

CHAPTER VI

DEMOCRATIC SPACE: IS IT POSSIBLE IN BURMA?

Introduction

To answer the research question of whether civil society organizations in Burma create democratic space, this chapter will analyze activities and impact of the 88 Generation Students and Shalom Foundation in terms of theories of civil society, democracy and social movements. The argument of this chapter is that the 88 Generation Students could create democratic space in which people can participate for democratic movements. On the other hand, Shalom Foundation could also create democratic space for its projects which try to solve ethnic conflict, building trust and communications among different groups, which are necessary foundation for democratization in Burma.

Theories and practices of civil society in Burma

In theory, civil society has been strongly emphasized as an element of the democratic process, both as a counterbalance to state power and as a means to greater democratic legitimacy and effectiveness. Civil society organizations have actively contributed to regime change and the transition from authoritarian rule in Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s through public debate, campaigns, street demonstrations and other forms of mobilization. Unlike those in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the Burmese democracy activists had little democratic space within which to operate, or to mobilize people to participate in fundamental change to democracy. Like Tocqueville theory, in which civil society can counterbalance the state to be accountable and effective, the current civil society in Burma is trying to be able to counterbalance which help to keep the state accountable and effective.

In the case of Burma, like Gramsci's civil society theory, civil society organizations try to resist state power in different ways. But it does not have power to change the government like other civil society organizations did in other countries. In fact, Burma has not strong civil society strong organizations yet to be able to change the political system like in Eastern European countries where trade unions played important roles in democracy movements.

Democracy, democratization and democratic space

Democracy has been defined as a system in which citizens can pursue their interests freely, exercise their rights, and take responsibility for their own lives. Citizens make their own decisions about where they will work; what kind of work they will do, where they will live, whether to join a political party, what to believe, and so on. Democracy supports citizens to be independent, questioning, analytical in their outlook, participation in politics and protect human rights. Democratic governments do not control, and censor the content of written and verbal speech. Democracy is also a set of rules for managing conflict. This conflict must be managed within certain limits and result in compromises, consensus, or other agreements. So a democratic society needs the commitment of citizens who accept the inevitability of conflict as well as the necessity for tolerance and trust. Democratization is the transition to a more democratic political regime. It is the transition from an authoritarian regime to a partial democracy, or transition from a semi-authoritarian political system to a democratic political system. Democratization is influenced by various factors, including economic development, history, and civil society. Democratic space has been defined as public space in which democratization process is happening and democratic practices are applying. The variables to create democratic space can be in the area of improving the quality of governance, promoting education and protecting human rights, strengthening people power, addressing social conflict, building trust, enabling development, and challenging the authoritarian government. In the history of Burma, democratization is linked with

social movements and ethnic conflicts. Students have a long history of creating social movements since colonial days. Social movements in colonial time helped the country to get independence. 1988 social movements ended the Burmese socialist system. Thus social movements have a strong link with democratization process in Burma. Solving ethnic conflicts is also a part of democratization process. Because of the ethnic conflict and civil war, the military government came into power and democratic government failed in the country. Ethnic conflict resolutions become an indispensable component in democratization in Burma. Thus, building reconciliation, building trust among ethnic, maintaining the existed peace with ethnic, engaging dialogue, communicating, and networking among different groups, culture, religion are important process of democratization in Burma. However, some argue that without democracy, ethnic conflict cannot be solved. But in the Burmese case, ethnic conflict started when the country is in democratic system. So it's a chicken and egg syndrome.

