

CHAPTER III

**DEMOCRATIC SPACE OF DIFFERENT
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN BURMA**

Introduction

This chapter will examine a macro structure of civil society organizations in Burma and provide an overview of the trend of democratic space of various civil society organizations. In presenting the overview, the author hopes to engender a general understanding of the condition of civil society under the authoritarian government so as to examine the democratic space of 88 Generation Students and Shalom Foundation in the following chapters. This chapter will first look at the difficulties and opportunities of civil society organizations in Burma, how the authoritarian government systematically exerts control over them and how civil society organizations attempt to survive under the authoritarian rule.

The study defines democratic space as operational environment for Agencies, which are working for democratic practices in the public space. For example, when an organization uses a public space for the purpose of democratization in the country, that public space becomes democratic space. The variables of democratic practices are improving the quality of governance, promoting education and human rights, strengthening people power, addressing conflict, building trust among different race, religions, enabling development, and challenging the authoritarian government. This chapter will analyze how the military government systematically controls the public space to prevent the emergence of democratic space in the country.

Civil society organizations in Burma and their democratic spaces

This chapter will discuss the democratic spaces of civil society organization in the areas of student groups, religious groups, workers, intellectual and professional groups, media and NGOs. It will discuss the democratic space of political organizations in Burma, although political parties are not mentioned as civil society in theory. Government NGO will also be discussed in this chapter since it exist parallel with independent civil society organizations

Throughout this chapter the author analyses the various methods used by the Burmese government to systematically limit the freedom of civil society organizations, subsequently narrowing down the democratic space available in the country. It will argue that there are many strategies the military regime employs in order to retain their grip on the activities of civil society. Furthermore, it shows that while many civil society groups in Burma like to act politically, they have few chances to do so. Nevertheless, non-political civil society organizations are still able to find room to maneuver some space for democratization.

Student groups

In Burma, students played a significant role in social and political activities since from the colonial period. Under colonial rule, All Burma Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU) was formed as a social organization. Aung San, father of Aung San Suu Kyi, was the secretary of ABFSU in the colonial time. At the beginning, the aim of ABSFU was to protect students' rights. Then ABFSU protested against the colonial rule which led to the independence of Burma in 1948. At that time, the aim of ABSFU was changed to end colonial rule by social movements and the ideology was based on nationalism. Throughout the colonial period, ABSFU served as training ground for nationalist leaders and future politicians. After Burma got independence, ABSFU became a very powerful

organization and influence on the then political situation. However, there was a military coup in 1962 led by General Ne Win's army. Then General Ne Win decided to end ABSFU since students protest against his caretaker government. In one of 1974 student demonstrations, General Ne Win government bombed Student Union Building in the Yangon University, killing hundreds of university students. From that time on ABFSU was banned to exist legally. Although the ABFSU were not allowed to exist legally under the military government, many student members and new recruits continue to search for ways to support the pro-democracy movement. Win Thaung, an old ABSFU member said:

“We struggled to resist fascism, to gain nation independence and to create an internal peace movement. Now we continue in the pro-democracy struggle.”
(Win Thaung, Personal communication, August, 2007)

In 1988, ABFSU was reunited again to protest against the government. It was formed by 1980s students and led the pro-democracy demonstrations. Min Ko Naing was the president of ABFSU in 1988. In 1987, Ne Win government declared illegal all bank notes over 15 K (Burmese note) and no compensation was to be paid for them. It was 60 percent of the currency in circulation. This demonetization had big effects on people live and so it led to 1988 uprising.

In December 1996, student activists demonstrated against the regime. It happened in downtown Yangon and on university campuses calling for the reforming of Student Union to protect students' rights. To prevent these from spreading, as in 1988 uprising, the universities were closed, many students were arrested and some were dismissed from their schools. When the universities were reopened in 1998 again, demonstrations broke out again, and the universities were not reopened until July 2000 (Seekins, 2005).

After that, the government moved universities far away from the cities so that it could control more on students. The government put many student informers in

universities. These informers were offered good jobs at government offices after they finished their schools. Parents of university students had to sign letters of guarantee that their children would not participate in political activities. Lecturers had to take responsibility to monitor students outside the classrooms. Professors informed students to avoid politics and they had to hold accountable for student actions. The authorities encouraged distance education classes so that students cannot gather to protest the government. Some high school headmasters encourage parents to enroll their children in these programs to reduce the possibility of their becoming involved in political activities. Former student political prisoners were denied to study regular courses and allowed to access only to the distance education courses.

