

## ASSESSING MYANMAR'S GEOPOLITICAL CONSIDERATION: CLASSICAL CONTEXT TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

The aim of the study is to draw up a holistic picture of Myanmar's geopolitical consideration, and discuss the features of geopolitics in terms of both classical and critical approaches. It examines the transformation of classical geopolitics to critical geopolitical discourse and it also attempts to apply these approaches of geopolitics to Myanmar's geopolitical consideration. Classical geopolitics emphasis on the physical space, power, technology by reflecting the conventional aspects of national economic, political, and military strategy and on the other hand, critical geopolitics focus on other important factors like quality of the environment knowledge, geoeconomic factors by challenging traditional aspects of geopolitical thinking. In assessing Myanmar geopolitical consideration, this study will highlight how Myanmar's situation deals with classical context and critical discourse by focusing China-Myanmar interactions. Based on this background, the main research question of this study is "how does current Myanmar's geopolitics go along traditional (classical) of geopolitics, or along to critical approach while trend of the geopolitics is transformed from classical to critical geopolitics". In terms of classical geopolitical approach, it try to highlight the concept of Lines of Communication (LOC) in Myanmar's strategic concerns by giving example of some significant projects under China's BRI. As for the critical geopolitical discourse, Myanmar-China relations in the context of domestic debate on Myitsone dam project is assessed in line with China's involvement and concerns in the dam project.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Classical Geopolitics, Critical Discourse, Popular Geopolitics, LOC

### Introduction

Geopolitics can be defined as describing geographical settings and their relationship to political power and setting out spatial frameworks, which embrace the political power units such as hemispheres, oceans, land and maritime boundaries, natural resources, and culture. Geopolitics is now a multifaceted topic essential for understanding the multifaceted ways of geography and human behaviors that are also shaping the current international political and security matters.

Generally, the trend of geopolitics can be divided into two camps: classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics. Classical geopolitics incorporates traditional methodological emphases by practitioners such as Halford Mackinder and Alfred Thayer Mahan etc. It stresses conventional aspects of national economic, political, and military strategy. Geopolitics field area is dynamic and it is not static. It reflects international realities and the global constellation of power arising from the interaction of geography on one hand and technology and economic development on the other. It was more developed during the 1980s. The work of scholars such as Simon Dalby and Geróid Ó Tuathail (Gerard Toal) reflects the critical geopolitical discourse and their perspectives challenged traditional geopolitical interpretations. In this context, their literatures reflect the transformation of classical geopolitics to critical geopolitical discourse.

Generally, classical geopolitics emphasis on the physical space, power, technology by reflecting the conventional aspects of national economic, political, and military strategy and critical geopolitics focus on other important factors like quality of the environment knowledge, geoeconomic factors etc... by challenging traditional aspects of geopolitical thinkings. Reviewing the relevance literatures for this research, it can be found out the lack of the comprehensive literatures the covers the two approaches: classical and critical geopolitics. In this context, this study draws up to represent a holistic picture of Myanmar's geopolitical consideration by

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combining two approaches. In assessing Myanmar geopolitical consideration, this study will highlight how Myanmar's situation deals with classical context and critical discourse by focusing China-Myanmar interactions. In this context, the main research question is "how does the current Myanmar's geopolitics go along traditional (classical) of geopolitics, or along to critical approach while trend of the geopolitics is transformed from classical to critical geopolitics?" In terms of research methodology, the explanatory research method is used for the research, as it is a comprehensive summarization of specific events and situation. In order to explain the phenomenon of geopolitical trend and approach, the secondary data sources are used. The research paper consists of five portions including introduction and conclusion parts. Firstly, it examines the overview on trend and approaches of geopolitics by focusing the changing nature of classical to critical geopolitics. Secondly, it assesses Myanmar's geographic situation by explain strategic significant of Myanmar's position among powerful states. Finally, it analyses Myanmar's geopolitical approaches in line with the transformation of classical geopolitical context to critical discourse. In terms of classical geopolitical context, the research try to highlight important of the LOC in Myanmar's strategic concerns by giving example of some significant projects under China's BRI. The critical geopolitical dynamics of Myanmar-China relations in the context of Myitsone dam project can be assessed the domestic debate in Myanmar over China's activities in line with the project.