How democratic space is limited in Burma

Democratic space in Burma is firstly limited by preventing people participation in politics. People who participate in political activities are usually sentenced for 7 years. Some political activists were sentenced over 100 years. Secondly, there is no independent news media. All the newspapers and radio stations are state own. Private journals and magazines are censored and not allowed to write political issues of the country. Thirdly the government tightly control on civil society. Unions are not allowed to form. No organization can be formed without the consent of the government. Law 6/88 enacts that people are not allowed to gather more than five people for political purpose. There are also lots of human rights violation in the country. For example, the government arrests people without charges and refuse to give a bail and consult with a lawyer. In the military, there are still many child soldiers. In ethnic area, people have been forced to move from their villages for military purposes. There are some reports that ethnic women have been raped by soldiers. Economic stagnation also constraint democratic space in

Burma. Poor people are increasing and middle class are decreasing. Only people who are related become richer. People have to struggle for their survival and cannot participate in social movements.

The 88 Generation Students could transcend some of these limitations. They raise their voices and use freedom of expression through foreign media. All people can hear their view through radios. They could gather thousands of people for the political purposes while the government limit to five people to be able to gathering. They tried to protect human rights of people by informing media about human rights violation cases that are happening in Burma.

Shalom Foundation could transcend some of these limitations of democratic space. People who participate in Shalom Foundation's training programs have a chance for freedom of speech in the group. These people can assembly in the training area. Shalom Foundation protect human rights by being present in ethnic conflict areas. The present of Shalom Foundation can constrain local power-holders' opportunities to abuse ethnic people because authorities worry that information regarding violations will be communicated to the international community. The presence of a witness also shames local authorities into behaving better behavior.

The characteristic of the 88 Generation Students as social movement

In theory, social movements are large informal groupings of organizations focused on specific political or social issues and resist state power and try to change political system. Charles Tilly (2004:3) defines social movements as a series of contentious performances, displays and campaigns by which ordinary people made collective claims on others. Social movements are a major vehicle for ordinary people's participation in politics.

The 88 Generation Students is an informal organization and a network of former students who took part in 1988 democracy uprising. Their members have tried to mobilize people to stand up for their human rights democracy. Its activities raise fundamental issues of democratic politics, such as the issues of rights and freedom, the accountability of the government on economic crisis, and it aims to challenge the power of authoritarian government. Its campaigns range from signature campaigns for the release of political prisoners to organizing protests against the government, and it aims to bring about democratic change in the country. So its character and activities can be categorized as social movement organization.

In theory, social movements are not eternal. They have a life cycle: they are created, they grow, they achieve successes or failures and eventually, they dissolve and cease to exist. Many social movements are created around some charismatic leader, i.e. one possessing charismatic authority. The 88 Generation Students appeared in 2005 and dissolved in 2007. The 88 Generation Students also created around Min Ko Naing who has been a student leader in 1988 pro-democracy uprising and imprisoned for 16 years. Since the government arrested all leaders of the 88 Generation Students including Min Ko Naing and trying to arrest more members, the activities of the group became paralyzed. Although the group is not moving anymore, the spirit of the 88 Generations will continue to next generation. Now, there become a question for the rest members of the 88 Generation Students that whether the 88 Generation Students will revive with new leadership and will be able to continue more social movements in the country.

How the 88 Generation Students created democratic space

The 88 Generation Students attempted to create democratic space by organizing social movements. Social movements are defined as a type of group action. They are large informal groupings of organizations focused on specific political or social issues. The 88 Generation Students openly challenged the military government and operated

many political campaigns. Their aim is to realize democracy and human rights by political changes in the national level. At the beginning, campaigns are small, symbolic and flexible. Famous campaigns are Prayer campaigns, White expression campaigns and Signature campaigns. In the Prayer campaign, the 88 Generation Students organized 200 people on every Sunday at Shwe Dagon Pagoda and other pagodas in different cities and prayed together for the release of all political prisoners. The campaign lasted for three months. In the White expression campaign, people from the whole country are asked to wear white as a symbol of protesting the government. There were thousands of people who wore white clothes to support the campaign. In signature campaigns, people are asked to sign on a petition letter to the government which asked for the release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi. In this campaign, over 500,000 people signed the petition. All these campaigns raised political awareness and revived the hope for some political change. At the beginning, the government also had flexible response upon the campaigns but later the government tried to stop the campaigns by using USDA members and detaining the five leaders of the 88 Generation Students. All the students were released after a few months though. Thus, the 88 Generation Students used the available public space for their political campaigns which aims to raise democratic awareness and mobilize people for political participation. The public space the 88 Generation students used for the campaigns is not the space that the government allowed. The government has already tried to limit all the available public space by ending freedom of speech, and freedom of association. In addition, the government tried to limit the public space by forming USDA and detaining political activists and the 88 Generation Students leaders. It is the space that the 88 Generation Students created by themselves for the purpose of democratization process.

