THE EVOLUTION OF THE MEDIA IN THE AUNG SAN SUU KYI SAGA FROM 1988-2013

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine the evolution of the media in the Aung San Suu Kyi saga to show the changes that have taken place, from the dominance of print media at the beginning of her struggle for democracy in 1988 to the growing role of digital media by 2013. Technological advancements have allowed digital media to be fast, far-reaching, and pervasive. The media has thus been an important tool in impacting change in Burma, from military rule to some civilian rule. The term Burma will be used in the thesis until 1989, when the military junta changed the country’s name to Myanmar. The scope covers a period of twenty-four years and includes the media chronicling her return home in 1989 to care for her ailing mother, winning the 1990 elections and the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, and being elected to parliament in 2012 as her country’s most notable democratic leader.

The organization of this thesis is in five parts. Chapter I, “Introduction: Background Information to 1988 on the Media, Burma (Myanmar), and Aung San Suu Kyi,” sets the stage by providing important relevant information for the rest of this thesis. Chapter II, “The Role of Print and Broadcast Media in the Aung San Suu Kyi Saga, 1989-1990,” tracks the beginning of her relationship with the media and shows how they reinforce each other. The media provided her a platform to voice her country’s struggles and she afforded the media compelling stories on human rights abuses. Chapter III, “The
Continued Domination of Print and Broadcast Media in the Aung San Suu Kyi Saga, 1991-1999,” continues to explore this relationship by focusing on socio-economic and political problems in Myanmar as well as on the media’s role. Chapter IV, “Aung San Suu Kyi and the Media, 2000-2011,” examines some long-awaited changes in Myanmar along with the growth of digital media, which captured and immediately relayed these historic events. Chapter V, “Conclusion: The Media’s Role in the Aung San Suu Kyi Saga, 2012-2013, and Future Prospects,” traces the latest developments in media coverage of Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi and discusses some future prospects regarding her and the media.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO 1988 ON THE MEDIA, BURMA (MYANMAR), AND AUNG SAN SUU KYI

The media has been linked to political impact ever since mankind has had the ability to spread information on a wide scale with the invention of the printing press in 1455. Over the years, mass communications have allowed revolutionaries to spread their ideas, brought groups of people together for a cause, and enabled the masses, even in Burma (Myanmar since 1989), to question those in power. This thesis focuses on the evolution of the media in connection to Aung San Suu Kyi. The aim of this first chapter is to provide relevant information on the development of the media; important data on Burma including its location, history, religion and peoples; and some understanding of its main democratic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, from her childhood to her return to Burma. The scope of this chapter covers a long period, from early times to 1988. The organization is in four sections to cover the three main parts of this chapter and the conclusion.

All numerical data in this thesis is taken from searches conducted on the LexisNexis Academic database. For the search, relevant keywords were used with specific dates corresponding to the events in Myanmar and in Aung San Suu Kyi’s life. Within the database, all international and regional English language news sources were employed to gather information.

The Evolution of the Media, 1455-1988

It is critical to fully examine the evolution of the media in order to understand its vital role in affecting change around the world, including in Burma. This section will
trace the development of the media in three stages. First, print media will be discussed, which includes the Gutenberg printing press, the steam press, the linotype, and phototypesetting. The second part will cover five advancements in broadcast media: the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, and the satellite. The third section will deal with electronic media, focusing on the personal computer and the early development of the Internet as digital media only became pervasive in the mid 1990s.

Print media started with Johannes Gutenberg, a German blacksmith born in 1398 to a politically active family. He invented the moveable type printing press that began the print revolution in Europe in 1455. His system was a series of small blocks made out of lead and tin that each had a letter of the alphabet. The blocks could be rearranged to print a new set of documents. The Gutenberg Bible was the first publication printed in this fashion. Previously, books were duplicated through handwritten copying by a limited few educated enough to read and write. Gutenberg’s invention allowed for books, pamphlets, and other types of literature to be mass-produced quickly and inexpensively. This resulted in more people having increased access to information.

The next technological advancement under print media was the steam press in the early nineteenth century by another German inventor named Friedrich Koenig. His steam machine was remarkable because it allowed an even greater amount of production. This led to the printing of newspapers that became known as the “Penny Press” because it only cost one penny per paper. Since newspapers were inexpensive to produce, the press began to cover more sensationalized topics that appealed to a wider audience, therefore

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increasing sales. According to Bill Kovarik, “The editorial agenda had changed drastically, shifting from long political discussions to short descriptions of events, crimes and scandals; from summary essays about social trends to first-person accounts by paid ‘reporters.’”

The next step was in 1886, when Otto Mergenthaler, a German American, revolutionized the media industry again with his linotype machine. A linotype’s input process was similar to that of the typewriter. An operator would sit at a keyboard and type text, and then a small metal item with a single character engraved into one side, called a matrix, would be assembled to form one line of text. After that, each line of text would be put together in order, ink placed upon it, and rolled onto paper. This innovation escalated the speed of production and allowed for newspapers to have more than eight pages in each edition. Around the same time, halftone, a process for photographs to be etched onto metal plates, was invented, allowing for photographs to be printed as well. The linotypes and halftone technologies were used all the way up to the 1970s, when computers replaced them.

In the meantime, in the 1940s, Frenchmen Rene Higonnet and Louis Moyroud developed a phototypesetting machine, where photosensitive paper containing different blocks of text and halftones were put together, transferred to negatives, and then imprinted onto aluminum printing plates. This machine first came out in the 1940s and

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2 Ibid., 49.
3 Ibid., 99.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 100.
was used throughout the 1970s. A decade later it would be eclipsed by the personal computer. Personal computers, from companies such as IBM and Apple, created desktop publishing, which enabled the creation of digital layouts and cut down on production time and costs. This will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this section.

Broadcast media began with the invention of the telegraph, a way of sending messages through an electric current sent through a wire. It served as a means for the press to gather news faster across far distances and was a precursor to the radio. American Samuel Morse created the electric telegraph in 1837. Morse, with the aid of his assistant Alfred Vail, was able to devise a system that used a click key as a transmitter and a receiver that took in a pattern of dots and dashes on a moving piece of paper. This series of dots and dashes became known as Morse code, named after its inventor.

Improving the broadcast medium even further was the invention of the telephone, which was credited to American inventors Elisha Gray and Alexander Graham Bell. Gray developed a way to transmit vocal sounds of conversations telegraphically through an electric current. At the same time, Bell had been working on a harmonic telegraph that used varying tones and frequencies for sending several messages simultaneously on the same electrical wire.

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6 Ibid.


8 Kovarik, *Revolutions in Communication*, 84.

9 Ibid.
The next important advancement in broadcast was the development of the radio. In 1895, Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi was able to send Morse code wirelessly through an antenna for miles around the surrounding hills on his property.\textsuperscript{10} Previously, Morse code could only be sent through an electronic wire. This enabled information to travel even longer distances than before. Lee De Forest, an American inventor hailed as the father of radio, created a vacuum tube that boosted radio waves and allowed the transmission of audio speech.\textsuperscript{11} Numerous radio stations were erected in the 1920s and by 1927 there were around 732 stations on the air.\textsuperscript{12} It was a new medium for people to listen to entertainment programming, such as music, or news and cultural programs.\textsuperscript{13} Prominent American media organizations, like the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), all came into existence during this period. The demand for radio news grew during the advent of World War II, as tensions rose in Europe and audiences were tuned in to hear the latest developments amongst the great powers abroad.

Radio technology led to the creation of the television in the late 1920s by Idaho high school student Philo Farnsworth. He devised a system that lit up phosphorous on the back of a glass screen.\textsuperscript{14} Large companies, such as General Electric (GE) and Westinghouse, began manufacturing televisions and by 1952 fifteen million American

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\textsuperscript{10} Fang, \textit{A History of Mass Communication}, 91.
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\textsuperscript{12} Kovarik, \textit{Revolutions in Communication}, 217.
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\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 237.
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homes had them.\textsuperscript{15} The first regularly scheduled evening news broadcasts began in 1948, with NBC’s \textit{NBC Television Newsreel} airing in February and CBS’ \textit{CBS Television News} in August.\textsuperscript{16} Network news dominated the television landscape until satellite technology made it possible for cable news channels such as the Cable News Network (CNN) to enter the market. CNN was founded by Ted Turner in 1980 and was the first channel to broadcast news twenty-four hours a day.

The next advancement in broadcast technology was the development of the satellite, a machine that orbits around the earth in order to relay telephone, radio, and television signals. The Russians launched the first satellite, Sputnik, into space in October 1957. However, it wasn’t until the 1980s that satellites could be employed to broadcast programs made on one side of the country to the other side without the use of a local radio station.\textsuperscript{17} Through the invention of the satellite, television reporters were able to bring the news live from remote locations back to their home countries instantly.\textsuperscript{18} Nevertheless, satellite radio stations, such as Sirius, would not be established until 1997 after getting approval from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The third stage of the media’s evolution is the development of electronic media, beginning with the computer. As previously mentioned, the computer was a significant advancement because newspaper publishers were able to create digital layouts, making it

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 240.


\textsuperscript{17} Kovarik, \textit{Revolutions in Communication}, 233.

\textsuperscript{18} Fang, \textit{A History of Mass Communication}, 209.
faster and cheaper to produce papers. Origins of the computer began in 1837 with Englishman Charles Babbage’s Analytical Engine, a machine designed to perform calculations. American John Atanasoff, however, constructed the first electronic digital computer in 1939. In 1944, engineers at International Business Machines (IBM) successfully developed the Harvard Mark I, an electronic machine that could calculate long computations automatically. In the 1970s, personal computers were developed as technology advanced and allowed for machine production to be cheap enough to be sold to the general public. It was during this time that computers began to populate newsrooms around the world.

The next major innovation that impacted electronic media was the creation of the Internet, a virtual network of connected computers that bring together millions of public, private, and government systems and allows for users to access information from around the world. The Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), a part of the U.S. Department of Defense, was the first to create a network called ARPANET in 1969. ARPA was the agency responsible for the development of new technology for the military and was involved with universities such as the University of California, Berkeley, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). J.C.R. Licklider, computer information chief at ARPA, had come up with an idea of using one computer terminal to communicate with three different locations instead of having three separate

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20 Ibid.

In the 1990s, the development of the World Wide Web would have a profound impact on the media industry and the way people consume news, as text, photo, and video from around the world would be accessible through a computer. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter III.

Newspapers, radio and television all remain important sources for current events, but with the advancement of technology in the twentieth century, media outlets have expanded their outreach by building a presence online where they can incorporate text, photo, audio, and video to meet the demands of the public. These once separate and distinct news entities are no longer delivering content in one medium but are now giving audiences a variety of options through the Internet. The vital role that the media plays in reporting the news is an important factor in Burma’s ongoing struggles with political change, media censorship, ethnic strife, religious issues, and poor human rights conditions. The following section will provide relevant information on the origins of Burma’s complex state of affairs.

**Important Data on Burma to 1988**

In this first chapter, the term Burma will be used, since the name change to Myanmar occurred in 1989. Regarding location, Burma is bordered by China, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand, and its coastline defines the eastern section of the Bay of Bengal. There are three main parts to Burma: the coastal area, lower Burma, and upper Burma. The major rivers are the Irrawaddy and the Salween. Burma has an ethnically diverse population, comprising the Mons, Burmans, Shans, Karens, Rakhines, Kachins,

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Chins, Chinese, and Indians.\textsuperscript{23} The original peoples were the Mons and Pyus, though the Pyus have intermarried and disappeared. The Mons had occupied lower Burma, centered in Pegu and Thaton. The Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Shans were recorded to have already been living in various parts of Burma since twelfth or thirteenth century Pagan.\textsuperscript{24} Later, during colonial rule, the British brought in the Indians to help them exploit the country, while the Chinese came on their own mainly for trade opportunities. The unions between the British and the Indians and the Burmese led to a new group of Eurasians, either Anglo-Indians or Anglo-Burmese. In regards to religion, Theravada Buddhism became the dominant faith in the country, with believers being responsible for their own salvation through good works.\textsuperscript{25} This religion had come to Burma through India.

As for the history of Burma, this section will be divided in three main periods: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. The pre-colonial period is made up of two sections: pre-Pagan (first 1000 years) and Pagan, which includes the Shan era, the Toungoo Dynasty, and the Kongbaung Dynasty to 1885. In the pre-Pagan period, the Pyu city-states were established in 200 BC near the Irrawaddy River. The Pyu period saw the flourishing of language, culture, art, religion, trade and politics. However, they were conquered because of their strict adherence to non-violence, which made them unwilling to use even silkworms to make cloth.\textsuperscript{26} The Pagan Dynasty absorbed the Pyus.


\textsuperscript{25} Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Myanmar."

\textsuperscript{26} D.R. SarDesai, Southeast Asia, Past and Present (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), 31.
Meanwhile, the Mon had established large city-states in Thaton and Pegu in the ninth century. The Pagan Dynasty eventually overpowered the Mons as well in 1057.

The Pagan period represented the height of Burman power and was known as the golden age of Burma. The Pagans boasted many accomplishments, including strengthening the military, providing free education, and unifying the country under King Anawrahta. Their most significant contribution was the connection of religion and state as Buddhist monks became important advisors to the king during this period and ordinary citizens could gain merit by performing good deeds to help the monks, such as providing them with food, robes, and oil lamps. However, the Pagan Dynasty then succumbed to Mongol attacks in 1287.

The Shans, who came down from the north with the Mongols, eventually controlled the north and eastern parts of Burma. They were in power from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, a period that is significant because it was the only phase during pre-colonial times when the Burmans were not in power. The Shans’ dominance at this time also depicts the deep-rooted ethnic issues in Burma’s history. They were then annexed by the Toungoo Dynasty, a Burman group. Despite becoming a part of the Toungoo kingdom and then falling under British rule, the Shans always exercised some level of autonomy.

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The Toungoo Dynasty, which brought control of Burma back to the Burmans in 1531, extended into parts of Laos and Siam (now Thailand).\(^{30}\) It also reunified the country by conquering the Shans in the north, the Mons in the south, and Ava to the east although it never annexed Arakan. The Toungoo Dynasty gradually disintegrated in the eighteenth century and was followed by the Konbaung Dynasty in 1752.\(^{31}\) Both the Toungoo and Konbaung dynasties began reforms that would be important for modern Burma, such as the creation of state owned factories that produced modern weaponry and goods.

The Konbaung Dynasty was the last dynasty before British rule. It fell to the British in 1885 after three wars: 1824-1826, 1852-1853, and 1885.\(^{32}\) In the First Anglo-Burmese War, the British gained control of the coastal areas of Arakan and Tenasserim. The Burmese also had to pay an indemnity of one million pounds sterling. The Second Anglo-Burmese War resulted in the British annexation of lower Burma.\(^{33}\) The Third Anglo-Burmese War caused the Konbaung Dynasty to lose sovereignty as the British gained all of upper Burma into the Kachin and Chin Hills. The Burmese had fought as best as they could, but in the end they were not strong enough to defeat the more advanced British colonizers.


\(^{32}\) Charney, A History of Modern Burma, 5.