### **Overview on Trend and Approaches of Geopolitics**

Geopolitics is one of the important grand theories that can be used in several disciplines, such as (Political) Geography, Strategic studies and IR. It also concern with 'Geography', 'Politics' and 'Technology' by emphasizing on the interrelationships between them. Classical geopolitics, is traditionally interpreted to deal with 'physical space', including natural resources, 'power' and a 'state'. In addition, 'technology' plays a relevant role here, as the technology models of geopolitics emphasizing the importance of advanced (arms) technology (e.g., airplane, missile and submarine).

At the end of the nineteenth century, geopolitical theories were generated as classical context. At that time, the geopolitical thoughts were related with the increasing competition between the most powerful states based on the interstate conflict especially among the powerful Western countries. In addition, geopolitical assumptions and theories were label as the classical geopolitics because it was a period of increasing competition within the most powerful states. Therefore, the geopolitical assumptions were generated among the powerful Western countries by focusing the realm of interstate conflicts. In the classical geopolitical context, there are two kinds of school of thoughts such as German and British/American school of thought. In studying classical geopolitical approach, it is necessary to explore the assumptions and theories of classical geopolitical thinkers. Table (1) represents the main influential geo-politicians' assumptions by categorizing German and British/ American geopolitics.

**Table 1 Key Classical Geopolitical Thinkers of Classical Geopolitics**

No.	Key Thinkers	Major Assumptions	Branches (School of Thoughts)
1	Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914)	Sea Power	British and American Geopolitics
2	Sir Halford Mackinder (1861–1947)	Heart Land (Eurasia Pivot)	
3	Nicholas J. Spykman (1893–1943)	Rimland	
4	Alexander P. de Seversky (1894–1974)	Air Power	
5	Rudolf Kjellen (1864–1922)	Start the term “Geopolitics”	German Geopolitics
6	Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904)	Lebensraum (Living space)	
7	Karl Haushofer (1869–1946)	Pan Regions	

**Sources:** Compiled by Author

German Geopolitics and its traditional interpretations were copied from natural sciences, as a state was seen as a living organism that grows, contracts, and eventually dies, or at least as an aggregate-organism. German geopolitics was defined by the work of two key individuals: Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) and Rudolf Kjellen (1864–1922). Ratzel was instrumental in establishing geography as an academic discipline. His “Politische Geographie” (1897) and “Laws of the Spatial Growth of States” laid the foundations for geopolitik. Ratzel stated that a state’s expansion through war as a natural and progressive tendency and a state’s territory and its greatest success of expansion depend on the effective use of geography.

Kjellen invented the term “geopolitics” and also developed Ratzel’s idea by refining an organic view of the state also known as Lebensraum, or living space. He defined geopolitics as the study of the state as geographical organism or spatial phenomenon with particular emphasis on a state’s location in relations to other states. According to him, the territorial size are crucial for state in their relationship with other powers. He also emphasize the state’s physical character, size and location as the key to its international political power position. In practice, the ideas of Ratzel and Kjellen were aimed at increasing the size of the German state Eastwards to create a large state that the advanced German culture warranted, in their minds, at the expense of the Slavs who were presumed culturally inferior.

As Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party began to rise to power in the 1920s, General Karl Haushofer (1869–1946) began to disseminate geopolitical ideas to the German public. His definition of pan-regions are concerned with large multi-latitude regions that were dominated by a particular core power. In this scenario, Germany dominated Eurasia while Britain controlled Africa. Haushofer’s vision allowed for both territorial growth and colonial acquisition by Germany, without initiating conflict with Britain.