The 88 Generation Students continued to search for democratic space by protesting over the price hike of petrol in the country. To control the democratic space that the 88 Generation created, the government immediately arrested tens of the 88 Generation students leaders over night. When monks continue to use the public space by

protesting and thousands of people joined the protests, the government cracked down the protesters by shooting and beating to dead. Finally thousands of people were arrested, and over a hundred people have been disappeared without trace since the protests. The space for the social movements is definitely not the space the government allowed. It was the public space initiated by the 88 Generation Students to become the democratic social force by the participation of people. Since the 88 Generation Students politicize the public space for the purpose of democracy we can conclude that the 88 Generation Students created democratic space in the country. Tilly (2004:3) argues that social movements are a major vehicle for ordinary people's participation in public politics. The activities of the 88 Generation students are contentious performances and resist the authoritarian state power by mobilizing people. Thus, social movement theory confirms that the 88 Generation students is a group which seeks for democracy.

Decisive factors for the space created by the 88 Generation Students

The 88 Generation Students tried to broaden democratic space in the national level as their objectives. The main external factor of the limitation for the space depends on the political opportunities of organization allowed by the SPDC and the willingness of the people to participate. The government controls all public aspects of the country's political space. It formed a well-organized military intelligence networks which could closely watch all the activities of the 88 Generation Students. Private newspapers are not allowed to publish and journals are not allowed to write about political news. No media from inside the country wrote about the campaigns of the 88 Generation Students activities and social movements in 2007. SO only a few people who listens BBC, RFA and DVB know what happened to the 88 Generation and their movements. The government also increased prison sentences for political cases up to over 100 years. Since the cost for doing politics is too high, people are unwilling to sacrifice too much for the sake of democracy. On the side of opposition group, NLD's point of leverage to the power of SPDC is very weak. NLD is becoming less and less representative of the people

and their continuing inaction undermines people's trust in social movements. All these are the external factors limited the space that created by the 88 Generation Students in searching for national level political transition.

There are also internal factor that limit the 88 Generation Students. The 88 Generation Students are the informal group and no organization structure. Members are working around prominent leaders without separated duty. This fact weakens the power of the 88 Generation Students when it confronts the systematically organized military government. The 88 Generation Students have also financial limitation since it cannot accept financial help from international organizations. The 88 Generation Students finally chose a strategy to confront the government in which the government is totally intolerance. Since the strategy is very radical, people also could not follow the way the 88 Generation lead. The 88 Generation Students are mistrusted by the government because of their cooperation with NLD and their inflammatory political background as former political prisoners.

Impact of the 88 Generation Students on democratization

The political awareness campaigns and 2007 social movements of the 88 Generation Students severely contribute the internal conflict within the military leadership. Military chief and SPDC second-in-command General Maung Aye opposed using force against the tens of thousands of monks who took to the streets, bringing him into conflict with Senior General Than Shwe, according to sources close to Maung Aye (Larry, 2007:3). Some soldiers refused to obey their senior officers' commands to attack or shoot at protesting monks, according to diplomatic sources in Yangon. Several aid workers in Mandalay witnessed soldiers there refusing to open fire when ordered by commanding officers. The shoot-to-kill policy has backfired on the military regime, with international condemnation coming from the West as well as neighboring countries included in the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Burma is a member. Because of the increase international pressure, the SPDC allowed

United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari to meet with detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and is now pressing to meet with both Than Shwe and Maung Aye. As a result, the regime appointed Minister for Relations Aung Kyi to meet detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon, the first time in five years she has met with a high-ranking military official. They have been met for four times till the time the thesis is writing. However, there was no report in the state-run media about the topics discussed in the meeting.

