New Approaches to Building Markets in Asia

Working Paper Series

Adam Simpson

Civil Society and Pipeline Politics in Myanmar (Burma): Energy Markets and Activist Environmental Governance

New Approaches to Building Markets in Asia is a research project run out of the Centre on Asia and Globalisation at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

The New Approaches to Building Markets in Asia Working Paper series presents draft papers originally delivered at each of the research project's three workshops. The series serves as an opportunity for project participants to present work in progress for the purpose of gaining feedback and refining the contributions for peer reviewed publication.

The papers have not undergone peer review. Subsequently, all of the papers should be treated as 'not for citation' unless the consent of the author is obtained. Further, the views expressed in the papers are those of the respective authors and should in no way be construed as those of the Centre on Asia and Globalisation, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy or the National University of Singapore.

For more information on New Approaches to Building Markets in Asia please visit the project's website at:

http://www.caglkyschool.com/content/new-approach-building-markets-asia

Civil Society and Pipeline Politics in Myanmar (Burma): Energy Markets and Activist Environmental Governance

Adam Simpson[1]

ABSTRACT: *The search for energy security and the establishment of reliable transnational energy markets is one of the key dynamics that is re-shaping politics and governance throughout Asia in the twenty-first century. With the energy needs of China and India, in particular, growing at extraordinary rates Myanmar (Burma), sandwiched between the two, has taken on greater significance both as a source and a transit route for fossil fuels. With the regional market for energy developing at such a rapid rate there is a pressing need for meaningful environmental governance of transnational energy projects that have the potential to inflict serious and widespread social and environmental impacts.*

The processes that constitute environmental governance of large energy projects vary enormously depending on the type of political regime under which they operate and on the opportunities available for public participation. For states in the South with plentiful energy resources the export of energy via transnational energy projects takes on a high priority, either as a source of government revenue for development or a stream of rent facilitating corruption. In Myanmar, a state with few democratic institutions following the installation of a nominally civilian government in 2011, state-led environmental governance of these projects is extremely tenuous while the most visible governance is undertaken by exiled activists who operate outside the government's sphere of influence, particularly those based in the Thai-Myanmar border area.

Governance of transnational energy projects is usually undertaken by a variety of administering bodies attached to the states involved in the projects but after five decades of authoritarian rule and relative international isolation the capabilities of the government in Myanmar in this regard are extremely limited and transnational activist networks provide a valuable role in investigating and assessing impacts on local environments and communities. Although exiled civil society actors have been the most visible international influence in the past there is also a nascent domestic activism emerging that is challenging the development of transnational energy markets and, in particular, the export of the country's limited fossil fuel resources while their many communities face significant energy shortages.

This paper examines the strategies and tactics that these activists have used primarily in the campaign against two pipelines being built to carry oil and natural gas from Rakhine (Arakan) State on Myanmar's western Indian Ocean coast, northwest across Myanmar to China's Yunnan Province. This 'activist environmental governance' challenges the attempts by states at regional energy market building and the resultant large-scale development model that requires such vast energy consumption. This paper finds that although these activists are opposed by overwhelming state and business forces they have developed expertise and skills that can positively contribute to more democratic governance in Myanmar and the region in the future.

Introduction

The search for energy security and the establishment of reliable transnational energy markets is one of the key dynamics that is re-shaping politics and governance throughout Asia in the

---

[1] Dr Adam Simpson is Lecturer, School of Communication, International Studies and Languages, University of South Australia

twenty-first century. With the energy needs of China and India, in particular, growing at extraordinary rates Myanmar (Burma), sandwiched between them at the new 'crossroads of Asia' (Thant Myint-U 2011), has taken on greater significance both as a source and a transit route for fossil fuels. Contracts for hydropower dams and gas pipelines, in particular, between the Myanmar government and delegations from its neighbouring countries, are being signed at a furious rate in Beijing, Delhi, Bangkok and Naypyidaw, the new Myanmar capital. With the regional market for energy developing at such a rapid rate there is a pressing need for meaningful environmental governance of transnational energy projects that have the potential to inflict serious and widespread social and environmental impacts in a country where transparency and democratic accountability in government activities are new and novel concepts. This environmental governance takes many forms, but is often led by non-state actors who challenge the establishment of regional energy markets when the people of Myanmar are so bereft of energy supplies themselves. Many of these actors do not, however, ideologically oppose the establishment of international energy markets; rather, their concern is focussed on the local energy insecurity facing their communities.

