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**Myanmar-China Asymmetrical Relations: The Case Study of Myitsone
Hydropower Dam Project through the Lens of Small Power's Strategies**

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Doctoral Dissertation

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMRDP	- All Mon Regional Nationality Democracy Party
ASEAN	-Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BANCA	- Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association
BIA	-Biological Impact Assessment
BSPP	-Burma Socialist Programme Party
CISPDR	- Changjiang Institute of Survey, Planning, Design and Research
CPB	-Communist Party of Burma
CPC	-Communist Party of China
CPI	- China Power Investment Corporation
CPPCC	-Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress
EAO	-Ethnic Armed Organizations
EIA	-Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	-European Union
FDI	-Foreign Direct Investment
KIO	-Kachin Independence Organization
NDF	-National Democratic Force
NLD	-National League for Democracy
NUP	- National Unity Party
OSCE	-Organization for Security and Cooperation
PSRD	-Press Scrutiny and Registration Division
RNDP	- Rakhine Nationality Democracy Party
SIA	-Social Impact Assessment
SIPRI	- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SNDP	- Shan Nationality Democracy Party
SLORC	-State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	-State Peace and Development Council
WWF	-World Wildlife Fund
UNGA	-United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	-United States Security Council

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Chapter (1)

Introduction

1.1.The Research Problem

In history, most of the theorists have emphasized international relations on the analysis of great powers' competition and the relations between great powers, particularly in Western countries. Though small nations are important components in international relations, the role of small country (weak power) has less attention in international relations. Literature about the role of big powers in international relations is plentiful, and the role of small powers has been marginally explored (Sweijts, 2010).

In general, international politics has always been seen as a game played by the big powers and a game in which the lesser powers have no substantial say. Then it assumes that great powers have both constitutive power and distributive power in which they determine the rules of the game, fight the wars, and decide who gets what, over the heads of the other powers (Sweijts, 2010, p. 2). There is also a widespread assumption that the global international system and its regional subsystems are formed primarily by interactions among greater states, which pursue their national interests, while smaller states must accept the resulting balance of power and imposed rules of the game (Efremova, 2019, p. 101).

Kenneth Waltz said that international politics is based on great powers (Waltz, 1979, p. 73). Jesse and Dreyer noted that “the great powers establish not only the norms and structures of the international system, but also the regional security hierarchies” (Jesse & Dreyer, 2016, p. 3). According to Jaquet (1971), “a small state is a state that is neither on a global nor regional scale able to impose its political will or protect its national interest by exerting power politics” (Jaquet, 1971; Vaicekauskaitė, 2017, p. 8). At the same time, small powers are characterized as helpless pawns in the grand schemes of the great powers. Small states are characterized as “a weaker part in an asymmetric relationship, which is unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on its own” (Archer, Bailes & Wivel, 2014).

However, in the international system, a large proportion of countries are small countries. Small countries, as measured by the size of military power, population, and size, are more vulnerable than other nations in the international system. Despite their vulnerability, small countries are much more likely to take part in global activities that can bring them some

significant roles in the international arena. Nonetheless, small powers also play a role in international politics (Myoe, 2011).

The power asymmetry between small and great powers cannot be defined, as it leads to absolute subjection of the weaker side to the stronger one. According to Womack (2015),

Asymmetric relationships are by definition unequal, but they are far from constituting a simple pecking order of domination. An asymmetric relationship is one in which the smaller side is significantly more exposed to interactions than the larger side because of the disparity of capabilities, and yet the larger is not able to dictate unilaterally the terms of the relationship.” (Womack, 2015, p. 3)

Despite the variance of power in an asymmetric relationship, the material power differential does not always produce the expected outcome (Aspinwall & Riech, 2016), while the material asymmetries may be partially offset by disparities in attention, political will, and perceptions, with real effects for both agendas and outcomes (Womack, 2016; Long, 2017). In the asymmetric relations, it is more relevant to define the “preponderant power” and the “hypo-power” than the usage of the great and small countries because Womack identified that asymmetric remains an ingrained feature of the relationship in which one party is preponderant while the other is comparably deficient in specified, relevant resources (Long, 2017, p. 4). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a hypo-power as a power “in a lower degree” without necessarily being subordinated (Long, p. 4). Womack also noted that “asymmetric relationships are normally characterized not only by a disparity of resources but also by mutual if sometimes implicit acknowledgement of autonomy. They are negotiated relationships, not simply ones of demand and evasion” (Womack, 2016).

The research of Womack has proved that small powers are not the puppet of big powers as well as ‘power is not a determinant factor’ in international relations. Moreover, Womack’s ‘asymmetrical theory of international relations’ has already explained that the asymmetrical relations can be managed by both small and big sides, and it cannot be controlled only by the big power.

According to Womack, the greater size and strength of the bigger state cannot always easily dominate the smaller ones. If power can always decide everything, there would be no small states in the world because there were a lot of wars between stronger and weaker states in history. Although the states are in the situation of asymmetrical politics, not every sector is

concluded in asymmetry in the way that each country has its relative strength and relative vulnerability, regardless of their power discrepancy. The stronger power cannot absolutely eliminate the weaker ones by using its relative power in an asymmetrical relationship because the relative power does not denote absolute power. He claims that relative power does not mean absolute power or victory. It means that the stronger side cannot always impose its will on the weaker side. So, it must be managed by both sides since the asymmetrical relationship cannot be fully solved by the use of force. In this sense, how a small power can manage its asymmetrical relations with a great power neighbor. This is research problem (1).

The small and great powers relations are noted as the unchanging relationship in which small states are viewed as ‘power consumers’ while great powers are regarded as ‘power suppliers’ and the bandwagoning or the cooperation of small countries with great powers stands for the small’s consuming common goods (including international and domestic stability and security) provided by the great ones (Amstrup, 1976, p. 170 & Anis, 2015, p.532). Moreover, small powers choose the balancing (confrontation/ conflict) against the great power. Balancing and bandwagoning strategies are significant strategies to reflect the behavior of small powers in small-great power relations. To the analysis of the literature review in Chapter (2), small powers have used these two strategies not only in war-prone period but also in the peaceful times. For small powers, there are different reasons why a small power utilizes these strategies.

In asymmetric politics, the weaker power never attempts to use confrontation methods with the stronger powers except in a condition in which the stronger state falls into its constraints. However, it does not mean that the small power must have always been influenced by the bigger power. As the asymmetrical international relations theory has proved that the power of greater states does not imply absolute victory over smaller states, small states are no longer the puppets or client states of the bigger powers. Thus, small states can tackle asymmetrical relations by handling different strategies to achieve their own national interests. Even though they cannot afford to counter influence their great neighbor or hegemonic power, they may have the ability to change the behavior of those states to a certain extent.

Regarding this relationship, the weaker sides mostly employ two prominent strategies—such as balancing, bandwagoning, (conflict/confrontation or cooperation)—that have been influencing international relations for a long time. According to the literature on international relations, small countries utilize either confrontation or cooperation methods in relations with

great powers. The confrontation method is mostly applied by small countries even when they don't have another option except choosing this strategy. But this is so dangerous for small states, because their lack of capacity is incomparable to the rival great power's capability. On the other hand, the price of cooperation is too risky for small powers to totally rely on the big powers because the former's autonomy can be threatened in any circumstance. On top of that, the second research problem coherently and consistently comes out: 'How does a small power cooperative with a big power without deteriorating its sovereignty, by protecting its national interest, and by avoiding confrontation with the big power, as well as by preserving the bilateral relations between them?'

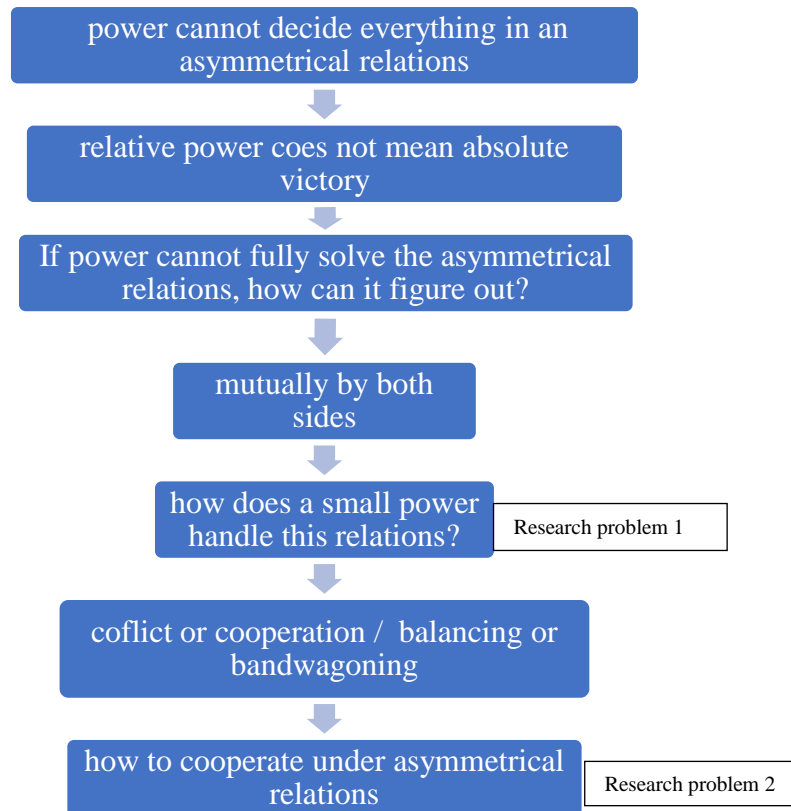


Figure 1.1. Research problem

The next section will explain the relevance of the case selection and also raise the research question to solve the research problems.

1.2. The Subject of Analysis

The research tends to emphasize the Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations as the heart of

the study. Within the distinct feature of asymmetrical nature between the two countries, the Sino-Myanmar relations is the excellent choice to exemplify the small-great power relations. Myanmar-China relations are discernible asymmetrical relationship due to the power disparity between the two countries. Being neighboring countries, the relations between the two countries have not always been peaceful but have always been robust. Myanmar is not geographically too small or is not regarded as a small state in terms of its population. It is the second-largest country in Southeast Asia, after Indonesia, and is the biggest country in mainland Southeast Asia. Thus, it is more suitable to refer to Myanmar as a “small power” than a “small state” due to its lack of state capability. However, being stuck between its two giant neighbors, China and India, Myanmar is sometimes represented as a small country in some literature. On the other hand, there are no clear-cut lines for smallness that entail the definition dilemma for small countries (Long, 2017, p. 145). Approaching the lens of an asymmetrical point of view, the two countries have undoubtedly found an imbalance economically, militarily, diplomatically, and institutionally.

Then the research pays special attention to the ‘Irrawaddy’/ ‘Ayeyarwady Myitsone Hydropower Dam Project (later refers to as ‘Myitsone Dam Project) as a case study. As mentioned above, the two countries have huge power disparity and Myanmar’s dependence on China is so asymmetrical. When the military government took power in Myanmar in 1988, the two countries had closer economic, political, and military relations than had previously existed. Because of human rights violations by the military government and the brutal suppression of pro-democracy movements, it faced a lot of sanctions imposed by the West, especially by the United States. As an isolated country, China became the major consumer of Myanmar’s abundant natural resources, such as teak, jade, oil, and gas, and Chinese influence has been growing significantly. Myanmar and China have huge differences in capacity and their geographic proximity can inevitably push the asymmetrical relations to intensify. As Myanmar’s dependence on China was increasing, the Chinese influence in Myanmar was immensely exacerbated. Myanmar was even attributed as the client or puppet state of China by the international community, although the Myanmar government had never agreed with that designation.

Under this situation, the unexpected watershed turned out in Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations in 2011 with the unilateral suspension of the Myitsone dam project by the Myanmar government without any intimation to its Chinese counterpart. The Myitsone Dam

Project was a joint venture between the Myanmar government and a Chinese state-owned company as well as it was an important hydropower dam project for China too. The agreement for the dam project was signed during Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping's visit to Naypyidaw in 2009. The electricity generated from the project was aimed to send the landlord to Yunnan province of China which played a pivotal role in China's 'Going Out Strategy. The dam will be the fifteenth-largest hydropower dam in the world and China's largest hydropower project abroad if the construction is finished.

The interesting point was that the Myanmar government could well maintain close and cordial relations with China until the president declared the unilateral suspension of the project. Beijing never anticipated Naypyidaw's miracle response against China. The Myitsone Dam can be regarded as the bargaining strength of Myanmar because the project is significant for China.

Another credible point could be found after the dam issue which resulted in a vigorous shift in Myanmar-China relations from several points of view. After that stunning event, there are many progressive changes in Myanmar-China relations that were contrary to the international estimation that bilateral relations were seriously devastated. Myanmar could enjoy favorable positions after the dam issue, and it could say that the bilateral relations evolved a U-turn change contrary to the previous time. This was the unexpected response from China to its less powerful small nation with its great dependence on it.

In this sense, it looks like the small power grasps an opportunity by using its bargaining strength to counterbalance or counter-influence the great power, even in asymmetrical relations. Thus, the Myitsone Hydropower Dam issue is a unique example of identifying how the asymmetrical relationship can be changed in favor of the smaller power despite power disparity with the greater power. After seeing the vigorous changes of great power China, the following research question comes out as an appropriate question.

1.3. Research Question and the Novelty of the Study

What tactics and strategies does Myanmar use to increase its room for maneuver in its asymmetric relationship with China?

Thus, the research will find out the strategies of Myanmar in relation to its great power neighbor China expanding its role in an asymmetric relationship. In fact, Myanmar possesses few chances to counterbalance or counter-influence on its great power neighbor due to the

asymmetrical situation. There is less tendency to turn asymmetry into symmetry because the inequality of capability is huge between Myanmar and China.

In the Myitsone dam issue, the Myanmar government's policy manipulation is well-worth studying because the bilateral cooperation was still improving after the dam issue. Thus, it seems that Myanmar never gives up its cooperation with China. On the other hand, the halt of the dam construction by Myanmar without prior notice to China sounds like Myanmar's disrespect to Beijing. But why Beijing does not shift its antagonistic relations toward Myanmar, instead, it tries to change its great power behavior toward its small-power neighbor. Based on these facts, the research shows its novelty in small-great power relations from the perspective of small power's strategy to great power, in this case, Myanmar's strategy to China.

At a glance at the international arena, China's grand strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an attractive project for small countries that can expect the development of participating countries. With the close cooperation in the huge project, the small countries should consider both the risk and opportunities coming from bilateral asymmetric cooperation. The lack of negligence of corporate social responsibility of Chinese enterprises and the unfair distribution of profits has created many problems. The small powers' lack of financial sources, poor governance, and domestic constraints can push these countries into the "debt trap" of China and can even lead to more complex domestic conflicts. Thus, small powers should well expect possible impediments and should seek excellent strategies to meet the fruitful advantages of foreign investments. This research also aims to give valuable points for small powers to handle their relationship with China to protect themselves from asymmetrical cooperation.

Based on these important facts, the research chooses Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations as the relevant subject of analysis by doing the case study of the 'Myitsone Dam issue' which was a critical issue in bilateral relations. The research tries to prove that small powers have opportunities to change the behavior of great powers even under the extreme asymmetric relationship. By doing so, the research will investigate the Myanmar government's adroitness to manipulate its tactics and strategy to achieve its intended political purpose in a general cooperative manner by avoiding confrontation. The result hopes to highlight the linkage of Myanmar's tactical moves to strategic achievement, and then finally to the goal of its political triumph even being the asymmetrical relations with China. The research hopes to strongly contribute to the important empirical gap between small and great power relations, especially in

asymmetric relations. Finally, this research will also identify how the behavioral changes of China impact Myanmar.

1.4.Hypotheses

The research will investigate two main hypotheses:

- (1) The behaviors of small powers can be identified between a tactical and strategic level in an asymmetric relationship.
- (2) Small powers are capable of changing the behavior of big powers in different ways besides by using balancing and bandwagoning strategies.

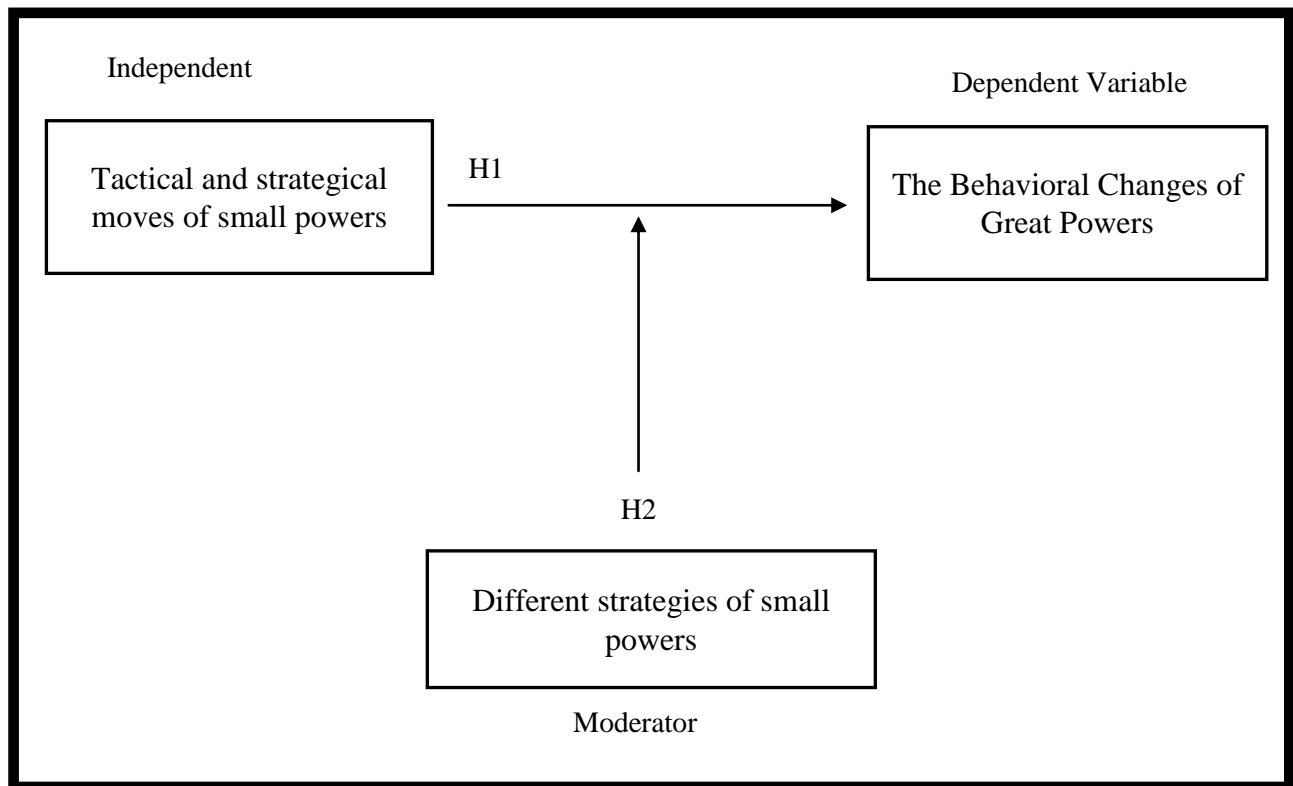


Figure 1.2. The Concept of Conceptual Framework

Hypothesis (1): The behaviors of small powers can be occasionally identified between a tactical and strategical level in an asymmetric relationship.

From the perspective of small powers' behavior, small countries use several tactics and strategies in handling their relations with great powers in the asymmetric relationship. In this sense, balancing and bandwagoning strategies are the traditional strategies of small powers among other strategies which are significant small powers' behaviors. During the period of world

wars and the cold war era, small powers prefer these two strategies to secure their survival. However, recent literature, it has found that small states use both strategies even in a peaceful time. They employ these strategies not only for sake of their own interest but also for the enhancement of mutual benefits. The previous lecturers have proved that small powers could do the behavioral changes of big powers by using these two significant strategies in favor of getting the former's interest. However, the literature has not discovered the small states' behaviors through tactical and strategical levels. Based on this point of view, the research wants to investigate if it is possible to identify the behavior of small powers between the tactical level and strategical level in an asymmetric relationship.

Hypothesis (2): Small powers are capable of changing the behavior of big powers by using different ways other than the balancing and bandwagoning strategies.

Small powers might need to employ lots of ways in manipulating relations with great powers apart from popular small powers' strategies. In this case, we can hope that the more effective the strategies of small powers, the more changes in the behavior of great powers. The second hypothesis will identify the different methods of small states in dealing with great powers. From both theoretical and empirical points of view, the small countries have preferred using the bandwagoning strategy or balancing strategy to the threatened great powers. Apart from using these prominent strategies, the research wants to investigate other supporting ways of a small power that can help to extend its room in relations with a powerful state. Then, the research will observe that a small state can use several methods to counterbalance the great neighbors or threatening power without deteriorating the existing relations apart from using balancing and bandwagoning strategies. These methods may act as supporting roles in the small power's behavior. Literature of small-great powers relations have found that the effective use of its geostrategic locations, the initiative of new economic cooperation with the neighboring strong power and the international community, active participation in regional and international organizations, the establishment of more friendly relations with all countries at a regional and global level, and promotion of its reputation in international relations are brilliant channels of the small and less powerful countries to improve their rooms with the great powers. Based on these interesting factors, the research will also try to find out if Myanmar has used any of these methods or other new techniques to boost its centrality and to put pressure on China. With the

combination of both literature reviews and the case study, the research aims to prove the hypothesis (2).

1.5.Thesis Outline

To conclude, the thesis seeks to discover the tactics and strategies of small countries in asymmetrical relations with great powers in attempting to expand their rooms. In Chapter 2, the Literature Review introduces three parts. The first part explains the tactics and strategy. The second part presents the theory of the asymmetrical relation, which is the basic theoretical foundation of this research, and the third part examines other strategies used by small powers in international relations apart from the two prominent bandwagoning and balancing strategies. Chapter 3 presents the methodological choice of the research. Chapter 4 reveals the background of Sino-Myanmar relations to understand bilateral relations. It will also briefly explain Myanmar's foreign policy, which is the main pillar of the country's international relations strategy. Chapter 5 is the result section of the research analyzing the case study and the semi-structured interviews. After that, the discussion section follows Chapter 6, and the limitation of the research is in Chapter 7. Finally, the conclusion section comes as in Chapter 8.

Chapter (2)

Literature Review

2.1. Defining Strategy and Tactics

The term 'strategy' indirectly originated from the Greek word 'strategos' which means 'general'. According to Greek, the modern work 'strategy' would have been synonymous with 'general's knowledge' ('strategike episteme' in Greek) and 'general's wisdom' ('strategon sophin'). The term 'strategy' emerges from people's requirement to conquest their enemies, which means the strategy is unnecessary if there is no enemy. As the strategy derives from the Greeks, the term 'tactics' also comes from the same origin with the original meaning referring to 'order'. In this sense, the word 'order' implies the "ordering of formations on the battlefield." Horwath noted that the modern use of "strategic" and "tactical" developed from World War II in which "Strategic" relates to long-range aircraft and missiles meanwhile "tactical" has represented shorter-range aircraft and missiles. (Horwath, nd.) As 'strategy is the art of creating power' (Freedman, 2013) and effective strategy is vital for organizing power and winning a strategic contest (Goh & Prantl, 2022).

The word 'strategy' implies the endeavor 'to relate ends to means and it is the use of available resources to gain any objective'. In this case, the term 'resources' or the 'means' can be both tangible powers that may be utilized to acquire objectives and the various intangible factors that can impact on decision-maker (Smith, 2011). Strategy requires the assemblage and coordination of specified acts deliberately linked a manner designed to achieve a specific end or set of ends (Sklenka, 2007, p,3). To carry out an effective strategy, the specific acts which regarded as tactics are essential.

The terms 'strategy' and 'tactics' are enormously used in different sectors: politics, economics, military, and in public discourses. However, the definitions of these words are not much different. In the business realm, 'strategy' means the overall goals for a business by

defining the problems to be solved and who the customers are. It also refers to the things that the owners want to conduct at a high level. Meanwhile, tactics are the specific things to conduct to reach the goals that are planned in the strategy. Tactics are certain plans and resources that are used to achieve goals. In business, tactics can consist of marketing and sales plans, the team who will execute the plans, and any other partners and resources to work together depending on the situation. Moreover, tactics are actions, projects, or events, to reach a particular point or the desired end, whereas strategy is defined as a game plan, which can assist the organization in getting its mission and objectives. Tactics imply the moves that businesses adopt, to obtain a concrete outcome (“What is the difference between tactics and strategy,” nd).

The U.S. Army War College denotes strategy in two ways: "Conceptually, we define strategy as the relationship among ends, ways, and means". Alternatively, “Strategic art, broadly defined, is, therefore: The skillful formulation, coordination, and application of ends (objectives), ways (courses of action), and means (supporting resources) to promote and defend the national interests (as cited in Bartholomees, 2012)”.

Most of the definitions of strategy and tactics are from the military-oriented point of view. From the military point of view, tactics teach the use of armed forces in engagements, while strategy teaches the use of engagements to achieve the objectives of the war (Horwath, nd). Betts prescribed strategy as a plan for using the military to achieve political ends (Betts, 2000). In warfare, strategy and tactics are associated with each other referring that large-scale and small-scale planning to achieve military success. ‘Strategy may be defined as the general scheme of the conduct of a war, and tactics as the planning of means to achieve strategic objectives (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2022). According to Karl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist defined strategy as the planning of a whole campaign and tactics as the planning of a single battle (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2022).

Both strategy and tactics are equally important to achieve the goals. Sun Tzu, who was a Chinese military strategist, wrote that “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy are the noise before defeat.” Strategy and tactics work together as means to an end, and they are associated with each other. Strategy is defined as long-term goals with plans to achieve them. Meanwhile tactics are more specific plans and smaller steps within a shorter time frame along the way (Messineo, nd).

Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War*, also wrote that “All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved” (Laoyan, 2021). Tactics are visible because of their small actions, but the strategy can finally appear as the result of successful tactics. In deploying strategy and tactics, which should come first? In this case, Hughes noted that “strategy and tactics are best thought of as handmaidens, but if one must choose, it is probably more correct to say that tactics come first because they dictate the limits of strategy (Hughes, 1989, p.47).” Moreover, strategy is realized through tactics (Lukas, 2013).

In international relations, the role of strategies and tactics is prominent. Grand or national strategy is associated with actions at the national level (Bartholomees, 2012). Declaratory strategy is a kind of strategy that is used by states. “Declaratory strategy is what a nation says its strategy is. The declaratory strategy may or may not be the nation’s true strategy, and the nation may or may not believe it (Bartholomees, 2012).”

A strategy is an action plan that you will take in the future to achieve an end goal. Strategies help to define your long-term goals and how you go about achieving them. The tactics are the individual steps and actions that will get you there. (Laoyan, 2021)



Figure 2.1. The context of Tactics, Strategy and Goal

The tactics used by a country can be easily visible in the short term. Meanwhile, the strategy behind these tactics emerges as the final victory. In small-great powers relations, small powers should have serious attention to the tactics of the big powers. Sometimes, it may lead to a slap in the face of great powers, resulting the severe reactions from it that can damage the strategy set out by the small. To sum up, strategy means what you want to achieve, and tactics are the performances or activities of how you plan to get it. To achieve a specific goal, there can be necessary one or more tactics, while strategy is the overall plan. In another word, a strategy

can include several tactics whilst trying to reach an aim. While a tactical view is more focused on the present or near future, a strategic view has emphasized the future (Mutabazi, 2016).

In conclusion, both strategy and tactics are vital to materialize a specific goal. The two things do not exist separately, and they are in the same team to achieve a purpose. While strategy is long-term, tactics are short-term. While strategy intends for the future, tactics aim for the present. Strategy means the overall-plan meanwhile tactics refer to the specific shorter steps. Whilst strategy is possible at a high risk that is necessary to reach a destination or goal, tactics have low risks compared with strategy because of their small steps to support the strategy. Each tactic defines as the subject of strategy and needs properly organized action to obtain a precise end. Strategy is the combination of one or more tactics and an integrated plan to attain its objective. Without concrete plans which are called tactics, it is hard to reach the destination because there is no effective action in it. Likewise, tactics without a strategy will end up in aimless work. Therefore, it is essential to utilize both strategy and tactics to get balance in approaching the aim.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Numerous schools of geopolitics and international relations theory have recognized that the process of international politics and the behavior of states are affected by differences in scale. In geopolitics, this is primarily the neoclassical approach; in international relations theory, it is the Neoclassical, Marxist, and Constructivist schools. Neoclassical realism is a theoretical approach that belongs to the realist tradition in international relations theory, and it primarily aims at explaining the foreign policies of states by referring to both international and national (domestic) levels (Dawood, 2016). Neoclassical realism argues that ‘the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy are driven first and foremost by the country’s relative material power. Yet it contends that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and state structure’ (Rose, 2011). Geopolitical study or neoclassical geopolitics explains the impact of the geographical setting, filtered by the geopolitical agent’s perceptions and capacities, on foreign policy and, by extension, on international politics (Morgado, 2020, p. 151).

A common feature of these streams is that they analyze differences in size as (geostrategic) factors of influence (such as demographics, economic and military strength, etc.)

and the perceptions of policymakers and other geopolitical actors such as foreign policy advisors, but do not pay particular attention to foreign policy outcomes.

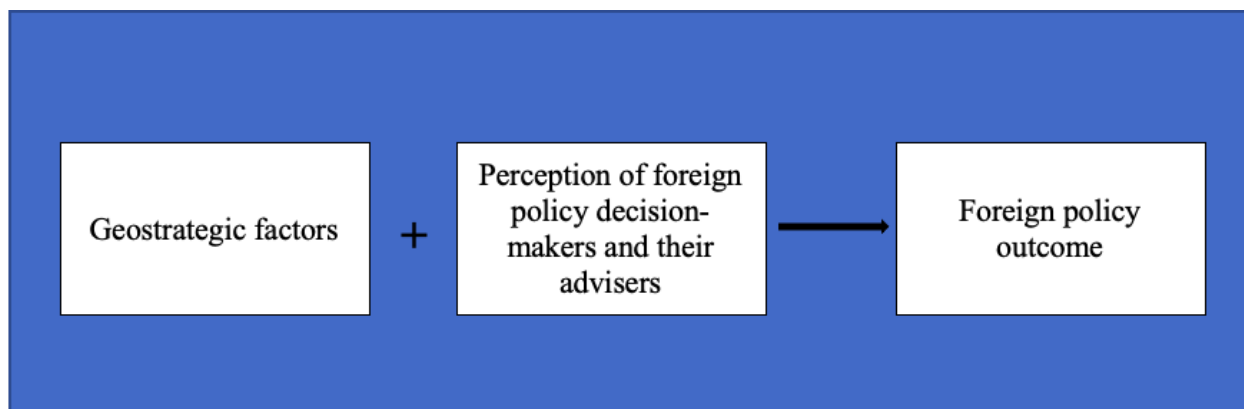


Figure 2.2. The process of foreign policy decision-making and strategy formation according to neoclassical geopolitics

My study takes differences in resources and their effects on policymakers as given. However, it is more concerned with what kinds of foreign policy responses result.

The international relations theories have immensely emphasized the great power politics and the war between great powers in terms of paying attention to the equal powers. Consequently, the role of small powers in international relations has been less important compared with the big powers. Elman (1995) bemoaned that IR theory had largely ignored small states. In the core understanding of the balance of power theory, states are major actors in international affairs, and the great powers are regarded as the most important players (Shiffrinson, 2020).

In addition, the contemporary international politics are constituted by asymmetric powers, thus most of international cooperation must be asymmetrical cooperation as well. Consequently, the asymmetrical cooperation causes the asymmetrical cooperative benefits, and it also results the asymmetrical conflicts between partner countries (Gu, 2018). If the asymmetrical relations lead to the zero-sum status, the small powers can suffer a huge predicament; meanwhile, the greater power might experience a slight impediment from the deteriorated relations. Thus, the small countries are more conscious and pay more attention than the big powers in their relations.

Generally, small states are defined depending on their vulnerability, or lack of capacities, in terms of population, economic strength, and military power as well as the state's public administration ability or governance. Most of the relations are asymmetric based on the differences of political, economic, and military capabilities that profoundly impact the small state's ability. Although the disparity in capacity is not the only cause, it serves as the most prominent factor in an asymmetric relationship. The divergent political system as well as the regime type can also be identified as sources of asymmetrical relationships (Womack, 2006). Although all asymmetrical relations are not solely between neighboring countries, geographical proximity means a wide range of contact and usually more intense relations (Womack, 2006).

For realists, power is the currency of international politics, and international politics is synonymous with power politics. (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 77). Although relative power is a key element not only in relations between small and great powers but also in all inter-state relations, it is not the only one determinant feature to decide the victory and failure in international relations, even in the war of asymmetric conflicts. Most of the literature on asymmetric conflicts has assumed the power discrepancy as to the main cause of the conflict (Bobić, 2019). Womack (2015) observed that "if the defeat of the small were easy in the good old days of barbarians and empires, many small states would not have survived." That is an incredible assumption that is consistent with the "theory of asymmetric conflict." If power implies victory in war, weak actors should rarely win against stronger opponents, especially when the gap in relative power is very large (Arreguín-Toft, 2001). However, stronger powers cannot always win the war by their relative power.

Besides, Mack (1975) argued that there are three key elements to explain how weak states win the asymmetric war: (1) relative power explains relative interests; (2) relative interests explain relative political vulnerability; and (3) relative political vulnerability explains why strong actors lose. According to Mack, the stronger powers have a lower interest in winning, as their survival is not at stake on this victory; on the other hand, the weaker sides have a high interest in winning, as their survival directly depends on this victory (Mack, 1975; Arreguín-Toft, 2001).

The power asymmetry explains the interest asymmetry: The greater the gap in relative power, the less resolute and hence more politically vulnerable strong actors are, and the more resolute and less politically vulnerable weak actors are. Big nations, therefore, lose small wars because frustrated publics (in democratic regimes) or countervailing elites (in

authoritarian regimes) force a withdrawal short of military victory. (Arreguín-Toft, 2001, p. 95)

Mack also introduced the concept of political vulnerability in the context of relative interest. He pointed out that a strong actor's low interests imply high political vulnerability; on the contrary, a weak actor's high interest implies low political vulnerability (Mack, 1975, p. 97). This political vulnerability also highlights how the stronger state loses to the weaker state. This concept was strongly demonstrated in the Vietnam War, in which the powerful U.S. military lost to the weaker Vietnamese force, proving that power is not the only core reason in core-periphery relations.

The priority of power in realism also takes serious repercussions on the analytic view of foreign policy behaviors of small countries. Realists see the physical power, especially military power, of countries as the major instrument to formulate a policy outside their borders. According to realists, only the great powers can develop an effective and influential foreign policy, while the small countries are unable to complete this action because they are non-actors in the international system because of a lack of that type of material power. Based on this assumption, realist theory views that the best behavior of small states is to play as satellite states to the great powers (Galal, 2020, p. 39). However, the fundamental shift in the structure of the international system from the bipolar system to the multi-polar system at the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s had already shown that realism was wrong with this notion. According to Galal, that change had a great effect on the states' foreign policy behaviors resulting from the shift of the concept of power turning from the material dimensions to non-material ones. As the consequence, small countries evolving after the dissolution of the Soviet Union have adopted an effective foreign policy by using non-material dimensions in a way that contradicts the theory of realism in international relations (Galal, 2020, p. 39). Thus, the small power's lack of material capability or tangible power in the international system cannot decide the small and great powers' relations, pushing the former as the pawn of the latter.

Generally, the literature of International Relations (IR) agrees that small states need a protecting power for their survival. Realists emphasize the "hard power competition and believe that the survival of small states relies on the military alliance with powerful states through bandwagoning (align itself through the most powerful state) or balancing (join coalitions against that state)" (Thorhallsson & Bailes, 2017). Consequently, shelter theory was formed to

understand and expect small state behavior. It assumes that the small states have certain disadvantages because of their smallness, and they need to compensate for such deficiencies by seeking shelter in allying with large states and joining international organizations (Thorhallsson, 2018). The shelter theory mainly highlights the point that small entities inevitably must require the stronger power's protection from three perspectives: to secure its survival through political shelter; to achieve direct economic assistance and help from external financial authority, a common market, and favorable market access through economic shelter; and to avoid isolation and social stagnation, and to overcome problems that come from a lack of native knowledge through social shelter (Thorhallsson, 2018). Thus, the shelter theory underlines the dependency of small states on stronger powers in terms of three different dimensions.

The mainstream IR theories mostly emphasize the great powers' behaviors based on great powers' rivalry and competition from the Western world. Brantly Womack presented the asymmetrical theory as a new model that tries to solve the effects of national disparities in international relations (Womack, 2006). According to Womack, disparity of power does not mean that the more powerful simply dominates the less powerful (Womack, 2004).

Regarding the assumption of power, there is a major difference between asymmetrical theory and realist theory. The asymmetrical theory of international relations does not assume that relative power implies control. It analyzes the relations of states with different capacities within a relatively stable matrix of international relations. The asymmetrical theory acknowledges that a disparity of power and capability between states creates real differences of perception and relative interest. According to Womack, the basic idea of the theory concentrates on two major factors. The first is that the disparities between states can create fundamental differences of perspectives between the stronger power and the weaker power. Then the differences of perspectives produce structural misperceptions of the other's intentions and can lead to a vicious circle of misunderstandings that can culminate in conflict. Then, the second major point highlights that the more powerful countries usually cannot impose their will on the less powerful countries. The latter point can be regarded as the opposite assumption of realist theory that prefers power as a state's survival. Womack's theory counters that asymmetric relationships remain problematic for the stronger side despite being a great power. Womack suggested that the strong do what is feasible (or cost-effective), while the weak do what they can. Womack's

suggestion is obviously contrary to the Melian dialogue's assertion of "the strong do what they can, while the weak suffer what they must" (Wassermann, 1947).