Because of the movement, people now are more interested and politically aware. The monks have been staying away from politics since 1988 but they are now firmly back in the political arena. It has made the world more aware of the situation in Burma and it helps for the Burmese government slightly more accountable. The international community is now putting more pressure on the government including China and India. Because of the regime's stubbornness, new, tougher sanctions were imposed by the US, the EU, Australia, Japan and other countries. On the other hand, International NGOs are more aware of the Burmese situations and trying to give more aid and more investment in civil society projects to help for democratization.

Without the movement, the people of Burma wouldn't have achieved the present political momentum which seems to be building toward a chance of democratic reforms. Without the movement, the pro-democracy movement wouldn't have achieved the current international pressure that's pushing the ruling junta to engage in a dialogue with the opposition. Without the movement, there would be no hope for a better future in 2008.

The efforts and sacrifices of protesters have given Burma a chance to take a few steps forward on the long road to democracy. Throughout the bloodshed and arrests, another important message came through: that the public anger was largely directed against the members of the ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council. That

kind of mentality can damage the attempts of the government to be popular to win in the future election.

The characteristic of Shalom Foundation as an NGO

Tandon (1994:44) defined two types of NGOs. The first type is that NGOs can be viewed as agents for 'democratization' and the main component of a thriving civil society. For the second type, NGOs are increasingly seen as a mechanism of grassroots organizations for solving economic and social problems. This view comes from considering the socio-economic roles of NGOs as a political role by which poverty is seen as a political condition. For example, NGOs have a strong commitment to poverty alleviation, they actively support the establishment of grassroots organizations through which people can express views on their needs. Shalom Foundation is the second type of NGO since it tries to solve the socio economic problems of grassroots level through social and political dialogues. It focuses on peace making, conflict resolution, mediation, dialogue and reconciliation among ethnic minority people and Burman and networking among different religious groups in ethnic areas. So the character and activities of Shalom Foundation can be categorized as an NGO which tries to solve social problems through social and political dialogues among ethnic people. Thus Shalom Foundation helps for democratization in Burma, not in the sense of resisting state power but in the sense of supporting democratic values such as people participation, and negotiation and solving one of the main problems for democratization in the country.

How Shalom Foundation created democratic space

Shalom Foundation attempted to create the democratic space by using humanitarian space in which its projects are operating. Its projects are especially focus on peace building training, mediation activities, dialogue trainings, conflict resolution and capacity building in ethnic areas. Peace building training creates a space for problem-

solving on a particular issue that the participants are facing in their communities or institutions. For mediation activities, Shalom Foundation organizes workshops for sharing knowledge, learning, networking and cooperation purpose. In dialogue training, participants learn about the important of dialogue, the root causes of problems, the relationship of economic and politics, the relationship of ASEAN and Burma, the history of Burma, HIV/ AIDS and social relationship and the international policies on Burma. This aspect of NGO activity is a critical contribution to democratic foundation since it encourage to egalitarian relations in the country. These projects aimed to raise democratic values among people in conflicted areas and tried to solve conflict between minority ethnic people and majority Burman. Trying to solve ethnic conflicts, maintaining peace and setting democratic values are important for Burmese democracy and it can be considered as democratization process in Burma.

