THE ROLE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FORCES IN MYANMAR POLITICAL REFORM

BY

MR. THAN WIN HLAING

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS (ASEAN STUDIES)
PRIDI BANOMYONG INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE
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ENTITLED

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was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the recent dramatic democratic transition in Myanmar in the period after the 2010 reforms, in particular the external and domestic forces. Among external factors it focuses on the role of ASEAN. Domestically it looks most closely at the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). It will touch on important factors outside of its two main foci of ASEAN and CSOs, externally, for example, the role of China and Western pressures for more democratic government. Internally there are the ongoing and unnecessary conflicts between the central government and ethnic groups, and the role of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy.

In its dealings with Myanmar, ASEAN followed its common principle of "non-interference" applying it flexibly, and finally convincing the military government to accept ASEAN's invitation to membership, in spite of the disapproval of major international powers. In the end ASEAN alone cannot fully provide a climate for national reconciliation, peacemaking, and political transformation to take place. However, by applying its rules judiciously, ASEAN has overall dealt with Myanmar effectively, and helped provide some of that climate.

Still, the current ceasefire agreement is under negotiation, due to a lack of mutual trust between the stakeholders. It can be seen that the military still wants to hold on to its power as long as possible.

Under the Thein Sein administration the country opened its economy, and annual GDP growth began its positive climb. Free social media are emerging as one key of this transition period. Despite its bloody suppression, the 2007 "Saffron Revolution" was another milestone leading to democratic reform. After the disaster of cyclone Nargis in 2008, ASEAN continued to apply its collaborative style of diplomacy with some success, leading to more trust and a more constructive relationship with Myanmar leaders. In fact, the role of ASEAN has been guiding the transformation from military regime to democratic reforms, and it is helping to solve the country's longstanding political strife with minorities. The current government leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has extensively discussed peacemaking and national reconciliation in the country, but peoples' unreasonable expectations are an additional obstacle.

In conclusion, this research gives rich descriptive details on some important issues such as people's hopes and attitudes, the role of the CSOs, and the role of ASEAN and other external influences. The country is in a delicate process of transition, due to political instability and lack of trust between ethnic groups and the government. It needs time and support to find the best paths to successful reform to become a stable, developing nation.

Keywords: Myanmar Political Reforms, Internal and External Forces, ASEAN

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Mr.Than Win Hlaing

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AHRD	ASEAN Human Rights Declaration
AMM	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asia Nations
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMLV	Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam
ed.	Edition
ed./eds	Editor (s)
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FFSS	Free Funeral Service Society
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV/AIDs	Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection & Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
INGOs	International Non-Government Organizations
LRC	Local Resource Center
MATA	Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability
NANGOs	National Association of Non-Government Organizations
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCWC	National Convention Convening Work Committee
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
NLD	National League for Democracy
NLM	New Light of Myanmar
No.	Number
Pg.	Pages
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council

SLORC	State Law and Order Council
TB	Tuberculosis disease
Trans.	Translator (s)
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
UN	United Nations
UNA	United Nationalities Alliance
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
USDA	The Union Solidarity and Development Association
USDP	The Union Solidarity and Development Party
Vol.	Volumes (s)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

The country of Myanmar (Burma) was colonized by two foreign powers before it achieved its independence in 1948; it was ruled by Britain and Japan. After independence, Myanmar fell under military control up to its democratic transition in 2010. It is significant that since Myanmar's admission into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997, the country has been moving toward political and economic reforms. A number of contradictory views have emerged on the role of ASEAN in helping to resolve the country's ongoing domestic political struggles, considering ASEAN's limitations, especially its principle of non-interference. However, Myanmar's situation now is significantly different from what the country endured during the previous almost five decades when its military leaders chose isolation. In contrast, Myanmar is now vigorously pursuing engagement with the outside world, which is equally courting it (Gupt, 2010). ASEAN seems to have convinced Myanmar to move in the right direction, and the transition seems to be increasingly energetic in economic and political restructuring (International Crisis Group, 2012). Of course many internal problems remain, especially the ongoing influence of the military and the ethnic conflicts.

1.1.1 Role of the Military

The military has been dominant for almost five decades since 1962, when an elected government was overthrown by General Ne Win, up until the last overt military dictatorship by General Than Shwe in 2010. The military's role as the central institution of the state featured three main national principles: "non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, consolidation of national sovereignty" and the military retained tight control over social, religious and economic affairs ("The New ASEANS," 1997). When Myanmar joined ASEAN, the military was ruling through the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), a reconstitution of the earlier State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), that had seized power in1988 (Weatherbee, 2005, P.35). As an ASEAN member, Myanmar planned a seven-step "road map" for democratic reforms led by Military Intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt, who became Prime Minister in 2003 (Robinson, 2014). In 2006 ASEAN persuaded Myanmar to forfeit its turn as rotating

chair of ASEAN, out of fear that the Western nations would boycott the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) because of Myanmar's abusive human rights record under military dictatorship (Brandon, 2014). At the time, Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest, thousands of political prisoners were in jail, and the country was still under political and economic sanctions by the U.S. and the European Union (Jones, W. 2014). Along with North Korea, Myanmar was one of the world's pariah states, a precarious position in which uncritical support was available only from China.

1.1.2 Political Reforms

In 2010 the military group transformed itself into a political party: the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by former Prime Minister U Thein Sein, who had been appointed First State Secretary of the council after the downfall of General Kin Nyunt in 2004. He became Prime Minister in May 2007 (BBC News, 2014). Although the 2010 general elections were marked by some vote-rigging activities (International Crisis Group, 2015), the government party (the USDP) claimed a great victory in the first election in 2010. In fact, Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD had boycotted the election due to the undemocratic 2008 constitution which states that 25% of the seats in the parliament must be reserved for the military (Jesnes, 2014). Also, there were still ongoing civil armed conflicts in Karen State, where the legitimacy of military rule has been challenged most vigorously. There were virtually no elections in several ethnic states (Oh, 2013).

Despite these problems, when President U Thein Sein took office in March 2011, he initiated a substantial political liberalization, and opened new political space for civil society and for opposition politicians (Bunte & Dorsch, 2015). He instituted a series of concrete steps to positive change, amounting to some genuine progress. President Thein Sein met with Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011, and on January 5, 2012, the NLD became a legally registered political party with Aung San Suu Kyi as chairperson. She and other members took part in the by-elections on 1 April 2012, winning 43 out of 45 seats (Ramesh, 2012).

Thein Sein also announced amnesties for selected prisoners on 13 separate occasions, and in total, the USDP government released 29,670 prisoners, of whom 1,071 were political prisoners according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma, (Martin, 2013a). The USDP government has also

transformed economic policies and opened the door to foreign direct investment (Rieffel, 2010). Another bit of progress the Thein Sein government accomplished was the removal of the names of 20,000 people from the immigration blacklist, including Aung San Suu Kyi's two sons (Kocha, 2012). There was also a change of education systems and a new educational law enacted in 2014 ("National Education Law," 2014).

In 2013, the 22nd World Economic Forum for East Asia was held in Myanmar's new capital city Nay Pyi Daw, and President Thein Sein gave a keynote speech, in which he said:

> We started with the most fundamental aspect of our reforms; our Peace Building Process is one of the most essential ingredients for the success of our political reforms. We are also working hard to move from military rule to democracy, and to reform the economy away from a centralized economy to one based on the free market ("Main Objective," 2013, P.1).

After the 2010 reforms, people assumed the military would no longer rule directly, but in fact, according to the constitution the military still has a leading role in the parliament, because it reserved 25 percent of the parliament seats and several cabinet posts for itself. Particularly, it retains control of all security-related ministries: Home Affairs, Ministry of Border Affairs and Ministry of Defense. Another military advantage is that any constitutional amendment needs 75% of the votes in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) or Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) of the parliament before it can be approved in a referendum (Bunte & Dosch, 2015).

Overall, The Myanmar transition to democracy has been gradual after the 2010 reforms. Under the Thein Sein administration, several political and social reforms have been implemented, such as release of political prisoners, peace talks with ethnic armed groups and relatively relaxed media censorship. These were due to Thein Sein's progressive leadership, for which he has been declared a "famous leader" (The Famous People, 2011).

1.1.3 The Role of ASEAN

ASEAN engaged flexibly with Myanmar under Article 2, Principle (e) of the ASEAN Charter, which mentions "non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN member states" (Association, 2008). Ideally, ASEAN countries will simply

pursue their economic interests in Myanmar rather than interfere politically. In this way both sides have benefits (Jones, W., 2014). Therefore, ASEAN should not be directly involved in Myanmar's domestic issues.

The Philippines and Thailand began to advocate the policy of "constructive engagement" in the 24th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) of July 1991, before Myanmar joined ASEAN. This was in response to the failure of the junta to respect the 1990 election results. Constructive engagement is ideally a friendly engagement that attempts to help start a process of proper "institutionalization of norms" (*Davies, 2014).* After President Soeharto's fall in 1998, Indonesia was more inclined toward democracy, and ASEAN established a human rights mechanism in the region to promote the development of civil society. Myanmar, of course, was listed as the most extreme offender. The later members of ASEAN, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam (the "CMLV countries") all had high profiles of human rights concerns at that time, so human rights discussion was always very restricted within ASEAN. At the 34th Foreign Minister's Meeting (AMM) in Hanoi in 2001, Myanmar was encouraged to start a national conversation on efforts to develop democracy. ASEAN also encouraged Myanmar to implement a "National Roadmap to Democracy" (*ASEAN News* 2015a). In the 39th AMM in 2006, ASEAN discussed the progress of Myanmar democracy, expressing concern about peace and national reconciliation in the country (*Davies, 2012*).

Although the Myanmar military government gave up the ASEAN chair in 2006 due to strong Western protests, by 2014 there was far less objection to Myanmar taking the chair (Bart, 2013), because of the rapidly changing Myanmar politics. In 2008, before the reforms, the chair of the 7th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) stated that the leaders encouraged Myanmar to "engage all stakeholders in inclusive political, economic and social development" (*European Commission*, 2008). This policy, by the time of the 14th ASEAN Summit in Thailand in 2009, appeared to have convinced the SPDC to allow a decisive 'free and fair' general election in 2010 (Marchi, 2014, Pg.19). The resulting government showed further willingness to allow subsequent 2012 by-elections which enabled the NLD entry into parliament, and which were widely recognized by the international community. The EU responded positively and opened opportunities for trade and investment with Myanmar (Marchi,

2014, pg.20). In brief, the Burmese military leaders had transformed their ideology through ASEAN engagement.

There was also the impact of two major crises: in 2007 the so-called "Saffron Revolution," and in 2008 Cyclone Nargis. Together these helped Myanmar to end its isolation after so many long decades. ASEAN also supported capacity-building through international cooperation, and encouraged Western nations to suspend their economic sanctions against Myanmar.

Overall, ASEAN engaged Myanmar during the two major crises in 2007 and 2008, and used its institutional mechanisms to encourage Myanmar political liberalization. Of course ASEAN was aided and supported by individual member states which had been promoting political reforms in Myanmar all along. There is a summary of these in the Literature Review below.

1.1.4 Other International Relations

China is another major neighboring country which also has developed a substantial relationship with Myanmar, consisting of some huge projects for major oil and gas pipelines from Rakhine State to Yunnan province, copper mining projects (where human rights abuses have recently occurred) and the Myitsone dam project which was suspended after intense criticism. These have encouraged further scrutiny of Chinese investments. Therefore the Myanmar reforms have been a series of unpleasant uncertainties for China (Sun, 2012, P.52). However, Beijing has positively stated that it is glad to see growing contact between Myanmar and Western countries, and that it supports the easing of sanctions (Hill, 2012).

India has also maintained close contact and has gained benefit from cooperation and support of Myanmar development. During President Thein Sein's visit to India in October 2011, the Prime Minister of India announced a new aid facility in the form of a US$500 million line of credit to Myanmar for specific projects, including irrigation projects (India, 2011). There is a shared sense of rivalry between China and India, so it is clear that these two countries compete for influence in Myanmar in every policy area (Myat-U, 2011, P. 338).

Japanese support has been relatively strong, for example its stated view that the 2010 election is significant and that any substantial political progress should meet with a positive response from the international community

(*Burma/Myanmar Report*, 2010. Pg.57). In late April 2012, President Thein Sein became the first Myanmar leader to visit Japan since 1984. During his visit, Japan announced it would cancel $3.7 billion in debt owed by Myanmar (Lansford, 2015). The Japanese government decided to cooperate with Myanmar in constructing the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ), located southeast of Yangon (Nam Pan, 2012, P. 28).

International recognition of Myanmar's progressive reforms is led by the **Western nations**. For example, in 2011 the European Council suspended its visa ban on Myanmar cabinet members and other high ranking officials. The EU more than doubled its development aid (to about 150 million euros) for 2012-2013, and also explored the feasibility of a bilateral investment agreement (Xinhua, 2013). EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, UK Prime Minister David Cameron and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon visited Naypyidaw for talks on the reform process (Robinson, 2014). US changes in policy towards Myanmar were set in motion during a visit by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December 2011. On 17 May, 2012, the US announced that it would suspend the restrictions on American investment (Hill, 2012). The United States, which had withdrawn its ambassador from the country in 1990, reestablished full diplomatic ties in 2013, and some of the increase in change and reform in Myanmar is attributable to the increasing engagement with the Obama administration ("U.S. Relations," 2014). The U.S announced that it would ease sanctions in response to the recent reforms. Although the U.S strongly supports Myanmar reforms, its economic sanctions are still only suspended, not fully revoked (Bower & Hiebert, 2012). Australian diplomats also agreed that this is the time for international support of Myanmar reforms but, like other nations, also expressed frustration at the slow pace of reform (Dalpino, 2009).

1.1.5 Ethnic and Human Rights

Armed conflicts with ethnic minorities have been continuous in Myanmar since before the military seized power. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by 2015 there were an estimated 500,000 refugees in neighboring countries, and more than 240,000 internally displaced people ("2015 UNHR", 2015).

In June 2012, the United Nations Human Rights Commission expressed concern about the violence in Rakine State between the ethnic Rakhines and stateless Muslim Bengalis. Later that year, the Heads of State of ASEAN at their 21st ASEAN Summit adopted the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) in Phnom Penh (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012).However, the AHRD is applied through ASEAN mechanisms which are not up to international standards, and further they are constrained by ASEAN norms (Jones W., 2014). Especially in dealing with recent Myanmar human rights issues, The AHRD is constrained by the so-called "ASEAN Way" that upholds non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states (Mohamed, and Sani Mohad, 2010). However, in recent years, we have seen some progress in Myanmar on human rights such as freeing of social activists, allowing ethnic activist groups which are supported by international non-government organizations (INGOs), and parliamentary discussion of women and children in ethnic violence. Nonetheless, the international community still sees Myanmar human rights abuses occurring frequently. It is a fact that civil wars in some states, recent religious conflicts, and several other problems need to be solved with the utmost urgency.

In addition, regarding the ethnic issues, U.S President Obama urged national reconciliation when he visited Myanmar in 2012 and said, "No process of reform will succeed without national reconciliation" (McLaughlin, 2012). However, the ceasefire agreement that had been in place was broken by a military attack on Laiza town in Kachin State in early 2013 (Martin, 2013b). The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) complained to the Thein Sein Government about the government demand that ethnic armed groups sign the ceasefire agreement with prior disarmament, and also other violence and human rights abuses in the state (Beech, 2013). Meanwhile, the Myanmar United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) called for a national ceasefire agreement. Eventually, on 9 April 2016 ASEAN congratulated the military for the implementation of Myanmar's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement which is "conducive to the realization of a peaceful, united and harmonious Myanmar," as stated by ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh (*ASEAN News,* 2015a). However, as of October 2015 the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement had been signed by only eight ethnic armies out of fifteen invited groups (RFA News, 2015). This was called a "first step in a long process of building a

sustainable and just peace in Myanmar" by the US Department of State (Kirby, 2015). There are fifty active armed resistance groups, from 2009 to the present (*Myanmar Peace Monitor*, 2015).

1.1.6 Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD)

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945. She is the daughter of General Aung San, Burmese independence hero (Pletcher, 2012). Suu Kyi became famous during the 1988 student-led uprising (known as the "8-8-88" uprising), which brought down Ne Win's government. However, the military crushed the protests, and the protestors, mostly students, were either killed, imprisoned, or fled to jungle resistance camps.

Along with some others, Suu Kyi founded the National League for Democracy (NLD) on 27 September, 1988 (Aung Aung, 2013). She has served as the party's General Secretary since then, and has become an important icon for the re-establishment of democracy. One result of the 1988 uprising was that the army promised a general election in 1990. The opposition NLD won this election convincingly, but the junta refused to hand over power and put NLD leader Suu Kyi under house arrest. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 (Marchi, 2014). While under house arrest she was the leading voice for human rights and freedom of Myanmar in the international community ("Aung San Suu Kyi," 2003). Her NLD became the major opposition party in the country.

In 2003, Aung San Suu Kyi was attacked as her NLD motorcade was travelling near Depayin (Tabayin) town, Sagaing Division in the north of Myanmar. This is known as the "Depayin Massacre." Dozens of NLD members were shot and killed, but she was lucky. She survived but was rearrested (Lowell, 2010). Regarding these issues ASEAN stated bluntly, "We have made our stand known that Aung San Suu Kyi is to be released immediately" (Jones, L. 2007), and the ASEAN Ministers Meeting (AMM) discussed and argued about it. ASEAN urged resumption of efforts toward national reconciliation and peaceful transition to democracy. It also recommended that "measures taken [be] temporary, and early lifting of restrictions on Su Kyi and the NLD" (*ASEAN*, 2003).

As we all know, Aung San Suu Kyi has great charisma with the people of Myanmar. Hence, people believe that her NLD will play the most important role in achieving a democratic transition and national reconciliation ("Political Reforms," 2015). The recent NLD victory in the general election of 2015 (BBC News, 2015), has inspired the country, and most people are now expecting dynamic change. Since the previous USDP government has made so many reforms in the past five years, people of Myanmar are now willing to accept and follow what "Daw Su" and the NLD have planned out. The first year or so will be the time for the inexperienced NLD representatives to get settled into their positions and learn what can and what cannot be done.

Overall, among the democratic forces, the opposition leader is more than a person: she is a symbol of resistance and her international image is of legendary proportions. Nobel Prize laureate, daughter of Myanmar's greatest national hero, she has been praised for her courage and is also well known for her call for non-violent resistance to the military dictatorship ever since the public uprising in 1988 (Soe Myat New, 2008).

Today in Myanmar we can see clear evidence of real and positive progress; however, unequal prosperity of citizens is still one of the big challenges for the new government, and ethnic groups are still being attacked, leaving a strong negative impact on the everyday life of all ordinary people. Therefore, Myanmar is still on a very sensitive level in all these areas, and despite the high expectations, the NLD needs to handle all this wisely and carefully during its five years of administration.

