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INTRODUCTION

After a long period of anti-colonial struggles and movements for national liberation, Myanmar finally regained her independence on 4 January 1948. Many sacrifices were made in the name of sovereignty, national self determination, and territorial integrity. At the time of Independence, one immediate task for Myanmar was to become a member of the "family of nations"; thus it applied for the membership in the world body known as the United Nations. Myanmar became a member of the United Nations on 19 April 1948. For the people of Myanmar, this signified the recognition of their country as a sovereign state in the Westphalian international system. Successive Myanmar governments since independence have based their foreign policy on "non-alignment" or "neutralism" and highlighted their "independent" nature in the conduct of diplomacy. The Myanmar government expects that the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs should form the basis upon which a country's foreign relations should be regulated. It is in this context that Myanmar has formulated her China policy. Nevertheless her relations with China have never been easy and have been subjected to numerous strains over the years. Historically, China established Sinocentric world order of tributary relations with political entities near and far, which was regulated by rules, customs and rituals, not by treaties. This worldview, constructed primarily upon Confucian norms, was based on hierarchy rather than equality. Lesser political entities were obliged to send tribute and offer symbolic obeisance to the Chinese emperor. Although the Sinocentric world order of tributary relations did not necessarily involve any significant political control by China, it did require the lesser political entities to recognize a hierarchical structure with China at the apex. With

this historical legacy, China entered into the world of twentieth century international politics based on the Westphalian model of the theoretical sovereign equality of nation-states. Whether China will ever really reconcile her own traditional worldview with Westphalian norms is a question that has often troubled Myanmar's leaders.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The foreign policy of a nation can be studied at various dimensions and levels. Analysis can be made on the basis of issues, actors, goals and strategies, and so on. In addition, the whole process of the conduct of foreign policy can be reviewed to assess the fundamental nature of a nation's foreign relations. The foreign policy of a nation is determined by a number of factors, all conceived in terms of national interest; these factors may include regime or state security, various geopolitical and geostrategic realities, historical memories, perceptions of ruling elites, and so on. This explains why different states, or the same state at different historical moments, have different policies, intentions, goals, and preferences toward the outside world. One important area of foreign policy study is foreign policy restructuring. According to K. J. Holsti, foreign policies can be classified into four broad categories: isolation, self-reliance, dependence, and non-alignment diversification. These classifications are based on levels of external involvement, policies regarding types and sources of external penetration, directions and patterns of external involvement, and military and diplomatic commitments. Nevertheless, nations restructure their foreign policy orientations in the context of changing international and domestic situations.[1]

Foreign policy study also involves levels of analysis. In the analysis of foreign policy, as in the case of explaining the dynamics of international politics, there are many schools of thought. For convenience sake, a foreign policy can be analysed from at least three levels. First, it can be explained at the individual level, on the basis of the actions and behaviour of individual statesmen. Their education, socialization, personalities, ideological beliefs, motivations, ideals, perceptions, values, or idiosyncrasies all influence the choice of foreign policy options. Their role in the societal and political system will also affect their choices. Beyond this individual level is the state level. One can explain the foreign policy behaviour of a state by reference to not only the impact of the external environment but also of domestic conditions, such as structure of government, the political system, the nature of society, national ideologies, public opinion, or economic and social needs. At the state level, foreign policy is not merely an output of reaction to the external

environment. This level of analysis is also important in identifying the foreign policy behaviour. Next is the systemic level. The systemic level explanation of foreign policy focuses solely on the impact of the external environment on the individual political unit, in this case the state, and in term of the condition of whole system or the world order.

However, it is important to understand the true nature of international politics. It is a fact that nation-states have different levels or degrees of power in the international system which is characterized by anarchy. In every international system, as Stephen Krasner argues, there is a set of rules or norms that define actors and appropriate behaviours, but these are rarely obeyed in an automatic or rote fashion. Actors violate rules in practice without at the same time challenging their legitimacy. Krasner called this "organized hypocrisy".[2] This situation occurs because (1) states have different levels of power, (2) rulers in different political entities will be responsive to different domestic norms which may, or may not, be fully compatible with international norms, and (3) situations arise in which it is unclear what rule should apply since there is no authority structure that can resolve these differences in the international system of anarchy.[3] All political and social environments are characterized by the logic of expected consequences and the logic of appropriateness. The logic of expected consequences sees political actions and outcomes, including institutions, as the products of rational calculated behaviour designed to maximize a given set of unexplained preferences. The logic of appropriateness understands political action as a product of rules, roles and identities. Identities specify appropriate behaviour in given situations. The question is not: "How can I maximize my self interest?, but rather, given my role, "How should I act in this particular circumstance?"[4]