In term of classical geopolitical approach, the British and American school of thought also influence in international relations. Sir Halford Mackinder (1861–1947) is the most well-known and influential geopoliticians. The classical geopolitics approach was started with Mackinder’s Heartland theory. His major work was concerned with the relative decline in Great Britain’s power as it faced the challenge of Germany. In 1904, he examined the geography and history of land power by defining the core of Eurasia as the Pivot Area and it was renamed as the Heartland 1919. According to his theory, the history of the world pivoted around the sequence of invasions out of the Eurasia region into the surrounding areas that were more oriented to the sea. Nicholas J. Spykman (1893–1943), a professor of International Relations at Yale University identified the

“Rimland,” following Mackinder’s “inner crescent,” as the key geopolitical arena.

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) also prominent in academic and policy circles. He wrote the two books “Influence of Sea Power upon History (1890)” and “The Interest of America in Sea power (1897)”. Mahan made a historical distinction between land and sea powers. He advocated an alliance with Britain to counterbalance Eurasian land powers. Mahan’s goal was to increase US global influence and projection of power, while avoiding conflict with the dominant British navy.

Assumption of Alexander P. de Seversky (1894–1974) is notable for its emphasis upon the polar regions as a new zone of conflict. He emphasized the using maps with a polar projection to show the geographical proximity of the US and Soviet Union, and the importance of air power. He argued that using polar projection to enhance global U.S. air control extending over an offensive radius of 6,000 miles and a defensive radius of 3,000 miles controlled from what he regarded as an impregnable superfortress. He also stressed that whoever gained control of airspace overlapping Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and North America could achieve global dominance and that the United States needed to make its heartland an invincible base so it could project offensive power to all corners of the world.

These aforementioned geopolitical thoughts are related with the classical geopolitical account. Based on these major theories geopolitics, the spatialization of international politics by major powers and hegemonic states, which understands geopolitics to be concerned “the geography of international politics”, especially the relationship between the physical environment and the conduct of foreign policy. This sounds like power politics, or what is understood as ‘Realpolitik’, a traditional understanding of international politics and practice of diplomacy based on the assessment of power, territory, and material interests.

Classical geopolitics assumptions were challenged by new and critical approaches that re-conceptualized the traditional definitions and interpretations in the 1990s. Under globalization, there was a shift in mindset and culture as well as change in security premises due to the changes of international system, and the consequent environmental awakening, and the implications on policy shaping and policy-making. Critical geopolitics used the tools of discourse analysis to re-engage the previous work of classical geopoliticians and expose their biases and political agendas. In this way, it allowed for a new generation of scholars to criticize the classical school and the new ‘critical’ schools of thought of geopolitics were established. The end of the Cold War has allowed the emergence of a new geopolitical order that is dominated by geo-economic questions and issues. Under the process of globalization, the economic activity and global flows of trade, investment becomes significant. In addition, the “new geopolitics” describes a world dominated no longer by territorial struggles between competing blocs but by emerging transnational problems like terrorism, nuclear proliferation and clashing civilizations and the relationship of politics to the earth is to deal with environmental.

In terms of critical geopolitical discourse, the production of geopolitical knowledge is an essentially contested political activity and also deals with power-knowledge justification. The French philosopher Michel Foucault stated that “the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power”. According to him, it is concerned with “how structures of power in society (the military, police, doctors and judicial systems, for instance) create structures of knowledge that justify their own power and authority over subject populations.” For example, as promoting the national security discourse is military’s justification of power in society, military experts proclaim to safeguard national security of state. Therefore, the military institutions of the state will encourage enhancing the resources from political leaders for new missions and new weapons systems. However, other experts might disagree the military experts’ justification of power because other institutions and their interests

might against the spending of large amount of expenditure for weapon system instead of using social needs. Under such context, the military's discourse of "national security" often clashes with the "social security" discourse of other intellectuals and interest groups. Defining the concept of security again and again in terms of military by controlling the dominant discourse about it, becomes an extremely important means of exercising power within a state. Therefore monopolizing the right to speak authoritatively about "security" in name of everyone is at the crux of the practice of power.