Regarding the misperception in bilateral asymmetrical relations derived from differences in capacities, misperception is possible in any relationship. In asymmetrical relations, it is important to consider that it is not a one-sided relation but sub-relations such as the "stronger to weaker" and "weaker to stronger." The discrepancies of capacities in an asymmetric relationship mean different stakes in the relationship. Then the different stakes imply different patterns of attention. Stronger and weaker powers will tempt the errors of over-attention and inattention by the misjudgment of each reality. The stronger part will tend toward errors of inattention in its behavior, while the weaker side will be more tempted by errors of over-attention (Womack, 2003, p. 100). Nevertheless, systemic stability can be won by the fulfillment of minimum expectations from both sides, such as deference and autonomy. Because of their disparities, attention asymmetry is inevitable in the relationship that leads to systemic misperceptions, but good leadership on both sides would try to avoid this misperception (Womack, 2004).

As patterns of attention are different in asymmetrical relations, relative status is also sensitive. In the bilateral asymmetrical relationship, the stronger state's objective is deference, while the weaker state's objective is acknowledgement. Brantly Womack noted that

Deference does not necessarily require submissive behavior. The minimum standard for deference is that the weaker side pursues its interests in a manner that is respectful of the stronger side's relative status. The latter does not need the respect for autonomy that acknowledgement implies because it does not feel that its autonomy can be endangered by the former alone. However, the stronger side does want the weaker part to be deferential because deference implies that the latter accepts the asymmetry of the relationship. (Womack, 2014, p. 97)

He does not claim that all differences of interest and attention, all misperception, or all conflicts are caused by asymmetry, even among asymmetrical members, but it can also be caused by regime change and ideological preference.

Managing the asymmetrical relations between countries with power disparities is not easy for either side. According to Womack (2004), there are two major techniques of management of asymmetry: to decrease the potential hot issues and to control an escalation of misperception.

The first one can be neutralized by using rhetoric that emphasizes common interest and by creating an expert mission to manage specific problem areas. To control the level of misperception, it is necessary to have diplomatic rituals based on mutual respect, membership in multilateral institutions, and simply the common sense of well-established relations. Womack also suggested that economic interdependence and cooperation in international organizations may be a solution to minimize the asymmetrical conflicts. By learning the asymmetrical politics between Vietnam and China, a variety of asymmetries are obvious: amorphous asymmetry, internal asymmetry, subjugated asymmetry, role asymmetry, disjunctive asymmetry, distracted asymmetry, dependent asymmetry, hostile asymmetry, and normalized asymmetry. Normalized asymmetry is the most remarkable stable, even though it cannot solve the problem of asymmetry, as demonstrated by the experience of these two countries. However, it can provide patterns of managing an asymmetrical relationship for mutual benefit. In bilateral asymmetrical relations, in both sides it is impossible to avoid the strength and risks of the relations. The one remarkable point is that no country is perfect in all types of national power (Womack, 2014).

In conclusion, the power disparity and the capacity difference between states should not be considered a determinant factor in the relationships between small and great powers. The asymmetrical relations are not the relations of superior and subordinate. According to Womack, states in asymmetrical relationships are usually viewed as similar actors, plus or minus in capacities, rather than as actors whose interests and perceptions are shaped by their relative position. The main feature of this relation is maintaining the reciprocity between defiance and autonomy of both sides. From the weaker actor's point of view, the stronger actor is expected to acknowledge its autonomy, while the more powerful hopes for deference on the part of the less powerful (Womack, 2003). From the theoretical point of view based on an argument of the asymmetrical theory of international relations, power is not the primary component to decide the failure and victory of a relationship. Small powers can manipulate different strategies to manage the asymmetrical relations and it is worth analyzing the strategies of small countries with great powers because of their persistence to survive in a competitive world.

2.3. Strategies of Small States

2.3.1. Balancing and Bandwagoning Strategies

The proponents of the traditional alliance theory state the small countries' strategies from the security point of view in which states intend to use two broad strategies when they face threatening powers. These strategies are the balancing (to align with weaker allies against the potential aggressor) or the bandwagoning (to align with the threatening power itself) (Živilė Marija Vaicekauskaitė, 2017). Balancing refers to “allying with others against prevailing threat” while “bandwagoning” refers to aligning with the source of anger. (Walt, 1987, p. 17, cited in Gunasekara 2015, p.213).

The term “bandwagoning” as a description of international alliance behavior first appeared in Kenneth Waltz's Theory of International Politics. In his structural model of balance-of-power theory, Waltz uses “bandwagoning” to serve as the opposite of balancing: bandwagoning refers to joining the stronger coalition, balancing means allying with the weaker side (as cited in Schweller, 1994, p.80). Later, Walt modifies these terms to be suitable with balance-of-threat theory: “When confronted by a significant external threat, states may either balance or bandwagon. To his definition, balancing is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat; bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger. By using these definitions, like Waltz, Walt also agrees to put these two concepts of balancing and bandwagoning in polar opposition: bandwagoning is meant to serve as the opposite of balancing (ibid, p, 80).

In the realist theory, bandwagoning can be described as two types:

- (1) Soft bandwagoning – modest or indirect support of a threatening or powerful state in order to optimize its security or protect from it.
- (2) Hard bandwagoning – full and open support of the most powerful state in order to protect materially or ideationally from it. (Massie, 2014)

When and why do the small powers choose to bandwagon? States align with a powerful coalition will support the aligned one to appease and attain some measure of security (Gunasekara, 2015). To the neo-realist view, the weaker states tend to bandwagon because the stronger powers pose the greater threat and/or the weaker states are too small to influence the distribution of power, even if they choose to balance. Accordingly, the international system forces small powers to choose bandwagoning as their security strategy; small states are helpless

to resist “systemic pressure,” and bandwagoning becomes a survival method in the anarchic world of great power competition (Myoe, 2011, p. 7).

Walt (1990) explored that there are three factors that cause small powers tend to use bandwagoning strategies.

First, the weaker the state is, the more likely it is to bandwagon in order to minimize potential costs of losing. Secondly, small states choose to bandwagon when allies are unavailable, and the state is directly threatened. Finally, states bandwagon in exchange for mutual benefits. (cited in Vaicekauskaitė, 2017, p. 11).

According to these definitions, bandwagoning can be also used as a profit-seeking strategy for small powers accompanied by the aim of mitigating the threats of potential adversary. In choosing bandwagoning strategy by a state, two distinct motives can be identified.

First, bandwagoning may be embraced as a form of appeasement. By aligning with the threatening state or coalition, the bandwagoner may hope to avoid an attack on himself by diverting it elsewhere. Second, a state may align with the dominant side in war in order to share the spoils of victory. (Walt, 1985, p. 8)

In system theory, bandwagoning is a form of positive feedback whilst the aim of balancing behavior is to prevent systemic disequilibrium or, when deterrence fails, to restore the balance. Thus, balancing is a form of negative feedback (Jervis, 1979, Schweller, 1994, p. 93). Schweller believes that bandwagoning behavior may enhance the prospects for a more durable peace referring two types of bandwagoning: “jackal” bandwagoning and “pilling on” bandwagoning.

“Just as the lion attracts jackals, a powerful revisionist state or coalition attracts opportunistic revisionist powers. The goal of “jackal bandwagoning” is profit. Specifically, revisionist states bandwagon to share in the spoils of victory. “Pilling on” bandwagoning occurs of a war has been determined. States typically bandwagon with the victor to claim an unearned share of the spoils. When this is the motive, pilling on is simply jackal bandwagoning that takes place at the end of the wars. Contrariwise, states may pile on because they fear the victors will punish them if they do not actively side against the losers. Whatever the motivation, either opportunity or fear, pilling on is a form of predatory buck-passing with regard to the winning coalition.” (Schweller, 1994, p. (93-95)

In his opinion, “jackal” bandwagoning, with a rising expansionist state or a coalition that seeks to overthrow the status quo, decrease system stability. On the contrary, Schweller underlines that “piling on” bandwagoning with the stronger status-quo coalition enhances system stability. Then, he denotes that all these forms of bandwagoning are inspired by the prospect of making gains and they includes costs and typically done in the expectation of gain (Schweller, 1994, p. 93). Unlike Walt’s opinion, Schweller argued that balancing and bandwagoning are not opposite behaviors though the motivation for each strategy is different from each other. He said that bandwagoning is commonly used in the hope of creating gains meanwhile balancing is done for security, and it always have costs (ibid, 106).

Walt and Kenneth Waltz also emphasize the domestic reasons why states choose bandwagoning: “states with illegitimate leaders, weak governmental institutions, and/or little ability to mobilize economic resources are weak states that are likely to bandwagon anyway” (as cited in Schweller, 1994). From this perspective, a country with poor state’s capability tends to choose bandwagoning strategy. According to international literature, there are at least two definitions to identify the bandwagoning strategy. The first definition said that bandwagoning is aligning with a threatening country to avoid being attacked by it (Walt, 1987, p. 17). The second expression of bandwagoning is “being on the winning side” in the hope of realizing economic gains (Schweller, 1994, pp. 72–107; Roy, 2005, p. 307).

In the past, the small countries in the world struggled with their survival in the competition between superpowers, especially in wartime. Thus, the first definition is appropriate to mention the previous era. Roy (2005) noted that the second definition of bandwagoning as “being on the winning side” would seem to include any case of a state making an effort to establish or maintain a favorable relationship with a strong country out of respect for the latter’s power and influence, in the hope that this relationship will open the door to future economic opportunities (Roy, 2005, p.307). In this interpretation, Roy presented the relationship between China and Southeast Asian countries in which he claimed that all the countries of Southeast Asia are bandwagoning with China to some degree based on the second interpretation. At the same time, he denoted that none of the Southeast Asian countries is bandwagoning with China under the first definition of aligning with a threatening state to avoid being attacked. In this case, Roy also explained several reasons for this assumption based on China’s behavior toward Southeast Asian countries and Beijing’s proclamation of “China will never seek hegemony”. The critical

point is that an assessment of whether a state is bandwagoning or not mainly depends on which of these two definitions is employed. Roy also wrote that the second interpretation of bandwagoning as profit-seeking is broad and divorced from security considerations, allowing for bandwagoning to be equated with economic cooperation (Roy, 2005).

Therefore, the choice of bandwagoning is also relevant for small countries not only for security reasons but also for economic ties. In the contemporary world, bandwagoning for profit-seeking or seeking mutual benefits may be more suitable in small-great powers' relations. With the changing international system after the cold war, the economic development of each country is more prioritized than security in comparison to the war-prone eras.

According to realism, there are two kinds of balancing: hard balancing and soft balancing.

- (1) Hard balancing – direct military opposition to the most powerful state in order to overthrow its hegemony
- (2) Soft balancing – non-offensive resistance to a threatening power's policies in order to constrain and/or influence it.

Hard balancing reached its peak in the Cold War when the two superpower-led blocs contested each other by means of establishing formal alliances and increasing arm buildups with the proliferation of nuclear weapons (Paul, 2018).

In accordance with the traditional balance of power theory, states join alliances as an attempt to balance against great powers to eschew the domination of stronger powers and to protect themselves from states or coalitions whose superior resources could pose a threat. States decide to balance for two core reasons.

First, states risk their own survival if they fail to curb a potential hegemon before it becomes too strong. To ally with the dominant power means placing one's trust in its continued benevolence. The safer strategy is to join with those who cannot readily dominate their allies, in order to avoid being dominated by those who can. Second, joining the more vulnerable side increases the new member's influence, because the weaker side has greater need for assistance. Joining the stronger side, by contrast, reduces the new member's influence (because it adds relatively less to the coalition) and leaves it vulnerable to the whims of its new partners. Alignment with the weaker side is thus the preferred choice. (Walt, 1985, p. 6)

Walt made refinement of balance-of-power theory to “balance-of-threat” theory. He assumes, like structural balance-of-power theorists, that states usually balance and rarely bandwagon. He differs from those theorists, however, in that he argues that “states do not align solely or even primarily in response to the distribution of capabilities.” According to Walt’s argument through the “balance-of-power” theory, alliance choices of states are pushed by imbalances of threat when one state or coalition is especially dangerous (Walt, 1988, p. 265).

According to balance of power theory, balancing can be characterized as two different types: internal balancing and external balancing. Balancing can be internal (military preparations and arms buildups directed at an obvious threat) or external (forging countervailing military alliances with other states against the threat) (Morrow, 1993). Internal balancing is an internal buildup of military capabilities and the economic and industrial foundations of military strength while external balancing is primarily the formation of alliances as blocking coalitions against a prospective aggressor, but it also includes territorial compensations or partitions for the purposes of redistributing the sources of power and, if necessary, threats of force, intervention, and even war (Paul, Wirtz & Fortmann, 2004).

There are also some opponents of the clarification about the relations between balance of power theory and soft balancing. Robert Art assumes that a state’s foreign policy strategy “determined by both purpose—the values it holds and the political choices it makes—and power—the capabilities it wields” (Art, 2010, p. 390). Art believes that this benchmark is ideal and underline the analytical meaning of the term soft balancing that is defined as a calculated, focused and nonmilitary strategy that may involve economic statecraft, institutional binding or exclusion, diplomatic entangling and political integration practiced in order to constrain and restrict an emerging power from pursuing its threatening policies (Saltzman, 2012, p. 132). Art’s definition of soft balancing brings to light the small power’s strategic choice of balancing strategy different from the previous perspective of the balance of power concept.

Pressman (2005) underlines that ‘soft balancing is a foreign policy theory of state action that explains why and how states respond to changes in the distribution of capabilities, that is, it is a theory of strategic choice rather than of systemic outcomes (Pressman, 2004, & Saltzman, 2012, p. 133). Thus, the goal of soft balancing is to enhance states’ security by restraining the emerging power and discouraging it from carrying out its over-reaching hegemonic aspirations rather than creating countervailing alliances or initiating arms races (Saltzman, 2012, p. 133).

Contrary to the traditional balance of power theory, Pape (2005) noted that soft balancing is based on the use of nonmilitary assets for the purpose of constraining and limiting the rising power's freedom of maneuver (Pape, 2005, p. 36). Rosecrance and Lo (1996) also noted that the aim of a soft-balancing strategy is not to alter the share of available capabilities or resources, but rather to curb the emerging power's behavior and deter it from further practicing hostile policies without turning to hard balancing, thus, military buildup or formal alliances are not necessarily the most appropriate remedies (Rosecrance and Lo, 1996, & Saltzman, 2012). Soft balancing by means of a foreign policy may embrace many strategies such as diplomatic coordination and entanglement, strategic non-cooperation, institutional building or bargaining and economic statecraft (Pape, 2005, p. 10, & Saltzman, 2012). The new approaches of balance power theory seem appropriate to the contemporary international relations for small-great power relations.

Balancing may include different levels of intensity. If a state chooses a low-intensity balancing, it endeavors to sustain a constructive relationship with the targeted state. In the case of high-intensity balancing, the relationship between the balancing state and the targeted state is more openly adversarial, and many forms of cooperation between them are precluded by political tensions (Roy, 2005, p.306). However, the targeted state may allow a fundamental cordial relationship including economic and other forms of cooperation with a state employing low-intensity balancing. On the contrary, a high-level balancing strategy would obviously weaken a stable working relationship between the balancing state and the target state because this strategy usually seems like an act of open hostility between the two countries (ibid, p. 313).

Maclean, in his review of the book 'Balance of power: Theory and Practice in the 21st century, remarked as follows.

Balancing is not the dominant pattern of security behavior anymore. But the already dense concept is made more complex by several important findings: balancing is more difficult in a near-unipolar environment; there are no accepted outcomes; human agency has a larger role than anticipated; balancing is not automatic; and there is no way of predicting balancing behavior. For international relations theory, the findings are significant, particularly regarding the way that states balance today, "Hard" balancing of the Cold War is no longer germane, but "soft" balancing, or tacit balancing not involving full alliances, is a common response to the current nature of the international system. A

variation of an old Canadian aphorism seems appropriate: balancing, when necessary, but not necessarily balancing. (Maclean, 2006, p. 275).

According to Stephen Waltz, four important factors come to play in balancing or bandwagoning as a key part of the defensive strand of structural realism.

(1) Aggregated power: the bigger the power of a nation (i.e, a state's total resources such as population, industrial and military capability, technological powers, etc.), the more likely it is that it is perceived by other actors to be a threat to their security, leading to either balancing or bandwagoning;

(2) Proximity: the closer a rising power, the more likely it is perceived to be a threat, leading likewise to either balancing or bandwagoning;

(3) Offensive capabilities: the more offensive capabilities a state possesses, the more likely an alliance will be established in order to balance it (Walt noted that only in cases where offensive capabilities allow for easy conquest a bandwagoning strategy is preferred).

(4) Offensive intentions: the more aggressive the foreign policy goals of a nation are perceived to be, the more likely other states balance against it. (Fels, 2017, pp. 119–120)

There are various assumptions on why the small countries choose either balancing or bandwagoning strategies and when and why small powers use these strategies. Weak states are more likely to bandwagon because they are more vulnerable to pressure, and the capabilities they can add to either side are unlikely to make much difference. Because of their low capacity, they can do little to affect the outcome, and thus they are more likely to choose for the winning side (Rothstein, 1968, p. 11; Walt, 1985, p. 18). In addition, weak powers are more likely to choose bandwagoning when allies are simply not available. Even weak states may be tempted to balance when they are confident of allied support; in its absence, however, accommodation with the threatening power may be the only viable alternative. An essential prerequisite for ensuring effective balancing behavior is an active system of diplomatic communication, permitting potential allies to recognize their shared interests and coordinate their responses (Walt, 1985, p. 18).

Walt (1979) said that their lack of capability pushes small entities to choose bandwagoning strategy rather than balancing with powerful countries by the desire of gain. He also noted that if a state is weaker, it has a huge possibility to bandwagon with the

threatening great powers because balancing and relying on one's alliance are unwise, since the help that comes from this alliance may not be sufficient enough to get quick aid. Moreover, states that are close to a big neighbor with offensive power may be forced to bandwagon because balancing alliances are simply not viable (Walt, 1987, p. 25; Gunasekara, 2015). The weaker states in the proximity of stronger states try to bandwagon with the strength for their survival, however, the great powers balance against potential hegemony (Levy, 1989).

In the bandwagoning school of thought, small states choose to align with fast emerging power instead of balancing against it and accepting subordination in exchange for profit (Kuik, 2008; Vaicekauskaitė, 2017). Schweller (1994) denoted states have different reasons to opt for balancing or bandwagoning. Schweller did not accept the assumption that bandwagoning and balancing are opposite behaviors motivated by the same goal, i.e., to achieve greater security and he pointed out that this definition of the bandwagoning has been narrowed if it were simply the opposite of balancing. According to his opinion, states choose to balance with the aim of self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed; they select bandwagoning for self-extension and to obtain values coveted. In this sense, balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses; bandwagoning is driven by the opportunity for gain (Walt, 1988). Schweller believed that the existence of significant external threats is not necessary for states to bandwagon; instead, significant external threats are required for effective balancing (Schweller, 1994, p. 74).

The choice of small countries to choose either balancing or bandwagoning largely depends on their own evaluation of that rising power. Sometimes, the countries refuse to practice either balancing or bandwagoning strategies when they put their economic interest as their priority instead of a military threat by a rising power. Kenneth Waltz (1993) said that "hegemony leads to balance," but the balancing nature has increased empirically and theoretically in contrast with the conservative perspective. South Korea's response to the rise of China in the last three decades has proved that assumption. The rise of China has threatened the international community in the region and global level as a peaceful or threatening ascent. In the view of balance power perspective, South Korea would have to balance against or bandwagon to China due to its fear of rapid growth in China; geographically and demographically massive authoritarian and Communist China that sits on its border; the possible military threat by Beijing; and the widening power disparity between them (Kang, 2009). The close relations between China and North Korea could also be the main concern for Seoul. Moreover, the United States

military presence in South Korea pushed international observers to expect that the intense geopolitical shift would appear in the way of South Korea's balancing against or bandwagoning choice.

Nonetheless, South Korea escalated its relations with China, contrary to these expectations, while developing its friendly relations with the United States. Regarding Seoul's behavior, Kang argued that South Korea had less frightened the Chinese influence compared with the Japanese militarization and increased South Korea and United States relations did not totally position the country against China (Kang, 2009). South Korea's accommodation of China was a puzzle for international relations theorists who firmly believed that the rise of great powers always comes together with war and instability (Gilpin, 1981). Thus, it affirmed that South Korea saw the stronger China as the prospect of regional stability, and thereby the domestic policy alignment has an impact on determining the state strategies.

Paul (2018) said that in the first two decades of the post-Cold War era, countries employed more often in soft balancing, leaning on informal alignments, international institutions, and economic sanctions to restrain threatening powers. Consequently, the hard-balancing strategy consisting of formal alliance and unlimited arms buildups changed the character of soft balancing or limited hard balancing as the popular balancing strategy held by both small and great powers today. That shift, however, has been fostering the asymmetric capabilities of weaker states in contesting with stronger powers. It can be generally analyzed that balancing can imagine the situation of less violence while bandwagoning can lead to a more competitive world (Womack, 2015).

2.3.2. The Highlight of General Small Powers' Strategies

The small countries had sought a more secured middle strategy, preserving their sovereignty and national interests among great powers competition; this became accepted as the "hedging" strategy. Kang (2009) said that there is a large middle area where states avoid making a distinct choice, and they are simply accommodated, with no basic change in their military stance or alignment posture, although balancing and bandwagoning are two common concepts in the theoretical literature on international relations.

A variety of strategies within the middle area are composed of engagement, accommodation, hiding, and hedging, as well as numerous other similar strategies (Goh, 2005).

Within these middle strategies, the most important distinction is between strategies that represent more or less fear of a potential adversary. Countries may not balance but still be somewhat skeptical of another country, in which case it might prefer to hedge. Yet countries that do not fear a larger state do not hedge, even if they do not bandwagon. Those strategies can be called accommodation—attempts to cooperate and craft stability that are short of slavish bandwagoning. (Kang, 2009, P.8p. 8)

The following figure shows the context of these strategies.

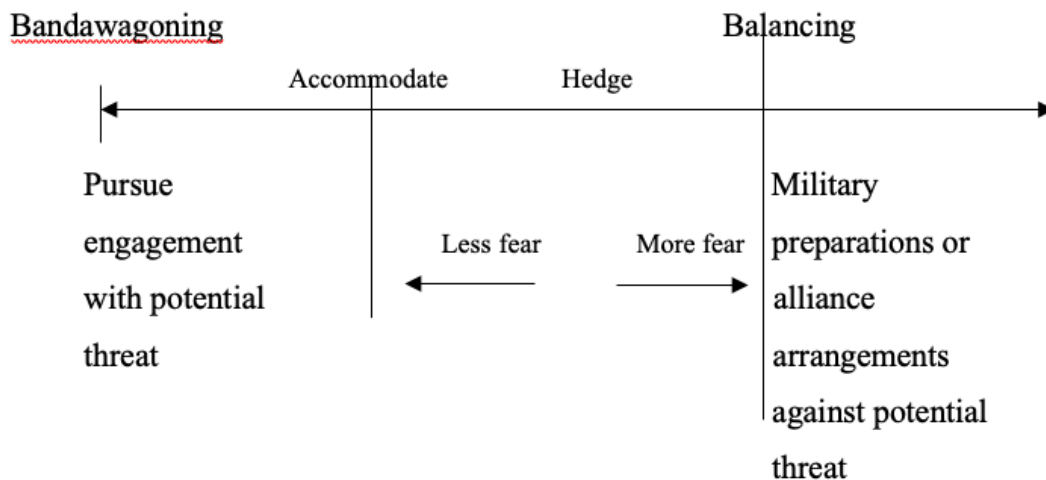


Figure 2.3. A Spectrum of Alignment Strategies (Kang, 2009, P.8)

The meaning of *hedging* can be inferred to indicate an investment position aimed to offset possible losses or gains that may be incurred by a companion investment. Later, the interpretation of hedging developed more accurately as a mixed strategy of balancing (containment) or bandwagoning (engagement) within interstate relations (Fiori & Passeri, 2015). Hedging can also be considered as a specific type of limited alignment strategy, designed to optimize the returns of security cooperation with a great power, while minimizing the risk of enmeshment in formal alliance and simultaneously pursuing political and economic engagement with that great power's rival (Ciorciari, 2008). In addition, hedging should also indicate:

a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality. Instead they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side (or one straightforward policy stance) at the obvious expense of another. (Goh, 2007, p. 825)

The strategic positioning of hedging has been found in several Southeast Asian countries when they strive for the political competition between China and the United States. Thus, hedging is likely used by the small and middle actors in their relations with great powers when the distribution of power changes at the regional or global levels. Small states prefer hedging over balancing or bandwagoning due to several factors. Sometimes, balancing can be strategically unnecessary and politically provocative, or even counterproductive, leading to the loss of potential economic gains. It can also be politically risky and limit the freedom of action of small states (Kuik, 2008; Vaicekauskaitė, 2017). Sometimes, hedging and wedging can serve as the contesting strategies that are incredible and effective for small countries as a way of survival between hegemonic or threatening great powers. In strategic hedging, the behavior of the state is less confrontational than traditional balancing, less cooperative than bandwagoning, and more proactive than neutrality that applied everything simultaneously (Tessman, 2012).

In the concept of complex interdependency, some small states that are close to great neighbors or stuck between great power competition have used their bargaining power to balance or influence these great powers. A good example of this is the foreign policy behavior of energy-rich small states in Central Asia, specifically Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, in the context of their big neighbors, particularly Russia and China. The energy resources of these small states give them some ability to influence the asymmetries of the relationship, and they use this leverage increasingly to promote their foreign-policy interests (Garrison & Abdurahmonov, 2011). The power of small states is then measured by their ability to manipulate the asymmetrical relationship by using their bargaining power. On the other hand, economic interdependence that results from globalization has demanded the world countries to adopt less threatening economic strategies because economic prosperity demands access to markets, technology, and the goodwill of others, especially the dominant economic powers (Paul, 2018).

Despite their vulnerability, small countries could take a number of measures to decrease their vulnerability, such as the strengthening of national defense capabilities; entering into defense agreements with other states; underpinning security through economic growth; promoting internal cohesion; and adopting sound diplomatic policies at both bilateral and multilateral levels (Tan, 2017).

It is well noted that the role of international organizations is essential as one of the small power's strategies to counter the influence of great powers. Small countries also try to join the

regional and international organizations with the hope of protecting their interests and to get a collective strength. Rothstein (1968) noted that using international organizations is a clear alternative to the formal promise of equality because such mechanisms provide collective security and a meaningful way to restrain great powers (cited in Gunasekara, 2015, p. 213). Moreover, small states can use these organizations to gain their political security and economic support through multilateral diplomacy. The most important fact is that engagement in regional and international organizations can take the opportunities for small powers to penetrate world politics. Hey (2003) theorized that smaller countries join the different organizations to increase their relative power and to meet their goals of foreign policy and security (cited in Emini & Marleku, 2016). For example, Southeast Asian countries established ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Countries) to address economic, security, and political issues in the region. The region has been a contested zone between competition between the United States and China. Amid the great power rivalry, the countries keep up their ASEAN centrality as the collective strength while facing the Chinese assertive acts in the South China Sea and the United States' increasing presence in the region.

There are significant elements that shaped the small and great powers' relations, such as (1) the degree of tension between the great powers A (the neighboring great power) and its main opponent B, (2) the degree of extroversion in A's foreign policy, and (3) the small state's foreign policy orientation—in other words, the degree of its alignment with A or B or with neither (Knudsen, 1988). The scholarly consensus views small-state behavior from a state-centric perspective in which foreign policy outputs are a response to external constraints (Elman, 1995). Small countries have less chance to emphasize their domestic political process, focusing on the external threats that are explicitly affected by their national survival. So, small countries are always sensible to adopt an appropriate policy because their policy orientation not only depends on them but also on their neighboring great powers.

Occasionally, small powers can exert powerful influence on great power to some extent, especially in times of power shift, exploiting their geostrategic positions “either as bulwarks of rising state or as daggers against ascending power's throat” (Lee, 2012). Sometimes, small power overestimates or strongly relies on its geographical significance in relations to those with great powers. The greater the conflicts between great powers, the greater the strategic significance of small neighbors to its great power neighbors and the greater the strategic significance of small

neighbors to its great power neighbor's enemy (Fels, 2017). In a bipolar world, small states temporarily gain influence while all great powers have chosen the sides to get stronger power influence.

The literature review of the research analyzes the theory and concepts of small and great powers' relations and the strategies of small countries in manipulating the asymmetrical relations with great powers and sometimes positioning themselves to get the major roles on the global stages. There is no limited boundary that can deter the capabilities of small countries in the changing international system. The role of small nations is improving in international relations because small is not the same as powerless anymore. Power is not the only determining factor in international relations. The asymmetrical relations are normal in small-great power relations because of their different capabilities. However, this does not mean that small powers are the pawn of great powers or smaller ones cannot change the behavior of greater ones in the asymmetrical framework.

To sum up the literature review, the strength of a country cannot be decided solely on its material power. Although small states are attempting to implement and position different strategies for the sake of their national interest, the success of these strategies is also determined by various factors. Bandwagoning and balancing strategies are still the primary strategies and backbones of small and weak powers. At the same time, it affirms that new and different strategies are being used by small powers regardless of their size, poor resources, and limited capability. Probably, the bandwagoning and balancing strategy largely focused on the state's survival from the security point of view. However, both strategies are also correspondent for peaceful times with the simple purpose of promoting a state's benefit in the current international system. Thus, the application of these two strategies in the present world would be interesting from the small power's perspective.

Chapter (3)

Methodology

3.1. The Myitsone Dam Issue as a Relevant Case Study

The aim of the research is to find out the possible tactics and strategies of small powers to manipulate their roles in relations with great powers under asymmetrical situation. Apart from the traditional strategy of balancing and bandwagoning strategies, the research also observes how a small power can handle its policy manipulation with great power under asymmetrical bilateral relations. The unit of analysis of the research is bilateral asymmetrical relations between China and Myanmar. The subject of analysis is the case of the Myitsone Hydropower Dam Project (also known as the Ayeyarwady/ Irrawaddy Myitsone Hydropower Dam Project), which is the most controversial issue between the two countries and has strongly impacted bilateral asymmetrical relations. The Sino-Myanmar relations implemented a U-turn change after the suspension of the

dam project. Through the detailed analysis of the case of the dam issue, the research exposes the Myanmar government's strategies as an attempt to counterinfluence its great power neighbour, China, and how the strategy shift impacts on China's Myanmar policy followed by the behaviour changes of Beijing toward Myanmar. Although the suspension of the dam project by the Myanmar government is the immediate outcome, there were prolonged efforts of the Myanmar government to escape or at least to reduce the Chinese influence in the country. Thus, it is also worthwhile to scan the Myanmar-China bilateral relations. Thus, to reach this conspicuous conclusion, the research also traces the history of Sino-Myanmar relations since 1988, which was significantly improving the bilateral ties under the Myanmar military governments.

The descriptive case study is chosen as an appropriate research method for this study. A case study is research that investigates a selected representation or sample of an entire population or phenomenon, often to generalize conclusions for the whole population; it could also be research aimed at selecting a representation of an entire population (Augustine & Okonkwo, 2018, p. 2). Stake (1995) noted that a case study is "the study of the complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995). According to Yin (1984), the case study research method is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984, p. 23). By constituting both qualitative and quantitative data, a case study supports the explanation of both the process and outcome of a phenomenon by accomplished observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997). Moreover, the case study method helps the researcher closely scrutinize the data within a specific context (Zainal, 2007). A descriptive case study aims to describe the natural phenomena that occur within the data in question. Thus, the aim of the research is to describe the data as they occur in a narrative form (Zainal, 2007).

The Myitsone Dam issue or the Ayeyarwady Myitsone Dam (also spelled *Irrawaddy*) issue is the most credible case in Myanmar-China relations. It is China's largest hydropower project abroad, and it will become the world's fifteenth-largest hydropower project if the construction is finished. The project was signed by the two countries when Vice-president Xi Jinping visited Myanmar in 2009. The project will fulfil the electricity requirement of China's

landlocked Yunnan Province. Moreover, the Myitsone Dam project is the largest hydropower dam project in Myanmar.

The dam project is designed to build the confluence of the Ayeyarwady River, which is the lifeblood of the Myanmar people. The river originates from the combination of the N'mai and Mali rivers in Kachin State in the northern part of Myanmar. Flowing straight from the north to south and passing through the whole country, it finally drains into the Andaman Sea. The Ayeyarwady River is the longest and the most useful river in Myanmar, and it provides the agricultural country with its water resources and essential-commercial waterway. The river is the birthplace of Myanmar's civilization and of the ethnic Kachin people. The confluence significantly provides unique, natural beauty, and it attracts both local and foreign visitors.

Because of social and environmental concerns about the dam construction, the Myanmar government faced powerful protests by the people across the whole country. Although the dam is implemented in the ethnic region, both local ethnic people and other ethnicities in the whole country opposed the dam project. With the cooperation of all people, the dam issue became a nationwide issue that could put pressure on both Myanmar and Chinese governments. The project was signed under the military government in Myanmar, but it was unilaterally suspended under the semi-civilian government in 2011. That suspension was the first Chinese economic setback in Myanmar.

It is noticeable that the relationship between Myanmar and China is politically, economically, and militarily asymmetrical. The international community even sometimes branded Myanmar as a puppet of China. In this situation, the one-sided halt of the Myitsone Dam by the Myanmar government without any notification to Beijing was a huge shock both to China and the world. Some may think that the suspension of a dam between the two countries cannot unfold the whole picture of asymmetrical relations. However, this dam is critical for China and is the largest hydropower project in Myanmar.

If the dam is finished, the electricity generated is aimed to support the Yunnan province of China and is essential for the development of the province. Though the halt of the dam project is overviewed as a simple case that happened in bilateral relations, the innermost scene of the issue unambiguously uncovers the changing pattern of Sino-Myanmar relations, which can be identified as a U-turn change in bilateral asymmetrical relations. Apart from the huge power discrepancy between China and Myanmar and Myanmar's overt reliance on China, Naypyidaw's

undaunted decision over the dam issue was stunning to both China and the international community.

The Sino-Myanmar historical relations since 1988 provide greater understanding in the analysis of the case study from the viewpoint of Myanmar's strategic deployment to China under a deep-seated asymmetrical framework. Thus, the Myitsone Dam issue is an excellent research ground from which to examine the strategic position of a small power to expand its roles in relations with a great power neighbour under a huge power discrepancy between the two countries. From the dam issue, the research traces the structural changes in Sino-Myanmar relations that finally could reach Myanmar's counterbalance to China. The research aims to explore the question of "the tactics and strategies Myanmar using to increase its room for maneuver in its asymmetric relationship with China".

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The major technique of the data collection method focuses on the interview method. The semi-structured interview is conducted with the aim of exploring the embedded facts of the research. Allowing the participants their open-ended responses, is helpful to achieve valuable information. I made fifteen semi-structured interviews with who are experts in Myanmar-China relations. The thirteen local researchers and two international researchers help to answer the research interview. The retired diplomat, the researcher from the Myanmar Institute of Strategic Studies, and the professors and lecturers from the international relations departments of different universities in Myanmar conducted the semi-structured interviews. The two international researchers from China and Hungary also conducted the interview.

When I started to study about Myanmar-China relations, most of the literatures are written by the international scholars. I found few literatures with reliable sources written by the Myanmar scholars. If it is totally relied on the literatures, the research will only collect the opinion of the international researchers. As the research is mainly based on the Myanmar-China relations, it is essential to listen to the perspectives of local researchers. Thus, I chose the interview method as the main data collection of my research. By doing so, the research could make a proper balance between literatures of its data collection process, and it could avoid the one-sided opinion of either local or international researchers.

To improve the validity of the research, I also choose triangular data collection method. In social science triangulation is defined as the mixing of data or methods so that diverse

viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon a topic. There are two types of triangulations: the mixing of data types which known as data triangulation; and the mixing of methodologies which means the combination of the use of survey data with interviews (Olsen, 2004, p. 3). On top of that, Olsen (2004) noted that ‘triangulation is something we do to generate a dialectic of learning. means mixing approaches to get two or three viewpoints upon things being studied. Thus, the resulting dialectic of learning thrives on the contrasts between what seems self-evident in interviews, what seems to underlie the lay discourses, what appears to be generally true in surveys, and what differences arise when comparing all these with official interpretations of the same thing (Olsen, 2004, p. 3). Thus, the data triangulation of this research highly assists the validity of the thesis.

I explore both primary data and secondary data to support the investigation. The newspaper articles, reports, reviews, academic journal articles, books, and book chapters are used in collecting data for both variables. To analyze the behavioral changes of China, I scrutinize official documents, such as statements issued by the Chinese government, the speeches of President Xi Jinping, the agreements between Myanmar and China after the dam cancellation to the present time, and major achievements between the two countries. I use primary data such as documents, statements, and agreements; the speeches of leaders from both sides; press releases; articles from governments; articles in local and international newspapers; and so on. The sources of data can also be available from government websites from Myanmar and China. The interview provides ample data and information. A lot of primary and secondary sources support the research enough to evaluate the case study and to answer the research question. Then the fifteen expert interviews provide significant research that provides more specific data. I also took detailed analysis to get the relevant data based on the answers of the participants.

To prove the hypotheses, the research attempts to measure two important facts: (1) China has also changed its behaviors toward Myanmar after the suspension of the Myitsone Dam; and (2) the Myanmar government has transformed its strategies toward China. The Myanmar government has firmly stood upon its independence, active, and non-aligned foreign policy to handle its international relations, including those with China. After the semi-civilian government took office and power, the government tried to readjust its foreign policy to reintegrate into the international community by expanding its friendly relations with all countries. The USDP government practiced its foreign policy strategy that delicately balances the strategic interests of

major powers in the country (Myoe, 2016, p. 123). According to the adherence of the government, it can generally understand Myanmar's external relations. However, to get more proof for the Myanmar's policy transformation toward China, apart from the analysis of the whole case study, the interviews provide the important contribution to the strategical changes of Myanmar as well as the subtle shift of Chinese behavior toward Myanmar.

