

## V.1. Rebalancing and Counterbalancing of Myanmar between India and China

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### Abstract

*Myanmar is a small country with great geostrategic significance between India and China. It is important for Myanmar to maintain good relations with these powers. As a small and fragile state struggling with domestic constraints and international pressure, Myanmar usually relies on the diplomatic shield of its great neighbors. Myanmar's bilateral relations with these two countries have been an important role for all successive Myanmar governments. After 2011, the relations have been remarkable changes in Myanmar domestic politics when the first elected government took power into office. Then, Myanmar could adjust its foreign relations deviation from the conventional way of bandwagoning strategy to China. Under the incumbent government since 2015, Myanmar has expanded its international relations in regionally and globally. In a scenario, there may be criticism that the improvement of bilateral ties with India can diminish Sino-Myanmar relations interpreting Myanmar's defiance to China. This paper will be based on the analysis of the past and present situation of Myanmar-India relations. The research will attempt to explore the recent progress of Myanmar-India relations and how these changes effect Sino-Myanmar relations.*

**Keywords:** balancing strategy, Belt and Road Initiative, China, India, Myanmar

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### V.1.1. Introduction

Myanmar, a member of ASEAN countries (Association of South East Asian Nations) is situated between India and China. Myanmar's geostrategic location at the tri-Juncture of East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia is essential for these two countries. Both countries share long border with Myanmar and consider this small

strategic neighbor as its security buffer between their intense rivalry. Because of these sharing borders, most of their frontier areas and borderlands have always encountered with sensitive issues concerning insurgency problems, border trade, cross-national criminal issues.

Myanmar and India have long standing border of unfenced 1,640 Km and a long coastline

border of 2,276 Km sharing part of Bay of Bangel. For India, Myanmar is the natural ‘Land-bridge’ and the only ASEAN country sharing land boundary with India as the nexus between India, Southeast Asia and East Asia (YHOME, K. 2015). Myanmar stands at the center of the India-Southeast Asia geography that makes its geopolitical significance. Myanmar

was strategically important for India especially in implementing its Look East Policy. It is also the only one country at the intersection of India’s “Neighborhood First” policy and “Act East” policy and is also essential in practicing India’s regional diplomacy in Indo-Pacific (ATMAKURI, A. – IZZUDDIN, M. 2020).



Figure 30: Myanmar between India and China  
Source: The Myanmar Embassy, Tokyo

In the early years of its independence, Myanmar had adopted and applied non-aligned foreign policy with the purpose of preserving its sovereignty. Under the

military government in Myanmar, India practiced the negligence policy by condemning the regime’s brutal act upon democratization movements. But, after recognizing

Chinese predominance in Myanmar since 1988, following the government's suppression of 1988 students' uprising and at the same time the Tiananmen Square's incident in China, New Delhi made readjustment its foreign policy toward Myanmar. Another reason why India's 'constructive engagement' or 'rapprochement to Myanmar' was its thirst for economic development as the result of severe economic crisis of 1991 (GOTTSCHLICH, P. 2017).

Since that time, bilateral relations between the two countries have been improving. The 'Look East Policy' under the administration of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991-1996) tried to reinforce economic development focusing on Asian markets and an extension of trade relations towards Southeast Asia. It is the significance of Myanmar which is situated the tri-juncture of East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia in order to accomplish India's new foreign policy orientation. In recent years, the popularity of Belt and Road Initiative which is Chinese grand strategy is an impetus to India to leverage its multifaceted cooperation with Myanmar in all sectors as well as aiming at driving Myanmar away from Chinese sphere of influence.

Myanmar's bilateral

relations with these giants are not always excellent. Its geostrategic significance between these two countries and within region always entails Myanmar into a struggle balancing with or against them. Moreover, both of these countries are seeking access to Indian Ocean, through Myanmar, for the development of their landlocked provinces in Southwest China and Northeast India (ZHAO, H. 2008). In compared with China, India has not taken the serious problems and any confrontation with Myanmar. It can be said that bilateral relations could remain on good terms without any confrontation.