The public space Shalom Foundation used for its activities is humanitarian space that the government allows for NGOs. However, Shalom Foundation has to be careful not to be overtly political since the government can stop its activities. Sometimes Shalom Foundation faces restrictions such as program postponing, travel limitations, stricter regulations, longer delays in seeing officials and getting permissions. It has been restricted to bring donors to see the projects funded by the donors. However, Shalom Foundation confirms that it can still operate well of its programs and has not experienced significant disruptions to their activities. The trainings of Shalom Foundation provide space for multiple voices of ethnic people, building trust, maintaining peace, empowering and networking among ethnic people. All these kinds of activities are an essential first step towards local participation and democracy from below. Wilson (2002:78) said that social networks created by civil society build trust among people and trust is essential for functioning of democratic institutions. The social network is important for democratization, as they give people a unity and a common purpose through which to organize and challenge the power of the state hierarchy. According to Carter (2005:46) democratic society needs the commitment of citizens who accept the inevitability of

conflict as well as the necessity for tolerance and trust. Since the activities of Shalom Foundation are solving conflict, building trust and tolerance and creating network, the activities of Shalom Foundation are within the frame work of democratization process. Since the activities of Shalom Foundation are the necessary foundation for a democratic system in Burma, it can be considered that Shalom Foundation is making democratic space in the country.

Decisive factors for the space created by Shalom Foundation

Shalom Foundation tried to broaden up democratic space in local levels as its objective. The external factor of the creating of the space depends on the political opportunities of NGOs. The government permits more NGOs to work in the country. Shalom Foundation is working in a local level and its activities do not challenge the existence of the SPDC although it tries to widen democratic space to some extent. The central government is unable to address the underdevelopment of war-torn communities in ethnic areas. The government is afraid that the armed resistance groups will call off the ceasefires due to economic frustration. This is an important reason why the military regime allows development projects to be conducted by civil society actors, particularly in ethnic areas. Since Shalom Foundation is a registered organization in the country, international organizations can support financial and technical assistances legally. Since the activities of NGOs are legally permitted, local people can participate without harassment or being arrest by the government.

As internal factors, Shalom Foundation was able to bridge the ceasefire between the government and KIO in the situation of both organizations could agree. Shalom Foundation gained the trust of the government by attending National Convention which is a step of the government's political agenda. There can be a question that whether Shalom Foundation provides legitimacy for the junta by attending the national Convention. In this category, the government cannot be legitimacy since Shalom Foundation is just a local

NGO which does not represent any ethnic group or minority people. It can argue that the organization can take a great advantage because it gained the trust from the government and is hard to be deregistered since it has a role in the National Convention. Shalom Foundation got funded by International Christian Organizations and Vatican Church. Shalom Foundation is a well organized organization and can show transparency and accountability to international donors. The strategy of Shalom Foundation is flexible and incremental, acceptable by the government, and meet with the level that local people can participate.

Impact of Shalom Foundation on democratization

The activities of Shalom Foundation can promote long-lasting peace in the country. With the belief that "peace begins within" the Shalom Foundation focuses its work at changing the attitudes, values and perceptions of individuals as the fundamental principle for peace, trust and conflict resolution. Individuals from all major ethnic nationalities (Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Mon, Bamar, rakhine, Shan) and different religious groups (Buddhists and Christians) are involved in peace maintaining and conflict resolution in the local level. Between 1948 - 2000, 20 major armed groups and many smaller and splinter groups emerged in Burma. The major armed groups are the Burma Communist Party (BCP), Shan State Army (SSA), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Karen National Union (KNU), New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Kayinni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Ethnic insurgency ended the Burmese Parliamentary democracy since the process led to pro-long military coup in 1962. The conflict between all ethnic and Burmese government destabilize the country and slower the process of democratization. Solving the ethnic conflicts becomes necessary step for democratization process in Burma. At present, changing the hearts of many people at the local level is Shalom's strategy and it is less threatening. At the same time moving from the local level to socio-political level obtains more risk and is therefore a long-term strategy. The capacity building training of Shalom Foundation has impacted on individual

life of the participants. Because of the projects, many villagers become aware of their possibilities and able to communicate with different groups building understanding and finally it led to less discrimination in the communities. Since many people of the country have deep-rooted fears, distrust and insecurities, changing the hearts of the people is time consuming. Thus, the impact of Shalom Foundation on democratization process cannot be seen in the national level. At the same time, just working for local level changes and not moving to the socio-political systemic change will not change the political system.