Many students are upset with declining educational quality and going to far away universities. However, they don't want to engage in protests for fear of prison and more university closures. Although most parents don't want to see their children risk their lives in political activities, student activism is generally supported by public. Thus all democratic space of students is tightly controlled by the government. So there is no other student organization apart from underground student organization ABFSU. Only after the release of old students from 1988 in 2004, there appear a new student organization called '88 Generation Student'. The 88 Generation Students tried to mobilize people by doing awareness campaigns. There are many campaigns that the group could do successfully before it was banned.

In conclusion, we can argue that the student group tried to politicize the public space since the colonial time. The military government also tried to limit the public space of the student by banning Student Union, moving school to remote areas, and investing military intelligence among students. Thus students find it very difficulty to create a democratic space in the student live. However, there was a student group which managed to create a democratic space and that will be studied as a case study in the following chapter.

Religious groups

In Burma, there are two main religious groups: Buddhists and Christians, which work for social issues. Muslim and Hindu are minorities and they usually engage in their respective religious activities and hardly related to social welfare of general population. That's why, this study will neglect of the role of Muslim and Hindu organizations. For Buddhists, there are approximately over 400,000 monks and novices. Monks, considered "sons of Buddha," are the biggest institution in Burma after the arm force which has over 500,000 soldiers and polices. Since almost ninety per cent of populations are Buddhists, monks have the moral authority to influence the majority of the population. Most of the people lived in the countryside were educated by the Buddhist monks. The monastery education is very important for the people's literacy from the monarchy rule up to now. Monks have a hierarchical structure under the state's authority. The structure demand junior monks to listen the words of senior monks. The structure is useful for the government to control the Monk populations. The government officials usually tries to get a good relation with senior monks by building pagodas, monasteries and donating all necessary things so that they can ask for help of senior monks when they need. For example, in 1988 and 2007, when young monks joined the public protests, government officials went to senior monks and requested to control monk protesters.

To get out of the hierarchical structure, independent monks' union was formed in 1988 to support the pro-democracy movement. In 1990, the government cracked down brutally on many protesters in Mandalay. That's why monks in Mandalay and other towns in central Burma boycotted the regime for the first time. Monks refused to accept alms from military personnel and their families and to preside over religious ceremonies, such as funerals. In Burmese culture, giving food and gifts to monks is a primary way of accumulating merit for the next life. So monks are regarded as one of the greatest benefactors along with parents and Buddha. According to Buddhism, every man can take a monk- hood. Almost all Buddhist men in Burma were monks for a temporary. Based on this fact, the government propagates that monk protesters are bogus monks who use

religion to destabilize the country. In personal communications, some people said that people can be monks easily if they shave their heads and wear robes. Thus, some people don't have much respect on monks.

The boycott ended after troops raided monasteries and arrested hundreds of monks. In Burma, majority of monks live together in monasteries rather than in temples where people always visit and pay respect. Monasteries are also located in big compounds separated from people's housing. That's why the government could raid monasteries without the knowledge of people.

After the event, the government was concerned about monks' role in politics. To control the role of monks in politics, the government issued two decrees in October 1990. The decree bans all independent Buddhist monks' organizations and authorizes army commanders to charge monks who are inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism (SLORC, 1990:57). Sentences range from three years' imprisonment to death. It is estimated that since the present military regime came to power in 1988, about 300 monks have been derobed and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment (Zaw, 2007:23).

According to an personal communication with U San Di Mar, many old monks feel that politics is not related to religion and some monks have been impressed by the massive donations of the regime on building temples in many place (Personal communication, August, 2007). However a number of young monks, like high school and university students, feel a duty to fight against unjust rule for the benefit of people. They have not forgotten the active role that highly respected monks, such as U Ottama and U Wisara, and Buddhist organizations, such as the Young Men's Buddhist Association, played in protesting British colonial rule.

The government issued another order in 2000 prohibiting monks from discussing politics with lay people, giving speeches encouraging unrest, or allowing meetings in monasteries. Monks were also forbidden from reading any anti-SPDC materials and were

informed that they must apply for permission before traveling outside their districts. Thus the government tried to prevent systematically the possibility that monks would join with lay people in organizing large-scale protests against military rule. In 2003, Buddhist monks were forced to sign the promise that they will not get involve in politics of Burma. The chief monks of monasteries were forced to take the responsibility of controlling the monks in their monasteries so that they won't get involved in politics. In the end of 2003, around 150 Buddhist monks from Gandayon monastery in Rangoon were arrested after they refused to accept food offered by ministers and military authorities in Rangoon during the religious festival (DVB,28 January, 2004) Novice monks were sent home and those who were suspected of organizing the protest were arrested and got long prison sentences. According to Aung Aung, approximately 100 monks were disrobed and 11 monks were sent to prison at the time (Aung Aung,Personal communication,October, 2007)