Myanmar's relations with China is more fluctuant than the relations with India. Behind the 'Pauk-Phaw' relationship, the Myanmar government has been recognizing Beijing's growing influence on the country and, at the same time, its over-dependence on China. Myanmar has attempted to mitigate its heavy reliance on China but there was no option except to do so because of military rule which was imposed sanctions by West. Myanmar's regime in 2011, the Chinese introduction of Belt and Road Initiative and implementation of strategic deep-sea ports and special economic zones in Myanmar has put Myanmar into a new enlightenment. There is the

permanent truth that a stuck state between great powers is always balancing its relations in dealing with those countries. Based on this, this paper will try to analyze the improving Myanmar-India relations and how it affects on Myanmar-China relations.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: first, it outlines the brief history of Myanmar's relations between India and China. Second, it presents growing Myanmar's significance as the geo-economic crux beyond its occupied geostrategic focus with three sub-topics. Third, it discusses the progress of Myanmar-India relations and the analysis of its impacts on Sino-Myanmar relations. The fourth is the result and discussion part following the conclusion section as the last.

### **V.1.2. Traces of Relations: Myanmar between India and China**

Myanmar and India possessed the same historical background of being under British colonial rule and Myanmar (Burma at that time) was the largest part of British India. Moreover, their similar religious belief has led the two countries to closer ties and more understanding in bilateral relations. At the early years of independence, Myanmar-

India relations were good under Prime Minister Nehru from India and U Nu from Myanmar and they played the leading role in Non-aligned Movement together. In 1951, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship referred to as 'for ever thereafter'. In 1954, the five principles of Peaceful Coexistence were signed between India, China and Myanmar. These five principles are the following (EKELEN VAN, W. 2016):

1. mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty,
2. mutual non-aggression,
3. mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs,
4. equality and mutual benefit and
5. peaceful co-existence.

At that time, the bilateral relations were like-minded and India assisted Myanmar in battling with Communist insurgencies by providing arms and financial aids from Commonwealth countries. However, the 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win in Myanmar strained the well-established relations. The military junta put the country in the xenophobic "Burmanization" of society and introduced "Burmese Way of Socialism" followed by nationalization of private

businesses and expropriation of property without compensation as well as the exodus of around 300,000 people of Indian origin (LEE, L. 2014). Since that time, New Delhi neglected its small non-democratic neighbor for long time until it started to recognize the ascent of China and Chinese influence toward Myanmar. In 1988 the student uprising had been brutally suppressed by military, India became the first country that officially condemned the authoritarian Myanmar regime and the only one neighbor accepting fleeing dissidents.

In the mid 1990s, India's policy toward Myanmar moved from its opposition of military rule to a pragmatic approach, non-interventionist policy. New Delhi abandoned its strong support to pro-democracy forces in Myanmar and chose the engagement with ruling military regime because the cooperation of Myanmar government was essential in order to accomplish its geostrategic and geo-economic purposes (GOTTSCHLICH, P. 2015). Moreover, the achievement of India's Act East Policy, the friendly relations with Myanmar was essential for India. Under the 'Act East Policy', Myanmar is the important bridge to connect India to other Southeast Asian countries. At

present, Myanmar-India relations is dramatically developing under NLD government (National League for Democracy). Myanmar was one of only two Southeast Asian countries to attend Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing ceremony when he won re-election in May 2019.

On the other side, Myanmar and China have possessed long-standing close relations since Myanmar gained its independence in 1948. The term 'Pauk-phaw' or fraternity has been used and accepted as diplomatic rhetoric to depict Sino-Myanmar relations (CHAN, D. S. W. 2017). But the term of 'Pauk-Phaw' is debatable when China's overwhelming influence in Myanmar has increased time by time. The two causes may be Myanmar's longtime domestic instability and Chinese hegemonic position on its internal affairs particularly its control over ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in Sino-Myanmar bordering regions. Both causes have the prominent reasons why these consequences are brought about and how they are.