3.3. Limitation of the Data Collection

The research faced serious difficulties during the data-collection process. When I started to collect data, I could not come back to my country because of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic followed by the lock-down and travel restrictions. During that time, I contacted the participants in Myanmar and pursued my interview process through online face-to-face interview. My initial plan is to conduct twenty-five semi-structured interviews to both academic experts and grassroots people, and I prepared two types of questions for the two groups. I have already contacted all possible respondents and some of them had already accepted the interviews.

While I was doing some interviews and waiting for specific dates to interview other respondents, the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2022, caused huge setbacks for my interviews. Unfortunately, I lost contact with the people who promised to participate in the interviews. They were reluctant to do interviews because of various problems they encountered. The military junta blocked the internet throughout the country during the people's protest against the coup, which caused serious obstacles in reaching the respondents. Moreover, some interviewees informed me that they could not help me in conducting interviews because of their terrible situation and circumstances. In Myanmar, people have been suffering the impacts of both the Covid-19 pandemic and the military coup. Therefore, the interview process could not be smoothly undertaken as I had planned. The expert interviews were finished, but other interviews had to be cancelled because of all these obstacles. Thus, the research could reach the total number of fifteen expert interviews who are professionals in Myanmar-China relations.

Chapter (4)

Background of Myanmar-China Relations

4.1. Introduction

In general, Sino-Myanmar relations can be deduced as an asymmetrical one because of the great disparity between the two countries. In 802 A.D., the two countries had initiated bilateral relations when the Puy delegation paid a visit to the Tang dynasty capital Chang-an, resulting in the first confirmed diplomatic contact. In the historical context, China had practiced tributary relations with its near and far countries bounded by rules, customs, and rituals based on its Sinocentric approach (Myoe, 2011). Myanmar was one of the elements of China's established political entities. Historically and occasionally, there were some tensions and confrontations,

such as the Mongol invasion of Myanmar in 1283; the spillover of the Ming emperor and the Manchus into Myanmar territory in the late seventeenth century; and the Chinese intrusion to Myanmar between 1765 and 1769, which ended with the signing a treaty of peace and friendship in December 1769 (Than, 2003). Chinese emperors used to traditionally threaten Burmese kingdoms (Myanmar kingdoms); consequently, some of the measures of Myanmar's threat perceptions have traditionally been rooted in China (Ganesan, 2018, p. 3).

Myanmar-China relations have undergone both ups and downs, but there are currently robust relations within the asymmetrical framework. According to Tin Maung Maung Than (2003), the development of Sino-Myanmar relations can be divided into the following four periods: Toward a Paukphaw Relationship (1948-67); China on the Dual Track (1968-78); Rapprochement (1979-88); and Closet Ever (1988...) (in this point, it seems that the author refers to 1988 to 2003 when he writes this article).

Myanmar was the first Asian country and first non-communist country that welcomed the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (FAN, 2012). The two countries established official diplomatic relations on June 8, 1950, and the Yangon government coined the term *Pauk Phaw* to describe the friendly (fraternal) relationship (USIP, 2018). After signing the Five Principles of Co-existence in 1954, the bilateral relationship has been premised upon these principles. The personal contact or personal diplomacy launched by both leaders had profoundly developed the friendly relations, such as Zhou Enlai's visit to Myanmar in June 1954 and U Nu's return visit to China in November of the same year (USIP, 2018, p. 191). Then, the significant *Paukphaw* relationship (the word referred to as "a sibling" or "brotherly" in the Myanmar language) came to appear as the word for cordial-bilateral relationship. In the economic context, the regular and substantial commercial linkages were formed only in the eighteenth century, though small-scale border trade with Yunnan had commenced centuries earlier. Between 1954 and 1965, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited Myanmar nine times to strengthen bilateral ties (*Global Times*, 2021). In return for its assistance to Myanmar, China gained access to a large, untapped consumer market; exploration rights to oil and gas reserves; the right to extract timber, minerals, and gems; and contracts to build new energy and transport routes to support the development of its southwest (Asia Report, 2009, p. 2).

In the 1960s, the thorny issue broke out, and the generated hostility between the two countries through the expulsion of Chinese communities from Myanmar in the early 1960s under

General Ne Win and the anti-Chinese riots in 1967 during the early stage of Mao's Cultural Revolution. From the 1960s, after the riots, China began to give its overt assistance to the Communist Party of Burma with all moral, material, financial, organizational, and ideological support against the Myanmar government. Apart from these supports, Beijing helped the CPB in establishing a "liberated area" of more than twenty thousand square kilometers along the shared border in Shan State. Although the Myanmar government knew China's support of the aboveground and underground Communists and Beijing's violation of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, the government wisely solved the problem by using its internal resources by means of social, psychological, and military tactics (Than, 2003). But with the export of Mao's "Cultural Revolution" to the overseas Chinese community in mid-1967, the bilateral relations deteriorated, resulting in the detention of hundreds of Chinese activists and violent riots in Yangon. At the peak of tensions, Myanmar recalled its ambassador and students from Beijing; meanwhile, Chinese technicians working on technical assistance projects were expelled from Myanmar. That was the worst period in bilateral relations (Than, 2003).

As for the Dual Track approach, China tried to establish both party-to-party relations and government-to-government relations in terms of improving diplomatic relations with the government of Myanmar and by maintaining strong relations with political parties in Myanmar. Under this approach, Beijing continued its support to the underground movements of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB, also called BCP [Burmese Communist Party]) with several provisions, including arms and ammunition. Beijing was also allowed to set up the Voice of People of Burma (VPOB), a clandestine radio channel in its Yunnan territory. The CPB could maintain the trade centers along the China-Myanmar border in the early 1970s. In the meantime, China gave its strong support to CPB, and the Revolutionary Council (RC) government led by General Ne Win made a concerted effort to restore normalized relations with China. As a fruitful result, Myanmar and China reestablished official diplomatic relations in March 1971. The two countries also reinstated the soft loan agreement of 1961, which can be regarded as economic normalcy. After establishing the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government in March 1974, the Myanmar government attempted to maintain friendly relations with China by engaging in personal diplomacy with high-level visits to China through sending many official delegations. The watershed emerged to open a new era in Sino-Myanmar relations after Mao's death. The assistance to CPB was reduced by Beijing. The Chinese Deputy Premier Deng Xiaoping's visit

to Myanmar in 1978 underlined the upgrading of the bilateral relations, signaling China's new policy toward Myanmar.

Tin Maung Maung Than (2003) noted that the changes in Chinese foreign policy toward Myanmar became significant after 1979. By the mid-1970s, China turned its emphasis to government-to-government relations rather than party-to-party relations. This period (1979-1988) can be regarded as the rapprochement of China toward Myanmar, in which China started to withdraw its assistance to CPB. One of the apparent indications was that the CPB had to relocate its headquarters from Manshi (China) to Pang Hsang, which was Myanmar territory in 1979. Myanmar received Official Development Assistance from China in the amounts of US\$ 64 million in 1979 and US\$15 million between 1984 and 1987 (Than, 2003, p. 194).

After 1985, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) discarded all its support for CPB. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) crumpled in March 1989. Since that time, the bilateral relations have been steadily improving between the two countries.

4.2. Myanmar-China Relations since 1988

Myanmar's geographic position has been one of the major reasons it has developed closer relations with China than other Southeast Asian nations. After General Ne Win's military coup in 1962, Myanmar (it was called "Burma" at that time) used isolationism under a xenophobic attitude, and the world paid less attention to the self-isolated country. The world viewed Myanmar as nothing more than an exotic country of golden pagodas, picturesque paddy fields, and crumbling British colonial architecture—as well as a small, weak, poorly governed Third - World country with a poor military force and a wide range of internal problems (Selth, 2007, p. 280).

When the Tatmadaw (the Myanmar army) crashed down a nationwide pro-democracy uprising and took power in 1988, the country once more drew international attention. On 18 September 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council seized power. It ruled the country by constituting the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) that was changed into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November 1997. From the beginning of Myanmar's rule by the State Law and Order Restoration Council in 1988, the role of China in the country has grown. In 1988, the major hope of the SLORC from China was Beijing's support for its regime survival and economic cooperation (Haacke, 2006). Myanmar regarded itself as

playing a key role in Deng Xiaoping's policies of 'opening up' and economic reform, especially for the Yunnan province bordering with Myanmar. However, Beijing's support of the CPB (Communist Party of Burma) made the bilateral relations sour. In early 1989, China withdrew its support of CPB, which led to the disintegration of the CPB.

In 1990, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) held an election in which the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) won by a landslide victory. Instead of handing power to the NLD Party, the SLORC detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest along with capturing thousands of NLD members and supporters. Because of its brutal suppression of pro-democracy movements and the poor record of human rights violations, the SLORC government was ostracized by the Western countries led by the United States. Facing both international isolation and domestic unrest, the military government chose to rely on China.

All these factors gave China a golden opportunity to fulfill the strategic vacuum in Myanmar's struggles from all fronts, especially in the economic sector, which was struggling with strong economic sanctions, and the military regime. These two factors turned the country into open-door economic policies and boosted the strong bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China. Thus, the 1990s can be considered as opening the new era of Sino-Myanmar relations as closer friends than ever before. In addition, it is the outset of extreme asymmetrical relations of giant and small power neighbors that draped the latter one into the former's sphere of influence in several ways. These changes have also brought Myanmar to accept much attention from India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and even from Russia (Selth, 2007, p. 280).

Both Beijing leadership and the SLORC established the defense of national sovereignty and independence as the foundation of their foreign policy. After the development of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, both countries have cited these principles—especially mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs—in responding to Western criticism of their domestic policies, particularly in relation to the human rights issues in their countries (Seekins, 1997, p. 532). The two countries were identical in both actions and words in reaction to domestic opposition. That was shown in the Myanmar military's violent capture of power in September 1988 and the 1989 Tiananmen incident in China; both were push factors to get closer relations under which both countries suffered attendant

international sanctions (FAN, 2012). Both cases received serious condemnation from Western countries, and both Myanmar and China became global pariahs. Both countries repelled the international criticism by maintaining that the Western-style concepts of human rights and democracy were not suitable for Asia (Seekins, 1997, p. 533). After China stopped its support of the CPB and faced the Tiananmen incident in June 1989, which brought lots of international predicaments, the SLORC and the Chinese Communist Party got into closer alignment, countering international pressures and condemnation.

According to Haacke (2006), the Myanmar government achieved immediate benefits from Beijing after its decision to choose China in the hope of getting assistance. Firstly, China deviated from Western powers' human-rights criticisms targeting Myanmar. At the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1990, China prevented the adoption of the first-ever draft resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar. Secondly, the border agreement in 1988 was the onset of substantial economic exchange between the two countries. Then, after Than Shwe's visit to China in October 1989, the Chinese companies and especially Yunnanese state companies filled crucial roles in the economic reconstruction of northern Myanmar in terms of establishing power stations, roads, bridges, and telecommunication facilities. In return, the Myanmar government allowed Chinese companies to exploit their natural resources in the ethnic minority regions along the Myanmar-China border. Thirdly, the two countries reached two substantial arms deals in 1990 and 1994 that were worth about US\$1.2 billion and US\$ 400 million. This helped the Myanmar army to upgrade its armaments—such as heavy artillery, multiple rocket launchers, patrol boats, guided-missile attack craft, fighter aircraft, air-to-air missiles, electronic warfare, and signals intelligence (SIGINT) equipment—as well as night vision equipment (Haacke, 2006, p. 26). When Premier Li Peng visited Myanmar in 1994, the SLORC cited China as its “most trusted friend” (Haacke, 2006, p. 26).

Myanmar's reliance on China is more significant in the political arena while the military government has faced strong condemnation in the United Nations. The Myanmar military junta was often the diplomatic shelter from China as well as from Russia to the United Nations' resolutions against the junta's actions. In January 2007, the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution on the situation in Myanmar because of vetoes by China and the Russian Federation. The resolution intended to call on Myanmar's government to cease military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions and to begin a substantive political dialogue that

would lead to a genuine democratic transition (Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Myanmar, 2007). China (Wang Guangya) firmly insisted that

The Myanmar issue was mainly an internal affair of a sovereign State' and the Council's primary responsibility was to maintain peace and security, there was no need for the Council to get involved or to take action on the issue of Myanmar. China had always adopted a reasonable approach and made vigorous efforts to encourage Myanmar's Government to address its problems step by step. Myanmar's internal affairs should be handled mainly and independently by Myanmar's Government through consultation. The international community could offer constructive advice and assistance but should refrain from any arbitrary interference. (Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Myanmar, 2007)

According to this case, it is clearly seen that China's standpoint and attitude toward Myanmar government and the extent of the military junta's diplomatically reliance on China in international stage.

In the military coup on February 1, 2021, the United Nations Security Council failed to agree to issue a joint statement condemning the coup because China did not accept the statement. The Myanmar army led by Min Aung Hlaing refused to accept the outcome of the 2021 general election that was held in November 2020. As usual, China blocked the UN action on Myanmar, and it called the action a "cabinet reshuffle" instead of a "military coup." Unwavering, China saw the situation as Myanmar's "internal issue" (Myanmar coup: China blocks UN condemnation as protest grows, 2021). For decades, the United Nations Security Council has failed to take effective actions against the Myanmar military's widespread violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the country, since China and Russia have repeatedly applied their vetoes or threatened to veto resolutions (UN Security Council: Impose Arms Embargo on Myanmar, 2021).

While the SLORC/SPDC governments required an economic and diplomatic lifeline to minimize international sanctions and condemnation for its human rights violation in the country, Beijing provided Myanmar's necessities with trading and investing in Myanmar and protecting the military regime with its veto over UN Security Council scrutiny of Myanmar's human rights issues. In return, China has achieved access to Myanmar's abundant reserves of petroleum, natural gas, timber, and minerals. It also accessed Myanmar's hydropower potential, which could

fulfill China's energy requirement for its economic growth and particularly for the development of the landlocked Yunnan province (Chow, 2015). With the combination of Myanmar's isolation and China's growing economy, Beijing gained considerable political influence on the SLORC/SPDC government. In this sense, China shared a large amount of its state-owned enterprises in establishing major infrastructure, a persistent trade surplus in China's favor, extensive purchases of Chinese armaments by Myanmar's military, and resource extraction operations that disproportionately favored Chinese interests (Chow, 2015, p. 3). During the SLORC/SPDC era, the asymmetry between the two countries was huge, especially in economic dependence, because Myanmar had no other alternatives than reliance on China.

Because of economic sanctions imposed by Western powers, Myanmar's economic dependence on China has rapidly grown in the military regime. After 1988, the bilateral economic ties grew rapidly between the two countries when the Myanmar-Yunnan border trade was opened, leading to a significant increase in cross-border commerce. Another point that encouraged bilateral economic cooperation was Myanmar having a pivotal role in China's "Go Global" policy. Under the Go Global policy, many Chinese state-owned enterprises expanded their businesses abroad in Myanmar. That policy was initiated in 1999 and later added to the tenth Five-Year Plan from 2001–2005. Under this policy, Beijing intended to foster its enterprises to invest overseas, improve competitiveness, and secure an international business presence (Hilton, 2013).

By 2011, China stood as Myanmar's biggest trading partner. The annual foreign direct investment amounted to US\$8.2 billion in 2010–2011. After the Myanmar government halted the Myitsone dam construction, it steadily declined to US\$56 million in 2013–2014 (Sun, 2015). In 2014–2015, the bilateral trade was recorded US\$9.7 billion, and in 2015–2016, it was US\$10.9 billion. In the fiscal year 2016–2017, the Sino-Myanmar bilateral trade was US\$10.8 billion. The amount of trade was gradually increased to US\$11.78 billion in the fiscal year of 2017–2018 (Singh, 2020). According to Myanmar's Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA), Myanmar has accepted a total of US\$20.24 billion from China since 1988 (Lwin, 2020a). In 2019, the bilateral trade reached US\$12 billion out of the overall trade of nearly US \$36 billion, which accounts for roughly one-third of the total amount. China is a main source of Myanmar's FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and contributed US\$21 billion in March 2020 (Chaudhury, 2021).

According to Maung Aung Myoe (2015), the negative attitude toward China has spread at both societal and state levels in Myanmar along with the increasing ties between the two countries. The anti-China sentiments have been raised among Myanmar people for many reasons. One of the most significant reasons was that the majority of people thought that the Chinese government's support of the military government prohibited the country to take any meaningful change in the governance, resulting in a lack of progress toward democracy and a strengthening of the military regime's repressive measures to the people (Myoe, 2015, p. 28).

Myanmar's official exports to China include a large proportion of raw materials, especially natural gas and oil, teak and other hardwoods, minerals, imported manufactured goods, electric equipment, machinery, vehicles, and steel (Chow, 2015). Chinese products have a bad reputation among Myanmar people because of their poor quality, including but not limited to poor food hygiene, fake medicines, harmful milk powder, inedible cooking oil, and inedible snacks. In addition, the resentment of Myanmar people has increased toward Chinese business firms and Chinese individuals because of China's lack of proper labor standards and the lack of corporate social responsibility, the unethical business practices of Chinese firms and individuals, unfair distribution of profits between parties, and China's unfair trading practices (Myoe, 2015). China's asymmetrical economic advantages are palpable in trade and aid as well as its investment sector, which push the resentment among business and political actors and facing public protests. Consequently, these things led to putting pressure on the Myanmar government to adjust its policies toward Chinese investment (Chow, 2015).

During 1988–2013, China enhanced its liberal economic assistance, cheap loans, trade, investment, energy deals, and military and diplomatic support to Myanmar. The amount of Chinese firms' contribution was 42 percent of Myanmar's total foreign direct investment (FDI) (Malik, 2018). Between 2008 and 2011, China stood as the largest donor country for Myanmar. In bilateral trade, China is the largest trading partner of Myanmar and possesses the biggest share of both import and export sectors. In 2019, China occupied a 31.7 percent share in its exports and a 34.7 percent share in its import in Myanmar. Since 2011, Myanmar imported the largest share of goods from China, particularly machinery, metal products, vehicles, and telecommunication equipment. In the export sector, Myanmar stands as a country that exports important goods for China, such as refined tin and rare earth metals. China occupies the largest tin resources in the world, and the refined tin from Myanmar is used for circuit-board soldering. The rare earth

metals, which are used in manufacturing consumer electronics and military equipment, are exported to China by Myanmar; those exports account for 12.5 percent of the global production and more than half of China's domestic supplies. Among the exported items, Myanmar exports 32 percent of its oil and gas to China (ORF, 2021).

Due to its dependence on China's military might to fulfill the army's weapon needs, Myanmar was considered a client state of China. In the 1990s, the Sino-Myanmar relations tremendously improved, and nearly two-thirds of the Myanmar army, navy, and air force personnel sent abroad for military training between 1990 and 1999 received their training from China (USIP, 2018). Along with the Myanmar-China relations, the Myanmar military junta was immensely dependent on China's support for its economic and political survival.

During 1988–2010, Beijing provided Myanmar economic and military assistance: in the form of cheap loans, trade, investment, energy deals, military weapons, and diplomatic support (Soong & Aung, 2020). Myanmar imported nearly 60 percent of its weapons from China, and 42 percent of foreign direct investment in Myanmar came from China (Malik, 2018). From the security point of view, Myanmar-China military cooperation has improved since 1988. Beijing has been Myanmar's biggest supplier of military weapons since 1988. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) database, Myanmar spent US\$1.3 billion in arms from Beijing between 2010 and 2019. China accounted for around 50 percent of major arms imports in 2014–2019, including numerous things such as radars, warships, combat and trainer aircraft, armed drones, armoured vehicles, and missiles. Beijing also provided 90 percent of military transport to Naypyidaw (ORF, 2021). China has endeavoured to strengthen military-to-military ties with the Tatmadaw (Myanmar army) through boosting contacts and enhancing training and technical exchanges between the two-armed forces. In May 2017, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) made its first joint exercises with the Myanmar navy. That was the important milestone in the projection of Chinese naval power into the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

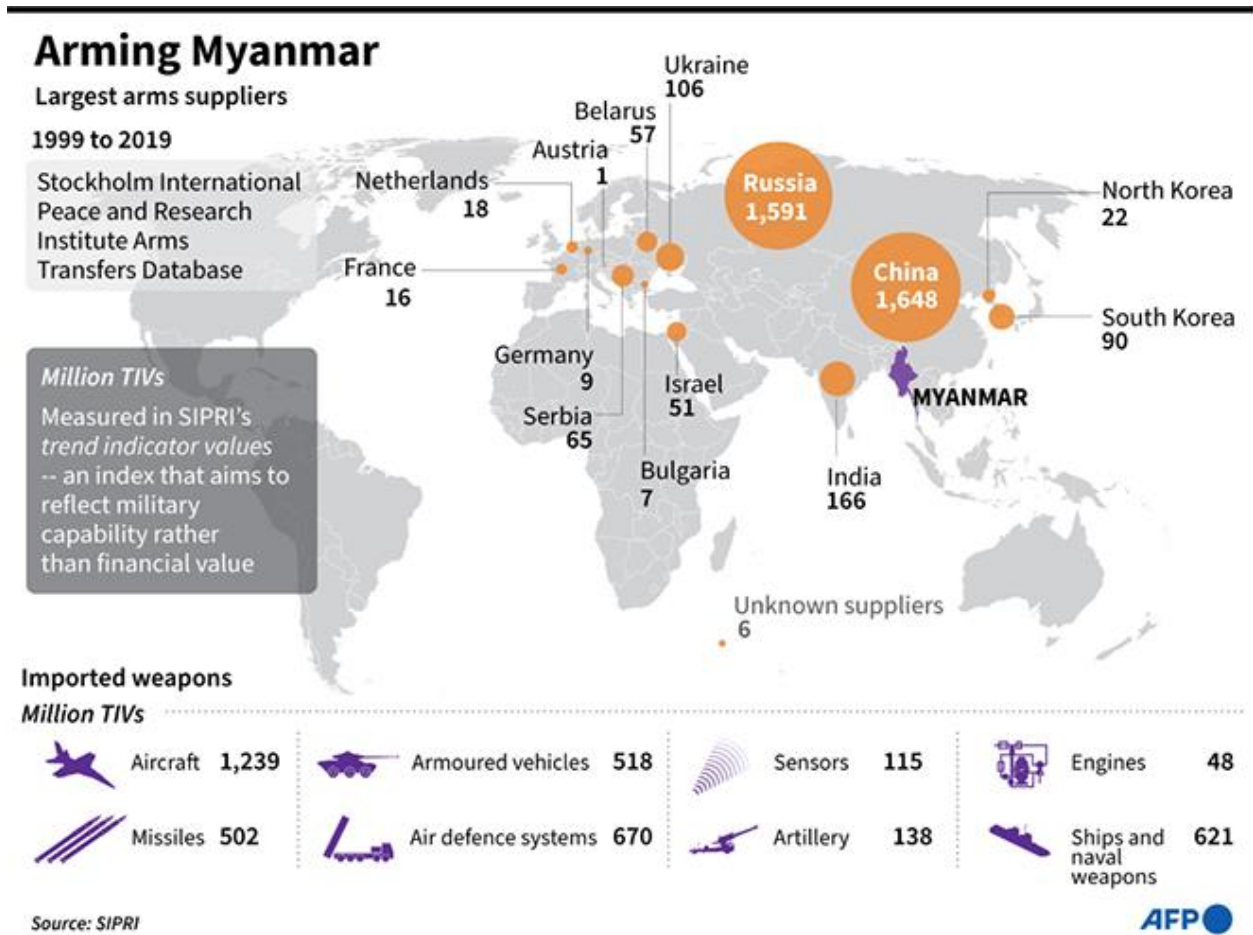


Figure 4.1. Arming Myanmar

Source: SIPRI

Myanmar is the only country that can give China access to the Indian Ocean via Myanmar-controlled islands, only thirty kilometers north of Indian-owned islands. To fulfill the Chinese world-class blue water naval status in 1950, the location of Myanmar is crucial. Moreover, Myanmar's importance is more significant under China's two ocean strategies to get access to both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Between 1988 and 2013, nearly 60 percent of Myanmar's weapons imports came from China (Malik, 2018). According to SIPRI's Arms Transfer Database, Myanmar imported arms worth US\$190 million, US\$65 million, US\$185 million, US\$190 million, and US\$70 million from China in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively (Singh, 2020). In 2003, China assisted Myanmar in establishing an eighty-five-meter jetty to naval facilities on Great Coco Island, which is situated eighteen kilometers away from India's Nicobar Island, and their possible military use by Beijing made New Delhi's threat perception of its neighboring power. Furthermore, China also set up modern

reconnaissance and electronic intelligence systems of that island, which allows China to monitor India's military movements. In the early 1990s, the relations between Myanmar and India had undergone a serious deterioration, while the military alliance between Myanmar and China was closer than ever before. India publicly denounced the Myanmar junta's cruel suppression of pro-democracy movements and the army's violation of human rights. At the same time, New Delhi also aligned with the democratic movement led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The distance from India pushed to reach closer ties with China for the Myanmar government.

However, at the state level, the Myanmar government's displeasure toward Beijing has come from several sources. Under the military government, Myanmar purchased most of its arms from Beijing because of western sanctions, including an arms embargo. However, the low quality of Chinese military weapons and the shortage of spare parts and follow-up services created dissatisfaction with the Myanmar government. China was not responsible for their weapons and equipment in selling Myanmar. Moreover, the Myanmar pilots did not even get enough courses for technical training, and thus they had to learn supersonic flying on their own when they returned to Myanmar. Later, many pilots lost their lives in air crashes because of poor-quality aircraft. Thus, the Myanmar army diversified its purchase of military weapons and military hardware from other countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and other East European states (Myoe, 2015, p. 30).

4.3. Myanmar's Foreign Policy

Historically, the evolution of Myanmar's foreign policy had been strongly molded by both internal and external factors. Since Myanmar gained its independence in 1948, it has consistently practiced the foreign policy of neutralism in its conscious consideration of both domestic and international politics. At the time of its independence, the world was ideologically divided into two parts between Eastern and Western blocs. As a newly independent country, Myanmar faced immense problems of domestic instability, such as internal insurgency. Amidst its own internal struggles, the Myanmar leaders wanted to avoid becoming a victim of the disastrous competition between great powers. On the other hand, the social and economic reconstruction of the country had been prioritized to develop the country. Moreover, one of the primary principles of Myanmar's foreign policy after obtaining its independence was to maintain friendly relations with all countries, especially with its immediate neighbors and countries in the

region to cooperate with freedom, democracy, peace, and prosperity. The choice of neutralism had been the most appropriate to secure a newly independent country like Myanmar. To the realistic considerations of all, Myanmar had decided to adopt and practice a policy of neutralism, refusing to join any power bloc that could be a risk for the newly independent country.

In 1952, the Myanmar government had officially adopted the policy of neutralism. On August 4, Prime Minister U Nu stated the four prerequisites of adopting neutralism as follows:

- (1) We must use our own consideration to either support or object to any matter on its own merits.
- (2) We must establish the friendliest relations with all nations whenever possible.
- (3) We must accept from any country any assistance for the creation of a Welfare State, provided such assistance is given freely and does not violate our sovereignty.
- (4) We must render our utmost assistance to any country that needs it.

The geographical location as a sandwich state between China and India has always played an important role in shaping Myanmar's foreign policy and strategy. In 1954, China, India, and Myanmar initiated "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," which included the following elements:

- mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- mutual non-aggression;
- non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
- respect for mutual equality and to work for mutual benefit; and
- peaceful co-existence

Myanmar signed the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence to make sure that the two great neighbors would respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. These principles have remained steadfast as the core cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy (Myoe, 2020).

When Myanmar became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961, the country had embarked on and officially endorsed the principle of non-alignment in its foreign policy (MYOE, 2021, p. 776). In September 1962, General Ne Win made a brief highlight on Myanmar's foreign policy as "strict neutrality of non-alignment." When the Revolutionary Council took power in March 1962, "Positive Neutrality" became the foreign policy of Myanmar. In the 1970s, the foreign policy of the country changed from positive neutrality to an

independent foreign policy with the aim of focusing on its self-reliance and staying away from international affairs. Since 1981, the Myanmar government (Burma Socialist Programme Party) officially pursued an “independent and active foreign policy,” though it did not mean to give up its positive neutrality; instead, it intends to highlight Myanmar’s stand on international issues.

On September 18, 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (the military government) reassured and declared its adherence to practice the independent and active foreign policy. However, Myanmar has never abandoned the non-aligned policy because it also promulgated that it will not align itself with any bloc on international issues except to consistently stand on the side that is right. It also decided to engage actively in the world’s activities and maintain friendly ties with all countries. Under the military regime, the top priority of the government was the regime’s security and survival. In these internal and external security challenges in terms of ethnic insurgent groups and foreign aggression, the former is absolutely related to the regime’s legitimacy and survival. The latter can be straightly connected with the external support for insurgencies and political organizations, both for ideological and geopolitical reasons, which is a great concern for the Myanmar government (Myoe, 2020).

Article 41 of the 2008 constitution states that “the Union practices independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy for world peace and friendly relations with nations and upholds the principles of peaceful co-existence among nations.” All successive Myanmar governments exercised the non-aligned, independent, and active foreign policy in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, though they have somewhat adjusted foreign policy depending on both domestic and international circumstances.

When the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) came into power in 2011, the government announced the new foreign policy goals without deflecting from its fundamental rules (Myoe, 2020). The new foreign policy’s goal of Thein Sein’s administration was to reintegrate Myanmar into the international community. In his inaugural speech on March 30, 2011, President Thein Sein assured,

From post-independence period to date, successive governments practiced different political and economic policies and concepts. But, about the foreign affairs policy, they all exercised non-aligned, independent and active foreign affairs policy and dealt with other countries in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. In addition, they never came under the influence of any

powers. They remained neutral in international relations. They never permitted any foreign troops to deploy within the borders of the Union. They never launched aggression against and interfere in the internal affairs of any other country. And they never posed threats to international and regional peace and security. New government will adhere to ‘non-aligned, independent and active foreign affairs policy and dealt with other countries in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Moreover, our country will stand firm as a respected member of the global community while actively participating in the international organizations, including the UN, ASEAN, BIMSTEC and other regional organizations. (New Light of Myanmar, 2011)

The USDP government positioned its foreign policy strategy to delicately balance the strategic interests of major powers in the country, primarily maintain friendly relations with countries both near and far and apply multilateralism with an emphasis on regional cooperation or regional institutions (Myoe, 2020, p. 784). Under President Thein Sein’s administration, the Myanmar government did not seek strategic alignment with any of the major and regional powers like China, India, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Meanwhile, it pursued security partnerships with all (Haacke, 2016).

Like its predecessors, the National League for Democracy (NLD) government has also exercised the independent, active, and non-aligned foreign policy. The foreign policy under the NLG government strongly focuses on people-to-people contacts and multilateralism. In terms of foreign policy objective and principles, it is not new but different by adjusting the wider diplomatic domain (Myoe, 2017, p. 89). With the cognizance of the country’s security and the reality of great-power politics by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD government has discreetly balanced its relations with China, Japan, the United States, and the European Union while facing the immense pressure for alleged crimes of ethnic cleaning or genocide against the “Rohingya” community (Myoe, 2020, p. 785). More than thirty years later, in an interview with the *Washington Post* on November 19, 2015—about ten days after the election had resulted in a landslide victory for the NLD, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi confirmed that her government would follow a non-aligned foreign policy, as it had proved to be very successful ever since Myanmar gained independence (Myoe, 2020, p. 777).

Myanmar's foreign policy has been profoundly shaped by both internal and external factors. Historically, the evolution of Myanmar's foreign policy has been processed through neutralism, independent neutrality, positive neutrality, non-alignment, and independent and active policies. Consequently, Myanmar has also formulated its China policy in this context (Myoe, 2011). Notwithstanding occasional adjustment in foreign policy strategy by the successive governments, the core principles of Myanmar's foreign policy have remained unchanged, and it has stood as the backbone of Myanmar's domestic and international strategy.

4.4. Conclusion

Despite having close bilateral relations, Myanmar-China relations are not always smooth and flawless. China's attitude with Myanmar does not always represent friendly and cordial relations, and it is an asymmetrical one in favor of China (Ganesan, 2018). Having great power discrepancies between the two countries, China could not completely control Myanmar and could not wield unbridled, disproportionate influence in the relationship (Ganesan, 2011). This is because of the opinion of Myanmar's elites that have traditionally perceived the disparity between the two countries and have continuously attempted to protect its domestic interests and preferences (Ganesan, 2018). On the other hand, Myanmar military leaders have a xenophobic attitude standing on their strong nationalism.

The two countries have deep, and complex relations based on several factors. Apart from political and economic asymmetry, Beijing has involved, strong relations with Myanmar's ethnic armed groups that play an important role in the country's peace and stability. Though Myanmar developed its close relations in the context of the traditional Pauk-Phaw relationship, it has always searched for other alternatives to counter China's growing predominance in the country (Myoe, 2011b). In the maintenance of its autonomy and sovereignty, the Myanmar government has sought to temper the relationship by engaging its relationship with two other neighboring countries, India and Thailand, on similar issues (Ganesan 2010).

To the general analysis of Sino-Myanmar relations, it is clearly viewed that bilateral stable relations are essential for both countries' mutual interests. The asymmetrical relations are unavoidable, but the management of asymmetry is crucial for developing bilateral relations. While Myanmar maintains its autonomy from the interference of foreign power in its domestic affairs, China should respect its non-interference policy, avoiding direct or indirect intervention in its neighboring country. China should regard the anti-Chinese sentiments that have grown

among the Myanmar people by changing some of its assertive and aggressive behaviors. For Myanmar, there is little chance to escape from its dependence on China, but it is likely to expand its external relations with other powers in the counterbalance of China's predominance in the country.

Chapter (5)

The Case Study of Myitsone Hydropower Dam Project

5.1. What is Myitsone?

Myitsone is the Myanmar name that means “the confluence of the rivers”; at this confluence, the Mali and N’mai rivers merge to originate the Irrawaddy River (also spelled as the *Ayeyarwady/Irrawaddy* River). Thus, the Myitsone confluence is the origin of the grand Irrawaddy River. It is situated in the Kachin state of the northern part of Myanmar. The Myitsone is one of the most famous and beautiful places in Myanmar, and it is also a place that is attractive to tourists and visitors because of its stunning natural scenes. The Irrawaddy originates from the Myitsone and flows from north to south, crossing through the whole country and then finally flowing into the Adman Sea.

During the Asian-African Summit held in Jakarta in 2005, a bilateral agreement to operate this mega-project received the highest-level governmental endorsement between Senior-General Than Shwe from Myanmar military regime and Chinese President Hu Jintao. Then China Power Investment Corporation and Asia World established a joint venture to set up hydropower projects in seven locations along Mali Hka and Nmai Hka rivers. In December 2006, a MOU on hydropower electricity between the Ministry of Electric Power and China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) was signed to build seven dams, including Myitsone and Chibwe dams. On May 21, 2007, the Chinese Power Investment Corporation and China Southern Power Grid Corporation (CSG) signed a cooperation framework agreement to build seven hydropower dam projects in the N’mai Hka River, Mali Hka River, and Ayeyarwady River Basins to become strategic partners on the project. On June 21, 2009, Myanmar’s Ambassador to china U Thein Lwin and the President of China Power Investment Corporation Mr. Lu Qizhou signed the MOA between the Department of Hydropower Implementation of Myanmar and CPI for “the Development, Operation and Transfer of Hydropower Projects in the Maykha, Malikha, and Upstream Ayeyarwady-Myitsone River Basins.”

The Irrawaddy Myitsone dam is situated on the mainstream Irrawaddy River that is three miles downstream of the confluence of the Mali and N’Mail rivers. The confluence is regarded as the landmark of Myanmar as well as the significant cultural venue of Kachin ethnic people. If

the dam is constructed, this beautiful area will be totally submerged and damaged. The cultural heartland of the Kachin people will also be lost.

The hydropower megaproject includes building a cascade of seven dams on the Mali and N'Mai rivers: a 6,000-MW project on the Irrawaddy confluence, a 2,000-MW project in Chibwa, a 1,600-MW project in Pashe, a 1,400-MW project in Lakin, a 1,500-MW project in Phizaw, a 1,700-MW project in Khaunglanphu, and a 1,560-MW project in Laiza in Kachin (KDNG, 2007). At that time, the Myitsone Dam project was China's largest hydropower project abroad ever proposed in the world under China's Going Out strategy (Kiik, 2016). The initial cost of the project is estimated at US\$3.6 billion. The reservoir of the dam was about 766 KM² (296 square miles), which is slightly larger than the area of Singapore (Harvey, 2011).