On the other hand, the regime persuaded senior monks by offering alms, robes and material needs. Most young monks are not very pleased with the way senior monks are being exploited by the generals with titles and new monasteries. Although the military junta pressured the monks not to involve in politics, an anonymous group calling itself Scholar Monks distributed a letter describing the illegal arrests and forcibly disrobing of Buddhist monks and the closures of Buddhists seminaries by the regime(DVB, 30 January,2004). The Police Directorate in Yangon asked all the head monks of monasteries throughout Burma to submit the list of monks in their monasteries including their personal particulars and details to the Department of Religious Affairs.

In May 2006, Revered Senior monks called on the regime and NLD, the winner party to cooperate in order to solve the ongoing political problems and for the benefits of the people of Burma (DVB,7 February,2006). The call was made by Reverend Nandasara in Yangon Pali University and Reverend Kaweindabiwuntha in the New Masoeyein Monastery in Mandalay.

Reverend Nandasara said that

“As the NLD is taking gently, the SPDC is refusing; it is the fault of the SPDC. The SPDC generals are Buddhists and citizens of Burma. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the like are also Buddhists and citizens of Burma. I want them to try to keep the spirit of older and younger brothers (family spirit). I want to make a plea to all to solve the problems of Burma at the table by peaceful means” (DVB, 25 May, 2006).

This shows that the Buddhist monks have been participating to force the government or to negotiate with the winner party (NLD), despite the government's restrictions and oppressions. Nowadays, Buddhist monks have been active in promoting literacy and health, but they are closely monitored by the regime. In September 2007, thousands of monks protested against the government over the raise of fuel price. It will be mentioned in detail in the next part of the thesis.

In conclusion, we can argue that some monk groups tried to politicize the public space by involving in social movements. The military government also tried to limit the public space of the monks by banning independent Monk Association, punishing monks who were involved in protests over the government, asking senior monks to control young monks. Thus monks have a few chances to create a democratic space. However, there were monks who sought a democratic space by organizing 2007 social movements and that will be studied in detail in the next chapter.

Christian organizations

About 10 per cent of Burma's population is Christian. Among them, approximately, fifty percent are Roman Catholic and the rest are Protestants and other small branches of Christianity. The majority of Christians live in the mountainous ethnic states, such as Kayin, Kachin, Kayah and Chin. There are lots of Christian organizations which work for social development. Churches and related associations have also actively

engaged in local development, education, and social welfare activities in their communities. Joseph, a staff from Shalom Foundation, which is a Christian affiliated organization, said that

“The government tolerates Christian-sponsored projects particularly in ethnic minority areas because they fulfill basic welfare demands not met by the state”. (Joseph, Personal communication, November, 2007)

There have been many ethnic insurgent groups in Burma since from the late 1950s and early 1960s because the central government neglected the rights and development of the ethnic areas. As long as the Christian activities have no political content, they can operate with some freedom in the ethnic area.

To a greater extent than the Buddhist community, Christians have an extensive lay organization tradition, with church-based women’s groups, youth groups, and oversight committees (Smith, 1999: 44). Moreover, the Protestant and Catholic communities have links with international Christian groups and some Christians attend meetings and study abroad. They have also been able to meet with visiting church groups. Through such contacts, members of the Christian community have been encouraged to introduce development projects and capacity building programs in their areas. Some of the strongest Christian associations are the Myanmar Christian Council of Churches, which represents thirteen Protestant denominations, the YMCA, the Myanmar Baptist Convention, and one of its members, the Kachin Baptist Convention. These have organized leadership training for youth and women, management courses, and a host of small-scale development and welfare initiatives. They have also built a sense of community among Christians from different ethnic backgrounds.

Thus, Christian organizations are active in civil society and have some space to work for community in the community level and ethnic areas. One Christian social worker mentioned that their activities mainly focus on non-threatening humanitarian, education, and economic development projects. The social worker said that Christian

organizations cannot extend their activities and do much at the national level because of the regime's intolerance in any dissent (Personal communication, November, 2007).

In comparison to Christian and Buddhist organizations, Christian organizations have more opportunities to work for community development. Buddhist institutions have been closely controlled by the government through Senior Monk Association which is sponsored by the government. Christian institutions are more independent from the government and get supported from Vatican Church. Most of the Buddhist institutions focus on spiritual and religious ceremonies while Christian institutions are used to work on humanitarian issues. So Christian organizations and Buddhist organizations operate differently and the former seems to have more space than the latter.

