

**Panel 1**

1. International Legitimacy, Economic Performance, and Political Reform in Burma - Sun Tsai-wei, Assistant Professor, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

**Abstract:** The Burmese military has been successful in maintaining its authoritarian rule in the past decades. In 2011, however, the junta shifted its power to civilian government despite the absence of severe political pressure from inside or outside. Since then, the new government has introduced many reforms that allow greater political liberty in Burma. This paper locates the junta's power shift as part of a wider process of the military consolidating political legitimacy. It argues that as the junta's power consolidation reached its bottleneck in the 2000s, political reform was imperative as the pre-condition for international legitimacy and economic development. Yet, regarding aspects of the content of the new constitution, military-civilian power relationships, and ethnic minority-central government relations, it remains to be seen whether Burma will move toward actual democratization, or continue to be a soft authoritarian regime in which quasi-democratic institutions like elections are merely tools of legitimation. Burma's domestic political reform is bound to affect the development of foreign relations. Thus, one of the big challenges for President Thein Sein will be satisfying the high expectations of the international community and domestic opposition parties while still being able to control the pace of reform and maintain power.

2. Envisioning "Democracy" in Myanmar – Tamas Wells, Doctoral Candidate, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne, Australia

**Abstract:** In public discourse about Myanmar, the word 'democracy' now has a crucial place. From President Thein Sein's speeches to Western donor strategies, there is almost universal public agreement about the importance of Myanmar's 'democratisation'. And not only is this transition seen to be significant for the country itself, but also for encouraging wider global movements for democracy. Yet despite its key place in public discourse, there has been limited exploration of what Myanmar's 'democratisation' may actually mean to different actors. Could there in fact be a whole set of different narratives about what democracy is, and how democratic change may happen? To what extent are local and international actors' visions of Myanmar's past, present and desired democratic future actually in tension? Based on field research in 2013, this paper explores these 'narratives' about democratisation in Myanmar, especially those of actors who are involved in democracy promotion programs - such as Burmese activists, political parties and Western donors. While there are some common threads in how 'democratisation' is envisaged, narratives diverge significantly over the relative importance of values and formal institutions. Where many Burmese activists and political party members describe democratisation through a values based framework - highlighting the importance of personal commitment, obligations and moral leadership - Western agencies tend to emphasise the centrality of rights-based institution building. In the lead up to Myanmar's 2015 elections, an assumption by Western agencies that

local and international actors are all aligned in their understandings of ‘democratisation’ will almost certainly lead to disappointment. In contrast, recognition of different narratives - and their different forms of rationality and ‘common sense’ – may serve to ‘democratise’ Western agency conceptions of ‘democracy’ and allow for more creative approaches to engagement.

3. Myanmar: Signposts on the Road Ahead - Rabindra Sen, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

**Abstract:** Since the dawn of independence in 1948, Myanmar has been riven by ethnic insurgencies adversely impacting the nation-building process and resulting in internal strife and instability. The seizure of power by the military in 1962 after a short-lived experiment with parliamentary democracy and the continuation of military rule, albeit interspersed with cosmetic changes in nomenclature up until recently, also led to near isolation of the pariah state. For the international community, Myanmar came to be considered as high up on the list of countries trampling upon democratic freedom. The treatment meted out to pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi shocked the conscience of democratically-minded people the world over. This paper purports to analyse the change in Myanmar from three important angles. Two of them are internal, namely the ethnic fault-lines and democratization, and the third is the role of external powers, especially China and India. The internal issues both are important for nation-building and national unity. It is important to ensure that the ethnic and religious minorities do not feel alienated as a result of domination by the majority community. Resolution of the ethnic issue is considered as the key to bringing peace to the troubled country. But the question is how to achieve the objective. Also important for peace and ‘national’ unity is to have a genuinely democratic government. The question here is whether the expectations generated by the recent developments are really going to usher in a truly democratic polity. Finally, the change witnessed in Myanmar being explicable, to a certain extent at least, in terms of external factors, the relevant question is what role countries like China and India will play in fashioning the process of change. The future of Myanmar hinges largely on the answers to the above-mentioned questions.