Similarities and differences between two organizations

Shalom Foundation is formed and registered as a legal and formal NGO while the 88 Generation Students is an informal organization which has consequently turned into a social movement. Shalom Foundation has been able to build the trust of the government by working as a bridge to get a peace agreement between the government and KIO. The 88 Generation Students in contrast are mistrusted by the government because of their protest campaigns and their inflammatory political background as former political prisoners. Shalom Foundation is officially registered and it can accept funds legally from international organizations. So it can clearly demonstrate its accountability, reliability and transparency to the government. However, the 88 Generation Students cannot registered as a legal organization and so it cannot accept funds legally from international organizations and so the group is not transparent to the government. It seems to have informal financial support from both inside and outside the country, but since their funding is kept secret, the accountability and reliability are also not clear. Shalom Foundation carries out their activities mainly in ethnic areas which are politically in the periphery of the country while the 88 Generation Students operate mainly in Yangon, which is politically in the central area. Shalom Foundation cooperates with the government and attends National Convention in which the 88 Generation Students refused to cooperate with the government and protest against. The 88 Generation Students is well-known and has tried to work for national-level political transition in a radical approach. Few people know about Shalom Foundation and it works for

democratic foundations on a community level. The activities of Shalom Foundation are mainly trainings such as peace making, conflict resolution, and negotiation. Shalom Foundation designed its approach to democratization by the incremental ways which might take decades. The activities of 88 Generation are mainly national level activities such as signature campaign in which 500,000 people participated. The 88 Generation designed its approach to democracy by directly challenging the government's authoritative power.

The similarity of the 88 Generation students and Shalom Foundation is that they both are civil society organizations working for democracy under the same authoritarian government. They are in different beds with the same dream. The goals are shared, but the approaches to reach such goals are different. All in all, the activities of the 88 Generation create higher impact on political awareness of people but there is no political opportunity for the group to continue their movement. On the other hand, the impacts of activities of Shalom Foundation are slower but there is a political opportunity to continue their activities. Shalom Foundation have utilized the limited opportunity given by the government, which is confining social actions within the scope that not threatening to the government, instead of creating democratic space themselves. By so doing, they have compromised with the existing repressive structure, with the trade off for low profile activities.”

Conclusions

Over night democracy in Burma can only be possible in two ways: either the SPDC is forced out of power or it decides willingly to surrender power from a position of strength. For the latter to happen, there would need to be a significant shift of values in the armed forces leadership and civil society will have a role if that is ever to occur. However, the mere ejection of the SPDC from power in Burma will not be sure to lead to the return to a democratic government. Even if the SPDC were forced from power, a

transition to a functioning and effective democracy would be hard, and there is a high likelihood the country might become destabilized and conflict will follow. Ethnic and religious communities could clash during the transition process and it could lead to bloody turmoil. Thus a lack of democratic culture prevents the successful democratic change. Democracy will succeed only if there is a strong civil society in Burma. The decisive factor to restore democracy in Burma is to strengthen civil society in different sectors such as education, health and religion and nurture democratic culture in the country.

This study suggests that the balance of power lies firmly in favor of the SPDC. No social movement is sufficiently unified, organized and powerful to force the SPDC from power by either violent or non-violent means. In the absence of the overthrow of the SPDC, the only path to democracy in Burma is one negotiated by the SPDC from a position of relative strength. If the dialogue between Aung San Suu Kyi and the SPDC progresses, and a transition plan is agreed, it is likely to lead to an amendment of the new constitution. After some extended period, election would be held and power transferred. But, it is not clear how much power the military would continue to hold and how much freedom independent organizations would be permitted after elections.