In conclusion, we can argue that the Christian organization focus on humanitarian space and do not try to politicize the space. Since the Christian activities have no political content, they can operate with some freedom in the country. For the Christian organizations the government allows to use the public space as long as they do not use the space for political purpose.

Worker groups

Unlike in many countries, worker groups do not play an important role in Burma's democracy struggle. In fact industrialization does not developed in Burma and so there are few factories and workers. According to the government statistic, only 20 percent of the populations work in industrial business and more than 70 per cent of the population lives in rural areas and is primarily engaged in small-scale farming, fishing, and animal breeding (New Light of Myanmar,12 January,2001). Although there are a few independent worker groups, the government has organized some controlled workers' associations. In history, state-enterprise workers protested ration cuts in the mid-1970s, and urban workers formed independent unions during the 1988 pro-democracy

demonstrations. There are some workers who were not arrested continue to look for ways to support the democracy movement.

However, it has been very difficult for workers to continue their struggle for democracy when most factory workers are poor and desperate to keep jobs. Hundreds of thousands have migrated to neighboring countries to find better life, although they have to work illegally. According to the exile-based Federation of Trade Unions of Burma, it has sought to organize underground unions and educate workers about their rights but there has been no political activity from workers. In 1998, some garment factories appeared and many people become industrial workers. But most of these workers are poor women who are trying to provide families and cannot take the risk of losing job.

However, in 2006, the workers in many garment factories demonstrated against their owners to get enough salary. Since workers need to maintain their jobs for their survival, their protest was stopped when employers dismissed some workers.

In conclusion, we can argue that workers in Burma tried to politicize the public space by involving in social movements in 1970s and 1988. However, the government banned worker union and arrested worker leaders. Workers in nowadays rarely try to politicize the public space because they need to maintain their job for their survival the government. Thus the democratic space is very limited for worker groups by their poverty and severe government control.

Intellectual and professional groups

Generally, intellectual people in Burma are university scholars and writers and some NGO officials. Almost all university scholars in the country are civil servants working at a university or in a government office. In Burmese law, civil servants are not allowed to join political parties. The government restricted academic freedom by censoring books. Academic conferences are watched by military intelligent to ensure that

no anti-regime discussions emerge. University teachers and professors remained subject to the same restrictions on freedom of speech, political activities, and publications as other state employees. The Ministry of Education routinely warned teachers against criticizing the government. It also instructed them not to discuss politics at work, prohibited them from joining or supporting political parties or from engaging in political activity. Like all state employees, professors and teachers were required to join the USDA. Teachers at all levels continued to be held responsible for the political activities of their students. Foreigners were not permitted to visit university campuses without prior approval or attend any meetings involving students, including graduation ceremonies.

Because of these situations, many scholars left the country rather than work where they cannot speak, teach, or write freely. Although writers, poets, cartoonists, comedians and editors discuss the situation of the country, they have found it difficult to hold regular discussions at a fixed place because of surveillance by informers. Literature study groups still meet in Yangon and Mandalay but generally avoid politics for fear of surveillance.

Many writers feel responsible to speak out about the real situation of the country, but it is risky that their licenses to write could be ended. Publications are closely monitored by a censorship board, limiting all the writing that the government consider dissident. If the censorship board doesn't like a portion of text, the publisher has to rewrite the section and reprint or has to dismiss the whole writing part. Writing to the limits of censorship became risky game because publishers can lose the registration of their magazines and journals. Writers known to support the pro-democracy movement or who tried to point out the terrible situations of the country are also watched carefully by the censorship board. Some writers are banned from writing. Thus, both writers and editors are under severe pressure to engage in self-censorship. A famous sarcastic comedian, Zarganar (whose name means "tweezers"), has been in jail for a long time because of his brilliant jokes over politics.

Most independent magazines and journals try to save their survival by focusing on the issues of magic, religion, business, sports, entertainment, and fashion. Readers are used to reading between the lines and look for political meanings in seemingly apolitical texts, sometimes reading in meanings never intended. There is also a censorship in art. Art galleries are not allowed to display works showing poverty. Films cannot be made about the life of poor people because this would suggest a failure of the regime's economic policies.

The government also practices carrot and stick policy on intellectuals, singers, and movie stars. It rewards those who cooperate with the government and punishing those who refuse. Musicians and movie stars who sing propaganda songs or perform in propaganda movies get apartments, cars, opportunities for doing business or other luxuries. Those who say 'no' are threatened with performance bans. That's why many performers try to negotiate these boundaries of how much work for the regime is necessary or acceptable. As a result, there becomes mistrust among performers and artists. The regime get benefit from this situation because divided artistic communities cannot effectively challenge the power of the government.