1.1.7 The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Civil Society organizations (CSOs) have existed since British colonization in 1906, and there was one most significant CSO, the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) which was formed to promote political dialogue and protect Buddhism (Sang, 2013, Pg.19). During Ne Win's regimes civil society was stamped out and only state-controlled organizations were allowed. CSOs only re-emerged during the 1988 uprising. However, military regimes still have continued to keep control over media, telecommunications, and the internet, which are key foci for anti-government activities. In spite of this, students, monks and authors have been

active to restore democracy through their efforts to establish civil society, an essential tool to move the political transition forward as quickly as possible (International Crisis Group, 2001, Pp. i-ii).

After the 2010 reforms, CSOs played a more important role in community development and this could be a key to reform on a national level. Mainly, civil society engages the people in the promotion and protection of human rights, freedom and public awareness of such issues. It is the so-called "bedrock of democracy"(International Crisis Group, 2001). In June 2014, 75 Civil Societies presented a list of recommendations to the government on such issues as democratization, political reforms, the peace process, human rights and socio-economic development. Civil Society leaders participated as members in the nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team as well (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

The CSOs are non-profit. They build social capital and can improve respect for the law and properly-run government in Myanmar. For example, U Thein Sein respected public voices and suspended the construction of the Myitsone dam on the Ayeyarwaddy River. Thus civil and political societies share common values with the government. CSOs also engage in combatting the major diseases in Myanmar such as TB, Malaria and HIV/AIDs, which are regarded as national concerns (Than Than Aye, 2015). Below are some examples of CSO organizations active in the general area of development reforms.

Overall, these three CSOs represent three different criteria: first the Local Resource Center (LRC) represents a local organization which stands by internal funding and it does its work at a domestic level. Secondly, the Free Funeral Service Society (FFSS) represents the private organizations which work on some limited projects, but overall target the whole country. This organization also relies on individual donors rather than funds through international NGOs. Lastly, the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA), is an international organization which participates in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), an international process based in Norway, but which is also recognized and accepted by the Myanmar government. Therefore, these three organizations represent a range of different approaches to help Myanmar political and social reforms progress. Like these three, the rest of Myanmar's very diverse CSOs cover an

extremely wide range of services and training, with each establishing itself in its own area of expertise and experience.

Local Resource Center (LRC) has been one of the more active NGOs since 2008. It used local and international NGOs to support emergency relief and humanitarian assistance after cyclone Nargis struck. The LRC is now the coordinating body for more than 600 civil society networks, sharing information, creating opportunities for CSOs to collaborate with each other and with other public and private stakeholders (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

Some CSOs are individually set up, such as the **Free Funeral Service Society (FFSS)**. It was founded on 1 January, 2001, by movie actor and director Thukha. It provides free funeral services to all people in Yangon. It also helps war victims in Kachin State, and refugees in areas of Rakhine State. It is an active and strong supporter of the NLD (Uy, 2015). Another major NGO named **Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA),** is a nationwide umbrella organization of 449 CSO networks and individual members from all states and regions in Myanmar. This network was established in April 2014 and has been representing people with problems related to land ownership, human rights, environmental protection and natural resource extraction (Kean, 2014).

Myanmar political dialogue has also been developed by government cooperation, both internationally and domestically (International Crisis Group, 2001). On basic issues such as human rights and other social and political affairs, CSOs actively serve to bring about interaction between government and people in Myanmar. For example, armed ethnic groups have passed on their messages via CSOs. In such ways, they work toward an equitable political reorganization of the country along federal lines (Ashley, 2008).

After five years of political and economic progress under the Thein Sein administration, Myanmar held its second elections on 8 November 2015, which resulted in a very solid NLD victory. The USDP government co-operated in a fairly smooth transition. Hence there seems to be a strong and irreversible movement toward more liberalized, democratic, and peaceful government, with increased hope for national reconciliation in Myanmar.

1.2 Objectives of Research

i. To clarify the role of ASEAN in Myanmar political reforms.

ii. To clarify the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Myanmar political reforms

1.3 Research Questions

i. What are the main practices which ASEAN has applied to help Myanmar political reforms?

ii. In what ways have Civil Society Organizations contributed to Myanmar political reforms?

1.4 Literature Review

1.4.1. The Reforms and Challenges

Many scholars acknowledge the positive changes in Myanmar and see the development of some personal freedoms, for example diplomats and politicians being more active today in getting out information about pro-democracy events and human rights violations to the international community. Unlike in previous decades, the people of Myanmar access social media more freely since reforms. At the same time, there is a lot more criticism in the media, especially of politics and other major issues of the nation. Martin (2013b) commented that Myanmar's major political reforms may be caused by both internal and external factors, and most accounts have been focusing on how much or how little conditions in Myanmar have changed since the State Peace Development Council (SPDC) handed power over to the Union Government and the Union Parliament.

Several authors remark that in all respects Myanmar is in the early stages of democratic transition, the opening of space for CSOs, empowerment of women, defining foreign policy and national security priorities, and finding a path to national reconciliation with its diverse ethnic groups. However significant challenges remain within government and with ethnic armies, and human rights abuses continue in some conflict areas (Bower et al. 2012). Therefore, it is urgent that the reforms continue, a ceasefire agreement is signed and strictly followed, leading to peace with the ethnic armed groups, and national reconciliation is steadily constructed nationwide.

1.4.2 ASEAN

Amitav Acharya argues that Western pressure on ASEAN has not significantly affected Myanmar and he emphasized the effect of ASEAN's cherished norm of non-interference, which provided the credibility for real change in Myanmar (in Ganesan, 2006, Pg. 131-139).

In some respects, ASEAN's role has been the most important in Myanmar reforms; that is, ASEAN used simple soft diplomacy with the military leaders who were shown respect and a commitment not to criticize them. One Burmese scholar at an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting said that ARF was one of the few places where Myanmar could actively engage with the United States and the international community (Mya Than 2005).

Yun (2014b) also appreciated what ASEAN has done so far, especially international meetings in which ASEAN engaged Myanmar, helping to end its isolation. This eventually resulted in Myanmar chairing the Association in 2014, and this further opened the economic door. That year Myanmar chose the building of a strong foundation for the coming ASEAN Economic Community 2015 as its key task. So, for now, Myanmar has positively changed in many sectors, and the international community can now confirm its successful integration into ASEAN.

Among ASEAN members, **Thailand** is in practical terms more closely engaged with Myanmar than any other country in ASEAN. Myanmar-Thailand bilateral relations began decades ago when Myanmar was still isolated. These included close military-to-military relations, including business deals. Thailand has gained some significant economic benefits and considerable political influence in Myanmar, and today 25% of Thai electric power is imported from Myanmar ("Thai Power," 2014). It is also said that within ASEAN Thailand has protected the Myanmar government, citing the constructive engagement policy whenever ASEAN discussed Myanmar domestic issues (Kavi, 2011). Therefore, in general we can say that the role of Thailand in Myanmar's transition has therefore been crucial (Pavin, 2011).

Malaysia also engaged with Myanmar positively since the latter's admission to ASEAN, and cajoled it to become an internationally acceptable ASEAN member. Then Prime Minister Mahathir visited Yangon in January 2001 as

ASEAN's representative to encourage political progress and he announced a 'blueprint' which stated that elections would be held in a few years through it also reminded people that elections too have limits (Jones L. 2007).

The Philippines government actively engaged Myanmar for democratic transition in its early years of ASEAN membership. In the 2011 foreign ministers' meeting, the Foreign Minister of the Philippines said that they encouraged SPDC-NLD talks, claiming that since everything was moving in a positive direction there was no interference. The Philippines would encourage and persuade, but could not do it publically. Myanmar knows they have to find a solution and they know they have to ultimately follow democratic processes (Jones L. 2007). The Philippines also shared their experience of democratic transition and a critical approach to promoting human rights during the visit of Myanmar Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in June 2012 (Trajano, 2012).

Indonesia enjoyed economic growth under the Suharto regime unlike Myanmar under General Ne Win. After Suharto's fall, the collapse of the Indonesia economy brought it closer to Myanmar in 1997. A year later, Indonesia played an important role in providing Burma's military leaders with an ideological basis for reform (Aung Zaw, 2001. Pg.48). Indonesia helped the Myanmar government draft its defense white paper which outlined military needs, a critical component for reform progress in Myanmar. The Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said "Indonesia also plans to support other aspects of the reforms process such as a national human rights commission, civil society, and a presidential advisory council, and to share Indonesia's experience of reforms" (Tin Htwe, 2012).

Singapore has had a long and close relationship with Myanmar, and their 50th year of diplomatic relations was marked on 12 April, 2016 (Wong, 2016). In fact, "Singapore's economic linkage with Burma is one of the most vital factors for the survival of Burma's military regime" (Mya Maung, cited in Kean & Bernstein, 1998). Singapore was also Myanmar's most valuable international ally when it was under international sanctions (Ellis, 2013). Singapore helped Myanmar economically after the military crackdown on students in 1988. State-owned Singapore companies directly supported the Junta with crucial financing that provided military equipment and weaponry. Singapore also provides very important financial structural support for

the Myanmar economy by enabling currency transactions which are nominally prevented by international trade sanctions. Also the military families could establish legal international business operations out of the country (Kean & Bernstein, 1998).

On January 29, 2013 President Thein Sein met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on a visit to Singapore, resulting in an agreement to provide training for reforms in the legal, banking and financial sectors and also to align practices in trade and tourism planning, crucial steps in helping Myanmar emerge from political and economic isolation after long decades of military regimes (Agence France Presse, 2013).

In general we can summarize the range of positions of ASEAN members:

i. Those who were supportive and fully active economically and politically were Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Indonesia was strongly supportive ideologically.
ii. Those who were supportive but critical: the Philippines and Malaysia.
iii. Those who were supportive but did not get involved: Laos, Cambodia, and Brunei.

1.4.3 Military Power

Durand (2013) contends that isolationism and socialism both contributed to the Myanmar military regime's thinking when it progressively closed off the country to the world, thereby increasing the power of the junta. Burmese citizens steadily lost their rights and freedoms. So, during the early democratic transition period, although the recent President Thein Sein allowed various social-economic freedoms, many people were suspicious; they believed that there were things hidden behind the reforms. Also, Wells notes that some people may have thought that the reforms were being driven by president U Thein Sein, but many civilians believed that former general Than Shwe still held power behind the scenes. He found further that many ethnic leaders see democracy as an end to ethnic Burmese dominance and better recognition of the cultural and political rights of minorities (Wells, 2014). Hence, the majority of the ethnic groups are still looking to a federal system as the ultimate solution.

Sakhong (2012) expressed dissatisfaction with recent Myanmar reforms and he saw great difficulty in achieving peaceful settlement between government forces and ethnic armed groups due to their mutual distrust. The fact is that the military always gets involved in national politics although to different degrees in different states.

1.4.4 Aung San Suu Kyi

In local social media, we had heard recently about Aung San Suu Kyi being criticized by Burmese politicians and social network users due to her silence on ethnic armed forces and sexual violence against women in ethnic conflict areas. This has occurred over the last couple years when she was a member of parliament. Also, a large number of Buddhist people reacted against her speech at the time of the stateless Muslim crisis, when Suu Kyi said that Myanmar needs to protect minority groups and respect human rights. Many nationalists objected to her comment due to a high tide of nationalism at the time.

However the majority of civilians still loves and praises her. It is because she is the daughter of Burmese independence hero Aung San, and she is the pre-eminent pro-democracy leader of Myanmar in the 21st century. Therefore Martin (2012b) reminds us that Myanmar still needs Aung San Suu Kyi. In any case she will always be a powerful player.

1.4.5 Other International Relations

The international community has exerted great pressure for the reforms that Myanmar has accomplished so far. Still, many political prisoners remain in jail, armed ethnic conflicts continue, and the 2008 constitution remains in place, ensuring 25% military presence in the legislature and barring Daw Suu Kyi from the presidency. For these reasons, Davis (2011) said the international community needs to be aware of Myanmar's domestic political situation with its diverse ethnic groups, different political directions, and unsure foreign policies.

The EU is very active in Myanmar affairs. *Cameron* (2012) argues that the EU was right in its three expectations of Myanmar political reforms: the release of all political prisoners, sustained efforts towards ethnic peace, and free and fair elections. After these reforms the EU made very positive responses such as

ending economic sanctions and removing visa bans on the many political leaders from Myanmar.

After reforms Myanmar has improved its relationship with the US, and it has become an intermediary when the US meets with China. There is more competition than cooperation between China and the US, and Myanmar is often a place where that competition has been at work since 2011 (Yun, 2014a). Hence, some scholars also remind Myanmar that it needs to be aware in managing the relationship between these two foreign powers and it is said that Myanmar should welcome the US, as long as the relationship develops slowly. These scholars also point out the "confrontation and recrimination" which will almost certainly occur between U.S & China in the region (Birdsall et al., 2006) and the delicate balance between these two powers. It is reasonable advice to avoid this kind of competition, and not let it happen in such a small space as Myanmar, while it still has limited experience in international relations.

Japanese leaders may see Chinese activities in Myanmar as not in Japan's national interest. It is unlikely Japan can hope to equal the Chinese position in Myanmar, but they have canceled over US$3.7 billion in debts, and have offered a new foreign aid assistance program of US$900 million to support the infrastructure development in two new major ports: Thilawa and Dawei. This may help the Japanese to regain some influence in Myanmar alongside of the Chinese, U.S and EU roles (Steinberg, 2013).

In general, reforms are now moving slowly, finding numerous challenges like the lack of international commitment in foreign direct investment (FDI) and a worse rate in the Freedom House Transparency of Corruption Index for 2012, in which Myanmar ranked 157th out of 175 countries (*Freedom House*, 2012). Other problems consist of judicial training for reintegration of the powerful military, engaging in non-traditional security, dealing with child soldiers, and the ever-resilient drug trade: just some of the key challenges. In fact, Myanmar is the world's second-largest opium producer after Afghanistan (Khandekar, 2013)

1.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Democracy is what everyone in Myanmar has been awaiting for long decades. But Myanmar might actually have a different concept of freedom from other societies, because their idea of freedom is rooted in Buddhist philosophy, in particular in the theory of impermanence. What Buddhists believe is that everyone has his own personal freedom inside his heart, but the freedom of the moment is just a temporary sensual pleasure and it is impermanent. This is why the Buddha said "freedom is difficult" in the Dhammapada,[1] and if the word "democracy" means "freedom," it is not permanent freedom in a Buddhist philosophical way. Of course, there have been some efforts in Myanmar history where people fought for freedom against the military junta, such as the 1988 Uprising and the 2007 'Saffron Revolution.' Unsurprisingly, those movements were not familiar with the idea of a violent struggle to wrest freedom from the military government and their deep and longstanding tolerance might be based on their belief in Buddhist concepts of Karma, which are interpreted (by some) to mean that freedom can be achieved in life cycles of dependent origination.

In contrast, there are many armed ethnic groups fighting against the military government, motivated by their own nationalism rather than any religious concept. Eventually, many youths learn the meaning of freedom in the modern era. This is a global impact upon the generations who desire to be "modern," meaning to follow social media and technological advantages as a way of life, rather than more traditional identities. This is at least one reason why our concept of democracy becomes a larger expression that explores gaining freedom and rights for everyone.

In the early military period, Ne Win's government laid down guidelines for the "Burmese way to socialism" which maintained an official public form of Buddhism. In reality, however, the Burmese way to socialism is anti-Western and anti-Marxist socialism (Von der Mehden, 2007). The Marxist theory of socialism is against religions, saying that religions retard human development and therefore religion must be a private affair, not concerned with state and authority (Lenin, 2000).

[1] *Dhammapada* is a smaller text which selects the most useful teachings of the Buddha. It was composed by Venerable Buddhaghosa, and can be found in the Khuddaka Nikaya, a division of the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism.

However Burmese rulers developed their own ideological concepts rooted in their own cultural expectations. On several points this is similar to the "ASEAN Way," which was at first introduced in response not only to the ideological conflict between Western capitalism and Eastern communism during the Cold War, but also to maintain and protect ASEAN identity which is based on norms that are different from those of the Western concept, so-called communitarianism (Gvosdev, 2016). Thus, some of these ASEAN mechanisms have gained wide acceptance and brought regional benefits. This is one major reason why ASEAN admitted Myanmar as a full member in 1997, despite intense international community disapproval. Hence, it is a fact now that Myanmar is gradually changing due to ASEAN engagement. This is the way in which ASEAN norms helped Myanmar rise from its previous status as international pariah (Poole, 2006).

Southeast Asia regionalism has been debated from realist and constructivist theoretical perspectives. Realist theory emphasizes material capabilities, international anarchy, and balancing-power strategies. Constructivist theory includes more social and historical factors. Both theories agree that the principle of non-interference is central in ASEAN. However, realists generally accepted ASEAN's commitment to member sovereignty, allowing non-interference as the only normative principle. Constructivists argued for a bundle of norms (central to which is non-interference) combining into the principle of the "ASEAN Way" (Jones, L. 2012, Pp.2-3). Based on the ASEAN engagement with Myanmar, it appears that the constructivist theory has more explanatory power. As described above, it can now be confirmed that Myanmar has changed its identity and is in the process of becoming a very different state, based primarily on its opening to the world, and abandoning its longstanding policy of isolation. This affects not only the politics and the economy, but in fact the entire society. Myanmar is in the process of building a new identity for itself, not only as a more democratic state, but also as a member of worldwide political and economic networks, and especially as a member of ASEAN.

On the other hand, International Relationship (IR) theory describes an important transformation from realism to liberalism, which results from the relationship between a nation and the international community (Ikenberry, 2015). In this view Myanmar has moved from a realist approach to a more liberal one as a result

of external influences. Realism is a natural phenomenon theory which rejects supernatural factors (Mayes, 2016) and it is based on conflicts and war. It fits the attitude of Burmese military regimes. This is a system which believes states are the embodiment of power. As Myanmar has received increasingly intense international attention from Western powers and its giant Asian neighbors, it has been adjusting fundamental perspectives toward a more liberal view. This might have a negative impact on Myanmar if it is insufficiently prepared when big powers pursue their advantages in the region. However, the liberal theory has the positive concept of human rationalism, based on the idea of mutual cooperation (Reus-Smit, 2001**)**. This theoretical view seems to be a more appropriate direction for Myanmar at this time.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study will use both quantitative and qualitative research methodology, the latter based on a social science research paradigm. Firstly, research will be conducted mainly from secondary documents that discuss the thesis topic area. These documents would include books, journal articles, report papers, online articles, research papers and magazines, newspapers, keynote speeches and news in both print and online editions. These sources will mostly be written or recorded by local Myanmarese and international scholars and wherever possible this study will rely on local explanations of causes for major events and trends. The data consists of both English and Burmese sources which for the most part were collected from internet sources which the researcher uses: websites, blogs, free reading of Google books, and newspapers.