This study has showed how far civil society organization could use humanitarian space to create a restricted civic space under the authoritarian government. It has also examined the maximum possibility of NGOs to use humanitarian space to support for democratization process under the authoritarian regime. Although the social movement organizations created a big democratic space in the national level, it was finally cracked down when thousands of people participate in the space. Since NGOs have a humanitarian space to operate in, they can maintain that space as they slowly work towards democratization. The finding in the study of Shalom Foundation is in contrast to information that NGOs in Burma can only deliver humanitarian aid rather than working for democratization. In fact NGOs' intervention alone is not enough to protect human

rights, because it does not try to address the underlying causes of political problems. But the presence of NGOs in local communities can hinder the human rights abuses of the local authorities.

Nevertheless, many local NGOs and CBOs are using the humanitarian space within which to work for development from below, and build networks of independent, community-level participation. These locally-rooted associations have potential to undermine the ideological and practical basis of military rule, creating autonomous space, at least in limited spheres. This study has showed that although the SPDC tries to reach every corner of civil society, it is not capable of reaching every corner all of the time. Some political parties, including the NLD are using the public space by holding meetings, seminars and announcing statements. There are still secret meetings and discussion among students, writers and religious people. There are professional associations which are working in public space for their objectives. There are human rights based INGOs such as ILO, Save the Children and British Council and LNGOs which are working in humanitarian space for democratic purposes. All of the organizations are constrained in some ways by the SPDC although not all of the time and not in all of their activities. But civil society organizations in Burma are using public space for their purposes.

As the study showed, the most substantial constraint on the space of civil society in Burma is the government's intolerance to dissent and distrust to organizations. Nevertheless, the past ten years have seen a re-adjustment of state-society relations such as the government allowed many NGOs to work in the country. As the study showed, the 88 Generation Students attempted to realize a national level political settlement by creating democratic space for people. INGOs, LNGOs and CBOs are able to work in humanitarian space and delivering assistance in ways which build local capacities, strengthen protection, and contribute towards development and longer-term

reconstruction efforts. These kinds of outcomes cannot be assumed as strengthening the SPDC.

The study of Shalom Foundation has showed that NGOs have humanitarian space as long as they do not challenge the government. Although the government limits the amount of registered NGOs, NGOs that are not registered with government agencies are not considered illegal. These agencies are working as the registered NGOs in the country. In some respects, the study also shows that, the operational environment for NGOs in Burma today is more restrictive than it was two years ago though it is still better than 1990s when very few NGOs were allowed to work in the country. Although there are still many obstacles, NGOs have become adept at working in space that are visible only from the ground and finding support from officials at the working level.

At the same time, in some respects, the pressures on civil society organizations are higher, as the government pursues its political roadmap. To secure a favorable outcome in the planned referendum and next elections, the pressure is on the military and its sponsored- organizations. They want to improve their image as a provider of benefits and to ensure that no one stirs up local resistance. For both these reasons, the authorities announced NGO guidelines to contain the space of NGOs. Although the guidelines reflect the heightened sense of uncertainty within the government, these guidelines have not been implemented in reality.

The emergence of CSOs and their initiatives reflects a change in political thinking at the top of the state although it is in a small scale. At the same time, new civil society can sow the seeds for a long-term, gradual realignment of political and ethnic relations in the country to the extent that they are able to expand without provoking a backlash from the authorities. Meanwhile, their greatest impact is on the ground in the communities where civil society networks develop and challenge existing local political structures, primarily armed groups. Although civil society has limited potential, it is working on a

front line for more plural and participatory structures that would serve the general population better.

After all, regardless of the government's anti-civil society measures, Burma does have somewhat vibrant CSOs. This study proved that in spite of the limitations and constraints, there is certain democratic space for CSOs. Although they are not currently in a position to challenge the government, these organizations can turn themselves into politically conscious civil society groups when the political opportunity structure permits. In the absence of major political reform, the impact on democratization of expanding civil society in Burma is crucial to local empowerment. All in all, the thesis will conclude that there are limited political opportunities for CSOs in Burma to successfully bring about democracy at the national level, but there are certain political opportunities for NGOs, as part of civil society organizations working under humanitarian approach, to expand and politicize its existing public space and can be seen as a condition for fostering long-term democratization process inside the country.

