

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

A capital has significance as the seat of power and the centre of bureaucratic administration which influences political formation and the effectiveness of the government. In other words, a capital functions as a centre of country development and a symbol of national and cultural pride. As a result, capital location is very important for state sovereignty and political centrality. In this respect, if there are significant areas over which the government does not exercise effective control, and/or if the location of the previous capital is not appropriate for national development and does not really represent national pride, capital relocation to a core area with more geopolitical importance makes sense to enhancing governmental administrative effectiveness and capability.

In case of Myanmar, shifting the capital has been neither a recent nor an unusual phenomenon. Ancient Burmese monarchs were inclined to transfer their capitals for several reasons such as military strategy, to manifest political charisma and ward off evil omens, to develop agricultural areas and to preserve cultural identity from the volatile outside world. However, the current move from Yangon to Pyinmana is structurally different from capital relocation in monarchical periods because of different conditions and circumstances. Transferring a capital in the past was driven by traditional factors and the old political system where real power centralization was based on western bureaucratic models and the concept of the modern nation-state had apparently never occurred.

Even though the current capital relocation is influenced to some degree by the historical legacy and shares some characteristics with capital relocations in the past such as the adoption of royal traditions and astrological principles, military strategy, agricultural and irrigation development and a return to cultural heartland, the establishment of Pyinmana Naypyidaw is driven by new circumstances in which the state of Myanmar has evolved into a modern nation-state with real power centralization

under the rule of a military regime. Furthermore, the current move is also deeply influenced by military ideology and globalization which has brought change and complexity to the security environment. Relocation of the capital to Pyinmana is mainly influenced by three main factors: politico-military security, hinterland economic development and spiritual-cultural unity.

In the political and military dimensions, the ruling government led by Senior General Than Shwe ascended to power by massacring civilians, ignoring democratic processes and violating human rights. The current junta has also adopted and applied military ideology and the principle of security in policy formulation and implementation for maintaining state sovereignty and ensuring a strong military regime. The ruling leaders believe that power is finite and limited and power centrality is the core of a dictatorship's continued existence and the Union of Myanmar. The sharing and distribution of power to other political organs, particularly democratic parties and ethnic minority groups residing in the frontiers will bring decline to the military regime and state security system. In the same way, the expansion military power and the enlargement of the armed forces is also a grand strategy which can strengthen the government's political power and ensure the regime's ability to control the Union of Myanmar in the future.

Moreover, the current military elite also believe that the establishment of concentric power in the center of the country can provide a strong power and effective control throughout the Union. In accordance with this framework, Yangon is geopolitically inappropriate to function as a seat of power of the ruling government because it is a centre of democratic movements and urban uprisings against the junta. It lacks administrative effectiveness because it is not strategically located in the center of the country and far away from chronically turbulent regions, especially in Karen, Kayah and Shan states from the point of view of the ruling government. Additionally, its location is also considered vulnerable to a sea-borne attack by a superpower. Therefore, the location of Yangon cannot effectively secure the military regime and state integration in terms of geopolitics and geostrategy. From this point, the establishment of

the new command and control centre at Pyinmana is a realization of politico-military strategies to expand power exercised by the current military regime.

In the economic dimension, current military leaders perceive that economic development is the driving force behind national development and the expansion of political and military power. They realize that Myanmar is a country rich in energy and mineral deposits located in a strategic position between South and East Asian regions. The geo-economic location in this respect is considered an important source of economic power and the ruling government can also earn and distribute enormous incomes to ensure a strong military regime. The military junta has mainly focused on hinterland economic development paralleling maritime commercial development around the Gulf of Martaban. According to this framework, the ruling junta views the southern edge of the dry zone as a core economic region because it is situated between the agricultural areas in central plains and mountainous areas on the frontiers and is much closer to important deposits and natural resources whose future development will increase. Hence, the establishment of Pyinmana as a centre of inland development paralleling the establishment of Yangon as a centre of free trade in the delta is considered as an important economic strategy which will support the strong domination by the military regime through the monopoly of natural resources and the networks of industrial production.

Under this conceptual framework, the location of Pyinmana is geographically appropriate because it is situated in the Upper Sittang Valley at the southern edge of the dry zone and not far from the fertile Irrawaddy basin which is the agricultural heartland and moreover, not far from mountainous regions in the Shan plateau and Salween Valley which has a high potential for hydroelectricity generation. This geographical configuration has affected the rise of Pyinmana as the economic stronghold of the ruling government to earn income from hinterland development in the future. In addition, the fertility of the Sittang basin and the expansion of agricultural areas and transportation systems by the ruling government are also important factors to strengthen Pyinmana as a self-sufficient capital in times of warfare and support the flexibility of military movements and consolidation for fighting enemies. In this regard, the ruling

government can combine economic power with political and military power and can effectively access all parts of the country.

