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The History of Broadcasting in Myanmar: Technological Colonization, Political Games and the Deconstruction of Sovereignty in Communication (1938-2025)

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Abstract: The history of broadcasting development in Myanmar has so far been divided into four stages: the colonial dependency stage (1938-1948), the Cold War confrontation stage (1948-1988), the military government monopoly stage (1988-2010), and the digital sovereignty stage (2010-2025). Throughout these four stages, the control of communication has always been the core concern, but each stage has its own focus. The first stage was dominated by the transplantation of colonial technologies, establishing an attached broadcasting system, and the content and form of communication were deeply influenced by colonial ideology; the second stage was oriented towards political propaganda and geopolitical strategy, with broadcasting becoming a propaganda tool for the great powers' competition during the Cold War, and the media becoming a weapon in political games, presenting characteristics of ideological confrontation; the third stage, during the military government's rule, the broadcasting technology was alienated into a tool to maintain the military government's regime, and people in Myanmar and those in exile in Myanmar and exile organizations conducted resistance through underground radio stations; the fourth stage focuses on the competition for communication sovereignty in the digital era. Facing technological alienation and spectrum crises, Myanmar seeks technological autonomy and digital cultural independence, striving to reconstruct the autonomous development path of the broadcasting system in the process of decolonization and digital transformation. This evolution trajectory not only reveals the complex aspects of technological politics in post-colonial countries but also provides a typical sample for the research on media sovereignty in global southern countries.

Keywords: Myanmar Radio Station; History and current situation; Communicating technology politics; Post-colonial countries

Myanmar, as one of the countries with the strictest media control in Southeast Asia, its broadcasting history is like an epic masterpiece with multiple layers of value, standing out in the global media development process. During the colonial period, Western colonizers used broadcasting as the core tool of cultural colonization. Through systematic implantation of language systems, program contents, and communication models, they restructured the political and cultural ecosystem of Myanmar. While constructing the colonial discourse system, they also shaped the early technical dependence and cultural mixture characteristics of Myanmar's broadcasting. This colonial imprint profoundly influenced the broadcasting language, program forms, and communication logic, forming the media structure foundation that persists to this day. During the Cold War, Myanmar was located in the gap between the two major camps, and broadcasting became an ideological propaganda weapon for countries like the United States and the Soviet Union, becoming the forefront of international political games. During the military government's monopoly period, the military regime controlled basic facilities, while nationalists resisted through underground radio stations, breaking the paradox of technological empowerment. In the digital age, with the popularization of technology and the extension of sovereignty to the digital space, Myanmar faces challenges such as spectrum control, online communication rights, and digital content production. The crisis of broadcasting sovereignty has become prominent, and national cultural independence and information security have become core propositions.

I. Introduction

(1) Research Value and Shortcomings of existing research

The study of the history of radio in Myanmar has many important values: First, the history of radio is rich in historical materials. Reviewing the history of radio in Myanmar is to review the social and historical process of Myanmar, and it can analyze the political, economic and cultural conditions of Myanmar in different periods from the different stages

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of the development of radio in Myanmar. The strict control of the news by the authorities in Myanmar has led to a special internal flow structure of information dissemination within the country, with the most effective way being through external broadcasting, and most of the content of external broadcasting news comes from within Myanmar; Second, the history of broadcasting is rich in cultural connotations. Broadcasting is an important medium for a country to disseminate its culture. Myanmar has a long and unique ethnic culture, and the content of Myanmar radio stations is centered on the inheritance and dissemination of Myanmar's ethnic culture, thereby promoting the exchange and integration of Myanmar's ethnic cultures. At the same time, Myanmar's radio culture is inevitably influenced by the infiltration of different cultures, and the history of Myanmar's radio can be used to explore the international influence and development of Myanmar's culture; Thirdly, the history of broadcasting has extensive international relations value. Broadcasting is a tool for a country to conduct international propaganda and diplomacy. During the years of international struggle, Myanmar's broadcasting also exerted influence in international public opinion and formed broadcasting diplomacy relations with other international radio stations. In addition, in the exchanges and cooperation of broadcasting technology with international radio stations, Myanmar's broadcasting has extensive connections with other countries.