All successive governments took priority to have national consolidation and ending the armed conflicts between army and these EAOs. The incumbent NLD government (The National League for Democracy), the first democratically elected government,

has prioritized the national reconciliation through peace negotiation process in believing that only peaceful Myanmar continues its economic development. For the latter, the most powerful EAOs settling at Myanmar-China border, are illegally supported by China as they are ethnic Chinese origins, Han ethnic Chinese as Kokang in Myanmar and Jingpo ethnic Chinese as Kachin ethnic of Myanmar (HAN, E. 2017). Occasionally, these Myanmar ethnics of Chinese origins are used to be the tools that can enable to threaten the stability of Myanmar by Chinese government. On the other hand, China plays an important role in Myanmar peace process as negotiator between central government and EAOs.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (1988-1997) and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (1997-2010) faced with the international isolation and sanctions and then had extreme dependence on China for economic investments and diplomatic protection (HAN, E. 2017). As a consequence, China became the main consumer of Myanmar's natural resources and main investor in all economic sectors. But the remarkable geopolitical change was materialized in the aftermath of Myanmar peaceful democratic

transition in 2010 in which the first elected government held the power. The new government conducted its foreign policy reorientation to the West especially the United States that could assume as Myanmar's effort to take away from China. Even Myanmar government could make a gallant decision to suspend the most controversial project of Ayeyarwady Myitsone Dam construction against China in 2011.

Myanmar relations with India and China is always up and down in history but the robust one. During the 1990s, the relations have been changing more pragmatically and positively by New Delhi and Beijing focusing on their national interest. Moreover, Myanmar's democratic transition in 2011 have vigorously altered the long-time geopolitical structure opening the country's new strategy.

### **V.1.3. Myanmar as a Geo-economic Juncture beyond its Geostrategic Hub between Two Major Power Neighbors**

#### **India's Return to Myanmar**

After passing the deserted period to Myanmar, the following reasons were traced behind that

policy changes by India: the economic development of India's Northeast; India's increased interest in trade and investment with ASEAN; India's search for energy security; and the growing influence of China in Myanmar (ZHAO, H. 2008). Firstly, Indian armed successionist ethnic insurgencies have settled along Myanmar-Indian border of India's northeast regions. It has been the most crucial reality for India to achieve strong cooperation with Myanmar government in combating these insurgencies so as to achieve peace and prosperity in these regions. Northeast India has always been the most formidable problem for New Delhi's policy priority.

Secondly, India's increased interest in trade and investment driven by "Look East Policy" pushed India towards accelerating its integration with ASEAN countries. "Look East Policy" was initiated in 1991 by the Narasimha Rao government with the purpose of developing political contacts, improving economic integration and strengthening security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries (HAOKIP, T. 2011). According to this, Myanmar is the only one country that can connect India with Southeast Asia as a 'land-bridge'. Thirdly, the abundance of natural resources of Myanmar including

oil and gas, is attractive for India to fulfill its increasing domestic demand for oil and gas. The oil and gas fields in Myanmar such as Shwe, Yadana and Yetagun were expected to meet these necessities and this could support India to get cheaper and more secure routes than transporting through pipelines from Central Asia that would need to cross Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Finally, it was the rise of China that India could be stimulated to get closer relations with Myanmar by analyzing its previous policy failure. India and China are long time regional rivals. Myanmar is strategically situated between them as a buffer state and that strategic small country might be the risk or opportunity for their great power status. Myanmar is in vital position for the security of both countries as well as the back door for both. After 1988 student uprising, the isolated Myanmar military regime, faced with strong economic sanction by the West, was totally dependent on China by exploiting and importing all its natural resources. As long as China became the only one reliant partner for Myanmar, its influence on Myanmar was larger as well. That was the strong desire of India to remove Myanmar from the Chinese sphere of influence. Moreover, Myanmar is an important

member of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), an organization that enable to accomplish New Delhi's aims of increasing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with regional countries.