In conclusion, we can argue that few intellectuals in Burma tried to politicize the public space by writing the real political situation of the country. The government restricted academic freedom by censoring books, restricting academic forums and prohibiting intellectual to join political parties and arresting some journalist. Intellectuals in nowadays rarely try to politicize the public space because they are afraid of being punishment by the government. Thus intellectuals have few chance to create democratic space because of the government limitation.

Media

Burma's four daily newspapers are all published by the News and Periodicals Enterprise, a division of the Ministry of Information. People's access to information in Burma is limited by state run news agency, namely MRTV. The agency gives information to government controlled newspapers, radio and television stations. There are some private journals and magazines but they are not allowed to write political news in Burma. The most important sources of uncensored information are four foreign-based radio stations broadcasting in Burmese: BBC, VOA, the Democratic Voice of Burma, and Radio Free Asia. The Democratic Voice of Burma is based in Oslo and run by exile-based pro-democracy organizations. It also produces short programs in several ethnic minority languages. The Burmese section of Radio Free Asia, based in Washington D.C., focuses primarily on news about Burma but is not linked to any political organizations.

People listen to these stations to learn what is happening not only abroad but also in their own country. Although talks between Aung San Suu Kyi and the regime began in October 2000, the state-controlled media has never mentioned them. It was only through foreign radio broadcasts that people in Burma learned a dialogue had begun. Some of the stations also carry educational programs related to politics and civil society. However, only a minority tunes into foreign broadcasts regularly. Soldiers are forbidden and few civilians dare to listen openly. In 1999, a teashop owner was sentenced to two years in prison for tuning loud on a BBC broadcast in his shop.

In conclusion, we can argue that media in Burma have no chance to politicize the public space since the government control all print media and electronic media in the country. Only the foreign media like BBC, DVB can support for democratization process by broadcasting all political news inside the country.

Internet Freedom

No laws or regulations exist regarding monitoring Internet communications or establishing penalties for the exercise of freedom of expression via Internet. However, the government monitored Internet communications, and individuals could not freely use them. When Internet users spent a long time at one Web site, police blocked access if they discovered the site was related to national issues. E mail messages sometimes took several days to arrive in the receiver's inbox, often with attachments deleted. Citizens believed this was due to the government's censoring of incoming and outgoing e mail.

The government banned all Web sites critical of the regime and its activities. Authorities also periodically banned all access to free e-mail services such as Yahoo and Hotmail. After Google talk and Skype, Web sites became popular means of long distance communication, resulting in lost income for government telephone services, in June 2006 the minister of communications, post, and telegraphs banned Internet telephone services offered by Gmail, Gtalk, and Skype.

The government blocked most Web sites containing words that it considered suspicious, such as Burma, drugs, military government, democracy, student movement, 8888, and human rights. Users could sometimes reach the home pages of the DVB and BBC's Burma service, but they could not access articles on the sites. Occasionally the government mistakenly blocked educational or other Web sites when its software detected censored words.

However, there are many internet café in Yangon in which users can use Freedom proxy software and overcome the government's censorship. In 2007 September movements, many people from inside sent photos and news to all over the world by using this software. There were no cases of arrest or punishment for the peaceful expression of political, religious, or dissenting views in electronic forums, including e mail. All Internet

cafes displayed a notice that forbade users to access political and pornographic sites but did not state a specific punishment.

More importantly, we can argue that there is still some internet freedom although the government tried to control over it. There have a chance to present the situation of Burma to the outside world as seen in the 2007 demonstration in Burma. Some people try to create websites and blogs and put political news on their blogs. Thus for the people who know how to use internet and use proxy software have some virtual space to communicate freely with people, to raise their voice and idea, to share and access information freely.

NGOs

Most international NGOs and U.N. agencies have carried out programs since the mid-1990s in Burma. They work mainly in the area of health, education and humanitarian aid. For example there are NGOs which provide safe drinking water and sanitation, support access to education and health care, community-based development projects and micro-loans, and solve the HIV/AIDS crisis. At the beginning international NGOs worked through government-sponsored organizations, like Mother and Child Care Association, Women Affair association, etc. Many local NGOs have appeared because international NGOs fund local NGOs to work for community development.