At present, there are obvious limitations in academic research on the history of Myanmar's broadcasting. In recent years, there have been few studies on Myanmar's radio history in the domestic academic circle. However, most of the articles have explored the military government era, and the research subjects mainly focus on Myanmar's radio development policies, political control, social influence, etc., in the era of Myanmar's military and political history. There is a lack of research on Myanmar's radio history from the perspective of technical politics. However, technology is not only a tool and technical means for the development of broadcasting, but in the process of its interaction with politics, it has shaped the form, function and social influence of broadcasting. The development of radio technology from amplitude modulation to frequency modulation and then to digital broadcasting has broadened and enriched the spatial range and signal strength of sound transmission and has also had a huge impact on radio content, media dissemination and listeners' listening habits. At the same time, the development of broadcasting technology and the direction of its selection and use were also restricted and directed by politics, so what kind of technology was chosen or promoted in Myanmar during the military government era was often what was needed for the military government's political propaganda and social control. The current research lacks a comprehensive and systematic study of the technopolitical role of Myanmar's broadcasting history in its development process from a technopolitical perspective and thus cannot present a clear picture of the entire history of Myanmar's broadcasting.

(2) Theoretical Framework

This study mainly employs historical research methods. By consulting official publications, news reports, academic books, memoirs and other materials, it comprehensively reviews the development history of radio stations in Myanmar. Combined with the theory of communication politics and economy, it analyzes various political, economic and social factors in the development process of radio in Myanmar from the political, economic and social perspectives. From a technical and social perspective, discuss the impact of the introduction, development and application of broadcasting technology on Myanmar's society, politics and culture, as well as the obstructive or promoting effects of the social environment on the development of broadcasting.

Based on the recognition of the unique value of the history of broadcasting in Myanmar and the deficiencies of existing research, this study, based on the value of the history of broadcasting in Myanmar and reflecting on the imbalance of existing research, establishes a comprehensive theoretical framework of the history of broadcasting development in Myanmar from the perspective of "technopolitics", and attempts to take technopolitics as the perspective, Introducing the historical period-based analysis of the development of media technology, this study explores the historical period characteristics and social influence laws of the interaction between technology and political systems in the development of broadcasting technology in Myanmar during the colonial period, the Cold War period, and the digital period.

During the colonial period, explore the use of broadcasting technology by colonial authorities, patterns, strategies and practices for consolidating colonial rule and cultural infiltration, and the reception, conflict and confrontation of colonial broadcasting technology and content by the local society; During the Cold War, explore the strategies, models, means of major powers using broadcasting technology for propaganda and the response of Myanmar society, and the use of broadcasting technology by Myanmar's domestic political forces to gain a voice in international competition; In the digital age, the influence of political elements and political decisions in the digital space on the introduction, development and application of broadcasting technology in Myanmar, the introduction, development and application of broadcasting technology on Myanmar's digital sovereignty and the protection of Myanmar's broadcasting culture.

II. Colonial Technology Transplantation and the Construction of Broadcasting System Dependence (1938-1948)

(1) The introduction of broadcasting technology during the colonial period

Burma was completely reduced to a British colony in 1886. To protect the regime, the colonial government began to implement new press and publication policies, strengthening control over press and publication and restricting freedom of press and broadcasting. During colonial rule, the development of the media industry in Myanmar was

characterized by "vigorous development by the people and violent control by the government."³ Radio stations became a means for Britain to disseminate colonial culture, colonial policies and values, with the aim of promoting and expanding Britain's cultural and political influence in Myanmar through English programmes, news, propaganda, etc.

⁴The introduction of Burmese radio in 1938 also changed the country's communication pattern. Before that, information dissemination in Burma was mainly carried out through traditional forms such as oral transmission, newspapers, and leaflets. Radio made the dissemination of information faster and wider, and could reach a wider audience. To some extent, this had an impact on social mobilization and organization in Burma. For example, colonial authorities could use radio to convey information such as labor mobilization and public health to the people.

(2) Dependent features of the broadcasting system

The broadcasting system in Myanmar showed obvious dependence during this period. Technically, Myanmar's broadcasting technology and equipment all come from Britain, from the construction of radio stations to the purchase of equipment and to the daily maintenance, all require the participation of British broadcasting technology. This reliance on technology has led to a lack of independence in the development of Myanmar Broadcasting, preventing it from making technological innovations based on its own needs. In terms of content, the broadcasts mainly focus on British culture and colonialist policies. Apart from the English programs, there are few local ethnic cultures and social conditions in Myanmar. To some extent, this restricts the dissemination and development of Myanmar's own ethnic culture, deepens the cultural identity of the Myanmar people towards colonialism, and is not conducive to the emergence and awakening of Myanmar's national consciousness. In terms of institutional management, the radio station was directly managed by the British colonial authorities, and the positions held by Burmese people in the broadcasting organization were mostly of lower status, lacking decision-making and management authority.⁵ This management system further consolidated the dependent status of radio, making it a tool of colonial rule rather than a medium for the development of Burmese society.