Globally, an increasing understanding of environmental concerns has led to improved environmental governance at many levels but it is often the most important issues that remain the least well governed; energy – and the impacts of its production, trade and consumption – provides a key example. The centrality of energy security to modern states and societies ensures that it is often a focus of foreign policy activities but there have been very limited attempts at constructing an effective global energy governance system with these attempts often bypassing the United Nations, the central institution of global governance (Florini and Sovacool 2011; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2010; Lesage et al. 2009; 2010). In the absence of a coherent global system, governance is largely undertaken in an ad hoc manner at regional or national levels. Although this arrangement is far more subject to the vagaries of national political regimes it may also allow for less powerful non-state actors to influence local or regional outcomes.

The governance of transnational energy projects is usually undertaken by an array of administering bodies attached to the governments of the states involved in the projects. Domestic environmental activists can play an important role in communicating local community concerns to these bodies and their governments but the extent of their influence depends on the nature of the political regimes under which they operate. Domestic environmental activism is most efficacious under democratic regimes where domestic popular opinion is regularly tested in free and fair elections but in some cases this activism can also sway more authoritarian regimes (Mertha 2009, 1002-06). Despite opposing often powerful business and political interests, environmental activists see this direct lobbying as a potentially significant tool in contributing to the environmental governance of transnational energy projects. For states in the South with plentiful energy resources the export of energy via transnational energy projects takes on a high priority, either as a source of government revenue for development or a stream of rent facilitating corruption. In Myanmar (Burma), a state with few established democratic institutions, five decades of authoritarian rule and relative international isolation has ensured that rent seeking is the norm. Furthermore, even with more generous intentions the environmental governance capabilities of government institutions remain extremely limited and its domestic civil society, which could provide a key governance role, is embryonic and under-developed.

In the absence of dynamic and dissenting domestic environmental movements it has been largely exiled environmental activists, who have removed themselves from the military's sphere of influence, particularly to the Thai-Myanmar border region, who have been most visible in challenging the development of transnational energy markets and, in particular, the export of the country's limited fossil fuel resources while their communities face significant energy shortages. Over the last decade these activists have held little hope of directly

influencing their own government so they have focused almost entirely on transnational modes of governance. The division between these domestic and exiled activists offers an enhanced interpretation of the traditional differentiation between environmental activists as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in relation to their cooperation with authority structures (Alcock 2008, 67).[2]

In general, environmental governance of large projects by governments and their agencies in the South is poorly executed, but projects involving Myanmar have been particularly notable for environmental destruction and human rights abuses (Simpson 2007; Smith 2007). With civil conflict in parts of the country between ethnic minorities and the central government since independence in 1948 energy projects are particularly problematic as 'tensions triggered by environmental problems or contested access to natural resources [can] lead to renewed conflict' (Conca and Wallace 2009, 486). The possibility of Myanmar's neighbouring states contributing to a rigorous environmental governance of Myanmar's energy projects is restricted by the limited self-interested perspectives on energy security and national interest adopted by many of the region's countries (Sovacool 2009, 2365).

Governance of energy at a global level is still limited despite recent attempts at greater coherence but in the case of Myanmar considerations of energy policy are particularly intertwined with the broader political relationships that have existed between the Myanmar military government and other states. While the US and EU have maintained a regime of sanctions against Myanmar that precludes their transnational corporations (TNCs) from engaging in new investments some oil and gas companies, including Chevron and Total, are still involved with pre-existing projects such as the Yadana gas pipeline in the east of the country (Simpson 2008). In the absence of US and European TNCs, however, the Shwe gas pipeline project, which is to carry natural gas from Rakhine (Arakan) state across Myanmar into China's Yunnan Province is being driven by Asian TNCs from China, South Korea and India, particularly the state-controlled China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC). This pipeline, as with others in the region (Chaturvedi 2005), can either promote or undermine regional stability but it is also a significant component in an emerging regional market in energy that sees energy exported from less economically developed states, such as Myanmar and Laos, to the more developed economies. While under a democratic regime of sensitive environmental governance there could be widespread potential benefits from the development of the gas fields even optimistic accounts of Chinese investment in the South admit that it is often characterised by a severe lack of transparency (Matti 2010, 409-10). This is particularly so in Myanmar which has been characterised by corrupt rent-seeking behaviour by its rulers with the conditions for good governance and the effective use of resource revenues largely absent (McFerson 2009, 1542-44; Turnell 2009, 342).