4. Myanmar’s Tryst with Democracy: Lessons from India – Amrita Dey, Research Fellow, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, India

**Abstract:** Although nascent and pre-matured, there is no doubt that whatever ‘attention’ and ‘spotlight’ Myanmar is enjoying today is all because of ‘democracy’ and attempts at ‘democratic transition’ undertaken by President Thein Sein’s government in power since 2010. In the political front, the President released most political prisoners from exile; freed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest; amended the electoral laws to enable her and the National League for Democracy (NLD) to contest the parliamentary by-elections (Suu Kyi has joined the Parliament now as the main opposition party); freed the media and allowed civil society groups to function more freely in the country. In the critical domain of ethnic relations, the President promised

that his government would seek to solve the root causes of ethnic problems through political means and even organize a nation-wide ceasefire agreement to enable lasting peace among its ethnic communities. In other social and economic sectors, the President has undertaken commendable changes aimed at boosting economic growth and sustainable development at the grassroots level. But beneath the façade of seeming progresses, critics fear that Myanmar might backtrack to repressive rule once again, given the present administration's stubbornness in amending/re-writing the 2008 constitution, its outright refusal of the United Nations proposal to recognize the stateless 'Rohingya's,' its slackened pace in arresting corruption and ensuring people-centric development in the poverty-stricken areas of the country. The present paper is an attempt to compare and contrast Myanmar's experiment with democratization vis-à-vis India whose tryst with democracy, pluralism and capacity building has made it a model for discussion at home and abroad. India's progress in health sector, its emerging middle class, a vibrant media and an engaging young generation has lessons that can not only make Myanmar's democratic transition irreversible, but enable the two neighbours to jointly address their common problems of insurgency, corruption, unemployment and all inclusive governance.

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## Panel 2

5. Census in Myanmar: A Long Road Ahead – Sonu Trivedi, Assistant Professor, Zakir Hussain Delhi College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

**Abstract:** We see a new political dynamics emerging in Myanmar. Nevertheless, only regime change in not enough, it has to be supplemented with the social and economic transformation. While procedural democracy has been established, but the stability and survival of the regime would rest on deepening of democracy and its consolidation. This requires the institutions of liberal democracy to take deep roots in the society. *Under this background, the proposed paper would highlight the upcoming Census in the country. The paper argues that transformation from procedural to substantive democracy has to be inclusive. It needs a caveat against the challenges of majoritarianism.* Myanmar, which remained a hermit kingdom until not very long, is all set for the individual headcount beginning in 2014. It is supposed to prepare a ground for the next general elections in 2015. In a deliberate attempt to ward off genuine growth of democratic institutions, the military regime had necessarily avoided census for decades. It has not been undertaken for last 30 years, so those who were born after 1983 in Myanmar have not been counted since last three decades. An accurate count of the population is a critical part of the government's political reforms. The census will allow the government to accurately estimate key economic indicators such as GDP, per capita income and other socio-economic data of the country for national development, economic planning and balanced assessment. It would facilitate the decision making process in the country related with education, health care, housing, employment, sanitation, transport and communication etc. The process also becomes necessary for delimitation of constituencies and ensuring a fair representation of all the ethnic nationalities in the national and regional legislative bodies. Though, the government has

agreed to include all “national races” in the census, but there are numerous challenges before this gigantic exercise becomes real. There is an apprehension that the process could marginalize ethnic nationalities or those living in one of Myanmar's many conflict areas. Furthermore, security related challenges, problems of logistics, funding, and building up the trust deficit are some of the critical areas which require immediate intervention.