(3) Nationalist Struggles and the Use of Radio

The gradual awakening of Burmese nationalist consciousness has also drawn the attention of Burmese nationalists. Some Burmese nationalists have attempted to use the radio to convey and promote nationalist ideas, and some nationalist groups have used underground channels to broadcast anti-colonialist content through the radio, calling on the people to unite and fight for Myanmar's national independence.⁶ For instance, they use the radio to talk about Myanmar's history and culture and the deeds of national heroes in an attempt to inspire the people's national consciousness, national spirit and patriotic enthusiasm. Of course, nationalists' propaganda campaigns using the radio were suppressed, suppressed and restricted by the British colonial authorities. The colonial authorities strengthened their control over radio stations, and strictly controlled the broadcasting of "illegal" content by radio stations. Nationalists, in order to promote their nationalist ideas, have to seek alternative opportunities and channels, such as publishing underground newspapers, using religious sites, various gatherings and other forms to broadcast and promote their nationalist ideas.

III. Radio Diplomacy in the Cold War Context (1948-1988)

(1) The diplomatic Role of Radio in Myanmar in the Cold War Context

Burma declared independence in 1948 and became a sovereign state. Myanmar remained neutral in its Cold War diplomacy, and Myanmar radio was a powerful propaganda tool for the country's diplomacy during that period.⁷ Myanmar Radio reports on Myanmar's neutral foreign policy, peace vision and national image to neighboring countries and the international community by broadcasting multilingual programs. In its diplomatic propaganda, Myanmar Radio emphasizes Myanmar's willingness to engage in friendly cooperation with countries around the world and its commitment to non-alliance and non-intervention; In the field of broadcasting, Myanmar Radio also pays attention to reporting on international developments, reflecting Myanmar's attitude and position on diplomatic issues and enhancing the country's influence in international public opinion. In regional affairs, Myanmar Radio conducts broadcasting exchanges with neighboring radio stations to promote regional cooperation and cultural identity, and carries out program exchange activities in the process of broadcasting exchanges with neighboring countries such as Thailand and India.

(2) The transnational trajectory of Myanmar's broadcasting technology cooperation: Technology transfer in geopolitical waves

The history of broadcasting technology development in Myanmar has always been closely intertwined with geopolitical games. From colonial legacies to the digital revolution, the radio waves of this Southeast Asian country echo the sounds of international technological competition and cooperation of different eras.

In 1954, the government of Myanmar reached the Japan-Myanmar Compensation and Economic Cooperation Agreement and the Japan-Myanmar Peace Treaty with Japan, making it the first Southeast Asian country to reach a compensation agreement with Japan after the war. Myanmar demanded \$2.5 billion in compensation from Japan. After repeated negotiations between the two countries, Japan finally agreed to provide Myanmar with \$20 million worth of labor and Japanese supplies each year for 10 consecutive years. In addition, the two countries also signed a detailed treaty on post-war economic cooperation. Myanmar was the first Southeast Asian country to reach a compensation

agreement with Japan, which was of great significance to Japan as it opened the door to diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian countries and provided conditions for Japan's economic expansion into Southeast Asia.⁸ Tokyo's team of technical experts stayed in Myanmar for three years and trained Myanmar's first local broadcasting engineers, many of whom later became technical backbones of the national broadcasting bureau.

At present, Myanmar is trying to find a new position in regional technology integration. The history of Myanmar's broadcasting technology cooperation reflects the survival wisdom of a medium-sized country in technology politics, from colonial unipolar imports to ideological and technological bundles during the Cold War and to multi-faceted competition and cooperation during the democratization stage. As the era of 5G broadcasting and satellite direct connection arrives, this country, once bound by technology embargoes, is carefully balancing various technical standards in an attempt to forge its own path on the tightrope of digital sovereignty. Historical experience shows that every technological leap in Myanmar's broadcasting system has never been a mere technological choice, but a realistic script written by both geopolitics and the technological generation gap.