This qualitative approach deals with sensitive transformations and local affairs that occasionally involve the author's personal experiences and observations as a Myanmar citizen, but most information is from scholars supplying basic data through their descriptions. Chapter Two to Chapter Four address research questions which ask "what," "why," and "how." Chapter three will be the most qualitative in approach, aiming at thick description of the views of active CSO leaders in Myanmar at this time.

Mainly, this research provides historical and contemporary data on the state of the current political reforms in Myanmar. In the present-day complex

situation many factors and actors are in play. So this thesis divides into five chapters, in order to answer the research questions. Each chapter will consist of background and finer data that will be analysed for overall impact. In the third chapter some selected CSO sources are interviewed for their involvement in the reform progress, and their overview of society. These organizations are Local Resource Center (LRC), Free Funeral Service Society (FFSS) and Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA). Chapter Four traces the critical conduct of ASEAN and its role in Myanmar reforms. The last chapter is to answer research questions as well as a final summary of the thesis.

CHAPATER 2
PROCESS OF REFROMS (SINCE 2010)

2.1. "Roadmap to Democracy"

Myanmar has had a long and bloody search for peace and stability, especially compared with some ASEAN countries in the region. Since independence and an early period of democratic government, civil war has raged in the country. Many ethnic groups like the Karen, Kachin, Mon, Shan and Chin revolted against the government, including the Muslim group called the 'Mujaheedin' in Rakhine State, as well as Burmese communist elements in some of the ethnic areas and remote states. In such a situation, the central government needed military intervention to prevent dissolution of the state. The U Nu government had successfully maintained this fragile situation for a decade (Than Tin, 1993), but it was unsustainable.

In 1962, under the Ne Win regime, the state changed its direction from chaotic democracy to the "Burmese Way to Socialism," and was renamed "The Socialist Republic of the Union of Myanmar" (Than Tin, 1993). In this period, Myanmar was characterized by military order, isolation from the world economy, and one-party rule. With the severing of international relations, the Myanmar economy quickly weakened, and education standards became worse. After twenty-two years of military rule, the gradual impact of global waves of democratization led to the great uprising in 1988. However, the Tatmadaw (the army) took back direct control and formed the State Law and Order Council (SLORC) to organize the promised general elections. When these were won resoundingly by the National League for Democracy (NLD), the army leaders refused to hand over power due to their distrust of Aung San Suu Kyi, who had close relations with the West and was supported by ethnic minority insurgents, as testified by at least one senior government official (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2012). Then international pressure increased, supported by domestic protests against the military government. After decades of this, a new leader, General Than Shwe, from 1992 to 2011 sought his own way toward democracy and re-established relations with Myanmar's neighbour countries. ASEAN by this time had a vision of a unified ten-member association, and preferred to use a "soft power" approach to Myanmar.

Like China and India, ASEAN provided economic and political support. SLORC also showed political progress by reforming itself into the State Peace and Democracy Council (SPDC) in 1997. Earlier in that year, Myanmar had joined ASEAN (McCarthy, 2008).

In 2003 the new SPDC Prime Minister Khin Nyunt declared the "Seven-Step Roadmap to Democracy" (McCarthy, 2008) which allowed ASEAN to increase its engagement with the Myanmar government, who in turn pledged clear advances in the processes of the Roadmap, namely "a national convention, drafting a constitution, conducting a referendum, and calling a general election" (McCarthy, 2008). On 30 August, 2003, the roadmap was officially announced by Gen. Khin Nyunt to all SPDC members, which included Government Ministers, Heads of Departments, and some Non-Governmental Organizations. The Prime Minister stated that Myanmar would implement this roadmap of democratic transition, according to the official government newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* (English version), and the steps were to be:

i. Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996
ii. After the successful holding of the National Convention, step by step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic state
iii. Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention
iv. Adoption of the constitution through a national referendum
v. Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws (legislative bodies) according to the new constitution
vi. Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution.
vii. Building a modern, developed and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaws, and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaws (*The New Light of Myanmar,* 2003a).

The National Convention was the first crucial step of the roadmap (Arnott, 2004). SLORC Declaration No.11/92 stated that holding a National Convention would be the most important step in the roadmap, and it laid down the basic objectives of drafting a stable constitution, namely:

viii. Non-disintegration of the Union
ix. Non-disintegration of national solidarity
x. Perpetuation of sovereignty
xi. Flourishing of a genuine multiparty democratic system
xii. Development of eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality in the state
xiii. For the Tatmadaw to be able to participate in the national political leadership role of the state (Khing Maung Win, 2004).

These six objectives are known as the central principles of SLORC, which proceeded with the convening of a commission for the National Convention on 2 October, 1992 (Arnott, 2004). The National Convention adjourned in 1996, and from its first meeting in 1993 it accomplished several tasks, such as drawing up the State Constitution, formulating fundamental state principles, state structure, self-administered divisions, formation of the legislature, formation of the executive and formation of the judiciary, all of which appear in the 2008 constitution (Khing Maung Win, 2004). It was stated that the 2003 Roadmap did not acknowledge any 1990 election victors so that winners of future elections would be able to form a new government with no conditions attached, and the roadmap was systemically planned and introduced in order to protect the new constitution proposal. As one recorded note described the situation:

i. A new constitution must be drawn up before the power can be transferred
ii. This constitution must follow certain principles, to be drafted by a National Convention
iii. The whole nation must approve the constitution
iv. The government to which power is ultimately transferred must be strong (Arnott, 2004).

These conditions emerged after 27 May, 1990, and seemed to highlight two points. The first was that there must be a strong government which would meet the requirements of the new constitution, which had to be adopted before military leaders would hand over power. Second, the conditions for drafting a new constitution would need to exclude the 1990 NLD victory, how the constitution should be drafted, or previous elected representatives in the assembly (Arnott, 2004). After this Roadmap was announced, several state-owned newspapers propagated it during 2003. Then, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) - later changed to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)- led a nation-wide campaign to support the "democracy roadmap policy" (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2003d, Pg.16). Also the *New Light of Myanmar* stated that "only when the National Convention is held successfully can the fourth objective, which calls for building a new modern and developed nation in accordance with the new State Constitution out of 'four political objectives,' be materialized" (NLM, 2003c). These four political objectives were:

i. Stability of the state, community peace and tranquility, prevalence of law and order
ii. National reconsolidation
iii. Emergence of a new enduring State Constitution
iv. Building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new State Constitution (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2003a).

These four political objectives of the SPDC government were described in various campaigns and government official ceremonies in support of the 'democracy roadmap' that always described the democratic transition goal as "fully disciplined democracy." On October 2, 2003, the government announced the National Convention Convening Work Committee (NCCWC) stating that, "to enable the National Convention to carry out its duties and responsibilities successfully and smoothly, the State Peace and Development Council has reconstituted the NCCWC" (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2003b).

During this time there was immense international pressure on Myanmar, which ASEAN mediated diplomatically. The 9th ASEAN Summit discussed and approved the Roadmap in Bali in October 2003, and supported a statement by the

chairperson that "the leaders welcomed the recent positive developments in Myanmar and the government's pledge to bring about a transition to democracy through dialogue and reconciliation" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003). The leaders also agreed that sanctions are not helpful in promoting peace and stability, which are essential for democracy to take root. In 2003 Gen. Khin Nyunt travelled to meet various ASEAN leaders to discuss bilateral relations and common interests. Particularly, some Myanmar news commented on the meeting of Indonesian President S.B. Yudhoyono and Gen. Khin Nyunt, who said "the two countries have been forging bilateral relations based on mutual friendship and understanding since the time of independence struggles in the two countries" (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2003d), and he expressed his desire to further strengthen this mutual friendship, based on great traditions and ongoing contacts to further strengthen economic cooperation. After the ASEAN Summit, Gen. Khin Nyunt stated that "ASEAN warmly welcomed the pledge and future policy and programme of Myanmar to transform itself into a democratic nation" (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2003d).

During this time, General Khin Nyunt met 13 ethnic groups and all the groups supported his seven-step Road Map (Khing Maung Win, 2004). The process of reinventing the country led to numerous concerns, the most important of which was the retention of the military's central role in the political institutions of the country. The SPDC's Gen. Khin Nyunt said, "Elections will be held as soon as law and order have been restored and the Tatmadaw (armed forces) will then hand over state power to the party which wins" (Htet Aung, 2007). In a unilateral official statement in 1992, three months before the first meeting of the National Convention, the military leaders raised a key requirement, that the leading role of the Tatmadaw in national politics must be preserved (Arnott, 2004). This fit with the SLORC principles listed above. Such a strong position could have been taken because "the SPDC is known to have studied Indonesia's *dwi fungsi* doctrine of 1966, which granted a dual role for the military in politics and defence" (Htet Aung, 2007).

However, from the ASEAN perspective, a decision of the 10th Ministerial Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) acknowledged the Myanmar government's efforts towards democratic transition, in particular the National Convention and the seven-step Roadmap. Yet, some participants still argued for

further progress on national reconciliation (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2003). The Asian Regional Forum is also one of the most comprehensive meetings, where most of the world's powerful leaders gather, and Myanmar was now able to meet with those leaders and explain its political transformation through ASEAN mediation.

On the other hand, a major obstacle in the process was the so-called 'Saffron Revolution' in 2007, when the direction of Myanmar's democracy Roadmap went seriously astray with military violence against peaceful protesters and international newsmen. At that time, the ASEAN reaction was (perhaps understandably) weak, and it did not try to communicate with the international community. The next horrific incident was in 2008, with Cyclone Nargis. Though hundreds of thousands were in perilous condition, the military refused international aid. The democracy Roadmap seemed to have led to a dead end. At this time, constant ASEAN diplomatic action led to its role as a "bridge" between the Myanmar military and international relief aid, mostly donated through the UN. This counts as a major success in building trust between Myanmar and ASEAN. It also set a model for future ASEAN natural disaster relief (Thuzar, 2011). In addition, it certainly helped ASEAN solidarity in dealing with Myanmar (Weatherbee, 2009).

In 2006 Myanmar had been scheduled to take ASEAN's rotating chairmanship. Despite ASEAN support, many Western countries considered increasing economic sanctions against Myanmar, and threatened to boycott ASEAN meetings and downgrade their trade and investment with ASEAN member countries if Myanmar were to take the chair (Oishi, 2016). Then Malaysian parliamentarians openly suggested that Myanmar should forfeit the coming chairmanship (Oishi, 2016). Indonesia also remarked on the lack of sustainable achievement on the Roadmap, and that the country should work on solving its internal problems and develop some substantial results before taking the Chair of ASEAN (Haacke, 2005, P. 196).

Eventually Myanmar did give up the chairmanship, and the country's Roadmap-promoting campaign continued on slowly. And once the 2007 'Saffron Revolution' was suppressed, the Myanmar military leaders seemed to have quickly decided under international pressure to make an official public announcement to hold a constitution draft referendum. This referendum was ratified by 92 percent of voters

in the country on 29 May, 2008, at the height of the post-Nargis disaster. Despite the criticism for not delaying the referendum, the military authorities seemed to believe that almost half of the population supported the USDA. Therefore, the military leaders assured everyone that plans for a 2010 election were well underway. The *New Light of Myanmar* newspaper quoted Gen. Than Shwe: "the seven-step Roadmap is the only way to smoothly transition to democracy" (cited in *VOA News*, 2009).

2.2 Reforms to date in Selected Areas

2.2.1 Reforms in Government

Myanmar's critical year of 2010 became the most important and defining year in over two decades of political change and deep uncertainty about the political situation in the country. However, when general elections seemed to be an approaching reality under the SPDC government, a unique dialogue emerged, especially with ethnic minorities. People did tend to expect to resolve all political and armed conflicts overnight, therefore Myanmar still had many challenges (Burma Centrum, 2010).

In any case, the military-backed party (USDP) won the 2010 election, and the new president, Thein Sein, 68, took office. His first official visit abroad was in May 2011, to attend the ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, and his first state visit in the same month was to China, where he received an honorary Ph.D (Kuppuswamy, 2014). Since then he traveled to many countries, including the U.S.A., the U.K, Japan, and India. His name was on the Oslo Peace Research Institute shortlist of five possible Nobel Peace Prize recipients due to his efforts in peacemaking (Parameswaran, 2012). He also made efforts at national reconciliation and was happy to meet Aung San Suu Kyi, the "88 generation" leaders, and some leaders of major ethnic groups (Kuppuswamy, 2014). Although a ceasefire policy had been instituted under the new regime in 1989, most insurgencies maintained their arms and control of their border areas with no democratic transition. Further, while many ethnic parties were allowed to join the election, and some political and economic reforms were underway, no benefit to the ethnic groups was immediately apparent, especially their demands for equal rights, regional autonomy, and the formation of a federal union (Kuppuswamy, 2014).

On the other hand, in 2011, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) was established through Notification No. 34/2011 by President Thein Sein, to promote fundamental rights of the citizens as specified in the constitution of Myanmar. This 15-member body is largely composed of civilians, including Chin, Karen, Kachin and Shan ethnic representatives. Unfortunately to date it does not yet have international (or UN) recognition. Myanmar also joined five Southeast Asian countries as independent National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), which include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Timor Leste. Win Mra, the chairperson of Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) was welcomed at the 9th Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institution Forum (SEANF), 12-14 September, 2011 (Kuppuswamy, 2014).

In fact, the country was changing gradually under the Thein Sein administration. The new legislature formed in 2011 was much more developed than the international community expected for the first five years of democratic reforms, and open discussion on public media was allowed. The largest opposition party (NLD) registered in November, 2011 (Kuppuswamy, 2014). The Ministry of Finance announced a new labour law to increase the wages of all public sector employees, including soldiers, with an additional cost-of-living allowance of 30,000 kyat (Burmese currency = $38 USD). This law has been in effect since April 1, 2012, the same date that the NLD won 44 of the 45 seats in the by-elections (Ba Kaung, 2012). After the 2nd Media Conference held in Yangon in 2013, government censorship was abolished, new media laws were set up to establish a temporary press council, and private daily newspapers began to appear around the country (International Media, 2013).

2.2.2. Reforms on Ethnic Affairs and the Civil Wars

The most important point to note on Myanmar ethnic affairs is that during these sensitive times, the United Nationalities Federal Council was formed in February 2013, as a negotiating group. It represented eleven armed ethnic groups to consider the nation-wide ceasefire proposed by the USDP government in the middle of 2013. Meanwhile major ethnic groups gathered in Laiza to form the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) and came up with eleven points of a

framework agreement. This agreement was presented to the government peace-making committee at the first joint meeting at Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin State, in November, 2013. In fact, Thein Sein had announced a unilateral ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in January of that year. Eventually, a ceasefire agreement was signed in Myitkyina, witnessed by diplomatic representatives from China and the United Nations (Williams, 2015). For many decades of these internal wars, one controversial issue was that the Government said its troops were ordered to fire only in self-defense, but the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the KIA's political arm, claimed it had come under attack without provocation since the breakdown of the Government-KIA ceasefire on January 19, 2013 (Whiteman, 2013).

Although the USDP government had striven for peace and national reconciliation through the ceasefire, the country's longest civil war was still going on between the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Myanmar Tatmadaw at the end of the last year of the USDP government. Recently, in 2015 the MNDAA which in the past had been part of the Burmese Communist Party with some Chinese support, attacked a Burmese Army camp near the border of China. The Tatmadaw said it lost 55 soldiers, and claimed to have killed more than 70 MNDAA rebels, led by Pheun Kya-Shin (Dinmore, 2015). Shin, an 85-year-old warlord, returned from China to re-establish his army in Myanmar's Kokang zone after he had been driven out six years earlier during the "Kokang incident." In this incident the Burmese Army proposed to convert the Kokang Army into "border guards" in a ceasefire agreement before the general election in 2010. After the Kokang leader refused, the government troops occupied Laukai, displacing the MNDAA (Dinmore, 2015). The Kokang fighters had in fact been the first-ever ceasefire group, in a 1989 deal with Kin Nyunt and the SLORC. This conflict area is located on the fringe of the drug-producing Golden Triangle region where Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet (Guan, 2009).

The Kokang people are recognized as Han Chinese in China. During the fighting, an estimated 30,000 refugees crossed the border into China after several days of skirmishes with government troops. Local media reported that the MNDAA had joined with other groups like the Kachin Independence Army (KIA),

the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army (AA) against government troops. "Beijing has asked Myanmar to end the fighting," the PRC government said (Zin Mar Win & Kyaw Thu, 2015).

In fact, the military strategy was to separate the ethnic groups by redrawing the maps of some ethnic nations, and establishing "self-administered" zones or divisions for the Wa, Danu, Kokang, Lahu, Palaung and Pao in Shan State. This administration system is not accepted by the majority Shan people in the State. Nagaland, over on the western border with India also became one of the special administration regions (Burma Centrum, 2010), though the people there are not involved in anti-government activity.

In 2009 the SPDC had ordered that all ceasefire groups must transform into "Border Guard Forces (BGF)" before the general election in 2010, and the election law declared that those groups must register as parties, otherwise the groups will be effectively illegal. Due to the uncertainties of the new rules, many ethnic groups found that the army had taken territorial control up to the new border lines, leaving the transformed ethnic parties unable to operate their armed forces in their traditional territories. It was estimated that there were 40,000 soldiers participating in these forces (*Mizzima*, 2010a). Therefore, real solutions have not been found, and the current situation is considered neither war nor peace. United Wa State Army (UWSA) chairman Bao Youxiang said, "Myanmar is a multinational nation. Peaceful solution of the problems based on equality and solidarity should be the only means when there are conflicts and contradictions among the national minorities or between a big race and a smaller race" (*Mizzima*, 2010a).

2.2.3. Reforms in Education

The British colonial period introduced a nation-wide government education system. Upon independence in 1954, Myanmar had the highest literacy rate in Asia, which had been maintained through the late 1940s and 1950s (Oxford Burma Alliance, 2016a). However, the education system fell to a lower standard with the Ne Win Military coup in 1962, after the new dictator declared that the language of the colonizer (English) should no longer be taught in school (Hays, 2008). The poor state education system faced even more trouble after the 1988 student uprising, when the SLORC government closed down all universities for three years (Oxford Burma

Alliance, 2016a). The country's education budget was only 1.4 % of GDP in 2011/12 and although the 2012/13 budget was doubled, it was still one of the lowest in ASEAN and even worldwide (Thaung Win, 2015).