Despite Myanmar's dismal history of authoritarian governments some environmental activists are now seeing the potential for incremental openings in the domestic political space following the first national elections for two decades in November 2010. There is little doubt that over the last decade, and particularly since Cyclone Nargis in 2008, environment movements have become more active in Myanmar, but restrictions on freedom of speech, of association and of the media in the intervening years still made the collection and dissemination of information on energy projects extremely difficult. With the establishment of a new government under President Thein Sein in 2011, however, relatively rapid reforms have suggested that there might possibly be an expansion of domestic environmental activism with echoes of that which accompanied the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe (Carmin and Fagan 2010).

---

[2] Both domestic and exiled activists regularly use the terms 'inside' and 'outside' as shorthand for either inside or outside Myanmar.

The effectiveness of environmental campaigns, as well as an indicator of the increasing responsiveness of the government to public concern, was demonstrated by the announcements on the suspension of the $3.6 billion Myitsone Dam in September 2011 (Simpson 2012a), and the cancellation of the 4,000MW coal fired power station at the Dawei Development Project the following January; 90 % of the electricity from the each project was to be exported to China and Thailand respectively. Greater control by local communities over domestic energy resources and their availability for transnational energy markets is a key demand of the environmental campaigners with Shwe activists arguing that Rakhine State, which has one of the lowest levels of electricity usage in the country, be supplied with 24 hour electricity before any of the gas is exported to China. On 27 January,(Year?) after several years of transnational activism and a gathering domestic campaign in Rakhine State the Minister for Energy, Than Htay, made the unprecedented announcement that any new gas development projects from 2013 would be for domestic consumption (Szep 2012). Despite the accommodating nature of the announcement, however, companies such as Thailand's PTT continue to be awarded exploration licences at a rapid rate (*Mizzima* 2012) and it remains unlikely the government will refuse the export of future discoveries.

To explore the role that environmental activists can play in facilitating environmental governance of large scale energy projects such as the Shwe pipeline this paper begins by critiquing limited views of what environmental governance entails. It argues that activists can play an essential and productive role in environmental governance, particularly in the absence of rigorous formalised processes, provided they adhere to emancipatory principles in their organisation and activities. The paper then delves into the case study material which examines the strategies and tactics that social and environmental activists have used in their campaign for greater environmental and human rights protections in relation to both the Shwe gas pipeline project and Myanmar more generally. With limited transparency and environmental oversight of the project by the domestic and neighbouring governments this paper suggests that while the option of dissenting local activism has been largely closed within Myanmar itself, its exiled activist community, or 'activist diaspora' (Simpson 2012b), has engaged in an 'activist environmental governance' that challenges the attempts by states at regional energy market building and promotes local ownership, control and use of natural resources. Although these activists are opposed by overwhelming state and business forces they have developed expertise and skills in this campaign that may assist not only in the environmental governance of this project but make a substantial contribution to broader justice-oriented governance of the country in future.

An 'ACTIVIST environmental governance'

The nature of environmental governance, like most concepts in the social sciences, is ultimately contested and there are a variety of interpretations of what can or cannot be included or achieved under its banner. While some authors have argued that environmental movements have been engaged in forms of environmental governance (Bretherton 2003; Elliott 2004; Kutting 2011; Lipschutz and Mayer 1996; Paterson et al. 2003, 2), the focus is often on more formalised activities that do little to challenge existing social relations with the Forest Stewardship Council an oft-cited example (Garner 2011; O'Neill 2009). Due to this focus a view has emerged that environmental governance is now largely dominated by environmental groups and NGOs that engage in a counter-productive, neoliberal form of governance. This tendency is evident in the concluding article of a special issue of *Environmental Politics* edited by Brian Doherty and Tim Doyle, which divides environmental organisations – informal groups and NGOs – into either emancipatory groups (EGs) or part of an environmental governance state (EGS) (Doyle and Doherty 2006), with the implication

being that environmental governance is now largely limited to within the latter as part of a global neoliberal project.