### **The Important Interest of India and China in Myanmar**

In 2015, with the changing of Myanmar politics through democratization, Indian government upgraded its policy to improve relations toward Myanmar. India always recognizes Myanmar as its crucial partner because of its membership in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its critical role in the fight to end insurgency in its northeast border and its importance in implementing Mode's Act East Policy. New Delhi has been investing in ASEAN-wide

infrastructural projects with the aim of bolstering trade in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (ATMAKURI, A. – IZZUDDIN, M. 2020). India also affirms Myanmar as a gateway to link the rest of Southeast Asia for its economic development.

Likewise, some infrastructure projects are being implemented such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT) that that provides connection from Sittwe deep-water port to Kolkata. India aims to use Sittwe port as a counter balancing to China's BRI in Indo-Pacific region. The construction of Sittwe port is part of the Kaladan multi-model transit transport project to expand a multi-modal sea, river and road transport corridor for shipment of cargo from eastern port of India to Myanmar through Sittwe port as well as north-eastern part of India via Myanmar.

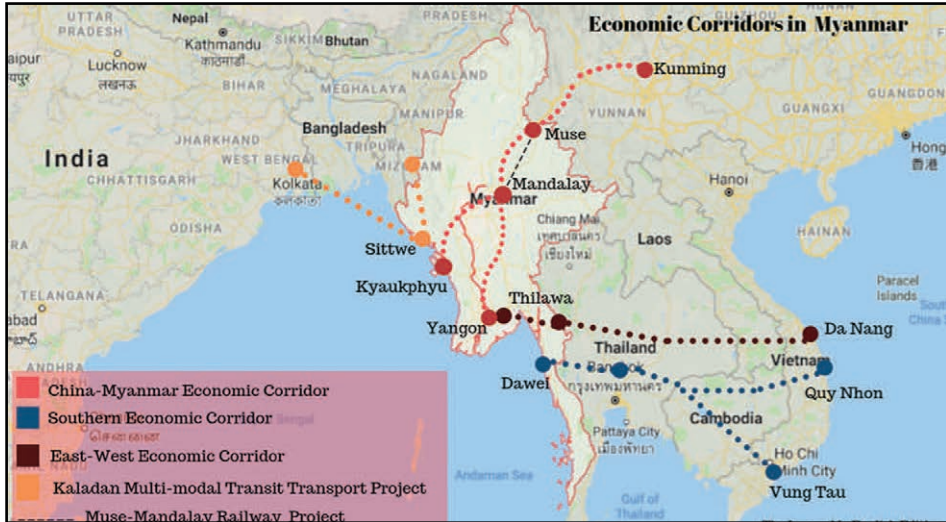


Figure 31: Myanmar’s Economic Corridors  
 Source: www.beltandroad.news

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR) is Chinese high ambitious grand strategy launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping aimed at connecting China and the rest of the world with a network of roads, high-speed rail, power lines, ports, pipelines, and other infrastructures networks. Under BRI, more than 60 countries from Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa, will take part in the project based on three key pillars such as utilizing industrial capacity, nurturing a network of economic interdependence, and fostering regional stability and prosperity (HENG, K. – Po, S. 2017). Like any other ASEAN countries Myanmar has launched cooperation with

China in BRI project. In mainland Southeast Asia, Myanmar is the important country as the linking the southern Chinese province of Yunnan with Myanmar’s Kyaukphyu port that allows oil and gas delivered to China without bypassing Malacca straits, i.e., as a land corridor to overcome the so-called Malacca dilemma. Moreover, it can provide China to access the Indian Ocean that is necessary both for trade and security and also from military point of view.