In the historical and cultural context, the current government has paid much attention to monarchical nationalism by referring to traditional history to strengthen conformity to the military's world view and to associate the military with historical patriotic icons to build national pride and political legitimacy and uplift the armed forces' status as the main pillar in keeping national solidarity and the Union spirit of Myanmar. On the other hand, the ruling junta has adopted and adapted ancient royal traditions and astrological principles to convince people about good omens and auspicious times in Myanmar and to upgrade the image of Than Shwe as a powerful leader through the revival of holy traditions and royal ceremonies, for example, hoisting a scared umbrella on the spire of Shwedagon pagoda or renovating ancient capital cities such as Pagan, Ava and Pegu. Furthermore, the military junta has also applied a policy of anti-colonialism and xenophobic nationalism to preserve Burmese culture and enhance the army's image as great patriots who protect nation against foreign troops and undesirable threats.

Yangon is sociologically and culturally not appropriate to function as a symbol of Burmese historical pride because it was established by British intruders and is also perceived as a political symbol of Aung San's family which has strongly challenged the military regime. Moreover, it has been threatened by globalization and westernization which has changed social values and decayed Burmese cultural identity from the point of view of the government. In this regard, the establishment of Pyinmana Naypyidaw is considered as both a cultural security strategy to create historical integration and a ceremonial process to build the political image of Senior General Than Shwe as an omnipotent and powerful ruler comparable to great Burmese monarchs in the past. In terms of geography, Naypyidaw is not located in the Irrawaddy Valley like most ancient capitals, but in the Sittang basin, which was the center of the Burmese empire in the Toungoo period. Thus, capital relocation to Sittang Valley more or less can stimulate the emergence of monarchical nationalism which can legitimize the image of the

military as a symbol of Union spirit in building Burmese historical pride, securing cultural identity and conducting a policy of anti-neocolonialism.

In conclusion, the current capital relocation is an important government strategy and heavily driven by military ideology and post Cold War circumstances and has three main causes; politico-military security, hinterland economic development and spiritual-cultural unity. Among the several factors involved, security strategy is considered as a primary cause to strengthen the army and ensure the dictatorship's continued existence while inland economic development is integral to the politico-military factor to enrich and enhance economic power dominated by the ruling junta and to exercise tight control throughout the country. Historical and cultural dimensions are also considered as additional factors to build monarchical nationalism and enhance the political image of the military.

Pyinmana Naypyidaw is geographically appropriate as an effective capital instead of Yangon on geopolitical, geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-historical dimensions. As a result, the ruling government can conduct its national mission, exercise effective control and deploy military forces in strategic positions throughout the country to subjugate popular uprisings, suppress ethnic insurgencies and defend against foreign invasions by using mountainous areas as natural fortifications. Meanwhile, agricultural networks around the new capital and transportation systems linking the central and frontier regions can also support military operations during the times of war in terms of supplies and troop movements. These characteristics can support the power of the military government in ruling the state of Myanmar and to secure the state's continued existence. Therefore, the establishment of Pyinmana is heavily influenced by military ideology and security strategy in order to establish a new seat of power and a new command and control centre to ensure the regime's ability in governing and administrating the Union of Myanmar.

Lastly, even though the author has evaluated, prioritized and analyzed the possible factors about capital relocation from Yangon to Pyinmana systematically, there still remain outstanding issues and further studies to develop from the thesis. The thesis looks only at primary causes and mainly focuses on the military government's

perspectives and strategies and does not mention other interesting problems which can also enrich and enhance understanding about current capital relocation inside Myanmar. Unexamined questions include the following. Is relocating the capital to Pyinmana a waste of resources or a useful program? Will it benefit only the ruling military regime or can it also contribute to the well-being of the Burmese people. Would the economic resources used in establishing a new capital be better used to develop the quality of Burmese people? How can the ruling junta pay for building a new magnificent capital to ensure a strong regime and who will profit in the process of capital construction? What are the impacts on, and the reactions of government officials, the Burmese people, ethnic minority groups, ASEAN and other countries such as the US, China and India? What is the role and function of Yangon after the centre of power was moved to Pyinmana? What becomes of the political image of Aung San's family after the ruling junta has established a traditional image based on monarchical nationalism in Naypyidaw? What are the new roles and functions of the army, naval and air force after the new military command center has been established at Pyinmana? And what will happen to the new seat of power if conflicts and confrontations emerge among ruling military leaders?