The concept of the EGS drew heavily on Duffy's contribution to the same issue examining Madagascar (Duffy 2006), which itself drew on Harrsion's concept of the governance state (Harrison 2004). Although Duffy argued in her Madagascar case study that the power of the Donor Consortium compromised Madagascar's sovereignty, providing a 'conditioned form of autonomy [which indicates it] is a good example of a governance state' (Duffy 2006, 746), she also made the point that it was important not to overstate the Consortium's power as it did not have a unified view on environmental management; local organisations adopted donor language to attract external funds, then pursued local agendas. These local groups therefore did not necessarily adhere to neoliberal philosophies but used the existing frameworks for their own ends.

By suggesting environmental governance is limited to a neoliberal institutionalist framework the model proposed by Doyle and Doherty (2006, 883) therefore limits the constructive role that emancipatory environment groups and movements can play. While Okereke (2008, 26) similarly argues that the 'most important determinant' of the success of equity norms in environmental governance is their 'fit' within this framework this strict compartmentalisation underplays the transformative potential of emancipatory actors who can engage in a politics of resistance under an expanded definition of environmental governance. Although there are formal institutionalised processes of environmental governance, such as the aforementioned Forest Stewardship Council, the World Commission of Dams (Khagram and Ali 2008) and the EITI initiative (Haufler 2010), the broad possibilities emerging for more informal manifestations of environmental governance are illustrated by an edited collection by Kutting and Lipschutz (2009). Although the editors acknowledge that 'environmental governance in its current discourse is about environmental management and not about attaining local ecological democracy globally' (Kutting and Lipschutz 2009, 6), the volume also provides innovative and alternative conceptions of environmental governance. An example is a chapter on the global ecovillage movement (Litfin 2009), which shifts environmental governance away from state-based and neoliberal forms towards interactive and localised, but simultaneously globalised, interpretations. As the editors acknowledge their goal is 'not to offer definitive "solutions" … but, rather, to suggest "processes" that might point agents toward knowledge-base strategies that foster effective forms of social power' (Kutting and Lipschutz 2009, 9).

This approach is supported in the first textbook on environmental governance that analyses the concept of governance from first principles in which Evans (2012, 200) includes 'monkey wrenching' by radical activist group EarthFirst! as a form of environmental governance. The importance of maintaining this radical edge in creating transnational or global forms of environmental governance is now well acknowledged:

Some radical movements are pointing out the dangers of cooptation through global civil society, as well as the dangers of adopting orthodox discourse. They are recognizing the need for the engagers to retain links with the grassroots in the battle over the agency of global civil society and attempts to radicalize and expand it (Ford 2003, 132).

Various forms of environmental governance therefore challenge the neoliberal or market-oriented forms of environmental governance prevalent in, for example, the global climate change discourse. There are many non-market oriented solutions to climate change but the widespread adoption of market based tools by many of the governments that actually attempt to deal with climate change has ensured that the debate in the global media centres largely around this strategy. This often limits the solutions that communities can imagine to issues such as climate change. As Evans (2012, 202) acknowledges, alternative approaches to traditional ways of thinking must be disseminated to, and pursued by, communities to provide more progressive forms in environmental governance.

Environmental governance in a globalised world is clearly, therefore, not simply involvement in transnational funding bodies or institutions, or solely focusing on market-based solutions, it is also engaging in local and transnational processes of societal transformation through an acknowledgement of the intimate connection between ecological and social concerns. All EGs, including those within this paper, have a significant role to play in this process – whether informal local groups or transnational NGOs. It is not clear whether Doyle and Doherty categorically deny any opportunities for EGs in environmental governance but this paper seeks to clarify the issue by demonstrating the positive role they can play through an 'activist environmental governance' in both formal and informal settings.