Burma was fully conquered by the British in 1885 with the fall of Konbaung Dynasty in the Third Anglo-Burmese War. The following were the main reasons why Britain wanted all of Burma: imperial rivalry, especially with France; exploitation of resources (rice, teak, jewels, gold); a passageway into China; and to spread Christianity. Under colonial rule, Burma was split into two areas: Ministerial Burma (Tenasserim, Arakan, Pegu, and Irrawaddy divisions) and the Frontier Areas (Shan states, Kachin region, and Chin hills).³⁴

Burma experienced political, economic, and socio-cultural changes under British colonialism. Politically, the monarchy was abolished and Burma became a province of British India in 1886, making it a colony of a colony until 1937, when Burma became its own province. The British also separated religion and state and implemented a bureaucratic system, so that instead of villages working out local issues, villagers would have to go to townships and law courts, speak to government clerks, and fill out countless forms in order to resolve disputes with neighbors and to pay taxes.³⁵

Economically, Burma became a part of the global trade market, saw increased exports in rice, teak, gold, and jewels, and witnessed the establishment of tobacco and rubber plantations.³⁶ Yet, the Burmese benefitted little from these changes and had to pay colonial taxes. The socio-cultural changes included a rise in politically active monks, who

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³⁵ Charney, A History of Modern Burma, 8.
had lost their esteemed place in society under British rule. Since the British separated the entities of church and state, the monks were no longer honored advisors and lost much of their autonomy. Moreover, Christian evangelists had entered Burma during colonial rule and they sought to convert the population away from Buddhism.\(^{37}\) In regards to education, literacy rates had always been high in Burma due to the education from Buddhist monks. The monks taught their students to read and write in Burmese and Pali, the languages used in Theravada Buddhist scriptures. However, under colonial rule, the British set up two institutions that taught English: Rangoon College and the American Baptist College (which became Judson College after the American missionary Adorinam Judson).\(^{38}\) Only wealthy Burmese were able to pay the required school fees to attend these establishments, and as a result, very few Burmese were able to speak, read, or write English, despite it being the standard language of business and politics in Burma. Additionally, Indians were brought into Burma to serve as clerks and to work in other English-speaking positions. The Chinese immigrated as well and they setup manufacturing businesses, brokerages, and contracting firms.\(^{39}\)

During colonial rule, the people of Burma developed a strong sense of nationalism, fueled by Buddhism, and strong anti-British and anti-Indian sentiments. A nationalist movement began to take shape with the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA), founded in 1906, with the aim of promoting cultural nationalism and


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 57.

\(^{39}\) Charney, A History of Modern Burma, 23.
revitalizing interest in Burmese history and literature. The YMBA eventually divided into two factions, the second group becoming the General Council of Burman Associations (GCBA), in 1921. The GCBA faction supported the 1920 student protest against the formation of Rangoon University because it mirrored elitist policies. It was during this time that a young student named Aung San became involved in the nationalist movement. The Burmese were provoked into riots that began in the 1920s and 1930s, led by Buddhist monks like Saya San, who protested against the tax increase, and U Ottama and U Wisara, who criticized the British and were imprisoned for doing so.

Aung San, who would become known as the father of modern Burma, started as a student leader who wanted elitist policies out of the school system. He first gained attention as the student union secretary at Rangoon University, where he led a student strike in February 1936. After graduating, Aung San earned more prominence by working with the Dobama Asiayone (Our Burman Association) in 1939. He and other members of the society used the honorary title of “Thakin,” which meant master in Burmese. Aung Sang then garnered greater distinction by co-founding the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in the same year. In 1940, Aung San was looking for foreign assistance to aid in Burma’s independence from British rule. He headed to China, seeking help from the Chinese Kuomintang nationalists (KMT). However, once he got there, he was contacted by the Japanese and was promised help to gain independence. Aung San

40 Wintle, A Perfect Hostage, 55.
41 Ibid., 61.
43 Wintle, Perfect Hostage, 67.
was then flown to Tokyo to undergo training with other Burmese men who would become known as the “30 Comrades.”\(^{44}\) They received Japanese training that would lead to the development of the Burmese Independent Army (BIA). Aung San and his compatriots collaborated with the Japanese in getting the British out of Burma.

Under the Japanese occupation, a puppet government was set up with Ba Maw as the head of state. During World War II, Japan occupied other parts of Asia such as Indochina, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. In all these countries and in Burma, the Japanese treated the native population terribly by imposing forced labor and using “comfort women” or sex slaves for their soldiers.\(^{45}\) As the defense minister in Ba Maw’s regime from 1943-1945, Aung San soon realized that the Japanese had no real intention of giving Burma independence. In response, he and other Burmese nationalists secretly formed the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) in August 1944 and they discreetly contacted the Allied forces.\(^{46}\) On March 27, 1945, the BIA, which was now the Burmese National Army (BNA), revolted against the Japanese and helped the Allies to win World War II.

After the war, Aung San was ready for Burma to be independent. Instead, with the Japanese gone, the British returned and Governor Reginald Dorman-Smith was reinstated as the governor of Burma. The British planned for him to govern with emergency powers


until the pre-war Burmese government could be reestablished.\(^{47}\) Dorman-Smith decided not to include the League in his executive council and considered Aung San a traitorous rebel leader.\(^{48}\) In order to get rid of the governor, Aung San staged a strike in September 1946 that involved government workers, laborers, police, and students. Dorman-Smith was recalled to London and was replaced by Hubert Rance, who was much more sympathetic to Burmese independence. Aung San served as deputy chairman of a new executive council formed by Rance. However, the new governor excluded the communists from joining this council and the CPB broke with the AFPFL. The communists then split into two factions, the Red Flags and the White Flags. Working with Rance, Aung San signed an agreement with British Prime Minister Clement Atlee on January 27, 1947 that ensured Burma’s independence within one year.\(^{49}\)

Next on Aung San’s agenda was the unification of the country under the Union of Burma. He visited all the ethnic minorities and convinced them to unite as one nation. The Shans, Kachins, and Chins agreed to join only if they could retain their autonomy. The Shans also asked for the option to secede from the Union after a period of ten years if they were dissatisfied with the state of affairs.\(^{50}\) Aung San and leaders from other ethnic groups solidified this agreement at the Panglong Conference on February 12, 1947. However, the Karens wanted their own independent state and only sent observers to the

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Aung San."

conference. In April of that year, Burma held its first general election and the AFPFL won 196 of 202 seats in the Constitutional Assembly.\(^{51}\) A few months later, in July, tragedy struck when, under orders from U Saw, his political rival, armed gunmen assassinated Aung San during a meeting in Rangoon.\(^{52}\)

The task of leading the country now fell upon U Nu, who took over leadership of the AFPFL and the government. He then became Prime Minister when Burma gained its independence in January 1948. After independence, the country faced a war on two fronts as both the communists and the Karens took up an armed struggle against the U Nu government. Additionally, he had made Buddhism the official religion of Burma, which angered many ethnic minorities who were not Buddhists. For instance, the Muslim Rohingyas wanted to secede and to join Pakistan. Gen. Ne Win, who was the head of the army, was told to build up his troops in response to the internal conflicts. The AFPFL also began to fragment amidst disagreements within their ranks.\(^{53}\) U Nu, unlike Aung San, had no ties to the military, the hill tribes, or the communists and was struggling to maintain control of the country. At this time, the economy declined severely after the agriculture and mining industries were nationalized and the Indians, who were targeted, left. The U Nu government experienced additional problems in 1949 when KMT soldiers entered Burma to escape from the Chinese communists.\(^{54}\) Many of these soldiers stayed, intermarried with the locals, and became involved in the drug trade.

\(^{51}\) Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Aung San."

\(^{52}\) Charney, A History of Modern Burma, 69.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 92.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 79
In 1958, U Nu asked Ne Win to temporarily take over the government to establish order. By 1960, a general election was held and Nu’s party was re-elected. The two years that U Nu held office continued to be problematic as the country was fraught with political, economic, ethnic, and religious issues. Burma became politically isolated with its neutral policy in order to not malign the communist and anti-communist powers. Additionally, inflation, rising costs of living, and failed crops contributed to the country’s poor economy. Ethnic civil war continued and it was related to religion, as many of the minorities were non-Buddhists. U Nu’s return to power would be short-lived because, in 1962, Ne Win staged a military coup that toppled U Nu’s government.

Ne Win successfully took over the government with the intention of establishing a socialist state. He abolished the 1947 constitution and formed the State Revolutionary Council that governed the country. He also created the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), which soon became the only legal political party under military control. According to Michael Charney, this was to prevent power struggles that had plagued the U Nu administration. The Revolutionary Council introduced Burmese socialist reforms, such as the nationalization of the economy, complete regulation of the media, and limited autonomy to Buddhist monks. These reforms fueled discontent amongst the people as the economy deteriorated, freedom of speech became non-existent, and protests were violently suppressed.

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55 Ibid., 81
56 Ibid., 84.
57 Ibid., 109.
In the latter half of 1974, Ne Win declared martial law, which lasted until 1976, due to worker strikes, student demonstrations, and trouble from the army. The year 1974 was also important because a new constitution was drafted and the State Council was established, replacing the Revolutionary Council. Two years later general elections were held and the People’s Assembly (Pyithu Hluttaw) elected Ne Win again to serve four more years as Burma’s president and as chairman of the State Council.\(^{58}\) Meanwhile, ethnic conflict persisted, partly due to the country’s 1974 constitution that failed to recognize Burma’s ethnic minorities. The Karen National Union (KNU), the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the Shan United Revolutionary Army, and the Arakan Liberation Party were among the ethnic movements that opposed the Burmese military government. In 1975 these groups formed the National Democratic Front (NDF).\(^{59}\)

Along with continued ethnic conflict, the military government also had difficulty in improving Burma’s economy as demonstrations from workers, students, and monks persisted. In May 1980, Ne Win attempted to curb the monks’ growing opposition to military rule by holding a government sponsored religious conference on Buddhism.\(^{60}\) He also granted amnesty to rebels, and former Prime Minister U Nu returned to the country after choosing to live in India for many years.\(^{61}\) The following year, Ne Win announced his retirement as president and was succeeded by Gen. San Yu, his close colleague.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 136  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 143.  
However, he retained his control on the government as chairman of the BSPP and was elected to the same position in 1985.

The economy further declined and on September 5, 1987, Ne Win launched a currency reform that declared the three highest bills as worthless and that old banknotes could not be exchanged or cashed in.\(^{62}\) New 45 kyats and 90 kyats bills were introduced because they were divisible by nine as this was Ne Win’s lucky number. This caused great discontent amongst the student population, whose savings were suddenly wiped out and they found themselves unable to pay tuition fees.\(^{63}\) Universities were closed the following day after students began protesting in response to the reform.

The situation in Burma was already tense with the economy weakened from growing international debts, currency mismanagement, global recession, poor human rights conditions, and ethnic strife. Under these circumstances, a series of student demonstrations began after several students got into a fight with locals at a teashop on March 12, 1988.\(^{64}\) The son of a local BSPP party official had hit one of the students with a chair after a disagreement between song selections while inside the establishment. The situation escalated in the following days as more clashes occurred between students and locals, prompting the riot police to intervene. The student population became even angrier when they were fired upon and the police barred doctors from operating on

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injured students. Brutality continued with the infamous White Bridge incident, where a group of students were stopped by armed soldiers, then beaten and raped when they demanded change in the government. The demonstrations continued until June, when a major confrontation occurred after 5,000 students from two medical schools and the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) boycotted classes and held protests for a week. They had asked the government to release imprisoned students but had received no response.

As a result of the riots, Gen. Ne Win and his right hand man, Gen. San Yu, resigned as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the BSPP in July 1988. Ne Win also called for multi-party elections to be held but the rest of the BSPP dismissed this call. Gen. Sein Lwin, who became the next BSPP Chairman and President of Burma, was known as “The Butcher,” having orchestrated the White Bridge incident where at least 200 students were brutally beaten. He was forced to resign after only a month in power because of his violent response to the August 1988 protests.

These protests began on August 8, 1988, in Rangoon when dockworkers walking out on their jobs and going on strike. The news spread all over the city and people began marching towards City Hall. All of Rangoon’s population seemed to participate, including dockworkers, monks, students, women, men, children, Burmans, Indians,

65 Ibid., 149.
66 Ibid., 150.
67 Ibid., 151.
68 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 47.
Chinese, and people from almost every ethnic group in the country. The protesters carried pictures of Aung San, flags, and banners and called for democracy and economic reform. The mass demonstrations occurred in towns all across Burma, from the north to the Irrawaddy River, the central plains to the Shan State, and even as far as Myitkyina, the Kachin State capital. This event became known as the 8888 Uprising. At the end of the day however, the army had come in with machine guns and fired at protesters in Rangoon. While the exact number of deaths is unknown, Sit Naing, a medical volunteer, believes that at least 1,000 people were killed from August 8-12.

On August 12, Gen. Sein Lwin announced his resignation. He was replaced by Dr. Maung Maung, the first civilian to hold the position of BSPP Chairman and President of Burma. Unfortunately, he was unable to stop the protests because the people were motivated by Lwin’s resignation and continued to demonstrate, hoping that such pressure on the government would bring about quicker reforms. On August 26, Aung San’s daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, addressed a crowd of nearly half a million people at the Shwedagon Pagoda. She called for non-violent protests and urged the people to embrace the army rather than shun them. Then early in September, the government incited chaos by releasing 10,000 prisoners without food or money. Some of them got into violent confrontations with demonstrators, who had formed vigilante committees.

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69 Ibid., 48.
70 Ibid., 49.
71 Ibid., 53.
72 Ibid., 55.
73 Charney, A Modern History of Burma, 155.
Like his predecessors, Dr. Maung Maung’s presidency was short lived. Gen. Saw Maung orchestrated a coup against him on September 17, 1988 and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the new governing body that would bring peace and stability back to the country as well as facilitate multi-party elections. With violence and looting happening on the streets, Gen. Saw Maung saw this as the government’s opportunity to step in and restore order, so he disbanded the BSPP and formed the National Unity Party (NUP). As the new president, he also established martial law, claiming that current political parties had been helping protesters engage in violent acts.

Nevertheless, SLORC did go through establishing multi-party elections by enacting the Political Parties Registration Law on September 27, 1988. Meanwhile, retired Brigadier Gen. Aung Gyi and Aung San Suu Kyi founded a new political group called the National League for Democracy (NLD) and it stood for multi-party democracy in Burma. The NLD also advocated close connections with the United Nations and the international community, free enterprise, free internal rice trade, and an export-oriented economy. Moreover, the party recognized the importance of the ethnic minorities in Burma and sought to find a long-term solution to problems concerning them. Lintner said that the NLD, however, was not a cohesive organization and comprised several

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74 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 61.
75 Charney, A Modern History of Burma, 161.
76 Ibid.
77 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 66.
78 Ibid.
interest groups with different experiences. This was evident on December 3, 1988, when chairman Aung Gyi decided to leave the party because the rest of the members were unwilling to expel former communists from their ranks.\textsuperscript{79} When he left, Aung San Suu Kyi became leader of the NLD. She then continued campaigning around Burma, promoting the NLD’s message of multi-party democracy. Suu Kyi became the focal point of the Burmese democracy movement and the target of the military government for many years to come.

**History of Aung San Suu Kyi until 1988**

This section of the chapter is organized in three parts. Aung San Suu Kyi’s life is also in three sections: first, her life before she went to England for further studies; second, her education, career, and then marriage to Michael Aris; and third, her return to Burma in 1988 and her involvement in local events.

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945 to Khin Kyi and Aung San, Myanmar’s revolutionary hero. Named after her father, her paternal grandmother, and her mother, her name means “strange collection of bright victories.”\textsuperscript{80} Suu Kyi was only two years old when her father was assassinated. Her mother, although a widow, went on to become a representative for the Lanmadaw constituency, director of the Women and Children Welfare Board, and then chairman of the Social Planning Commission and Council of Social Services.\textsuperscript{81} Khin Kyi sought to instill virtues of compassion, open-

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Wintle, *Perfect Hostage*, 143.

\textsuperscript{81} Lintner, *Aung San Suu Kyi*, 32.
mindedness, and honesty in her three children.\textsuperscript{82} According to Wintle, “Khin Kyi provided the material and emotional support every child needs. In doing so she furnished Suu Kyi with a model of selflessness.”\textsuperscript{83} Suu Kyi attended Methodist English High School in Rangoon, where she excelled in languages and was interested in Burmese and Buddhist literature, Greek mythology, and the European classics.\textsuperscript{84}

In 1960, Khin Kyi became Ambassador to India and Suu Kyi went with her mother to live in New Delhi. At fifteen years old she was exposed to various groups of people, including Buddhists monks from Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia and renowned politicians like India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.\textsuperscript{85} During this time she also learned about the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, a leader well known for his non-violent civil disobedience against the British in order to gain independence. Gandhi’s teachings would influence her own political beliefs when she stood for Burma’s independence later in her life.

In 1964, Suu Kyi went on to study at Oxford University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy, politics, and economics in 1967. She also worked as a research assistant at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London while she pursued her studies. Former British Ambassador to Burma, Lord Paul

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Wintle, \textit{Perfect Hostage}, 154.