Stephen Krasner explains that in a well-established domestic polity, logics of appropriateness prevail and will usually, but not always, be consistent with logics of consequences, since doing "the right thing" is usually consistent with an actor's self-interest. Besides, any disagreement about contested rules can be resolved by institutions, such as the courts or the legislature, which all actors regard as authoritative. He points out, however, that in the international system, logics of appropriateness and logics of consequences will not always be compatible. Saying one thing but doing another, endorsing the logic of appropriateness while acting in ways consistent with logic of consequences, will be a more frequently observed phenomenon. This kind of "organized hypocrisy" will be inevitable unless one of the parties abandons, or is forced to give up, its normative architecture. The reasons for the prevalence of "organized hypocrisy" in international politics are power asymmetries and the absence of any universally recognized legitimate authority. The stronger states can pick

and choose from among those norms that best suit their material interests, or ignore norms altogether, because they can impose their choices on weaker states in the absence of any legitimate institution that could constrain their coercion and take action against them.[5]

In the Westphalian norm based international system of sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, logics of appropriateness should prevail over logics of consequences. Yet the international system is, in reality, an environment in which logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness. This kind of explanation can be found in neorealist and neoliberal explanations of international politics. States are to refrain from interference in the affairs of other states but, at the same time, attempt to alter or influence the domestic institutional structures of those states. This is partly as a result of the asymmetric relations that exist between nation-states.

Asymmetric relations are not uncommon in world politics. Disparity of power does not necessarily mean that the more powerful dominate the less powerful. Brantly Womack explains that in an asymmetric bilateral relationship the two sides nurture different patterns of attention and status sensitivities. The stronger side will tend towards error of inattention in its behaviour, while the weaker side will be more tempted by error of overattention. These differences are the major causes of what Womack calls systemic misperception that can lead to conflict. However, systemic stability can be achieved by fulfilling the minimum expectations of both the more powerful and the less powerful. For the less powerful, the minimum expectation is acknowledgement of its autonomy by the more powerful. For the more powerful, the minimum expectation is deference on the part of the less powerful, which does not necessarily mean submission but simply pursuit of the latter's interest in a manner that corresponds to and is respectful of the superior status of the more powerful.[6]

Womack explains that there are four bilateral factors that moderate structural misperception in asymmetric relationships: (1) inclusive rhetoric (2) issue routinization (3) precedents, and (4) diplomatic ritual. The first two are considered as "inner dimensions" which help creation and expansion of a neutralized core of policy areas in the relationship that are buffered from bilateral confrontation. The last two are "outer dimensions" that aim at establishment of a sleeve for the relationship that makes increasingly radical misperceptions less plausible. In the case of the inner dimensions, neutralization of potential problem areas can be accomplished rhetorically through the use of discourse that articulates the vital interests of both sides or

through the conversion of issue areas to 'low politics' through routinization and institutionalization. If both sides present their actions in mutually shared terms and values, that is "inclusive rhetoric", there is more chance of drawing them both into dialogue rather than confrontation. Likewise, "issue routinization", which leaves the direct involvement of central leadership, is less likely to produce confrontation and exacerbate misunderstanding. For the outer dimensions, structural misperception can be mitigated through the presentation of the continuum of historical precedents and the application of diplomatic rituals. "As long as precedent provides familiar ground for an asymmetric relationship, it provides a horizon of common sense that defines what is normal and implicitly places an increasing burden of proof on perceptions of the abnormal", Womack remarks. The practice of diplomatic rituals and exchanges of state visits provides occasions in which both sides can fulfil their minimum expectations, that is, the stronger side acknowledging the weaker side's autonomy and the weaker side deferring to the stronger side's superior position, without either prejudicing their cases on specific issues. While diplomatic ritual and inclusive rhetoric are designed to enhance a common mindset, historical precedents and issue routinization are intended to strengthen the institutional capacity of problem management.[7]

Womack also develops a typology of asymmetric relations. He presented nine different types of asymmetries, of which four are more relevant to modern nation-states. First, "distracted asymmetry" exists between two political entities in asymmetric relations when both of them have other more important relationships to worry about. Both sides will stand shoulder to shoulder in their relationship in facing others. The case of "dependent asymmetry" can be found when the weaker side is under the constraint of not having a feasible alternative to compliance with the preferences of the stronger. "Hostile asymmetry" occurs when one or both sides are perceived as denying minimal levels of autonomy or deference to the other. Finally, "normalized asymmetry" exists, although it is by no means a completely harmonious relationship, when both sides are confident of fulfilling their basic interests and expectations of mutual benefits, leading to the institutionalization of the bilateral relationship management.[8]

At times when bilateral relations are asymmetric, in favour of stronger power, the weaker power can also find appropriate strategies to deal with the stronger side, in addition to deference. Kenneth Waltz once argued that international politics is based on great powers.[9] However, small states do play a role in international politics too. Within the neorealist school of International Relations theory, a number of scholars provide conceptual insights as to how

small states can adopt policies to preserve and advance their interests *vis-à-vis* great powers; balancing and bandwagoning are two prominent concepts in the literature. When confronted by a significant external threat, states may balance or bandwagon. Balancing is defined as allying with others against potentially threatening great power while bandwagoning refers to the strategy of alignment with the perceived source of danger.[10]