Today the Myanmar literacy rate stands at 89.5% (males 92%, females 86.9%), according to the 2014 Myanmar Census (Ministry, 2015). In 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE) began a comprehensive education sector review with technical support from international partners UNESCO and the ADB, to support capacity development of education for all, planned for 2014. However, these education reforms are criticized by some as being a repetition of the previous so-called "comprehensive reforms movement," in which the government highly centralized higher education and excluded private stakeholders. But as noted above, since 2011 Myanmar educational law now allows private ownership of schools. Another problem is that the recent higher education curriculum used is out of date with little relevance to the new generations of students. The main issue is the qualifications of the teachers. Many are not competent for the modern classroom, and need revised professional development programs. Here again cooperation and networking with international institutions is necessary to achieve practical modern-day skills for the graduates (Thaung Win, 2015).

2.2.4. Reforms in Business and Development

Perhaps due to poor quality of education, Myanmar ranks 148 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index 2012 (Human Development Index, 2015). Similarly, on the Corruption Perception Index 2015 Myanmar ranks 147 out of 168 countries (Transparency, 2015). Following the corruption issue, the Global Witness group, after a 12-month investigation reported in October 2014 that Myanmar's secret jade trade was worth US$31 billion in 2014 alone. This trade is controlled by military families and cronies. This figure is equal to almost half of the country's GDP and over 46 times the national spending on health (Global Witness, 2015).

In fact, it is the author's perception, and also that of some business people, that currently Myanmar is a two-class society with a huge income gap between rich and poor. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer. There is a lack of middle class people in the country, and this is one reason for the corruption of recent

decades. At the same time, there are long-existing arrangements whereby Singapore protects military leaders' investments despite the origins of the funds in military monopolies and drug dealing (Ellis, 2013). Therefore, military families have been taking economic advantages such as health care in world-class hospitals, private banking security support, and advanced education for their children in Singapore. Also the military families enjoyed official status for business operations out of the country (Kean & Bernstein, 1998). Economic growth may also get a boost from wealthy Burmese people who have recently been freed of the economic sanctions imposed by America and Europe. According to a 2012 report, Myanmar had 39 "high net-worth individuals," people who had assets of $30 million or more. This report came out after the number of Myanmar people who had invested in upmarket property in London within 12 months equaled the number of wealthy people from Hong Kong and Switzerland (cited in Boot, 2013). The country's currency has a dual exchange rate, one official and the other a black market rate, and this is still considered a source of major corruption in the country. After Thein Sein came to power, the establishment of the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX) was just a matter of time. It was opened on March 25, 2016, accepting foreign investors as well as citizens (Potkin, 2016).

Overall, international observers who experienced or studied the first five years of reforms have concluded that Myanmar has had positive economic growth, with GDP per capita of only $824.19 in 2011, rising to $1,203.80 in 2014. This is good, but it is still far below neighbors Thailand at $5,977.4 and Singapore at $56,284.3 (World Bank, 2016b).

In fact, the current Myanmar per capita electricity consumption is the lowest in ASEAN. Only one in four people can access electricity. "Approximately two thirds of primary energy in the country is supplied by biomass like firewood, charcoal, agricultural residue and animal waste" (Asian Development Bank, 2012). The electrification rate varies from 67 percent in the Yangon area to only 16 percent in rural areas. Nevertheless, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) positively viewed the country's potential for power generation (Asian Development Bank, 2012), and the ADB has also opened an office in Yangon. Also the World Bank returned again to Myanmar after having ended financial ties due to non-payment

of overdue loans in 1998 (Hufbauer et al., 2008). The ADB granted $512 million, while the World Bank approved $440 million in credit in 2013. In January 2014, during a visit by World Bank president Jim Yong Kim, a $2 billion multi-year program for health and electricity was launched (Kuppuswamy, 2014).

2.3 Retention of Military Power

During the British colonial period, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was formed by a group of nationalists known as the Thirty Comrades, and was led by General Aung San who thus became the father of the present-day Tatmadaw (Army). After independence from Britain in 1948, the Myanmar Tatmadaw became the most powerful institution in the country. From these beginnings the military has dominated Myanmar's politics for nearly five decades, 1962 to 2010.

In fact, since 1962, under the junta of Ne Win, Myanmar fell into the worst economic condition in its history, although Myanmar is so rich in natural resources. Today, the military status still remains strong. In 2002 it built a new capital Nay Pyi Taw (formerly known as Paymana) in the center of the country for the purpose of retention of military power. They re-located all government offices there in 2005 (Preecharush, 2011). It seems that the military has always believed that national security is the key concern for decision making, whether in domestic or international affairs (Than Tin, 1993). Thus it has always seen the role of the military as essential in domestic politics, for national security purposes. During the early independence period, when civil war broke out, the Myanmar Armed Forces were authorized by the government to suppress the rebel groups, and the military was able to restore the state successfully (Hnin Yi, 2014). Since then, the military gradually took over the state power and General Ne Win and his Revolutionary Council (RC) controlled politics until 1974. The RC government adopted the "Burmese Way to Socialism" that "planned proportional development for all national productive forces" (Von der Mehden, 2007). However, the RC government declined. In the period 1948-1965, Burma had desperately sought to avoid the Cold War, due to its own civil war. So the Ne Win government followed a strict policy of avoiding support of any Cold War factions, and this was combined with Burma's longstanding tradition of isolation (van Dyk, 2008). But even with the end of the Cold War, the Myanmar

military continued with an ambitious expansion of the armed forces. So, in this way the military consolidated its central and powerful role in politics. By 1974, the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) had clearly failed in the area of socio-economic development due to mismanagement under its own socialist system. The primacy of national security was transformed into something called the National Ideology and Role of Defence Services (NIRDS). This military ideology legitimized the military's dual functions of internal security and economic development. These new professional tasks confirmed the military as the dominant player in national politics, and the most enduring institution in Myanmar (Hnin Yi, 2014, p 8).

In Myanmar's civil wars, whenever foreign interventions occurred this made it impossible for any local solutions to be worked out (Thant Myint, 2006, P.289). In line with its isolationism, the military regime changed the name of the country from "Burma" to "Myanmar" in July 1989. Also many other titles and place names were changed in an overall attempt to remove any residue of colonization (Dittmer, 2010). According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report on world military power, Myanmar is ranked number 22, followed by the United Kingdom and then Italy. Myanmar ranks as the fourth largest military power out of ten in Southeast Asia (CIA, 2016). This was possible in some accepted why military power in Myanmar is still so strong today.

By regulation, the military role is systemically placed before the public eye in every published book, newspaper and magazine, electronic media and on the internet. Each message emphasizes the above-mentioned objectives of the military, focusing on stability and order, and reorganizing the nation according to the constitution.

The military also has four other directives against foreign influence that are regularly published in state daily newspapers:

i. Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views.

ii. Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation.

iii. Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State.

iv. Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2006).

These extreme policies of the military government have been systemically presented to the people for long decades, as part of daily life. Each powerful military officer is connected with business cronies, and profits in various unrecorded ways.

Furthermore, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) has had a bad record since October 1983, due to its secret relationship providing it with weaponry from North Korea. This relationship was exposed when North Korea detonated a bomb in Yangon killing 17 South Korean government officers (Lintner, 2013). As isolated international pariahs, Myanmar and North Korea had by default become military allies. This in turn led the US to impose increased economic sanctions and demands to cut off the relationship with North Korea (Lintner, 2013). Despite the relationship, the agents who set off the deadly bomb were jailed and remain there today. Most controversial is North Korean assistance in a ballistic missile program. In 2008 Thura Shew Man, (later to be speaker of the Lower House), met Gen. Kim Kyok-sik, chief of the North Korean military. The Myanmar delegation was taken on a tour of various defense facilities, production lines, radar stations and one of North Korea's missile factories. Thus this military-to-military cooperation could well lead to the production of portable anti-aircraft missiles (Lintner, 2013).

For these reasons, the Tatmadaw is still strong and in a very important role in Myanmar national politics. They still have twenty-five percent of the representatives in the parliament, as provided by the 2008 constitution. During the 68th anniversary of Armed Forces Day, current military commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing said, "The Tatmadaw always safeguards the country while protecting the county from the outbreak of racial and political conflicts. This is the Tatmadaw's national politics" (Hnin Yi, 2014). This illustrates the ongoing centrality of the military in Myanmar, and their concentrated mission to preserve this position in national political affairs.

2.4 The NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi

Political charisma is associated with Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar. It arises from her father, Aung San, who played a critical role in Myanmar independence in 1948. It has been a good image to support her own capacities and activities (Steinberg, 2010). Her father also had begun to construct a form of national unity as a federal government union in the Panglong Agreement of 12 February 1947 (Phay Kin, 1990). Earlier, he had met with British Prime Minister Attlee in London and worked out an agreement to achieve independence within a year (Hla Myoe, 1968a). Unfortunately Aung San and his cabinet were assassinated by a political rival six months later (Steinberg, 2010), so Britain and the Provisional Government of Myanmar signed an agreement on October 1, 1947, which passed British legislation to make Myanmar an independent state (Hla Myoe, 1968b).

In 1960, two years before the military coup, Suu Kyi went to India with her mother Daw Khin Kyi, who had been appointed as Myanmar's ambassador in Delhi. Four years later she went to Oxford University in the United Kingdom, where she studied philosophy, politics and economics and where she met Michael Aris, whom she married. They had two boys, Alexander and Kim. In 1988, she came back to Yangon due to her mother's critical illness. At that time, thousands of students, monks, and workers were protesting for democratic reforms (BBC Asia News, 2015a). She could not ignore this nationwide uprising of students, Buddhist monks, customs officers, teachers, hospital staff, and even military personnel. It was estimated that 10,000 people were protesting in Sule Pagoda Road, among many other sites, on 3 August, 1988. Then the military junta imposed martial law, killing up to 5,000 demonstrators on August 8, 1988 (Oxford Burma Alliance, 2016a). Following the outcome of the 1990 elections in which the NLD won 82 percent of the parliamentary seats, the military refused to hand over power, and Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. After her husband died of cancer in London in 1999, authorities urged her to join her family abroad but she knew that she would not be permitted to return if she left the country (Oxford Burma Alliance, 2016a). And obviously the SLORC/SPDC has sought over the years to destroy the NLD. They arrested many members and put some leaders in prison, closed branch offices, and

prevented Aung San Suu Kyi from traveling each time she was freed from house arrest.

The relationship between Suu Kyi and ASEAN was often difficult. Once she was supposed to meet with ASEAN diplomats in Yangon in July 1995, a week after Myanmar was admitted as an observer in ASEAN meetings. She had supported Myanmar to be a member of ASEAN, hoping that ASEAN would advance the democratic cause in Myanmar. Unfortunately, due to ASEAN's infamous principle of noninterference in internal affairs, the member states' foreign ministers refused to support her cause, and during Suu Kyi's intermittent house arrests between 1989 and 2010, ASEAN did almost nothing to defend her. The Association would make statements with different tones, depending on which member was in the rotational chair. One example was outright and blunt condemnation when Singapore had the chair and pushed for a regional reaction to the junta's violent suppression of the monks and students during the 'Saffron Revolution' (Chongkittavorn, 2016b).

During the 2010 election, the NLD decided not to participate (Chongkittavorn, 2016a). NLD party spokesman Ohn Kyaing said "we decided to boycott this election as the 2008 Constitution and the 2010 electoral laws will not lead to the restoration of democracy and human rights in Burma" (*Mizzima*, 2010b).

The NLD announced they would re-register as a political party in November 2011, with Suu Kyi as chairperson of NLD (BBC Asia News, 2011). In fact, this happened because President Thein Sein had signed a law to change some key areas of the political party registration law. Where it had said that all political parties must "protect" the country's constitution, it was amended to "respect" the constitution. Another change was allowing serving "political prisoners" to be members of a political party. For these reasons some observers viewed the amendments as designed to make it possible for the NLD to re-register (*Mizzima*, 2011).

In 2011 US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited. Suu Kyi assured diplomats of both the US and China of her willingness to work with both countries to rebuild Myanmar. She also made a special effort to reassure China that Myanmar hoped to maintain their very good relationship (Myers, 2011).

After she won a by-election in 2012, Suu Kyi joined the parliament as Pyithu Lower House MP (Chongkittavorn, 2016b). Then she made her first trip to Europe and accepted the Nobel Peace Prize which had been awarded to her 21 years before. She was also invited to address the UN General Assembly and met with President Obama during her visit to the United States, also receiving a number of awards and recognition there.

Thus Suu Kyi has made her transition from political dissident and icon of democracy to NLD party leader and parliamentarian. Some argue that she has not managed it well; she has been criticized for ending her opposition, for supporting the progressive work of Thein Sein's government, and also for not condemning the ongoing violence in the ethnic minority regions, especially in Kachin State at that time (Kuppuswamy, 2014). Daw Suu Kyi has often expressed her ambition to become the president of Myanmar (Kuppuswamy, 2014).

In the 2015 election there were more than 6,000 candidates in 93 political parties running for 1,142 seats in the national, regional and state parliaments. There were more than 600 seats in the upper and lower houses (Than Y., 2015). According to the election commission, the NLD won 887 parliamentary seats or 77% of the seats up for election. The USDP won only 117 or 10% of the seats but the military still has 25% of the seats reserved for it by the 2008 constitution. For the NLD it was even better than the 1990 election, in which they won 52.5 % percent of the vote (cited in BBC Asia News, 2015b).

One main reason Aung San Suu Kyi won so many ethnic votes in the 2015 election was her promise, when speaking in the Pao Autonomous Zone, that the NLD would hold the long-promised Second Panglong (Pinlon) Conference, named after her father's historic overture to ethnic leaders in 1947. After the election she stated, "After we become a real federal system, the minority ethnic groups will be free from fears and they can independently decide their affairs" (in Kyaw Phone, 2015).

CHAPTER 3
INTRODUCTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MYANMAR

Civil Service Organizations (CSOs) in Myanmar are attempting to fill in the gaps neglected by the military governments. Unfortunately these cover basically all social services. The CSOs also try to coordinate and advocate with government to promote social change in general. This study has focused on education, health, and politics as the most important CSO roles in Myanmar development. In fact, CSOs by their very nature are varied, diverse, and are almost impossible to categorize. Myanmar CSOs often focus on education in religious schools, especially in the numerous Buddhist monasteries found everywhere in Myanmar, to improve education access for poor people. Remote areas especially tend to depend on Buddhist monastic education even up to the present day (Chong & Elies, 2011). As Myanmar has improved its governance, the growth of civil society has become stronger.

Improving access to health care is the second main role of CSOs in Myanmar. In 2009, the international funding return from donors worldwide brought in 110 million dollars to support the fight against HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis (Deutsche Presse Agetur, 2009). The CSOs, new and old, will help to pinpoint the most desperate areas of health needs. The relationship between government and CSOs has traditionally been that both sides have limited trust in the other side.

Myanmar CSOs in recent years have also been able to advocate for democracy and social justice. For example, the ASEAN Summit is the supreme policymaking body of ASEAN. The member states host the Summit by annual rotation of the ASEAN chair. CSO-organized events can also be presented at Summits (Chong & Elis, 2011, p.26). ASEAN has adopted CSO forums in all member states due to the inadequacy of ASEAN mechanisms for social engagement (Forum Asia, 2013). Actually, within the ten member states, regional CSO cooperation seems to be weak and less involved in ASEAN-related issues, although civil society itself is growing in national structures. Each government could improve its own accountability mechanisms in the region by co-operation with CSOs (Forum Asia, 2013). Regarding this point, the Annual ASEAN Civil Society

Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) took place in Yangon from 21 to 23 March 2014, bringing together CSOs from all member states and many International Non-Governmental Organization (INGOs) to discuss "Advancing People's Solidarity Toward Sustainable Peace, Development, Justice and Democratization" (ASEAN Civil Society, 2014). The meeting also encouraged CSOs to continue their engagement with ASEAN by promoting public awareness of it among member countries. The summary statement of the meeting was a strong call for "the end of detention for children and stateless people, landless people, sex workers, victims of prostitution and all forms of violence, forced labor, trafficked persons, drug users and persons living with HIV/AIDS" by all ASEAN states, emphasizing alternatives to detention for these groups of victims (ASEAN Civil Society, 2014). Yet the established ASEAN CSOs have established very few links with Myanmar CSOs.

ASEAN has also been involved with Myanmar CSOs in the area of humanitarian aid in disaster relief. It first made contributions through the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) which was formed by ASEAN to get humanitarian aid into Myanmar following the Nargis cyclone emergency. ASEAN also initiated the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force (AHTF) in post-disaster Myanmar. An ASEAN volunteer project was also set up to work with Myanmar volunteers.

Some Myanmar CSOs have relations with other ASEAN countries like Thailand and Cambodia through their own connections and the support of donors. Thus they can exchange information at the regional level. All these interactions have led to improved relations between Myanmar CSOs and Myanmar authorities.

The Myanmar NGOs Forum is an initiative based on an international model. The Forum gathered twice monthly in Yangon in the period after Cyclone Nargis. This coordination has improved cooperation between humanitarian actors and has led to the more structured National Association of Non-Government Organizations (NANGOs) to link with INGOs and UN agencies. In addition, this multiplication of CSO coordinating efforts has become more complex for those organizations willing to get involved in the 2010 election, especially those CSO staff members who participated as candidates (Lateef, 2009). Therefore, CSOs already have some influence with government, and regularly contact officials to build good

relations. Some CSO senior staff members even have direct access to policy-makers through continued dialogue with government (Than Than Aye, 2015).

Back in 1962, following the military coup, CSOs were banned in Myanmar and all efforts to work with the public came under the single party rule of General Ne Win. So NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) have kept away from partisan politics and challenges to state power. In 1988, Law No. 6/88 (Law Relating to Formation of Associations and Organization), decreed that all organization are required to seek permission from the authorities to register, and may not be allowed to participate in all public activities. If any group did not register, according to law it would be illegal (International Labour, 2016). It seems that most CSOs did not register under this 1988 law (Jesnes, 2014). However, Myanmar's 2008 Constitution has a provision to allow social organizations for Myanmar citizens, and that has made it easier to officially set up local NGOs and CSOs. In March 2011, the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that there were 218 organizations registered under this law (*New Light of Myanmar*, 2011).

However, one unpublished local survey found that of more than 100 CSOs, only 3% of them were registered. Some small community-based organizations (CBOs) also tend to lack a legal basis, so for them dealing with authorities can be more complex or difficult (International Center, 2013). Myanmar CSOs were not able to prepare for the 2010 general election partly because the election date was not announced very far in advance. One NGO staffer in Rakhine State told this researcher that there was a lack of journalists, and CSOs seemed not to be working together. In wartime situations NGOs work only for peace but in an election they need to cover all sectors, and that requires strong cooperation. This is one reason why most Myanmar CSO networks still need much more interaction to be strong enough to bring real change to the country (Center for Peace, 2010).