Accordingly, it can assume that the interests of both India and China meet at the same point of strategic Western part of Myanmar, Rakhine state. India is worried about China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) that is vital for

China to reduce its reliance on Malacca Straits and access to Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. There is already running oil and gas pipeline from Myanmar to China under this project. For China, the strategic advantages coming from this project area are more crucial than oil and gas transportation. The CMEC involves the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port with a special economic zone (SEZ), the China-Myanmar border economic zone and new Yangon urban development project. While China is running the Kyaukphyu port project with special economic zone, India is developing the Sittwe port project simultaneously.

### **The Progress of Myanmar-India Relations: A Threat for China and Hope for Myanmar?**

In 2017, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar as his first bilateral visit to Myanmar. That was the third by an Indian prime minister in five years and second by him in three years. At the historical visit, Prime Minister Modi met with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi who was strongly criticized by international community in concerning with the Bengalis issue in western part of Myanmar. He supported Myanmar's government

proper management on that issue and fully realized the country's real situation on conflicts between ethnic Rakhine people and migrated Bengalis people following the attack of ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army). In his visit, the following joint statement was released:

'India condemned the recent terrorist attacks in northern Rakhine State, where several members of the Myanmar security forces lost their lives. Both sides agreed that terrorism violates human rights and there should, therefore, be no glorification of terrorist as martyrs' (ROCHE, E. 2017)

Myanmar stands as one of the strategic neighbors of India sharing borders with a lot of Indian northeastern states including militancy-hit Nagaland and Manipur states. Many of the tribes in India's Northeastern region are ethnically linked to some Myanmar tribes and at least five major militant groups from India's Northeast have been fighting for their autonomy setting up in Sagaing region of Myanmar border (ZHAO, H. 2008). There are a lot of cooperations between India and Myanmar to fight against the insurgent groups. On 16 May 2019, the two countries carried out a three-week-long military operation to fight several militant groups hiding along Indo-

Myanmar border. In addition, they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defense cooperation aimed at enhancing military training, joint surveillance, and maritime security (DELHI, A. B. N. 2019).

In July 2019, Myanmar and India signed a defense cooperation agreement aiming at advancing military-to-military cooperation between Indian Armed Forces and Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) (PANDA, A. 2019). It was signed after the extensive talk between Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and India's Minister of State for Defense Shripad Yesso Naik (DELHI, A. B. N. 2019). Indian government delivered Myanmar navy Advanced light Torpedo (TAL) Shyena torpedoes which were manufactured by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), a public sector enterprise under the control of India's Ministry of Defense ("Indian Torpedoes Delivered to Myanmar Navy," 2019). Again in the same year, Myanmar navy acquired a diesel-electric Kilo-class submarine, INS Sindhuvir, which India had modernized after purchasing from Russia in the 1980s (SIDDIQUI, H. 2019).

India has launched military engagement with regional countries

as part of its 'Act East Policy. For Naypyidaw, these military purchase assists Myanmar's maritime interests and maritime security, especially on the back of its neighbors Bangladesh and Thailand acquiring submarines from China (ATMAKURI, A. – IZZUDDIN, M. 2020). Under India's "Naval Diplomacy", the Indian navy initiated CORPAT (Coordinated Patrol) with Myanmar since 2003. According to CORPAT, India has done military exercises with other countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and Thailand.

India looks Myanmar as an important buffer for its national security interests, it provides military and also conducts joint military exercises with Myanmar Army like the India-Myanmar Bilateral Military Exercises (IMBAX-2017 and IMBEX 2018–2019) (ATMAKURI, A. – IZZUDDIN, M. 2020). In July 2019, during a visit of Commander-in-Chief of General Min Aung Hlaing to India, a new Memorandum of Understanding on defense cooperation was signed aiming at advancing military-to-military cooperation between Indian Armed Forces and Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) (PANDA, A. 2019).