Under these circumstances, the idea of geopolitics has been implicated in many different structures of power/knowledge justification throughout the twentieth century. Since geopolitics has for so long been a militaristic practice monopolized by statist elites, conservative politicians and geopolitical experts broaden the debate and consider ~~the~~ many different voices—minority civil rights, post-colonial, indigenous, feminist, trade unionist, etc. In the *Geopolitics Reader* by Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby published in 1998 and focus on critical geopolitical discourse. In this context, critical geopolitics politicizes the creation of geopolitical knowledge by intellectuals, institutions and practicing statesmen. It reflects on the many different dimensions to geopolitics in justification of knowledge and power at the end of the twentieth century (see Table 2).

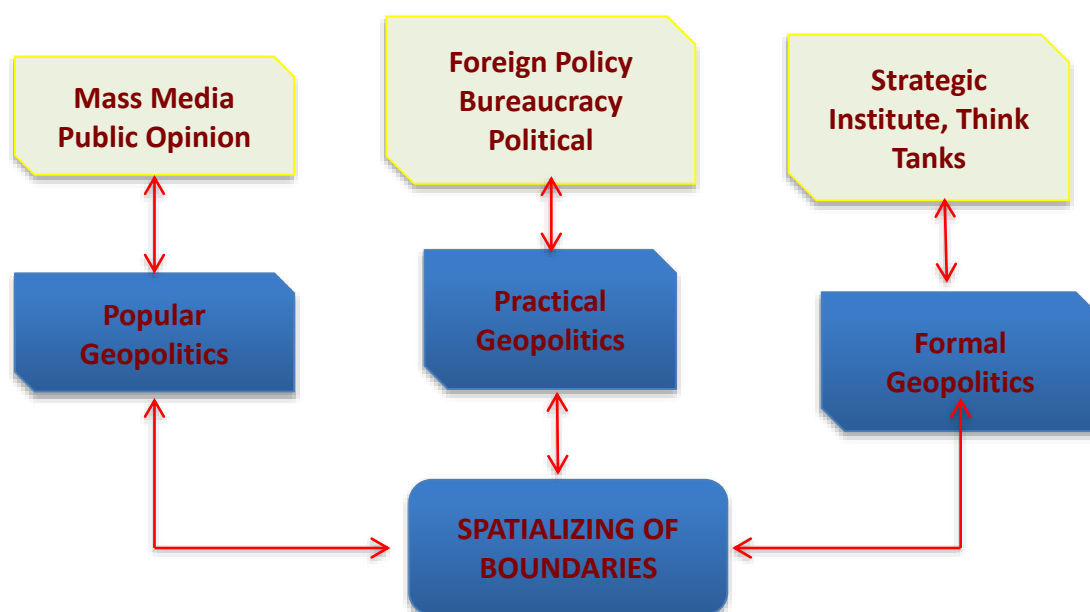
**Table 2 Some Significant Knowledge /Power Justification in Critical Geopolitical Discourse**

Discourse	Key Intellectuals	Dominant Lexicon
<b>New world order geopolitics</b>	Mikhail Gorbachev	New political thinking
	Francis Fukuyama	The end of history
	Edward Luttwak	Statist geo-economics
	George Bush	US led new world order
	Leader of G7, IMF, WTO	Transnational
<b>Environmental Geopolitics</b>	Strategic planners in the Pentagon and NATO	Liberalism/neoliberalism
	Samuel Huntington	Rouge states, nuclear outlaws and terrorist
		Clash of Civilization
	World Commission on Environment and Development	Sustainable Development
	Al Gore	Strategic environmental initiative
	Robert Kaplan	Coming anarchy
	Thomas Homer-Dixon	Environmental scarcity
	Michael Renner	Environmental security

**Source:** Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby & Paul Routledge, (1998) *"The Geopolitics Reader"*, New York, Routledge.