\textsuperscript{84} Lintner, \textit{Aung San Suu Kyi}, 34.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 35.
Gore-Booth, acted as Suu Kyi’s custodian while she lived in Britain and it was through this connection that she met her future husband Michael Aris.86

In 1969, Suu Kyi left London to attend New York University’s postgraduate program, but never finished her studies because she took a position at the United Nations (UN). There, she worked for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and she lived with fellow Burmese Dora Than E, a former popular singer in Burma, who was also working at the UN.87 In addition, Suu Kyi met revered politician U Thant, a contemporary of her father’s, who was serving as UN Secretary General. During her time in New York, she also faced some challenges that seemed to foreshadow her future. For instance, when Suu Kyi was invited to the home of U Soe Tin, a member of the Burmese UN delegation, Col. Lwin interrogated her for using a diplomatic passport.88 Suu Kyi was unwilling to be bullied and told Lwin that she had applied for a new Burmese passport, but that it was still being processed. The Burmese ambassador, who was also at the dinner, corroborated this story.89

Meanwhile, according to Lintner, Aris and Suu Kyi continued their friendship through extensive correspondence while she was in New York and he was in Bhutan.90 Suu Kyi then visited him in 1971 and their relationship became serious. At the beginning of the following year, they were married in London at the home of her former guardian.

86 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 39.
87 Ibid., 41.
88 Wintle, Perfect Hostage, 205.
89 Ibid.
90 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 40.
She then joined Aris in Bhutan, taking up an advisory post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The couple remained there for two years before returning to London where they had their first child, Alexander. Four years later, their second son, Kim, was born. As her children began to grow older, Suu Kyi returned to intellectual pursuits. She was able to write a biography on her father for Queensland Press as well as travel books on Myanmar, Bhutan, and Nepal for Macmillan Children’s Books.  

In 1985, Suu Kyi became a visiting scholar at Kyoto University, researching Myanmar’s independence movement. She interviewed aging Japanese soldiers who had known her father or who had fought in Burma during World War II. Her experience in Japan had been a challenge as she struggled with language barriers, cultural differences, and taking care of eight-year-old Kim who had come with her. Suu Kyi and Kim left Tokyo for India the following summer. They were reunited with Aris, who was on a fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Studies. Here, she was able to write two essays, one on “Literature and Nationalism in Burma,” and the other on “Intellectual Life in Burma Under Colonialism.”

During her time abroad, Suu Kyi was a student, academic, wife, and mother, yet her Burmese heritage remained a constant presence in her life. When she was at university, she wore the traditional longyi costume of her native land. Lady Patricia Gore-Booth, wife to the former British ambassador to Burma, Lord Paul Gore-Booth, said that Suu Kyi was trained by her mother in domestic affairs and in traditional

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91 Wintle, Perfect Hostage 215.

92 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 218.

93 Ibid., 219.
Burmese manners, such as slightly bowing before her elders. She also remained fluent in her native language and taught it to her children as well.

However, in March 1988, life for Suu Kyi and her family would drastically change. Khin Kyi suffered a severe stroke, which caused her daughter to immediately return to Burma. Suu Kyi told Aris initially that she would only be gone for a few weeks but that changed when she saw Burma’s severe human rights problems and the lack of democracy. Earlier, Suu Kyi had told her husband, “Should my people need me, you would help me do my duty by them.” The Burmese people, whose frustration had been growing over the lack of economic progress, poor human rights, and government corruption, became involved in a series of demonstrations that would end with the deaths of many people.

So therefore, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma to take care of her mother, who was gravely ill at Rangoon General Hospital on April 2, 1988. Eventually Suu Kyi moved Khin Kyi back to their family home so that her mother could spend her remaining days with her family. It was during this period that the call to serve her country came. While Khin Kyi was resting at home, many students, political activists, and retired military officers came to visit and pay their respects, but they also came to speak with Suu Kyi. Protests had begun in Burma in March, but it wasn’t until August 26, 1988 that Suu Kyi addressed the Burmese public at the Shwedagon Pagoda, where nearly half a

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95 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 41.
million people came to hear her speak.\textsuperscript{96} She purposely began her speech by addressing the monks first, as they have always held an important place in Burmese society. Suu Kyi then emphasized her attachment to the military because of her father and her belief that it could be a force that the people could trust and rely upon.\textsuperscript{97} Suu Kyi also felt that democracy must be the common goal for both the army and the people.\textsuperscript{98} Earlier that month on August 8, the 8888 Uprising had occurred, where for an entire week, the government mercilessly killed hundreds of men, women, and children all over the country who protested for democracy. However, at the time, Suu Kyi was still cautious about entering the national and international spotlight as a democratic leader, telling the London \textit{Times} on August 29, 1988 that she viewed herself more as a mediator.\textsuperscript{99}

But, as government oppression continued, Suu Kyi came to realize that she needed to do more than serve as a mediator. Thus, she fully committed herself to the democratic movement by co-founding the National League for Democracy (NLD) on September 24, 1988, along with retired Brigadier Gen. Aung Gyi. In the meantime, Gen. Saw Maung, head of the newly formed State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), had announced that multi-party elections would be held and the NLD decided to participate. Suu Kyi campaigned all over the country, gave speeches, wrote letters to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and saw foreign dignitaries in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{96}{Ibid., 55.}

\footnotetext{97}{Aung San Suu Kyi, \textit{Freedom From Fear and Other Writings} (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 195.}

\footnotetext{98}{Ibid., 193.}

\footnotetext{99}{Wintle, \textit{Perfect Hostage}, 279.}
\end{footnotes}
Meanwhile, the government arrested other NLD members, but realized that they had to treat Suu Kyi carefully because of the reverence that the people held for her father. Openly attacking her could incite a mass revolution.

On December 27, 1988, at the age of 76, Daw Khin Kyi died in her home at University Avenue. This was a big loss for Suu Kyi, as her mother had been the only parent she had known. Suu Kyi’s brother, Aung San U, was allowed into the country with a visa exemption to attend the funeral as he had become an American citizen. Usually, it was the military regime’s policy to deny entry visas to those who relinquished their Burmese citizenship. At the funeral, different people came to pay their respects to Khin Kyi, including monks to military officers. Large crowds began to gather outside of University Avenue. The government issued a warning for people not to disturb the funeral that was to take place on January 2, 1989.

The year 1988 had been tumultuous for Suu Kyi. She went from struggling between her roles as an academic, wife, and mother, to becoming an important democratic leader in Burma. Suu Kyi witnessed the attempts of fellow Burmese to rise against the military government, only to be imprisoned, injured, or killed. The time had come when her country needed her and she answered the call. Her love of her country would become a lifelong commitment that would be filled with many trials and difficulties as she became separated from her family, placed under house arrest, and

\[101\] Ibid., 67.
\[102\] Ibid., 68.
\[103\] Ibid., 67.
endured long periods of isolation from the rest of the world. Despite this, her beliefs
never wavered and she continued to fight for democracy as best as she could under
difficult circumstances.

Conclusion

The relationship between Aung San Suu Kyi and the media was just beginning as
she was only taking her first steps in a lifelong fight for democratic reforms in Burma.
The media at this time was mainly print media because it was still the most cost-effective
way to spread news. At first, international media coverage of Burma was not widespread,
but as technology improved and people became more aware of Aung San Suu Kyi and
Burma’s political and social issues, reporting increased.

Regarding Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma’s history, she has an important
historical link through her father Aung San. As his daughter, Suu Kyi continues his
legacy by struggling for basic human rights, democracy, and peace for all citizens of
Burma. She embodies the strength of her country through her Buddhist faith, staunch
nationalism, and loyalty to tradition.

Having set the stage with background information on the media, Burma, and
Aung San Suu Kyi, the following chapter will discuss in detail her entry into politics,
leading to her rise as a democratic leader. The media played a vital role in spreading
news of the injustice faced by the people of Burma as well as Suu Kyi’s personal
struggles against the military regime, bringing a measure of accountability to the ruling
military junta through global media attention.
CHAPTER II

The aim of this second chapter is two-fold: first, to explore Aung San Suu Kyi’s rise as a leader at a time of democratic upheaval in Burma, and second, to depict the evolution of the media, especially in print and broadcast. It is also important to illustrate the relationship between Aung San Suu Kyi and the media, as both were able to reinforce each other, with Suu Kyi using the press to spread news of Burma’s struggles and the media having a newsworthy saga to bring to their audiences. The scope will cover a period of two years from 1989-1990, a significant period in Burma’s history and in Suu Kyi’s life. The organization is in three sections. The first will trace important developments in Burma regarding Suu Kyi’s return in 1989 and the role of print and broadcast media. The second will follow her ascent as a leader in Myanmar’s democratic movement in 1990 as well as the media’s role during that time. The third, the conclusion, will compare these two important years, contrast print and broadcast media coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi, and examine the media’s effect on international policies towards Myanmar.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s Return and the Media’s Role in 1989

This portion is organized in five parts. The first section examines the funeral of Suu Kyi’s mother Khin Kyi and the effect it had on Burma’s political atmosphere. The second part focuses on Suu Kyi’s participation in national politics, while the third covers Burma’s name change to Myanmar in May 1989. The fourth segment concentrates on
Suu Kyi’s house arrest in July 1989 while the fifth part discusses the impact of media coverage on Suu Kyi and Myanmar during this year.

On December 28, 1988, Suu Kyi’s mother Khin Kyi had died at the age of seventy-six after suffering a severe stroke. A few days later, on January 1, 1989, the Associated Press (AP) reported that Burma’s government issued an announcement calling for people, especially Buddhist monks and students, to cooperate in order to have a peaceful and orderly procession for the wife of their beloved national leader.¹ On January 2, 1989, Khin Kyi’s funeral was held and attended by people from all over the country, including Buddhist monks, students, foreign envoys, and retired politicians. Even Gen. Saw Maung and Gen. Khin Nyunt paid their respects by signing a condolences book at Khin Kyi’s Rangoon home on University Avenue. This event was the first mass gathering allowed by SLORC due to Khin Kyi’s stature as the wife of Aung San and as a former ambassador to India. There had been a ban imposed on assemblies of more than five people after Gen. Saw Maung and his compatriots crushed pro-democracy demonstrations and seized power in September 1988. According to the AP, on the day of the funeral students defied the military government by chanting pro-democracy slogans.² Khin Kyi’s funeral was covered by 6 newspapers, 3 wire services, and 1 broadcast network. These media outlets included the AP, United Press International (UPI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Xinhua News Agency, The New York Times, and The Toronto Star. News reports on the event also noted the importance of Aung San Suu Kyi

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as the general secretary of the NLD and as a key leader in the democratic movement opposed to the current regime.

The media saw Suu Kyi as a growing pro-democracy leader in the struggle for political reforms in Burma. *New York Times* reporter, Steven Erlanger, interviewed her along with Rangoon locals, students, and older politicians. On January 9, 1989, he penned an article that discussed the political situation in Burma with the emergence of the NLD as a leading opposition party, the military government’s continued promise of multi-party elections, and discontent amongst the populace due to poor economic and human rights conditions.\(^3\) The majority of Suu Kyi’s media coverage was through newspapers such as *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Daily Yomiuri, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Times*, and *The Toronto Star*. Print media’s domination was also seen through wire stories from the AP, UPI, Xinhua, Japan Economic Newswire, Press Association Mediapoint, Inter Press Service, and Jiji Ticker Service and through magazines and journals, such as *US News and World Report, Newsweek, Foreign Affairs, Journal of Commerce, Maclean’s*, and *Facts on File World News Digest*. Broadcast news also covered Aung San Suu Kyi through the BBC, ABC News, and the Federal News Service (FNS).

When she visited different locations around Burma, articles of her campaigning emerged along with stories of government intimidation. In January and February 1989, Suu Kyi went to the Moulmein area, Irrawaddy delta region, and Tavoy and Mergui in Tenasserim to campaign for the NLD. *The Guardian* reported that military soldiers bullied people by firing shots in the air, forced local authorities to close down markets

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and offices, sent teachers out of town, and called civil servants to meetings in order to prevent them from seeing Suu Kyi.\textsuperscript{4} As she campaigned in March and April of that year, news articles and broadcasts continued to report her efforts to reach people, despite other NLD members being arrested and SLORC spreading propaganda that she surrounded herself with communists and was a puppet of Western governments. At times, she was even personally threatened by the military.\textsuperscript{5} Nevertheless, crowds continued to gather wherever she went, braving any government backlash. Newspaper articles from mainly Western newspapers depicted Suu Kyi as a determined person fighting for Burma’s democracy. Some stories compared her to Corazon Aquino and Benazir Bhutto, two women who were prominent figures for fighting against dictatorships, Aquino in the Philippines and Bhutto in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{6} Undeniably, Suu Kyi became the face of Burma’s democratic movement in the eyes of news organizations worldwide.

During this period, the military junta also had to contend with continued conflicts involving ethnic minorities, an issue that had troubled the country for generations. One way the government attempted to deal with the problem was by renaming the country.\textsuperscript{7} On May 27, 1989, Burma’s name was changed to Myanmar. That same year, Rangoon was also renamed as Yangon. The reason for the change was nationalistic in nature - the name Burma was tied to colonialism while the word Myanmar meant Burma and Burmese in the country’s native language. The nation’s new name was reported by the following


\textsuperscript{5} Charney, \textit{A History of Modern Burma},166.


media outlets: *The Saint Louis Post-Dispatch, The Toronto Star, The St. Petersburg Times*, followed by *The Sydney Morning Herald, The New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor*, AP, Xinhua, Japan Economic Newswire, and the BBC. However, most news organizations recognized that the name change was only symbolic in gesture, as Myanmar’s military continued to engage in armed struggle against the Karen, Rakhine, Shan, Karenni, and Kachin peoples. Tensions continued as various minority groups sought autonomy from Myanmar’s government.

Meanwhile, Suu Kyi grew to be such a threat to the military junta that she was placed under house arrest on July 20, 1989. SLORC would not send her to Insein prison because she was revered amongst the people as Aung San’s daughter and any harsh measures taken against her could result in uncontrollable mass protests. Instead, Myanmar’s government claimed that she was endangering the state so it placed her under house arrest. Before her confinement, Suu Kyi had planned to march peacefully on July 19 to commemorate the anniversary of her father’s assassination along with thousands of people. However, on July 18, trucks full of soldiers filled Yangon and announcements were made that anyone who opposed them would be tried under military tribunals. As a result, Suu Kyi and the NLD cancelled the march. Additionally, during this time the government cut telephone and telex (a network of teleprinters set up to send text-based messages) lines from Myanmar to the outside world. Erlanger reported that troops had

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10 Ibid.

11 Eng, “Burma Puts Opposition Leader.”
surrounded Suu Kyi’s home on July 20, forced her to stay inside, and prevented anyone from entering her home to see her. She was only allowed to have a housekeeper to help with chores and to purchase food. The same article also noted that the U.S. State Department released a statement reacting to Suu Kyi’s house arrest, saying that this cast serious doubts on the sincerity of Myanmar’s government to hold free and fair elections in May 1990.

On July 21, 1989, SLORC held a press conference with local and foreign journalists in attendance, explaining why Suu Kyi and fellow NLD leader U Tin Oo were detained in their homes. The BBC reported on July 24 that she could be placed under house arrest for up to one year as a preventive measure to safeguard state sovereignty. On the same day, Suu Kyi went on a hunger strike and demanded that she be treated in the same manner as other NLD members and taken to Insein prison. News of her hunger strike reached the press and Suu Kyi was placed on the cover of the Asia-Pacific edition of Time magazine for her defiance against the military junta. Although SLORC intended to remove its main political opponent from participating in the upcoming elections, it inadvertently strengthened her image as a martyr and as a prominent worldwide figure through the intense media attention paid to her.


13 Ibid.


15 Wintle, Perfect Hostage, 330.
While Suu Kyi remained locked inside her home, media coverage of her persisted. News organizations filed stories on her prolonged house arrest and the steps taken to prevent her from participating in the elections. These media outlets included the AP, UPI, BBC, CBS, Japan Economic Newswire, *The New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Washington Times*, *The Advertiser*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*. During this time, she barely had any contact with the outside world. However, at the beginning of her house arrest, SLORC allowed Michael Aris into the country, in hopes of convincing his wife to leave with him. But, Aris knew that Suu Kyi would never depart from Myanmar until democracy was realized. When he returned to England, Aris was determined to help by lobbying her cause internationally. His efforts garnered significant success through media exposure.\(^{16}\)

News coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi in 1989 made an impact on the growing democratic movement in Myanmar. In this year, print media coverage of her was greater than that of broadcast. This was due to three factors: the technological constraints of the time; expensive cost of shipping audiovisual equipment and television crews to Myanmar; and SLORC’s restrictive stance towards the media in general. It was far easier for print journalists to travel to Myanmar and file a text story in comparison to television reporters who arrive with multiple people, record and edit video, and then send the finished piece via satellite back to their bureau for broadcast.