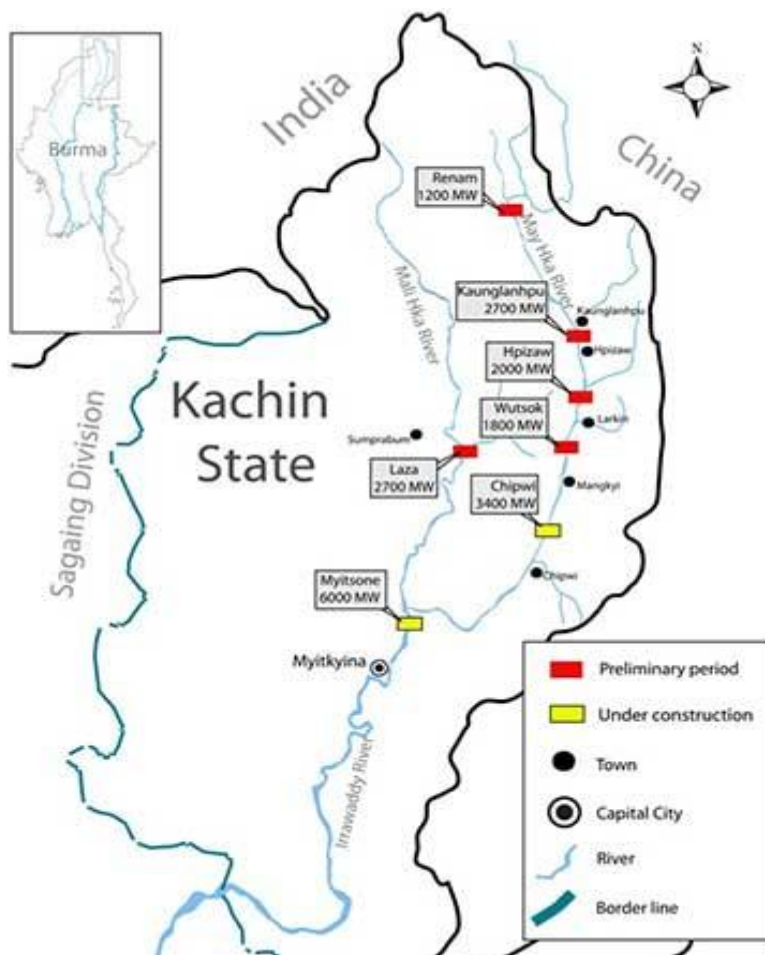


Figure 5.1. The Map of Seven Dams Proposed to be Built in Kachin State

Source: KDNG (<https://kdng.org/2020/01/08/irrawaddy-dams/>)

According to the plan, all seven dam projects can generate around 18,000 MW, which is nearly equal to China's massive Three Georges Dam, the world's largest dam (Kiik, 2016). The Myitsone Dam project will be the largest and the most important dam project among all these seven constructions. The height of the dam is about 152 meters. If the dam is built, it will be the world's fifteenth largest hydropower station with a designed capacity of 6,000 MW. It is a joint venture project between PRC's state-owned China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) (later restructured as State Power Investment Corporation), Myanmar's Ministry of Electric Power (1) (MOEP 1), and the Myanmar Conglomerate Asia World, which is owned by an ethnic Kokang (Han-Chinese) drug lord. The electricity generated by the dam is aimed to provide the serious power shortage of landlocked Yunnan Province that borders Myanmar. Eighty percent of the share is owned by CPI, 15 percent by the MOEP 1, and 5 percent by the Asia World. In accordance with the agreement, 90 percent of electricity goes to China's Yunnan province, and Myanmar will receive 10 percent of it. The Myanmar government will receive about 20 percent of the revenues (US\$500 million) annually. China will receive 70 percent of the annual profits, and the remaining 10 percent will be distributed as brokerage fees (International River, 2011b). The contract agreement will finish after fifty years.

5.2. Social and Environmental Impact of the Dam Construction

The Irrawaddy River is the longest among the five important rivers of Myanmar with a length of 2,170 kilometers. The catchment area of the river is 49,000 km². It is the most useful and the busiest commercial waterway in Myanmar both for transportation of people and for trading various kinds of goods. The Ayeyarwady River is the glacier-fed river more than a thousand miles long, and it is one of the best waterways in the world. It flows through the dry zone in the heart of Myanmar and acts as a conduit of communication to more than fifty million people (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association, p. 1).

The Ayeyarwady River is also recognized as the lifeblood of Myanmar people and also the birthplace of Myanmar civilization. It runs the whole length of the country through states and divisions—including Kachin State, Sagaing Division, Mandalay Division, Magwe Division, Bago Division, and Ayeyarwady Division—before entering the Bay of Bengal. It flows through Mandalay, Magway, Bago, and the Ayeyarwady delta region and finally flows into the Andaman Sea. The river's basin is 413,674 square kilometers, and it covers 61 percent of the country (KDNG, 2007). The river provides the livelihoods of millions of people who live along its left

and right banks (Hadfield, 2014). If the Myitsone Dam is established, it can be expected that the flood will affect 447 square kilometers (173 square miles), including forty-seven villages. The estimated 11,800 local residents would be relocated to the new places. Moreover, the dam project would submerge the valuable cultural sites of the Kachin people, such as historical churches and temples. The dam can severely destroy the livelihoods of people who are living in both upstream and downstream regions.

If the dam is built, several cultural sites will be submerged, and the historical churches and temples of Kachin ethnics will be lost because of the flood. It means the dam construction will bury Kachin identity and history, which should not be tolerable. Moreover, the livelihood of local people whose livings rely on the natural forests and rivers have been producing herbs and selling herbal plants as one of their traditional ways of living. In addition, the local people have provided for their families by harvesting and selling non-timber forest products like mushrooms, a variety of vegetables, and fruits from these natural forests. Furthermore, the Myitsone area is one of the most attractive areas of Myanmar, and it attracts a lot of both local visitors and international tourists because of its amazing natural beauty and the significant cultural landmark of the Kachin people. People sell their local food and traditional crafts to the visitors as well as serve tourists with boat rides and sight-seeing tours.

Farming and fishing are an important part of the life survival of people who lives in these areas. The dam construction will affect the agricultural livelihood of the local communities. Most people in the flood zone cultivate rice in the rainy season and also grow vegetables in the summer as well as make gardening on the fertile riverbanks and small islands in the rivers. These will also be flooded and destroyed by the establishment of the dam. Because of flooding areas, the local Kachin people will also lose their traditional ways of survival, such as harvesting traditional medicinal plants for their income. Fishing will be endangered because the dam will block the migration routes of fish by prohibiting the fish and the fishermen from reaching upstream spawning areas (KDNG, 2007, p. 29). Some species of fish will even be endangered as a severe impact of this process.

The harsh consequences will not spare the downstream regions along the Ayeyarwady River. The dam can seriously damage the downstream area of the country in various ways. The lower part of the Ayeyarwady delta is a wide and fertile plain region that supports a population of more than three million people and produces nearly 60 percent of the whole country's rice

production. As a result of the dam, fish cannot reach upstream areas to hatch because migration routes are blocked. This problem will affect the fisheries of the downstream regions. The Southeast Asia Rivers Network highlighted an example that fifty out of one hundred fish species vanished, and the rest of the species gradually dropped in numbers after the Thai government constructed the Pak Mun Dam in the northeastern part of the country (The NGO Forum on Cambodia, 2006).

The Ayeyarwady River basin is home to 34 million people and is home to 1,400 mammals, bird, and reptile species as well as an estimated 550 species of fish (WWF, 2021). Moreover, dams impact the sediment system of rivers. The sediment flow from upstream provides nutrients for fish and aquatic plants and benefits delta productivity. Dams keep the sediment from reaching downstream regions. Furthermore, dams also change the natural flooding cycles that are important in refilling water and nutrients to wetlands and floodplain areas downstream. These effects extremely affect the agricultural sector along the Ayeyarwady Delta, which is regarded as the “rice bowl” of Myanmar, since it produces nearly 60 percent of the rice produced in Myanmar (WWF, 2021). Thus, it is no doubt that the establishment of the dam will seriously jeopardize the traditional ways of survival of the local people.

According to the Independent Expert Review of the Myitsone Dam EIA, the Ayeyarwady dams will threaten biodiversity by clearing and logging the deluge areas and also by the construction works for a series of dams in Kachin. Particularly, the dams’ construction can damage the key ecosystems and cause the loss and fragmentation of core endemic and endangered species of both flora and fauna. The establishment of the dam can cause negative impacts to the whole Ayeyarwady Drainage Basin and the livelihoods of both upstream and downstream regions.

The major defect of the EIA Report is the lack of a Social Impact Assessment (SIA). To secure the lives of people who largely rely on the conduit of Myanmar’s main river, Ayeyarwady, a decent SIA should have been done before the construction of each dam. According to the United Nations Environment Program’s World Conservation Monitoring Center, the Irrawaddy River is one of the world’s top thirty high-priority river basins because of its support to high biodiversity and high vulnerability to future pressures (WCMC Biodiversity Series, 1988, KDNG, 2007). The Ayeyarwady River is one of the five great rivers—the Mekong, Salween, Chao Phraya, and Red rivers—in the Mekong subregion. The ecosystem should be

maintained in the watersheds of these important rivers. The construction of the large dam damage ecosystem integrity, fragment riverine ecosystems, isolate populations of species both upstream and downstream of the dam, and cut off migration, which can contribute to inbreeding from smaller genetic pools (KDNG, 2007, p. 39).

Kachin state is situated on the border between two of the most biodiverse and threatened ecological regions on earth: the Indo-Burma and South-Central China “hotspots,” homes to at least 1,500 species of vascular plants as endemic species. Moreover, the Indo-Burma hotspot is designated as one of the eight “hottest hotspots,” with 7,000 endemic plant species. The confluence of the Mali and N’mai rivers falls within the Mizoram-Manipur-Kachin rain forests, which is one of the 200 ecoregions recognized by the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) as a rich biodiversity hotspot. In addition, 1,027 bird species are found in Myanmar, providing the richest diversity in the mainland Southeast Asian countries. Changes in water quality and the number of fish species will devastate birdlife, including the endemic birds living in the water basin area (KDNG, 2007, p. 39). In addition, the Ayeyarwady River is one of the last refuges of the eponymous Irrawaddy dolphin; fewer than 80 remain in the river, and they need critical protection to avoid becoming endangered (WWF, 2021).

According to a global review in 2005, almost 60 percent of the world’s large river systems are affected by dams (Nilsson et al., 2005). According to 2003 WWF analysis, there are “seven sins” of dam building: building on the wrong river, neglecting downstream flows, neglecting biodiversity, falling for bad economics, failing to acquire the social license to operate, mishandling risks and impacts, and blindly following the temptation or bias to build. Based on that analysis, most of these sins are largely related to the Myitsone Dam project, and these are very worthwhile to consider. Dams play an important role in meeting people’s needs. According to BANCA report, the dam developers have fragmented and transformed the world’s rivers while global estimates suggest that forty to eighty million people have been displaced by reservoirs (BANCA, 2009).

5.3. EIA report

There are two EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) reports on hydropower development in the upper reaches of the Ayeyarwady River. The first one is the report conducted by China Power Investment Corporation (CPI), and no one knows what CPI stated in its report (International Rivers, 2011a). The second one is the report formed by a joint observation by

Myanmar and China experts that is known as BANCA Report (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association). The report was produced by a team of eighty scientists from Myanmar (from the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association) and others from the Changjiang Institute of Surveying, Planning, Design, and Research (CISPDR). Although there is no legal obligation to conduct EIA in Myanmar, CPI funded and commissioned CISPDR with Myanmar experts from BANCA with the aim of conducting the EIA. On December 24, 2008, BANCA and CPI signed an agreement to do the EIA special investigation. While BANCA was in charge of finding the environmental baseline and Biological Impact Assessment (BIA), which was finalized in October 2009, CISPDR was responsible for technology and overall quality of environmental assessment. BIA is an integral part of EIA, and its fundamental objective is to conserve biodiversity and ensure its sustainable utilization. In many countries in the world, BIA is mandatory before implementation of any major projects and is regulated by national acts and laws (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009, p. 9).

The 945-page BANCA report resulted from the collected baseline information on the biodiversity of flora and fauna in the catchment area of the seven dams. The period of the observation is only five months, from January to May 2009. On the other hand, the field survey was conducted in less than a week. That time period was considered too brief to get reliability and validity of data and information for empirical data. During the investigation period of the EIA, government authorities forced the households in the affected area not only to sign an agreement to leave their homes but also to relocate to the new villages in September 2009 (International Rivers, 2011a).

The BANCA Report significantly suggested recommendations and mitigating measures for four perspectives: Policy Perspectives, Environmental Perspective, Social Perspective, and Administrative and Technical Perspective. In Policy Perspectives, the report is highly concerned about the drafted environmental law to be proved by decisions makers so that EIA practice becomes mandatory, which is essential for any major development programs. It also insisted that an economically viable and environmentally sound policy should be supported for sustainable development of hydropower resources. Moreover, the report maintained that policymakers should highly prioritize access to both negative and positive aspects and promote partnership among the government, private sectors, and environmental NGOs to engage in environmental protection and sustainable resource management. Among the major points, the report also

recommended that policymakers to examine the illegal trade of forest and wildlife products and ban logging in Kachin above Myitkyina. To abide by the law, it also recommends following Myanmar National Sustainable Development Strategy and Myanmar Strategy and Action Plan as well as enforcing the 2006 Conservation of Water Resources and Rivers Law. Then, both Myanmar and China should follow PRC (2003) Law on Appraising of Environmental Impacts, although there is no legal obligation to conduct EIA in Myanmar (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009).

From the environmental point of view, the BANCA report highlights twenty-nine crucial points to consider in the construction of the dam project. Some of its suggestions are to avoid areas of high biodiversity and hotspots; reduce the extinction of species; conserve essential ecological processes; do research and install devices for migrating species; and design the project appropriately to mitigate the impacts of the dam on aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity, to sustain water quality, and to ensure the current potential on availability of traditional medicinal plants. Furthermore, it also proposes to monitor impacts at old and new dams, because there is a lack of studying follow-up information on the environmental and biodiversity impacts after dam construction. This is very critical for building environmentally friendly dams in the future (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], (2009), pp. 59–60).

Regarding the social perspective, the consent of people living in the affected region is mainly preferred. Moreover, the parties should regard the welfare of the resettled population by providing fair compensation and supporting employment to these people. The report warned that its use of agricultural land for the purpose of construction should be restricted as much as possible, and a systematic farming system should be developed toward permanent agriculture. Apart from the short-term provision, the people should be given long-term development assistance for up to ten years after resettlement implementation is completed. Moreover, it also underlines that government approval should be requested for land acquisition and resettlement plans, emphasizing the health and social services of resettled people. As of twenty-four points proposed by the BANCA, it also highlights the maintenance of the standard of living of resettled people to offset their loss in the process of relocating to other new places. (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009, pp-60-61).

The BANCA Report also makes suggestions for administrative and technical considerations. The report insists on law enforcement measures to stop illegal activities, such as

gold mining, hunting, tapping, logging, and collection of non-timber forest products. It also suggests continuing monitoring during and after the construction of dams and taking compensatory and remedial measures (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009, p. 62). In its conclusion, the BANCA report seriously recommends doing the Social Impact Assessment as part of the study because of the lack of that assessment in their investigation. Accordingly, the report strongly urged the decision-makers to consider a balance between negative and positive aspects of the dams. It also asked for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits of the hydropower development among the stakeholders (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009, p. 63).

After finalizing its full EIA in March 2010, CISPDR published it in September 2011. On the other hand, BANCA's Biological Impact Assessment and Environmental Baseline Report was leaked to NGOs and interested groups in Myanmar, although it was kept confidential for two years. According to BANCA Chairman Dr. Htin Hla, the survey period should have taken seven months to complete, and this report is not a perfect observation document because of insufficient time. Nevertheless, the report was concluded within five months due to the demands of Chinese experts. The BANCA report clearly suggested that it would be better to build two smaller hydropower dams instead of establishing the Myitsone Dam, and it also recommended establishing two national parks to protect the forests from the dam workers during the construction. In conclusion, EIA said that the dam would not absolutely solve major floods that would inundate Myitkyina (Moe, 2011a). But there were some contradictions between BANCA's findings and EIA's recommendations that were published by CPI on its Myitsone website (International Rivers, 2011b).

In sum, the Environmental Impact Report of Hydropower Development in the Upper Reaches of the Ayeyarwady River has found that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) had many weaknesses when it came to covering important facts. The twelve experts from different fields—including ecology, fisheries, environmental and social impact assessment, public health, flood management, and hydrology—made the reviews on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The report of the reviews was known as the “Independent Expert Review of the Myitsone Dam EIA” (International Rivers, 2011a). According to this, the EIA report proposed by CPI didn't investigate the temporal and spatial scale of the social and environmental impacts of the dams, superficial analysis of the dam's impacts on freshwater

biodiversity, and the failure of public participation to meet best practices (International Rivers, 2011a). Seven of the eight experts said that the report falls below the international standard and practice (International Rivers, 2011a). According to the analysis of the Burma River Network, this study misses the downstream impacts of the Ayeyarwady River, including assessments of river flows, water levels, flooding patterns, saltwater intrusion into the delta, fish habitats, and riverbank erosion. In addition, baseline data on the river is also not collected. Consultation with affected people is not included in this study.

5.4. Safety, Security and Political Concerns

The location of the dam is just 100 kilometers from Sagaing major fault line in an earthquake-prone area. The highly sensitive Sagaing fault line runs from north to south through Myanmar. The regions along the fault line have faced earthquakes before. Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin state, lies just 40 kilometers downstream. If the Myitsone dam breaks, it will flood Myitkyina with disastrous effects, endangering the 150,000 people living there. If both Myanmar and Chinese sites were really worried about environmental issues and sustainable development, they should not build such a big dam at the confluence of the Ayeyarwady River. Instead, two smaller dams that could produce the same amount of electricity generated should be established (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009).

The Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG), the Rural Reconstruction Movement Organization, and the Kachin Public Youth Organization were highly instrumental in the early days of the protests against the Myitsone Dam construction (Kirchherr, Charles & Malton, 2015). Since 2004, the Kachin villagers reached out to the various Kachin ceasefire groups asking them to stop the project. In 2007, Kachin villagers and activists initiated their underground anti-Myitsone Dam activities. They also expressed their unwillingness to the dam construction by conveying petition letters to the government, by doing prayer meetings, and by spreading secret leaflets and makeshift posters (Chan, 2017). On May 21, a group of twelve respected elders and community leaders from Kachin sent an open letter to Senior General Than voicing their opposition to the dam construction. However, any response from the military has not been received (KDNG, 2007).

In June 2007, Chairman of KIO Special Region 2 Zawng Hra sent a letter to the leader of the military government, Senior General Than Shwe, asking him to stop the dam project in the Myitsone confluence. On July 11, 2007, a letter was sent to Chinese authorities asking to halt the

dam construction and, instead, to build other dam projects in different parts of the Kachin state (Chronology of the Myitsone Dam, 2012). KIO suspected the Myanmar army leader would extend its domination in Kachin. Thus, KIO did not welcome the construction of the Myitsone Dam not only for concern for local people but also for political risk. KIO itself sent the letters many times and spoke with northern military commanders (U Kyaw Win and U Ohn Myint) of the military government by suggesting the authorities build the other dams in other places but not at the confluence.

At the beginning of 2009, the concerns about the Myitsone project spread out to mobilize other parts of the country, especially in the cities of lower Myanmar. In October 2009, about 15,000 local people living in the project areas were forced to relocate to new places. The villagers did not get fair compensation; instead, they were forced to sign compensation agreements regardless of accuracy in calculation of land size, the number of trees, or the value of properties (KDNG, 2009, p. 10).

Though the Myitsone Dam is funded, designed, and built by a state-owned Chinese corporation and the electricity generated will be sent back to China in line with Chinese government policies, the projects do not follow these standards that required assessments, consultation with affected peoples, and proper resettlement plans. In addition, the criteria of China's State Council's "Nine Principles on Encouraging and Standardizing Foreign Investments"—such as mutual respect, support for local livelihoods, and attention to environmental protection—are not well exercised in the Myitsone Dam construction (KDNG, 2009, p. 9). Thus, the failure of Chinese investment companies' business ethics was a strong reason why the people unanimously opposed the dam construction. This opposition was not only to the Myitsone issue, but also to other projects, such as the Ietpadaung copper mine project. It shows that local people are not satisfied with the practices of Chinese investment companies.

The area intended where the dam will be constructed is a conflict-prone region with an unstable situation; the Myanmar army and Kachin Independent Organization (KIO) have been fighting there for a long time. With the construction of the Myitsone Dam project, the tension between the military government and KIO has worsened again. KIO believed that the settlement and relocation plans at Myitsone aim to control the Kachin military forces for the sake of the government's interests. In addition, KIO strongly believe that the dam construction will destroy the traditional livelihoods of the Kachin people (International Rivers, 2011b). In October 2009,

RRMO and the Kachin Public Youth Organization conducted two anti-dam prayer meetings. Then they received the support of fifty local pastors to gather the signatures of more than 4,000 local residents who had protested the dam construction. After that, the petition was conveyed to the Chinese government (The Guardian, 2011a).

In April 2010, a series of bomb explosions broke out at the Myitsone Dam construction site, injuring a Chinese worker and destroying several temporary buildings and vehicles. Increasing militarization around the project threatened both the security and the livelihoods of the residents there. The resentment of local ethnic people intensified due to the lack of attention to local people's concerns and the lack of local benefits resulting from the project (KDNG, 2020). On February 11, 2010, hundreds of Kachin Roman Catholic Church followers gathered at the construction site of the Myitsone project on the Ayeyarwady River and prayed together to stop the dam project (BNI, 2010). In addition to the protest of the local Kachin people, the ethnic Kachin people who live abroad opposed the Myitsone Dam project by sending an appeal letter with many signatures to the Chinese Embassy, addressed to Premier Wen Jiabao. Overseas Kachin in five cities such as Bangkok, London, New Delhi, Singapore, and Wellington sent appeal letters to the respective embassies of the People's Republic of China. Despite their efforts, most of the embassies paid no attention to these people's demands and did not return any response. The only exception was the embassy in Singapore (Burma River Network, 2010).

5.5. The Myitsone Dam Issue

The USDP government led by President Thein Sein has implemented counterbalancing China with its new foreign policy realignment. Previously, the SPDC government tried to minimize Myanmar's overdependence on China (Myoe, 2015). The failure to reform would mean prolonging Myanmar's international isolation and deepening its overdependence on China (Yun, 2012a). In December 2010, a month after the general election, the campaigns against the dam construction heightened across the country.

The "Save the Irrawaddy" campaign was the first and most remarkable social movement; it was launched by a small group of environmentalists. It is the first major social movement throughout the Thein Sein administration. According to Chan (2017), the early stage of the "Save the Ayeyarwady" campaign was led by environmentalists and activists who felt concerned about the development of the project since the MOU of the project was signed in 2006. Though the campaign was launched by a small group of environmentalists, it became widespread when

joined by elites from different sectors, including civil society organizations (CSOs), political opponents, academics, retired technocrats, and mainstream media (Chan, 2017). Painters, cartoonists, singers, historians, and writers also alerted the people to improve public awareness. In November 2009, a twenty-six-member group organized by Soe Win Nyein, a famous environmental journalist and a member of environmental group Green Hearts, made a documentary trip to record the nature and the livelihoods of the people living along the river. The members of the team were composed of journalists, photographers, documentary producers, and writers who traveled by boat along the Ayeyarwady River from Mandalay to Bamaw in Kachin. Again in 2010, another boat trip was organized for the same purposes. Other groups made the same effort, all aimed at sending a valuable message to the people. All these efforts were the spearhead of the prominent “Save the Irrawaddy” campaign. Then, the campaign gained momentum as a scientific debate when Myanmar’s Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) report was leaked to CSOs. The retired technocrats from different ministries joined and spoke out to the whole country to recognize the social and environmental impacts of the dam by expressing their technical perspectives (Chan, 2017).

Although the people’s opposition to the project gradually increased in the country, the China-Myanmar relationship progressed since the early days of Thein Sein’s administration. When Thein Sein took office in March 2011, Chinese President Hu Jintao and his successor Vice-President Xi Jinping sent congratulations to Thein Sin and his two vice-presidents. China was the first country to recognize Myanmar’s new presidency. On March 12–16, Lt.-Gen. Jia Tingan, the PLA’s deputy director of the General Political Department, visited Myanmar. After that, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the 11th National Committee of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and a member of the Standing Committee of Political Bureau of Communist Party of China, was the first foreign dignitary to visit Myanmar after the new government was elected. On April 4, 2011, Jia Qinglin met with President Thein Sein and Vice-Presidents Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo and Dr. Sai Mauk Kham. At the meeting, President Thein Sin discussed Myanmar-China relations and their friendly cooperation in both regional and international organizations. The President said the bilateral relations were “the evolution of bilateral relations to strategic Paukphaw relations” and that he appreciated “China’s good neighborly cooperation in stability, tranquility, and development of Myanmar; successful transition to the new political system through Hluttaw sessions in line with the constitution;

bilateral cooperation in energy, oil, and natural gas; mechanized farming and transportation services; and strengthening of economic and friendly ties between Myanmar and China” (New Light of Myanmar, 2011b). Jia Qinglin also met with both the speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Upper House) Khin Aung Myint and the speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Thura Shwe Mann. The speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw praised the fact that the friendship between the two countries has reached “strategic relations” and affirmed the future of Myanmar to continue its relations with all global countries as well as with neighboring countries in accordance with the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” (New Light of Myanmar, 2011a, p. 7). During Jia Qinglin’s visit, the two countries signed the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, and the Myanmar government secured a 30 billion RMB (Renminbi) credit facility from the Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM Bank of China). Other agreements were also signed on the production sharing contract for copper mines and the construction of a refinery and petrol stations (Myo, 2015, p. 22).

On April 27, 2011, the two countries signed a MOU on the Muse-Kyaukphyu rail transportation system project between Myanmar Railways under the Ministry of Rail Transportation and China Railway Engineering Corporation. The vice-president of Myanmar attended the signing ceremony (New Light of Myanmar, 2011c). On May 12, 2011, Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the People’s Republic of China General Xu Caihou visited Myanmar and met with Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar General Min Aung Hlaing. At the ceremony, the leaders signed an agreement between the two-armed forces (New Light of Myanmar, 2011d).

In the President’s speech regarding his reform agenda, his priority focused on several credible points, such as reconciliation with opposition groups, especially with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; rapprochement with the West; good governance; promotion of human rights; and the abolition of repressive laws (Htut, 2019). The President also assured that he would practice non-aligned, independent, and active foreign policy in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

Within two months after his inauguration, President Thein Sein paid an official visit to China. In the middle of May, President Thein Sein attended the Association of Southeast Asian Summit (ASEAN) held in Jakarta, Indonesia. After attending the meeting, the President paid a visit to China from May 26–28, 2011, at the invitation of President Hu Jintao of the People’s

Republic of China. China was the first country that Myanmar's new government visited after assuming power in March. The two countries announced a joint statement that the bilateral relations were upgraded to the "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" during President Thein Sein's visit to China (Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 2011b). That was the very first-time bilateral relations were referred from political and economic friends into a strategic partner along with Myanmar-China relations.

Under the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, both countries agreed to maintain close high-level contacts and to build bilateral relations between the parliament, governments, judicial departments, and political parties (Eurasia Review, 2011). The following agreements were agreed by the two governments:

1. The two sides will maintain close high-level contacts, continue to promote strategic mutual trust, and further enhance friendly exchanges and cooperation between the parliaments, governments, judicial departments, and political parties of the two countries.
2. The two sides will continue to carry out consultations between the foreign ministries of the two countries on an irregular basis, have a timely exchange of views on bilateral relations and international and regional hotspot issues, and hold regular meetings on bilateral and multilateral occasions to strengthen strategic communication.
3. The two sides will follow the principles of equality and mutual benefit, drawing upon each other's strength and emphasizing practical results; further enhance the size and level of the economic cooperation and trade between the two countries; work to strengthen healthy, stable, and suitable business ties; make joint efforts to create a favorable environment for trade and investment cooperation; and enhance the closer economic and trade exchange between the two countries in accordance with their economic and trade policies.
4. The two countries will continue to conduct friendly cooperation in such areas as education, culture, science and technology, health, agriculture, and tourism on the basis of mutual benefit; strengthen people-to-people and cultural exchanges; increase mutual visits; and deepen mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.
5. The two sides will strengthen border management cooperation; conduct timely communication on border management affairs; and strive to maintain peace, tranquility, and stability in border areas.

6. The Chinese side reaffirms its respect for Myanmar's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and its support for Myanmar's pursuit of its development path suited to its national conditions. Myanmar reiterates that its adherence to the one-China policy recognizes that the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China and that Taiwan is an unalienable part of the Chinese territory. Myanmar will continue to support the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and China's cause of peaceful reunification.

7. The two sides will further enhance coordination and cooperation in the United Nations and other multilateral areas; jointly safeguard the interests of developing countries; strengthen cooperation in such mechanisms as the ASEAN Plus China, Japan, and the ROK, ASEAN plus China, and Greater Mekong Sub Regional Economic Cooperation; and promote common development and prosperity of the region. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 2011b)

Myanmar is the last country that signed the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China among the four late-comer member states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). China established the agreement with Vietnam in 2008, Laos in 2009, and Cambodia in 2010. Why did Myanmar reach an agreement with China to a strategic level? The Myanmar government needed Beijing's support as ASEAN's dialogue partners for its 2014 ASEAN Chairmanship and to gain financial support for a number of development projects assisted by Beijing. Mutually, China also required Npyidaw's support regarding South China Sea issues if Myanmar serves the chairmanship in the association. During his visit, President Thein Sein pledged to President Hu that the Myanmar government maintained the "One China Policy" and supported Beijing regarding the South China Sea issue that China faced territorial disputes with some ASEAN member states (Aung, 2011). Moreover, Thein Sein praised the bilateral relations that the historical paukphaw relationship has reached "a strategic level" (Aung, 2011). That was the time China and Vietnam raised tension because Chinese marine surveillance vessels approached a Vietnamese ship operated by the state oil and gas firm Petro Vietnam and cut its exploration cables. While the tension between China and Vietnam was escalating, President Thein Sein decided Myanmar would back China. Although Thein Sein's standpoint would be inconsistent with the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), the sixth ASEAN-China Summit in November 2002 in which each member state has an

obligation to respect the DOC and take a neutral position (Aung, 2011), it showed that Sino-Myanmar bilateral relations was inherently strengthening and Myanmar's attempt to build strong diplomatic ties with Beijing. In the statement, China and Myanmar omitted the content about the military cooperation between the two countries. However, the visit of the vice-chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission made an agreement with the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar (Chenyang, 2012).

During his visit, President Thein Sein agreed to work with China in the areas of energy, transportation, and agriculture. At his meeting with President Hu Jintao, Thein Sein declared that the relations with China were the closest and the most important ones for Myanmar (Xinhua, 2011). One of the agreements signed by the President's visit was "to jointly build a rail transport construction project in Myanmar. That agreement was a supplement to a memorandum of understanding signed in April between the Myanmar Union Ministry of Rail Transportation and the China Railways Engineering Corporation, the parent company of China Railway, to build the railway between Myanmar's border town of Muse and the port of Kyaukphyu" (Eurasia Review, 2011). That railway line would be the parallel way to the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines that would transfer the Rakhine state of Myanmar to Kunming of China.

Although Myanmar was the last country among ASEAN member states to sign the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China, it was a critical development in the bilateral ties because that partnership would overwhelm a wide range of sectors in cooperation. In this context, Myanmar's Military General Min Aung Hlaing met with Vice-President Xi Jinping in China in November 2011, and they successfully signed an MOU on defense cooperation between the two militaries. With the progressive transformation of Myanmar's domestic politics, the country's legitimacy at home and abroad and its dignity improved. As another step, Myanmar would serve as the chair of ASEAN in 2014, in which Beijing hoped Myanmar would become its diplomatic supporter in the region. China aimed to deeply cooperate in regional cooperation through ASEAN such as ASEAN+3, ASEAN+1, and the Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation for the sake of its interests, especially in the South China Sea dispute.

During the visit, President Thein Sein and his counterpart, President Hu Jintao, signed nine agreements, including a cooperation framework agreement with loan and credit line agreements worth more than 540 million euros (US\$765 million) line of credit from China

Development Bank to Myanmar's Ministry of Taxation and Finance. The President of Myanmar said to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao that "China is a friendly neighbor of Myanmar's worthy of trust and has provided vigorous support and selfless help for Myanmar's economic development." Chinese leaders promised the President of Myanmar that they would help Naypyidaw with the 2013 South East Asian Games and the 24th ASEAN Summit that would be held in Myanmar (Myoe, 2015). Premier Wen also told of Beijing's desire to help Myanmar's development and to bring the "smooth progress" of oil and gas pipelines being built across Myanmar. In their statement, the two countries' mutual perspectives and preferences were vigorously shown. President Hu also expressed the President of Myanmar's visit as an advantageous one to advance mutual understanding and as a new page in twenty-first-century friendship and cooperation between China and Myanmar (Blanchard, 2011). For China, the oil and gas pipeline are very essential not only for its energy security but also for strategic interest. As for Myanmar, Beijing plays an essential role in the country's economic development, providing loans and bringing many investments in different sectors especially extracting natural resources and energy sectors.

While the governmental relations were improving between the two countries, the Myitsone Dam issue was heightening at the same time. In March 2011, KIO sent an open letter to Beijing expressing its concerns about a large number of Chinese gold mining camps along the river (Chronology of the Myitsone Dam, 2012). In June 2011, the construction of the Myitsone Dam was temporarily stopped because of the risks of snowmelt and rainy season water rise. While the project was paused, the armed confrontation between KIA (Kachin Independence Army) and the Tatmadaw (the Army) increased near the Dapein (also called Taping) Dam because of the disagreement between two parties about the future of KIO-controlled areas (Chronology of the Myitsone Dam, 2012). Consequently, the Myitsone Dam construction was halted for eight weeks for security problems and high water as well as the departure of workers from the site. Failure to reach an agreement between the government and KIO led to not only the series of explosions but to fighting in June 2011 (International Rivers, 2011b). Subsequently, along with the protest of the dam construction, there was heightened threat to the lives of local people and also Chinese personnel. More than 20,000 Kachin residents fled to the Chinese border. The Myitsone Dam issue threatened the peace and security of the Kachin state, and it became the flashpoint for the renewal of conflict between the Burmese army/Myanmar army and

the ethnic Armed Organizations. Finally, it ended the seventeen-year ceasefire agreement between the Myanmar army and the KIO (Kachin Independence Organization) (Chronology of the Myitsone Dam, 2012).

Myanmar's government boosted its strong diplomatic relations with China during the month of the halt of the hydropower project. In the Position Paper of the People's Republic of China at the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2011, China recognized the Myanmar government's progress in the democratic process. China uncovered its attitude and opinion toward Naypyidaw political development as follows:

The formation and smooth operation of the new government mark important progress in the democratic process of Myanmar. China hopes to see political stability, economic development, and social progress in Myanmar. The Myanmar issue is, in essence, the country's internal affair. The international community should provide constructive help to Myanmar and create an enabling environment for it to advance national reconciliation and steadily achieve democracy and development. Imposing sanctions and pressure will not help resolve the issue. China supports the good offices of the UN Secretary-General and his Special Advisor and will continue working with the international community to provide support and assistance so as to contribute to democracy and development in Myanmar. (Position Paper of the People's Republic of China, 2011)

Around July 2011, an environmental baseline report of the Myitsone Dam conducted by BANCA was leaked to CSOs and then the technical information from this report accelerated the "Save the Ayeyarwady" campaign (Chan, 2017). According to the report, it suggested constructing two smaller dams instead of establishing a mega-dam at the Myitsone confluence because of upcoming severe environmental deterioration and the damage of cultural heritage of Kachin ethnics (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association [BANCA], 2009). Before the report was spread to the people, the construction of the dam was built in December 2009. On the other hand, China's CISPDR's finalized report was found in contradiction the BANCA's findings. The CISPDR was assigned by CPI to carry out the EIA for the Myitsone Dam construction. According to the commission of the CISPDR, BANCA conducted the environmental baseline survey (International Rivers, 2011). In this sense, the anti-dam

campaigns were reinforced by the scientific data of the report. In addition, the anti-dam movements were accelerated to the scientific debates joined by retired technocrats such as U Tun Lwin, who was the retired Director-General of the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology; U Ohn, former Director of the Forest Department; and Daw Cho Cho, who was a retired Deputy Director of the Irrigation Department. They also shared their technical knowledge with the people through public talks and interviews. Their technical perspectives enlightened people's awareness to bolster their campaigns not only from cultural appeal but also from a scientific point of view (Chan, 2017, p. 7).

Thanks to the relaxation of media as part of the government's reforms, the media could support the anti-dam campaigns in an effective way. In 2011, the Eleven Media took the issue of the Myitsone Dam project to the public by highlighting the government's accountability in the consideration of environmental problems and the welfare and livelihoods of the people (The Nation, 2012). From June to September 2011, it issued at least one article on the Myitsone Dam every week in its two weekly journals (Chan, 2017). Likely, the *7Day News* and *The Voice* journals spoke out against the dam project (Chan, 2017, p. 683).

On August 11, 2011, the leader of opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD), Aung San Suu Kyi issued an open letter, the "Irrawaddy Appeal." In her letter, she highlighted the significance of the Ayeyarwady River as the great river with remarkable "geographical feature of Myanmar, the grand natural highway, a profile source of food, the home of varied water flora and fauna, the supporter of traditional modes of life, the must that has inspired countless works of prose and poetry" (Irrawaddy Appeal, 2011). Then she asked for saving of the Irrawaddy, which was under threat. She also called for those who are environmental experts, conservationists, and lovers of nature, peace, and harmony to join the campaign of creating worldwide awareness of the risks that would fall upon one of the most important rivers of Asia (Ayeyarwady Appeal, 2011). As the public figure and the democracy icon of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal to protect the lifeblood river of the country encouraged the people of Myanmar to raise their awareness and to recognize the threats to the Ayeyarwady River. Aung San Suu Kyi's involvement in the Myitsone Dam issue put the issue to raise a new step and to gain both domestic and international emphasis over the dam issue. For Naypyidaw, her participation in the dam issue could create more opportunities to put pressure on China because of her unique political role in Myanmar. Due to her sacrifices and efforts for

democratic movements, she has achieved trust from people, and she stood as the democratic icon in the international community. Thus, her appeal letter was a huge impact both on the Myanmar government and the international community as well as China.

On September 1, 2011, a petition letter with a campaign message “From Those who Wish the Irrawaddy to Flow Forever” was sent to President Thein Sein. The 88 Generation Peace and Open Society (88 Generation) collected 1,600 signatories from different social actors, including political leaders, film directors and actors, journalists, and writers (The Irrawaddy, 2011). In August and September, the dam opponents became more outspoken, and their mobilization was also more visible (Chan, 2017). There were also both signature campaigns and talks initiated by environmental groups, ethnic activists, young groups, poets, and individual celebrities across the country (Chan, 2017). The literary talks were held in cities to improve the people’s political consciousness and called for the suspension of the project (Chan, 2017, pp. 681–682). Several “Save the Ayeyarwady” events were held around Yangon. People also actively participated in the talks to oppose the dam construction. At that time, the speakers could speak more openly than the previous time under the military regime and demand to stop the dam project. That was the benefit of the government’s media relaxation reform.