For better understanding on critical discourse, critical geopolitical writers proposed a threefold division – formal, practical, and popular (see Figure 1). The formal geopolitics is deal with the subject matter and concerned with how do academics and commentators self-consciously invoke an intellectual tradition associated with geopolitics. Practical geopolitics refers to the policy-orientated geographical templates used by political leaders in global politics. Popular geopolitics encompass the role of the media and other forms of popular culture, in which citizens use to make sense of events in their own locale, country, region, and the wider world. All these three forms are interconnected as academic writers and journalists routinely share ideas and discourses with one another and both groups have regular contacts with government officials and

organizations. They are also immersed in the media and popular culture.



**Source:** Klaus Dodds, (2007) *“Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction”*, New York, Oxford University Press

**Figure 1** Threefold Division of Critical Geopolitics

### Myanmar's Geographic Situation and its Strategic Significance

Myanmar's geostrategic situation is strategically significant in the Southeast Asia region. It is the largest state in mainland Southeast Asia and comprises an area of 678,000 square kilometers is bordered by the five neighbouring countries: Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand and by the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Its 5,876 kilometer land boundary is adjacent with five countries, including two strategic giants China and India. To the Western part of the nation, its border shares a 1,463 kilometer with India, a nuclear power that dominates the South Asian subcontinent and Bay of Bengal. To the northeast, Myanmar shares a 2,185kilometer-long border with China which is now reach of the great power status and rising power. In the Eastern part, Myanmar's frontier runs southwest and south for 1,800 kilometers alongside Thailand, an influential player in the Southeast Asia region. At its eastern-most point, Myanmar shares a short border with Laos (235 kilometers), and at its western- most point, another with Bangladesh (193 kilometers). Myanmar's coastline is 1,930 kilometers long, and faces the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea to the south. In addition, it is crossed by a number of important east-west commercial air routes. In accordance with this profile and position, Myanmar can hardly be ignored for geostrategic important for regional countries.

The world most powerful countries throughout the history recognized the importance of Myanmar's geostrategic position. From 1824 to 1826, British annexed the coastal districts of Arakan (Rakhine) and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) in order to safeguard Eastern India and close the gap between Bengal and the Straits Settlements. Sixty years later, both the United Kingdom and France were also compete with each other to influence Myanmar. During the Second World War, Myanmar was a major theater of operations for both allied and Japanese strategists. Myanmar's strategic position became not only China's critical access to the Indian Ocean via the Bay of Bengal, but also crucial for Japan's conquests in Southeast Asia and the allied bastion of British India.

After the World War II, the security calculation of key Western policy makers continued to focus on Myanmar strategic significant. For instance, British was eager to retain Myanmar ports and airfields and tried to persuade the Attlee government to include the question of access in its independence agreement with Myanmar. In the face of rising nationalist sentiment around the Asia-Pacific region, and the communist insurgencies in colonies like Malaya, Mingaladon airfield of Myanmar became a more important factor in British defense planning. As for the emergency cases, British's air reinforcement route to the Far East and the rapid movement of air and land forces via Myanmar (Mingaladon airfield) became the indispensable strategic concerns.

After the independence, Myanmar's geostrategic position was still wider attention because its location is closed to China, India and situated within the same regional context with Vietnam. In 1950s, a number of insurgencies including Burmese Communist Party (BCP) problem emerged in Myanmar. In this context, British government made the considerable effort via British Commonwealth countries to deter the communist expansion by reinforcing U Nu's government. At that time, British and US assumed Myanmar as the Asia Domino in terms of communist domination. As for US, if Myanmar will become under such domination, a communist military advance through Thailand would make Indochina military indefensible. As for British, if Chinese-sponsored BCP influences Myanmar, it will become the threat to security of Malay and the vital Straits of Malacca. Some analysts also pointed out that China could use the easy route for its invasion via Yunnan Province across Northern Myanmar to Assam province of India. It has been claimed that India had a tacit understanding with Myanmar over the joint defense of the Assam-northern Myanmar area in the event of a Chinese invasion.