The Myanmar CSO Forum was held in October 2014. Over 650 representatives from 256 organizations and networks nationwide attended with much enthusiasm (Civil Society, 2015). The united CSOs prepared a statement for the general election to be held on 8 November 2015. It said the CSOs were taking part in order to ensure that the election result reflects the desire of the people. They strongly criticized all restrictions on the voters, as well as any activities that undermined the

freedom and the fairness of the elections. They called on the government and ruling party to take responsibility for ensuring an acceptable and fair election result that represents people's desire for a new government (Civil Society, 2015). The Myanmar CSO Forum Coordination Committee is comprised of many well-known CSO leaders and was formed during the Forum. This time CSOs were well-prepared and actively involved during the pre-election period. In this way CSOs have legitimized their political activities by following a non-partisan model focused on freedom and fairness, something the Myanmar governments also have shared, at least to the extent that they want their elections to be seen internationally as free and fair. In this way, the CSOs role is something the governments can support.

3.1 Interview Profile

The information below was gained from qualitative interviews, all in a semi-structured format. These interviews yielded the primary data, but also encouraged interviewees to move on naturally to what they want to talk about when answering questions. This researcher contacted three CSOs to request 15-30 minute interviews with senior officers. All interview questions are aimed at discovering their understanding of the social and political changes in Myanmar (see questions in Appendix 1). All sections of the interviews ask about their real experiences and understanding of the process of Myanmar political reform, and the roles of CSOs. The interview data is compared across individuals and organizations in more detail in following sections.

3.1.1 Local Resource Center (LRC)

The Local Resource Center is currently located in No.10, Zayarthukha Lane 2, Ka Quarter, Thuwanna, Thingangyun Township, Yangon. Following Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the LRC was established to assist local communities and CSOs in targeting areas for relief and rehabilitation in collaboration with other centers. These other centers include World Concern, the HIV/AIDS Alliance, the Capacity Building Initiative (CBI), and Oxfam (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016).

LRC officially registered in May 2012, and their mission was "to support holistic development of civil society in Myanmar by promoting institutional development through skill development and information sharing." This mission in turn was based on their objectives

To empower individual sectors in Myanmar civil society by providing information that can be translated into knowledge and skill, to shape the organizational culture of CSOs as responsive, responsible and accountable, and to facilitate the realization of CSO-related policies that are comprehensive, pro-poor and reflect the needs of the people (Local Resource, 2012b).

This researcher met the LRC interviewee, Myo Khin (Director of Operations) at the LRC office in the morning of 21 June, 2016.

3.1.2 The Free Funeral Service Society (FFSS)

FFSS is located at A Bohmu Ba Htoo Street, 48 Ward, North Dagon, Yangon. It was founded by film director U Thukha, and the provision of all services in the Yangon Region has been managed by film director and actor U Kyaw Thu, who has been chairperson since 2011. Their mission is "to offer free funeral services on request, regardless of race, religion and wealth, to give free health care services and medical aid to needy patients and to help ease the suffering and difficulties of destitute people in mass catastrophic situations" (Local Resource, 2012a). Kyaw Thu was arrested for distributing donations to monks during the 'Saffron Revolution' in 2007, his HIV/AIDs awareness film was banned, and other films were censored as well.

The FFSS provided much needed assistance, food and water to Nargis victims in 2008. They have helped pay medical costs in poor neighborhoods since 2003, and the first Thukha Free Clinic (named after the founder) was opened in 2007 to provide basic medical care with a team of 50 doctors, 60 support staff and over 300 volunteers throughout the organization. FFSS now also provides free education in English and computer courses with more than 500 students a year (Mackay, 2012). Since 2011 it has carried out more than 121,000 funerals, owns 14 hearses, seven staff vehicles, and it currently operates in 50 of Myanmar's 325 townships (Thein, 2012).

This researcher met with interviewee Daw Ei Ra Maung Maung (Managing Director of FFSS) and had a good direct conversation at the FFSS office in the afternoon of 21 June, 2016. On the following afternoon he interviewed the current Chairperson of FFSS, U Kyaw Thu, in his home.

3.1.3 MATA

The Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA) main office is located at No.11C, 11th Floor of the Myaynigone Plaza, Sanchaung Township, Yangon. This civil society network group was set up in 2014 as an umbrella networking organization, and has been quite successful in coordinating engagements with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), an international organization which assesses the levels of transparency in oil, gas and mineral extractive industries (World Bank, 2014). MATA was formed as a CSO, so it also supports civil society actors by coordinating advocacy for transparency and accountability in all sectors across the country, and it especially focuses on linking society networks and individuals. MATA coordinates within the EITI process, and it helps to facilitate and build openness in natural resource management in Myanmar (Kean, 2014).

This researcher got a call for the first interview with Ko Tun Lwin, Regional Coordinator of MATA on 21 June, and met him in Rose Garden Hotel for a personal interview on 23 June, 2016.

3.2 Responses from Interviewees

3.2.1 External and Internal Forces for Change

Myo Khin (LRC) had a completely different outlook from the other interviewees in discussing recent Myanmar changes. He strongly believes that Myanmar changed itself rather than reacted to international pressure, saying, "We believe that our country has been changed because we wanted to change, not because other nations wanted us to change or because of international pressure" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016). This perspective is from his experiences since the 1988 student uprising. He says that Myanmar changed without any external pressure, and that people also chose a democratic government by themselves with strong motivation to change. Therefore, from his point of view, international pressure is not really effective, and Myanmar has changed by internal intention. "Without changing ourselves, nobody can change us, although external forces may be strong" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016).

The other interviewees agreed with each other and had similar understandings that both external and internal factors are important for reforms. Mis Ei Ra said that "it is a chain between domestic activities and international pressure, although if there is not any international pressure Myanmar political reforms would not have happened." Internal factors are also very important, she stressed, but people must try hard to collaborate with one another to realize more reforms, in her view (Ei Ra Maung Maung, Personal Interview 21 June, 2016). Kyaw Thu (also FFSS) also agreed with the statement that both internal and external forces can be considerable, but in the end international pressure, if people do not make any efforts or strive for any reforms, will bring no results. In Myanmar, both factors complemented each other: people were looking for freedom, and the international community also supported them. "Therefore, the people must continue to collaborate with the international community to make change possible in our country (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, and 22 June 2016)". Ko Soe Lwin (MATA) has expressed concepts similar to those of the FFSS interviewees.

3.2.2 The Importance of CSOs

All interviewees described their ideas and their experiences about how essential the role of CSOs has been in recent Myanmar political reforms. As LRC's Myo Khin explained it, the CSO role has been crucial: "If our civil society organizations were not supporting the people, our country would never develop" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016). He also thought that since 2008, as Myanmar gradually has been changing, CSO involvement is expanding strongly. After the 2010 elections, the situation was changed, as a more democratic government system came into practice. Myo Khin described their success when the 6/88 Association Law was changed. The LRC had been leading a co-operative of other CSOs. The new Association Law allows any organization to officially register. Further, it allows CSOs to negotiate and advocate with government and parliament. Myo Khin also pointed out the various ways his association contributes:

> "We respond when people need us; we fill in the gap as mediators between government and the people, and now CSOs cooperate with government, which in turn has been willing to help and provide more opportunities for CSOs to play a role. Now the authorities allow us to hold CSO forums officially, unlike before when we did it ourselves without government support (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016)".

Regarding the peacemaking process, the government has given CSOs a space to make suggestions and report to them. Therefore, the CSOs' role in a more democratic Myanmar has grown. Myo Khin felt the country needed a lot more CSOs from all parts of the country and in all sectors for the future development of the country, especially for health and social affairs. This is because government cannot fully support all these sectors, so if CSOs were not organized and able to offer support, the society could not develop any further. "The LRC provides many different kinds of training courses in many different sectors with the intention of changing from the present situation to a brighter future," he said (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016).

Ms. Ei Ra (FFSS) said "Partly, at least, CSOs have been very important for reforms." She believes that CSOs started in 2001, and then continued to gradually develop. People had been encouraged by CSOs to elect a new government. Many different CSOs formed, and some are very small, just in their own village, but some are large. During elections, CSOs shared knowledge for "voter education," and many CSOs led the campaign into remote areas and villages without discrimination. CSOs were becoming a successful social force. FFSS was also involved in voter education campaigns in recent elections. Although some legislature candidates could afford to do it by themselves, at least around the Yangon region, in distant cities, towns, or deep in the countryside the candidates could not take responsibility for voter education campaigns. Therefore, the FFSS connected up a network of CSOs to lead voter education efforts, for example in Pyi Town in Pago Division, and in north Pe Lun Gon, based on Thukha free clinics already established by the FFSS (Ei Ra Maung Maung, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016).

Kyaw Thu of FFSS also recalled that in his experience there were very few social organizations in the early 2000s. "Some of them criticized me," he said, "saying why is your organization concerned with and involved in politics?" He continued on, "Of course, we started with only funeral services at the beginning. From that time to now, we have arranged funerals for over 150,000 people (156,855 from 2001 to 2015)"[2]. It has been estimated that 40 people die each day in Yangon and its nearby districts. This raised the question in Kyaw Thu's mind, "Why do so many people die every day?" The reason, he found, was a lack of public health care, and people didn't have enough income to meet the very high health care costs. Then FFSS leaders met with volunteer doctors in Yangon to open free clinics, called "Thukha Clinics" where free medical treatment is offered to over 200 patients each day, with similar service in other regions as well. Since people need knowledge and education, FFSS opened the Thukha Allin Education Center, which provides free vocational training courses. Kyaw Thu also feels deeply that "when people suffer we suffer too, we feel the same way: it's equality with the people." Therefore, FFSS members everywhere are involved in helping people, especially disaster and war

[2] Data from a table in the front FFSS office, North Dagon, Yangon

victims. Furthermore, in 2014, when students were demonstrating to change the education system, FFSS staff automatically followed them to take care of them in case of trouble. Overall, although FFSS still provides funeral services, they still connect with and help people in a range of social affairs. But Kaw Thu was very clear: "One thing is for sure. We do not get involved in any politics or set up any political party; we just do what the nation and the people need" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016).

Similarly, MATA's interviewee, Soe Lwin, expressed his thoughts and experiences. He felt the role of CSOs gained importance during the 2015 election, due to the voting rights watch group organized by CSOs. The result is considered to have been free and fair elections, but the previous 2010 election was considered unfair as CSOs were not allowed to observe and investigate. Therefore, CSOs play a very important role in the society and produce good results, he said. MATA began in 2014, under the previous government, and now works on making national environmental issues (especially those regarding natural resource industrialization) more open, transparent, and accountable. Furthermore, MATA promotes and protects basic rights and possible opportunities for local people, especially regarding natural resources, revenue and profits that will be managed to the standards of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

3.2.3 CSO Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities

LRC's Myo Khin stated that "During Cyclone Nargis in 2008 we faced a lot of difficulties due to military government control at that time. Especially for humanitarian issues, we needed to advocate with government, letting them get involved in all our activities as much as possible, in order to change their mindset" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview , 21 June). It is not easy to deal with these authorities but it is absolutely necessary to engage with them responsibly, especially in emergency work which cannot be delayed. Funeral services also have to be done every day. In fact, after Hurricane Nargis, humanitarian food supplies could not effectively reach the most devastated locations on time when the authorities blocked access to the area. That caused so many people to die unnecessarily. However, when Kalay town flooded last year, LRC took relief supplies there. When people are in trouble, immediate and effective aid can prevent the loss of much property and so

many lives. Therefore, Myo Khin said, "our involvement really succeeded at that time. That is why CSOs are so important, and it seems the government also finally understands that they can't function in these emergencies as well without CSOs involved." In addition, LRC believes that the country made its own reforms since the 2010 democratic government, and the change has been good and real (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June).

Kyaw Thu of FFSS was also thinking broadly when he said, "Our association began on the first of January, 2001. In the year 2010 we offered food to the monks during the 'Saffron Revolution', and the state authorities arrested me and put me in jail for seven days" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016). After he was convicted he lost his job as a professional actor, and his passport was seized as well. At the time of the interview, eight years later, he felt the country situation was even worse than 2010. "During the period of FFSS founder BaBa U Thukha, there was not so much pressure from state authorities. After he died, the authorities dramatically watched me to see what I would do" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016). It is a normal process of state authorities to investigate anyone who is doing things about human rights, and standing beside the people. Especially if people begin to rely on this person or group, authorities don't like it. So the authorities watched Kyaw Thu and his activities. "However," he said, "although they kept watching me, I did what I had to do because our job is to be accurate and to keep doing the right things. That is why people depend on us so much. The donors also trust us, so they make donations" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016).

In fact, what Kyaw Thu does is funeral services, and wherever he visits a place, he goes to the cemetery and the monastery, that's all. But the authorities still shadow him. Therefore, he wonders what change really means for Myanmar. He is doing exactly what he used to do before, and possibly the only change has been from USDP to NLD government, he said (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016).

In actual fact, there were a lot of challenges and difficulties before 2010. The first FFSS office was located inside a monastery in downtown Yangon, but authorities said that according to British colonial law, private organizations were not allowed in the public quarter. So the FFSS had to move to North Dagon, outside of

Yangon. To tell the truth, the government provided them with two square kilometers of land. It was wholly covered with rubbish but today they have put up their building successfully. In another incident, to get a permit for a Thukha Free Clinic, Kyaw was asked by the authorities to dig a five-foot-deep drain in front of the building. When Kyaw refused to do it, the authorities charged him, but this time he went to the public media saying, "I will not put donation money into the ground" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016). Only then did the authorities back off without disturbing him again. Overall, there is one thing he has believed in all along: "As for myself, I have only a vow to be truthful and faithful to the Buddha. Sometimes, I go to BaBa U Thukha's brick tomb, where I repeat a pledge of allegiance to his memory and try to overcome every challenge and difficulty" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016).

Ms. Ei Ra of FFSS also reminisced about her experiences during the military regime. The FFSS faced a lot of challenges, but after the 2010 elections the barriers were fewer for work only slightly different from that of Kyaw Thu (above). Mis Ei Ra said, "After the USDP government came to power in 2010, the authorities gave us neither strong support nor strong distrust" (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016). Their restrictions had been gradually reduced by late 2011, and then the government offered support for the operation of ambulances and hearses. In earlier times, it was a fact that when poor people died, their families could not afford a funeral because the cost was too high. Some then even left the dead body at the hospital. In early 2009, funeral services were few and widely separated in many townships around Yangon. Now services are much more coordinated, and it is better than before, with health care services covering even some operations (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016).

On the other hand, FFSS also supports programs to reduce poverty and collaborate with local developers to improve the socio-economic sector, but it is just beginning now. Further, FFSS also has vocational training courses in such areas as computing, English language, accounting, hospitality, and nursing. The intention is "knowledge innovation" for youths (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016).

Soe Lwin also recalled that he had been working for INGOs for years before joining MATA. He argued that the USDP government, when they were

reorganizing standards for the CSOs, was redefining them too broadly. He argued that the government had even appointed an arts association as a CSO. "How the USDP government was recognizing and defining the meaning of 'CSO' I don't know," he said. However, Lwin believes that CSOs prefer to work only in a public capacity which serves local people, helping them develop and progress. So these organizations also may deal with social, political and environmental affairs.

In truth, MATA is a real CSO organization which has worked together with international NGOs like Global Witness Group. For example, the recent report named "Myanmar's Big State Secret" by Global Witness was supported by MATA and The National Resources Governance Institute, whose mandate is "helping the country to realize the benefits of its endowments of oil, gas and minerals" (Natural Resource, 2016). MATA also has connections as noted above with the international NGO named EITI, which works to establish a "global standard to promote the open and accountable management of natural resources" (EITI, 2016). If Myanmar becomes a member country, MATA will be the local representative, responsible for an annual report. The very high standards of the EITI process are very difficult to meet, but MATA so far seems competent. Moreover, regarding environmental issues such as the Chinese gas pipeline and the Ayeyarwaddy dam project, campaigns were led by MATA to protest and abolish these projects. As a result, the Thein Sein government at least suspended the dam project. Similarly, in the Letpadaung copper mining violence, MATA helped achieve open discussions on the issues for local peoples' rights regarding the projects, and produced reports to the public through the media. Furthermore, for many years unlimited jade production was going on in Hpakent Township, with no information available. Nobody knew exactly the number of companies, weight of production, or amount of income for states (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview, and 23 June, 2016). As a member of EITI, MATA will be responsible for trying to establish even relative data, and conducting interviews to gather better information about this massive industry kept secret for so many years.

In sum, MATA works as a whole-country network, but each local group operates individually in its own region, and needs to provide its own finances. There is no connection with ASEAN or the UN (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview, 23 June, 2016).

3.2.4 Collaboration and CSO Development

Myanmar CSOs in general are open for positive collaboration and development, as exemplified by the three organizations selected above. As LRC's Myo Khin said, "Our main goal is civil society development; that is why we do as much as we can to connect by networking and joining together with groups like the Women's Empowerment Network, or environmental organizations" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016). To achieve this role for CSOs, LRC has collaborated in all sectors. "There is no limitation as to what sector we can work in, since our job, and our focus is to help develop civil society" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016). The LRC also created the Youth Empowerment Project to support and collaborate with youths. The volunteer registering process established in 2014 provides free system access for interested persons, so anyone can apply. In this way, LRC pushes itself to develop further. As the USDP government gradually evolves into a democratic state, CSOs are showing that they want to work together with the people. That is why the situation has changed so obviously, and there has been real development within a few years. Myo Khin hopes the current NLD government gives more space for CSOs to work than the previous USPD government did (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, and 21 June 2016).

Ms. Ei Ra of FFSS emphasized that "We support solutions to conflicts, even religious issues. We support and help persons in need regardless of any social or religious factors, without discrimination; for example in the cases of Mittila city and Rakhine state" (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016). As for environmental concerns, FFSS staff and volunteers have been meeting every Sunday to collect litter and garbage around Yangon since 2013. She said "We collect the garbage not simply because we want to clean up these places, but because we want to teach people how to buy and use products in order to systematically prevent the creation of garbage" (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016). Moreover, collecting garbage is part of a well-known ceremony in the annual tree-planting campaign which gathers large numbers of children and is hosted by FFSS. They especially joined in these activities because they wanted to help demonstrate how to make positive changes for national development.

As shown above, nowadays many CSOs provide services for health, social activities, and funerals. This is quite effective and continues to develop. If some CSOs or community-based organizations (CBOs) need support, FFSS helps them in a variety of ways, for example providing an ambulance, or financial support. A crucial point is that FFSS doesn't try to control people. They only ask for evidence of financial need. Sometimes FFSS provides training courses for new CSOs and CBOs, advising on their developmental progress and management, especially "in terms of morality, rules and regulations. Otherwise it will be difficult to achieve real success," she said (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June 2016).