All in all, the approaches of the 88 Generation students and Shalom Foundation are not inherently different. Both approaches can even work together as a hybrid strategy for democratization. While social movements are working on the front line of politic, the civil society networks, grassroots people's participation, negotiation methods, compromising ways trained by Shalom Foundation and other NGOs can contribute the movement to become on the right way and bring out some political solution which can bring to democratic system.

Recommendations

Based on the study of the 88 Generation Students and Shalom Foundation, the following recommendations are proposed as being most relevant to creating democratic space of civil society.

To maintain a long term democratic space, the 88 Generation Students should change politics of confrontation since the massive power imbalance between the government and the group. A more gradual and subtle strategy can be used to become less imbalance between the government and the group. Since the 88 Generation Students have a high reputation and get support by many people and international organizations, they can be more successful by working as an NGO organization and using the humanitarian space in the country. When the political situation permits, they can change to more politically active organizations such as policy advocacy group. As an alternative way, the 88 Generation Students should maintain the force they have by only doing lower momentum political campaign and transform the group to political party when the election, which seems to be unavoidable, come as in the political agenda of the SPDC. The 88 Generation Students need to find more experience and skills on negotiation. It is required to search for some positive ways to address the political problem of Burma. Leaders from new generation need to come out and use new strategies joined by large numbers of ambitious people who want change in the societies.

For the current NGOs in Burma, they should gradually raise the public's awareness of the causes of poverty, conflict, human rights and democratic values. Together they could also gradually raise government officials' awareness of peace, negotiation and human rights. On the other hand, NGOs should not be satisfied with simple community development programs. They need to go to the level of empowerment approach to the community.

LNGOs, student groups, other civil society organizations should increase the contacts among themselves to increase mutual understanding. One specific important initiative would be establishing meaningful coordination bodies for specific issues. INGOs and UN agencies would be in an ideal position to take this initiative. They would need to build trust and create a space for local NGOs and CBOs. They should also

explore further opportunities to increase information sharing, networking and joint projects.

Capacity building (skills, knowledge and experience of staff) is also a very critical area to address in the short term and long term democratization. Embassies, INGOs and the UN agencies should support capacity building through funding and training efforts to strengthen programmatic, administrative and managerial capacity. British Embassy and American Embassy are pioneers in providing that kind of courses and other embassies should follow the way. NGOs should give capacity building within their organizations a higher priority. International donors should foster supportive, long-term relationships with local associations. However, it needs to be careful that the long-standing politicization of assistance by donors and lobby groups can damage the trust between the government and NGOs.

Burma is structured by many ethnic nationalities which create environment of conflict. Ceasefires on the ground are an essential first step towards addressing the needs of rural communities, and building local participation and democracy from below. International organizations should be aware of these situations and should invest more on promoting civil society and national reconciliation. In the current political climate, with only limited options available for national-level transition, civil society networks can represent an important vehicle for long-term, bottom-up democratization in the country. International Organizations should support local NGOs and CBOs to be able to promote grass-roots social mobilization and potentially political participation in the long-term. In the end, these local networks can form the base for democratization at the national level, and help to ensure that political transition is sustained, and takes root in local communities.

Further Study

The important topic for further study is civil society and monk organizations. Monk organizations were not analyzed in this research. A very interesting future study could revolve around the authority of monks in Burmese society where 90 percent are Buddhists. The study can analyze the role of Buddhism in forming NGOs and CBOs, and the role of monks in Burmese democracy. This topic would bring greater understanding to this area. Another important study is how the introducing of market economy in the country affects democracy in Burma. Now the government is trading with more international organizations and practicing market economy, it has to give some freedom to be able to develop business in the country. Not only can the role of civil society, the role of market economy be open up democratic space in Burma.