Print and broadcast media played a significant role during this year in Myanmar’s history and in Aung San Suu Kyi’s life. Although it was difficult for foreign journalists to enter the country, stories of killings and imprisonments were published through the aid of refugees that fled to Thailand and diplomats that lived in Myanmar. These reports of the

\(^{16}\) Lintner, *Aung San Suu Kyi*, 75.
military junta’s continued repression of political activism garnered media attention and put Myanmar under scrutiny for human rights violations.

While Suu Kyi was at first hesitant to take a leadership role in the democratic movement, she came to embrace it, and used the press to bring attention to the injustices suffered by the Burmese. The media, meanwhile, had a compelling story to tell of a courageous female leader fighting for democracy under an authoritarian regime. The press played an integral part in spreading news abroad of Suu Kyi’s struggles in Myanmar, from government threats against her, arrests and torture of NLD members, and eventually her house arrest. Reporting these events allowed the media to hold SLORC accountable for its actions and to bring awareness to the global community.

**New Developments Concerning Aung San Suu Kyi and The Media in 1990**

The section is organized in four parts. The first examines the announcement of Suu Kyi’s disqualification in January 1990 from participating in Myanmar’s elections. The second focuses on the NLD’s overwhelming victory in the May 1990 general elections. The third concentrates on the aftermath of the elections, with SLORC issuing order 1/90 in July 1990 as justification to continue controlling the government, and to reject the NLD’s call to transfer power to a new People’s Assembly. The fourth analyzes the media’s impact in reporting these events.

In January 1990, Yangon’s election commission determined that Aung San Suu Kyi was disqualified from running in Myanmar’s parliament because she had married a Briton, resided abroad for many years, and her organization, the NLD, had ties to illegal insurgents. The NLD appealed the decision made by the election committee, but its

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ruling stood and Suu Kyi remained barred from participating. There had been scattered protests around Yangon, but armed troops patrolled the city and detained anyone who demonstrated on the streets.\textsuperscript{18} While the reporting was not widespread, the print media dominated coverage of this incident with 12 newspapers and 5 newswires. These print media outlets included the AP, UPI, Xinhua News Agency, and Japan Economic Newswire, \textit{The New York Times}, \textit{St. Petersburg Times}, \textit{Christian Science Monitor}, \textit{The Washington Times}, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, \textit{The Times}, \textit{The Independent}, and \textit{The Globe and Mail}.

On May 27, 1990, Myanmar’s multi-party elections took place and it was covered by news organizations around the globe months before and after the event. Most of the world doubted the fairness of the elections because leaders of top opposition parties were disqualified, jailed, or placed under house arrest. Aside from Suu Kyi, former Prime Minister U Nu was also confined to his home after returning from exile in India. He had formed a new political party, the League For Democracy and Peace (LDP).\textsuperscript{19} Meanwhile, NLD leader U Tin Oo was serving a prison sentence. All three individuals were unable to take part in the elections, which had 93 political parties and 87 independents competing for 485 seats in Myanmar’s National Legislature.\textsuperscript{20} Throughout the weeks leading up to the elections, Gen. Saw Maung had declared that the elections would remain free and fair because it was the government’s goal was to facilitate democracy. However, it would not relinquish power until a new constitution was drafted.

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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
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News organizations such as the AP, *The New York Times*, and *The Times*, speculated that the elections were meant to encourage Western governments to resume sending monetary aid to Myanmar. $500 billion dollars worth of assistance had been suspended after SLORC killed thousands of protesters during the 8888 uprising.\textsuperscript{21} While foreigners had been banned from visiting the country since April 30, AP reported on May 24 that 60 journalists from the United States, Japan, Western Europe, Thailand and Indonesia would be allowed into the country to cover the elections.\textsuperscript{22} On May 27, the day of the elections, *The Guardian* reported that the NLD was headed towards a landslide victory and that the polling had gone relatively smoothly.\textsuperscript{23} In the days following the elections, AP stated that military leaders conceded that the NLD had won a 2/3 majority in Myanmar’s 485 constituencies. Suu Kyi and her party had scored a major victory despite all the barriers the military junta erected. Nevertheless, SLORC remained firm in its stance that a new constitution needed to be drafted before it would transfer power to the legislative body, a development that could potentially take years to accomplish.

In the months to follow, political unrest began to stir, as the military government remained unwilling to enter into talks with the NLD. On July 27, 1990, the SLORC issued Order 1/90, stating that it had international legitimacy because of recognition from UN and other nations, and that its responsibility was to make certain that national unity


was maintained, order was safeguarded, and state sovereignty ensured. SLORC also stated that any formation of an interim government was illegal until the new constitution was created. The NLD and other elected members of various political parties had already drafted a new constitution based on the one made in 1947. But, it was rejected by SLORC on the grounds that the new constitution had to take all ethnic minorities into account. The print media mainly covered these events, with newswires and newspaper organizations like the AP, UPI, Japan Economic Newswire, IPS-Inter Press Service, BBC, The Independent, The Toronto Star, The Times, Sunday Herald, The New York Times and The Washington Times. AP reported on August 5 that SLORC’s addition of new complicated procedures to delay the power transfer had incited anti-government protests in Yangon and Mandalay. However, the demonstrations did not reach the same magnitude as the 1988 protests due to the military’s continued suppression of any dissent. International news organizations interviewed opposition leaders, Western diplomats, monks, students, and local Yangon residents to get their perspectives on this latest development in Myanmar’s political saga. These different groups all responded similarly, expressing anger towards SLORC and frustration at its persistent repression of basic freedoms.

The year 1990 was a tumultuous one in Myanmar’s history. Democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi was barred from running as a candidate in the election. Despite that,

27 Ibid.
her party, the NLD, won the majority in parliament. However, it soon became apparent that SLORC was not going to surrender control of the government. The international media played a critical role in reporting the abuse of power that the military junta continued to exercise during this time. They were able to give opposing groups a voice, albeit anonymously at times because of the danger of government retaliation.

The print media reported the events of 1990 more significantly than broadcast media. This was because the continued limitation of broadcast technology and the considerable cost of sending a television crew to Myanmar. Moreover, the broadcast networks were more focused on the troubles facing the Middle East, especially in August 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait and a coalition of forces led by the U.S. resulted in the Persian Gulf War. Since this war involved Western countries (the U.S., the UK, France, and Canada), the audiences of major TV organizations were more apt to be interested in a conflict that included their respective nations. Still, the print media’s reportage of Suu Kyi’s exclusion from the general elections and SLORC’s delay tactics in handing over government control, displayed the military regime’s insincerity in fostering democratic reforms. Decades of local press censorship and state propaganda were attempts by SLORC to prevent pro-democracy influence from abroad, yet Myanmar’s citizens spoke to foreign news outlets to get their stories told, even at the risk of being arrested and tortured for their dissension. Lacking freedom of speech and press, Suu Kyi and others who disagreed with the military junta had become dependent on the international media to be their advocates. They had to rely on the foreign press to spread news of the injustices being done in Myanmar and to raise awareness amongst powerful governments abroad that could put pressure on SLORC to adopt some changes.
Conclusion

The years 1989 and 1990 contained important developments in Myanmar’s ongoing political saga. The print media dominated coverage of events during this period with broadcast reporting being much less substantial. Digital media at this time was still in its early stages, as commercial Internet access was only beginning to be offered to consumers through companies like America Online (AOL) and Prodigy.\textsuperscript{28} Newspapers were more focused on online archives as a new source of revenue and they were just beginning to establish limited digital versions of their papers.\textsuperscript{29} Meanwhile, television news was more prevalent in developed countries, but, in nations like Myanmar, there was only an average of 0.2 TV sets for every 100 people and broadcasts were state controlled.\textsuperscript{30} During this time, Western television networks concentrated more on events in happening in the Middle East, especially in 1990.

However, news of Aung San Suu Kyi became more widespread in 1989 because of her mother’s death, her campaign efforts, and her house arrest, compared to the following year, when she was confined in her home and was prohibited from contacting anyone, including the press. Regardless, media coverage of Suu Kyi persisted throughout 1990, from her disqualification in Myanmar’s elections, the NLD’s overwhelming victory in parliament, and SLORC’s refusal to release her and the leaders of other opposition parties from confinement.


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

The difference between 1989 and 1990 was minimal as topics of Aung San Suu Kyi’s activities, actions taken by SLORC, Myanmar’s current political state, and the condition of its people, were all covered during both years. The press continued to play an important role in keeping Aung San Suu Kyi and the challenges of her people in the purview of Western governments and audiences around the world. She used the media to call on foreign countries to impose economic sanctions and trade embargos against Myanmar.\(^31\) At the same time, reporting on Suu Kyi made a critical impact on U.S. and UN policies towards her country. On March 8, 1989, the UN Human Rights Commission adopted a resolution urging Myanmar’s government to respect human rights and the fundamental freedoms of their people.\(^32\) In April 1989, U.S. President George H.W. Bush deferred Myanmar’s eligibility for benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) because of worker’s rights violations.\(^33\) The GSP is a World Trade Organization (WTO) program that granted lower tariffs on imports from developing countries. Additionally in February 1990, the UN Human Rights Commission also announced plans to have an independent expert investigate alleged human rights abuses in Myanmar.\(^34\) On August 20, 1990, President Bush signed the “Customs and Trade Act of 1990,” with a


\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
significant provision requiring him to impose economic sanctions on Myanmar if human rights conditions did not improve and if narcotics trafficking continued.\(^{35}\)

Furthermore, the European Union (EU) announced its first embargo on Myanmar in 1990, suspending any trade in arms, munitions and military equipment, as well as terminating all non-humanitarian aid and development programs.\(^{36}\) In that same year, the U.S. downgraded its level of diplomatic representation in Myanmar to Charge d’Affaires in response to the military government’s refusal to honor the results of the May 1990 elections.\(^{37}\) Despite SLORC remaining in power, international pressure for the country to adopt democratic reforms increased.

In summary, the media played a significant part in informing Western governments and international organizations of the military junta’s actions against Aung San Suu Kyi and its own citizens. Both print and broadcast news outlets aided in imposing economic sanctions and arms embargos on Myanmar as well as bringing a measure of accountability in regards to its government. This chapter has seen Suu Kyi rise to prominence but more challenges lay ahead for both her and Myanmar in the next nine years. Nevertheless, the media would continue to report on the country’s development, making certain that Suu Kyi and the Burmese were not forgotten.


CHAPTER III

The aim of this chapter is to examine Aung San Suu Kyi’s ongoing role as a democratic leader and her continued relationship with the media by focusing on press coverage of social and political events in Myanmar. The scope will encompass eight years from 1991-1999, a period in Suu Kyi’s life when she was mostly under house arrest. The organization of this chapter is in four parts. The first covers the immediate aftermath of the 1990 elections in Myanmar as well as Suu Kyi’s house arrest from 1991-1994. The second examines the period when she went in and out of house arrest from 1995-1996. The third studies the early years of Myanmar’s admission into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from 1997-1999, which occurred amidst criticism of Myanmar by the U.S. and the EU for its continued human rights abuses. The fourth part, the conclusion, will compare eight years of print and broadcast media coverage on Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar, and assess the overall impact the media has had on political circumstances in the country.


The section is organized in four parts. The first covers Suu Kyi winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991; the second deals with the publication of Suu Kyi’s book, “Freedom From Fear and Other Writings,” in the same year. The third examines Gen. Saw Maung’s replacement by Gen. Than Shwe as SLORC chairman in April 1992. The fourth discusses the January 1993 opening of the National Convention in Yangon to draft a new constitution.
In the aftermath of Myanmar’s May 1990 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi remained confined in her home, while SLORC maintained control of the government and claimed that a new constitution needed to be drafted before a new parliament could be convened. Despite this situation, Suu Kyi’s popularity continued to grow both in Myanmar and in the international community. On October 14, 1991, the Nobel Committee announced that she was the recipient of that year’s Nobel Peace Prize for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights in her country.\(^1\) Other contenders at the time were Chinese pro-democracy activist Chiang Ling and Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel, the latter publicly stating his support for Suu Kyi to receive the award.\(^2\) Media reporting of this event increased in comparison to the previous two years, indicating Suu Kyi’s rising status abroad. For instance, news of her being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize was reported in 37 newspapers, 11 newswire services, 4 broadcast news outlets, 3 journals, and 2 magazines. On the day of the announcement, news organizations such as Agence France Presse (AFP), AP, UPI, Japan Economic Newswire, IPS, Press Association Mediapoint, Xinhua General News Service, CBS, ABC, The Times, and The Washington Post filed stories. Suu Kyi’s positive portrayal was often reported along with details of her house arrest and her separation from her children after their Burmese passports were revoked in September 1989 by Myanmar’s government. SLORC also received media attention, but it was usually negative and reported the military junta’s unwillingness to

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allow the new parliament to convene and keeping Suu Kyi and other political prisoners under detention.³

Since Suu Kyi could not travel abroad, on December 10, 1991, her husband Michael Aris, with sons Alexander and Kim, accepted the prize in Oslo on her behalf. Covering the momentous occasion were The Toronto Star, Christian Science Monitor, The Washington Post, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Courier Mail, Daily Yomiuri, The Gazette, Houston Chronicle, The Independent, Ottawa Citizen, Tampa Bay Times, The Vancouver Sun, AFP, AP, Japan Economic Newswire, UPI, Inter Press Service, FNS, Xinhua General News Service, ABC and CBS. AP reported that Alexander gave the acceptance speech, saying that if his mother was present she would have accepted it on behalf of all of the people of Myanmar.⁴ He also spoke about the continued human rights abuses the Burmese endured under the military government’s rule. The U.S. government continued its condemnation of Suu Kyi’s house arrest while praising her for winning the award.⁵ Meanwhile, students in Yangon had demonstrated on the same day of the award ceremony to protest Suu Kyi’s confinement and SLORC’s refusal to relinquish government control.⁶ In response, the military arrived at Yangon University to confront the students and curb political dissent through the use of force.⁷


Aung San Suu Kyi maintained international attention during this time with the publication of her book, “Freedom From Fear and Other Writings,” in December 1991. This book, a collection of Suu Kyi’s writings, described her father’s life and her political viewpoints. According to Bertil Lintner, a Swedish journalist and author who has covered Myanmar extensively, the book became a bestseller because of Suu Kyi’s popularity domestically and internationally. An example of a positive international review came from The Christian Science Monitor’s Takashi Oka, who on December 10, 1991, praised Suu Kyi’s writing as it depicted her belief in village traditions going hand-in-hand with her ideals of unity, discipline, love, and democracy. The media gave the book positive press coverage and supported the image of her heroic, but peaceful fight against adverse and challenging circumstances. The news outlets featuring the book included The New York Times, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, The Guardian, The Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, AP, UPI, and AFP.

Meanwhile, AFP reported that Gen. Saw Maung’s mental and physical health had rapidly deteriorated in 1991 and that he had suffered a nervous breakdown in December that year. After displaying erratic behavior, such as believing he was the reincarnation of an 11th century Burmese king, Gen. Saw Maung was forced to retire.

8 Lintner, Aung San Suu Kyi, 78.


In January 1993, SLORC allowed a National Convention to begin drafting a new constitution. However, it ensured that the military would have a leading role in the new parliament. One opposition party member told \textit{The Guardian} that SLORC intended to give military officials high-ranking positions without the need to be elected.\textsuperscript{13} Media coverage of the National Convention communicated similar information about SLORC’s desire to retain power and its unwillingness to let Myanmar establish a true democracy. Opposition party members and the international community believed that SLORC holding a short two-day National Convention was a stunt to improve the military junta’s image and nothing more.\textsuperscript{14} The media reporting was still mainly print, with AP, AFP, UPI, Inter Press Service, Japan Economic Newswire, \textit{The New York Times}, \textit{Christian...}


**Challenges Faced by Aung San Suu Kyi, 1995-1996**

This section is organized in four parts. The first focuses on Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest in July 1995. The second concentrates on Michael Aris, Suu Kyi’s husband, and his last visit in December 1995 before his death in 1999. The third centers on Myanmar being granted observer status by ASEAN in July 1996. The fourth covers Suu Kyi being placed under house arrest again in December 1996 following a student demonstration, and her release a few weeks later.