Nowadays, many local NGOs work as subcontractors of UNDP and UNICEF projects. Both INGOs and LNGOs have to spend a couple of years proving themselves before they can obtain memorandums of understanding (MOU) for their own work. By supporting local NGOs, international NGOs tried to establish the foundation for community groups to expand activities and roles in civil society. There are also Local NGOs and CBOs which are able to promote community civil society, deliver humanitarian and other forms of assistance. But at the present, the government interfere some local NGOs. If local NGOs stay away from politics and cooperated with the regime,

they can survive from being stopped. So, some of local NGOs are changing to another form of GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations).

GONGOs are prominent in Burma. Some, such as the Myanmar Red Cross, the Myanmar Medical Association, the Myanmar Maternal Child and Welfare Association, and the Auxiliary Fire Brigades, are formed nationwide. Similar to USDA and professional organizations controlled by the regime, these organizations are often run by military officers or their wives. While politically closely aligned with the regime, there are also some members at the local level who participate to address health or social welfare issues. Indeed, many are very concerned about the country's rising problems and are eager to do what they can to help. There are also members who are not necessarily regime' supporters and who genuinely seek to improve conditions for women and children. Members of such organizations are carefully watched to ensure they do not develop close relations with the NLD or get involved in party politics (DVB,20 August,2001). The government mobilizes these organizations to demonstrate support for its policies but it is likely that some organizations can be independent in the future.

However there are much more space in community level of the country. For example, small community groups, such as funeral associations, women's groups, literature and culture groups, sport groups, and religious groups for celebrations, do not need to register as long as their activities are local and non-politics.

Some independent community groups have been told they are not needed because government-controlled organizations like USDA have been set up to handle social welfare activities. The uncertainty over what is legal makes it difficult for groups to initiate activities. However, the government cannot control more on the community groups since they have been existed for a long time and are deeply rooted in the society. Thus, there are space in community which is between the government-controlled sphere and private life.

Indeed, the government more focuses to restrict on the activities of international organizations. The government even restricts more on INGOs after it dismissed the former Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, known as friendly to NGOs, in October 2004. The government formalized its restrictions on all NGOs in 2006 by publishing guidelines to govern their activities. The guidelines further tighten government controls over NGOs activities and contain provisions that UN officials consider to be unacceptable.

After the removal of General Khin Nyunt, although the government still allow UNDP and UNICEF to proceed with a previously agreed upon expansion of their programs into certain remote villages, the government increased restrictions on international access to conflict areas. The government has also pressured some international organizations to work with government-sponsored political mobilization groups, such as the USDA. An official from UNICEF in Burma said that

“When there is no General Khin Nyunt, the government made more restrictions on the implementation of the UN projects. Now, the government wants to stay away from international organizations. Now both INGOs and LNGOs are more difficult to make contact with regime officials after October 2004” (UNICEF official, Personal communication, August, 2007)

In 2006, the regime moved its offices to the new capital, Nay Pyi Taw, which is more than 200 miles inland from Yangon. Almost NGOs are based in Yangon since it was the capital. As a result, people from INGOs and LNGOs need to spend several hours traveling by car and airplane to meet with government officials in Nay Pyi Taw who were formerly located in Yangon.

In 2006, the government tried to restrict more on the international organization. The Burmese Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development published guidelines governing international organizations' programs in Burma. A senior official of the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development said that the guidelines are

intended to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the international organizations' programs by improving coordination and eliminating duplicative programs.

The provisions in the guidelines would restrict several aspects of international organizations' activities in Burma. For example, the guidelines would require the international organizations to

- Agree that their international staff may only travel within Burma with permission from the subject area ministry and with a regime representative;
- Obtain prior approval of all international projects by subject area ministries and by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development;
- Avoid conducting or distributing any surveys not mentioned and approved in the original project documentation;
- Deposit all incoming funds in Burma's national bank of subsequent withdrawal as "foreign exchange credits";
- Agree that their programs will "enhance and safeguard the national interest," "prevent infringement of the sovereignty of the State," and "be on the right track...to contributing to the socio-economic development of the Nation";
- Coordinate their work with local and state coordinating committees that include representatives of the Union Solidarity Development Association and similar groups; and
- Select their Burmese national staff from government-prepared lists of individuals (NGO guidelines, 2006)

The extent to which the government will fully implement these guidelines is unclear. High-ranking officials of the Ministry of Health said that the guidelines are now in effect and are not being negotiated. Many INGOs are trying to engage the government in discussions regarding the guidelines. However, there is no evidence yet that the government implements the guidelines on NGOs after a year of its announcement.