Myanmar army has bought most of its military weapons and fighter jets mostly from China while facing with arm-embargo

imposed by West. But there is growing dissatisfaction in Myanmar military because of substandard and unqualified military weapons as well as lack of sufficient technical support by China. Some fighter pilots from Myanmar Air Force often lost their lives in air crash accidents. Coincidentally, India's "Made in India" arms industry has identified Myanmar as a key to increasing its military exports and then Myanmar bought India's first locally produced anti-submarine torpedo, called TAL Shyena in 2017. "Made in India" initiative was launched in September 2014 with the aim of becoming India as a global manufacturing powerhouse and production hub and the defense industry has regarded as one of the government's key strategic plans (ROSSITER, A. – CANNON, B. J. 2019).

On the one hand, there is an incredible change in Myanmar-China relations. In January 2020, President Xi Jinping paid a two-day visit to Myanmar on the occasion of the 70 years anniversary of Sino-Myanmar relations. He was the first Chinese leader to visit Naypyidaw after Jiang Zemin back in 2001. During his visit, 33 projects were signed for joint projects between the countries. The most significant fact is that China didn't ask to start Ayeyarwady Myitsone dam project that was the most controversial

and sensitive issue in bilateral relations. That may be satisfied with Myanmar people's desire and decrease the risk of tensions between the two countries. It may be China's trade-off between the Mega Dam Project and Kyaukphyu port and special economic zone that can bring a wide range of interests through BRI. The good-well visit of President Xi highlights how important Myanmar's role is for Beijing.

Most recently, a delegation led by President of Myanmar visited India according to the cordial invitation of the President of the Republic of India from 26 to 29 February 2020. Both sides welcomed the synergies between Myanmar's independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy and India's Act East and Neighborhood First policies ("India-Myanmar joint statement during the state visit of the Myanmar President to India," 2020). New Delhi also revealed its support for the steps taken by the Government of Myanmar addressing the challenges in Northern Rakhine State in which the crisis happened between ethnic insurgent group and army.

Furthermore, India reiterated its support to Myanmar government's repatriation process for displaced persons from Rakhine State that was signed an agreement

between Myanmar and Bangladesh. For Myanmar, the situation of Rakhine State, which is located in the western part of Myanmar, is complex and challenging issue that has drawn much attention by the international community. On 25 August 2017, the violence was triggered in Rakhine State when the extremist group known as Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) committed the collective attacks on Myanmar security forces (more than 30 police posts). Later, this terrorist groups targeted, attacked and threatened innocent civilians in the Rakhine state. This was not the first time for these violence attack and they carried out similar assaults on police posts that nine police officers had been killed in October 2016 (RAKHINE 2017). Myanmar Army planned a military operation to fight against these militants in order to protect the lives of civilians and to maintain the sovereignty of the country. The brutal terrorist attacks of ARSA led to the escalation of violence and the subsequent mass displacement of Muslim people flee into Bangladesh which has changed the entire situation and negatively affected the perception and attitude of the international community on Rakhine issues. The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar fully shares the concern of the international community

regarding the displacement and suffering of all communities affected by this violence, and it has made great strides for restoration of the rule of law, peace and stability and preparation for repatriation of displaced people from Rakhine State. In order to solve this issue, the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh signed the “Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State” on 23 November 2017, the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Joint Working Group on the repatriation of displaced Myanmar residents from Bangladesh (Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Belgrade, 2019, p.3). As a result, Myanmar has been received full support by India as New Delhi understands the prevailing situation on the ground and recognizes Myanmar’s effort to accomplish main objectives to establish peace, stability, rule of law and sustained development in Rakhine State, meanwhile international community impose pressure on Myanmar government based on unreliable and one-sided narratives and sources which could only hinder progress (ibid). So, India’s stance on this issue from the side of Myanmar means to provide the Myanmar government the diplomatic shield in international arena. Moreover, regarding defense

and security cooperation, New Delhi agrees to assist Naypyidaw in the capacity building of the Myanmar Defense Services and to enhance maritime cooperation by recognizing the importance of addressing maritime challenges and strengthening maritime security.

