

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

EXTERNAL LEVERAGE, LINKAGE, AND POLITICAL TRANSITION IN MYANMAR

by

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China's influence over and the West's pressure on Myanmar have existed since 1988. The former emanated from the Myanmar's overdependence on it, whereas the latter began with punitive actions intended to encourage Myanmar's democratisation. However, the SLORC/SPDC regime engendered 'transition towards a somewhat democracy' in 2011, while maintaining strong links to China, but had low levels of these with the West. In addition, the constitutionally-elected government (2011–2016) also facilitated remarkable political reforms and transferred power to a pro-democracy civilian government following the 2016 general election. Accordingly, it is worth examining why political transition materialised in Myanmar, despite low links to the West and close ties to a powerful authoritarian neighbour (PAN) or Black Knight (BK). The current study employed a qualitative research design by using the single case-study method based on different timeframes (1988–2011, 2011–2016, and 2016–onwards). The study conducted an in-depth analysis on qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources. Certain qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews while using survey data from five distinctive quantitative works.

The study argues that, despite low links to the West and close ties to a PAN/BK, a somewhat democratic transition can materialise, as the ruling regime engendered the transition in an attempt to lessen the country's overdependence on the latter. Specifically, the SLORC/SPDC adjusted its policy from overdependence to interdependence. Accordingly, the country's domestic factors also became favourable

to pursuing this policy. Despite its high organisational capacity, the SLORC/SPDC became concerned about state and regime insecurity as long as it solely depended on China. Since the SLORC/SPDC's successor, the USDP, possessed medium organisational capacity and low regime uncertainty, it engendered unprecedented political reform, but was unable to retain its power. Accordingly, people's attitudes towards and perception of the political system became a prominent implication. The pro-democracy party, the NLD, conducted a reversal of its policy preferences to ameliorate its regime uncertainty due to its low organisational capacity. In sum, this study not only academically investigates the political transition from the perspectives of existing theories and concepts, but also contributes to an existing conceptual framework.

Keywords: Democracy, democratisation, political transition, political culture, linkage, leverage, organisational capacity.