Expansion of NGOs

Under the current government, international agencies and local NGOs have been able to make considerable advances. The International Crisis Group refers to three examples of how expansion has taken place: scaling up (more money and more activities—UNDP Human Development Initiative, World Food Program, MSF Holand, 3DFund), geographical expansion (INGOs in remote areas of Chin, Shan, and Kaya states), and new activities (work on HIV/AIDS and UNICEF's education program). Hlaing Myat, information officer of the Capacity Building Initiative, affirms this expansion; CBI regularly updates its internal NGO directory and sees that the number NGOs, staff and projects are increasing (Personal communication, Dec, 2007). CBI also confirms the geographic expansion, showing more organizations are gaining access to previously restricted areas.

In conclusion, we can argue that NGOs in Burma are working in the available public space for humanitarian purposes. Although the military government allows NGOs to work in the public, it tightly controls the NGOs not to politicize the public space. Thus NGOs find it very difficult to create a democratic space under the government. However, there is some more freedom in community level of the country and NGOs working in that area can have more opportunity to use the public space for the purpose of democratization. There will be a case study in the next chapter to analyze how an NGO can manage to create a democratic space under the current government.

Political organizations

Political parties in Burma can be regarded as civil society organizations since they are working for the benefits of people and they never had the State power. In Burma, there were over 100 political parties, in which NLD is a dominant party. There is also the

government supported party called United Citizens party (UCP) which won 7 seats in the 1990 election. The biggest ethnic party is Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) and it won 12 seats in the 1990 election. After 1990 election, political parties were banned and the rest of the parties cannot operate anymore since they didn't won any seat in the election. Several ethnic parties were declared illegal after the 1990 election. Among political parties, the National League for Democracy (NLD) is the largest party led by Aung San Suu Kyi. In 1990, it had over two million members and offices country-wide and won 392 of 485 seats in the parliament. Although the party is still legal, the regime attempts to stop its existence by arresting members of parliament (MPs) and other active members, pressuring members to resign, and closing offices. The party leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi are still detained by the government for several years. According to ICRC, there are over 1000 political prisoners in Burma.

However, NLD members in Yangon can hold periodic educational seminars, political meetings, and party ceremonies. They can issue statements documenting the mistreatment of members and worked with ethnic minority political party leaders, such as U Khun Htoon Oo from Shan NLD. The headquarters has also organized occasional donations of food and medicine for the poor. However, the NLD is not permitted to photocopy or distribute party documents or newsletters or organize public rallies. So its ability to communicate with the public is limited. People only learn about NLD activities through foreign radio broadcasts.

Although the NLD has worked actively, they got few people participations because people are afraid of punishment by the government. The government has imprisoned over 10,000 people with political cases since 1988. The strategy of the NLD is to do civil resistance, political dialogue, international activism (including establishment of a government in exile), and to support for international sanctions on the regime. However the strategy doesn't work properly in the situation of Burma because Burma has no internationalized, liberal business sectors. It has good relationship with two great

powers (China and Russia), and backed by its ASEAN' members, which counteract in different ways the consensus of the Western countries. The NLD also didn't use violence means to intimidate political opponents. However, to take control of power forever, the government has been controlling all the political space. Thus NLD became focus on organizing and leading the people to take part in struggling for democratization. Now NLD is trying to promote civil society for democratization.

In conclusion, we can argue that NLD tried to politicize the public space by encouraging civil resistance, asking for political dialogue and advocating for international sanctions on the military regime. The military government also tried to limit the public space by closing NLD offices, arresting party leaders and MPs and pressuring members to resign. Thus NLD has a limited space to do for politics because of such government control.

Government Organized NGOs (GONGOs)

According to Gramsci civil society definition, in which civil society organizations are independent from the state and the market, GONGOs are not a civil society organizations. However we need to understand the role of GONGOs in this study because the government uses the GONGOs to control public space, to deter democratic movements, to exploit for its future political agenda in the country.

The government tried to control people and civil society organizations by establishing the government sponsored organizations. Members of such organizations are expected to support the government policies and against the opposition. The largest government sponsored organization is the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). It was formed in 1993, following the disastrous May 1990 elections, where NLD won 80 per cent of seats in parliament. The founding of the USDA followed within two weeks of the SLORC decision to hold a carefully controlled National Convention to

form a new constitution. The USDA chairman is Senior General Than Shwe himself. Although the USDA is a social organization, it has been referred to by General Maung Aye as an auxiliary national defense force. In the late 1990s, it publicly denounced Aung San Suu Kyi and the activities of the NLD party. It is widely believed that the USDA will be transformed into a political party in the next election.