On July 10, 1995, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest unconditionally after being confined to her home for nearly six years. This was an unexpected move by the military government, with numerous media outlets believing that the junta had given in to political pressure from the international community and was using her release as a tactic to ease economic sanctions and attract tourists to the country. While Suu Kyi was now free, SLORC increased security around her house, claiming she had made the request.\(^{15}\) News of her freedom spread quickly around Yangon and many foreign news outlets reported this momentous occasion. The coverage of this event was extensive with 65 newspapers, 15 wire services, 7 broadcast outlets, 3 journals, and 2 magazines all filing stories on her and the positive response from the international community. According to AP, foreign governments, human rights activists, and

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dissidents applauded Suu Kyi’s release as a step towards democracy. Inter Press Service reported that Japan resumed sending aid relief funds to Myanmar and that U.S. President Bill Clinton, Amnesty International, the Nobel Committee and the UN praised Myanmar’s government.16

That same year, Suu Kyi’s husband, Michael Aris, and their younger son, Kim, came to visit her on December 18. The AP, Japan Economic Newswire, Saint Paul Pioneer Press, The Gazette, and The Vancouver Sun all reported the Christmas visit. The last time they had both seen her was on July 22, 1989, twelve days after her house arrest began.17 While none of the reports give any details on the visit itself, journalists focused on the NLD’s 1990 election victory, SLORC’s refusal to surrender power, and Suu Kyi being awarded the 1991 Nobel peace prize. The December 1995 meeting turned out to be a significant personal and public moment in Suu Kyi’s life as it would be the last time she would see her husband before his death due to cancer in 1999.

Soon after, Myanmar was granted observer status by ASEAN on July 21, 1996. This occurred despite protests from Western nations. SLORC wanted to end Myanmar’s isolation by entering ASEAN as well as to stimulate economic growth in the country. The path toward observer status was started a year earlier, in July 1995, when Myanmar’s Foreign Minister, Ohn Gyaw, attended the 28th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Brunei. He signed ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and applied for observer status. Meanwhile, in response to Myanmar’s acceptance into ASEAN, Aung San Suu Kyi

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released a video on July 18, 1996, that called for economic sanctions against her country because of her belief that economic change should only happen with political change.\(^\text{18}\)
The media coverage of this event highlighted the military government’s history of oppressiveness towards the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar. It also mirrored the concerns of Western nations that Myanmar’s admittance into ASEAN would be detrimental to improving human rights conditions in the country. However, the reports also showed ASEAN’s perspective. The organization believed in regional cooperation through inclusiveness and it aimed to pressure Myanmar into enacting change through its “constructive engagement” policy.\(^\text{19}\) Only print media reported on the event and these included AP, AFP, Japan Economic Newswire, Deutche Presse-Agentur, Xinhua General News Service, The Straits Times, South China Morning Post, The New Straits Times, The Age, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Guardian Weekly, The Observer, Ottawa Citizen, The Record, and The Sydney Morning Herald.

SLORC signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and its release of Aung San Suu Kyi in 1995 led the international community to believe that the military junta was ready to engage in positive reforms. However, these hopes were dashed when Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest again on December 4, 1996, after a large student demonstration in Yangon. While authorities claimed she was free to leave her premises, her actions were restricted as SLORC told her to remain in her home for her protection. AP reported that the democratic leader had failed to appear for a fifth week in a row at an


intersection near her home where she normally addressed her followers. Additionally, roadblocks were erected on the way to her house on University Avenue. Throughout the month, she was only allowed to leave on a case-by-case basis and was always accompanied by government security cars when she left her home. One such occasion took place on December 27, when she visited the grave of her mother on the eight-year anniversary of her death.


**Myanmar’s Early Membership in ASEAN, 1997-1999**

This section will cover the first two years of Myanmar’s membership in ASEAN and it is organized in four segments. The first examines Myanmar’s entry as a full

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22 Ibid.
member of ASEAN in July 1997, while the second concentrates on SLORC’s name change in November 1997 into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The third focuses on the SPDC preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from traveling outside of Yangon in July 1998, prompting her to stage a five-day sit-in within her vehicle. The fourth covers the death of Michael Aris in England in March 1999 without Suu Kyi by his side.

On July 23, 1997, Myanmar became an official member of ASEAN after only applying for membership two years earlier. ASEAN fast-tracked it into full membership despite numerous objections from the U.S. and the European Union (EU). According to AP, the U.S. lobbied against Myanmar joining ASEAN because of the country’s heroin trade and repressive military regime. The EU was concerned over the continued repression of pro-democracy activists. However, to ASEAN, it was more conducive to have Myanmar included in the organization to limit China’s growing economic and strategic relationship, as well as to use the regional organization’s policy of “constructive engagement” to encourage Myanmar towards democratic reforms. In a press conference, ASEAN Standing Committee Chairman, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, declared that Myanmar’s admittance was reached via consensus amongst all current members. He also asserted that ASEAN could help improve the country’s poor human rights conditions by working with its government. Additionally, the group was also trying to reach its


goal of “ASEAN 10,” encompassing all the nations of Southeast Asia. In July 1997, ASEAN’s aim was to admit Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia as its new members, but only Myanmar and Laos were admitted. Cambodia’s entry into ASEAN was postponed because Hun Sen ousted his Co-Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh that month, which caused political instability. Still, the EU and the U.S. insisted that Myanmar be excluded from any of their discussions with ASEAN, as they wanted to see drastic improvements on human rights before having any interaction with the military junta.

The print media covered Myanmar’s ASEAN membership extensively. There were 20 newspapers and 8 newswires filing stories, including *The New Straits Times*, *Business Times*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Australian*, *The Sydney Times Herald*, *The Business Times Singapore*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Vancouver Sun*, AP, AFP, Japan Economic Newswire, Jiji Press Ticker Service, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Xinhua General News Service, and UPI.

Later that year, on November 15, 1997, SLORC announced its reorganization and name change to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). As a result, its 21 member military council was replaced by 19 regional commanders, with its 4 highest-ranking generals still retaining their positions. These generals were Gen. Than Shwe as Chairman, Gen. Maung Aye as Vice-Chairman, Gen. Khin Nyunt as Secretary One and

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head of military intelligence, and Gen. Tin Oo as Secretary Two. This was the third name change for the military regime since 1962, the first name being the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) and the second the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Gen. Khin Nyunt said that SPDC’s intentions were to achieve a peaceful democratic and modern state and that SLORC had fulfilled its responsibilities of stabilizing the political, economic, and social institutions. The agencies that reported on this announcement included the following: AP, AFP, Xinhua General News Service, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Japan Economic Newswire, BBC, and National Public Radio (NPR).

In the meantime, the SPDC took a harder stance towards Suu Kyi by restricting her movements. On July 24, 1998, Suu Kyi was prevented for the third time from traveling outside of Yangon to meet with NLD members in Bassein. She protested this decision by staging, with an aide and two drivers, a five-day sit-in within her car. Since 1996, the government had erected police checkpoints to her home, preventing journalists from visiting her and severely limiting diplomats and other NLD party members from entering. Constraints placed on her by the military regime continued to draw international attention, in part due to the sustained media coverage she received. AP

29 Ibid.


33 Ibid.
reported that during the sit-in, U.S. and Japanese envoys requested to meet with Suu Kyi but were denied permission to do so.\textsuperscript{34} At an ASEAN meeting in Manila that same week, foreign ministers from Japan, South Korea, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the EU tried to pressure Myanmar’s Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw to let Suu Kyi proceed to Bassein, but their attempts failed as well.\textsuperscript{35} However, on her sixth night spent inside her car, Suu Kyi went home with no details given to the press on what ended the confrontation. Her health suffered because they were running out of food and during this time she was in her early fifties.\textsuperscript{36} The SPDC permitted doctors to examine her. This led U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to say that she held the military junta responsible for the Suu Kyi’s well being. The print media dominated the coverage of this incident, with 48 newspapers, 13 newswires, and 1 magazine filing stories. Meanwhile, The BBC, FNS, and NPR also broadcasted the news.

At this time, Michael Aris, was ailing from terminal prostate cancer. He passed away on March 27, 1999. She chose not to leave Myanmar to see him because she felt she would be forced into exile, as the SPDC had warned her that if she left the country she would not be allowed to return. However, she did release a brief statement through diplomats, thanking everyone who supported Aris through his illness.\textsuperscript{37} AFP reported that Suu Kyi put her own personal grief aside, stating publically that many NLD members


were suffering in prison and were unable to see their own families.\(^{38}\) Earlier that year, Aris tried to visit his wife but the SPDC refused to grant him a visa, preferring that she went to see him instead. The death of Aris, an Oxford professor, was covered by the print media, including AP, AFP, Xinhua General News Service, Deutsche Press-Agentur, UPI, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Times*, and *Midland Independent Newspapers*. AFP also filed a story on the reaction of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who condemned the Myanmar government for refusing the couple a final farewell.\(^{39}\) This was a sad moment in Suu Kyi’s life, being mostly apart from him since 1989. In her public statement, she said that she was fortunate to have had such an understanding husband and that nothing could take that away from her.\(^{40}\) Indeed, he had continued to support her by advocating her cause until his last days.

**Conclusion**

The years 1991-1999 were a turbulent time for both Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar. Suu Kyi experienced many challenges as she was placed under house arrest for nearly six years and, once she was released, had her movements constantly restricted by the military government and was barred from traveling outside of Yangon. Yet despite difficult circumstances, she did have a few triumphant moments such as winning the Nobel Peace Prize and seeing her husband and son again in 1996. During that time period, Myanmar’s ruling body, the SLORC, experienced a leadership change, reorganized its structure, and renamed itself the SPDC. The country also became a


member of ASEAN despite human rights concerns voiced by the U.S. and EU. Print media dominated coverage of these events, with newspapers and newswire services playing a major role. Broadcast media, on the other hand, still provided only a small amount of reporting, while digital news sites had little to no coverage. News organizations like CNN, BBC, NPR, *Chicago Tribune*, *Charlotte Observer*, *The New York Times*, *U.S News and World Report*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Boston Globe* were just starting to establish their online websites during the 1990s. At that time, Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar were not topics that were found on their webpages, given that digital journalism was still in its infancy in North America and the events in that region of the world were not considered headline worthy news.

However, more coverage was given to the bigger stories, such as Suu Kyi’s Nobel Peace Prize award in 1991, her release from house arrest in 1995, and Myanmar’s acceptance into ASEAN in 1997. With these events, there was a significant increase in the number of newspapers, newswires, and broadcast news organizations filing reports on Myanmar. While audiovisual technology continued to improve during this time, the military government’s persistent hostility towards the international media made it challenging for broadcast news to shoot on location. Much like in 1989 and 1990, print media had the advantage over broadcast media in regards to portability and cost-effectiveness, removing thousands of dollars worth of equipment being shipped to a less developed country.

Nevertheless, the media had a significant impact on the policies of the U.S. and the EU towards Myanmar. As early as July 1991, U.S. President George H.W. Bush invoked the Customs and Trade Act of 1990, choosing not to renew a bilateral textile
agreement between the two countries because of the news media’s reporting on the continued drug trafficking and the lack of democratic reform. In 1994, the U.S. continued its strict policy towards Myanmar by adding the country to its list of outlaw states. This meant that any U.S. funds allocated under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 could not be used by the United Nations to give aid to the nation. In January 1996, Representative Dana Rohrabacher introduced a Myanmar sanction bill that banned U.S. investment, assistance, and travel as well as required an investigation into the nation’s labor practices, environmental policies, and narcotics trade. On October 4, 1996, U.S. President Bill Clinton also banned the issuing of visas to Myanmar’s officials because of the country’s continued human rights violations.

The EU followed suit on October 25 by banning entry visas and preventing any communication with the then fifteen-member organization. On January 27, 1997 the U.S. State Department took into account the reported increased restrictions placed on Suu Kyi and the detention of other political activists that year when they released their annual report on human rights practices in Myanmar. In March of that year, the EU revoked

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43 Ibid.


the country’s GSP benefits, affecting $30 million worth of exports. In July 1997, the United Kingdom (UK) suspended trade promotions with the country and in October 1997 the EU extended its embargo on non-humanitarian aid, sale of military equipment, and visas for military leaders. In response to ASEAN’s acceptance of Myanmar, in November 1997 the EU refused to attend the EU-ASEAN summit unless Myanmar was only there as an observer and unable to actively participate. After failing to reach a consensus, the EU-ASEAN meeting was cancelled for that year.

Other international organizations, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), WTO, and the World Bank, also took action against Myanmar. For instance on August 1998, the ILO released a report on the military junta’s systemic use of forced labor and noted that Myanmar’s government chose not to participate in the investigation proceedings and denied ILO investigators entry into Myanmar, citing interference in internal affairs. Meanwhile, the WTO on September 1998 suspended any future loans to the country because it defaulted on previous payments. By July 1999, the ILO banned Myanmar from participating in a majority of ILO meetings as well as barred them from


receiving assistance until the state improved labor standards. This resolution was the first of its kind for the labor group.\footnote{“Myanmar at ‘Forefront of Women’s Rights’: Junta,” Agence France Presse, July 21, 1999, in LexisNexis Academic (accessed January 31, 2013).}

In conclusion, the amount of international action taken against Myanmar in this time period was much greater in comparison to previous years, indicating some impact from the media’s reportage of Aung San Suu Kyi and political events in Myanmar. The press then, as now, continues to provide a measure of accountability for change-resistant regimes. Suu Kyi was able to show the world the SPDC’s persistent oppressive actions towards her and the lack of real improvement in the country. Her discharge from house arrest was a significant change of behavior for the military regime and showed that they were affected by international sanctions and policies due to the SPDC’s desire to improve Myanmar’s struggling economy. Economic sanctions were also the first notable effect that the media had on this closed government and was an important step towards real development towards political reform in Myanmar.
CHAPTER IV
AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE MEDIA, 2000-2011

This chapter aims to survey the media’s impact on political reform in Myanmar with the advent of digital media, through examination of reports on Aung San Suu Kyi and on important events encompassing the country. The scope is eleven years from 2000-2011 while the organization will be in four parts. The first focuses on Suu Kyi’s further challenges as a pro-democracy leader from 2000-2004, when she was in and out of house arrest as the military government persisted in limiting her movements. The second centers on a phase of great turbulence in Myanmar from 2005-2008, when the nation experienced political upheaval as well as environmental disaster. The third concentrates on the period from 2009-2011, when Suu Kyi’s disputes with the government reached a crescendo and was followed by significant political change. The fourth segment, the conclusion, will compare and assess the effect of print, broadcast, and online media coverage on the political situation in Myanmar.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s Continuing Challenges, 2000-2004

The organization of this portion will be in five parts. The first explores Suu Kyi being placed under house arrest from September 2000 to May 2002. The second examines former military junta leader, Ne Win, along with his daughter Sandar Win, his son-in-law, and three grandsons, being placed under house arrest on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government in March 2002. The third investigates Suu Kyi being placed under house arrest again after a violent confrontation between the NLD and military government supporters in May 2003. The fourth section covers Gen. Khin Nyunt
becoming Myanmar’s Prime Minister in August 2003, while the fifth section discusses his removal from office on the grounds of corruption in October 2004.

Aung San Suu Kyi had been released from house arrest in 1995, yet from that point on she had not been able to travel outside of Yangon. When Suu Kyi and other NLD members attempted to board a train to Mandalay on September 22, 2000, they were not allowed to do so. She was then escorted back to her home by six police cars.\(^1\) AFP reported that she had wanted to check reports of a crackdown at NLD offices in the northern city.\(^2\) Additionally, AFP’s story included U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s condemnation of SPDC’s latest act of aggression against Suu Kyi and Albright’s call for an immediate restoration of her freedom of movement and access to others, including foreign diplomats. In the same newswire, Myanmar’s state-run newspaper, the *Mirror*, was quoted criticizing the foreign press as being blatantly biased in favor of the NLD.\(^3\) The SPDC then placed Suu Kyi under house arrest again for trying to leave Yangon and this punishment lasted until May 2002.