MATA's other interviewee touched on the collaboration and development question when he said "we need to work with all CSOs and INGOs. We also have some workshops with the current government to improve some processes, especially, the EITI process." (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview, 23 June, 2016). This includes state financial budget planning, and the engagement of government departments, Upper House parliament representatives, and other authorities in the Yangon region. Of course MATA also cooperates with other CSOs, whoever is involved.

3.2.5 Ceasefire and Peace Progress

In this research, it became clear through interactions with CSO workers that they follow different ideologies on the peace-making process: some of them believe that genuine peace can be attained, but some don't. However, it is totally fascinating to learn how CSO activists think about it. LRC's Myo Khin and MATA's Soe Lwin take a positive view showing belief in the NLD government and the peace-making process. They think there is some success so far, even though after over 60 years of fighting, only eight ethnic groups out of 12 have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) (RFA News, 2015). The gradual growth of understanding between ethnic groups and government is a result of closer engagement in these agreements. Eventually this can lead to actual trust, and then the ceasefire can move the peace process forward in the long term.

In August 2016, the government started the meetings called the 21st Century Panglong Congress. This can be seen as part of a general and gradual improvement resulting from the ceasefire. Myo Khin said, "To me, if we can build

trust between one another or strengthen the trust we do have, our goal is that much closer to success" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016). Khin also hopes the remaining armed ethnic groups will be persuaded to sign under the NLD leadership. But he also suggested that the government needs to negotiate some further matters in which both sides need to accommodate each other. If both parties have sincere intentions to improve the situation, they must build much more mutual understanding with each other. Overall, the main goal is trust-building and mutual understanding, which is also a critical part of nation building. Khin's overview is that "Understanding needs to be established first. The next step is to have genuine dialogue. Just talking on the phone cannot work out well, because then there will always be the need to get in touch to check on what the other side needs" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016). Considerable compromise will always be necessary. Each individual group need not gain absolutely equal rights but all do need the right to speak up in open face-to-face discussions. A third party may be needed as a mediator, and this could very well be a CSO taking part in the peace process. "It is very important to make sure these inclusive negotiation groups are not in danger from any 'virus', and they should focus only on moving the peace process along" Khin said. To him 'virus' meant 'international organizations or third party interaction groups.' But there is a main obstacle that both government and ethnic groups really need to change. Peace can definitely come regardless of international pressure, but if one or both sides don't sincerely work for change and real peace, there will not be any good result. The current ceasefire will be just another 'sign and fight again' arrangement (Myo Khin, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016).

MATA also had similar ideas to those of LRC's Myo Khin. Soe Lwin of MATA said, "I personally think that much will depend on whoever is included in the peace-making process; if they want to have peace, they can find it. If not, there will be no peace." He went on to mention that "ceasefire groups should not think like, 'I belong to a big group and you are in a small group, therefore, we will have more advantage than you'" (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview, 23 June, 2016). He emphasized that this kind of thinking is the worst. But he also still believed that the current NLD government can overcome the great obstacles to real peace in the country. Importantly Lwin stressed how Daw Suu Kyi didn't even consider going

back to her family when her husband died, because she cared so much for the people of the country. Therefore, she may possibly be able to build a genuine peace process. But nobody knows how long it will take (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview, 23 June, 2016).

In contrast, the FFSS interviewees thought the LRC view of the current government was rather unlikely. They seem to believe that peace will be difficult to achieve. "Peace is the best thing for anyone in this world" Kyaw Thu said. He gave an example of how long it was taking to organize the building of a memorial to a well-known activist in Aung Pan town. "When such a small job still isn't finished yet … I can see that it's not going to be any easier for the peace process (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, and 22 June 2016).

To build the peace, he said, there was one most important point: People need to forgive each other, and remove their grudges against one another, in order to make the peace process work. Most importantly, he described how people need to remove that deep desire for personal benefit, for "self." But in reality even a single person cannot make peace, the mind dealing with unlimited sense inputs, and the phenomena of consciousness going around and around, just endless obscuring cycles in our minds. This is what is normally happening in only one person. Therefore, it is no easier to deal with others. "The process for peace is always endangered by 'self' and 'anger' and we need to reduce these," he said (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016).

Similarly, Ms. Ei Ra accepted that peace was a very complex issue, saying "Each individual needs to stay concentrated on reality, in order for actual peace to be possible" (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016). In fact, although the previous USDP government worked with coordinating teams by opening a peace-making center in Yangon, there is no actual peace progress due to lack of real concentration and fear of losing power.

CSOs generally offer their help regardless of race or religion, because the country has such diverse nations, often with very different ideologies and religions. Shan, Karen, Chin and all the other ethnic groups uphold their identities with different belief systems. So the NLD government knows it will take a very long time to solve the problem. Therefore Ei Ra said, "I personally think that the peace

process is almost impossible. But regardless of personal or organizational perspective, the views of both sides must be thoroughly discussed for each issue. Otherwise, if natural resources belong to certain groups who will hold onto this advantage, and lucrative businesses such as poppies, opium, and other drugs belong to still other groups, then conflict will continue without anyone willing to give up their weapons (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, 21 June, 2016).

3.2.6 Stateless Muslim Issue

FFSS also agrees to offer support regardless of religion or race. Kyaw Thu said, "In the Rakhine conflict, we went there to help both sides but the Muslim camp didn't allow us to enter, so we didn't have any opportunity to help them" (Kyaw Thu Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016). He added that even in Yangon, many Muslim preachers came and received medical treatment, and sometimes he drove for them. CSOs cannot discriminate friend or enemies, rich or poor, they work for everyone, he said. Similarly, MATA's interviewee Soe Lwin said, **"**For me personally, I work for humanity. Our organization has worked for both sides: the Muslim side and the Rakhine local people's side, for two years. So we treated them equally (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview on 23 June, 2016).

3.2.7 Persistence of Military Power

Many interviewees felt that they were approaching normal conditions, unlike under the previous military regime, and they have confidence to fight against unfairness anywhere. LRC's Myo Khin argues that there will not be any barriers with the military. As the government has changed already, law and enforcement can actually bring more empowerment. Even during the past five years during USDP leadership, many opportunities and freedoms were taken. Therefore, in Khin's view, "fear depends on the individual, because if a person does wrong, he or she will experience fear. But there is no fear among those organizations doing right things. So, our organization will not have any fear" (Myo Khin, Personal Interview on 21 June, 2016).

Mis Ei Ra shared her experience when, in 2011, the Yangon government investigated FFSS finances due to an unknown court charge without any reason. Suddenly, FFSS needed to respond to the allegations as a whole organization. It took a month, but they were able to solve the challenge due to clear records with no

corruption. In the end, it was a good experience for them. Another experience was during the great protest campaign against the Myitsone Dam, the authorities interrogated, examined and warned them, including a group of youths who entered the compound of the FFSS office to recite poems on the protection of the dam. Furthermore, when FFSS arranged the collection of garbage during the 2015 election, the authorities asked them to stop and tried to shame them for simply doing their duty. "Therefore," she said, "whether we followed the law and principles or not, we were afraid of the previous government. That is why we need to be very aware of whether we are doing right or wrong, and whether any court could charge us with something. We really needed to be aware of such things" (Ei Ra, Personal Interview, and 21 June, 2016).

Kyaw Thu (also of FFSS) said, "If the country has peace, there is no need for the military, even for police. People just conduct themselves in morally responsible ways, and simply practice their humanity" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016). However, his stories about all their experiences show clearly that people's fear of the military is still strong.

3.2.8 Further Goals

All these CSOs have the same goals, and LRC's interviewee said that there are good and bad events and conditions that arise and change but there is a need to take what is good and make it better, to avoid what is bad, to reduce it and do it less, and strive constantly to develop and help our own community. This is the CSO goal. Also Ms. Ei Ra argued that if it means we will have no democracy or peace to hand down as our legacy, we will have no one to blame but ourselves. People should have personal freedom, but within the principle of "doing no actions with bad effects on others." That is democracy.

Kyaw Thu of FFSS was more critical of current issues and the development process. He said that true change is not only a government responsibility: all the people need to change too. At the same time, however, people should keep their moral principles, and good characteristics that do not need to change. They have set up good social welfare associations, and there are many now. He said "We do social work like using a drug. We never use the financial power of our budget, and we do it only to help others. This is our drug. Therefore, we do this

kind of service as much as we can" (Kyaw Thu, Personal Interview, 22 June, 2016). In particular, now he prefers to help in emergencies, where they can go directly and quickly provide the aid. Therefore he has organized a new 'Kyaw Thu social welfare network'.

MATA's Soe Lwin said, "We will survive no matter how the government changes, because our organization includes over 518 associations now. Our CSOs really do represent the people and we work to achieve peace and progress with transparency, accountability and consistent policy" (Soe Lwin, Personal Interview, 23 June 2016).

Many years earlier, after the 1988 democratic movement, the CSOs were forced into clandestine politics and lost their basic rights. But in the 2007 'Saffron Revolution,' civil society organizations re-emerged. When Nargis hit, CSOs proved their resilience effectively in the disaster areas (Min Zin, 2014). Through the efforts of CSOs Myitsone Dam construction was suspended. Therefore, the role of CSOs is still essential in Myanmar's social, political, and economic affairs.

CHAPTER 4
THE ROLE OF ASEAN

4.1 ASEAN – Myanmar Relations

There had been an ASEAN interest in Myanmar at the organization's inception in 1967, but during the Ne Win government regime the offer of membership was ignored. The "Bangkok Declaration" was signed in 1967, forming a regional bloc aiming at security and stability in the region. The establishment of ASEAN was at the height of the Vietnam War and included the original five members (Lee, 2006). Their concern was security threats from internal communist insurgencies active in many countries in Southeast Asia at that time, usually with some support from China. There were also regional threats of spill-over from the Indochina conflict. ASEAN leaders hoped to strengthen the region and avoid communism (Aung Zaw, 2001). During this time, Myanmar also faced a communist insurgency. In fact, since Myanmar achieved its independence, the Burmese Communist Party had gained control in some parts of the country, with support from China. Despite these problems, Myanmar's military was not interested in joining ASEAN (Aung Zaw, 2001).

Thus Myanmar disappeared from the ASEAN agenda for twenty years. ASEAN and Myanmar became interested in each other again when ASEAN considered "constructive engagement" in the 1990s. This policy can be viewed in the larger context of a reaction to changes in the regional security structure of the Asia Pacific region. In the early 1990s ASEAN members continued rapid economic growth and were interested in regional trade blocs (Aung Zaw, 2001). Myanmar was shocked to see how far it had fallen behind economically, and it awoke from its reliance on isolation. For twenty years, ASEAN had kept busy with internal issues, rather than contemplating expansion, and it had held only three summits, given the conflict between the Philippines and Malaysia over Sabah in its early years (Aung Zaw, 2001). Meanwhile the Myanmar economy had withered under Ne Win's Burmese Way to Socialism, which offered ASEAN little economic opportunity for engagement (Aung Zaw, 2001).

In the late 1980s, world leaders were reassessing policies in reaction to the collapse of world communism. In Southeast Asia, leaders realigned the regional security order resulting in the emergence of a new regional landscape. ASEAN's interest in Myanmar (and other SE Asian non-members) was rekindled. ASEAN leaders saw expansion as a means of protecting their security, economies, and political positions (Aung Zaw, 2001). Almost a decade later, after the great student-led uprising of 1988, Myanmar re-emerged to review its foreign relations and economic system. As a result, the contemporary SPDC government of Myanmar engaged with China and ASEAN to access the world. One important result was that Chinese support for the Burmese communist party (BCP), which had decreased since the 1980s to 1989, was ended. There were also conflicts between the Burmese leadership and the constituent ethnic minorities. Smooth relations developed between Rangoon and Beijing through trade, especially in weaponry and military equipment.

In this period ASEAN investment flowed into Myanmar, focused on natural resources such as timber, gems, and offshore oil and gas exploration. Key investors were Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia (Aung Zaw, 2001). Myanmar became an official observer of ASEAN and a member of the Asian Regional Forum in July 1996, and then became a full member on the 30th anniversary of ASEAN's birth.

In fact, the relationship between ASEAN countries and Myanmar had already begun in 1992 with the ASEAN Investment Area, which liberalized foreign investment laws in ASEAN countries and promoted future economic growth in Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Myanmar has developed through ASEAN engagement in three stages. The first policy was "constructive engagement" which applied from 1990 to 1998. During that phase, ASEAN kept strictly to its non-interference principle. The purpose of engagement seemed to be economic benefits for Myanmar, with no public political persuasion, although there were some progressive political dialogues after ASEAN offered full membership to Myanmar in 1997 (SCFAS, 2012). The second phase began when the Asia Financial Crisis shocked ASEAN and it began to shift its non-interference principle toward regional problem solving. A major advocate was Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan who invented the term "flexible engagement." He later became the ASEAN Secretary General, in 2008 (SCFAS, 2012).

The third phase saw flexible engagement applied in real practice, for example after Cyclone Nargis stuck the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in May 2008. At that time Myanmar refused international aid due to fear of foreign intervention in domestic political issues. However, ASEAN worked successfully with Myanmar, using flexible engagement to become a kind of bridge between foreign disaster relief and the Myanmar government. This role vastly increased mutual trust between ASEAN and the Myanmar government.

ASEAN re-engaged with Myanmar gradually. In 2003, ASEAN ignored the bloody incident known as the 'Depayin Massacre' when Aung San Suu Kyi was carrying out political activities in northern Myanmar. During this time, ASEAN was under strong pressure from the international community, and Myanmar's membership brought a huge negative impact to the ASEAN image. "The Burma/Myanmar policy was costing ASEAN dearly in terms of its international image, frustration with the slow pace of reform in Burma/Myanmar, and growing Chinese influence in the country despite Burma/Myanmar's membership in ASEAN" (SCFAS, 2012). The policy was to apply ASEAN's "constructive engagement" in cooperation with ASEAN dialogue partners at meetings such as the ASEAN-US Leaders Meeting, the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (Hongwei, 2012). It was as a result of ASEAN's right approach to Myanmar that at the second opportunity for Myanmar to take the ASEAN chair in 2014, it was able to do so, despite the concerns of Western nations. Therefore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was able to proudly declare that: It is not because of ASEAN's approach that Myanmar has done these reforms but we took the right approach in keeping Myanmar in the family and working with Myanmar rather than try to ostracise and penalise it the way some of the Western countries have tried to do with sanctions (Singapore, 2016).

The ASEAN-Myanmar relationship has been improving continually, resulting in a better international image for both nowadays.

4.2 Non-Interference

"Iinterference" is active involvement in the domestic affairs of another state (Vincent, 1974). The ASEAN founding document, the Bangkok Declaration, states that members seek security from external influence. ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation has four basic principles to guide interactions between state members: "sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the domestic affairs of others, peaceful settlement of disputes, and relinquishment of use of force" (Goh, 2003, P.114). The principle of non-interference is also stated in the ASEAN Charter in Article 2 (e) (*ASEAN Secretariat*, 2008).

Although ASEAN seems to strongly respect this principle, in fact it frequently acts in contravention of it (Chetchaiwong, 2016; Jones, L., 2007). Nevertheless, ASEAN leaders agree on the power of this "cherished" non-interference principle; therefore, in ASEAN such interference is still officially unacceptable (Jones, L., 2007).

Nevertheless, in the 1980s, in the formative years of the association when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, ASEAN constructively elevated ASEAN norms as part of a Southeast Asian security community. Since then, ASEAN was also involved in a series of interventions in Cambodia's internal affairs. Also during the invasion of East Timor, ASEAN norms were "systematically ignored" and ASEAN members participated in the United Nations' 1999 intervention. Therefore, ASEAN's practice of non-interference is not absolute (James, 2014). Acharya (2001) additionally notes that non-interference was breached in 1986, when ASEAN called for the peaceful determination of great political changes in the Philippines. Among other copious examples of intervention was continual Thai support for armed Myanmar ethnic groups to prevent the Thai and Burmese Communist Parties from linking up (Alatas, 2006).

This tradition of non-interference, however, was seriously criticized by the international community when it resulted in absolutely no pressure on the Myanmar military government (Solingen, 2005). Although ASEAN had a vision of a united geographical zone, some argued that ASEAN's main interest was to expand economic prosperity (Peou 2002). For example, ASEAN investors could receive a

hundred per cent ownership and tax relaxations of up to fifty percent in Myanmar (Ramcharn, 2000). Among the ASEAN members, Thailand imports huge amounts of oil and timber from Myanmar. Furthermore, 80% of Myanmar trade is with ASEAN (Ruland, 2000). Therefore, although the military regime remained in power, Myanmar received flexible engagement from ASEAN (Haacke, 1999).

Consequently, ASEAN non-interference has been much debated, especially in the case of Myanmar, but also in other cases. For example, Philippine President Arroyo once requested Malaysian intervention in the southern Philippines (Badawi, 2006).

ASEAN has long had a security problem with the increasing flow of drugs and refugees from Myanmar, although Jakarta stated that ASEAN did not believe Myanmar was a security threat (in fact, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) did in fact see Myanmar as such a threat -Jones, L., 2007). Millions of Myanmar immigrants have left home due to internal political crises, and a lot of low-skilled Myanmar labour takes up jobs that ASEAN citizens do not want to do. So, for other ASEAN countries, but mostly Thailand, Myanmar refugees have been a positive business factor (Jones, L., 2007, pp. 285-6)

ASEAN claimed that it shared the goal of democratization with Myanmar. However, the credibility of ASEAN took a severe blow due to its inability to influence Myanmar, and its perceived lack of forceful action with the Myanmar junta (Jones, L., 2007). Overall, when violence exploded during the 'Saffron Revolution,' ASEAN leaders did openly criticize the military government although it was "appalled to receive reports of automatic weapons being used" (Jones, L., 2007) against the protestors. This was also reflected in bilateral contacts with ASEAN members. Nevertheless, Western nations continued to demand that ASEAN take responsibility for Myanmar, and to take more forceful action. ASEAN, for its part, referred to the responsibility of the United Nations in such crises (Jones, L. 2008, p.287), but it was unable to dodge the pressure applied to it.