(3) The Impact of Domestic political Changes on Broadcasting

During this period, the internal political environment in Myanmar has undergone significant changes. From the U Nu government to the rise of the Nai Win military government, there were huge changes in Myanmar's political system and social environment, which had a significant impact on the broadcasting industry. During the U Nu administration, Myanmar practiced parliamentary democracy and broadcasting was relatively free, allowing for a certain degree of coverage of voices from different social classes. Besides promoting government policies, there could also be some critical remarks. But with the rise of the military regime in Naywin, Myanmar implemented a "new policy," which imposed a strict control system on the media, and radio stations were included in the scope of national propaganda, becoming a tool for the government to disseminate policies and ideas.⁹ The military government's strict censorship of broadcast content, control of the news, and restrictions on free reporting and diverse speech. The radio programs are mainly focused on nation-building, socialism and national unity, in order to unify the national image and social values.

IV. Media Monopoly and Technological Alienation during the Military Government Period (1988-2010)

(1) The military government's monopoly control over radio media

In 1988, another military coup occurred in Myanmar, and the military government regained monopoly control of the broadcasting media, believing that broadcasting could maintain the security of the country and the stability of the regime. Therefore, the Myanmar Radio station was made public, the ownership and operation rights of the broadcasting media were strictly controlled. The military government established a broadcasting administration, which set up broadcasting policies based on the government's proposed guidelines and standards, and required that all broadcasting programs must undergo strict censorship and be in line with the state's position, viewpoint and ideological requirements.¹⁰ The task of the radio station is to publicize the military government's policies and relevant laws, regulations and social development achievements, and to educate the public about patriotism and national unity through the broadcasting of radio programs. The monopoly control of radio has made the media present a single voice and a single message. The public cannot learn about multiple political views and social issues through radio and cannot guarantee people's right to know and freedom of speech.

(2) The alienation of broadcasting technology

Broadcasting technology during the military government was supposed to serve the public utility of information transmission, but it was alienated into a tool for maintaining the military government's regime. The military government, on the one hand, maintained its exclusive control over broadcasting by upgrading technology, empowering official ideology with technology: using digital FM technology to increase the coverage of broadcasting signals, allowing official ideology to reach remote areas through broadcasting; Using shortwave technology to build a transnational network of radio broadcasts, it conducts "psychological warfare" information attacks in areas controlled by ethnic minority armed groups that have intersecting borders with Myanmar.¹¹ The alienation of technology is also manifested in the "duality" of the use of technology in broadcasting equipment. Imported equipment improves the efficiency of broadcasting transmission, but foreign technical workers need to be hired for technical support in order to maintain it, leaving Myanmar's broadcasting system technically subordinate to foreign control for a long time.

In addition, the production of broadcast content has been completely instrumentalized. The military government's broadcast control system pre-installed program formats and broadcast control software, making local broadcasts a "replicator" of central information, reducing the space for local cultural programs to less than 10%, squeezing out the space for the cultural information section of the broadcast, and replacing the functions of the cultural section.¹² Technological alienation not only cuts off the connection between broadcasting and people's society, but also causes the public to be increasingly distant from the central broadcasting media.

(3) Underground broadcasting and resistance from the people

Although there are many restrictions, the regulation of radio and television is actually looser than that of print media. Myanmar residents can listen to foreign radio stations such as the Voice of America and the BBC via shortwave to get news both at home and abroad; In addition, there are still many Burmese viewers who have illegally installed satellite channel receivers.¹³ During the Burmese civil war, under the oppressive government rule, Burmese people and exile

groups in Myanmar and in exile were able to resist through underground radio stations. In the 1990s, some anti-military government radio stations such as "Voice of the People of Democracy in Burma" and civilian intelligence radio stations used local journalists to privately transmit audio and video to the headquarters to report the real situation in Myanmar to the world.¹⁴ The resistance practices of underground radio stations profoundly illustrate the paradox of technological empowerment, which, despite the military regime's control of infrastructure, cannot completely curb the space for technological resistance created by technological mobility.