The press coverage of this incident was more extensive than for any other event earlier in Suu Kyi’s life, with print, broadcast and digital media all filing reports. The media attention now given to her was on a larger scale, involving 138 newspapers, 33 newswires, 19 web publications, and 11 broadcast outlets. Traditional print and broadcast outlets included were *The New York Times, International Herald Tribune, The Independent, Irish Times, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Toronto star, The Globe and*}


\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid.
Mail, South China Morning Post, New Straits Times, Assam Tribune, Assam Times, The Daily Yomiuri, The Financial Express, Gulf News, AP, AFP, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Xinhua General News Service, UPI, Malaysia General News, ThaiNews Service, Japan Economic Newswire, South Asian Media Network, RTE News, BBC, CNN, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, PBS NewsHour, Channel NewsAsia, and EuroNews. Digital news sites that covered this incident included CNN.com, Independent.co.uk, Globeandmail.com, Salon.com, and Washingtonpost.com. This was the first event in Suu Kyi’s life that was widely covered globally on the Internet as well as through traditional mediums.

Meanwhile, on March 8, 2002, the former head of the military regime, Ne Win, was placed under house detention along with his daughter Sandar Win, her husband Aye Zaw Win, and their three sons for planning a coup attempt against the military junta. AP reported that the coup attempt was due to dissatisfaction with the military government. According to Channel NewsAsia, Ne Win’s home was blockaded, put under heavy guard, and the phone lines were cut off. It was mainly the print media that covered the sudden arrest of Ne Win and his family although 4 broadcast outlets and 1 online news site also featured stories on this incident. The media organizations involved were CNN.com, the BBC, Channel NewsAsia, FNS, Congressional Quarterly (CQ), AP, AFP, UPI, Japan Economic Newswire, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Inter Press Service, The Vancouver Sun, The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Times, The Advertiser, The Calgary Herald,


The SPDC’s claim of Ne Win’s coup attempt was questionable, as the retired general was already ninety years old and in poor health. Ne Win passed away in December 2002 while still under house arrest.

In the meantime, Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest in May 2002 was brief, as she was confined again a year later. On May 26, 2003, the NLD leader was in Mandalay on a political tour when government supporters began throwing rocks and shooting catapults at her and other NLD members. According to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, nearly 100 members of the Union of Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a political party created by the military in 1993, harassed a convoy of NLD vehicles. However, the SPDC countered this story by saying that it was the NLD that had attacked the peaceful pro-government supporters. A violent clash occurred between NLD and USDA members, during which hundreds of people died or were injured in a span of two hours. This incident would be known as the Depayin Massacre. AFP reported that in the aftermath the SPDC and the NLD blamed the other for the confrontation. AP also reported that, according to Brig. Gen. Than Tun, the confrontation was triggered by Suu Kyi’s negative comments about the government. She was placed under temporary arrest again on May 30. During this month of conflict, print media mainly covered the events,

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9 Ibid.

A few months later on August 25, 2003, Gen. Khin Nyunt replaced Gen. Than Shwe as Myanmar’s Prime Minister. However, the latter still kept his position as chairman of the SPDC and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. According to a state radio announcement, the cabinet reshuffle, which saw five other senior officials being removed from their posts, was meant to improve government efficiency.\(^\text{10}\) However, AFP reported that Khin Nyunt’s new position was actually a demotion orchestrated by Than Shwe, as the prime minister role was then a ceremonial one.\(^\text{11}\) AFP speculated that the reason for this new position was that Gen. Nyunt was far more moderate than his fellow council members. An example includes his role in handling a secret UN-sponsored reconciliation process with Suu Kyi in October 2000.\(^\text{12}\) On the whole, this change of leadership was covered minimally in the press, with only AP, AFP, Xinhua General News Service, Japan Economic Newswire, and Channel NewsAsia filing reports.

It turned out that Gen. Khin Nyunt’s position as prime minister was short-lived as, on October 19, 2004, he was removed from office and placed under house arrest on


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
charges of corruption. Thai Gen. Lertart Rattanatavanich told reporters that factions within the SPDC were unhappy with Gen. Nyunt and wanted him removed from power. However, state television and radio services said that the general was retiring for health reasons. Additionally, Deutsche Presse-Agentur reported that the SPDC was done using Gen. Nyunt as the moderate face of the government in an attempt to garner international sympathy. He was replaced by Lieutenant Gen. Soe Win. The newswires dominated the coverage of this event with 15 outlets compared to only 3 broadcast channels, 1 newspaper, and 1 online publication. Among these news organizations were the AP, AFP, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Arabia 2000, UPI, Xinhua General News Service, Japan Economic Newswire, FNS, Inter Press Service, BBC, CNN, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, and the Global Insight.

**Digital Media’s Rise during Myanmar’s Turbulent Years, 2005-2008**

The organization of this section is in five parts. The first discusses Myanmar agreeing not to take on the chairmanship of ASEAN in July 2005 due to criticism from Western governments as well as from ASEAN. The second section deals with Myanmar’s capital being moved from Yangon in November 2005. The third involves Gen. Thein Sein replacing Gen. Soe Win as interim prime minister in May 2007, while the fourth concentrates on the Saffron Revolution in September 2007, in which protests

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were staged by Buddhist monks against the military junta. The fifth part covers the destruction caused by tropical cyclone Nargis in May 2008.

Regarding Myanmar not taking up the chairmanship of ASEAN on July 26, 2005, this was connected to threats by Western governments to boycott the regional organization’s meetings. According to *The New York Times*, the U.S. and the EU demanded that the SPDC release Aung San Suu Kyi and move towards democratic reform or forfeit their turn as the standing chair of ASEAN.\(^\text{16}\) Myanmar's Foreign Minister Nyan Win stated that the reason for this move was that his government wanted to focus their full attention on internal issues of national reconciliation and the ongoing democratic transition.\(^\text{17}\) AFP reported that the EU immediately applauded the move.\(^\text{18}\) Myanmar’s decision to step down from the ASEAN chairmanship was reported on chiefly by print media, with 17 newswires and 10 newspapers. Only 3 broadcast networks and 3 web publications featured the story. These media organizations included the AP, AFP, UPI, Xinhua General News Service, Malaysia General News, Interfax News Agency, Hindustan Times, ARABIA 2000, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, *International Herald Tribune*, *New Straits Times*, *The Age*, *The Business Times Singapore*, *The Nikkei Weekly*, BBC, Channel NewsAsia, Egi Web News and Global Insight.

In adherence to the Myanmar government’s focus on internal matters, the planned move towards Pyinmana began on November 6, 2005. According to analysts, the move

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\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.

was prompted by fears of a U.S. attack after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and by forecasts from astrologers. However, the official version was to establish a centralized command control center. On March 22, 2006, the new capital was given the name Naypyidaw, meaning, “seat of kings.” Armed Forces day was celebrated in the new capital on March 27, 2005, with over 13,000 troops participating in this military parade. The capital’s relocation was primarily covered by print media, with 4 newswires and 3 newspapers reporting the initial transfer in November 2005 and 2 newswires and 1 broadcast outlet filing stories on the naming of the capital. These media organizations included the AP, AFP, Xinhua General News Service, BBC, South China Morning Post and The Toronto Star.

More change was on the horizon for Myanmar when Gen. Soe Win was forced to retire as prime minister on May 18, 2007 due to ill health — severe leukemia. Gen. Thein Sein, the former first secretary of the SPDC, replaced him. While changes in leadership occurred repeatedly in Myanmar’s government, this change spurred the U.S. and the EU to resume sanctions against Myanmar, as Gen. Thein Sein was perceived to be a hardliner within the SPDC. By then, reformist policies towards to Aung San Suu Kyi had fallen out.

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22 Ibid.

of favor. The media reported minimally on the transition, with 6 newswires, 1 newspaper, 1 broadcast outlet, and 1 web publication filing reports. Despite the limited coverage, this was an important moment in Myanmar’s history because Gen. Thein Sein would later move to relinquish his military position in April 2010 in order to run for political office in a civilian government.

In August 2007, turmoil engulfed the country once more when the government removed oil subsidies, sparking a series of protests that became known as the Saffron Revolution. The name was devised from the saffron-colored robes worn by Buddhist monks, who were at the forefront of these protests. The SPDC reacted as it had in the past, by arresting activists and imprisoning them. Demonstrations continued to escalate due to Myanmar’s worsening economy and to rising fuel prices. On September 24, 2007, more than 100,000 people, led by Buddhist monks, marched down the streets of Yangon, making it the biggest anti-government protest since the 8888 Uprising. The marches persisted until the end of the month, with the military attempting to contain protestors by firing into crowds, raiding monasteries, arresting top leaders, and at times beating people with clubs and then dragging them away in trucks.

The media coverage of the Saffron Revolution was pervasive, with worldwide attention focused on Myanmar once again. Images of the robe-clad Buddhist monks

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27 Ibid.
clashing with the police were powerful as they were featured on newspapers, television, and on the Internet. The broadcast network Al Jazeera secretly captured footage of the military abusing demonstrators on the streets of Yangon.\(^{28}\) Compelling video and pictures were also smuggled out of the country by activists and were then passed on to media outlets around the globe.\(^{29}\) The story was picked up by numerous news organizations. These included the following: the BBC, Independent Television News (ITN), EuroNews, CBS, NBC, NPR, ABC, Channel NewsAsia, CNN, Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC), Salon.com, USNews.com, Slate Magazine, AP, AFP, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, UPI, Xinhua General News Service, Japan Economic Newswire, Malaysia General News, Central News Agency, Hindustan Times, The New York Times, The Evening Standard, The Daily Yomiuri, International Herald Tribune, South China Morning Post, Pretoria News, The Southland Times, and The Vancouver Sun. New technology became an important factor in the widespread reach of this story, with gripping visuals of the Saffron Revolution bringing international attention to Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, and the country’s struggles. Additionally, citizen journalism through online blogs and mobile phone text messages also provided the global media with new sources of information.\(^{30}\)

Myanmar’s political situation calmed down after the Saffron Revolution but the troubles facing the country became worse when Cyclone Nargis made landfall on May 2, 2008. This was the most destructive natural disaster in the nation’s history, as nearly 85,000 people died, 700,000 homes were destroyed, three-quarters of the livestock were


killed, half of the country’s fishing boats were battered and sunk, and millions of rice paddy acres were filled with salt from seawater. The SPDC at first resisted international aid because of its deep distrust of Western governments. Myanmar’s government was especially suspicious of possible hidden agendas attached to any help it accepted. In the immediate aftermath of the calamity, many foreign aid workers were stopped at the Thai border, stymied by the slowness of the military junta to allow them into the country. The media covered Cyclone Nargis and the repercussions of the catastrophe extensively. As with the Saffron Revolution, there was an increase in online coverage compared to previous decades due to the digital media’s growing presence in the media landscape. News sites such as CNN.com, USnews.com, CBC News, Guardian.co.uk, RTE News, Global Insight, Slate.com, Reuters.com, NYTtimes.com, and Abcnews.com all posted articles on the tragedy. Traditional print and broadcast media also covered the event comprehensively with newswire services, newspapers, and broadcast networks from around the world reporting multiple stories. In addition, broadcast news outlets such as Al Jazeera uploaded televised videos for online consumption on video sharing sites like YouTube, which was founded in February 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed


Karim. The horrific scenes of destruction reached more people around the world with the aid of new technology.

Myanmar’s Early Political Changes, 2009-2011

This section concentrates on a period of political reforms in Myanmar defined more by rhetorical change than by any noticeable actions taken by the government to behave differently. In May 2008, a referendum to Myanmar’s constitution stated that multi-party elections would be held in 2010, but the military continued to maintain control of the government, indicating that only superficial political changes would follow. The organization of this section is in four parts. The first deals with American national John Yettaw trespassing on Suu Kyi’s property in May 2009 as well as repercussions that resulted from that incident. The second centers on the general elections held in November 2010. The third encompasses Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest in November 2010. The fourth section involves the dissolution of the SPDC and the handing over of power to the elected parliament in March 2011.

According to reports, on May 4, 2009, Yettaw, a devout Mormon and Vietnam War veteran, believed he received a message from God instructing him to save Aung San Suu Kyi from assassination. He used homemade flippers to swim across a lake to get to the NLD leader’s home. She allowed him to stay in her home for two days and did not


report the intrusion to the authorities immediately because Yettaw was unwell and she did not want him or the security guards to get reprimanded.\textsuperscript{37} AFP reported that the American was taken into police custody after he was discovered, while Suu Kyi and her two maids were taken on May 14.\textsuperscript{38} She was charged with violating the terms of her house arrest and faced up to five years in prison. However, her supporters felt that this was an excuse for the military government to extend her detention, which was set to expire on May 27, so as to prevent her from participating in the general elections set for the following year.\textsuperscript{39} On August 11, 2009, Suu Kyi was sentenced to another eighteen months of house arrest with AFP reporting that Gen. Than Shwe had personally intervened on her behalf to reduce the terms of the verdict.\textsuperscript{40} This sparked international outrage, with the U.S., UN, EU, and ASEAN all condemning the punishment.


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{40} “Myanmar’s Suu Kyi Gets 18 Months of House Arrest,” Agence France Presse, August 11, 2009, in LexisNexis Academic (accessed February 17, 2013).
Meanwhile, in 2008, the SPDC voided Myanmar’s 1990 elections on the grounds that it was held before the 2008 referendum. Yet, the real reason was to allow former military members to run and get elected into parliament. As a result, another general election was held on November 7, 2010. The military backed party of former Gen. Thein Sein, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), won the majority of the parliamentary seats, capturing 883 out of 1,154.\(^4\) Thein Sein had retired from the armed services in April 2010 to lead the USDP as a civilian. The NLD, however, boycotted the elections because Aung San Suu Kyi was not permitted to participate after she was accused of violating the terms of her house arrest. The election was widely covered by the media because of allegations of fraud from opposing political parties as well as from members of the international community, including the Burma Campaign UK, the U.S., the EU, and the UN. Online news sites, such as CNN.com, Aljazeera.net, Globeandmail.com, Guardian.co.uk, Slate.com, and CBC.ca/news, posted articles on the voting outcomes, speculations of rigging, and Aung San Suu Kyi’s continued house arrest. Print and broadcast media also featured the elections significantly, with newspapers, newswires, and broadcast outlets from countries including the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, Scotland, Ireland, India, Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, Japan, Korea, and Kashmir.

With the election over and the USDP in power, Aung San Suu Kyi was freed from detention on November 13, 2010. Suu Kyi had been adamant in refusing any release that

would come with the caveat of continued restriction of her movements and correspondence. According to an anonymous government official, this time she would be completely free and there would be no conditions placed upon her.\textsuperscript{42} However, international perception of the Myanmar government was so negative that many continued to believe that the release was just a tactic to divert attention away from the elections. Nevertheless, on the day of her liberation, the pro-democracy leader was greeted by thousands of people outside her home.\textsuperscript{43} She thanked them for their support and urged everyone to work together. After nearly sixteen years in confinement, Suu Kyi’s release was applauded by the global community, including such dignitaries as U.S. President Barack Obama, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, ASEAN Chief Surin Pitsuswan, British Prime Minister David Cameron, and Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara. Her release garnered substantial attention across print, broadcast, and digital media. Suu Kyi obtained global coverage due to the difficult circumstances she endured while holding steadfast to her democratic beliefs, which made her life a compelling story. Through the international press, she had even received celebrity advocates like the Irish band U2, which helped further promote her cause.\textsuperscript{44} She wasted no time and went back to campaigning, speaking to followers on November 15, 2010 at the NLD headquarters in Yangon.

