007) Otherwise, the military patrons in the government made them pay a high price. One famous businessman was dropped from the board of a state for hosting Aung San Su Kyi when she was visiting Mandalay (Hlaing 2007, p 224). In this way, the military remained in power, and business has enmeshed with patron-client relations, which has aided military domination in Myanmar, which did not appear to be on the verge of collapse.

4.3 How Burmese Buddhist Culture is different from Sri Lanka's and Thailand's

Myanmar did not experience steps by step modernization like Thailand and Sri Lanka. The British colony brought administration and modernization to the traditional Myanmar society. Thailand was never colonized, and Sri Lanka was never part of the British raj, and as a crown country, it always had a civilian government system under colonial rule. It is naive to assume that the British system made the subordination of the military to civilian control; however, the evidence was not clear (De Silva 2001). Sri Lanka inherited a more civilian-oriented government than any other countries- Pakistan and Myanmar- which emerged from the British raj. As I have analyzed in the above section, the British colony destroyed the existing social mechanism and produced anti-colonial sentiments and nationalism. As Finer (1975) argues, militaries in countries that have been under colonial rule played a vital role in independent struggles, and politics is not an unrelated realm for them. Therefore, I analyze Myanmar's Buddhist culture as a single case study because both Thailand and Sri Lanka's militaries did not have a similar historical background as Myanmar's.

Conclusion

Sine the military took power in 1988, its legitimacy and rule had been severely challenged by many oppositions, political parties, pro-democracy activists and ethnic armed groups. At the same time, the military regime was predicted to be collapse from internal power struggles between the military and the intelligence unit. However, even after the military-intelligence frictions and dismissal of intelligence head, Khin Nyunt, Myanmar's military was not on the verge of collapse. Therefore, the longevity of Myanmar's military is exceptional in the World where military regimes have the shortest lifespan. In order to fully understand the persistence of military rule in Myanmar, two main factors are accounted for; firstly, how Myanmar's military can maintain, resisting external threats and overcoming international frictions and secondly, why the mass movements could not overthrow the military regime.

Its strength was a combination of the complex operational and organizational structure of the military and the disunity of the most viable democratic opposition. Its ability to keep a strong financial capacity through sanctions, continuing trade and contributions from the business community also strengthened the military rule in Myanmar. Historical institutionalism is necessary for formalizing for better understanding of Myanmar's military's unity, manifested through its unique historical myths, discourses and organizational culture. Yet, partly, it was also accounted for the unique situation that gave chances to one leader presiding the political-military structure.

Regarding cultural factors, although often ignored by scholars and analysts, aided in explaining both the strength of the military and the reason behind a limited number of significant mass movements which could threaten the regime's stability. While Myanmar's military used the fear of chaos above tyranny discourse and the Buddhist people's notions of legitimacy are undeniably complex and multi-faceted and not necessarily in line with Western definitions and conceptions. Therefore, advocating the Western's normative definition of legitimacy served to further entrench the perceived colonialism by the military officers and

created more polarization among Buddhist societies, mainly into two groups pro-democracy and pro-status-quo.

Actually, the economic factor- economic hardship- was even more convincing in explaining behind mass demonstrations, the 1988 uprising and the 2007 saffron revolution rather than the urge for democracy. Cultural factors and unity and strength of military are unlikely to wane unless there is a nationwide civic education project to increase the awareness of the public about liberal democracy and create counter-discourses to the military's propaganda and lies. Otherwise, the militarized politics and politicized military will remain, and military domination will continue in Myanmar.

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