The environmental groups in this paper opposing the Shwe gas pipeline do so over a range of concerns relating to environmental security and human rights in Myanmar. These groups include Arakan Oil Watch (AOW), a small organisation with only three staff that produces the detailed Shwe Gas Bulletins, and EarthRights International (ERI), a transnational North-South NGO with Special Consultative Status to the UN engaged in both local and global activities, including fieldwork in the forested conflict zones of Myanmar and the representation of local villagers in US courtrooms. Both these organisations were founding members of the Shwe Gas Movement, a coalition that gathers and disseminates information in Myanmar at the local village level while petitioning governments and transnational corporations in international fora. Both this project and other resource projects across the South generally favour large business and entrenched political interests over those of the general population and particularly those of local marginalised communities, of which there are many in Myanmar (McFerson 2009; Smith 2007). Far from providing environmental security to these communities, these projects often heighten insecurity while delivering wealth to business and political elites in both the North and South. This environmental insecurity, which is more prevalent in the South, leads to a focus on social justice and human rights.
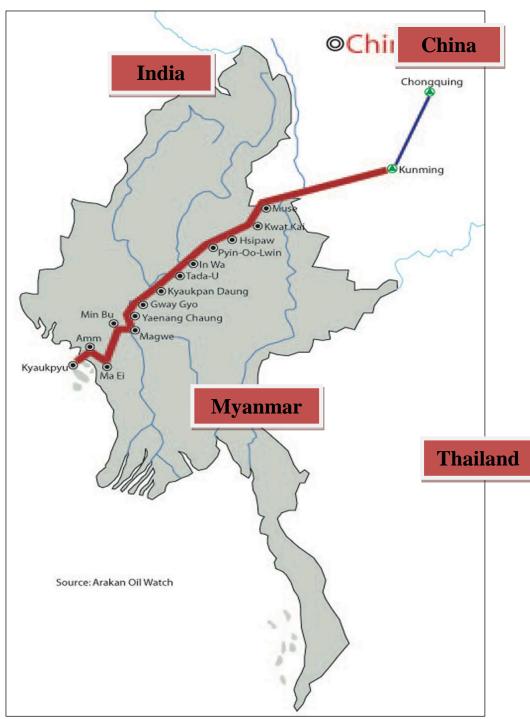
Despite the diversity of the groups in the Shwe campaign, the multiplicity of their activities contribute to enhanced environmental governance of the project by monitoring the activities of key actors and providing information, support and training to those adversely affected. These groups are emancipatory social movement actors who challenge existing social structures including the establishment of a regional energy market for the Shwe gas. Rather than rely on liberal markets to determine the distribution of the gas their desire is to clearly politicise the resource away from the military and China in favour of local communities. They therefore reject the dominant market approach to environmental governance (Evans 2012) and qualify as EGs that play a constructive role in promoting a localised and emancipatory approach to activist environmental governance. Groups that are comprised of exiled ethnic environmental activists who operate in Myanmar's borderlands dominate the Shwe campaign and this background and proximity appears to be reflected in strongly emancipatory approaches to activism.

Despite similar values adopted by EGs in both the North and the South there are potential differences in approach or emphasis relating to these values due to differing political, cultural and environmental settings. In addition, the potential for EGs in the South to undertake a two-track strategy, similar to that outlined by Duffy above, suggests that EGs in the South may adopt different approaches to their campaigns at local and transnational levels, depending on the context they are in and the role they are playing. Whatever their tactics, EGs in both the North and the South self-consciously consider their place within the global governance system to provide a more sensitive and interactive contribution to environmental governance while forming transnational networks and coalitions to enhance campaigns and overcome limited resources. The following analysis of activism against the Shwe gas pipeline demonstrates the intricate interconnections between these actors engaged in a particular

process of environmental governance; one that promotes natural resource rights and challenges the development of regional energy markets.