Myanmar would continue to experience political change with the dissolution of the SPDC on March 30, 2011. The country’s state radio made the announcement that

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{42} “Myanmar Frees Democracy Icon Suu Kyi,” Agence France Presse, November 13, 2010, in LexisNexis Academic (accessed February 19, 2013).}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{44} “Rock Stars U2 Cautiously Welcome Suu Kyi’s Release,” Agence France Presse, November 13, 2010, in LexisNexis Academic (accessed February 19, 2013).}
Gen. Than Shwe had ordered the abolishment of the military junta. Most reports commented on the firm grip that the military continued to have in the new civilian government, with the majority party, the USDP, comprised mostly of former military members. It is notable that out of thirty cabinet level members, only four were completely civilian in that they had no military background. The international community mainly viewed the new government as a farce with Suu Kyi being barred from participating and the NLD forced to disband for boycotting the elections. However, Suu Kyi was quoted saying that she wanted everyone to work towards good relations. The disbanding of the SPDC was covered minimally by the print, broadcast, and digital media. These news organizations included the following: the AP, Xinhua General News Service, AFP, Shanghai Daily, The Guardian, The Advertiser, The Australian, The Gazette, New India Express, Irish Examiner, Breakingnews.ie and the BBC.

Throughout this period, Myanmar’s government structure underwent slow but steady movement towards democratic transition, even though it continued to be under the rule of former military officials. Aung San Suu Kyi remained in lockdown until the end of 2010, ensuring that she would be unable to run for candidacy in the new parliament. Retired armed forces officers formed the main body of the civilian government. Still, transitioning to a non-military ruling body, even in name, was a step toward greater reforms.

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47 Ibid.
Conclusion

The period from 2000-2011 was a very turbulent time for Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi was released from house arrest but was re-detained multiple times throughout those years. Meanwhile, Myanmar went through three leadership changes, in 2005, 2007, and 2010; the capital city was moved from Yangon to Naypyidaw in November 2005; the Saffron Revolution protests took place in September 2007; the Cyclone Nargis tragedy occurred in May 2008; the general elections were held in November 2010; and the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011. Politically, Myanmar was taking steps towards democratic reform, even if these were less progressive than what the Western governments were expecting.

Meanwhile, towards the end of this decade, digital media began to play a larger role in the news landscape. While traditional mediums of print and broadcast were still a dominant force, online coverage of Suu Kyi, through news websites and video sharing platforms such as YouTube, were bringing news of Myanmar to a wider and even younger audience. Additionally, digital media had the advantage of expediency over print and broadcast, as articles, images, and video could be posted online quickly. The scale and scope of reporting increased dramatically in 2007 with the Saffron Revolution, in 2008 with Cyclone Nargis, and in 2010 with both Suu Kyi’s release and the general elections. For example, news outlets from South Africa, Egypt, and Israel covered Myanmar in this period, when there previously had been no reporting on the country. This extent of reporting clearly illustrates the impact technology has had on the media’s ability to circulate news stories around the world.
The media’s attention on Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar had a significant influence on the actions of the military government throughout this decade. For instance, many believed Suu Kyi’s final release from house arrest was an indicator of the SPDC’s desire to improve their image with regards to human rights in the international community and therefore ease economic sanctions. Moreover, the eventual dissolution of the SPDC was reported by the media as their final step in democratic reform, an act, which Western governments have been demanding for since the 1962 military coup. In regards to the 2010 general elections, the fact that Thein Sein and other former generals relinquished their military positions in order to run for civilian office is an important step in Myanmar’s political reforms. Overall, negative media attention given to the military government throughout the years contributed to its decision to reform. This was due to increasing coverage of the country, holding it accountable for its actions in the international community.

The media also had an effect on the policies of Western governments and international non-governmental organizations. They were steadily imposing harsher restrictions and embargoes on Myanmar. For instance, the EU extended its visa ban on Myanmar officials as well as their arms embargo in April 2000 amidst continued reports of human rights violations. In addition, in June 2003, U.S. Representative Tom Lantos introduced a bill banning Burmese imports from the U.S. A few months later, in July, U.S. President George W. Bush signed the “Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003,” which banned Burmese imports, froze assets of the Myanmar government, and

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49 Ibid.
sustained the existing visa ban unless the SPDC improved human rights abuses, freed political prisoners, cooperated with U.S. anti-narcotics efforts and transferred power to a civilian government. President Bush signed another legislation in 2006 to extend the Act. However, when Cyclone Nargis struck in 2008, the media featured powerful images and videos of destruction in Myanmar, which helped to compel the U.S. government to provide $84 million in disaster relief funds. The UN also supplied $288 million in assistance for the food, water and sanitation, agriculture, and health sectors in Myanmar. While Aung San Suu Kyi’s release and the transition of power to a civilian government was praised by the media, Western governments, and international organizations, the U.S., the UN and other nations kept economic sanctions and arms embargoes in place. Nevertheless, the U.S. made substantial diplomatic efforts under President Barack Obama’s administration to improve relations with Myanmar’s new government. For instance, in December 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar, making her the first Secretary of State to visit the nation in fifty years.

In summary, political reform in Myanmar improved substantially in contrast to preceding years, indicating that the media has had a positive impact on democratic

50 Ibid.


developments in the country. The advent of improved technology and the increased presence of digital media allowed for more widespread reporting of Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar across a greater number of countries. While many newspapers have closed down or scaled back on staff due to the declining print industry, their online presence continues to grow and the Internet has given journalists and their audiences faster access to information. Suu Kyi became a representation of the plight of the Burmese people. The media was able to turn her into an identifiable indicator of the country's state of progress or regression with respect to the government's attitudes towards democratic reform.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE MEDIA’S ROLE IN THE AUNG SAN SUU KYI SAGA, 2012-2013, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: first, to examine the media’s role in Aung San Suu Kyi’s efforts to promote democracy in Myanmar and, second, to discuss the future prospects for the media with regards to news organizations and for Aung San Suu Kyi regarding her leadership in her country. The scope is a period of thirteen months, from January 2012 to January 2013, while the organization is in three parts. The first focuses on overall media coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar from 2012-2013, at a time of significant political reforms. The second concentrates on the digital media’s influence on events regarding Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi, especially focusing on the role of technological advancements in online news sites, blogging, mobile phones, video sharing platforms, and social media, changing how news is created and shared. The third assesses the role of the news media in affecting political change in Myanmar and discusses future prospects for the media and Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Media’s Coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi Amidst Reforms

This section is organized in six parts. The first examines Aung San Suu Kyi’s official run for office in Myanmar’s legislature in January 2012. The second covers Suu Kyi winning a parliament seat in April 2012. The third involves Suu Kyi’s trip to Norway in June 2012, where she personally accepted the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. The fourth and fifth parts focus on the November 2012 visits to Myanmar by European Commission
President Jose Manuel Barroso and U.S. President Barack Obama. The sixth part features Suu Kyi’s January 2013 tour to Korea to attend the Special Olympics.

After enduring nearly sixteen years under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi formally registered as a candidate in the by-elections on January 18, 2012, representing the Kawhmu Township. Myanmar held by-elections that year to fill in the forty-eight available seats in parliament. It was a significant moment because Suu Kyi was participating in politics for the first time. While the available positions in Myanmar’s lower house were small in number, it was still important for the country’s political process that Suu Kyi and the NLD were allowed to participate because it was an indicator the country’s shift towards democracy. AP reported that since taking office in March 2011, the new government had released hundreds of political prisoners, signed cease-fires with ethnic insurgents, relaxed press restrictions, and engaged in meaningful dialogue with Suu Kyi.\(^1\) The sweeping changes were made in response to conditions set by Western governments that needed to be met before economic sanctions could be lifted.\(^2\) An enthusiastic crowd cheered Suu Kyi on as she filed candidate registration papers.\(^3\) During this time, the print media continued to dominate coverage of her, with 12 newswires and 10 newspapers reporting her candidacy. These organizations were the AP, UPI, AFP, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Japan Economic Newswire, Xinhua General News Service, Inter Press Service, States News Service, Thai News Service, The Straits Times, The Evening Standard, McClatchy-Tribune Business News, The Nation, New India


\(^2\) Ibid.

Express, South China Morning Post, Times of Oman, and The Washington Times. A number of web publications also featured this story and these included CNN.com, Breakingnews.ie, Telegraph.co.uk, and Thetimes.co.uk. Additionally, two broadcast outlets, the BBC and CNN, also aired news of Suu Kyi’s candidacy.

After two months of campaigning, Suu Kyi won the Kawhmu seat on April 1, 2012, receiving an estimated eighty-two percent of the vote.\(^4\) According to AFP, this election was the first time that foreign observers and journalists were allowed to witness the polls.\(^5\) Analysts speculated that the quasi-civilian government wanted the NLD leader to win as a visible indicator to Western governments that the reform process was underway.\(^6\) It wished that this development would lead to the removal of economic sanctions. Suu Kyi felt that the 2012 election was not completely free and fair, but she participated regardless because the people wanted her to.\(^7\) Her victory was an important moment in Myanmar’s history because she now had a voice in the government for the first time. Her election was reported internationally in countries such as the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and India. These media organizations included 38 newspapers, 19 newswire services, 14 web publications, and 8 broadcast outlets. While the print media still dominated coverage, digital media also reported Suu Kyi’s achievement through news sites like MSNBC.com, CNN.com, and other online platforms.

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\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid.

Telegraph.co.uk, Independent.co.uk, Washingtonpost.com, MailOnline.com, Politico.com, Asiantribune.com, and Theindianawaaz.com.

After her victory, she was invited to visit Norway in June 2012 to receive the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. This time she was able to attend. Speaking in Norway to an audience that included dignitaries and royalty, Suu Kyi gave a passionate speech about the need to remember the Burmese people’s plight and about the importance of working towards peace.\(^8\) In scope and scale, news coverage of this event rivaled that of the 2007 Saffron Revolution and the 2008 Cyclone Nargis disaster. Suu Kyi’s Norway visit was reported by 178 newspapers, 46 newswires, 27 web publications, 15 broadcast networks, and 13 journals. The story was featured globally in countries such as the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, India, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, South Africa, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Liberia, Nigeria, Uganda, Lebanon, and Israel.\(^9\) News articles focused on Suu Kyi’s identity as the democratic voice in her country as she exhibited courage by overcoming numerous obstacles in her life. In addition, reports contrasted the 1991 ceremony with the 2012 one, showing the remarkable developments in her personal and political circumstances.

The actions of the Myanmar government regarding Suu Kyi clearly had an impact on international diplomacy as Western leaders began visiting Myanmar. For example, on November 3, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso came to the country, pledging 150 million euros of development assistance in 2013.\(^{10}\) The EU leader met with


President Thein Sein, Speaker Thura Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi during this trip. While media coverage of the event was minimal, this trip improved Myanmar’s international relations with the EU. Barroso’s trip was mainly reported by the newswires, which included AFP, UPI, Xinhua General News Service, ARABIA 2000, and Targeted News Service.

A few days later on November 19, 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama visited Myanmar, generating intense media attention. It was significant because Obama was the first U.S. president to ever come to Myanmar. His visit indicated a symbolic approval of the political reforms undertaken by the new government.\(^{11}\) Earlier in May that year, he had appointed Derek Mitchell as the first U.S. Ambassador to Myanmar since 1990.\(^{12}\) Obama met with President Thein Sein who expressed his desire to strengthen bilateral relations between their two countries. While in Myanmar, the U.S. president said that the country’s democratic and economic reforms could lead to new development opportunities.\(^{13}\) Nevertheless, Suu Kyi was cautious when she met with the Obama, saying, “The most difficult time in any transition is when we think success is in sight.”\(^{14}\) His last stop was at Yangon University, where he gave a speech citing the U.S. and Myanmar’s commonality as former British colonies with deep activist roots. More


importantly, the U.S. president said that economic sanctions would be lifted from the country.\textsuperscript{15} The historic trip was reported by media organizations from around the world such as the AP, UPI, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, AFP, Kuwait News Agency, The Guardian, The Washington Post, The New Zealand Herald, Times of India, The Canberra Times, The Irish Times, The Nikkei Weekly, The New York Times, Times of Oman, CNN, BBC, Fox News, NBC, ABC, EuroNews, and Channel NewsAsia. Media coverage overall of Obama’s first foreign trip since his re-election involved 76 newspapers, 34 newswires, 22 web publications, and 17 broadcast outlets.

Since her release in 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi has travelled around the world including cities across the U.S. and Europe. On January 29, 2013, she visited the Republic of Korea to attend the Special Olympics. There she met with President Lee Myung Bak as well as President-elect Park Gyun Hye. Suu Kyi and Lee discussed education and economic development between their respective countries. She expressed her hopes that more young workers from Myanmar could come to South Korea for employment as well as to receive a vocational education.\textsuperscript{16} Over 2,300 athletes from all over the world attended the Special Olympics, and at the event Suu Kyi remarked that “….the spirit that overcomes all challenges.”\textsuperscript{17} This was another occasion for the NLD leader to engage the public, generating positive press in the process. Principal coverage

\textsuperscript{15} “Remarks by President Obama at the University of Yangon,” The White House, \url{http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/19/remarks-president-obama-university-yangon} (accessed March 2, 2013).

\textsuperscript{16} “South Korean President Meets Visiting Burmese Opposition Leader Suu Kyi,” BBC, January 29, 20123 in LexisNexis Academic (accessed March 5, 2013).

of this event was carried out by the print media with 23 newspapers and 17 newswires filing stories. These media outlets included the AP, AFP, Xinhua General News Service, Japan Economic Newswire, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, The Vancouver Sun, Korea Times, China Daily, Korea Herald, and Gulf Daily News. However, web publications such as CNN.com, Independent.co.uk, and Thetimes.co.uk also featured reports.

Because Myanmar undertook significant reforms in 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi was able to run and be elected for a parliamentary seat. She was also able to travel outside of Myanmar for the first time since 1988 and accept the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. Suu Kyi’s increased freedom mirrored the improved political liberties in her country as well. For instance, numerous political prisoners were released and censorship laws were relaxed. Since 2012, Suu Kyi continues to use the press to — voice her beliefs on unity, peace, and democracy; to express Myanmar’s challenges; and to share her hopes for the future. Although Myanmar is making substantial strides in the reform process, the country still has many improvements to make. The media continues to chronicle Myanmar’s democratic changes and Aung San Suu Kyi’s part in it.

Digital Media’s Impact on Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar

The aim of this section is to explore the advancements in digital media and their effects on Aung San Suu Kyi and on Myanmar’s political reforms. The organization will be in four parts. The first covers the growth of online news sites incorporating text, image and video, allowing their readers to have a more interactive experience. The second concentrates on the development of citizen journalism through the use of new technologies such as online blogging and mobile phones. The third examines the innovation of video sharing sites. One example of this is YouTube, a platform that
distributes content on the Internet for widespread viewing. The fourth portion focuses on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as tools for networking to share and spread information.

Technological progress in the last few years has led to an increase in the number and availability of online news sites and has also created opportunities for richer interactive experiences for their audiences. When news organizations first created online versions of their publications in the early 1990s, they were limited to text and pictures with very simple layouts that often mirrored their printed counterparts. In today’s news website, words and images are still present, but video has become an integral component in the way news is presented to audiences.18 Video provides a compelling visual that people around the world can view instantly. In the U.S. alone, there are 75 million viewers of online video daily and 40 billion per month.19 Additionally, news sites have increasingly used images and graphics, as people are more responsive to visual mediums.

An example of the importance of advancements in online news sites was the BBC video posting of Aung San Suu Kyi’s campaign speech, which was originally broadcasted on March 14, 2012 on Myanmar’s state-controlled television.20 The BBC’s use of her video on their website was an engaging way of informing audiences of human rights improvements in Myanmar and also served as a way for Suu Kyi to spread her message of democratic change worldwide. In her remarks, Suu Kyi called for further

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political and judicial reforms, the revoking of repressive laws, and the protection of people’s democratic rights.\(^{21}\) This was a noteworthy event, since she had only been released from house arrest two years prior and the media had been heavily censored in Myanmar since the 1962 military takeover. Additionally, Suu Kyi speaking on state-run media was an example of human rights reforms taking place in the country.