At the 13th ASEAN Summit in 2007, the ASEAN Charter was adopted. At the 14th Summit, the leaders agreed to produce a document on human rights within four months, and Myanmar ratified it on July 18, 2008. However, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines complained about the lack of action against Myanmar,

especially over the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi (Bodeen, 2008). Indonesia especially threatened not to approve the Charter until ASEAN had made clear progress on human rights in Myanmar. However, all three member countries eventually ratified the ASEAN Charter despite their objections (Williamson, 2008). Technically, ASEAN introduced "constructive engagement" in 1991 to deal with Myanmar. The ASEAN policy toward Myanmar is implemented chiefly on two levels. First is the multilateral level of regional organization and second is the bilateral level of relations between the member states. It had been hoped that Myanmar joining ASEAN would open it up more widely to the outside world, and it would carry out the necessary reforms (Hongwei, 2012). However, "constructive engagement" (which was officially presented as a 'non-paper') is different from the usual constructive policy. The official approach is all in compliance with the 1976 ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and the non-interference principle remains the overt and dominant principle (Irrawaddy, I998). So from an ASEAN perspective, "constructive engagement" was quite a useful and effective policy to apply in the less formal parts of its ongoing and more practical interactions with Myanmar. Furthermore, these interactions resulted in economic growth in ASEAN member states as they enjoyed the benefits of trade with Myanmar, along with increased indirect access to China (Arendshorst, 2009).

However, in this period, it was noticeable that ASEAN was changing its stand on the principle of non-interference. They discussed Myanmar affairs and decided to put pressure on the Myanmar government to reform its political system, and decided to send an official team to investigate the Myanmar situation (Katanyuu, 2006). At the 42nd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in 2009, the member states demanded Myanmar leaders release political prisoners and promote democratic reform (Katanyuu, 2006). Therefore, ASEAN did in fact increase its overt collective involvement in Myanmar affairs.

In general, there are two political factors that explain why ASEAN adopted the non-interference principle. The first factor is a special attachment to state sovereignty as a result of colonial rule and later the Cold War and China exporting communism. All these made ASEAN countries obsessed with sovereignty as the key

element for regional stability. The second factor is the priority that was placed on internal stability and security matters (Katsumata, 2003).

4.3 The "ASEAN Way"

The regional policy of ASEAN was to build strong and stable relations among member states. Later these practices evolved into a concept known as "the ASEAN Way," which in turn became the most important ASEAN community guideline between member countries, and eventually an important characteristic of ASEAN identity. This concept emphasized the fundamental norms in the ASEAN Charter, especially consensus-building and cooperation (Ishak & Sani, 2010). The ASEAN Way depends more on mutual understanding than on legal processes to deal with a given issue.

In fact, in the ASEAN Charter, the 'ASEAN Way' refers to several principles which can be summarized in two essential parts: the first is to emphasize decision-making through negotiation (Leviter, 2011). The second is a series of six principles set in the 1967 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, which are as follows:

i. Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations
ii. Right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion
iii. Non-interference in internal affairs of other states
iv. Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means
v. Renunciation of the threat or use of force
vi. Effective cooperation among themselves (ASEAN Secretariat, 1976).

The list shows that consultation and non-interference are central concepts in the ASEAN Way, with a critical emphasis on consultation, consensus, and non-interference. The ASEAN Charter, Article 13, recommends resolution of disputes 'through friendly negotiation' by following the ASEAN Way of dialogue and peaceful resolution (Narine, 2002). The ASEAN Way then is a set of diplomatic norms which are shared between member states. Perhaps from a legalistic perspective it is a rather "nebulous concept involving non-interference and preservation of

sovereignty" (Tamaki, 2006). Thus the 'ASEAN Way' is a kind of 'soft regionalism' based on consensuses building (Acharya, 1997, Pg. 320), but ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Co-operation (TAC) is a slightly more legalistic document (Tamaki, 2006). One view is that the ASEAN Way is a particular way of maintaining respect among member states, and it functions to maintain an "illusion of ASEAN unity" (Narine, 2002).

The ASEAN Way promotes co-operation between member states to maintain peace and stability in the region, as well as at least the foundations of a sense of regionalism. It is used to make the region function like a village community. The member states respect and protect one another from external oppression, all based on the norm of non-interference (Lee (ed.) 2011).

On the other hand, the ASEAN Way can also refer to working in an informal and interpersonal style. ASEAN policymakers always turn first to consultations in a very unofficial decision-making style. The style is 'quiet diplomacy' often by private discussion without public announcement. The ultimate point is to avoid any embarrassing matters among the leaders while solving conflicts (Goh, 2003). For example, Myanmar made it clear that any issue dealing with the stateless 'Bengali Muslims' would not be raised during its chairmanship in 2014 (Chongkittavorn, 2014). They were using the ASEAN Way. Overall, the ASEAN Way is a product of the fundamental political ideology that ASEAN must be unified, and if not at least it must appear to be unified in the eyes of the international community (Gupta & Chattopadhyaya, 1998).

The ASEAN Way can potentially be used as a conflict management mechanism for dispute settlement, as it does contain conflict management norms. Importantly, the ASEAN Way also promotes dialogue. This has been useful, especially in the past decade, when ASEAN has had to deal with new non-traditional security threats, at both regional and international levels (Loke, 2016) such as the Preah Vihear dispute between Thailand and Cambodia.

One negative result of the ASEAN Way of emphasis on consultation, non-interference and especially on consensus is that ASEAN is often forced to be satisfied with a "lowest common denominator" compromise result, which is often no action at all. Not every member has grasped the full meaning of the ASEAN Way.

That is why, for example, Myanmar may give full attention to the non-interference principle while other ASEAN members are focusing on collaboration or co-operation (Leviter, 2011).

It has been said that ASEAN needs a lot of rethinking and readjusting in foreign perspectives, usually concerning Western impatience over Myanmar's military government. Of course, during the 'Saffron Revolution' in 2007, many ASEAN members also criticized the Myanmar military junta. For example, Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont stated,

> "I am trying my best to convince the Burmese: don't use harsh measures. At least they should try to avoid violent action from the government side. As a Buddhist and as a solder, I can say that it will be very difficult for the Burmese government to use violence to crack down on the monks. It will be against the way of life of the Buddhists (cited in BBC News, 2007)".

The Philippine government also called on Myanmar to avoid its further isolation and to get back on track building its democracy without any further delay. "We have patiently but persistently advised Myanmar that within ASEAN it must make greater and faster progress toward that goal" ("Statement of the President," 2007). Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia also reacted to Myanmar government violence at that time. Among all ASEAN members, the Philippines argued most seriously for action to force the Myanmar military government to democratise the country (Kittisereechai, 2007). Other member countries were silent on the issue, (especially Laos, Vietnam and Brunei), but this can be seen as holding to the ASEAN Way of non-interference, rather than support for the Myanmar military junta.

At the same time, the U.S called for suspension of Myanmar from ASEAN membership, but ASEAN stated that "Burma is a part of the 'ASEAN family' and will be disciplined through dialogue. ASEAN knows the best way to deal with a family member like Burma" (*ABC News*, 2007). Clearly, ASEAN has faced strong international pressure since admitting Myanmar as a member. Yet ASEAN in general has kept to the ASEAN Way of dealing with new and as yet unsocialized members. While ASEAN in general has adhered to the ASEAN Way, member countries have individually made strong statements, but also conducted quiet

diplomacy to reduce the tensions of Myanmar's rocky entry into the organization (Ramcharan, 2000).

ASEAN member countries usually avoid any kind of international mechanism for solving problems. However, the situation has changed in recent years. ASEAN States are now more careful in dealing with conflicts within the region, often to avoid criticism from the international community. This was the case when the ASEAN Inter-Parliament Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) group repeatedly sent messages condemning political repression in Myanmar (Aung Myo, 2002). In the end ASEAN's relative success with Myanmar has proven the ultimate value of political dialogue rather than open public criticism (Aung Myo, 2002, p.4).

"Regionalism, a multi-national expression of shared identity and goals combined with institutions intended to shape cooperative action, is seen by many as a fresh turn in the history of political association" (James, 2014). The European Union is the most advanced association of integrated regionalism which has "generated huge economic gains and sharply narrowed the income gap among member countries" (Capannelli, 2009), although it has serious problems today. ASEAN regional integration is still in progress compared with EU, but there is an even more fundamental difference. This is the fact that the EU is a centralized body governing its members, and ASEAN is an organization of independent members. Overall, regionalism is developing across the globe in many forms of political and economic unions, such as the EU Free Trade Area (FTA), and ASEAN Free Trade Areas (AFTA). The reality of each region's progress or style of organization is still completely local, and must develop in its own unique local way. However, the difference between ASEAN and the EU is highlighted when issues arise between states and international actors. In the case of Myanmar human rights abuses, the EU called for Myanmar to be suspended from ASEAN membership and economically sanctioned, but ASEAN policy could only follow the ASEAN Way. ASEAN could not force change in Myanmar but it has proved much more effective in opening up the country, and that in the end will be a more important and complete change of direction for Myanmar (James, 2014).

4.4 ASEAN-Myanmar Interaction

At the Ninth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 2002, the EU foreign policy chief, Javier Solana criticized the Myanmar authorities and demanded they release political prisoners and Aung San Suu Kyi in order to accomplish their political reform. He then tried to persuade ASEAN to pressure Burma into making democratic reforms (Roberts, 2010). However, the final ARF statement was simply that he "welcomed the recent developments in Myanmar that signified the important achievements of the national reconciliation process, unity and economic progress" (*ASEAN Regional Forum*, 2002).

World leaders at the 2003 ARF meeting also showed serious concern about the Depayin Massacre, and the leaders criticized Myanmar, saying it must resume its efforts at national reconciliation and dialogue among all ethnic groups to manage the peaceful transition to democracy. They also argued to end restrictions placed on Suu Kyi and NLD members (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2002). Therefore, ASEAN was under pressure to be more active on Myanmar political dialogue since the 2003 incidents. Each year, the ARF statement highlighted Myanmar's democratic progress, and interaction with ASEAN gradually pushed Myanmar leaders to meet democratic reform goals each year. When military leaders announced they would hold an election in 2010, ASEAN welcomed the statement. ARF leaders encouraged Myanmar political developments and encouraged the fulfilment of its commitment to the 'seven-step Roadmap to democracy.' Their genuine support was also shown in working closely with ASEAN and the United Nations to achieve a level of national reconciliation in Myanmar (Asean Regional Forum, 2010).

The ASEAN Policy of "enhanced interaction" was discussed in 1998 during a meeting in Manila. ASEAN member states eventually supported this new policy, the idea of Ali Alatas, former Indonesia Foreign Minister (Haacke, 2005). It was accepted by other leaders of ASEAN as a useful and justifiable mechanism. In fact, during ASEAN meetings, the idea of 'enhanced interaction' allows them to deal with sensitive issues in domestic affairs (Than Than Aye, 2005). In particular, when certain issues posed a problem to the credibility of ASEAN, especially in terms of relations with the regional dialogue partners in the security of the region, ASEAN

member states now consider it is allowed to take an active interest in each other's internal development, as in the case of Myanmar (Haacke, 2005).

The use of 'enhanced interaction' continued, based on the common understanding that events in the country would affect the international image of ASEAN as a regional organization. At the ASEAN Summit meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan in 2013, the Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong set aside 30 minutes in which the Prime Minister of Myanmar was asked to provide a report on his country's internal situation (Oishi, (2016). From this example, we can see that the newly established policy of 'enhanced interaction' could influence the domestic affairs within member states when leaders know they will have to justify their actions to the regional community.

During an ASEAN Regional Forum session in Singapore in 2003, Ali Alatas issued a statement on "the loosening of the non-interference policy." He said members will continue to respect sovereignty, and non-interference will remain a fundamental principle of ASEAN. He acknowledged the principle as a valuable one which will remain relevant and effective for all ASEAN member states (Oishi, 2016). Although the non-interference principle will be retained as a non-confrontational approach, ASEAN realised that it was crucial for its member states to communicate effectively with each other, even on ostensibly internal affairs. The discussions simply had to remain in a non-argumentative manner. Therefore, 'enhanced interaction' appears to be ASEAN s answer to this fundamental dilemma (Oishi, 2016).

These approaches can be effective and culturally suitable in ASEAN, where discussions tend to feature high-context behaviour with no specifics but still can be quite effective in communicating (Oishi, 2016). So 'enhanced interaction' has proven, in the case of Myanmar, to be profoundly effective in encouraging Myanmar to move forward in its democratic transition (Oishi, 2016).

ASEAN developed several mechanisms, under the policy of 'enhanced interaction' which were helpful in gently supporting Myanmar to take strong actions internally, with a positive result of bringing Myanmar into the international community. But the enhanced interaction has not been fully institutionalised, despite its effectiveness in the Myanmar case.

A parallel ASEAN mechanism to influence Myanmar was a Foreign Minister's retreat, something that could be called "constructive peer pressure" (Oishi, 2016), which occurred out of public view. Such a retreat could also be taken by ASEAN leaders. A similar example of 'constructive peer pressure' occurred in July 2003, when Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad referred to the Myanmar authorities, who continued to neglect the international demand to release Aung San Suu Kyi. Mahathir said,

> "We don't criticise member states unless what one state does embarrasses us, causing a problem for us. We are thinking about ourselves as ASEAN, we are not criticising Myanmar for doing what is not relative to us, but what they have done has affected us, our credibility. Because of that we have voiced our views (*Asian Tribune*, 2003)".

This speech explains quite simply this very wise approach and effective style of interaction among ASEAN members. In December 2005, ASEAN leaders' frustration was growing over the slow progress of democracy in Myanmar. Abdullah Badawi, who succeeded Mahathir as Malaysian Prime Minister, as host of the 11th ASEAN Summit released the following statement: "We note the increased interest of the international community on developments in Myanmar and the implementation of its roadmap to democracy" (*ASEAN Secretariat*, 2012). That was a first subtle step in the process of calling for the release of those in detention.

Much more directly, at the 3rd East Asia Summit in November 2007, ASEAN Chair Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo publically questioned the Myanmar military leader. She said that if the Myanmar government did not take future measures for democracy, the Philippine Senate would not officially agree to Myanmar signing the ASEAN Charter (which had earlier been signed by all ASEAN member countries). Along with this not-so-subtle point, the Foreign Relations Committee of the Philippines remarked that "if Myanmar ratifies the charter, it will be obliged to comply with its provisions and all other ASEAN agreements" (in ABS-CBN, 2008). Overall, finally, Myanmar officially ratified the charter in July 2008 without any special improvement in human rights (Myat Khet Nyo, 2015). Therefore, these such forceful examples would count as individual actions rather than those of ASEAN.

Meanwhile, international reaction was focused on economic sanctions against Myanmar, with more than two decades of political and economic sanctions applied by the European Union and the United States. At the height of the sanctions Myanmar products were forbidden in the United States and the EU, and this strongly affected several businesses and workers in Myanmar, but it did weaken the military government's official control over the flow of exports and imports (Myat Khet Nyo, 2015). Also Myanmar was placed under visa sanctions in order to penalize the military regime. Although international sanctions seriously affected the Myanmar government, the real effects and worst results directly drove ordinary citizens into deep hardship, and difficult economic conditions. Therefore, the enhanced interaction approach by ASEAN is a better way than direct sanctions.

4.5 The Role of ASEAN Members

Strategically, Myanmar has the largest land area in mainland Southeast Asia, and it is the only ASEAN nation which shares borders with both great nations of Asia, China and India. Thus it is also a kind of bridge to connect East, South, and Southeast Asia. Myanmar also has access to regional and global markets through the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Program, of which Myanmar was one of the original members since its establishment in 1992 (Haacke, 2005). Therefore, ASEAN accepted Myanmar and worked to consolidate the Myanmar political reform process. The statement of the 19th ASEAN Summit was that "we further support positive developments in Myanmar, and their continued progress contributes to conditions conducive to our decision to accord Myanmar the Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014" (Spandler, 2012).

However, some were saying that the influence of ASEAN member countries was leading the Myanmar military to further ensconce their powerful dictatorship in the country. According to defence analysts, Singapore was the first country to supply weaponry to Myanmar's leaders since the re-consolidation of military government power after the 1988 uprising (Taylor, 1988). Increased supplies of ammunition came to Yangon by ship from Israel and Belgium via Singapore. Singapore also provided training for the Burmese Army parachute unit and helped intelligence units to upgrade their war office and build a cyber-war center in Yangon

for monitoring telephone, fax and satellite communication. With the help of Chartered Industries of Singapore, and connecting with Israeli consultants, Myanmar military leaders had begun to manufacture small arms using a prefabricated factory. In February 1998, this arms factory was shipped from Singapore to Yangon (Taylor, 1988).

Moreover, in 1997 when the UN passed a resolution criticising human rights abuses in Myanmar, and calling for the 1990 election results to be recognized, the Singapore government replied back to the UN General Assembly that ASEAN governments could not support the resolution. This was because of "our different positions, and we have concrete and immediate stakes," said Bilahari Kuausikan, the Singapore representative (Selth, 2008). Singapore has also coordinated business deals for Myanmar, so that a joint Ministerial Working Committee encouraged the Myanmar military to "give priority to projects arranged by Singapore" (Taylor, 1988).

Meanwhile, Indonesia also played an important role in Myanmar by providing the ideological basis for the military leaders to reassert their power in 1988. The Myanmar government's state-owned newspaper declared that Myanmar and Indonesia were "two nations with a common identity," an identity that brought closer relations between Ne Win and Suharto (Aung Zaw, 2001).

Thailand has been closer to Myanmar than any other country in Southeast Asia, mostly through military-to-military relations. After the 1997 financial crisis, Thailand had started to consolidate its democratic policy under the government of Chuan Leekpai. Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan sent a signal to Yangon that Thailand advocated "constructive intervention" (later watered down to "flexible engagement") as a format for resolution of bilateral problems, particularly the flow of refugees from Myanmar into Thailand. The Thai Government thus helped to establish the concept that ASEAN members could comment critically on the policies of the Myanmar military regime, at least under specific circumstances (Aung Zaw, 2001).

On the other hand, these two countries have a mutual attraction for each other in various economic areas, and they share a long borderline of some 2,400 kilometres. Since Myanmar's independence the Thai-Myanmar border trade has been influenced by various ethnic groups in Myanmar. The Karen army, originally with British training, has been fighting Myanmar governments for the past fifty years, and

for decades had a self-declared independent border state which controlled its own trade with Thailand. The New Mon State Party, several armed Shan groups, and Kachin ethnic groups also shared the border trade. For many years, Thailand used to provide generous financial aid, scholarship and training courses to Myanmar officers. After 1995 the scope of cooperation between the two countries expanded to include agriculture, education, public health and railway rebuilding (Pillai, 2001).

By contrast, these two countries were also plagued by various problems due to lack of implementation mechanisms. Under Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda, there was no specific policy of supporting Myanmar minorities in the border areas but there was in fact ongoing Thai involvement with ethnic minorities, especially the Shan (who are ethnically Thai). Therefore, Myanmar military governments remained sceptical of Thai authorities who allowed support for the Shan and Karen rebels against the central government. "Thailand continued to provide shelter and sanctuary to fleeing leaders of various minority groups, offering logistics, and selling illegal arms to minority groups" (Aung Zaw, 2001).