The “Save the Ayeyarwady” campaign reached a peak in the third week of September 2011, and thus a series of public events were held across the country. The Free Funeral Service Society (FFSS) held an event titled “Irrawaddy of Youth.” Around five hundred people attended the event, and the attendees read out poems and essays (Hsene, 2011b). The well-known singers and poets entertained the people, and environmentalists and NGOs held workshops and seminars to increase public collaboration and to escalate the importance of the issue. Many people openly called for a permanent halt to the Myitsone Dam project. Furthermore, a book launch of a compilation of published articles on the Ayeyarwady River and the Myitsone Dam was also held (Chan, 2019, p. 682). The “Save the Ayeyarwady” campaign spread not only to the Yangon area but also to other parts of the country. Songs to express the value of the Ayeyarwady rivers were sung by the people. Literary talks and art exhibitions about the grand Ayeyarwady were held by CSOs located in towns along the Ayeyarwady River (Chan, 2017). When the support of famous media was added to the movement, the campaign had more accelerated as the nationwide movement.

On September 11, 2011, the Minister of Electric Power 1 Zaw Min said in a press meeting that the Myitsone hydropower project will proceed as the scheme albeit domestic and international protests against the project. On September 17, 2011, the Myanmar government officials including Minister of Electric Power No (1) held a workshop on the Impact of Hydropower Projects in Ayeyarwady basin on Ayeyarwady River and natural environment amid criticism and protest against the dam was escalating (Moe, 2011a). The workshop was financed by China; scholars, researchers, and NGOs joined the workshop. The Union Minister Zaw Min of MOEP (1) said to carry out the environmental conservation and river management through national-level plan including the people, organizations under the arrangement of the State, and drafting the law, if necessary. In addition, the Ministry of Mines will control gold mining in the Ayeyarwady River for the sake of environmental conservation.

Among the six papers read in the workshop, the Chairman of CPI Mr. Li Guanghua also attended the workshop and read a paper, “Ayeyarwady Basin Hydropower Projects are Strategic Selection for Myanmar Electric Power Industry.” In his discussion, the Chairman of CPI proposed the plans and preparations of the company to build the Myitsone Dam. At the meeting, Union Minister for MOEP (1) told that the change of environment and its impact are to be studied while implementing the project and operating plants as it is changing constantly.

At the pre-workshop press conference that was held on September 10, the Minister for MOEP (1) Zaw Min also assured that the government would not give up the project. However, there was some division among elites regarding the project (Chan, 2017). According to Chan (2017), the Minister of Industry No. (1) and (2) questioned the independence of the EUA and asked for doing a more comprehensive assessment of the dam project. He also called for a review of the terms of the contract and spoke out demanding accountability (Moe, 2011b). Furthermore, the Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry showed his concern about the problems of long-term detriments and economic benefits of the project (Chan, 2017). Although the risks and challenges of the project were discussed, the Minister of MOEP (1) said that the project will proceed in accord with the decision of the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (New Light of Myanmar, 2011e). It means that the government will not give up the construction of the dam project; instead, it will manage to make necessary implementations.

On September 22, 2011, the Green Heart's art exhibition was held at Gallery 65 in Yangon with the aim of promoting a public campaign to save the Ayeyarwady River. Seven thousand visitors attended the event within a week. The exhibition was composed of more than one hundred photographs, paintings, drawings, and cartoons and was attended by about one thousand people, including well-known writers, actors, politicians, and environmentalists. The event was also attended by Aung San Suu Kyi, and she delivered a speech that "People need to unite if they are to achieve what they want." This part of the speech was crossed out in a report by Myanmar's Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), which was a branch under the Ministry of Information. The PSRD had banned and prohibited journalists from writing about the Myitsone issue when public criticism was heightened among the people against the construction of the project. Apart from restricting the Myitsone Dam issue, the PSRD also warned the journals from writing criticism about China (Hseng, 2011a). Under these circumstances, China did not expect that Myanmar wanted to pause the dam construction based on the people's desire.

On September 20, 2011, on the sidelines of the General Debate of the 66th Session of the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly), the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi emphasized high-level contacts, construction of joint projects, and coordination in international and regional affairs between the two sides during his meeting with Myanmar Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin (Singh, 2020, p. 7). The relations between the two countries were smooth even in September 2011, before the dam project was shelved.

On the other hand, despite the escalation of anti-dam movements, none of the key organizers of the "Save the Irrawaddy" campaign were threatened by the authorities and did not face arbitrary detention. In addition, the government did not limit any publication about the Myitsone Dam issue even though the media censorship law was partially active. Moreover, the government still allowed permission to freely organize public events for dam campaigns. Thus, the anti-dam campaigners achieved some kinds of support from the government in the issue. Without the government's acquiescence, the "Save the Ayeyarwady" campaign could not have been turned into a nationwide movement. It is reasonable to believe that domestic calls for the suspension of the dam coincided with Naypyidaw's diplomatic intention (Chan, 2017, p. 684). It can assume that the Myanmar government intended to put pressure on China through people's power. However, the Chinese government's misjudgment of the Myanmar government's strategy and policy changes finally resulted in suspension of the dam project.

On September 30, 2011, the President announced the unilateral suspension of the Myitsone Hydropower Dam project at the second regular session of the first Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and the first Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House). The President made the decision on his own without consultation with Hluttaw (the Legislature). In his announcement, the President mentioned the following concerns about the Myitsone:

1. Natural beauties of Myitsone—the gift of nature and a landmark not only for Kachin State but also for Myanmar—may disappear;
2. Possible loss of livelihood of national races villages due to inundation at the upstream of the river;
3. Commercially grown rubber and teak plantations that are heavily invested by private entrepreneurs may be destroyed;
4. Melting ice from snow-capped mountains at the far north triggered by climate change, torrential rains, or severe earthquakes may destroy the Myitsone Dam, claiming lives and property of the people in towns and villages at downstream of the dam; and
5. There may be a devastating effect on the Ayeyarwady River. (New Light of Myanmar, 2011f)

He also proclaimed the point that “the government is elected by the people, and it has to respect people’s will, as well as the government, has the responsibility to address concerns in all serious” (New Light of Myanmar, 2011f). The President declared that the Myitsone Dam project will be suspended during his tenure.

The announcement of the Myanmar president was a surprise to the international community. The president of the CPI Lu Qizhou said in *China Daily* that he was shocked hearing about the suspension of the dam project and the Myanmar government had never communicated anything about the suspension with them (China Daily, 2011). However, the Myanmar government repeatedly asked China to reconsider the project, but “China brushed off such messages, believing the government was effectively silenced” (Sun, 2012b). Moreover, the local Kachin people and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) also sent letters to Beijing about the issue, but they received no response from China. Thus, it is vividly clear that China had no willingness to negotiate before the Myanmar government’s announcement to postpone the dam project (Mogensen, 2017). China neglected the Myanmar people’s request for negotiation when the public outcry heightened about the dam construction.

The unilateral announcement of President Thein Sein to suspend the Myitsone Dam project shocked China. At first, senior officials from Beijing castigated the Myanmar government and threatened legal action on the suspension of the project. Meanwhile, the dam was declared to be stopped by the Myanmar government, China was the second-largest trading partner and the biggest foreign investor in Myanmar. On the other hand, the Myanmar government received praise from the United States because of its “significant and positive step” in terms of listening to the voices of people in accordance with the democratic government’s norms. The manager of the China Power Investment (Lu Qizhou) said that the failure of the project was the loss of direct investment and the loss of opportunity to generate electric power; as additionally, Myanmar would lose its reputation due to the breach of contract. However, he whitewashed the environmental and social impacts of the dams saying that only 2,146 local people would have to relocate to new places (and the company supported these households with two-story houses, two-in-one color televisions, and a 100,000-kyat living allowance); through his statement, he intended to imply that the CPI already got the consent of the local community and there was no serious issue between CPI and local ethnics. In addition, Hong Leo, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, called for the Myanmar government to do the consultation over the issue because the project was agreed by both countries to pursue after its overall assessment. Despite China’s demand, the Burma Rivers Network pointed out that China negotiated its investment only with the military government without regarding the will of the Myanmar people, especially the local community. It also noted that Beijing neglected the request of the Myanmar people in which the local villagers who live at the dam area, several political and non-governmental organizations, and international human rights organizations attempted to contact CPI to discuss their concern about the social and environmental impacts of the dam project. In spite of their endeavor, the CPI never responded to all these attempts to reach a peaceful dialogue between the parties, and thus the CPI could not say that the company did not know about the dissatisfaction and feeling of the local people (The Guardian, 2011b).

Soon after the President’s announcement of the dam suspension, Thein Sein sent the Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin as his special envoy to Beijing in order to explain the pause of the project. It was clear that Myanmar had no desire to alienate China by halting an important project of China. The editorial section from the government-owned newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* expressed that “the suspension of the Myitsone project is out of the

concern of the environment and there are people in the country who want to harness this event to destroy Myanmar-China relations. The untrue coverage in the foreign media is spreading quickly. But undoubtedly, it is of vital importance for Myanmar to maintain a sincere friendship with its neighbor". In another editorial section, it stressed that "whoever cannot destroy the Myanmar-China relations" (China Daily, 2011).

After the suspension of the dam project, Myanmar Vice-President Tin Aung Myint Oo met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in China. The Vice-President attended the eighth China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning and also paid a high-level visit. Ahead of the Vice-President's trip to China, the state-owned newspapers stated in articles that the shelving of the Myitsone Dam would not interrupt the Myanmar-China fraternal ties. In an article, it said that "it is definitely impossible that Myitsone issue can deteriorate the friendship of two neighbors" (Moe, 2011d). In this way, the Myanmar government also conveyed its opinion to the Chinese government through the state-owned media. Naypyidaw wanted to maintain its friendly relations with China.

5.6. The External Power Playing a Key Role in Myanmar's Tactical Manipulation

The external influence played an important role in Myanmar's democratic transformation, and that external power became the Myanmar government's strategic tool to counterbalance China through the Myitsone Dam issue. In the suspension of Myitsone Dam, the role of the external powers, particularly the United States, immensely encouraged the momentum of the issue. On the other hand, the Myanmar government strategically used the power of external powers to counterbalance China.

The United States' primary focus on Myanmar was the restoration of democracy and support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD (Haacke, 2012). The United States' punitive sanctions on Myanmar were imposed after the military regime's brutal suppression of a peaceful protest in 1988. Then United States President Ronald Reagan stopped Washington's small aid program to Myanmar, imposed an arms embargo, and started a range of economic sanctions (Selth, 2012). The successive administration in the United States took more strengthening measures to Myanmar until President Barack Obama took office in 2009. Since that time, the United States' strong sanctions on Myanmar's military government gradually increased and put rigorous pressures aiming to conclude the repression and increasing democracy in Myanmar.

One of the military junta's first responses to United States (also EU) sanctions was to boost its bilateral relations with China. Myanmar's military government turned its direction

toward China for arms, trade, and diplomatic support. From approximately 2003, the military junta improved its military ties with nuclear-armed North Korea. When Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in 1997, the spectrum of its relations was more widespread, making the United States more inconvenient to handle authoritarian Myanmar. In addition, the country was an important element for neighboring countries' economic development because of its ample natural resources, such as energy resources. Furthermore, Naypyidaw could take advantage of Sino-India regional rivalry by using its geostrategic significance to some extent. On the other hand, the country was a center of international effort to combat transnational crime, such as narcotic drug traffic and human trafficking. Due to its firm and long-standing hardline policy, Washington found it difficult to play a constructive role on these issues. Consequently, though the major purpose of the United States' strong policy toward Myanmar was to isolate and punish Myanmar, Washington did not see an effective outcome (Selth, 2012, p. 5).

On the one hand, the United States found that its strong sanction-based foreign policy toward Myanmar made considerable damage to ASEAN-U.S. relations. The United States government was absent from several important meetings hosted by ASEAN in the late part of the Bush administration in the mid-2000s (Myoe, 2015, p. 33) that created a bit of distance between U.S.-ASEAN relations and also pushed ASEAN to get closer to China. For the United States, it has been necessary to hold good relationships with regional countries due to the rise of China and its growing assertiveness in the region. To contain Chinese influence in the region, it was the time for the United States to assess its policy toward Myanmar, which impacted the U.S.-ASEAN relations. In addition, the purpose of the United States' sanction toward Myanmar was in the hope of regime change in Myanmar and going through the democratic country. However, the United States failed its policy implication; its sanctions pushed the development of Sino-Myanmar relations to a large extent, and China supported its diplomatic shield to Myanmar whenever Naypyidaw faced defending the UN's resolution at the United Nations. Thus, the United States saw that its policy toward Myanmar was ineffective; instead, it made Washington get away from the regional affairs.

In 2009, when the Obama administration reviewed United States policy toward Myanmar, it finally reckoned that the sanctions were at best "modest inconveniences to the military regime" (Selth, 2012, p. 5). In September, the Obama administration, after a seven-month review of United States policy toward Myanmar, announced a change in United States

policy towards Myanmar in which the United States decided to engage in direct dialogue with the SPDC (Stated Peace and Development Council) on how to promote democracy and human rights in Myanmar and to cooperate to a greater extent with the SPDC on international security issues, such as nuclear nonproliferation and counter-narcotics efforts despite remaining sanctions on Myanmar (Martin & Mix, 2011). The review coincided with the final stage of the SPDC's "Seven-step Road Map" that was designed to replace the authoritarian government with a "discipline-flourishing democracy" coined by the military regime. Thus, Washington's 2009 adoption of pragmatic engagement that can be characterized as the balancing of bilateral engagement and the application of political and economic sanctions by the Obama administration paved the way for the progress of bilateral rapprochement. To achieve the goals of "a unified, peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Burma (Myanmar) that respects the human rights of its citizens," the Obama administration pressed Myanmar's military leaders to release all its political prisoners, end all its conflicts with ethnic minorities, cease its human rights violations, and initiate "a credible internal political dialogue with the democratic opposition and ethnic minority leaders on elements of reconciliation and reform" (Martin & Mix, 2011, p. 4).

At a 2011 conference at Georgetown University, some panelists strongly argued that the United States sanctions on Myanmar had pushed Myanmar into a heavily dependent situation on China. According to the argument, they pointed out that the United States should reconsider its isolation and sanction policy from a broader regional and strategic perspective because the growing influence of China in Myanmar could disturb the United States' strategic interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The strategic thinkers in the United States had called for the reviewing and modification of the American sanctions policy because of China's increasing political and economic integration with Myanmar (Sun, 2014, p. 5).

For Myanmar's side, the Myanmar government has attempted to improve its thorny relations with the United States since 2008. In 2009, the military-led SPDC government comprehended the United States' policy transformation to re-engage with Myanmar, and then the peaceful democratic transition in 2010 had more impetus. In March 2009, Stephen Blake, the director of the Office for Mainland Southeast Asia at the United States State Department, paid a visit to Myanmar and met with Myanmar's Foreign Minister. When President Barack Obama won the election in November, the SPDC Chairman Senior General Thaw Shwe sent a congratulatory message to President Obama (Qingrum, 2010).

There were apparent reasons why the military government wanted to reconcile with Washington and why the military gradually stayed away from its long-standing giant neighbor, China: (1) the 2007 “Saffron Revolution” and (2) the 2008 Cyclone Nargis that happened in Myanmar. In 2007, the Myanmar government faced anti-government demonstrations led by Buddhist monks, which were called the “Saffron Revolution.” Due to the development of information and communication technology, the pictures and stories of the military’s brutal crackdowns on Buddhist monks spread both in and out of the country. Thus, the arrest of Buddhist monks and the raid of monasteries by the army received enormous international condemnation, and it was a huge struggle of the junta, which has always praised itself as a promoter and defender of the Buddhist religion. The military junta was concerned about the loss of its legitimacy to rule because of international condemnation. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) tried to issue a resolution about the issue. Owing to the possibility of a veto by both China and Russia, a compromise was finished to issue a non-binding UNSC presidential statement. But China finally agreed to issue the final version of the presidential statement when the United States served as the rotating president of the UNSC. The statement was issued on October 11, 2007. Along the negotiation process, Beijing played a critical role between the Myanmar government and the UN. On this issue, the Myanmar military junta felt apprehensive and perceived the increasing Chinese influence and its crucial role in Myanmar’s affairs. The 2007 “Saffron Revolution” highlighted Myanmar’s huge dependence on China that made the military leader worry about reducing its over-dependence on Beijing (Myoe, 2015).

The second point that could wake up the military leaders was the event of Cyclone Nargis that hit the Myanmar coastline around the Ayeyarwady Delta on May 2, 2008. The almost 12 feet of water and wind speed of more than 200 km/hr killed more than 100,000 people and left 1.5 to 2 million people severely affected (Junk, 2016). The military government was neither able to take immediate recruitment nor willing to accept the international aid offered by international agencies and non-governmental organizations. The military government was afraid of being present with western NGOs and international organizations in the country. Thus, the international community urged China to convince the SPDC government to accept international relief aid and to receive Admiral Timothy J. Keating, commander of the United States Pacific Fleet Command in Yangon to coordinate the delivery of relief aid (Myoe, 2015, p. 32). Eventually, the junta allowed much local and international aid. Following these two consecutive

events, the military leaders gradually perceived China's international obligations and its willingness to establish a positive image in front of the international community (Myoe, 2015, p. 32). As a result, the army leaders felt more anxious about Beijing's predominance in Myanmar's domestic and international affairs as well as Beijing's contact with anti-government activists and organizations outside Myanmar. All these situations became the impetus for the Myanmar military government to reduce its dependence on China, to limit Chinese interference in Myanmar's internal affairs, and finally lead to engaging with the international community particularly the United States.

In August 2011, the Obama administration appointed Derek Mitchell as special representative and policy coordinator for Myanmar. It was the appointment of the first ambassador to Myanmar in twenty years. Then Washington introduced its "dual-track" approach of "engagement and sanction" to Naypyidaw (Turnell, 2012, p. 162). After several visits of Derek Mitchell, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid her visit to Myanmar in November 2011.

The suspension of the Myitsone Hydropower project was impressive news that convinced Myanmar's concrete reform for the Western powers, particularly the United States. Even after Hillary Clinton's visit, the United States' economic and financial sanctions posted on Myanmar still remained, but the time was described as "flickers of progress" in Myanmar-U.S. relations (Turnell, 2012, p. 163). The improved relationship encouraged future reform processes for Myanmar.

For the EU (the European Union), it emphasized the normalization of its relations on an "improvement in the human rights situation" and "substantive progress towards an inclusive democratization process" (European Union, 2010). EU has long called for the release of political prisoners detained by the military junta. In 1996, the European Union adopted a common position, such as banning the sale or transfer of arms or weapons expertise from the EU to Myanmar as well as the sale or transfer of any equipment that is possible to use for internal repression. After the crackdown on a pro-democracy protest led by Buddhist monks in September 2007 (the "Saffron Revolution"), the EU escalated its sanctions on the military government by targeting 1, 207 firms with measures including visa bans and asset freezes. In April 2009, the EU made the extension of its sanctions of banning visas and freezing assets of Myanmar's military members and its backers (Reuters, 2011).

Since the Obama administration started in 2009, the United States policy toward Myanmar significantly turned to a positive side. Washington itself pushed Myanmar to the democratic path and it also endeavored to work with ASEAN in bringing about reforms in Myanmar. In doing so, Washington signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. In the Bush administration, signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation was refused because of Myanmar's ASEAN membership (Selth, 2012).

At the regional level, ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) called for both the United States and EU to lift their sanctions on Myanmar after the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. The association issued a declaration in which the sanctions imposed by both the United States and EU entailed setbacks for the development of trade, investment, and modern technologies in the ethnic regions of Myanmar. The ASEAN's desire to review the western's sanctions on Myanmar was a distinct sign of welcoming Myanmar's reform process (Southeast Asian nations call for Europe, the US to lift Myanmar sanctions, 2011).

Another external factor that pushed Myanmar toward the reform process was ASEAN. The Myanmar government needed to prove its realistic reforms to uphold the position of ASEAN chairmanship in 2014. In 2005, the country abandoned the 2006 chairmanship because of international pressure and the opposition of some member states of the association. As late as August 2011, ASEAN did not make any decision, waiting for a clear and radical political reform. President Thein Sein's cordial meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi and his decision to postpone the Myitsone Dam project were stemming from the aspiration of the country to become an ASEAN chairmanship and to upgrade its dignity at the regional and international level. These significant moves were completely recognized by the ASEAN, with the result that Naypyidaw started to shift the path of democracy from military rule. As a result, Myanmar was approved to serve as the ASEAN chairmanship in 2014 (Sun, 2012a). Thus, the Myanmar government needed to prove its real change in the regional and international community. That was also a major pushing factor for the suspension of the Myitsone Dam in light of demonstrating Myanmar's genuine changes.

Myanmar's efforts to balance its relationship with China were likely to be quietly welcomed in ASEAN diplomatic circles (Chow, 2012, p. 7). In ASEAN, some member countries have faced territorial disputes with Beijing regarding the South China Sea issue. As small and less powerful countries as compared to China, ASEAN member countries also feel worried about

the rise of China and its growing predominance in the region despite the economic collaboration that remains increasing between states. In addition, the geographic proximity with and the gigantic size of China have concerned the ASEAN countries. Consequently, member states are willing to turn toward the United States as a counterweight. In that situation, Myanmar's alignment between China and the United States and Myanmar's bold decision to the unilateral cancelation of the Chinese giant project could make it easier for ASEAN to lean more closely toward the United States (Chow, 2012). It was Myanmar's successful counterbalancing act to China that created much impact on other regional countries.

According to Myoe (2015), Myanmar's approach to China was Naypyidaw's desire and decision to reintegrate Myanmar within the international community, dependent on the rapprochement with the United States, which in turn required both domestic political reforms and foreign policy alignment—a need to reduce Myanmar's dependence on China, particularly in the context of U.S.–China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region. In the context of China-Myanmar relations, the factors that influenced Myanmar's China policy since 2011 are growing anti-Chinese sentiment in Myanmar, growing concern with China's interference in Myanmar affairs, and the rapprochement with the United States (Myoe, 2015, p. 23).

5.7. Myanmar's Policy Manipulation (1988-2011)

Since the military junta took power in 1988, the country suffered strong international isolation imposed by the western countries, especially by the United States. Because of various sanctions, the military government had to depend on the Chinese government politically and economically as well as militarily. However, the military government perceived Beijing's growing dominance in the country, and Myanmar fell into the Chinese pariah state gradually. Thus, the different military regimes, such as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), were concerned about Chinese influence in the country and attempted to free from the Chinese sphere of influence. Politically, Myanmar and China had an unbalanced relationship that forced the former to accede to the latter's *de facto* intervention in its internal affairs, such as the issues related to the EAOs (ethnic Armed Organization) at Sino-Myanmar borders. Some of the ethnic insurgent groups have very close relations with the Chinese government in terms of both trade and aid by China. That seriously disturbed the Myanmar government.

On the other hand, China's exploitation of Myanmar's ample natural resources had produced intense problems between the two countries. According to Yun (2012a), "Neither the hydropower dams nor the oil and gas pipelines would help alleviate Myanmar's extreme power shortage; most investments from China focus on extractive industry with little regard for sustainable development, job creation or technology transfers; many of them bring irreversible detrimental environmental and social impacts" (Yun, 2012a, p. 57). Thus, the growing dominance of China in the country and Myanmar's extreme dependence on Beijing created a wake-up call for Myanmar leaders who had xenophobic nature about foreign threats. In addition, the Myanmar leaders had felt suspicion of China's intention and behavior toward Myanmar. Finally, the military government decided to change the political system to break its international isolation and decrease Chinese influence in the country by diversifying its foreign relations through the new government's foreign policy realignment (Yun, 2012a, p. 57).

The reform process is rooted in the seven-step road map schemed by the former military government. On August 30, 2003, Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt announced a so-called road map to democracy constituted with the following seven steps:

1. Reconvening of the National Convention that had been adjourned since 1996;
2. 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 system;
3. Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention;
4. Adoption of the constitution through a national referendum;
5. Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaw (legislative bodies) according to the new constitution;
6. Convening of Hluttaw attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution;
7. Building a modern, developed, and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.

According to the road map, the military-dominated constitution was drafted with the support of the military's cohorts without the participation of the major opposition party NLD, which won a landslide victory in 1990. On May 10, 2008, a guided constitutional referendum

was held to ratify the draft constitution that it claims as ushering in a new era of “discipline-flourishing genuine multiparty democracy.” The 2008 Constitution was created with several provisions guaranteeing the military’s huge involvement in the national government and forming the national system systematically and constitutionally trying to preserve the military’s influence in the government. It was the military-centered political system in which the retired military leaders run the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which was fully backed by the army, and the active military leaders run the military (Kudo, 2012). Under this constitution, a quarter of the seats in parliament are held by military officers.

With the regime change, democratization was formed in Myanmar in 2011. This is the onset of the country’s power counterbalance to China. On March 30, 2011, Senior General Than Shwe officially dissolved the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), transferred power to the newly elected government, and appointed General Min Aung Hlaing as the next Commander-in-Chief of the army. Thein Sein, who was a former Prime Minister and top General, became the President as the head of the government formed by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (Moe, 2011c). The elected party is the USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party), which is backed by the army.

Before 2000, the relations between Myanmar and China were favorable political ties more than other relations, such as economic relations. Around 2000, Myanmar become more significant when Beijing started seeking new resources and markets. Consequently, economic relations between the two countries increased substantially (Sun, 2012). In the late days of the military regime, China and Myanmar concluded a series of megaprojects such as the Myitsone Hydropower Dam project in 2009, the Letpadaung Copper Mine project in 2010, and the China-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipelines project in 2010. China achieved all these projects without competing in any tender process before signing the contract with the Myanmar government (Chan, 2018). With China’s purpose to expand its national interests and influence in the region, the strategic importance of Myanmar has dramatically improved. That was distinct through reviewing China’s four initiatives by the onset of President Thein Sein’s administration. These four initiatives were (1) the establishment of a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, (2) China’s seeking of Myanmar’s support in regional diplomacy, (3) the potential enhancement of military cooperation, and (4) Yunnan’s bridgehead strategy.

After the country's first election in twenty-nine years in November 2010, Thein Sein, who was the former military general, became the president (from the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party [USDP]). He was regarded as the reformer who led a process of major reforms in Myanmar, which was ruled by a military junta for decades (BBC, 2014). After transforming to democracy with the newly elected government led by President Thein Sein, Myanmar has started to enjoy a political liberation that has reduced repression and brought new political space for people, civil society, and political opposition. In his inaugural address in March 2011, President Thein Sein announced far-reaching political, administrative, and economic reforms. In his first three years in office, the President introduced political reform in the first year, socioeconomic reform in the second year, and administrative reforms in the third year. While the political reforms started a political liberalization, the socioeconomic and administrative reforms aimed to promote good governance, fight corruption, and reform the economy (Bünthe & Dosch, 2015, p. 5).

In his inaugural speech, Thein Sein stated the future reform agendas as the priorities, including with opposition parties, especially Aung San Suu Kyi, who is a democratic icon and the leader of the NLD party; rapprochement with the West; good governance; promotion of human rights; and the abolition of repressive laws (Htut, 2019, p. 3). Thein Sein's government has introduced a series of reform agendas, such as political reform, economic reform, and administrative reform (Than, 2014). Subsequently, some restrictions that were prohibited in the military government were released.

In the inaugural address, the President stated the significant reform agendas as follows:

1. To amend laws that were incompatible with the new constitution
2. To submit bills to establish the fundamental rights of citizens
3. To raise the salaries of government personnel and the pensions of retired former personnel
4. To study and compile laws on the rights of farmers and review existing laws before amending them as necessary
5. To review existing labor laws
6. To submit a new Public Health Care and Social Security Law
7. To introduce bills to promote health and education

8. To revoke the existing press laws and introduce new bills to protect freedom of expression
9. To promulgate laws on environmental conservation and amend laws on industry mining
10. To promulgate new environmental laws (Htut, 2019, pp. 46–47)

The inauguration of the Thein Sein government was the final step of the roadmap to “building a modern, developed and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw, and the other central organs former by the Hluttaw.” Regarding the political reform, there were two parts. The first part was related to the attempt of bringing the individuals and organizations who did not accept the 2008 constitution and who had boycotted the 2010 election to participate in the state’s political process. The second factor included implementing the peace process with the ethnic armed group (Htut, 2019, p. 48). As part of the first reform, Thein Sein made dialogue with the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The improved relationship between the President and opposition leader made the enhancement of trust to the new government’s democratic reform by the international community. This was the important step of the Thein Sein government to fulfill its aim of reintegrating into the international community.

The significant change could be seen when the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest on November 13, 2010, a week after the 2010 general election was held. Before that day, the government managed meetings with her. Before the inauguration of the semi-civilian government, the military government released political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the democracy icon of Myanmar. On November 30, 2010, the release of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi can be attributed as a significant step of reform.

On January 5, 2012, the government amended the political party registration law and the election, which could enable the NLD Party to contest future elections. In the by-election held on April 1, 2012, the National League for Democracy (NLD) party led by Aung San Suu Kyi won forty-three out of forty-five seats in parliaments and became a member of Parliament. On July 25, Minister Aung Kyi, who served as the liaison minister for her, met for the first time and then the second on August 12. To the surprise of positive reforms, President Thein Sein met Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), on August 19, 2011. Two days earlier, President Thein Sein had already invited the

exiled activists to return to Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi herself stated that she had trusted Thein Sein to bring positive changes to the country. With the mild attitude to Aung San Suu Kyi as a credible change, the government stepped toward instituting more media freedom, reinvigorating the economy, recognizing poverty as a priority, and making efforts to improve human rights (Thuzar, 2012). As the positive response of external powers, both the United States and some members of the European Union (EU) welcomed the meeting of the two leaders (Hlaing, 2012).

The media reform was implemented in Thein Sein's presidency. He addressed a speech to the Cabinet referring to the media sector as the "fourth estate" of the country (Thuzar, 2012). As an impressive reform, the government relaxed the controls over the local media in which the media is allowed to be published without prior submission drafts. The Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) allowed local media to relax on five genres—entertainment, health, children, information technology, and sports—that could be published without prior submission of drafts; this affected the 178 local language journals as the benefits from media reform. The PSRD head stated the press censorship should be abrogated in the near future because it is "not in harmony with democratic practices" (Press Censorship Should Cease as Part of Reforms, 2011). Subsequently, the news and report on the political news are more open, and journals can report on interviews with political parties and political news, including the activities of the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi (Thuzar, 2012). On September 18, 2012, as one of the remarkable shifts, the *New Light of Myanmar*, which is the government newspaper in the English language, stopped revealing the slogans to denounce the influence of foreign media. Moreover, foreign journalists were allowed to enter Myanmar with official visas, and both foreign and local media were permitted to cover the Hluttaw sessions in Naypyidaw for the first time (Thuzar, 2012). In August, the President publicly announced that the government would allow exiles who did not do any serious crimes to return home. The President's message intended to cooperate with returning exiles, including political exile after the 1988 uprising for the sake of the future development of the country (Kaung, 2011).

On August 19, 2011, during the first meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, and the President was crystal clear that the government made advancement in its political reform. In September, the publication of an article by Aung San Suu Kyi in a local journal showed another sign that the new government was different from the previous military regime (Thuzar, 2012). The role of media is very critical in the suspension of the Myitsone hydropower project. In the process of

reaching the suspension of the dam project, the media played a pivotal role in spreading the people's voice to the government, transferring the important message of the activists and technocrats to the people. By analysis of media reform to some extent, the government brought successful reform in this sector.

Moreover, the government invited the International Monetary Fund to receive advice of doing measurements to manage the problems with its Kyat currency and then undertaking several meetings between senior government officials and Western delegations (DW, 2011). As for economic reform, the government could implement a limited number of economic reforms despite some policy regression in many areas. In September 2012, the President announced that Myanmar will not welcome any investment that is harmful to the national interests, dignity, sovereignty, and environment of Myanmar (Singh, 2020). The government could do successful policy reforms, such as simplifying rules for foreign investment, ending the state's cooking-oil import monopoly, and granting the right to deal in foreign exchange to six of Myanmar's private banks at the informal "market" exchange rate (Turnell, 2011, p. 161). There were some positive changes by reducing the export tax. In his speech at the "National Workshop on Reforms for National Economic Development" held on August 19, 2011, President Thein Sein mentioned the process of economic reform focusing on good governance, transparency, and accountability with the measurements of attracting local and foreign direct investment (FDI), liberalizing trade, enhancing regional economic cooperation, reducing the state's economic role, boosting productivity, and balancing equity with efficiency (Than, 2014).

Sun (2012a) analyzed that Myanmar's democratic reform was deeply rooted in both internal and external factors. Internally, Myanmar's political changes were the result of the military leaders' desire for a chance to construct better governance and to implement economic performance. Moreover, the regime change was mainly formed because of the military government's attempt for its survival and the fact that the military junta felt secure to initiate the limited liberalization of the political system. Externally, the top leaders desire to minimize Chinese overwhelming influence upon Myanmar and to establish better governance and economic performance, the international sanctions led by the United States, to secure its ASEAN chairmanship position in 2014. The Arab Spring that swept across the Middle East and North Africa were the push factors for Myanmar military leaders to adopt the transformation to democracy in the country (Sun, 2012a). Although the shelving of Myitsone Dam happened in

2011, the cause was rooted in the military era. The democratization in Myanmar is known as “Myanmar Spring,” which was not a bloody transformation but a peaceful change to democracy. In the analysis of the Myanmar government’s strategies to counterbalance China, two distinct periods can be found: the military regimes that paved the way to counterbalance China, and the semi-civilian government initiated by the previous government that continued.

5.8. The Result from Semi-structured Interviews

The result provided by the interviews significantly support the research questions and the hypotheses testing. Among fifteen respondents, fourteen people agreed that the Myanmar governments had attempted to use the balancing strategy to China. According to them, the Myanmar government did not use a full bandwagoning strategy to China even when the military government had hugely relied on China while facing international sanctions and isolation. This was because of the military leaders’ strong nationalism and Xenophobia. Instead, the successive governments have practiced the limited alignment strategy to China under the ‘independent, active, and non-aligned foreign policy.

If the Myanmar government accepted bandwagoning strategy to its powerful neighbor China, at least, the governments would have to build its national development strategy as the Chinese model in which the economic development was placed the first priority than the transformation of the political system. (R5, R11, R,7)

Instead, the Myanmar government carried out the remarkable political reforms that were the first step to democracy. Regarding the analysis of Myanmar’s strategies toward China, it is clear that Myanmar has tried to avoid following a bandwagoning strategy to China in spite of being less powerful than China and being immensely reliant on China.

The shift of political system made the emergence of new strategies and then it impacted on the decision making of the government (R1, R2, R6, R11, R12, R15). The Myanmar military leaders used this as the “disciplined-flourishing democracy.” Among the regional powers, it could be said that Myanmar also occasionally exercised “hedging strategies” among the regional powers (R1, R2, R7, R8).

Instead, the Myanmar military government occasionally tries to counterbalance China at least to limit the Chinese predominance in Myanmar. Under the military government, the two countries built very close ties in all sectors. With the military government’s brutal crackdown of pro-democracy movements and its poor human rights records, the country seriously suffered

from international sanctions. For the regime's survival and economic development, China became a major trading partner for Myanmar, especially the main consumer of Myanmar's abundant resources. Under these situations, it does not seem surprising that the international community noted Myanmar as the client state of China or the puppet state of China. With reference to this, the term *Pauk-Phaw* (brotherhood) was widely used in military government in bilateral relations. Albeit the very close contact with Beijing, 80 percent of interviews said that Myanmar military government did not completely follow the bandwagoning strategy to China by indicating several pieces of evidence.

The Myanmar government since the military junta already had their willingness to minimize China's domination in the country. Thus, the junta had publicly outlined and implemented the 'Seven Step Road Map' which was the way to democracy.

In 2004, the military junta removed Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, who had close personal ties with China (it also said that he is of Chinese-Myanmar ethnicity). The military junta aimed to decrease the Chinese influence by the dismissal of pro-China leaders.

Although the Myanmar military government seriously rejected the foreign power's dominance in the country, it was difficult to use hard balancing against China; on the other hand, China did not pose any immediate threat to Myanmar in which Myanmar unnecessarily used bandwagoing strategy. The military junta largely relied on China's diplomatic protection particularly to defend the United Nations resolution on Myanmar. In return, the junta rewarded Beijing by giving economic and infrastructure projects that also delivered the regime's interest (R7). Nonetheless, the military government could resist Beijing's desire to completely control the regime (R3, R4).

At the regional and international level, Myanmar had tried to diversify its relations with other powers such as India and Russia. Moreover, it also attempted to reach the regional organizations such as the ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the GMS (Greater Mekong Subregion Program), and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).

The suspension of the Myitsone Dam issue was strong evidence that the Myanmar government could successfully counterbalance China.

Although the Myitsone Dam issue was an immediate act that happened in 2001, the numerous causes that pushed toward that phenomenon were rooted in the military government.

In the Myitsone dam issue, The Myanmar government used the adroit tactics to counterbalance China by using public force or people power to put pressure on China. The government let the people do the protests independently. On the one hand, the government has already eased the restrictions on the media and the people's rights such as freedom of actions, freedom of speech, and freedom of gathering/organizing. People did not get such opportunities to express their will without the government's desire and consent. (R1, R2, R4, R5, R6, R12, R13)

Before that time, the country was fully and largely dependent on China, especially politically and economically. Because of the Western sanctions, the military governments' dependence on China was growing while the influence of China in Myanmar's internal affairs was also increasing for decades.

The Myanmar government well recognized the role of external powers and thus it effectively used the strength of foreign powers particularly the United States of America. (R2, R7, R9, R, 10)

China does not want to see Myanmar being under the orbit of the United States, and it is also concerned about the "containment policy" of Washington. At the beginning of the Obama administration, U.S.-Myanmar relations were progressing under the "pivot to Asia" strategy of Washington. The United States constantly put pressure on the Myanmar military leaders for the country's political changes and for the release of political prisoners including Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. In 2011, the international community recognized Myanmar's smooth democratic transition as the outstanding political reforms brought peaceful transition from military rules to democracy. With the development of U.S.-Myanmar relations, the Myanmar government used external power to manipulate its strategies. The government's decision to make rapprochement with the United States vigorously intended to decline its dependence on China. By using both domestic and international leverage, Myanmar could successfully do its policy manipulation (R2 R6, R7, R8, R11). Finally, Myanmar reached its goal to uncover its willingness to Washington, proving Myanmar's intention to escape from China's asymmetric relationship.