The expansion of the USDA is rapid. In late 1996, it had over 5 million members, according to Than Shwe in his speech. By 1999, it had over 11 million members. By 2005, there are over 13 millions members in the USDA. Civil servants, soldiers, and high school and university students have to join by force. Others join for benefits, such as job opportunities and education opportunities for further studies. The USDA tries to get support from people by opening English and computer courses in urban areas, but most of its training courses provide management skills for USDA executives at the divisional, state, and township levels. The courses propagate to support the government policies.

In the mid and late 1990s, the government organized many new professional organizations. Current or retired military officers were generally appointed to head these organizations, which are expected to support of the government policies. In late 1998, the Myanmar Red Cross, the Auxiliary Fire Brigade, the Computer Entrepreneurs Association, the Rice Millers Association, Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Myanmar War Veterans Organization joined the USDA in denouncing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD party.

The government has also co-opted originally independent organizations such as the Myanmar Women's Entrepreneurial Association (MWEA), formed in 1995. When it registered with the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs, members have to sign to stay out of politics. After the women announced their first anniversary celebration, they were informed that General Khin Nyunt would attend and give the keynote address. His speech was then quoted at length in the state-controlled press. Later, members were pressured to

join the USDA. Members joined the USDA because they are afraid their businesses will suffer if they do not, or they hope to benefit from the connection. Thus the government controlled many professional civil society organizations.

The organizational structure of the USDA is top-down. The USDA Central Executive Committee (CEC) is formed by military officers. They instructed to State/Division USDA CEC and then instructions flow to Township USDA and then Village levels. Since the formation of USDA, it has supported the government's political agenda and especially in opposing the NLD and other oppositions' political agenda and activities. Thus people see USDA as the same side with the military government.

By taking opportunity upon the silence of the people due to fear, the government has intensively extent the number of USDA. A member of the USDA said that the expected target number of USDA for the government is up to 10 millions among the 50 millions of people in the country. It aggressively extends the number of USDA members since 1988 after the NLD and SNLD declared to convene the People's Parliament with Members of Parliament from elections.

USDA against the plan of NLD and the SNLD, and they also arranged the people's rally against the Convening of People's Parliament by forcing the civilians to gather in grounds of villages, towns, and divisions and accused the 1990 elections' MPs as betrayers to the State. It also plan to upgrade itself as a 'political party' in order to participate in the coming elections arranged by SPDC in order to implement one point of its road-map. According to Thant Zaw, an NGO worker working in Taung Thar Township, Village USDA CEC members told villagers that if they joined to USDA, they can be free from the conscription of forced labour, and free from many types of taxes (Thant Zaw, Personal communication, August, 2007). Kyaw Thu, an 88 Generation student said that

“Many villagers do not want to support them, but some opportunists joined the organization. They are free from every thing, and sometimes, show the power to

other villagers. Sometimes, the village headmen also have to be afraid of them. If they don't like someone, they can directly report to Township or State authorities. Senior USDA members can even directly send the letter to Sr. Gen. Than Shwe. So even Military Intelligence has to be afraid of senior USDA members". (Kyaw Thu ,Personal communication, August, 2007)

So, the USDA will be important as long as it serves the interests of the military government and as long as the SPDC provides funding. In fact, the USDA has several advantages to the future plan of the SPDC. As noted, it is a convenient mobilization organization that can be used when a referendum for the approval of a new constitution. The emphasis given to youth is an indication that the SPDC is building on what it may regard as a long-term approach to ensuring its continuing role in the next generation. So the USDA will remain important as long as the military has an active role in governance. Thus the government systematically controls the democratic space of other civic groups by establishing their own civic group.

Conclusion

This chapter has given a macro structure of civil society organizations in Burma by examining NGOs, student groups, religious groups, workers, media, intellectual and professional groups and GONGOs. This chapter assessed the difficulties and opportunities of civil society organizations in expanding and politicizing public space in Burma, and how the authoritarian government attempts to control them. This chapter has argued that there are many strategies the military regime employs in order to retain their grip on the activities of civil society. This chapter also argued that the government systematically control over all public space of CSOs by forming its own counter civil society organizations. Furthermore, it showed that while many civil society groups in Burma like to act politically, they have few chances to do so. Under the authoritarian rule, people have been forced into narrowly defined alternatives: support military rule, support the pro-democracy movement, or try to remain passive and stay safe. Although the government tried to control all the public space, there are still some loopholes in

which CSOs can use for political purpose. In conclusion, we can argue that there are certain CSOs in Burma which are trying to politicize the public space in different ways for the purpose of democracy in the country. Since this kind of CSOs are existing in the country, we need to investigate more detail on their functions and analyze how they can create democratic space under the authoritarian rule of Burma.