#### **V.1.4. Result and Discussion**

Although India is regarded as the largest democratic state in the world, it had never kept exhorting Myanmar in its democratic norms because it strongly embraces the principle of non-interference based on the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” since 1950s. Moreover, trade and economic linkages were weak compared to Myanmar’s economic relations with China. The less economic connections meant the less risk of possible clashes between the two sides. In comparison with China, India did not deliver the serious problems and any confrontation with Myanmar. For all of these reasons, India could build steady relations with Myanmar without leading to the terrible bilateral relations.

Considering China, Beijing’s illegal support of Myanmar EAOs with arms and ammunition was a cause of being disappointed by Myanmar government and

that was one of the deterrence for peace reconciliation process of Myanmar. Furthermore, the growing concern of Chinese influence over Myanmar, the mount of antagonism between local people’s and Chinese investment companies because of social discontent and the lack of Myanmar government’s specific rules and regulations in order to settle the disputes have lost the mutual trust in bilateral cooperation. In the past, although the isolated Myanmar was bandwagoning China with no option, the new geopolitical shift has paved the way for Myanmar to achieve more opportunities to extend its international relations around the world.

In the current situation, Myanmar is struggling with economic setback, political instability and social unrest. Apart from these challenges, the country has faced with international pressures to deal with the displaced Myanmar residents from Bangladesh. Both India and China give full confidence to Myanmar effort in solving this issue. As a less powerful state with international pressure, Myanmar absolutely needs the diplomatic support by these neighbors. However, as a small country between two powerful states, Myanmar inevitably faces with both threats and opportunities

offered by both sides. Myanmar should establish friendly relations with both giants to take advantages of Sino-Indian rivalry using its strategic value instead of leaning on one power.

Under the NLD government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, some political analysts surmised that Naypyidaw would intimate with the West by leaving China behind. But in reality, Myanmar is getting closer to China than the previous time. The incumbent government is consciously aware of the fact that it will not be beneficial for Myanmar to make any confrontation with Beijing. The government's policy is to build friendly relations with all countries in the world. Currently, there are remarkable improvements in Myanmar-India relations. The permanent truth is Myanmar is always an important neighbor both for India and China because of its geostrategic significance. If Myanmar can grasp its role between the two powers, it can possibly bring its economic development and political power.

From the point of view of the asymmetrical theory of international relations explored by Brantly Womack, small countries used to choose cooperative strategy to great powers instead of confrontation or competitive means except in one condition in

which they have no other choice of by doing this way in dealing with those powers (WOMACK, B. 2006). This is because of the power disparity between small and great powers. However, despite their vulnerability, small countries could take a number of measures to reduce 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, A. T. H. 2017). By analyzing current scenario, it can be assumed that Myanmar government can well handle its good relations with both India and China by strengthening economic cooperation in western part of Myanmar by utilizing its bargaining strength. So, this is the interesting point of Myanmar government's strategy in managing its relations with these two great powers for the sake of its own national interest without destroying any of those relations.

### **V.1.5. Conclusion**

To sum up, China is the most important economic partner for Myanmar meanwhile India is also the reliable one that can support

Naypyidaw to develop its military capability and diplomatic support in encountering international pressure. On the other hand, Myanmar inevitably rely on Beijing's diplomatic support and protection in United Nations Security Council. Under the clever and proper management of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is a smart leader, Myanmar will never allow itself to become a foe or competitive one with any of those powerful states. It is never ever impossible for Myanmar to incline one side. It is obviously seen that today Myanmar has pursued friendly relations with all countries with its great effort. While Myanmar is escalating its relations with India, there is some concern that its political shift can deteriorate Sino-Myanmar relations or that will trigger Beijing's anger to Naypyidaw. In reality, the relations between Myanmar and Beijing are increasing in parallel with the progress of Indian-Myanmar

bilateral ties. That would be the successful proof of Myanmar's balancing strategy paving the way of development of Myanmar. The better the Myanmar-India relations, the lesser Chinese influence in Myanmar even if Myanmar cannot totally get rid of China's role in its country. In a nutshell, the progress of Myanmar-India relations can be an impetus for the development of Sino-Myanmar relations in any way.

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