The USDP government announced the one-sided decision of the suspension of the dam project on September 30, 2011, without giving any hint to the Chinese side. The halt of the dam construction was distinct in that Myanmar obviously demonstrated more stance of the democratic

government's principles in the preference of the people's will (R3, R4, R5, R8). The Myitsone Dam issue also revealed the strategic judgment of the government in which a small-power country could manage to counter influence its big-power neighbor in this way. Myanmar's decision to unilaterally halt the project shocked the Chinese government and also came as a big surprise to the international community. In the declaration of the President, he referred to the public concern, which implies that the Myanmar government successfully maneuvered by referring to domestic and also international voices to put pressure on China (R6, R11, R12). Therefore, the Myanmar government portrayed the case as a sufferer of domestic and international pressure and did not intentionally cause harm to China. Myanmar's counterbalance act (R2) rationale was therefore not to break the ties with its giant neighbor, but to achieve better terms in the mutual interdependence relations (R2, R6, R7, R10, R11, R12).

After the suspension of the dam issue, there were significant changes in bilateral relations. Naypyidaw's symbolic political improvement not only surprised Beijing but also convinced the international community that Myanmar leaders generously desired to become a democratic country. The dam issue created both negative and positive impacts on Sino-Myanmar relations. Economically, it reduced the Chinese investments in Myanmar, as one would expect. The Chinese government urged Naypyidaw to protect the legal and legitimate rights of Chinese companies and warned that a halt in construction could lead to legal action (R1, R2, R8, R9, R,10, R11, R14, R,15). Nevertheless, the Myitsone Dam issue vividly brought some creditable changes for Myanmar's side. It could extend the political space of Myanmar in the international community.

The most remarkable alteration was that the Chinese government paid immense attention to the people of Myanmar in the recognition of public power. China had to respond to the growing anti-China sentiment that has forced Beijing to alter its behavior. All interviews agreed with the point that Beijing embarked on boosting public diplomacy as a major campaign to enhance the loosening of bilateral relations. Before 2011, there was no room for the role of people in Myanmar. However, President Thein Sein announced the unilateral suspension of the Myitsone Dam project in the preference of the people's will in accordance with the democratic government's practices. Before the suspension of the Myitsone project, China solely relied on government-to-government relations regardless of the opinion and attitude of the local people. President Thein Sein's terms of referring to the people's desire as a reason to suspend the

Myitsone Dam project drew China's attention to the voices of the Myanmar people. Beijing started to realize that people's endorsement is essential for the success of its future businesses (R1, R2, R3, R5, R6, R7, R8, R12, R13, R15).

Following the Naypyidaw, Beijing started to listen to the voices of local people in Myanmar and tried to get a direct approach to these people. The anti-Chinese sentiments and the pessimistic views of these people are deeply rooted in the local areas that have been influenced by the Chinese businesses. According to some interviewees, the local Kachin people suffered from rude and disdainful behavior from the staff of CPI who made some prior tests for the projects in the ethnic villages. After these experiences, the Chinese government warned its businesses and made them aware that they needed to pay respect to the cultural heritage and national identity of Myanmar people and that they could not commit irreverent acts prohibited by the local community (R2).

The Chinese companies should improve their business ethics in running their business if they want to continue their investments in Myanmar and that is the distinct factor that they need to be followed in Myanmar. (R3)

The lack of corporate social responsibility of the Chinese firms became apparent and visible, though it was long neglected by both Myanmar and Chinese stakeholders (R2, R3).

To acknowledge the people's power, Beijing strongly emphasized the Myanmar people in terms of its public diplomacy. It promoted direct people-to-people contact through several exchange programs between the two peoples of the country in all sectors.

“China assumed that ‘the lack of mutual understanding brought the serious case like the Myitsone dam issue believing that the Chinese understand Myanmar’ but ‘Myanmar people don't understand China’ (R2, R3). Thus, China launched the multi-dimensional approach for more understanding China from Myanmar people.”

In Myanmar-China relations, economic ties enormously influence bilateral relations. After the dam issue, the Chinese businesses have tried to get direct contact with the local people as they perceived that the will of people is essential for the successful operation of their businesses. Beijing also asked Chinese investments in Myanmar to pay respect to the social norms and cultural traditions of the local people. On the other hand, China realized the sole emphasis of shortcomings of government-to-government relations in economic cooperation and in running businesses in Myanmar.

Under its public diplomacy, education diplomacy is prominent through increasing Chinese scholarship awards to the Myanmar students to join the numerous Chinese universities. The support for higher education is more significant in its education diplomacy. More education programs are signed through MOUs than ever before. University of Yangon and Yangon University of Foreign Languages signed MOUs with Beijing Foreign Studies University to improve educational exchange programs, including the exchange of students, faculty members, scholars, and administrative staff as well as research cooperation in the field of mutual interests and sharing of academic materials and information (Tha, 2017). Many university teachers are awarded Ph.D. scholarships in Chinese universities to improve the research collaboration between the two countries. The Chinese support has reached not only the teachers but also the university students. The Chinese government initiated the “Pauk-phaw” scholarship under which some students achieved financial aid of 30,000 kyats per month in the academic year. Beijing boosted the student exchange program, and a lot of Chinese students were sent to Myanmar. Beijing also promoted its public diplomacy by introducing the “Deep Fraternal Friendship” campaign in Yangon. Additionally, Beijing used “Buddhist diplomacy” by conveying a sacred Buddha tooth from China to Myanmar for obeisance. The “Buddhist diplomacy” is Beijing’s unique and long-term strategy as part of cultural diplomacy toward Myanmar (R11, R12, R13, R15)

Subsequently, Myanmar could expand its balancing act toward China. It could make renegotiation of the economic agreements signed by the military regimes. The deterioration of political relations was only temporary, and the bilateral relations made significant progress. One of the most significant highlights was President Xi Jinping’s visit to Myanmar in January 2020. That was the prominent step to restore the friendly ties between the two countries. It was the time of the seventieth anniversary of China-Myanmar Diplomatic Relations and China-Myanmar Year and Tourism. Xi was the first Chinese leader to visit Myanmar in almost two decades. During his visits, dozens of economic agreements were signed, and thus Xi’s visit was a Chinese effort to draw closer to Myanmar.

It is obvious that Sino-Myanmar relations were asymmetrical due to their gigantic power discrepancy. Despite power disparity, Myanmar has its political leverage to counterbalance China. The most prominent is its pivot geostrategic situation. Myanmar inherently possesses its geographically strategic location between India and China, which is regarded as the “back door

of China.” The country occupies the long coastal line in the Bay of Bengal and it has ample natural resources. Nowadays, Myanmar plays a crucial role in China’s grand Belt and Road Initiative. Important infrastructure projects are established in the country. Some of the projects are delayed because of the controversial issues in dealing with the agreements. In the construction of the Kyaukphyu-Kunming project, the Chinese government asked for free-of-checking of the trains and Myanmar cannot accept that deal. Thus, the project has been postponed. Myanmar people view that the railway project could be a threat to the national security of the country as it crosses the country into two parts. It is unacceptable to the Myanmar government for the trains to freely pass without any investigation by Myanmar authorities. This is also the Myanmar government’s ability to counter China’s demand, which is to defend its national security and interest.

Even in the small-great power relations, the former does not necessarily act as a client or puppet state of the latter. This has already proved Myanmar’s position in the 2014 ASEAN Chairmanship in which China needed diplomatic support for its neighboring country. China has been facing maritime and territorial disputes with some of the Southeast Asian countries, such as Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Myanmar is a non-claimant state in the SCS dispute. In the past, reaching an agreement for a joint statement on the South China Sea dispute among ASEAN member countries is a sensitive and problematic issue because of its large impact on their relations with Beijing. In 2002, the ASEAN could not issue the joint communique due to controversy among the members regarding the South China Sea dispute (BBC, 2014). Cambodia, the close ally of Beijing, did not want to include in the statement any mention about the SCS dispute. That was the first failure to issue the ASEAN joint communique in ASEAN’s forty-five-year history. While Myanmar served as the chairmanship at the 17th ASEAN-China Summit in 2014, even it has very close ties with Beijing, and a joint statement could be successfully issued revealing the South China Sea dispute. Although Myanmar is extremely different from China in its ability, the country can occasionally raise its leverage to counter the great power neighbor China.

The level of dependence on China slightly changed in the comparison between the military government and the USDP government. Under the foreign policy diversification and reintegration to the international community, the USDP government could mitigate Myanmar’s dependence on China. Furthermore, Myanmar could renegotiate the unfair trade deal in the

infrastructure businesses. In the cooperation under the BRI scheme, Myanmar has become cautious of the debt trap of China. Regarding the loan, China is a creditor with the highest interest rate of 4 percent, in comparison to 1.5 percent by India and 0.01 percent from Japan. Economically, China remains the biggest trading partner for Myanmar even when the Myitsone Dam issue has somewhat strained the bilateral ties. The significant term of *Pauk-Phaw relations* was maintained by both sides since the military government. After the Myitsone issue, the Chinese government has made several references to Pauk-Phaw relations in their statements and announcements.

Generally, asymmetrical relations bring about asymmetrical dependence between countries. The Myanmar-China relations are no exception. However, the small powers' unique leverage helps the asymmetrical dependency to a balancing posture. As the concurrence of views, most of the interviewees unanimously accepted that the bilateral stable relations are equally important for both countries through Myanmar's dependence on China is extensively asymmetric.

"The demise that is caused by the damaged relations can deteriorate the interests of both countries" (R2, R6, R10). Thus, Myanmar is not the only country that can suffer from broken relations; China can be largely impacted by it. China can lose both a strategic interest and long-term economic development plan for its poor and landlocked Yunnan Province. Moreover, it can seriously damage the success of its grand Belt and Road Initiative.

5.9. Myanmar-China relations after the Myitsone Dam suspension

In the latter part of 2011, the bilateral ties between China and Myanmar were a little bit sour to some extent after passing the Myitsone Dam suspension. In response to Myanmar's new political shift, the Chinese government started to position some measures and its policy adjustment toward Myanmar after the Chinese government reviewed its approaches to its small-strategic neighbor. Not all of Beijing's adjustments could be assumed as different from the old ones. However, some changes were the modifications and encouragement of the previous strategies and policies toward Myanmar. To be adaptable to Naypyidaw's new political format, China also did its policy adjustment toward Myanmar, and these changes have vigorously positive for Myanmar. China's corrections have shifted from the straightforward method in

which developing government-to-government relationships have been replaced by establishing strong relations or improving greater interactions with different local communities. There are credible changes in China's behavior toward Myanmar. Beijing has tremendously emphasized the people-centered approach in terms of reaching out to the local community. At the state level, it has attempted to diversify its relations between governments and political parties. In addition, China has also focused on improving the corporate social responsibility of Chinese businesses in the host countries. Beijing has used a softer approach toward Myanmar by consciously watching Myanmar's improving relations with Western countries. Since 2011, Beijing started to realize the importance of people's perception or public opinion and how it effects bilateral relations; and it is well perceived that the Myanmar government has realistically changed in its policy manipulation. China's awareness made a shift in its foreign policy toward Myanmar to restore ties, deepen strategic trust, and safeguard its interest in Myanmar (Singh, 2020, p. 11).

5.9.1. Reposition Dual Track Diplomacy with the New Approach

One noticeable change in China's behavior was it extended its relations from government-to-government to party-to-party relations. That is Beijing's dual-track diplomacy, which China extended to Myanmar throughout the Cold War era. While the Chinese government was building government-to-government relations, the Communist Party of China (CPC) contacted the Burma Communist Party (BCP). Since the 1980s, China stopped its support of the BCP and relinquished the dual-track diplomacy (Myoe, 2015). After the dam suspension, China practiced the dual-track approach toward Myanmar. In this case, China has used dual-track diplomacy with the new approach in which Beijing tried to connect not only the ruling party but also the major opposition party as well as the other ethnic parties. On May 22, 2012, Htay Oo, the secretary-general of the ruling USDP, led a delegation and visited China. During the visit, Vice-President Xi-Jinping said that the Chinese Communist Party was willing to build stronger ties with the USDP. China also tried to develop ties with non-ruling parties. China's dual track approach improved the roles of the opposition political parties, and it could directly reach out their voices to the Chinese government which reflected the voices of the Myanmar people. On April 2–13, a twelve-member delegation from different parties, such as the All Mon Regional Nationality Democracy Party (AMRDP), the National Unity Party (NUP), the Shan Nationality Democracy Party (SNDP), and the Rakhine Nationality Democracy Party (RNDP), visited China. Then, on May 8, 2013, the CPC invited a delegation of the NLD party that included

twelve members for a ten-day visit to China. In December, the USDP secretary-general Htay Oo again visited China and met with a senior CPC official. In the same month, the secretary of the central executive committee of the NLD visited China according to the invitation of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs. Beijing steadily increased its goal to get stronger ties through party-to-party relationships (Myoe, 2015, p. 47).

Thus, the Chinese government made a strong effort to improve party-to-party relations. China continuously institutionalized its party-to-party channel with Myanmar. In April 2015, the speaker of Myanmar's Lower House and chairman of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) were invited by the CPC. Thura Shwe Mann met President Xi Jinping and other senior leaders during his visit. At the meeting, President Xi called for the chairman of the USDP for high-level contacts and personnel exchanges between the CCP and the USDP. They also discussed the Chinese "One Belt, One Road" initiative. At that time, a proposal for a railway line connecting the Bay of Bengal with China's landlocked Yunnan Province was stalled, and Beijing was pushing for Myanmar's government approval (Yhome, 2015).

The more significant than the previous time is that Beijing simultaneously attempted to establish friendly relations with major opposition parties and non-ruling parties. That is the remarkable change of Beijing's policy/behavior change to Myanmar. This is a very significant change for China. Before 2011, especially from 1988 to 2010, the Chinese government avoided meetings and building contacts with political parties and opposition politicians when Myanmar was under military rule by the SLORC/SPDC governments (Myoe, 2015).

After the halt of the dam project, Beijing enormously changed its traditional way of maintaining good relations with only the Myanmar government in bilateral relations. Beijing also had to engage Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy as well as other smaller opposition parties (Chenyang & Char, 2016). As a critical point, a delegation led by opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi visited China from June 10–14, 2015. She met with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqian. She also met with Wang Jiarui, the Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC) and the chief of the CPC Central Committee's International Department, as well as other important people. Xi told Aung San Suu Kyi that "the visit will help deepen your understanding on China and the CPC, which will contribute to our mutual understanding and trust, and lay a better foundation for the party-to-party and state-to-state relationship."

China's invitation to the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi showed its discreet behavioral change toward Myanmar. There were distinguished factors for Beijing's approach. First, it was crystal clear that Beijing's wish to establish a rapport with the opposition leader and her party was due to her gain of enormous public trust and support. China realized the unique role of Aung San Suu Kyi in the foreseeable future of Myanmar politics. Second, the success of China's important economic projects—such as the railway link between Yunnan and the Bay of Bengal, Chinese participation in the development of the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, Beijing's ambitious interregional connectivity initiatives of BCIM (including Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar), and Beijing's grand "Belt and Road" initiative—immensely depends on political support in Myanmar. Thus, Beijing tried to adapt its policy aiming to lend Aung San Suu Kyi's support to new infrastructure and investment projects. The third point was that the Chinese leaders wanted to convey a message to the Myanmar people that China could be a partner for Myanmar in the new cooperative form, which was different from the previous one. Fourth, Beijing wanted to send a political message to the ruling hybrid government by hosting Aung San Suu Kyi. Before her visit to China, Beijing also invited the Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House of Parliament) Thura Shwe Mann, who could be seen as a strong contender to become President after Thein Sein (Haacke, 2015). In this case, China tried to pre-open its diplomatic channel to the future possible actors in Myanmar politics. Finally, Beijing's engagement with Myanmar's opposition leader at the highest level was a strong signal to Washington in the context of geopolitical competition between the United States and China. Beijing took high consideration of the possible future of Aung San Suu Kyi's political victory in the 2015 general election. If this would happen, Beijing hopes that Aung San Suu Kyi would give careful consideration to ties between Naypyidaw and Beijing. (Haacke, 2015). From the perspective of China, the visit of Aung San Suu Kyi was a great diplomatic success (Yhome, 2015).

Beijing not only endeavored to improve its party-to-party relations with not only ruling and major opposition parties but also boosted its ties with smaller political parties. Earlier in April 2013, China hosted a delegation led by the USDP party that involved five other political parties. During the same month, the Chinese Communist Party invited Rakhine Nationalities Development Party. As another attempt, in June 2014 the CCP also invited a delegation of Myanmar political parties, and the delegation traveled to Kunming, Yunnan Province. The

delegation included leaders from the Arakan National Party (ANP) and the National Democratic Force (NDF) (Yhome, 2015).

With the development of the new political system, the significant Myitsone Dam was unilaterally stopped by Myanmar.

Though official Chinese pronouncements have stressed that Naypyidaw's political transition would not significantly alter bilateral ties, some policymakers nevertheless agreed that China and Myanmar's "fraternal friendship" has reached a historical turning point (Chenyang & Char, 2016, p. 69). The democratic transition in Myanmar created great changes in Sino-Myanmar relations. First, the anti-Chinese gained momentum among Myanmar people, who had been discontent with the Chinese projects. Second, the Myanmar government and civil society have leaned upon the West. Third, the Chinese projects in Myanmar have become politicized, with some Chinese companies facing difficulty in pursuing their trading and economic activities because of stagnant relations between Beijing and Myanmar. Fourth, China faced strategic competition for influence on Naypyidaw because the number of Myanmar's foreign interlocutors has significantly increased (Chenyang & Char, 2016, p. 73). China's diversification of relations between government and political parties could have some advantages for Myanmar because it increases the balance in Myanmar domestic politics among the government, opposition groups as well as the military.

5.9.2. China's Multi-dimensional Public Diplomacy Approach toward Myanmar

After China had unexpectedly experienced its grand project's failure in its neighboring small power, its diplomatic efforts focus on its own complex neighborhood. In the "peripheral diplomacy" or "neighborhood diplomacy," China has mainly aimed to engage the countries with which it shared borders as a key point. Through more strategic connections with neighboring countries, Beijing has maintained its influence around the world by upholding its border security, boosting trade and investment networks, and preventing a geopolitical balancing coalition in its neighbors (Stokes, 2020). On November 28, 2011, Myanmar's Commander of the Armed Forces Min Aung Hlaing met with the Chinese Vice-President and also Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Committee Xi Jinping. At that time, Xi also reiterated the significance of "Paukphaw" friendship affirming the two countries as friendly neighbors. At their meeting, Xi forged "Paukphaw" friendship as a profound one since time immemorial and bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership as important cooperation between the two countries (Consulate-General of

the People's Republic of China, 2011). The Chinese President urged his Myanmar counterpart "to properly settle relevant issues and maintain a sound momentum of development" with the acceleration of the comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Ireland, 2011). During Thein Sein's visit to China in April 2013, Xi urged to strengthen all forms of people-to-people exchanges between the youths and students from each country. China wanted to maintain its important role in Myanmar and did not want to lose its current relations, which are essential for its strategic significance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013). In addition, the Chinese President emphasized that bilateral relations cooperate in the major cooperation projects smoothly.

China held its first-ever Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference in October 2013. Since that time, the Xi Jinping administration has reiterated its purpose to build stronger relations with neighboring countries (Suwa, 2018). At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which was held in October 2017, the Secretary-general of the party laid out his foreign policy diplomacy for neighboring countries, saying, "China will deepen relations with its neighbors in accordance with the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness and the policy of forging friendship and partnership with its neighbors" (Suwa, 2018). In January 2014, President Thein Sein declared at the fifth meeting of the Planning Commission that the Union Government will draw a "people-centered plan" that is consistent with the needs of Myanmar and the political, economic, and social relations of neighboring countries (New Light of Myanmar, 2014). In this regard, both presidents tended to pursue a people-centered approach as the sound diplomatic tool in relations with neighboring countries.

As part of China's public diplomacy, China conveyed a Buddha sacred relic to Myanmar's capital for a forty-eight-day public obeisance from November 6 to December 24 in the country. The tooth relic has conveyed the cities of Naypyidaw, Yangon, and Mandalay. That was the fourth time the Buddhist sacred relic was conveyed to Myanmar. Myanmar is a Buddhist country, and 80 percent of its people believe in Buddhism. The conveyance of the Chinese sacred tooth relic to Myanmar as the cultural exchange has played a significant role in bilateral ties. Myanmar people are pleased to pay homage to the Buddhist relic, as the privileges for Buddhism. It is Whenever the tooth is conveyed to Myanmar, thousands of pilgrims are drawn to pay obeisance to it.

China has well used the Buddhist tooth diplomacy toward Myanmar in history. There have also been four times in recent history that the Buddhist sacred tooth relic has been conveyed to Myanmar: in 1955–56, 1994, and 1996–97 (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, 2011b). The tour of the Buddhist relics “represents not only a major event of the Buddhist believers but also a fine story of China-Myanmar friendship.” The giant crowds mounted their steps of the massive Uppatasanti Pagoda at Naypydiaw while the anti-China sentiments were also escalating in Myanmar people’s hearts. The pious multifarious Buddhist people generously offered their cash and various items of jewelry as sizeable donation in honor of the sacred relic. The tooth relic diplomacy is always successful for Beijing toward Myanmar. The President of Myanmar and his wife attended the consecration ceremony, and even the former military leader Than Shwe paid a homage tour.

According to the historical records of Myanmar, during the periods of the successive kings of Myanmar, friendly relations between the two kingdoms of China and Myanmar have existed since then. The first founder of the Myanmar Kingdom of Bagan Period, His Majesty King Anawrahta himself paid an official visit to China to request the King of China to permit the conveying of the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha to the Kingdom of Myanmar to be paid homage there. An emerald Buddha statue was presented to His Majesty King Anawrahta by the King of China as a Dhamma gift. This Emerald Buddha Statue is being paid homage in Mandalay, the third capital city of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. At present, there are other two Sacred Replica-Tooth Relics of the Buddha Pagodas that were enshrined in Yangon and Mandalay. The former was fully constructed in November 1996, and the latter was in December 1996 in each city. Those two pagodas were being paid homage at the same time the Tooth Relic from China was being paid to. Those two Sacred Replica-Tooth Relics of the Buddha Pagodas can be regarded as significant symbols of everlasting friendship and relationship between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. (Sein, 2011, p. 7)

That is very clear that how Buddhist tooth diplomacy is effective and popular in bilateral relations. “When China wants another country to feel all warm and fuzzy, it sends a panda. But Myanmar gets something special: A sacred Buddha’s tooth.” (Barta, 2011).

It is also the Chinese unique and long-standing strategy as cultural diplomacy of Buddhist diplomacy toward Naypyidaw (Tha, 2017). Buddhist diplomacy is not new in bilateral relations, but it is always useful and grasps a strong influence on Sino-Myanmar relations.

In May 2012, China boosted its public diplomacy by introducing the “Deep Fraternal Friendship” campaign in Yangon. The “Deep Fraternal Friendship” constituted of five main components: a medical assistance program, “Brightness Action,” for cataract patients; the establishment of a Sino-Myanmar Ophthalmology Center; the donation of computers to local elementary and secondary schools; a business forum targeting local small business; and large artistic performances, “Linked by Mountains and Waters,” with the aim of achieving the firm relations between the two peoples (Tha, 2017, p. 5). According to the Chinese Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Myanmar, the series of China-Myanmar “Deep Fraternal Friendship” activities aimed to promote the friendship between the peoples of the two countries and to accelerate traditional friendly ties (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, 2012). China positioned the people-to-people relations as the essential instrument to build a strong tie between the two countries. After encountering massive public opposition to Chinese large investments, Beijing realized that Chinese investment in Myanmar could not be successful without people’s endorsement.

Furthermore, China promoted its “educational diplomacy” by offering many Chinese scholarships and educational exchange programs with Myanmar. In 2013, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) sent a team to visit local governmental departments, monasteries, universities, villages, media, an economic counselor to Chinese enterprises, and overseas Chinese living and working in the neighboring country. With its assessment of the local actors, the CFPA started the “Paukphaw Scholarship Project” to give some financial support to Myanmar university students in need. The winning students who got the scholarship were proposed and selected by a committee of officials and teachers. The chosen students receive \$300 per person for a year (ten months), which is equal to \$30 (30,000 Myanmar kyats) per month. In 2015, the CFPA carried out its pilot project to aid fifty Myanmar students from two universities in Yangon. In 2016, it also extended the program to four universities in Yangon as well as to Rakhine state in 2017 (Yiqian, 2018).

Apart from the higher education sector, the Chinese government has tried to reach its support to the primary education level in Myanmar. In 2015, the China Foundation for Peace and

Development (CFPD) and the Myanmar Alinyaung (Myanmar Brightness) Foundation initiated the “Friends of Silk Road” program. According to this program, the Chinese side was responsible for funds, and the Myanmar side was responsible for construction. The “Friends of Silk Road” initiative has received profound support from the Myanmar government and the local people where the programs operated in the country (Kmewu, 2020).

The Chinese Embassy in Myanmar and the government of Myanmar launched the “China-Myanmar Friendship Schools” program in 2016 under the topic of providing Myanmar’s educational development and helping the country train necessary personnel. Under the program, Beijing has donated new school buildings and stadiums as well as offering further opportunities for graduated students to pursue their studies in China. The China-Myanmar friendship association in Beijing organized a summer camp for teachers in Yangon and Naypyidaw to teach the Chinese language from Chinese teachers (Bin, 2017). It could also be said that Beijing has been successful in this educational diplomacy. Many students and teachers from Myanmar expressed their positive feedback and their gratitude to China’s program. According to these Chinese government implementations, Beijing has vigorously emphasized the mutual understanding between peoples of the two countries. In the higher education sector, the Chinese government offered many Chinese scholarships to both university teachers and exchange programs for university students since 2011. Every year, the number of scholarship students has been growing.

5.9.3. Beijing’s Prudent Approach to the Growing U.S.-Myanmar Relations

Myanmar effectively used its balancing strategy between great powers, especially its strategic position its role between United States and China competition. The release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the meeting between her and President Thein Sein were perfect evidence that Myanmar was going straight on the democratic path. This domestic political development encouraged Myanmar to be impressed and regarded by the United States, and it raised China’s concern about the U.S.-Myanmar rapid bilateral relations. In September 2011, the historical visits of United States Special Envoy Derek Mitchell highlighted the progressive engagement of U.S.-Myanmar relations. That was the time of diplomatic normalization between Naypyidaw and Washington.

After the announcement of the dam suspension, China asked Myanmar to consider the resume of the project. However, the steady improvement of U.S.-Myanmar relations made a

barrier for Beijing that was not able to compel Myanmar to re-start of the project. China consciously watched the improvement of U.S.-Myanmar bilateral relations in the consideration of losing its interest in Myanmar and avoiding being trapped by the United States' strategic containment policy toward China.

After the Myitsone Dam suspension, the bilateral ties between Myanmar and the United States were more powerful than ever before. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid a goodwill visit to Myanmar three months after the visit of Special Envoy Derek Mitchell. She was the first United States Secretary of State to make a state visit to Myanmar in five decades. Hillary Clinton announced during her trip that the United States would start the exchange of ambassadors between the two countries. That was the major step of diplomatic normalization between Myanmar and the great democratic powerful state. Another historical turning point happened again when President Barack Obama visited Myanmar two times. Myanmar could achieve Western economic sanctions as the reward of its certain development. These were the terrible nightmares for Beijing when its loyal friend leaned on the United States, and it could bring the failure of Beijing's interest.

According to Sun (2012b), China's fear of the burgeoning ties between the United States and Myanmar was multi-fold. The first and most important point was that Beijing saw the strengthening U.S.-Myanmar relations as a conspiracy to encircle and contain China with the potential threat of the Chinese southwestern border, Indian Ocean access, and oil and gas pipelines. Economically, the release of economic sanctions on/to Myanmar could open the floodgates for Western companies to return to Myanmar, creating competition for Chinese companies that have thrived under the sanctions during the past two decades. In addition, China is concerned about the multilateral institutions' return to Myanmar helping Myanmar formulate a set of economic, financial, and monetary systems without China's participation, forcing China to accept potentially unfriendly rules in its future economic activities in the country. By doing so, if the experts from International Monetary Fund convince the Myanmar government to accept a new foreign exchange mechanism pegged to United States dollars, the existing trade with China in Chinese currency would come under severe challenges (Sun, 2012b, p. 88).

On March 14, 2013, Xi Jinping was elected President of the People's Republic of China and Chairman of the State Central Military Commission (CMC) in the first session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) (Singh, 2020). A month after the President took office,

Myanmar President Thein Sein made a state visit to China from April 5–7. At the meeting, President Xi emphasized adhering to “China’s good-neighbor policy” and boosting the bilateral ties based on mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit, deepening strategic mutual trust. Regarding the external powers’ role, President Xi Jinping urged that “bilateral relations should not be swayed by the vicissitudes in international politics or distracted by outside forces and the two sides should unswervingly push forward their friendship” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2013). In this sense, it clearly showed Beijing’s prudent and adroit approach in concerning Naypyidaw’s relationships with other countries especially relating to progressing relations with western powers although Xi did not remark any candid comment on Myanmar’s international relations.

Myanmar’s rapprochement with the United States was also a means for the Myanmar government to uncover its desire to lean on the United States as a soft-bandwagoning in the Sino-U.S. competition. On the other hand, Myanmar could take advantage of the Sino-U.S. rivalry. Another interesting point was that the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued several statements during November and December 2011, in which it welcomed the progress of relations between Myanmar and Western countries, including the United States. Despite this, China did not show any sign of opposition to Myanmar’s improvement with the West. From the Chinese perspective, it was nonsense to show any negative reaction because China avoided interfering with the internal affairs of Myanmar and Beijing and also did not worsen its already-strained relations with Myanmar (Sun, 2012b, p. 89). Another important factor is that the future tendency of Myanmar’s ASEAN membership in 2014 could fulfill China for the diplomatic support of Myanmar. As a sign of its genuine and rapid progress, Myanmar could restore its reputation not only in the region but also in the international arena that was the situation that could never be imagined by the military government. It was clear that China consciously approached Myanmar, although it got a serious shock because of Myanmar’s unilateral announcement of the cancelation of the Myitsone Hydropower Dam project. It was Myanmar’s successful balancing act to China in light of the Myitsone case.

5.9.4. Improvement of Corporate Social Responsibility

Chinese state-owned enterprises and other smaller-scale firms operating in a number of developing countries have failed to follow the local labor laws and environmental regulations or disregarded local customs, which has led to the anti-China sentiments in these countries (Li &

Char, 2015). Due to the lack of corporate social responsibility, Chinese overseas investments have encountered public resistance in host countries. After facing various issues caused by the Chinese firms and enterprises abroad, Chinese policymakers, companies, and scholars have also perceived the requirement for a bottom-up approach to engaging with the public and project-affected communities (Lee, 2015).

The suspension of the Myitsone Dam was announced by the President of Myanmar one day before the 62nd Anniversary of the Founding Day of the People's Republic of China, which fell on October 1, 2011. It was a coincidence that the Myanmar government gave terrible news to China on that day. On October 1, after a day of Myitsone Dam suspension, Chinese ambassador Li Junhua went to the ceremony of the start of construction four of the Myanmar section of the Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipeline. The ambassador called on the Chinese company to establish close working relations with Myanmar's counterpart and highlighted the importance of the project. He also asked the company "to ensure safety and equality, give priority to environmental protection, abide by Myanmar laws and regulations and get along well with local staff and residents." On October 2, the ambassador went to the Mon Ywa Copper Mine of Myanmar Wanbao Mining Copper LTD, which is a Chinese-owned company. At the copper mine company, Ambassador Li also asked the Chinese company "to fulfill its social responsibility, protect the environment and make contributions to local development of society and economy" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2011a). The visit of the Chinese ambassador to these economic project areas signifies how the Chinese government changed its behavior in its business practices that were neglected before. The Chinese government strongly emphasized the business ethic of their companies, tried to respect the opinion of the local community, and regarded the environmental concerns of the project areas.

In June 2012, the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) called on companies to provide training in "foreign language necessary for working abroad as well as relevant laws, religion and social customs" (MOFCOM, 2012). The Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Environmental Protection issued "the guideline for environmental protection in foreign investment and cooperation" for Chinese enterprises "to further regularize their environmental protection behaviors in foreign investment and cooperation, to actively perform their social responsibilities of environmental protection, and promote the sustainable development of foreign

investment and cooperation” (MOFCOM, 2013). Chinese firms also modified their business practices to carry out prior environmental and social impact assessments in accordance with international best practices and to pay attention to the needs of local communities (Li & Char, 2015). The state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), which operates the China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline, launched a series of public welfare programs with the goal of promoting local social and economic development. The CNPC made its donation to the government of Myanmar and local communities for public welfare programs in the fields of infrastructure construction, healthcare, education, and disaster relief (CNPC, n.d).

The positive transformation to emphasize corporate social responsibility could be seen in another China’s state-owned enterprise, Wanbao Mining Ltd., that oversees the Letpadaung Copper Mine. In June 2010, Wanbao Mining Corporation, which is a subsidiary of China’s state-owned weapons manufacturer, China North Industries Corporation, made the finalization of its joint-venture agreement with the military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Ltd. (UMEHL) to establish a copper mine project. The estimated investment amount is US\$65 billion (Sun, 2013). The project occupies around 7,867.78 acres of land, including 5,057 acres of cultivated land, affecting 26 villages and causing the displacement of 441 households from four villages out of twenty-six villages (Letpadaung Investigation Commission, 2013).

In 2012, widespread protest against the project emerged because of the lack of transparency about project details, thousands of acres of seized land, negative social and environmental impacts, and unfair benefit distribution between the two countries (Lee, 2015). In response to the public discontent, the Myanmar Wanbao introduced its initiative by providing free healthcare services, establishing schools, helping villages on the linkage of the national electric grid, and giving compensation to displaced villagers (Mahtani, 2013). The company also initiated a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program in which a Community and Social Development (CSD) team consisting of village elders and leaders was formed to get a better understanding of the needs of the neighboring villages. Regarding improved transparency, it also published several documents, including the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) (Lee, 2015).

The suspension of the dam project has enormously impacted other Chinese enterprises in Myanmar in terms of awakening the importance of CSR and the local community’s desire. Consequently, Beijing started to emphasize improving its corporate social responsibility

programs as an integral component of Chinese SOE's operations inside Myanmar after the suspension of the Myitsone Dam.

5.9.5. Reaching to Civil Society Organization (CSOs)

Though the Chinese government has issued a series of policies to strengthen the regulation of Chinese companies' investments overseas targeting risk management, foreign exchange, security, labor rights, and environmental protection, these companies do not fully conduct the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) and Due Diligence that is necessary to prevent and manage social and environmental risks. On the other hand, most Chinese state-owned companies have paid more attention to the consultations with the local government rather than other stakeholders, such as local communities, trade unions, and NGOs. But the technique of solely relying on governments is not sufficient for Chinese enterprises to handle the social and environmental risks, problems, and challenges they are encountering overseas. This is clearly seen in the Myitsone Hydropower Dam issue that lost Chinese benefits both economically and politically (Cai, Zhang & Chen, 2017, p. 9).

In Myanmar, Chinese companies had a bad reputation for their investment activities throughout the years. Gong (2018) noted that there are several major complaints about China's investments. First, Chinese investments were accused of being irresponsible and environmentally damaging. Second, Chinese companies were blamed for alienating the local people and depriving them of employment opportunities by hiring only Chinese workers instead of local workers. Third, Chinese companies were accused of non-compliance with Myanmar's logging law and regulations. Although Myanmar banned foreign sales of logs in April 2014, illegal logging and log smuggling were happening through logging trade by both Chinese traders and border officers and the conflict-prone area controlled by the ethnic groups. Finally, Chinese investments lacked transparency and were carried out under close contact with the military government, resulting in ignorance of the grassroots demands. In addition, the Chinese businesses neglected the local norms and behaved badly toward the local people (Gong, 2018, pp. 127–128). All these factors have increased discontent against Chinese investments and businesses in the country.

In the Myitsone Dam issue, people protested for reasons associated with the above, such as lack of transparency in the investment; unfair land expropriation; potential environmental degradation; and disrespect for the Myanmar culture. Neither the Myanmar government nor the

Chinese companies could conduct a long-term plan for villagers who had lived on the land for generations (Gong, 2018, p. 128).

In Myanmar, the Myitsone Dam issue made stronger the voice of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the privately-owned media, federations, trade unions, other social classes, and ethnic minority groups in domestic affairs. Starting in 2012, after the Myitsone Dam suspension, both countries have put their priorities on high exchanges and meetings to enhance mutual trust and resolve differences on implementation of development projects, border security, and other issues (Singh, 2020, p. 11). The Chinese government has approached different sectors of Myanmar society, including the media network and local NGOs. Beijing has re-established the China-Myanmar Friendship Association (CMFA) since 2011. In 2003, CMFA organized the Chinese entrepreneurs' visit to Myanmar under the arrangement of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC). The Chinese business delegation met with Myanmar local NGOs and business executives to discuss China's current projects and future investment potential in the country. They also discussed the local people's requests, resource situation, and environmental protection requirements (Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 2013). This was the Chinese government's realistic and direct approach to businessmen from both countries aiming to get more understanding between each party.

5.9.6. Escalating China's Role in the Myanmar Peace Process and with EAOs (Ethnic Armed Organizations)

The peace process in Myanmar includes a crucial role in the country's peace, stability, and development. When President Thein's semi-civilian government took power in 2011, the government initiated the nationwide peace process, and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed by eight of twenty-one ethnic armed organizations on October 15, 2011. When the two presidents met in Beijing in April 2013, Xi said that "China supports Myanmar in choosing the development path in line with its national conditions and China will play a constructive role in promoting peace talks between Myanmar's government and the rebels in its northern territory." After the NLD government came to power in 2016, the momentum of the national reconciliation took the next steps, holding three twenty-first-century Panglong peace conferences in Naypyidaw in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Throughout the negotiation for peace, representatives and signatories from the Myanmar military, parliament, political parties, and civil society gathered and discussed a wide range of issues that could reach the goal of durable peace with the

ethnic armed groups. As a neighboring great power with long shared borders, China also plays a key role in Myanmar's peace process. Most of the non-signatory ethnic groups are from the northern border with China. Beijing's engagement with some ethnic groups is complicated, and its actions are also contradictory. According to the USIP report, China encourages Naypyidaw in pursuing the peace process; meanwhile it also provides shelter, weapons, and other assistance to some of the ethnic armed organizations (USIP, 2018).