At the 2001 annual meeting of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Papua New Guinea, Thailand abstained from supporting Myanmar. This was the first time ASEAN dropped the group's practice of a common vote. Thus Thailand illustrated to Myanmar that their support was no longer automatic. As a result of the overall vote, the ILO decided to impose sanctions on Myanmar, which would take effect if their common practice of forced labour did not change. However, the situation was different when Thaksin Shinawatra came to power later. He turned Thailand's Myanmar policy upside down and strongly supported cooperation with Myanmar. Together with Defence Minister Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a long-time military business operator in Myanmar, Thaksin has followed a policy of appeasement to increase future economic ties and gain cooperation in suppression of the massive illegal drug trade (Chongkittavorn, 2011). Therefore, the role of Thailand, especially its cross-border trade, will always be an important part of any subsequent agreements about Myanmar in ASEAN.

The Philippines has also been one of the ASEAN members most critical of the Myanmar government when it was moving toward political transition in 2011. The Philippines also criticized Myanmar's "seven-step democracy roadmap," arguing

in the ASEAN Informal Special Regional Minister's Meeting, part of the East Asia Summit in Bangkok, that Myanmar should release its more than 2,000 political prisoners (*Mizzima*, 2012). Philippine president Benigno Aquino welcomed political developments in Myanmar, and encouraged the new government to continue its reforms, also urging the government to let Aung San Suu Kyi remain as an opposition member, allowing her to engage in political activities without detaining her again. It is possible that Aquino's comments influenced the Myanmar government to subsequently release 120 political prisoners including the famous Burmese comedian Zarganer. Overall, the Philippines has stood by Western nations in criticizing the military regime for many years (Agence France Presse, 2011). In 2004, at the two countries' bilateral meeting in Yangon, the Philippines offered joint cooperation to expand their areas of trade, investment, education and other sectors (Philippines, 2014).

The Malaysian reaction on Myanmar was similar to Western countries, supporting sanctions. PM Mahathir even agreed with Western countries on the suspension of Myanmar from ASEAN. Therefore, the economic involvement of Malaysia in Myanmar has been limited so far (Haacke, 2008). The rest of the ASEAN countries, like Vietnam, improved relations with Myanmar. Vietnam and Myanmar have become important trade partners. Economic relations with Vietnam have grown remarkably, from $170 to $500 million over just five years, 2010-2015 (Viet Nam, 2015). Myanmar's first reformer, President Thein Sein, made his first international visit to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos after he took office in 2011 (Doan, 2012). Thein Sein also thanked Vietnam for helping it to take the ASEAN Chair in 2014. Myanmar-Vietnam relations became closer but when Myanmar was the ASEAN Chair the most delicate issue was the South China Sea dispute. Hanoi's approach to peaceful settlement relied on either international law or arbitration. China does not like either of these options (Doan, 2012). In the end Myanmar, as a strong ally of China, didn't support discussion of the issue, although they did allow the Philippines and Vietnam to lobby for stronger actions against China during the ASEAN Summit in Nay Pyi Taw in 2015 (Shihong, 2014). In general, the CLMV countries definitely do not support any intervention in Myanmar (Haacke, 2008).

The Myanmar economy has been growing, with ASEAN leading Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). ASEAN has integrated Myanmar successfully through its soft approach and constructive policy since 1989 to the present day. Over those years the ASEAN share of all FDI inflows has risen to 42%, which mostly come from Singapore (Myanmar Investment Commission, 2015).

It has become very obvious that Myanmar is economically important to ASEAN countries since the Burmese government opened its economy to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 1988. Figure 1 below illustrates the FDI into Myanmar by countries and groups of countries. Myanmar has also become a big market for ASEAN products, and ASEAN's role in Myanmar economic development has been extremely strong, especially the number of projects from ASEAN approved by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) (Kittisereechai, 2007).

Table 1: Approved FDI Inflows by Countries, 1989 to 2015 (USD in Millions)

N		No. of rojects	Foreign Capital (USD millions)	1989-1996	1997-2004	2005-2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
1	Singapore	89	1.817.614	101.639	32.574	58.23	26.170	18.233	300.121	297.185	998.062
2	Thailand	0	0.352.331	026.808	14.415	226.87		3.000	29.072	65.679	8.187
3	Malaysia	2	.662.688	6.369	98.378	14.35	1.864	.324	16.108	.724	.571
4	Indonesia	3	54.687	10.950	0.547						3.190
5	Philippines		47.173	.667	40.000					.506	
6	Brunei	7	4.667	.040	.040			.000	.273	3.873	5.483
7	Vietnam	0	91.572		.649	0.000	8.147	29.390	42.000	75.400	.986
8	Cambodia										
9	Laos		.883							.883	
									589.574		

A	**ASEAN**	**57**	**5.006.615**	**808.433**	**021.603**	**719.45**	**96.181**	**65.947**		**690.25**	**136.59**
10	China	**15**	5.418.363	8759	64,762	264.468	269.229	345.728	31.773	6.920	12.182
11	Hong Kong	**17**	.271.523	02.943	01,275		.000	798.277	4.839	07.102	45.529
12	Japan	**3**	08.862	67.021	4,613	9.841	.328	4.063	5.711	5.740	97.128
13	. Korea	**22**	.396.436	2.629	21,679	729.389	5.572	7.942	1.205	99.586	5.219
B	**Other Asia**		**7.448.045**	**77.709**	**38.829**	**121.773**	**968.129**	**0247.51**	**80.328**	**64.973**	**020.637**
C	**EU**		**.752.234**	**249.329**	**12.87**	**075.85**	**9.831**	**43.001**	**67.424**	**279.464**	**89.355**
D	**ther Areas**		**.026.01**	**30.600**	**19.987**	**35**		**6.000**	**.602**	**92.262**	**02.578**
	Total	**033**	**9.153.118**	**501.925**	**49.453**	**0304.406**	**998.960**	**419.467**	**107.055**	**010.533**	**915.819**

Note. "Myanmar Investment Commission 2015 by Knoema 2015

ASEAN investments in Myanmar reached 8,719 million USD in 2005-2010. However, during 2011, ASEAN investment significantly dropped, then gradually increased over the following years. The 2014 FDI inflow from ASEAN of 4,690 million USD was comparable to other regions in the same year. Therefore, aside from the 2011 adjustment, ASEAN investnment is increasingly important to Myanmar growth, continuing on after the reforms.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to contribute to understanding the current Myanmar political situation. It touches on the contemporary historical background, and especially on the role of ASEAN. It also reviews the role of Civil Society Organizations through interviews within Myanmar. Thus it reviews external and internal impacts on Myanmar.

In fact, after Myanmar made its initial reforms, it has faced many challenges. Years of economic mismanagement have left the country impoverished, with a lack of infrastructure, and poor social services, especially health and education. Hence, Myanmar leaders need to coordinate substantial assistance, both financial and technical, while dealing with corruption, ethnic conflicts, and human rights violations. After the reforms, the position of Myanmar within ASEAN improved, especially during 2014 when Myanmar responsibly held the ASEAN chair. Now Myanmar is continuing as an active member and fully supports peace and prosperity in the region. This has been due to successful ASEAN engagement.

Some observers believe that the reforms will not be complete until some needed constitutional amendments are passed. One of these is a change to a federal form of government, which can be achieved by constitutional change in a standard democratic system.

As noted above, the liberal theory has the positive concept of human rationalism, based on the idea of mutual cooperation (Reus-Smit, 2001). In this approach Myanmar must build relationships of trust between the government and the people, including ethnic groups. This is most essential for peace and national reconciliation. It may also bring together nationalist groups, religious groups, local people and CSOs. So, at the state level Myanmar needs social relations and good communication, just as at the regional level ASEAN works for integration among diverse nations. This is what liberals prefer to promote: good relations and cooperation locally and internationally. Today, the country of Myanmar stands as a very divided nation; it really needs liberalist theory to provide a way to abandon the concept of absolute authority which has dominated its long decades of isolation.

Social and economic development and equitable access are extremely important for opening up a country to the international community. So, it is time to suspend realist generalizations about managing the citizens by force. And it is time to observe the liberalist interactions of other developed nations. Liberal theory brings personal freedom and ethical and psychological development to every individual, and it also helps to build peaceful and capable societies that are socially and morally advanced. Hence, this thesis finds that liberal theory is more focused on, and more capable of, finding a peaceful way for Myanmar to define and to pursue more genuine democratic goals (Legene, 2013)

5.1 Answers to Research Questions

5.1.1 What are the main practices which ASEAN has applied to help Myanmar political Reforms?

Since Myanmar was admitted to ASEAN, the ASEAN annual meeting for Foreign Ministers added an ongoing agenda item on the Myanmar situation which included specific statements on political developments. In the earlier period Myanmar had to agree to defer equal treatment of all ASEAN member states at meetings, due to demands of some dialogue partners. Meanwhile, the Myanmar political transition began to move rapidly after the 2007 'Saffron Revolution,' then there was significant ASEAN involvement in the 2008 Hurricane Nargis relief effort, when ASEAN became the 'bridge' between the Myanmar military government and international aid (Baldwin, 2009). This was a very creative use of the 'ASEAN Way,' and it can be considered that the ASEAN Way, in its various forms, became one of the main practices ASEAN applied in support of Myanmar political change. At the same time the challenges of integrating Myanmar into ASEAN have made the application of ASEAN norms more sophisticated and nuanced.

In fact, the main problem in the complex relations between Myanmar and ASEAN is the difficulty of ASEAN compliance with its own 'non-interference' rule, one of the principles of the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). Because ASEAN members should maintain great mutual respect among themselves for "independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national identity," (*ASEAN*, 2005) therefore ASEAN developed a quiet and informal style of diplomacy

which in Myanmar's case was realized as respect and tolerance for diversity and a commitment not to criticize the junta.

When dialogue partner EU insisted on sanctions on Myanmar, ASEAN opposed the move, on the basis of its opposition to external interference. "In the 1998-2006 period, the EU moderated its criticism of Myanmar, while the Association appeared to distance itself from rejecting censure of the regime by its EU dialogue partner" (Marchi, 2014). This seemed to show a give-and-take arrangement with the EU. However, EU restrictive measures against Myanmar were not suspended until 30 April 2013, after a considerable period of ongoing reform (*Council of the European Union*, 2012).

All the above data (especially Figure 1) show clearly that after ASEAN engaged with Myanmar, the economic development of Myanmar has been strongly supported by ASEAN investment, led by Singapore, but including Thailand and Vietnam, up until the present-day. Thus we can conclude that ASEAN FDI is also a "practice applied to help Myanmar political reforms." It is ASEAN's flexible engagement which gradually increased FDI in Myanmar (Haacke, 1999). Joining the ASEAN community has connected Myanmar to the global supply chain, which in turn should help people in all sectors of its economy (Oxford Business Group, 2015), and hopefully fewer of its workers will have to leave home.

Myanmar's ethnic issues and its communal conflicts are no longer hidden from outside scrutiny, and have spilled into international awareness for the last five years. Local and international media have reported directly from affected areas inside the country. Therefore, these problems have been high on the ASEAN agenda due to their repercussions on neighboring countries and on ASEAN's reputation. It is already standard practice for ASEAN annual chairs to follow the relatively-recent best practices that have regional implications, such as individual nation updates and dialogues, especially as these were refined in the extended period of Myanmar reforms. These help increase confidence among ASEAN members in their ability to discuss sensitive issues, as was seen in the case of Myanmar. And it is clear that they are an inheritance from the period of intense pressure that ASEAN endured on behalf of its new member Myanmar. ASEAN evolved new mechanisms to set aside some of its deepest identifying norms because of the international difficulties of integrating

Myanmar. What didn't destroy ASEAN made it stronger. Ironically, thanks to Myanmar.

To conclude, the role of ASEAN member states individually applying pressure on Myanmar has been an influence, but the economic factors have been the main reason why the Myanmar authorities joined ASEAN. Of course they also joined in order to avoid international pressure, especially to avoid economic sanctions. For the military leaders, membership in ASEAN represents protection and economic development. Therefore, the role of ASEAN countries exercising their own sovereign economic decisions seems to have been more effective than international intervention in Myanmar (Marchi, 2014).

Since the Myanmar military still plays a very significant role in national politics, Daw Suu Kyi has argued Myanmar needs military reform. Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong has also stated that ASEAN shares the United States' goal of encouraging the Tatmadaw to reform and open up along with other institutions in Myanmar. Myanmar can learn much from other ASEAN countries which successfully evolved beyond military control, such as Indonesia (cited in Nan Than Htwe, 2012).

ASEAN can offer training to a new generation of military officers in areas like civilian-military relations, rules of war, and transparency. The ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting could establish a special timeslot for dealing with the Myanmar Tatmadaw, and set up further dialogue (Nan Than Htwe, 2012). Thus the ameliorating role of ASEAN within Myanmar will probably continue for some time.

The fact is that ASEAN-like "soft" mechanisms have always been important in the region, rather than outright compulsion. Therefore, ASEAN in a sense provided Myanmar with a wall behind which it could find its own way to adjust to the international community. This is why following ASEAN's principles, even when the principles themselves were in a process of evolution, allowed Myanmar leaders to keep an eye on the global community's reactions, and to judge what steps were urgent and unavoidable, and which others they could delay or work around. Overall, the positive approach of ASEAN regionalism is supporting Myanmar through this period of change using the norms of ASEAN as the appropriate tool to deal with Myanmar and with the larger global community.

5.1.2 How have CSOs played an Important Part in Recent Development Progress?

The civil society groups work hard and have made headway on their own individual projects, but few have been able to make a difference in the country's overall direction (Min Zin, 2014). The nation's formerly authoritarian government opened its doors to careful debate on the role of civil society in Myanmar, and deleted a restrictive law in place since the 1988 crackdown. Organization Law No.6/88 covered any public action which was seen to "disrupt law and order, peace and tranquility" (Morgan, 2015). In fact it was unprecedented that the military government allowed a convention of CSOs and NGOs to comment on a new law. Remarkably, the government revised the law proposed in 2013 in response to these criticisms, and subsequently signed the final version of the Association Registration Law in July 2014, thereby fundamentally altering the people's right to associate (Morgan, 2015).

After the long decades under strict government control, many CSOs recognize Cyclone Nargis as a turning point for the role that humanitarian and civil societies were allowed to play in Myanmar. There were only forty international NGOs operating on the ground in Myanmar prior to Cyclone Nargis. In the following year alone, the number grew to over 100, but most of these local civil society groups were not registered. And again, only a few had an impact on a national level.

Since the new law came in, there was a noticeable change that soon became the status quo for Myanmar government policy toward civil society. In fact, the government could not help but collaborate with the rapidly evolving social networks of reform-minded groups (Morgan, 2015).

One the other hand, the shelving of the Myitsone Dam has been cited as a successful example of Myanmar civil society convincing the government to respect public opinion. The Thein Sein government successfully engaged with civil society to gain public trust. However, "the government obviously signaled that there were lines not to be crossed when it began arresting leaders of the student protest over the newly-drafted education law in 2015" (Aye Thein, 2016). It seems that whatever political space there is for civil society, it can be attributed to the fact that Myanmar is deeply involved in the larger process of democratization. According to people

interviewed for this thesis, the neglect of social services drew in CSOs to fill the gaps in many different sectors. In fact, these selected three CSOs represent in big part for development progress work in such area humanitarian assistance and socio-politic development work as LRC. As second CSO, FFSS working area on health and education sectors, the MATA link with human rights and on economic development for further progress of reforms. Therefore, these three organizations effectively represent to rest of CSOs operation similarly in the country to fail the gap and help Myanmar reforms further.

Overall, nowadays education is the most obvious example where many CSOs often work with INGOs and local religious schools. Overall, health seems to be the second main area of CSO activity. The number of NGOs has been increasing, especially when the Global Fund returned to Myanmar with a strong focus on health care. CSOs are particularly instrumental in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Overall, livelihood improvement programs by CSOs are on the rise since the post-Cyclone Nargis period and into the times of Cyclone Giri and the recent stateless Muslims issue in Rakhine State, where CSOs are quite active with humanitarian aid. More importantly, for the more progressive CSOs, it is important to understand the role of informal exchanges among CSOs and to build trust among larger groups for long-term projects. It is widely hoped that the role of civil society in both the public and private spheres will be used increasingly over the coming years, improving the connections between CSOs and various stakeholders, including government officials. Advances and successes of CSOs to date have been one of the most positive contributions to the new democratic society of Myanmar (Chong & Elies, 2011).

Both government and military need the support and cooperation of CSOs and NGOs to improve the essential sectors of education, the economy, and grassroots democracy, especially in remote or minority areas.

Therefore we can conclude that international encouragement (both pressure and support) for reforms has been important, but domestic encouragement has also been essential, especially from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

In addition, all Myanmar Civil Society Organizations have worked hard on their own individual projects, but only a few have made a difference in the country's overall direction over the past several decades. As a strong example, the selected three CSOs surveyed here show a range of national impacts which can clarify national to international level access and their workforce in real need area of social and political environment development after the reforms in the country. Although, there remain a lot of challenges and barriers for the CSOs involvement in the development progress, their significant efforts and workforce are acknowledgeable. Therefore, basis on these selected three CSOs, rest of non-governmental organization role in essential part for the development of countries since its restore of the No. 6/88 association Law.

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APPENDIX

Title: The Role of Civil Society in Myanmar's Political Reforms

Introduction:

- I am conducting this interview as part of my research project for a Master's degree in ASEAN Studies at Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand.
- The interview is about the role of civil society organizations in Myanmar political reforms.
- From my research findings, I will assess how essential the role of CSOs has been in recent political change in Myanmar.
- I would also like to request your permission to translate some of your answers from Burmese into English and use this information as quotes from the interview.

Background Information:

Name:

Profession:

Questions for the interview:

1. Would you like to share a little about your organization's activities and goals?
2. Do you think Myanmar made the democratic transition by itself, or due to international pressure?
3. What do you think about the role of CSOs in recent Myanmar political reforms? How important were these organizations?
4. How did your organization overcome any difficulty during the military regime and how was it different after reforms?
5. What sort of opportunities and challenges have CSOs faced during the past five years of the USDP government?
6. Does your CSO collaborate with others in social activities? Do you share any main goals?

7. Do you think CSOs will gain power to change Myanmar into a more liberal country in the future? How much have CSOs developed in recent years?
8. In your own opinion, do you think the current ceasefire agreement between ethnic armies and the government will be successful or not? What has been done by the previous government?
9. How can government and ethnic groups build a deep trust for peace and national reconciliation?
10. As a civil society worker, what is your view on recent conflicts between stateless Muslims and citizens?
11. As Daw Su said "People live in fear of their military government." How do you feel about this statement, considering your real experiences with them? Do you still fear them?
12. Would you like to share anything else you have in mind?

BIOGRAPHY

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