Traditional balance of power theory argues that states form alliances in order to prevent stronger powers from dominating them, since they see their survival at risk if they fail to curb a potential hegemon before it becomes too strong, or seek to increase their influence within such an alliance. To ally with the dominant power, it is believed, means placing one's trust in its continued benevolence, for it is the stronger state that threatens the weaker; it is therefore much safer for a weaker state to join with those that cannot readily dominate their allies. Thus, neorealists argue that weaker states, in response to a threat perception, will naturally ally among themselves against the more powerful state to preserve their security and try to affect the distribution of power. Subsequently, Stephen Walt refined this proposition to argue that "states balance against threats rather than against power alone". He called this the "balance of threat" theory. He went on to argue that "although the distribution of power is an extremely important factor, the level of threat is also affected by geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intention".[11]

Weaker states are tempted to engage in bandwagoning — a less common pattern of behaviour, according to many neo-realists because the stronger state poses the greater threat or/and the weaker states are too small to influence the distribution of power, even if they choose to balance. Thus, in this context, the international system forces small states into bandwagoning as a security strategy; small states are helpless to resist "systemic pressure" and bandwagoning offers one road to survival in the anarchic world of great power rivalry. However, Randall Schweller contests this proposition and argues that small states adopt bandwagoning not simply because they are helpless in the face of an acute threat but rather as a carefully calculated policy option to exploit the great power's need for friends and allies, a course of action which can advance their political, economic and strategic interests. Thus, bandwagoning is not adopted out of fear and is not a response to threats. It provides a mixture of benefits and incentives. Schweller called this "bandwagoning for profit" and further explains that "balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses; bandwagoning by the opportunity for gain".[12] In sum, small states also have strategies to deal with great powers and they can even gain political and economic benefit from them.

LITERATURE ON SINO-MYANMAR RELATIONS

There are a few scholarly works and journalistic writings that address the issue of Sino-Myanmar relations. In 1963, William C. Johnstone examined Sino-Myanmar relations in the context of a study of neutralism in Myanmar's foreign policy. Chi-shad Liang's "Burma's Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice" also examined Sino-Myanmar relations up to the late 1980s in a similar context. Liang devoted one chapter to the Sino-Myanmar relationship, but he was more interested in the developments of bilateral relations rather than in Myanmar's actual China policy. Ralph Pettman's "China in Burma's Foreign Policy" addressed the issue of the China factor in Myanmar foreign policy up to around 1973 but the primary purpose of this excellent piece of research was to question the arguments put forward by Johnstone and to reassess Myanmar's overall foreign policy of neutralism. Jurgen Haacke's "Myanmar's Foreign Policy: Domestic Influence and International Implications", as the title suggests, analysed the domestic factors that contributed to the country's foreign policy direction since 1988 and the international implications of this policy. More recently, there have been several articles that examine the Sino-Myanmar relationship; some of them have focused on the wider context of regional power politics and most of them have analyzed the Sino-Myanmar relationship since 1988.[13]

The more intimate Sino-Myanmar relationship that has developed since 1988, and its regional strategic and security implications, has attracted the attention of scholars and policymakers around the world. Chi-shad Liang, a China-watcher with a special interest in Myanmar, argues that the Sino-Myanmar relationship since 1988 has been marked by a shift from 'delicate friendship' to 'genuine cooperation'. He holds an optimistic view of this closer and more stable relationship between the two countries. Donald Seekins, another scholar specializing in Myanmar, views recent developments in Myanmar's relations with China as 'playing with fire'. Mohan Malik, who is concerned about Indian security interests in the Indian Ocean, raises a number of questions concerning Myanmar's regional role and asks whether the country has surrendered her traditional foreign policy of neutralism and has become a strategic pawn or pivot player for China. He concludes: "Myanmar is unlikely to play the role of an independent or pivotal player in regional security affairs, given its role in China's grand strategy for the next century". Mya Maung, a respectable Myanmar dissident scholar, also argues that Myanmar has been overwhelmed by China and is being "sinicized". Andrew Selth, a long term observer knowledgeable about Myanmar affairs, while accepting the thesis that the country has abandoned its neutralist

foreign policy, offers a somewhat more optimistic view. He suggests that Myanmar's government can successfully manage her relations with China and "there is every indication that Myanmar will eventually attempt to draw back from China and try to find a more balanced position". A number of scholars identify three schools of thought on the Sino-Myanmar relationship. These are: (1) the "domination school", comprised mostly of "pessimists", who argue that Myanmar has abandoned her neutralist foreign policy and has become a pawn or client state of China, or is being subjected to so-called "sinicization"; (2) the "partnership school", represented by "optimists", who predict a closer, genuine and mutually supportive strategic relationship; and finally (3) the "rejectionist school", with "alarmists" at the very core, who believe that Myanmar can resist China's enormous strategic weight and remain independent but it might be playing with fire.[14] In recent years, some scholars have published articles on the Sino-Myanmar relations from Beijing's perspectives.[15] While all these academic papers do contribute to the better understanding of Sino-Myanmar relations, they do not adequately reflect the complexity and realities of the bilateral relationship and fail to examine Myanmar's China policy in the wider context of her overall foreign policy.