Since the Post-Cold War era to till the present time, the geopolitical world order has shifted to relative predominance of the United States and unpredictable challenges to its power, influence and symbols across the globe. In addition, the geographical dimensions of world politics, the term 'geopolitics' gradually came to define the knowledge used by leaders and ordinary citizens to make sense of the game of power politics across the world in line with the process of globalization. As for Myanmar, it has been the object of a large amount of political and diplomatic arena stemmed from its strategic value, derived from its geographical position on the borders of India and China, and its status as the abundant natural resources including energy and oil and gas.

### **Myanmar's Geopolitical Approaches: Classical Context and Critical Discourse**

#### **China's BRI in Classical Geopolitical Context**

In terms of classical geopolitical context, the geographic distribution Center of Resources (COR) and LOC are the significant concepts because it is concerned with geographic locations and strategic importance. According Phil Kelly (2016), the LOC provides the transport paths that are vital to states' dependent upon international trade and upon resources for import or export. He also stated that LOC are very crucial because it provides the linkage with the source of resources or COR and other strategic locations. COR are also vital because natural and economic resources are essential for a state's industrial and military capacity to control and influence for power. The nature of both COR and LOC can be found ~~out~~ in Myanmar geographic position based on the classical geopolitical context.

Myanmar's geostrategic location at the tri-junction of East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia is the critical significance for China. Myanmar is not only a potential supply route bypassing the Malacca Strait, but also a strategic staging point for controlling access to Malacca Strait. Access to Myanmar's ports and overland transportation routes can be seen as a vital and strategic security asset for China. In this regard, China's security interest in Myanmar is to gain promising access to the Indian Ocean. The protection of trade routes became the indispensable for China's economic

growth because nearly eighty percent of the oil imports passing through the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca before it reaches the South China Sea. For China, the development of a blue-water naval capability is pivotal to protect vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and Chinese ambitions to dominate the Malacca Straits and to ensure the safe passage of goods through the vital SLOCs for maintenance bases in and around the Indian Ocean for its naval ships became essential. China's SLOCs are subject to military blockade or interruption in the East and South China Seas. As for Chinese defence planners, Chinese forays into Myanmar is also a reflection of China's transformation from a continental to a maritime power, which is increasingly dependent upon external trade, ever-growing volumes of imports and exports through oceanic routes, and overseas markets for capital and investments.

Under President Xi Jinping administration, China implemented the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) along former Silk Road route that is ~~the major~~ Chinese major investment in regional infrastructure development including transport and communication projects. These infrastructure projects will enhance Chinese trade and commerce long former Silk Road routes. China committed to US\$ 40 billion fund for infrastructure development among the Silk Road Economic Belt nations in order to renewal the ancient Silk Road between China and Europe. China also leads the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in order to promote the economic development of Asia and inter connectivity of infrastructure through investment and productive fields. The BRI project aims to build a network of roads, railroads and shipping lanes linking at least seventy countries from China to Europe passing through Central Asia, the Middle East and Russia for fostering trade and investment. Myanmar occupies a unique geographical position in the BRI, lying at the junction of South Asia and Southeast Asia, and between the Indian Ocean and southwestern China's landlocked Yunnan province.

In addition, China's regional policy on connectivity can be observed through the important regional cooperation mechanisms like Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) etc. Implementing these regional mechanisms reflects the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity framework. There are three moods of connectivity such as physical connectivity, institutional connectivity and people to people connectivity. Among them, physical connectivity is most visible plan for strategic policy of China in shaping the communication lines.