Since Myanmar gained its independence from British colonial rule in 1948, the country has struggled with ethnic division and conflict. The ethnic minority groups strived for their political, economic, cultural, and social rights. As Myanmar's biggest neighbor, Beijing has been playing a critical role in the Myanmar peace process. China's interest in the Myanmar peace process is focused on the armed ethnic groups along the border in Kachin and Shan states—in particular, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and the Kokang-led Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) (Yun, 2017, p. 1). China has historical and cultural links with the ethnic armed groups in northern Myanmar. Driven by security concerns, economic interests, and a desire for political influence in Myanmar, China is playing a major role in Myanmar's internal security and peace process (USIP, 2018). The armed conflicts between Myanmar's military and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) have largely impacted China; on the other hand, they have widened Beijing's more active role in Naypyidaw's domestic affairs.

The border security issue is an essential part of Sino-Myanmar relations. The tension between the Myanmar army and the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) along the borders near Yunnan province directly affects the bilateral relations. The armed clashes between the army and EAOs along the Sino-Myanmar border sometimes threaten China's border stability and security by spilling the Myanmar refugees into China and by destroying China's commercial interests as well as the security of Chinese citizens living in both countries. In August 2009, the fighting between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Tatmadaw pushed more than thirty-seven thousand refugees to flee into Yunnan province (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Again in 2015, the armed clashes between these two groups also happened, causing a serious issue between the two countries in which Myanmar warplanes dropped bombs on China's side of the border that killed five Chinese citizens (Reuters, 2015). Then, in 2017, another two Chinese citizens on the Myanmar side near the border were killed during clashes

(Huang, 2017). Apart from the security issue stemming from the armed clashes, there are some ongoing problems between the two countries, such as drug and human trafficking, resource smuggling, and other illicit activity along the border (USIP, 2018, p. 16).

Ethnic armed groups such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Kokang-led Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) have historical ties to China through which Beijing supported the CPB (Communist Party of Burma) during the 1960s and 1970s; these armed groups are derived from the CPB. The UWSA, which is situated in eastern Shan state along the Chinese border, is a powerful ethnic armed organization with thirty thousand active fighters. The UWSA has strong contact with China, especially with actors in the PLA and Yunnan Province. The UWSA had a bilateral ceasefire with the government of Myanmar since 1989, and it is one of the members that reject the NCA. It has established a self-administered division, and the Tatmadaw cannot enter that region without invitation and cannot enter with arms. Otherwise, the region is accessible only through China. Because of this, the PLA sees the Wa area as a strategic buffer zone along its border against Western influence (USIP, 2018). The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is the second-largest ethnic army, with an estimated ten thousand troops and another ten thousand reserve forces. These ethnic groups are related to the Jingpo (Jingpaw) ethnic minority in China (Sun, 2017). The Kokang army or the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) is an ethnic Han Chinese group with a special relationship with China, and it lies in Shan state on the Chinese border.

On the other hand, Yunnan gains business and political interests from the border and extracts lucrative rents from trade with and investments where the EAOs dominate (Chang, 2013). The Myanmar government has suspected that the Chinese government secretly supported some ethnic groups with military-grade Chinese weaponry as an effort to wield leverage over Myanmar, and China has exerted control over the EAOs and provided them with arms and assistance (Chow, 2015, p. 6). Stakeholders in Myanmar also believe that the PLA shows its sympathetic acts to ethnic minority leaders and is more likely to take actions that fuel the armed conflicts. In addition, the retired PLA also enjoy their lucrative businesses with EAOs and even serve as mercenaries for ethnic armed groups in Myanmar (USIP, 2018, p. 28). Moreover, Beijing has a significant interest in the resource-rich northern part of Myanmar by extracting natural resources such as jade, lumber, and metals. Trade with Myanmar is critical for Yunnan province's economic growth; Yunnan is the poorest province in China and a core priority in

China's national development plan. According to Malik (2017), the reason for keeping ethnic armed groups on a tight leash is to retain the option of stepping up aid to rebels to punish Myanmar if it is perceived as going too far or titling toward "China-way" countries (Malik, 2017, p. 369).

At the geostrategic level, the ethnic armed conflicts in northern Myanmar along the Sino-Myanmar border are potential threats to China's magnificent strategic ambition of the Belt and Road Initiative or its Indian Ocean strategy. Under China's grand connectivity project, it aims to establish connectivity projects and transportation networks through Myanmar into South Asia and Southeast Asia in which Kyaukphyu special economic zone and deep seaport include a key part of Beijing's Maritime Silk Road via the Indian Ocean. The Sino-Myanmar border stability is also crucial for China in terms of its border trade and the refugee crisis that sometimes fly into China's border. However, China has played both sides for years, signing deals with the government while supporting and funding the EAOs (Malik, 2017). Nevertheless, Beijing should perceive that the Sino-Myanmar border security and stability are essential for Beijing's several connectivity projects, which definitely need the Myanmar government's support and cooperation. China's participation in Myanmar's ethnic armed conflicts can post itself into two direct and indirect negative effects that debilitate its strategic ambitions. First, the ethnic conflicts can block Beijing's strategic plan along the Myanmar-China border. Second, the conflict can damage the bilateral relations and Myanmar's trust in China due to China's complex relationship with the ethnic armed organizations (Sun, 2017).

After the Tatmadaw conducted airstrikes against KIA around the headquarter in Laiza on the Chinese border in December 2012 and three bombs landed on Chinese territory, thousands of refugees fled into Yunnan province. By acting as an external central player in Myanmar's peace process, China sent its special envoy Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vice-Minister Fu Yung to facilitate talks between the Myanmar government and the EAOs in 2013. Subsequently, China hosted several rounds of talks between KIO (Kachin Independence Organization) and the Myanmar government representatives in Ruili at Yunnan province. Though Myanmar refused China's offer to mediate the dispute in concerns of Beijing's interference in Myanmar's internal affairs, it allowed China's special envoy as well as the UN envoy. The special envoy served as a lead point of contact and formal observer to Myanmar's peace talk. When the NCA was signed

in October 2015, China signed as an official international witness, along with the UN, the EU, India, Japan, and Thailand (USIP, 2018, p. 24).

In October 2015, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed by eight ethnic armed groups, but most of the powerful groups, including the groups that settled along the Myanmar-China border, such as UWSA, KIA, and the Shan State Army-North, did not participate in the agreement. In this case, Myanmar officials publicly accused China of undermining Myanmar's peace process by blocking the participation of these groups in the NCA (Yun, 2017, p. 4). Although the United States has long participated in Myanmar's reform process, China's deep involvement and its strong reaction to the possibility of Washington's role in conflict resolution in northern Myanmar have limited the United States' active participation. Beijing explicitly opposed United States engagement in this process, especially in the areas along the Chinese border, due to its concern about Washington's influence in Myanmar (USIP, 2018).

In the Rakhine state that comprises the western part of Myanmar, China holds its extensive economic interests, such as a major port and special economic zone at Kyaukphyu and a railroad and pipeline project to transfer energy and other materials and supplies from the Bay of Bengal through Myanmar to Yunnan province. Yun Sun also noted that

According to Chinese experts, peace in Myanmar is desirable and conducive to China's national interests in terms of peace and development in the border region. However, whether peace is realistically attainable is an entirely different issue. Beijing's bottom line in the peace process is a ceasefire in the border region. Given the disruption due to the conflicts, including damages to China's border security, Beijing prioritizes suspension or elimination, or -at a minimum-containment and management of the active armed conflicts along its border. This is China's most basic security demand of Naypyidaw and Myanmar's ethnic armed groups. (Sun, 2017, p. 5)

After losing the important project in northern Myanmar, China tried to secure its other important projects, such as oil and gas pipeline projects in Rakhine state, which are situated in the western part of Myanmar. The Kyaukphyu deep seaport and the oil and gas pipeline project are valuable for China beyond its economic interest. It is essential for China for its strategic interest. In Rakhine state, the ethnic armed organization of AA (Arakan Army) has settled. The Rakhine state has experienced clashes and war between the Myanmar army and AA. Thus, it is

also important for Beijing to secure peace and stability in the region in order to achieve both its economic and strategic goals.

Beijing's security concerns in northern Myanmar are also outlined by its fear of Western intervention, particularly United States interference in immediate neighbor Myanmar. Yun (2017) noted that, "For China, an open and active U.S. role in the peace process would only further enhance the U.S. influence in Burmese politics and invite an American presence on the Chinese border (USIP, 2018)." According to the United States Institute of Peace, China ignores its adherence to the principle of non-interference and is proactively and assertively involved in Myanmar's peace process (USIP, 2018). In this sense, China blocked the KIA's proposal of "internationalization of the Kachin issue" to invite the United States, the UK, the United Nations, and China to be observers and witnesses of the negotiation between the KIA and the central government" (Sun, 2014). On the other hand, Beijing tried to maintain its leverage in Myanmar by keeping alive and protecting ethnic armed groups from destruction by the Myanmar military (Yun, 2017).

China's influence in the ethnic armed groups is also important for the Myanmar government. Under the national reconciliation framework, the twenty-first-century Panglong Conference was held in Myanmar under the NLD government. By its strong engagement with some ethnic groups, China could pressure some EAOs to attend the meetings, including groups operated fighting with the Tatmadaw and opposed to the NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement). In the shuttle diplomacy in May 2017, China's special envoy Sun Guoxiang met in Yunnan with ethnic armed groups from the FPNCC—the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee, which is organized by seven non-signatories of NCA, such as Arakan Army (AA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), and the United Wa State Army (UWSA). The special envoy could persuade and bring these ethnic groups to the negotiation table. In addition to these efforts for facilitating talks, China has also contributed funds to the peace process (USIP, 2018).

After the halt of the dam construction, China has made extensive efforts to have a mediator role between Myanmar central government and EAOs. The ethnic armed conflict has been a deep-rooted problem in Myanmar's internal politics. Keeping a critical role in Myanmar's

sensitive issue, China wanted to maintain its role in Myanmar as a negotiator between the Myanmar government and ethnic armed groups. The purpose of Beijing seemed to succeed to some extent because it could bring some ethnic armed groups to the negotiation, as China has a strong influence on the major ethnic armed groups in Myanmar. In the new government's aim, national reconciliation is one of the most important priorities to bring the ethnic armed organizations to peaceful negotiation. For Myanmar, as a result, peace and stability in the country are essential for the overall development of the country, and this is one of the major barriers for a peaceful developed nation. China's role in Myanmar's peace process could not be excluded in bilateral relations. In a nutshell, China could preserve its major role in Myanmar's politics and could maintain the Myanmar government's reliance on it (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013).

5.9.7. Myanmar-China Relations under the NLD Government

Myanmar's political reforms could bring significant changes in Myanmar's domestic politics and its relations with neighboring power China. After the halt of the Myitsone Dam project by the Myanmar side, Beijing's traditional view of holding Naypyidaw as one of its closest partners is no longer sound, shaking the foundation of China's Myanmar policy (Sun, 2012; Chenyang, & Char, 2016). No one can deny that the Thein Sein government has made impressive achievements politically, economically, and in its foreign policy relations. From China's side, it feels outrage over the dam issue and also feels unfairly penalized for its relationship with the military government by a quasi-civilian government and views itself as victimized by Myanmar's political transition. Consequently, the year 2012 tainted the Sino-Myanmar relations with the emergence of serious issues, such as public protest against Chinese-funded projects, Kachin conflict, border instability, and changes in external environment that came from Myanmar's political transition (Singh, 2020). All these situations were emerged as the reflection from the military leaders' awareness of the "potential danger of being too close to China" and the grievance against the Chinese owing to the practice of resource extraction by the Chinese enterprises investing in Myanmar (Zhao, 2010; Singh, 2020). Although China wants to hope that Naypyidaw will preserve its non-alignment and balanced diplomacy among great powers, it feels worried about Myanmar's rapidly growing relations with the United States and Japan in Myanmar's politics and national economy, which debilitated Beijing's confidence and created its sense of vulnerability (Sun, 2015).

Myanmar's transition to democracy brought Myanmar-China relations to its lowest point, though China still remains an important partner for Myanmar's economic, political, and security interests under the new, democratic civilian government led by the NLD (National League for Democracy) (Sein, 2018). In 2015, the NLD government led by Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory and took office in March 2016. After suffering unexpected problems in the previous USDP government, China hoped to build better relations with the NLD government.

When Xi Jinping took power in China, Sino-Myanmar relations were going through a challenging phase. Starting from the Myitsone Dam suspension, the growing momentum of Myanmar's domestic political changes and the new external environment molded by re-engagement policies of the United States, the EU, and Japan toward Myanmar raised concerns for Beijing (Singh, 2020, p. 10). In response to these situations, Beijing also tried to adjust its policies toward Myanmar. One of the important changes was the establishment of close and friendly relations with the leading opposition party, the National League for Democracy government. When the NLD won the landslide victory in the 2015 general election, Beijing kept its closer ties with the NLD from both government-to-government relations and party-to-party relations. In her interview with the Chinese Xinhua News Agency, Aung San Suu Kyi promised a friendly policy toward China, but stressed that Chinese investments should be designed to gain the trust of the Myanmar people. She also praised the Chinese BRI project, hoping to bring benefits for both countries. Aung San Suu Kyi's standpoint with China encouraged Beijing to establish closer ties with the NLD to protect its strategic projects (Sun, 2015).

Since the NLD government took office in 2015, the government discussed the China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC) to raise Myanmar's stake in the Kyaukphyu SEZ. The NLD government could re-negotiate some economic agreements that were unfair trade deals. In the former agreement under the Thein Sein government, the Chinese developers possess an 85 percent stake in the project; the rest was owned by Myanmar. In the new government, which resulted from several negotiations under the NLD government, Myanmar could hold 30 percent of the shares (The Irrawaddy, 2018a), and cutting project costs by 80 percent could reduce concerns of China's debt trap to Myanmar (Myers, 2020). In 2015, the previous Thein Sein government and Chinese state-owned Citic Group agreed to spend US\$7.3 billion costs. However, the NLD government could scale down the project cost to

US\$1.3 billion, with just two jetties, which could be expanded later if it was necessary to build (Yhome, 2019).

In November 2018, the Myanmar government successfully renegotiated the share ration agreement and signed a framework agreement for the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) that is the major strategic component of CMEC (China-Myanmar Economic Corridor) (Lwin, 2020). The Kyaukphyu SEZ is strategically significant for China, which gives it get access to the Indian Ocean and allows its oil imports to bypass the Malacca Strait. The SEZ can provide China with regional connectivity as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Moreover, the Kyaukphyu project is strategically located between the three economically vibrant and dynamic markets, such as China, India, and ASEAN, and thus it could serve as a trade corridor among these three economies (The Irrawaddy, 2018a). Under the NLD government, China strongly pressed to resume the Myitsone Dam project by revealing that the project is necessary for the BRI projects (Lwin, 2019a). However, the Myitsone Dam has not yet resumed.

In January 2020, President Xi Jinping paid a two-day visit to Myanmar. That was the time of the 70th Anniversary of China-Myanmar Diplomatic Relations. He was the first President who visited Myanmar in nearly two decades. It was Xi's second visit to Myanmar. He visited Myanmar in 2009 as vice-president. At that trip, the two countries signed sixteen MOUs on technical cooperation, the implementation of hydropower projects, the China-Myanmar Oil and Gas twin pipeline project, and the Kyaukphyu SEZ (Lwin, 2020a). In his remarks at the launch ceremony of celebrations for the seventieth anniversary of China-Myanmar diplomatic ties, President Xi highlighted the historic *Paukphaw* relations as, "Our two countries are geographically linked, our peoples are connected by kinship and our cultures enjoy a natural affinity. Our millennia-old, time-tested 'Paukphaw' friendship is as strong as ever; it is the driving force and source of strength behind China-Myanmar relations. . . . Guided by the shared vision of a China-Myanmar community with a shared future and by the fundamental interests of our people, we must pursue stronger political trust, broader practical cooperation, and closer cultural exchanges so that the two peoples will forever be good neighbors, good friends, good *Paukphaw* and good partners." According to Xi's speech, the Chinese government seemed to survive the traditional *Paukphaw* relations in a bilateral relationship (Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 2020a). The usage of *Paukphaw* in President Xi's speech showed Beijing's willingness to develop a mutual friendship similar to what existed in the previous time.

In his meeting with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Xi also reaffirmed the “Paukphaw” friendship. The Chinese President emphasized the important points for future economic cooperation between the two countries as follows:

First, the two countries should accelerate the alignment of development strategies and well construct the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). Second, the two countries should focus on flagship cooperation projects to strengthen connectivity. Third, China and Myanmar should expand trade and investment and intensify local cooperation. Fourth, China and Myanmar should deepen people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cement people-to-people bonds. (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, 2020a)

For the economic sector, Xi prioritized the implementation of Kyaukphyu projects as a demonstrative and driving role in the CMEC, the acceleration of the construction of the China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone, and the New Yangon City (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, 2020b). During Xi’s visit, Myanmar and China signed a total of thirty-three MOUs, agreements, exchanges letters, and protocols. The two countries signed a concession agreement and shareholders’ agreement for the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and deep seaport project. In 2004, Myanmar officials and Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi signed twenty-one agreements and MOUs on economic and technological cooperation (Lwin, 2020b).

The people-to-people contact was steadily improving between the two countries. In March 2019, a team of college students from China and Myanmar created documentaries that were screened at the China Cultural Center in Yangon. It was a result of a training program named “Future Communicator.” Under the program, nine Myanmar students joined hands with Chinese students from the School of Journalism at Yunnan University in 2018 (The People’s Daily, 2019a). The six documentary films consist of *Beauty of Yunnan*, *Myanmar Youths in Yunnan*, *Animated Plants in Yunnan*, *Technology in Your Sight*, *Blossoming*, and *Half a Month* (The People’s Daily, 2019a; Singh, 2020). China also promoted its cultural diplomacy during the NLD administration. In 2016, the two countries signed agreements to assist Myanmar in the restoration of the Thatbyinnyu Pahto Temple, which is a historical and famous pagoda in Myanmar that was destroyed by an earthquake on August 24, 2014 (The People’s Daily, 2019b).

Chapter (6)

Discussion

6.1. Summary of the Discussion

The research investigated that the asymmetrical relations remained in both periods: the military era and the semi-civilian government turn. Through the history of Myanmar-China relations since 1988, it is distinct that the Sino-Myanmar relations had been largely imbalanced in the military era. The nature of the relations had not been changed, but the strategies of Myanmar government had modified with the transformation of political system from military rule to democratic government. With the emergence of new political reform, the democratic government (quasi-civilian government backed by the military-dominated party) gave more spaces for people.

Since before the Myitsone Dam issue, the people's discontent over Chinese businesses mounted around the country. In the Myitsone Dam issue, people's discontent reached a peak, and the anti-Chinese sentiment was dramatically increasing across the country. The government paved the way for the people's movements to put pressure on China. The government could announce suspension of the dam construction without any notice to Beijing. But the government of Myanmar has been still cooperative with China, though using different strategies to change the behavior of China.

The year 2011 was a significant year in Sino-Myanmar relations, because the Myitsone Dam suspension entailed great challenges in China's existing interest and its future strategic-planning in Myanmar. For China, the dam issue made China examine and renew its policy toward Myanmar. After the dam issue, the behavioral changes of China toward Myanmar were significant, and Myanmar could negotiate unfair trade deals under the NLD government. The Myitsone Dam case study was the prominent example that could underline the asymmetrical relationship between great and small powers. The disproportionate economic deal between the stronger and weaker sides could be ended up by the latter one even in the imbalanced relationship. Despite the asymmetrical relationships, Myanmar could handle its relations with China in the issue of Myitsone Dam construction, which is an important project for China.

In the analysis of Myanmar-China relations from 1988 to 2011, we could see that there are various small tactical steps of Myanmar trying to manipulate its relations with Beijing. To thoroughly explain the outcome of the research, the first thing we need to understand was that there were two parts to Myanmar's policy manipulation. The first one was from the period between 1988 to 2010. The second part mainly focused on 2011. But the research also extended its general analysis to 2020 until the Chinese President paid a significant visit to Myanmar.

Under the military government, the dependence of Myanmar on China was considerably high because Myanmar faced strong international sanctions. At that time, the military government was struggling with its regime's survival. China was the only country that had close relations with the Myanmar military regime. Because of its huge reliance on China, it looked like Myanmar wanted to use the bandwagoning strategy to China. However, as the research revealed in the above chapters, the government of Myanmar prevented itself from being a puppet state of China. Since the military government noticed China's predominance in Myanmar's domestic politics, it deployed small steps such as removing popular pro-Chinese military leader General Khin Nyunt who was a very close relationship with China, by moving its capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw without taking any advice from China, and finally starting its new political system. After shifting to the (so-called) democratic government, the government announced its policy to reintegrate into the international community and established friendly relations with all nations. These were important tactical moves that were significant foreign policy behavior of a small country.

Then, the research investigated an interesting fact that is buried in the core of Myanmar's critical manipulation of Beijing. This outcome came from the analysis of the case study of the Myitsone Hydropower dam project. The Myitsone case, profoundly revealed Myanmar's tactical and strategical shifts to terminate the dam project. In this part, as I meticulously analyzed in the case study, Myanmar sensibly applied its several tactics, then the strategy, and finally reaches the goal of temporarily canceling the dam construction. The Myitsone dam project was signed under the military government before the semi-civilian government. When the surge of the people's discontent with this project, it was the best time for Myanmar to trigger its strategic aim to change the behavior of China. Fortunately, Myanmar had already initiated its democratic transition with the new government and the country was on the democratic transition. Then, the Myitsone dam issue was the critical game-changer to succeed Myanmar's grand purpose of

changing the behavior of China. It meant that the Myanmar government competently applied the Myitsone dam issue as a strategic tool.

The distinct tactics were also found in learning the Myitsone dam case. The Myanmar government indirectly supported the people's movements against the construction of the dam project. In this sense, the people of Myanmar could demonstrate freely with freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression about the Myitsone dam project. The people could freely make protest the construction of the dam project. The intellectuals and technocrats could freely raise people's awareness about the possible danger of building the Myitsone dam. The significant 'Save the Irrawaddy' campaigns accelerated around the country but none of the key organizers of the 'save the Irrawaddy campaigns' were not threatened by the authorities and did not face arbitrary detention. The government did not make any limitation on a publication about the Myitsone dam although the media censorship law was partially active. Under the media relaxation of the government, the media could boldly publish and criticize about the dam issue. On the other hand, some government officials' propaganda to build the project in the state-owned newspapers attracted China's trust on Myanmar's enthusiasm to proceed the project. The government of Myanmar indirectly encouraged its people under 'Democracy' though that was not a pure democracy. As part of political freedom, Aung San Suu Kyi could send its message to Myanmar and to the world through the 'Irrawaddy Appeal'. Consequently, her unique role in Myanmar politics had a strong influence on the people's involvement in anti-dam movements. Without the government's support, the anti-dam movements could not become a nationwide movement. The political transition of the country could shield Myanmar from the Chinese government's suspicion that Naypyidaw let the people's opposition to the dam project. These small tactical moves could bring Myanmar to implement its strategic goal of 'Building Beijing's trust in Naypyidaw's standpoint on the issue.

On the other hand, as part of its tactical move, Myanmar tried to improve its relations with the United States. It was the time when the United States adjusted its policy with the 'Pivot to Asia' strategy under the Obama administration. The cordial relations between the U.S. government and the democratic icon Aung San Suu Kyi helped Naypyidaw to seize the trust of its new political path to the international community. Furthermore, Myanmar expanded its role in a regional organization such as ASEAN. To serve as the ASEAN chairmanship position in 2014,

Myanmar could improve its role with China. Because of the South China Sea dispute with some ASEAN members, China needed Myanmar's diplomatic support to some extent.

While the improvement of Sino-Myanmar relations politically, economically, and militarily and the simultaneous escalation of the anti-dam movements, the President of Myanmar announced the suspension of the dam construction without giving any hint to Beijing. Myanmar's unilateral halt of the dam project caused disappointment and a big surprise to China. In his announcement, the President indicated the social and environmental impacts of the dam construction and he also proclaimed that 'the government is elected by the people, and it has to respect people's will, as well as the government, has the responsibility to address concerns in all serious'. In this sense, the President's declaration about the suspension of the project was impressive in the way that it could avoid China's antagonism and doubt in which he totally referred to his decision as the priority of the people's desire according to the responsibility of a democratic government. In the Myitsone dam issue, the Myanmar government consciously moved its tactical steps to implement its strategy of collaborating with domestic and international power or support from them. The successful implementation of the tactics and strategies finally drove Myanmar to reach its goal of the halt of the dam project.

General tactical moves	
Internal	Foreign policy realignment
	Developing democratic norms
	Improving the government's reputation through new government's policy
	Partially releasing media freedom
	Building trust between the government and the people through people-centered approach
	Consolidation the whole people including ethnic nationals through the Myitsone dam issue
	Showing elite division in the government upon the Myitsone dam issue
External	Efforts to reintegrate into the international community through the new democratic government
	Rapprochement with the U.S.

	Endeavoring a good relationship with China
	Developing friendly relations with China and other countries

Figure 6.1. Myanmar’s General Tactical Moves in the Myitsone dam issue

The more interesting thing comes after the suspension of the dam project. In fact, Myanmar’s act of unilateral cancellation of the project makes loss China’s political prestige not only in Myanmar but also in the international community. It was undeniable that Sino-Myanmar relations was tending to be frozen because of this issue and it seemed like the bilateral relations would seriously destroy. But the unprecedented conversion materializes in the bilateral relations- China significantly changed its behavior toward Myanmar. Despite some setbacks in bilateral relations, there were lots of fruitful results after the Myitsone Dam issue. For China itself, it could analyze the weakness of its state-owned companies and approach to deeply understanding the Myanmar people’s desires and fulfilling it. Obviously, Beijing started to listen to the Myanmar people’s voice with sole emphasis on government-to-government relations and it realizes that the Chinese businesses would not be successful without the people’s consent in Myanmar. In this case, Myanmar had never stalled its active cooperation with Beijing in various sectors, even after half of the project. It did not show any confrontation or antagonistic action to China that could damage bilateral relations. Instead, Myanmar consciously recalibrated its external relations through developing friendly cooperation with other countries in the world. The semi-civilian government aimed to reshape its foreign policy to reintegrate into the international community. It tried to expand cordial relations with China. At the same time, the government implemented its reform agenda, such as political, economic, social, and administrative reforms. The Myanmar government maintained its amicable relations while it tried to reduce its over-dependence on China. It was undeniable that the Myanmar-China relations were seriously affected by the dam issue because China never expected that Naypyidaw would snub Beijing’s interest in favor of the people’s lust to stop a project important to China.

General analysis of the behavioral changes of China	
Behavioral changes of China	Benefits for Myanmar
Reposition Dual Track diplomacy with new approach	-Resulting new political channels

	for the major opposition party and other non-ruling parties
People-centered approach	-Reaching out to Myanmar local community
Multi-dimensional public diplomacy approach	-reiterating the significance of 'Paukphaw' friendship in favor of Myanmar -achieving some benefits under cultural diplomacy and Deep Fraternal Friendship campaigns
Prudent approach to the growing U.S.-Myanmar relations	-Creating to improve Myanmar's political leverage in relations with China
Focusing on Corporate Social Responsibility of the Chinese companies and businesses	-Reducing the lack of business ethic of Chinese companies and businesses and trying to meet the local people's consent -renegotiating the agreements of the unfair trade deal
Reaching to Civil Society Organizations	-Creating more opportunity to send Myanmar people's voice regarding with China
Escalating China's role in the Myanmar Peace Process and with EAOs (Ethnic Armed Organizations)	-Supporting the national reconciliation process of the Myanmar government by China's strong influence on EAOs and bringing EAOs to the negotiation table -Reducing armed conflicts -Holding the 21 st century

Figure 6.2. General Analysis of General analysis of the behavioral changes of China

6.2. Did the Myanmar Government Really Aim to Counter Influence or Counterbalance China through the Case of the Myitsone Dam Suspension?

In the analysis of the previous literature, there were various assumptions for the Myanmar government's aims in the case of unilateral suspension of the Myitsone Dam. To Linter (2011), the suspension of the dam construction was the signal of the Myanmar government to send the message to the West that Myanmar's new post-junta government was not Beijing's client state, and it was willing to improve the relations with the West (Linter, 2011). There were also many assumptions about the President's decision to suspend the dam construction. According to Chinese analysts, the suspension of the Myitsone Dam project was stemming from the heated engagement between Myanmar and the United States, and it was Naypyidaw's attempt to show Washington that it was not China's client state and truly represented the people in the hope of achieving more rewards from the United States (Sun, 2012, p. 85).

According to Chan (2017), there were two common signals that the President wanted to avoid the outbreak of civil war and his willingness to have economic sanctions removed. Chan analyzed that the first one fails to explain the cancellation of the project by the President because both China and Myanmar sides would not be responsible for any unprecedented obstacles during the process of construction, such as the opposition of the people and the KIO's (Kachin Independent Organization) wanting to stop the project. The site of the dam construction was effectively controlled by KIO. In March 2011, the KIO issued a letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao in which it warned that the KIO would not be responsible for starting a civil war if CPI proceeds building the hydropower project (Lanyaw, 2011). Based on this point, Chan pointed out that the President had an option to negotiate with CPI for the process of the halt of the project in accordance with the contract. The second interesting point was that it is "Naypyidaw's signal to the West that it was willing to redefine diplomatic ties with Beijing in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions from the West" (Sun, 2012, p. 85; Chan, 2017, p. 685). Without the suspension of the project, nonetheless, U.S.-Myanmar relations had been developing with Naypyidaw's credible work such as the release of political prisoners, allowing the main

opposition party NLD to participate in the 2012 by-elections, and the dissolving the pre-publication censorship in 2012. Thus, the Myanmar government had already proved to the Western powers and the international community its remarkable or impressive transformation.

On the other hand, the United States government under the Obama administration had already turned its policy shift to Myanmar with “pragmatic engagement” under the pivot to Asia policy. No United States interest was positioned in the suspension of the Myitsone Dam project (Interview, LR, 14), and Washington would not hope to halt this mega-dam project for the sake of Myanmar-U.S. bilateral relations. Therefore, the decision to freeze such an important project was a risky situation for Myanmar. From this perspective, Myanmar was not necessary to do more proof for explicit its political changes. Therefore, the unique point showed that the Myanmar government aimed to pressure China by showing its political leverage in their asymmetrical relations. As mentioned above, the complete balancing act could be arduous for Myanmar, which had had huge dependence on China. Thus, it could be Myanmar’s government’s strong enthusiasm only to put pressure on China by showing its political leverage.

The Obama administration took a review of its policy concerning Myanmar in 2009 and then it initiated a new engagement strategy toward Myanmar. When the United States policy started to change Myanmar in a positive way, China raised its concern about the development of bilateral ties between Washington and Yangon and its impact on Beijing. However, when Washington announced Myanmar’s 2010 general election as “neither free nor fair,” Beijing released its concern (Sun, 2014, p. 4). According to Sun (2014), China, on the other hand, welcomed United States rapprochement to Myanmar because the progress of U.S.-Myanmar relations helped Beijing reduce international criticism for providing the Myanmar military junta. Nevertheless, China did not expect the improved relations between the United States and Myanmar not to destroy its existing interest in Myanmar. China never thought that the new government led by the military leaders would not create genuine political reforms soon, and the U.S.-Myanmar relations still continued to be constrained because of Myanmar’s domestic politics.

On the other hand, it was logical thinking that Myanmar wanted to prove to the United States its realistic political changes because of its strong will to minimize Chinese influence and to reintegrate into the international community. It should be no doubt that the role of Washington obliquely encouraged the decision of Naypyidaw to reach the suspension of the dam project. The

embassy of the United States in Myanmar supported the financial assistance of the civil society organizations in Kachin state that mobilized against the project. According to the United States State Department, Derek Mitchell, who was the United States Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Myanmar, discussed the dam issue with civil society groups when he visited Myanmar between September 9th and 14th. Moreover, President Obama visited Myanmar and made a speech at the University of Yangon in Myanmar, and he mentioned President Thein Sein's decision to postpone the Myitsone Dam project as an "example of progress being made in the country" (Dossi, 2015). President Obama praised the process of democratic reform and economic reforms in Myanmar, saying they could lead to incredible development opportunities. In this address, President Obama used the country name "Myanmar" that was changed by the military government in 1989 to the preferred name by Naypyidaw, instead of "Burma," which was constantly used by the United States. After U.S.-Myanmar relations significantly improved in August 2011, the Myitsone dam constructions were suspended one month later on September 30, 2011. A coincident point was that the announcement of the dam suspension was a day before the Chinese National Day. Possibly, Naypyidaw did not intend to irritate by declaring its decision before the Chinese National Day. However, this accidental event has become more significant than the case of the Myitsone Dam case.

Dossi (2015) said that there were two push factors to the government deciding the postponement of the Myitsone Hydropower Dam project. The first point was domestic political competition, such as the strong opposition of each individual in the country, the NGOs, the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the risk of outbreaking the civil war between Kachin ethnic armed organizations, and the Tatmadaw (Myanmar army). The second point was considered the external factor such as the United States' involvement by supporting the civil society groups in Kachin state, United States incentives for releasing economic sanctions to Myanmar and its significant pivot to Asia strategy that attracted Naypyidaw to pursue more visible reforms, the ASEAN that was about to assign Myanmar the ASEAN chairmanship, Beijing's failure to give enough emphasis on the dam protest while the public outcry was raised against China. Thus, the Myanmar government carried out its decision from this vacuum. There was also the "tactical value" as the Myanmar government's strategic ploy to grasp the goodwill of Western countries and neighboring ASEAN countries (Mogensen, 2017, p. 14).

It could also be assumed that the President wanted to highlight the willingness of Myanmar people toward the People's Republic of China and to undermine that Myanmar's future stance to be independent of the orbit of China or to send a strong message to China that today Myanmar is different from the past and the people's power was essential in bilateral relations. This is the appropriate interpretation behind the suspension of the project because Naypyidaw preserved and pursued its cordial and friendly relationships with Beijing before the dam suspension. It had vividly shown that the President visited China and signed more bilateral economic agreements, including the MOU for the Sino-Myanmar Railway project, which would cost US\$20 billion in May 2011 (Xinhua, 2011). So, it was clear that Myanmar did not want to break up its relations with China.

In his inaugural speech on March 30, 2011, the President said that implementing environmental conservation was an important task. The President pledged that the government would work for economic development in parallel with environmental conservation. In his address, he urged to development of democratic practices in transition to democracy in Myanmar. The President also pledged that the entire government policy must be people-centered, and he encouraged the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in policy development, which were obviously different from the previous government's top-down approach (Htut, 2019, p. 48). Thus, among the several perspectives of the President's determination to pause the dam project, some may consider that it was the President's own preference to keep his promise as a step to a real democratic nation and to stand firm on its new foreign policy direction.

The President was the former military general and the prime minister of the former military government. The high-ranking officials in the new government came from an army background. Political reformed are elite-driven and stem from the President and progressive members of the military-dominated USDP party. The President, who was enthusiastic about democratic reformation, and some liberal elements in the ruling USDP encountered hindrances from hard-liners within the party itself and by the army. The rift between the pro-reformers and anti-reformers was a serious obstacle in the government. However, the President finally could make a certain decision to suspend the Myitsone Dam project albeit the fierce opposition from hard-liners.

While the opposition against the Myitsone project was escalating across the country, there were different opinions among the government ministers at the national level on the

advantages and disadvantages of the dam project. Before the declaration of the postponement of the project, the government body itself separated into two groups: the one that was in favor of the project, and another one that called for the revision of the project. The first group included First Vice-President Tin Aung Myint Oo, Information and Culture Minister Kyaw Hsan, Finance Minister Hla Tun, and Upper House Speaker Khin Aung Myint. The second one consisted of the Minister for Industry-1 and Industry-2 Soe Win, Lower House Speaker Shwe Mann, Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, and the Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry Win Tun (Dossi, 2015). However, the final decision of whether to suspend or pursue the project was determined by the President. Thus, the project suspension could also be regarded as the President's enthusiastic reforms to the democracy. Even if the determination to halt the project stemmed from the President's preference, it can overwhelmingly represent and reflect the whole government at the national level.

Some might criticize that the suspension of the dam project stemmed only from the people's power that pushed the Myanmar government to reach the unilateral suspension of the dam project and that it was not the result of the government's strategical consideration or strategic manipulation. In this case, this was the long-term strategy of the Myanmar government to reduce its dependence on China and to raise its policy manipulation in bilateral asymmetrical relations. Thus, the junta had already outlined the seven-step road map paving the way for its democratic transition. It was true that the shift of political reform was an effort of the military government for its regime survival. However, the overall analytical consideration clearly showed that the successive Myanmar governments had their strong willingness to free from the Chinese sphere of influence. That purpose was significantly implemented under the semi-civilian government. It was obviously the government's desire to counterinfluence China through the Myitsone Dam suspension and its aim to change the behavior of China. The power of people was an important factor in the Myitsone Dam issue. However, without the government's consent or support, people could not do such effective campaigns throughout the whole process. The main point was the change of the political system that immensely impacted the decision-making process. That was also the government's prudent tactics and strategies of handling the situation to reach its final goal.

When the semi-civilian government handed over the power from the military regime, it announced its reform agenda, such as political reform, administrative reform, and socioeconomic

reforms. To introduce the democratic government, the new government made distinct relaxation of rules and regulations in various sectors including the media sector. In the Myitsone Dam issue, the people of Myanmar could express their desire for the dam project and could insist on public collaboration by using media networks. The private-owned media also incited the people and promoted the people's awareness. However, this cannot be done without the government's collaboration behind the scenes. The most important point was that the government uncovered space for people's voices.