THEME AND ARGUMENTS

This empirically grounded work analyzes the historical development of Myanmar's China policy since 1948. It examines the whole process of Myanmar's relationship with China with an emphasis on goals and strategies and the factors that have shaped it. The study is divided into three historical periods: the Anti Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) and the Union Party (UP) period (1948–62); the Revolutionary Council (RC) and the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) period (1962–88); and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) period (1988–). The Sino-Myanmar relationship has been described as "Pauk-Phaw (kinsfolk)" friendship. Myanmar reserves this term exclusively to describe her relations with China. China also accepts it. The Myanmar term "Pauk-Phaw", spelled in Myanmar as (ပေါက်ဖော်), is transcribed as (胞波) in Chinese.

This work argues that within the context of this "Pauk-Phaw" friendship, although the Sino-Myanmar relationship is an asymmetric one, tilted in favour of Beijing, Myanmar has skillfully played the "China card" and still enjoys considerable space in her conduct of foreign relations. Myanmar has constantly repositioned her relations with China to her best advantage. Myanmar's China policy has always been located somewhere between balancing and

bandwagoning, and the juxtaposition of accommodating China's regional strategic interests and resisting Chinese influence and interference in Myanmar internal affairs has been a hallmark of Myanmar's China policy, and this will likely to remain unchanged. As long as it recognizes the legitimate strategic interests of China in Myanmar, the Myanmar government will be left to conduct her foreign relations within the context of its long established non-aligned policy. In addition, with the growing significance of Myanmar to China in geopolitical and geostrategic terms as well as in the context of its own drive for modernization and economic development, China will base its diplomacy on the good neighborliness policy, mutual benefit, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. Myanmar will also continue to conduct her China policy in the context of the traditional "Pauk-Phaw" friendship that will allow Myanmar flexibility in her foreign relations. However, if Myanmar's engagement with China in the past decades offers any lesson for future reference, it is most likely that Myanmar will be very cautious in dealing with China, because Myanmar is thoroughly convinced that China, like all other countries, will determine its policies toward Myanmar according to the calculations of her own interests.

Notes

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4. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid*.
6. Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: China, Vietnam and Cambodia", *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (Vol. 26, No. 2; June 2003), pp. 96–100; Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 77-92.
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9. Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics* (Massachusetts: McGraw Hill, 1979), p. 73.

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12. Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State back In", *International Security* (Vol. 19, No. 1: Summer 1994), p. 74.
13. Tin Maung Maung Than, "Myanmar and China: A Special Relationship?", *Southeast Asian Affairs 2003* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), pp. 189–210; Poon Kim Shee, "The Political economy of China-Myanmar Relations: Strategic and economic Dimensions", *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies* (Vol. 1, 2002), pp. 33–53; Wayne Bert, "Chinese Policy Toward Democratization Movements: Burma and the Philippines", *Asian Survey* (Vol. 30, No. 11; November 1990), pp. 1066–1083; Donald M. Seekins, "Burma-China Relations: Playing with Fire", *Asian Survey* (Vol. 37, No. 6; June 1997), pp. 525–539; Chi-shad Liang, "Burma's Relations with People's Republic of China: From Delicate Friendship to Genuine Co-operation", in Peter Carey (ed.), *Burma: the Challenge of Change in a Divided Society* (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), pp. 71–93; Andrew Selth, "Burma's China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region", *SDSC Working Paper No. 377* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2003); Baladas Ghoshal, "Trends in China-Burma Relations" in Verinder Grover (ed.), *Myanmar: Government and Politics* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2000), pp. 504–522; J. Mohan Malik, "Myanmar's Role in Regional Security: Pawn or Pivot?, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Vol. 19, No. 1; June 1997), pp. 52–73; Wayne Bert, "Burma, China and the U.S.A", *Pacific Affairs* (Vol. 77, No. 2; Summer 2004), pp. 263–182.
14. See Poon Kim Shee, "The Political economy of China-Myanmar Relations: Strategic and Economic Dimensions", *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies* (Vol. 1, 2002), pp. 33–53; Andrew Selth, "Burma's China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region", *SDSC Working Paper No. 377* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2003).
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