China and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in September 2018 in order to establish the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) which is a part of BRI. Under the CMEC, the two governments signed agreements, memorandums of understanding, protocols and letters of exchange relating to railways, industrial and power projects, and trade. Several of these agreements firm up Myanmar's commitment to the CMEC's three central components: the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which includes a deep-sea port, an industrial park and other projects; the China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone; and an urban development plan for Yangon. The estimated 1,700-kilometer-long corridor will connect Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan Province, to Myanmar's major economic checkpoints—first to Mandalay in central Myanmar, and then east to Yangon and west to the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Under the MoU, two governments agree to collaborate on many sectors including basic infrastructure, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, transport, finance, human resources development, telecommunications, and research and technology.





Source: <https://www.studyiq.com>

**Figure 2** China-Myanmar Economic Corridor

It is undeniable that Myanmar geostrategic position is within the Chinese policy orientation in the region. Concerning BRI orbit, Myanmar is a key site for large-scale Chinese projects, including the dams, bridges, roads and ports. This kind of infrastructure development will convey the groundwork for implementing the “one belt, one road” idea by utilizing LOCs in classical geopolitical approach.

The strategic nature of LOC is critical for state’s survival and development. As for rapid rate of economic growth, the LOC have underlined the interconnection with the other resource centers, COR. As for Myanmar, it is geopolitically considers that the East line of the CMEC, including Mandalay-Yangon regions, are the most economically developed places in Myanmar. The CMEC, by connecting the poorest western seaboard of Myanmar and the most developed region of the country, will largely drive Myanmar's economic growth. Myanmar can also learn from the China’s BRI implementation process so as to bring more tangible benefit to its people.

### **Myitsone Dam Project in Considering Critical Geopolitical Discourse**

The critical geopolitical dynamics of Myanmar–China relations in the context of Myitsone dam project can be assessed the domestic debate in Myanmar over China’s activities with regard to the project. An analysis on critical geopolitical discourse is based on Save the Ayeyarwaddy Campaign in the public sphere. This is crucial to understand how China is framed in the public conscience in Myanmar concerning Myitsone dam project by applying popular geopolitical perspective.

The \$3.6 billion Myitsone dam project is a Sino-Myanmar joint venture: Myanmar’s Ministry of Electric Power and a domestic conglomerate, Asia World, as well as the PRC’s state-run China Power Investment Corporation. They signed a memorandum of understanding in 2006 and work on the project began subsequently in December 2009. Local people and civil societies in Myanmar opposed the dam construction. In September 2011, amid protests over the Myitsone Dam’s social and environmental costs, the then-President U Thein Sein of Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) announced the suspension of the project, by citing the “will of the people”.

The ‘Save the Ayeyarwady’ campaign was the first and most remarkable social movement throughout (USDP) administration in order to deter the implementation of the dam project. The campaign was initiated by a small group of environmentalists who had a strong media network. Later, it was joined by elites from different sectors, including civil society organizations (CSOs),

political opposition, academics, retired technocrats, and mainstream media. Different networks initiated activities to oppose the dam spontaneously. Painters and cartoonists, singers, historians and writers enlightened the public awareness in terms of Ayeyarwady River. Environmentalists backed up the movement with scientific research. The flourishing campaign via strong media network accumulated considerable pressure on U Thein Sein administration.

The 'Save the Ayeyarwady' movement correlated with the expansion of the political space in the country can be divided into three stages. In the first stage, a group of like-minded activists were brought together in the early phase of the campaign. After signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of the Myitsone Dam in 2006, a small group of environmentalists opposed the project. In November 2009, Green Hearts Environmental Network was organized to document the nature as well as people's livelihoods along the Ayeyarwaddy River. This team was composed of journalists, photographers, documentary producers, and writers and the team members traveled from Mandalay to Bamaw (Kachin State) along the Ayeyarwady River by boat. In 2010, two other boat trips for the same cause and these study tours laid the groundwork for the Save the Ayeyarwaddy campaign. To alert the public to the potential adverse impacts of the mega dam project, the boat trip's participants held the first art exhibition in 2010.