6. Women’s political participation in context of political change: Negotiating spaces for gender equality and women’s rights in contemporary Myanmar – Nora Pistor, Junior Researcher/PhD Candidate at Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung, Universität Bonn, Germany/Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany

**Abstract:** The proposed presentation is based on doctoral field research conducted in Myanmar analysing the role of women and gender equality in the context of the contemporary political reforms in Myanmar. The primary research aims at understanding the enabling and impeding factors for both governmental and non-governmental women’s organisations to participate in the proclaimed process of democratisation and to represent women’s (diverse) interests, especially aiming at gender equality, as well as societal influences that play a crucial role for women’s participation in the current political processes in Myanmar. In the government’s top-down transition to a “disciplined democracy” the participation and representation of women in formal political structures, in the political processes and policies as well as through informal channels, remains largely overlooked by politicians, activists and researchers alike. While the nexus of gender and democracy has been conceptualised in earlier research and various case studies, the question which role women and women’s organisations can play as change agents in Myanmar’s democratisation has not been raised so far. Thus, the scientific objectives of this research presented in the paper are to understand the socio-political processes and practices shaping the political participation and representation of women in the current transition process as well as the role that gender equality and women’s rights play on the political agenda in Myanmar. Applying an actor-oriented approach with a focus on the government structures, civil society organisations in Yangon (Myanmar) and the exiled women’s organisations and networks in Chiang Mai (Thailand), the paper will first present the existing political and legal *frameworks* and *institutions*. Secondly, the *strategies* deployed by the major actors to influence the political participation and representation of Burmese women as well as gender specific strategies will be scrutinised. Further, the focus is turned to examining the *interactions* being used to contribute to the goal of female political participation and representation in Myanmar on the national level. The early findings of the field research can lead to an improved understanding on which impacts can be produced by these organisations to enhance gender equality.

7. Impact of economic transition on livelihood of the common people – Georg Winterberger, Executive Director, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Zurich, Switzerland

**Abstract:** Myanmar’s phase of transition and its rapid opening since 2010 has different effects on the inhabitants and it is very complex and not yet totally explored and

understood. This highly fascinating and interesting phase of transition has to be investigated anthropologically – not only because qualitative anthropological research was not possible for decades, but also because right now is the time to explore a society in its transition from a more or less isolation to an openness in which the people are more and more influenced by effects of globalisation. The empirical part of my research is planned for next year. It will be an investigation on the livelihood strategies of common people in Mawlamyine in the Mon State. I will focus on livelihood strategies because the transition of the country will have many impacts for the inhabitants of Myanmar on an economic level. I will concentrate my research on a small number of households, since the household is the unit in which all important economic decisions are taken by the people. It will be a qualitative case study of households in Mawlamyine which offers a wide set of possibilities of generating income, such as fishing, cash cropping, industry, trading, migration, and tourism. This location is predestinated to study the impacts of the economic transition of the country and to study the economic answers of the people to this transition which are seen in their livelihood strategies. I see the relevance of this research mainly in three points. First, for decades it was not possible to conduct anthropological field research in Myanmar, this gap should partially be closed by this research. Second, the outcome of this research will help development organisations to improve their work in the field of livelihood. And third, it will give answers how inhabitants envision their way of living. This research will try to see the country through the eyes of its inhabitants. Important questions are: How do the people conceptualise their country? What are their imaginations of their future? And what do they tell us about their identity, images and issues?

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### Panel 3

8. Implementation and appropriation of bio (traditional) medicine in contemporary Rakhine – Celine Coderey, Postdoctoral Fellow, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Abstract:** The paper I propose focuses on the accessibility of biomedicine in contemporary Rakhine within a context of therapeutic pluralism; it explores the way biomedicine is implemented by health authorities and professionals and the way it's appropriated by local people and highlights the cultural, social, political and economical factors underlying these processes. The study of the accessibility of biomedicine is particularly important given that in 2000, Burma was ranked 190 out of 191 countries for the performance of its health system and the state of health of the population is considered one of the worst of the region. A second reason why this study is relevant – and especially in this specific moment – is that the country is living an important transformation with the passage in 2010, from the military dictatorship to a semi-civil government, the slackening of international economic sanctions, the opening to foreign investments, a greater tolerance toward international humanitarian organizations, and the resulting increase of the circulation of knowledge, goods, and people. Some important reforms and plans are currently developed also in the health sector. The paper will first highlight the important lacking in Rakhine in terms of equipments, medicines and personnel especially in the specialist sectors such as reproductive health and mental health and discuss the