Another significant development is the rise of citizen journalism through the use of online blogs and mobile devices. A blog is an online journal where a group or an individual can present a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs.\(^{22}\) Blogs became popular on the Internet since 2000 with the rise of Gawker and The Huffington Post, blogs that focused on news, popular culture, and gossip.\(^{23}\) Mobile phones have been around since the 1980s but significant improvements have been made in the twenty-first century that have allowed for these devices to be affordable and multi-functional.\(^{24}\) Currently they are used to make phone calls, send text messages, take pictures, listen to music, access the Internet, and engage in social media applications.\(^{25}\) The act of online blogging and the use of mobile phones were vital in the 2007 Saffron Revolution, as traditional media outlets such as CNN, AP, Reuters, and the BBC used images and information from activists and citizen journalists to show millions of people worldwide the horrific

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Blog."

\(^{23}\) Clive Thompson, “The Early Years,” New York Magazine,

\(^{24}\) Fran Berkman, “How the Cell Phone Got 'Smart','’

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
violence occurring in Myanmar. Additionally, the BBC posted daily accounts from Burmese and foreigners living in Myanmar as well as Burmese nationals residing abroad from September 24-29, 2007. These reports were sent via text messages and emails, and directly uploaded onto the BBC’s website, despite limited online access in Myanmar, with most locals needing to go to Internet cafes. Multiple online blogs arose as a response to the military junta’s brutality; examples of these include the Burma Watch, Burmese Bloggers Without Borders, Democratic Voice of Burma, and the Asia Pacific People’s Partnership on Burma. Due to technological advancements, media organizations were able to disseminate timely information on the conflict in a widespread fashion, making the 2007 Saffron Revolution an important international story told by people on the ground experiencing it first-hand.

Video sharing platforms have been another important development in digital media. In February 2005, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim founded YouTube, currently the Internet’s most popular video sharing website. YouTube allows any person to create an account in their system and then upload a video where it can be viewed and shared with the entire world. According to the Business Insider, users watch 4 billion videos each day.

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hours worth of video on YouTube every month. There are over 20,000 videos relating to Aung San Suu Kyi, featuring her speeches, campaigns, trips abroad, and interviews. Furthermore, there are almost 2,000 Cyclone Nargis videos and 150,000 clips involving Myanmar as well. These were created under varying levels of production quality, from the amateur individual using a mobile phone’s video camera to broadcast produced pieces from television networks like Al Jazeera and the BBC. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Al Jazeera uploaded their videos of the 2007 Saffron Revolution onto YouTube. A majority of major news organizations around the world now have a YouTube page. Al Jazeera’s video, *Inside Myanmar: The Crackdown - 10 Oct 07 - Part 1*, has garnered over 860,000 views and the number continues to grow daily since being posted in October 2007. The video sharing platform has been an important tool during times of crisis in Myanmar, where journalists and ordinary citizens alike have been able to record events and share it online. Since 2005, other similar websites have been established such as the Daily Motion, Vimeo, Google Video, and Ustream.

Social media has been a revolutionary force in the digital media landscape, as it has played a key role in spreading information between news organizations and their audiences faster than ever before. Arthur Curtis, a professor of mass communication at

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30 A basic keyword search of Aung San Suu Kyi on the video sharing website YouTube yielded over 20,000 results on March 7, 2013.

31 A basic keyword search of Cyclone yielded 1,980 entries and on Burma and Myanmar nearly 150,000 results on the video sharing website YouTube on March 7, 2013.

the University of North Carolina, defines social media as “Internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio.” Social media was created in 2002 with the conception of the first social networking site, Friendster by American programmer Jonathan Abram. In 2004, Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg established a webpage that would later become known as Facebook, a service that allows people to connect with each other, post pictures, videos, and website links. Two years later in 2006, Jack Dorsey founded Twitter, the social networking and micro-blogging site. Twitter allows people to post their thoughts in 140 characters or less. Social media sites have linked people and communities together around the world.

The foreign supporters of Myanmar’s pro-democracy movement have successfully utilized Facebook and Twitter for their cause through the establishment of online campaigns and lobbying movements. Slowly, the Burmese themselves are beginning to use social media as a means to connect, share information, and spread news despite Internet restrictions in the country. The impact of social media was keenly seen in the 2007 Saffron Revolution as well. According to a Columbia University study, there

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

were over 500 Facebook groups set up to support the people of Myanmar in 2007. The most notable was the “Support the Monk’s Protest in Burma” group, which grew from 3,500 members on September 24, 2007 to 432,479 participants a month later. This study also notes that mainstream media, such as CNN and the BBC, publicized the events of the online protest groups. In more recent times, Myanmar’s press has also used social media to report the most up to date information on the March 2012 elections.

Undoubtedly, the technological progress made in digital media has had a notable effect on both Aung San Suu Kyi and on Myanmar’s political reforms. According to Angela Romano, a Queensland University senior lecturer on journalism and the media, the contribution of newer technology is faster transmission, capturing public attention as news erupts, creating a need for continuous updates about a civil society’s activity. This has been the case with major events in Myanmar, allowing journalists, Burmese citizens, and activists to work together for the common goal of informing the world of important events in Myanmar in hopes of greater political transformations for the country.


38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.


41 Romano, “Asia.”
An Assessment of The Media’s Role and Prospects For The Future

This section is organized in two parts. The first section focuses on the effect and role of the media in the Aung San Suu Kyi saga. The second segment examines the variables that impact the future of the media and of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Since Aung San Suu Kyi’s return to Myanmar in 1988, the media has had a significant effect on her journey from civilian, to activist, to finally a politician. At the same time, Myanmar has gone through many challenges with multiple leadership changes, violent demonstrations, and natural disasters. Through this, the media had played a critical role in chronicling the country’s history. Since 1988’s 8888 Uprising, international attention given to Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi has contributed to the political changes that finally began in 2010. Consistent press coverage of human rights abuses and the contrast between the Myanmar government’s described democratic reform and actual execution of such reform, effectively informed decision makers within Western governments and international non-governmental organizations. As a result, these organizations were emboldened to place economic sanctions and arms embargoes on Myanmar. Reports of Suu Kyi’s struggles have given her worldwide support from human rights groups, foreign dignitaries, and ordinary people alike. From 1962, it took forty-eight years for the military to allow reforms to take place. Without continued media coverage and pressure from the U.S. and other countries, political changes would be less likely to occur.

The print media has dominated news coverage of Suu Kyi and Myanmar since 1989, with newspapers still being less expensive to produce, especially in places where access to digital media has been limited due to government restrictions or insufficient
communication infrastructures. However, digital media has allowed for faster communication between journalists and their audiences in recent years. This made a difference for Suu Kyi and Myanmar in the early 2000s through an increased amount of articles, broadcasts, and reports filed on the region as well as quicker dissemination of news. Citizen journalism through digital media had also arisen with advances in online blogging, mobile phones, video sharing platforms, and social media, supplementing traditional mediums as a source for news. The importance of digital media continues to grow as information consumption moves away from traditional media, making the world an increasingly virtual society.

Regarding the media’s future, there are four variables that affect it. The first factor is the media consumption ratio of print versus digital, which has been shifting towards digital since the mid-2000s. The second variable involves new inventions. The third element is the resilience of the print medium. The fourth point is the media’s lasting role in gathering and disseminating information.

Concerning media consumption, it has a considerable effect on the future of the media because there is a growing competition between print and digital. For examples, in the Pew Research Center’s 2011 study of “The State of the News Media,” thirty-one percent of Americans still read newspapers, which is print, while forty-one percent cited that they got their news on the Internet, which is digital. This means a seventeen percent increase of digital media consumption in 2011 while there was a five percent decrease for

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newspapers, this illustrates the move away from traditional print media.\textsuperscript{43} However, the same study finds that print media consumption in developing countries is growing because of improved literacy rates, better employment opportunities, and higher disposable income.\textsuperscript{44} In addition, the report suggests that U.S. media trends are ahead of the curve because of advancements in technology.\textsuperscript{45}

As for the creation of new inventions this already has had an impact on media consumption and dissemination, and will continue to do so in the future. For example, from 2011 to early 2012, there was a substantial growth of digital news consumption on mobile smartphones and multi-digital devices.\textsuperscript{46} These devices include tablets, e-book readers, and portable game consoles that allow people to browse online websites and use Internet applications or apps. In 2011, forty-four percent of Americans owned a smartphone, while eighteen percent owned a tablet.\textsuperscript{47} With the development of mobile devices, Internet applications have become a new way to receive information through different news aggregators and social media software. In today’s portable phones, users can browse CNN’s mobile app or read Twitter updates from their favorite news anchor as a way to stay instantly informed of major events. As discussed earlier in this chapter, new


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.}
technology has also changed the way information is acquired and spread. Undoubtedly, technological advances will continue to revolutionize the media and impact its future.

However, despite the progress made in digital media, the print media continues to be a fixture and is thus a variable that affects the media’s future. Historically, this medium has been present since the Chinese created a simple printing tool made of wood in the second century. The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers stated that, from 2009-2010, the Asia Pacific region saw an increase in newspaper circulation by seven percent, while Latin America saw a two percent increase. Additionally, the Pew Research Center’s 2012 “The State of the News Media” report, found that digital media is another tool for consuming news, rather than the only means of doing so. With the advent of media-related innovations such as the radio, television, the satellite, computers, mobile phones, and the Internet, print media continues to endure with books, newspapers, journals, and magazines as still relevant mediums.

Regardless of the way we receive news, the media’s role in informing and educating the public, as well as regulating individuals and institutions with political, economic, and social power, has endured throughout history and will thus impact its future. The press empowers people with the information they need and warns them of

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those who are doing them harm.\textsuperscript{51} The media also enables citizens to examine the values and policies of governments, businesses, and organizations. The media’s important roles persist despite attempts by authoritarian governments to restrict the flow of information, as in countries such as Myanmar, China, and Egypt, which use digital firewalls to block various online news sites and other websites that criticize them. This was the case in Myanmar’s 2007 Saffron Revolution, where Burmese civilians were able to connect to the BBC’s website to upload pictures of the violence caused by the police.\textsuperscript{52} Citizens in these nations have been able to circumvent virtual roadblocks to access blacklisted news sites and social media networks. Presently, news organizations continue to report on important issues that affect people around the world and hold those with influence and power responsible for their actions.

Regarding future prospects for Aung San Suu Kyi, there are also four variables. The first involves her capacity as a leader — in her party, in the government, and in her relations with the military. The second concerns her health. The third involves her advancing age, while the fourth relates to both internal and external forces that affect her and Myanmar.

As for her leadership role, her effectiveness within her party will affect her future. For instance, she addressed delegates at the NLD’s first party congress on March 8 2013, calling for unity and an end to the factionalism within the political group.\textsuperscript{53} Then on

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\textsuperscript{52} “Accounts from Inside Burma,” BBC, \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7011884.stm} (accessed March 7, 2013).

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
March 10, she was re-elected as chairwoman of the NLD.\textsuperscript{54} Whether she will be able to effectively lead her party into the 2015 national elections is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, analysts are predicting that her party will win a majority in parliament.\textsuperscript{55} As for her role in the government, her ability to enact change within the government as a legislator will also affect her legacy as a political leader. Currently, Suu Kyi has been quiet on ethnic troubles involving the Muslim Rohingyaas, who have a long history of being persecuted.\textsuperscript{56} She is also backing a controversial Chinese mining project that she sees as a way to encourage foreign investment, whereas locals are criticizing because it does not provide new jobs.\textsuperscript{57} As for her relationship with the military, this is another important element affecting her future. Suu Kyi has always believed that the armed forces are an essential part of national unity. Having their support would be an asset and she appears to be taking steps to improve the connection, calling for a “good relationship” with the military during the NLD’s first party congress.\textsuperscript{58}

Besides leadership, another factor that will affect Suu Kyi’s future is her health. Although there are no reports of the NLD leader having any serious health issues, she appears to look frailer than in previous years. While campaigning around Myanmar in

\begin{itemize}
\item[58] Fuller, “Myanmar Opposition Leader.”
\end{itemize}
March 2012, Suu Kyi also fell ill from exhaustion and had to be placed on an intravenous drip. During her European trip in June 2012, she got sick again while meeting with Swiss Foreign Minister Diedier Burkhalter. Suu Kyi cited her age and travel fatigue as the reasons behind her sudden abdominal pains and vomiting. Undoubtedly, health-related issues will impact her performance on the job, as she will have to travel considerably around the country and abroad.

Yet another factor affecting Suu Kyi’s future is her age. The effect of Suu Kyi’s declining age on her ability to carry out her responsibilities is a contributing variable to her future political goals. At sixty-seven years old, she is a first-term politician and chairwoman to a political party that is now 1.3 million members strong. Suu Kyi herself called for “new blood” to be injected into the NLD leadership, as the average age of the party’s executive committee is sixty. With her advancing years, Suu Kyi acknowledges that she has limited time to groom successors to replace her and other aging members of the NLD as well as to enact positive change within the government.

Additionally, there are also internal and external forces at play that will affect Suu Kyi’s future. Internal forces include government corruption and former military officials dominating the legislature. Myanmar ranks as the fifth most corrupt country in the world

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61 Fuller, “Myanmar Opposition Leader.”

62 Ibid.
according to Transparency International’s 2012 report. Furthermore, if the NLD wins the majority of seats in parliament during the 2015 elections, there will be a significant impact on Suu Kyi’s political career. Externally, there are still economic sanctions along with risks of natural disaster to consider. After Myanmar enacted positive reforms, such as the release of hundreds of pro-democracy activists, the U.S. lifted all sanctions against the country in 2012. This change in international relations allowed for foreign investments, a new market for exporting Burmese goods, and a normalization of U.S.-Myanmar relations. As for natural disasters, the country is also incredibly vulnerable to them. These calamities include floods, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, and tsunamis. These catastrophes delay important development work and cause severe damage and loss of homes, livestock, and crops in affected areas. The end of economic sanctions would allow Myanmar to improve its economy while natural calamities would worsen the situation. How Suu Kyi handles these internal and external forces will affect her prospects for the future.

With Suu Kyi now having an official voice in Myanmar’s parliament, the media will continue to observe her and the government in their progress towards greater democratic reform. Myanmar’s leaders remains accountable for their actions due to consistent media reporting and Suu Kyi will be held under the same scrutiny. However,


66 Ibid.
her positive press coverage will depend on her accomplishments going forward. It is evident that the Aung San Suu Kyi saga is far from over as both she and her country enter a new phase of change.
APPENDIX: MAP AND MEDIA

1. Map of Myanmar

2. Image of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2002


3. Image of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011

3. List of Media Organizations Covering Myanmar, 1988-2013

Print Media

ARABIA 2000
The Associated Press (AP)
Agence France Presse (AFP)
Asian Survey
Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Christian Science Monitor
Daily Yomiuri
Deutsche Presse-Agentur
Global Insight
Korea Herald
Kuwait News Agency
Houston Chronicle
International Herald Tribune
Interfax News Agency
Inter Press Service
Irish Times
Japan Economic Newswire
Jiji Ticker Service
Journal of Commerce
Malaysia General News
Newsweek
Reuters
San Francisco Chronicle
South Asian Media Network
South China Morning Post
Sydney Morning Herald
Targeted News Service
Thai News Service
The Egyptian Gazette
The Globe and Mail
The Guardian
The Independent
The New York Times
The Nikkei Weekly
The Strait Times
The Sydney Morning Herald
The Toronto Star
The Vancouver Sun
The Washington Post
Time
United Press International (UPI)
US News and World Report
Xinhua General News Service

Broadcast

Al Jazeera
American Broadcasting Company (ABC)
Australian Broadcast Company
British Broadcast Corporation (BBC)
Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC)
Columbia Broadcasting Service (CBS)
Consumer News and Business Channel (CNBC)
Channel NewsAsia
Cable News Network (CNN)
EuroNews
Federal News Service (FNS)
Independent Television News (ITN)
PBS NewsHour
National Broadcasting Company (NBC)
National Public Radio (NPR)
RTE News
Voice of America (VOA)

Digital (a form of Electronic Media)

Aljazeera.net
Asiantribune.com
Breakingnews.ie
CBC.ca/news
CNN.com
Egi Web News
Guardian.co.uk
Independent.co.uk
Mailonline.com
MSNBC.com
NYTimes.com
Politico.com
Slate.com
Theindianawaaz.com
Thetimes.co.uk
Telegraph.co.uk
USNews.com
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Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Printing."

Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Shan."

Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "The Colonial Economy."

Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s. v. "Toungoo Dynasty."

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