In the second stage, a scientific debate over the Myitsone Dam was launched. In July 2011, Myanmar's Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) wrote an environmental baseline report of the Dam project which recommended to construct two smaller dams to substitute the Myitsone Dam. Subsequently, the campaign was fortified by scientific data of environmental and social impacts of the project. One of the first technocrats U Tun Lwin, retired Director-General of the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, other retired government officials such as U Ohn, former Director of the Forest Department and Daw Cho Cho, retired Deputy Director of the Irrigation Department stood up against the dam project. They frequently highlighted the environmental and social impacts of the dam project from a technical perspective in their public speeches and interviews.

In third stage, mobilization against the project became more obvious and opponents of the dam became more straightforward. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also added her voice to the campaign by issuing an open letter to President U Thein Sein in the second week of August 2011. Afterwards, different sectors, including environmental groups, political activists, ethnic activists, youth groups, poets, and individual celebrities, initiated signature campaigns in different parts of the country.

While the campaigns mainly targeted people with political consciousness, there were also literary talks that appealed to the general public in various townships in Yangon. The turnout to each literary talk varied from hundreds to a thousand people. It was astonishing that numerous speakers overtly called for the suspension of the dam in August and September 2011. Moreover, speeches by famous speakers were recorded and circulated to rural areas. In the third week of September 2011, the anti-dam campaign reached its climax. Multiple public events were held simultaneously. Furthermore, a seminar attended by 500 CSO members, Kachin ethnic and religious leaders, environmentalists and journalists was organized. Participants categorically questioned the legitimacy of the project and demanded suspension of the dam. The strong media network multiplied the impact of the campaign. Among the several media, Eleven Media was the first media heavyweight who spoke out against the Myitsone Dam by criticized the government for acting like a client in the Sino-Myanmar relations. Alongside Eleven Media, 7Day News and The Voice were also vocal against the dam construction. China is framed in the public conscience and debate in Myanmar concerning Myitsone dam project construction by applying popular geopolitical perspective.

## Findings and Conclusion

This analysis highlighted that Myanmar's strategic significance contemplates with the trend of geopolitics field area in the context of changing international circumstances. During the pre-war period, Myanmar's geostrategic situation was aware of the colonial powers such as British, French and Japan and the conventional aspects of power projection can be seen in terms of Myanmar geographic position. In the Cold War period, Myanmar closed geographic position with communist China became wider attention by West because they assumed Myanmar as the Asia domino in terms of communist expansion. Under the New World Order international system and in the context of globalization, the non-conventional issues become obvious while the conventional strategic issues and still significant. In this regards, both classical and critical geopolitical considerations in line with the changing domestic and international circumstances can be assessed.

To sum up, the study found out that the current stage of Myanmar's geopolitical considerations composes of some sort of hybrid that includes aspects from the both approaches: classical context and critical discourse. In classical context, the state as the principal actor shapes the geopolitical landscape. Critical geopolitical discourse recognizes several factors and actors beyond the state such people, civil societies and indigenous peoples. It can be seen that some experts in Myanmar recognize the potential benefits of CMEC projects while others figure out the risks of the project. They recognize that CMEC offers Myanmar the opportunity to modernize its decrepit infrastructure, which is essential for economic growth. It is also seen as having the potential to create jobs for Myanmar's youth and to boost its trade. Therefore, the classical context of Myanmar's consideration can fulfill the social and economic development of the country by utilizing the favorable geographical advantages. Myanmar's geopolitical considerations in critical discourse can be found out by assessing the domestic debates in implementation of Myitsone Dam project. The popular geopolitical analysis by focusing Save the Ayeyarwaddy campaign shows that the news and media focus on intrinsically episodic to raise objections to the environmental and social costs of the project. The Myitsone experience had prompted Myanmar government, both USDP and NLD, to implement the project cautiously because it needs to aware and listen public opinions and voice of civil societies. In assessing Myanmar's geopolitical consideration, the country's political system and its policy formulation are indispensable influencing factors. While Myanmar is being faced with domestics political and economic challenges, its political orientation would determine the future national development process and the corresponding geopolitical landscape in the region.

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