V. Spectrum Scramble and Communication Sovereignty Crisis in the Digital Age (2010-2025)

(1) Digital Transformation and Spectrum Resource Competition

The Internet in Myanmar started and developed rather slowly. As of 2009, there were nearly 110,000 Internet users in Myanmar, about 0.2 percent of the country's population, and Internet access was expensive. However, the military government still spared no effort in controlling the Internet.¹⁵ After the coup, the military government of Myanmar, in the name of "national security", deprived private radio stations of FM segments and converted them into military radio communications; Civilian groups privately occupied frequencies in the form of open-source radio (software-defined radio) to create civilian radio stations; Some of Myanmar's "civilian armed groups" are also competing for their own spectrum. This struggle also reflects a fight between spreading sovereignty and grassroots empowerment.¹⁶ As the influence of the Internet and new media continues to grow, the means by which journalists fight have also changed. More and more journalists are making use of the Internet and new media platforms. Some ordinary citizens have successfully broken through the authorities' blockade of news by filming events with their mobile phones and posting them online, or by blogging what they have seen and heard, to let the world know what is happening in Myanmar.

(2) Geopolitical and communication sovereignty dilemmas

Myanmar is engaged in a "digital game", and there is a difficult dilemma for the government in terms of how to achieve communication sovereignty, which leads to its inability to independently control its means and paths of communication. Myanmar's construction of a terrestrial digital television network (DTMB) and the support of European and American non-governmental organizations for local media radio stations to establish an independent satellite digital broadcasting system (DAB+) to form a "decentralized" communication network reflect the lack of digital sovereignty in Myanmar behind the technical standards. According to statistics, 90 percent of Myanmar's broadcasting equipment was imported from abroad in 2023, with core codes and operation and maintenance coming from foreign institutions.¹⁷ The country's political unrest and armed conflicts in recent years have made independent media an important window for the international community to see through the local situation.

In summary, the history of broadcasting in Myanmar has gone through four periods: the period of colonial technology transplantation and the construction of the broadcasting system under its dependence, the broadcasting diplomacy during the Cold War era, the media monopoly and technological alienation during the military government period, and the period of spectrum competition and the crisis of communication sovereignty in the digital age. The history of broadcasting in Myanmar is as shown in the following diagram:

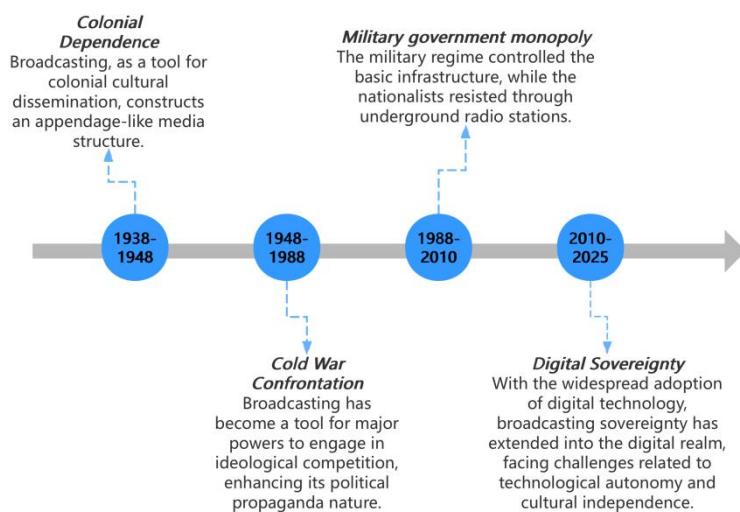


Chart 1 History of Broadcasting Development in Myanmar

VI. Theoretical Implications: Communication Technology Politics in Postcolonial Countries

The Myanmar case reveals the triple paradox of post-colonial communication technology:

The first is the dilemma of technology dependency and sovereignty construction: from the introduction of technology during the imperial colonial period to the contemporary competition for digital tabulation rights, Myanmar has been in a cycle of "introduction - dependency - re-introduction", and the lack of technological autonomy has led to the virtualization of communication sovereignty. The second is the paradox between instrumental rationality and public value: broadcasting technology is instrumentalized by the regime, while its mobility leaves a channel available for the confrontation movement, revealing the game of multiple powers in the construction of a technological society. Finally, there is the tension between geopolitics and local practice: The technological cooperation during the Cold War and the competition for digital standards today both show that within the technological system, it is difficult to see the existence of the technological free will of postcolonial countries free from the constraints of great power politics, and the growth of local technology faces structural pressure and constraints.

Regarding the study of the communication of technology and politics, the future exploration urgently needs to break away from the "technological determinism", politicize the communication of technology from the scientific, political and technological perspectives, and pay more attention to the shift of communication politics from the grassroots politics of "backward countries" to technological substitution behaviors - namely, community radio and encrypted broadcasting in countries like Myanmar. These may offer new ideas for post-colonial countries to solve the problem of technological hegemony.

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