inequalities existing between this peripheral area and the central area and, notably, Yangon. Second, it will consider how at the local level, the accessibility to biomedicine is further conditioned by cultural and socio-economical factors. Third, it will show how this peripheral area is seldom reached by the current reforms in matter of health. I argue that the understanding of the current modalities of implementation and appropriation of biomedicine by local people may contribute to make health programs better suited to the complexity of local reality and thus more effective.

9. Network Analysis and the core executive policy coordination: Exploring the Myanmar government in transition – Su Mon Thazin Aung, University of Hong Kong

**Abstract:** This paper advances the core executive studies -a set of actors and institutions in relation to the government's policy making and coordination- focusing on the Myanmar quasi-civilian government after its regime change from military dictatorship. This research provides new contribution to governance studies of political science discipline as well as area studies. Disciplinary-wise, the concept of core executive has not been employed to investigate in hybrid regime although there are a wealth of detailed empirical studies focused on the established democracies and few studies on post-communist countries in European contexts. Similarly, area study-wise, the concept has not yet travelled to less developed Asian countries as existing studies only focus on the advanced industrial countries in Asia, namely, Japan and Singapore. This paper investigates (1) who does what, (2) who has what resources, and (3) who coordinate in the Myanmar core executive during its political transition, which highlights the unsettled moments for decision-making and policy coordination. In mapping core executive in Myanmar, the author explores these questions by employing network analysis for policy issue handled by the Myanmar government. As in any other countries, policy formation and coordination are usually considered as parts of ministerial responsibilities in the Myanmar system of government. Although this is generally relevant, the core executive is the epicenter for managing strategic issues of the government. Established networks of key individual have formed surrounding each of these strategic issues. In this paper, the author observes the main network which centres on the core executive by focusing on a policy issue fallen in political, social and economic domains. Moreover, this paper will offer new empirical evidence to develop the existing core executive literature by examining how coordinating institutions have been emerged and how core executive actors interact under the moment of political uncertainty.

10. Uplifting Myanmar with ICT Strategy –Pa Pa Nyunt, University of Computer Studies, Yangon

**Abstract:** Myanmar is still one of the poorest countries in South-East Asia. The government of the Union of Myanmar is striving hard to carry out social development and poverty reduction activities with high momentum. In doing so, the following issues and challenges are being faced with: 1) need for improvement of healthcare coverage; 2) shortage of teachers, especially in remote areas; 3) geographical location; 4) level of

socio-economic condition; 5) population is growing much faster than the nation's food resources; 6) less employment opportunities and whose members condemned to poverty by the need to feed extra mouths; and 7) educated jobless problem. Despite these issues and challenges, Myanmar is striving its utmost for all-round development of the country and poverty eradication in line with the programme of action in devoting huge amount of its own resources. Our main contribution is to apply Information and Communication Technology(ICT) to social development and poverty reduction. In order to get job opportunities, labour should be skillful. ICT offers tools and applications but no solutions. By providing cheap and efficient tools with training for the change of information, ideas, knowledge and applications that fit with the cultural and social context, ICT can become an enabling tool for the wider socio-economic development. When properly used, it can greatly increase the ability of the poor to benefit from economic development and from the development programs meant to help them. ICT helps to build national and regional internet backbones and community access points, adopt enabling policies for the telecommunications and electronic commerce, expands education and training programs. ICT addresses connectivity, ICT governance, privacy, security, intellectual property and resource mobilization issues. ICT can enhance the quality of teaching, learning and improve administrative and instructional efficiency. By this way, economic development of Myanmar will surely be much faster and the living standards of the people will be uplifted.

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