It was the Myanmar government's long-standing willingness to counterbalance China that was rooted in the military government. Thus, in this case, the government applied the people's power as an effective weapon to counterbalance Beijing. Although it was established with former military officers, the Myanmar government sought to distance itself from decades of army rule. It had vividly cleared some reforms, such as easing restrictions on news and media, drafting a law on economic liberalization, and seeking to contact Aung San Suu Kyi by holding regular meetings with her as well as releasing the political prisoners who were detained by the military junta (Fuller, 2011).

It might be said that the suspension of the dam project was a minor issue in Sino-Myanmar relations or in small-great power relations. In Myanmar's transition period to democracy, China, unfortunately, encountered a wide range of challenges. The new political shift of Myanmar had opened a door of opportunity for new actors in domestic politics and put pressure on China to engage with a much broader range of stakeholders highlighting the risk of Chinese strategic investments in Myanmar (TNI, 2016). Therefore, it was undeniable that the new political shift of Myanmar had brought unexpected challenges to China's political and economic relations with its southwest neighbor. Even if Myanmar could not maneuver an effective counterbalance to China, the Myitsone Dam suspension was a turning point in Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations. To overcome its business risks and to secure its investments, China learned that the different sectors of society that impact the socio-political life of the host country (at least in Myanmar) should be regarded as an important role (TNI, 2016). Based on this knowledge, Beijing has increased its extensive changes to match Myanmar's reforms. It started to emphasize to interact the people of Myanmar and Myanmar politics than ever before instead of solely focusing on the "government-to-government" relationships. Since

the dam issue happened, public diplomacy began to be popular as a new strategy toward Myanmar.

The Myitsone Dam issue impacted on other Chinese investments around the country that were facing people's protest. Some of the investment contracts managed to be revised, such as the Letpadaung Copper Mine project. The Myitsone issue not only had domestic influence but also had great influence internationally. In 2015, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen suspended Sinohydro's Stung Cheay Areng hydropower dam until the end of this tenure because of the social opposition (Parameswaran, 2015). Likewise, in the same year, the government of Sri Lanka temporarily halted the construction of China Communications Construction Company's Colombo port city due to the environmental concerns (Aneez & Sirilal, 2006). In April 2016, Kazakhstan faced rare protests in the case of land reform in which protesters were worried about the new policy that might allow the government to sell land to Chinese companies, as they are the major investors in the agricultural sector (Farchy, 2016). The suspension of the Myitsone Dam had triggered China's small economic counterparts, highlighting the counterinfluence of Beijing in terms of prioritizing peoples' desire. In addition, it could also point out the deficiencies of Chinese state-owned companies operating across the world. It was Myanmar's best strategy to have balance between the great powers. In the Myitsone Dam case, Myanmar being a small power than those of its great power neighbor China, it could discreetly manage to counterinfluence China despite great disparity in capacity.

6.3. Other Factors why China Faced the Failure of the Myitsone Dam Construction

Myanmar's nationalist leader perceived the fact that the construction of the Myitsone Dam at the outset of the Irrawaddy River meant giving China an opportunity to control the water flow of the river, and it was a serious threat to the country's national security (Zhang, 2020). Behind the people's will of shelving the dam project, the national security concern might be hidden. According to Zhang (2020), the other two multi-billion-dollar projects, such as the Letpadaung Copper Mine project and the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines projects, also encountered severe opposition by the people. However, the former was suspended for two years, and the latter was never stopped and had been working since the completion of its construction work in 2015. Based on these facts, it seems that Myanmar leaders put into consideration the Myitsone project because of security concerns. Thus, the national security concern pushed the Myanmar leader who was former military leaders make different decisions on resemble projects

under different contexts (Zhang, 2020). That was the prompt example that the Myanmar government did not want to be bandwagoning or did not want to be a Chinese satellite state. On the other hand, the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline projects were more strategically important for Beijing, and it is unacceptable to suspend or stop that project like the Myitsone Dam project. If the project was shelved for any reason, the political cost to Beijing would be terribly affected by its major goal of energy supply needs and energy transportation security that was the only way to solve the Malacca dilemma. Therefore, Beijing itself might assumed that it made a decision to trade-off between two major projects: the Myitsone and the oil and gas pipeline projects. For Beijing, the abandonment of oil and gas pipeline project was less tolerable than other projects in Myanmar, not only because of its energy security but also because of its strategic significance. This assumption supported the point that Myanmar had strong political leverage to counterinfluence China. It was also eminent that Sino-Myanmar relations were asymmetrical but were not turning into mutual dependence instead of asymmetrical dependence.

Myanmar people's lack of trust in China and Chinese investment was one of the reasons why people strongly wanted to oppose the dam project. According to Kiik (2016), the failure of Chinese development at CPI's Myitsone Dam could be analyzed as two factors. First, CPI had a comparatively bad track record (International Rivers, 2015; Kiik, 2016, p. 387). Second, the practices of Chinese state-owned enterprises differed from country to country, depending on and adapting to discrete legal and political conditions of the host country (Kiik, 2016). Though the dam would be funded, designed, and established by a state-owned Chinese corporation and the electricity produced from the project would be transferred back to China in accordance with Chinese government policies, the construction of the dam project did not follow regulated even on-paper Chinese standards in which it is necessary comprehensive assessments and consultation with affected people and proper resettlement plans for the relocated villagers. The CPI did not heed China's State Council's "Nine Principles on Encouraging and Standardizing Foreign Investment," including mutual respect, support for local livelihoods, and attention to environmental protection (KDNG, p. 9). Although CPI did not represent all Chinese hydropower companies, the trust of people in Chinese businesses has been badly decreasing in other Chinese investments before the Myitsone case. That was also because of a general anti-Chinese attitude in Myanmar, which was based on a fear of Chinese influence on society and a perception that

Chinese investors are greedy, exploitative, and unethical (Zin, 2012; Mogensen, 2017, p. 14).

Dossi (2015) also pointed out that the misperceptions and disagreements between Beijing and Kunming might be a cause that led to a failure of the dam construction. Beijing had approached Myanmar in a more strategic way while the Yunnan government had mainly emphasized embracing economic opportunities beyond the border in Myanmar's northeastern regions. In June 2011, the Ministry of Commerce think-tank warned that the investment risk of the Myitsone project had "suddenly risen" and that Myanmar's government was ready to "sacrifice the Chinese investors as a scapegoat, in order to save itself" (Dissi, 2015, p. 113). However, the issue was not able to reach a good end because of the friction between the central government in Beijing and the government of Yunnan province in Kunming. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC finally intervened publicly on the issue on October 1, urging "appropriated handling by friendly consultations." However, it was too late to reach a result (Dossi, 2015, p. 113).

It was no doubt that China's mistake of misjudging Myanmar's domestic political reform of democratic transition should be considered as an important factor behind Beijing's failures in the dam construction. China believed that Myanmar's so-called election would not bring significant changes in Myanmar's domestic politics because the new government was led by former military officials. On the other hand, the international community, especially the West, criticized that the election was not a free and fair election that was designed to extend the power of the military government. Beijing underestimated Myanmar's democratic momentum. Beijing also underrated the aspiration of the former military officials to carry out the adaptation and transformation of the country and (their thirst to reduce Chinese dominance in Myanmar as perceived by the military junta). Sum (2012) noted that the new civilian government would be only marginally and negligibly different from the old military junta (Sun, 2012, p. 74). Moreover, China overestimated its political and economic predominance in Myanmar, and it also underestimated the anti-China sentiment of the Myanmar people (Sun, 2012, p. 74). On the other hand, China had never considered the Myanmar people's opinion as a critical challenge to threaten its interest. Consequently, Beijing disregarded the anti-Chinese sentiment of the people. It also underestimated the military officials' hidden thirst for releasing from Chinese influence and to be free from the status which was referred to as the Chinese client state by the

international community. Moreover, China missed the key signs of the democratic momentum inside Myanmar after the inauguration of the Thein Sein government and underestimated the government's determination to pursue democracy and national reconciliation (Sun, 2012, p. 92).

Despite escalating the protest against the dam project across Myanmar, the Chinese government did not pay attention to these oppositions and neglected the people's devotion to the Ayeyarwady Myitsone. China not only underestimated the Myanmar government's eagerness to reduce Chinese influence in the country but also the momentum of anti-Chinese sentiments. For China, the old and new governments were not too different. The new government took power under the 2008 constitution designed by the military to extend its power in a new way. Moreover, the high-ranking government officials, including the President, were the former military generals and officials from the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). These were the drawbacks of Beijing's calculation of Sino-Myanmar relations. In this sense, Myanmar could successfully use China's weakness of misjudging Myanmar's domestic political changes by projecting its effective strategies.

Chapter (7)

Limitation of the Research

The limitation of the research, there are some facts to be considered in the study of small powers' strategies. It is necessary to separate two important points. First, the research proves that Myanmar could manage its small-power strategies with limitations even under the military government that faced strong international sanctions. Second, the authoritarian regimes in Myanmar (the military governments) always prioritized the regime's survival in shaping the country's domestic and international policies. Therefore, it would need to think about the military government's realistic goal while studying the strategies of small powers in relations with big neighbors. These are two separate parts to think about in analyzing Sino-Myanmar relations. In studying small-great powers' relations from the perspective of small powers' strategies, it is worthwhile to consider the political system or the regime type of small powers, because the different purposes of the governments of small powers can impact shaping its strategies and relations with great powers.

In addition, each country is distinct from the others in terms of its geographical situation, political background, cultural significance, and economic leverage. The research will not fully embrace all weaker powers in the analysis of their relations with stronger powers, because different characteristics of countries can result in discrete outcomes. Thus, it is comprehensive to

consider the diversification of small powers in terms of economic, political, military, and other factors. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for future research to do a comparative analysis between authoritarian regimes by investigating their relations with stronger power neighbors or great powers and how these states can manipulate well-timed strategies to counterbalance or counter-influence big powers. However, this research obviously proves the fact that small powers can alter the behavior of big powers the way they can. Thus, the research ratifies Brantly Womack's assumption of "the strong do what is feasible (or cost-effective), while the weak do what they can," contrary to the Melian dialogue's assertion of "the strong do what they can, while the weak suffer what they must."

Moreover, it would be invaluable to review the long-term consequences of small powers' counterbalancing act toward a great power neighbor under which the bilateral relations are correlated to large extent in complexity. Apart from focusing on domestic affairs, it should explore how the changing international scenario can impact the small power's effort to boost its political leverage in handling asymmetric relations. In Myanmar-China relations, it could be seen that Myanmar could well use the United States' pivot to Asia policy. The international situation stemming from great powers rivalry sometimes gives small powers excellent opportunities to balance their position.

In Sino-Myanmar relations, the geographical pivot of Myanmar always plays an essential role. The strategic importance of Myanmar for Beijing's ambitious infrastructure projects and being a sandwich state between the two giants of India and China are principal factors. Furthermore, Myanmar is a country with an abundance of valuable natural resources that attract China. On the contrary, it is important to examine how a small power that lacks any geostrategic role can create a critical one in the international arena. Besides, the domestic political situation in the country between the military and ethnic armed organizations serves as the shortcoming of the country in relations with China that sometimes play as China's "Myanmar card." Thus, it is important to study how the small countries' internal issues can constrain their effort to counterbalance great powers. These all are future research directions for other researchers who are interested in small powers and their strategies in dealing with great powers. I would like to explore these questions in my future scientific career.

Chapter (8)

Conclusion

The major finding of the research reveals the promised research question of “What tactics and strategies does Myanmar use to increase its room for maneuver in its asymmetric relations with China? The result of the research also reveals that the transformation of the Myanmar government’s strategies has created changes in Chinese behavior. The change in Myanmar’s strategies of Myanmar can be obviously seen by the comparison of past Sino-Myanmar relations under the military government and the semi-civilian government that bore the Myitsone Dam suspension. Regarding the big picture of Sino-Myanmar relations, it has been found that Myanmar practices the “bandwagoning” strategy with limits. In the Myitsone Dam suspension, the Myanmar government used the “balancing” strategy with limits. It was fully dependent on China economically, but it protected its autonomy politically though Myanmar also relied on China’s diplomatic shield. Myanmar has positioned its strategies by combining the so-called mixed strategies of bandwagoning and balancing: limited bandwagoning and limited balancing. Moreover, the research undoubtedly uncovers the changes in Chinese behavior after the suspension of the Myitsone Dam. As mentioned above, there were both positive and negative changes in Beijing. However, the behavioral changes of Beijing could better bring fruitful results for Myanmar. The research shows that Myanmar did not change its specific relationship with

China to an asymmetric-friendly relationship, but it manipulated its strategies with enormous tactical steps to change its behavior toward China. The halt of the dam demonstrated that Myanmar snubbed its giant neighbor. At first, Beijing reacted to put pressure on Myanmar to resume the dam construction. The damage of relations would not bring long-term interest for either country. Therefore, Beijing also tried to change its behavior and maintain cooperative relations between the two countries.

Bandwagoning with Limit

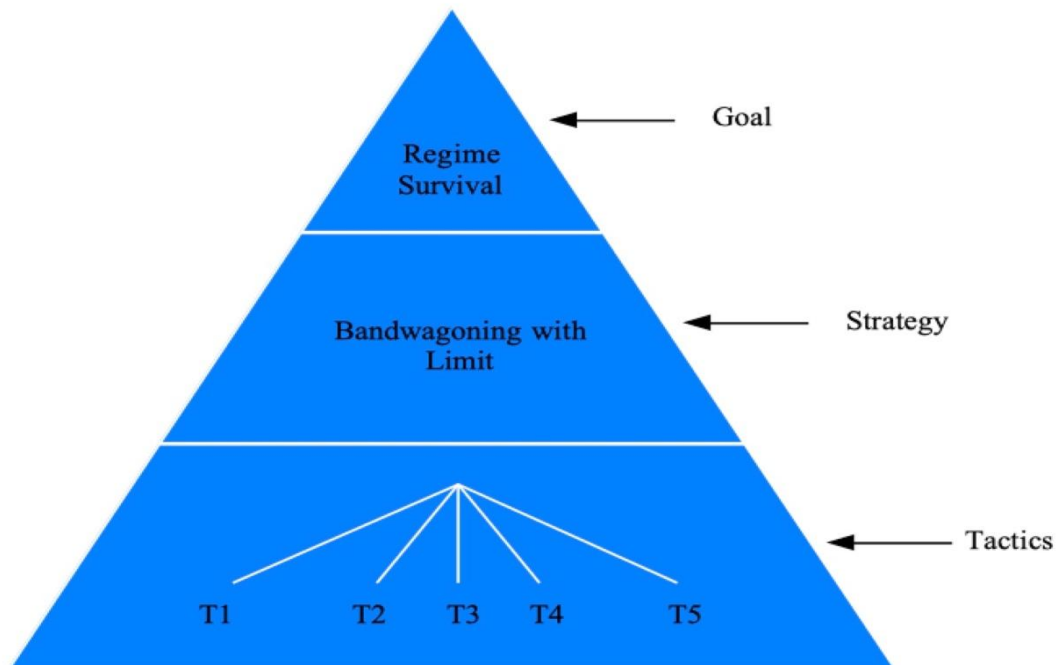


Figure 8.1. Bandwagoning with Limit

Asymmetrical relations are normal relationships between states with power discrepancies. In Myanmar-China relations, the two countries have experienced asymmetrical relations since time immemorial. Being under military rule for more than five decades, Myanmar has heavily depended on China both economically and politically as well as militarily. The international isolation and the poor governance of military governments pushed the country to become hugely reliant on Beijing. Despite overdependence on China, the research cannot prove that Myanmar entirely chooses the bandwagoning strategy to Beijing. At the same time, it cannot also refuse that Myanmar never uses the bandwagoning strategy because China was the solely close friend of Myanmar while facing international pressure at that time. From a security point of view, China is neither directly threatening the national security of Naypyidaw nor an immediate threat to Myanmar. The Bandwagoning strategy largely emphasizes the state's security for the small powers. On the one hand, the strong nationalistic attitude and xenophobic behavior of the Myanmar military leaders restrain the country from becoming a client state of China. Thus, Myanmar does not necessarily bandwagon with China. But Myanmar still needs Beijing not only for its regime survival but also for its political, economic, and strategic interests. On top of that, these strategies are not only used for the security reason of small powers but for the improvement of their own interest. Both things are correlated in the way that Myanmar needs China not only for its regime survival but also for improving its interest.

On the other hand, perceiving Myanmar's over-dependence on China and its growing influence in Myanmar's internal affairs, the military leaders have sought ways to escape or to reduce the Chinese predominance in the country. Even though the international community identified Myanmar as a pariah state of China, Myanmar has never accepted that designation. The military government attempted to limit its dependence on China through micro-tactics. Notwithstanding tremendous dependence on China, the Myanmar military junta tried to preserve its autonomy with various micro-tactical steps. First, the regime invariably refused any Chinese military presence in its territory of establishing a strategic alliance. Second, despite international isolation, Myanmar has sought to use the tool of soft balancing. With regard to its foreign relations, Myanmar vigilantly managed it through "equal distance diplomacy" by developing ties with the ASEAN and India. As another step for balancing Chinese influence in the country, the Myanmar junta arrested and detained Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt 2004, who had strong

personal relations with China. The removal of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt can be viewed as a counter-response to the Chinese predominance in Myanmar's political arena, which was designed to offset the boom in relations with China in the early 2000s. Additionally, in November 2005, the relocation of the capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw without advance notice to Beijing intentionally destroyed the trust between the two countries. Thus, these deliberate acts are not macro-strategies to take 'hard balancing' toward China; these micro-tactics purely showed the Myanmar government's stance toward its giant neighbor. Based on this finding, the research indisputably affirms that Myanmar was not a puppet state of China, and it has continuously tried to balance China to the utmost. Even Myanmar visibly leaned on China economically; it did not use a full bandwagoning strategy politically. Myanmar limited its reliance on China in terms of bandwagoning with limit. Myanmar's strategic choice of using bandwagoning with limitation is relevant to the previous literature in which bandwagoning is not to be used only for security reasons to avoid being attacked by the powerful state but it is for economic gains and mutual interest as well. In Myanmar-China relations, Myanmar's strategic choice of limited bandwagoning strategy is consonance with Walt's assumption in two points. Accordingly, Myanmar is unavailable to get allies except for China at that time and Myanmar aims to use this strategy in exchange for mutual benefits or for its own interest.

Balancing with Limit

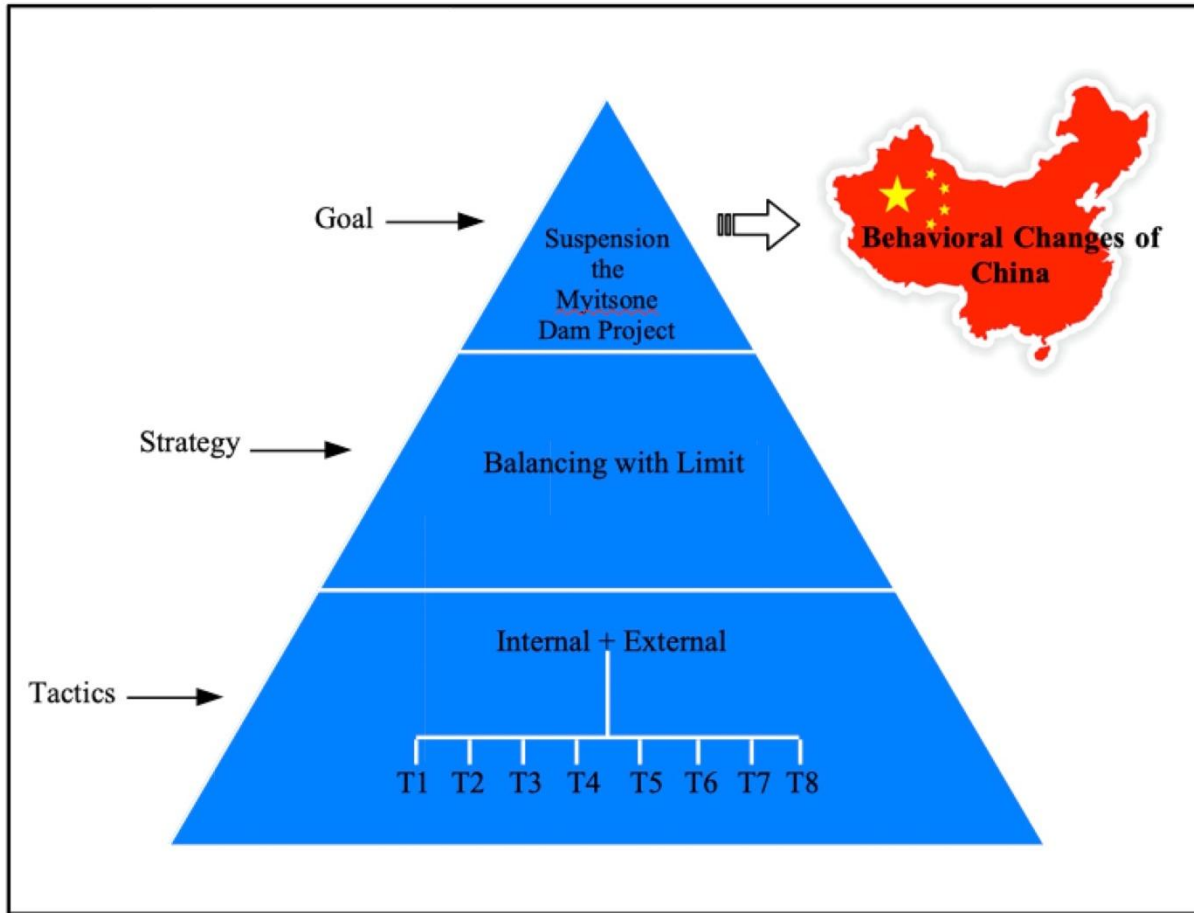


Figure 8.2. Balancing with Limit

By doing the case study of the Myitsone Dam suspension, the research shows that Myanmar has successfully maneuvered its limited balancing strategy toward China. To shape this strategy, the government of Myanmar used several tactical moves. The in-depth understanding of the Myitsone shows the two main tactics of Myanmar: domestic and international power or internal and external power. Several tactical steps are embedded in these two core tactics. First, the government builds trust between the government and the people. Then, it establishes trust from the international community by recalibrating its foreign policy.

At the domestic level, the Myanmar government first tries to rebuild a good relationship with the people. With the democratic transition, the people of Myanmar started to achieve some kinds of freedom that they never imagine in the military era. Although the new government is transformed from military leadership constituted by former military officials, the domestic

political change is significantly visible. Along with the democratic transition, the will of the people has played a crucial role in the decision-making process. The government used the people's power as the main part of its balancing strategy for China. At the same time, it could successfully exert the role of external powers to constrain China's hegemonic behavior.

The semi-civilian government's decision to make a rapprochement with the United States intended to reduce Myanmar's huge dependence on China by implementing domestic political reforms and a foreign policy realignment was intentionally labeled as a classic case for the balancing strategy. This was clearly paved for further anti-Chinese steps, like the suspension of the Myitsone dam project, which was a signal to Washington proving Myanmar's willingness to escape from China's influence. But how realistic was it to break away from China's dependency, and was this really the goal of the Myanmar government? The dominant Western explanation is that the aim of the balancing strategy was to break ties by switching security and political sides to the United States. However, it seems reality was again much more complex. Above all, the United States could not and probably did not want to fill China's role. The change in Myanmar was positive for the United States' pivot strategy, but in a country with deep links to China, it was not possible to build a realistic counterweight to China's influence. Cutting the ties with China, therefore, was not in Myanmar's interest, and because of the continued dependency, it had little chance to do so.

Along with the bilateral relations, President Thein Sein and his Chinese counterpart, President Hu Jintao, agreed to upgrade bilateral relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" (CSCP). CSCP was the highest category in Chinese diplomacy in the early 2000s. This shows that the relationship still had essential importance. Given the continued importance of maintaining a grip with Beijing, while Myanmar's "engagement" with the United States has been reduced to gestures, it is difficult to argue that Myanmar's foreign policy follows the logic of balancing. It is more correct to interpret that the nature of the relationship has changed, but not necessarily the content. The aim was therefore not to fully counterbalance China or to switch sides for perceived gains, but to increase Myanmar's room for maneuver and to extract better terms from Beijing. From this point of view, gestures such as the Myitsone Dam are not just a gesture towards the United States, but rather a direct violation of Chinese interests to enforce the change of Beijing's behavior to fight for better conditions for itself in the relationship. The case study shows how micro strategies or small tactics can be successful. Myanmar has successfully

employed the power of people and the external powers' role, particularly in the United States to defend China's influence. Significantly, the multidimensional relations with China were also steadily improving until the announcement of the Myitsone Dam suspension. In this sense, Myanmar has strategically positioned the balancing with limit toward its big neighbor.

The research tried to investigate the following two hypotheses:

(H1) The behaviors of small powers can be identified between a tactical and strategical level in an asymmetric relationship.

The research agrees with the hypothesis (1).

According to the result of the research, it is significant that the behaviors of small powers can be identified between their tactical and strategical levels in an asymmetric relationship. In Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations, profoundly shows that Myanmar has used both balancing and bandwagoning strategies between its tactical and strategical levels of management.

To the analysis of the research, the bandwagoning strategy acts as the background of Myanmar's significant behavior toward China because Myanmar needs China for its own interest especially the regime survival though Myanmar tries to apply this strategy with limitations. While Myanmar uses bandwagoning strategies with limits, it does not give up balancing toward China and it comes as micro tactics which are regarded as small balancing acts. It is not in direct opposition to China, but it intends to constrain China's policy toward Myanmar. These small balancing acts help to maintain Myanmar's role as an independent state and to protect Beijing's attempt to totally influence Myanmar's internal affairs. The Myitsone hydropower dam issue has obviously proved Myanmar's tactical movements toward China by using a balancing strategy within limitations. Although the semi-civilian government chooses that strategy, it still pursues its close cooperation with Beijing, and it does not want to collapse the bilateral relations. The foreign policy adjustment of Myanmar leads the country to develop friendly relations with all countries in the world and to reunite with the international community. Under this guidance, Naypyidaw improves its bilateral economic agreements with China. Not only government-to-government relations but also personal relations between government officials have also been promoted. In this case, the research simply reveals that Myanmar uses the balancing strategy only as a short-term tactic toward China. Myanmar never let its relations derail from its close ties with its giant neighbor.

According to the literature on small states, small powers can utilize both strategies not only to defend themselves from a threatening power but also to improve their own interest. depending on both the domestic and international situation. In this sense, Myanmar within the traditional balancing and bandwagoning strategy, uses so-called mixed strategies, combining the macro strategic level with micro tactics, which are effective tools in influencing the behavior of China and improving its own interest. In the analysis of Myanmar-China relations through the case of the Myitsone dam issue, the research affirms that the behaviors of small power can be identified through the tactical and strategical levels in its relations with great power.

In the case of Myanmar, I make a further contribution to the literature that Myanmar has used the bandwagoning strategy on a long-term strategical level while it sometimes uses the balancing strategy on a short-term tactical level as well.

(H2) Small powers are capable of changing the behavior of big powers in different ways besides by using balancing and bandwagoning strategies.

The research approves H (2) that small powers have the ability to change the behavior of great powers by using different methods beyond the balancing and bandwagoning strategies. Based on the analysis of literature reviews and the empirical understanding of Myanmar-China relations, Myanmar has used several ways to change China's behavior and these different methods have largely supported Myanmar to achieve its goal. The research confirms that Myanmar tried to change the behavior of China by using its unique geo-strategic position, extending its cooperation with regional and international organizations, improving its positive reputation in the international community, and accelerating domestic consolidation, According to the outcome of the research, small countries can expand its room and change the behavior of great powers beyond solely using well-known balancing or bandwagoning strategies, which are popular strategies of small states in relations with great powers.

The research question reveals the answers that the small powers can use both strategies of the bandwagoning with limit and balancing with limit. The research argues that the Myanmar government had successfully employed its strategies, and these strategies could change the behavior of great powers. According to the result, the research also assures that small states can use both balancing and bandwagoning strategies not only for resisting the possible and immediate threat of great powers but also for achieving their own interests. As Schweller, (1994) states, small powers employ these two prominent strategies in advancing their profits in which

“balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses; bandwagoning by the opportunity for gain.” In this sense, it is distinct that Myanmar accommodated both limited bandwagoning and balancing strategies toward China to grasp its political and economic advantages, simultaneously, by adapting China’s strategic interests and preventing Beijing’s predominance and interference in Myanmar.

Because of the asymmetrical relations with power discrepancy and geographical proximity as well as its dependence on China, it is impossible for Myanmar to damage the bilateral relations with Beijing. On the other hand, small powers choose the confrontation method with the great powers only if they don’t have any other option except to do so. The domestic political situation in the country, such as the ethnic armed conflicts at the Myanmar-China border, creates constraints on the country’s policymaking. The complicated relations with China and the powerful ethnic armed organization have created the Myanmar government impediments in manipulating its policy toward China. For Myanmar, these long-term ethnic conflicts stand as a weakness in its relations with China because of Beijing’s standpoint with these EAOs. Although border stability is essential for Beijing itself, China has sometimes used these conflicts as its bargaining instrument to influence Myanmar-China relations.

The research explores a conspicuous success that is relevant and applicable in small-great powers’ asymmetrical relations, though it is based on the Myanmar-China asymmetric relations. Despite huge asymmetries in capacities between states, it is hard to identify the asymmetrical relationship that small always will be a puppet of great powers because they can find an interrupted way to change or challenge the behavior of big powers. The significance of the research is far-reaching beyond the Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations. Today, China is a growing regional and global power. The rise of China is consciously recognized by both small and big countries. China has been implementing its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is China’s transcontinental long-term policy and investment program. It is a global initiative building on the historic Silk Road, including the countries in Asia, Eastern Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Under the BRI project, seventy-one countries are taking part, which represents more than a third of the world’s GDP and two-thirds of the world’s population (Belt and Road Initiative, nd). Although it can be believed that the project can develop better transport connectivity with economic well-being for all participating countries, states can face the possible political and economic risks from this huge project. Particularly,

small countries can be struggling with these risks, such as the debt trap of infrastructure development projects, and they should prepare and learn how to handle their asymmetric relations. Despite the asymmetrical interdependency between China and these small powers, it does not mean the small powers won't achieve an opportunity to change the behavior of China. That is also important from geopolitical perspectives because of interconnectivity. Even in asymmetrical relations, no country hopes to break its relations but to maintain interconnectivity for the sake of the country's development.

The growth of China's economic power and its multi-infrastructure projects attracts less developing countries like Myanmar to escalate closer economic ties with China. The improving economic cooperation with China will bring extensive economic benefits to the country if bilateral trade deals are fair for both parties. Myanmar also plays an essential role in China's grand Belt and Road Initiative. Not only Myanmar but also China expects stable relationships to fulfill and implement its projects that are important for its economic interests. This is a critical point to be well worth considering in Sino-Myanmar relations.

Despite the asymmetrical relations, Myanmar has its political leverage to counter-influence China. Its geographical significance being a sandwich between India and China, the tri juncture at East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, and the abundance of natural resources are credible for China to undertake its long-term goals. Bilateral relationships can be characterized as mutual interdependence instead of Myanmar's one-sided dependence on China. A bilateral stable relationship is important for both countries. In addition, Naypyidaw's considerable dependence on China both economically and politically points out that China is always an important partner for Myanmar. Even in the administration of the NLD government, which is a democratic and civilian government, Myanmar still needs the diplomatic shield of China, and it seemed Myanmar was closer to Beijing than the USDP government. For China, Myanmar is a vital neighbor, both for its long-term economic and strategic interests. From a security point of view, Myanmar also plays a critical role in Beijing being the backdoor of China.

The case study of the Myitsone Dam issue has substantially identified the asymmetrical relations between Myanmar and China, which can be the best example for other small-great power relations. The case study has verified that China has changed its behavior after the Myitsone Dam issue. Thus, the research finds that small powers can change the behaviors of great powers even in asymmetric relations. Even the limited transformation of great powers'

behavior could bring significant benefits for the smaller powers. The adjustment of China's policy toward Myanmar also means that a small power can convert the great power's behavior to a certain extent.

Consequently, the research advocates that power is not the only determinant factor in small-great powers' asymmetrical relations. Albeit power disparity, small countries can pressure the great powers to change their behavior by utilizing adroit strategies. Small powers are not the puppet states of bigger ones. Small countries can find strategies to transform the behaviors of great powers under cooperation by manipulating between two eminent strategies of bandwagoning and balancing. The difference in capacity between states does not determine that the stronger power can always stand on the winning side to the cost of the weaker power. In this sense, the suspension of the significant Myitsone Dam construction has proved that small powers can occasionally have an opportunity to influence the great power's behavior and expand their role in bilateral relations.

As mentioned in the previous literature, each country has its own relative strength and relative vulnerability. If a weaker state understands its reality of strengths and weaknesses, and it can deploy them effectively in asymmetrical relations, it is possible to manage the imbalanced relations and minimize its weak position. Then, the asymmetrical relations can reach reciprocity between the two countries. The stronger power cannot absolutely eliminate the weaker ones by using its relative power in an asymmetrical relationship, because relative power does not mean absolute power. In Myanmar-China asymmetrical relations, Myanmar could effectively exercise its significant geographical position as well as handle both domestic and external circumstances. As a result, the situation compelled China to reconcile its policy toward Myanmar. As the globalized world order, countries survive on interdependency or mutual dependence even in small and great powers' relations. Both Myanmar and China have mutual dependence on each other, though Naypyidaw's reliance on Beijing is more obvious in an asymmetrical pattern. Myanmar possesses some political and economic leverage to manage its asymmetry with China. As other supporting factors, the economic cooperation among states and the collaboration with regional and international organizations help small powers to counterbalance and counter-influence with stronger powers. From this point of view, it also shows that Myanmar could use its role in ASEAN to counterweight China.

Globalization affects the relationship between states. In a globalized world, bilateral relations are encompassed by various actors. States find difficulties in controlling the behavior of various actors, such as firms, international organizations, domestic interest groups, political parties, NGOs, charities, lobby groups, the media, multinational companies, some powerful individuals, and also terrorist groups, which are regarded as non-state actors. These actors play in international affairs in different ways and have a huge impact on state actors that represent a government. In Myanmar-China relations, several actors have engaged and shaped bilateral relations. In the Myitsone Dam issue, the role of individual activists, NGOs, and a group of like-minded people are found as the important players that can attract international concerns and push the issue to the highest momentum. Governments are becoming harder to restrain these actors to central statecraft. Subsequently, it has great influence on the possibilities on states in determining the bilateral relationship, even if the relations are in asymmetrical. Thus, this perspective of how the various actors shape the bilateral asymmetrical relations is productive research in small-great powers' relations.

The Myitsone dam issue gives China a huge lesson. Even in asymmetric relations like Myanmar and China, Myanmar is not a pawn of a big power like Beijing. In Myanmar-China relations, Myanmar has been overdependent on China for decades. However, this does not imply that a small country like Myanmar cannot be denoted as the client or puppet state of a big neighbor like China. Because of the disparity in capacity and geographic proximity, small nations cannot totally convert the asymmetrical relations to symmetric ones, but they have the ability to put pressure on those big countries by using these strategies. As a result, the big powers change their behaviors toward the small.

Under the asymmetrical relations with great power discrepancy, Myanmar has a small room to maneuver its open counterstrategy to China. Thus, it manipulates its strategies under cooperation in the context of mixed strategies of balancing and bandaging through the tactical and strategic levels. The two different methods of confrontation or cooperation have influenced international relations. In small-great powers relations, small parties choose the confrontation method when they have no other option to protect their national interest or sovereignty. When small powers embrace cooperation with big powers, it can often lead to the small ones into the vassal state of the greater ones because of the huge power discrepancy and the small's heavy reliance on the greater ones. However, this research bears a fruitful result that small powers can

manipulate their strategies under the cooperation method without losing their autonomy and sovereignty. They don't necessarily undertake the confrontation with great entities because it can obviously bring disadvantages for the small ones. It is very risky and dangerous for the less-powerful states, especially in asymmetrical relations. Thus, small countries should avoid confrontation. Instead, they should wield discrete strategies under cooperation. It was the so-called mixed strategy of balancing and bandwagoning.

The impact of Myitsone dam issue not only makes a tremendous impact on Myanmar's domestic politics but also on the international arena, especially on the economic relations between China and other small countries. This is the significant result that this research really wants to highlight between small-great power asymmetric relations. Power discrepancy causes asymmetric relations. Then, asymmetric relations can lead to asymmetric economic interdependence. However, small powers can change the behavior of great power even in asymmetric boundaries. As the research severally professes the previous chapters, power is not a determinant factor in international relations, the outcome of the research strongly proves that small powers can have the ability to extend their roles by using limited balancing and limited bandwagoning strategies with discreet tactics and strategies and then it can finally lead to the behavioral changes of the great power in favor of small power's interest.

To sum up, the research insists that small states are really important actors in international relations. Despite their power discrepancy with big powers, small countries have the capability to counterbalance and counterweight great powers through their tactical moves. In doing so, small states can change the behavior of great powers without breaking up their relationships. They can improve their own leverages and abilities within the framework of cooperation with stronger powers. Thus, power is not a determinant factor in international relations, even in the asymmetrical relationship. Small powers can manipulate their strategies by developing their political leverage, by taking advantages of stronger powers' deficiencies, by effectively using its geostrategic importance, by engaging regional and international organizations, and so on. The research highlights the two distinct strategies of bandwagoning and balancing, in which small powers can maneuver these two strategies in limitation. They can utilize these two strategies not only in resisting stronger powers but also in seeking and developing their interests. Small powers can also influence the behavior of great powers through their impressive strategies. To conclude, the Myitsone Dam issue has proved that the Myanmar

government positioned its strategies to reach its goal of counter influencing China and that the Chinese government could be forced to reshape its policy and behavior toward less powerful neighboring Myanmar.

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