The Shwe gas pipeline

The Shwe gas pipeline project emerged in 2004 as a tri-nation project to pipe natural gas from the Bay of Bengal off Myanmar's Rakhine (Arakan) State to India via Bangladesh. The main partner corporations in the venture were South Korea's Daewoo International with a majority interest, Korean Gas Corporation (Kogas) and the Indian corporations Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh Ltd and Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL). In January 2006, however, media reports emerged that the vice chairman of PetroChina and the Burmese Ministry of Energy had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in which the Ministry agreed to sell gas from the offshore A1 Block through an overland pipeline to Kunming in Yunnan Province in China for 30 years (see Fig. 1) (*Financial Express* 2006; *India Daily* 2006; Tin Maung Maung Than 2005, 265; Turnell 2007, 123; 2008, 962). A year later China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), the state-owned parent company of the listed PetroChina (Newmyer 2008, 191), announced it was launching a feasibility study on the Yunnan gas pipeline which would follow a proposed 1,250 km oil pipeline between Sittwe and Kunming. The gas pipeline would travel across the Arakan Roma Range, Myanmar proper and northern Shan State (AFP 2007; *Pipeline and Gas Journal* 2007; Xinhua 2007). In August 2007 the Indian government and a senior energy ministry official from Myanmar finally announced that the gas from Myanmar's A1 and A3 Blocks would be sold to China through PetroChina but it wasn't until later that that year that Daewoo International, as the majority operator of the gas fields, confirmed the announcement (Mukul 2007; Reuters 2007a; 2007b; Simpson 2008, 221; Verma 2007). Further MoUs were signed between CNPC and the Myanmar government in 2009 that set the terms for the gas pipeline and also a parallel overland oil pipeline that was to transport oil from the Middle East to Kunming, thus avoiding the Straits of Malacca. The South East Asia Pipeline Company Ltd (SEAP) was then founded in June 2009 as a joint venture between CNPC and the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) to build both pipelines with construction commencing in mid-2010 (Bo Kong 2010, 57), although the pipelines were unlikely to be finished in mid-2013 as planned if the conflict in northern Shan State with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) continued unabated.[3] With a lack of transparency and democratic oversight in the project negotiations and the absence of an environmental law in Myanmar there is no effective state-driven environmental governance process and it is therefore left to civil society actors, primarily those free to critique from outside the country, to provide a critical perspective on the project.

---

[3] Naing Htoo (2012, 13 February). *Interview with* author. Acting Burma Campaigns Director, EarthRights International (ERI). Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Figure 1 – The Shwe Gas Pipeline from Kyauk Phyu to Kunming
Source: Adapted from a map from Arakan Oil Watch

Much of the impacts of the energy projects will affect Kyauk Phyu on Ramree Island and the nearby Maday Island in Rakhine State where *tatmadaw* (Myanmar army) soldiers have expressed support for the Chinese investment in the project. [4] Prominent opposition Arakanese politician Aye Tha Aung argues, however, that Rakhine state faces increased environmental and human rights pressures relating to both increased militarisation and energy projects with land confiscation and forced labour linked to infrastructure projects and

---

[4] Tatmadaw Soldier (2010, 30 December). *Interview with author*. Kyauk Phyu, Rakhine State, Myanmar.

military shrimp farms.[5] In one case two people from each house in an exiled activist's home town were taken as forced labour to build three helicopter pads for the military and later he himself was arrested and tortured.[6] The link between militarisation of these projects and human rights abuses has been exacerbated by the rapid expansion of the Burmese military since 1988 in its attempts to spread its influence to the more remote border regions of the country (Selth 1996, 132). Rakhine State is one of Myanmar's poorest, with the lowest per capita electricity usage in the country according to the state-run media,[7] but with 80 % of the gas to be exported and the rest delivered to factories owned by the military and its business cronies there is likely to be very few improvements to local energy access as a result of the project.

Due to the severe restrictions on public dissent faced by activists across the country for much of the campaign there was no significant local protests over the gas pipeline in Rakhine State itself although its proximity to India and Bangladesh allowed transnational linkages with activists across the border.[8] Its distance from the activist locus of Thailand left local activists particularly isolated although these linkages grew throughout the campaign. In 2004, in the campaign's early stages, the then president of the All Arakan Students and Youth Congress (AASYC), exiled in Bangladesh, indicated that the organisation had learned from the Yadana project where the promised benefits for locals failed to materialise, but he suggested that at that stage knowledge regarding the project in Rakhine State was even lower than it was at a comparable stage in the areas surrounding the Yadana pipeline due to restrictions on their activity.[9]

As with the Yadana project there was no public participation in the development process and although a rudimentary EIA was undertaken, the lack of legislation on this issue limits the efficacy of the process. In this case, however, with CNPC being from China there was less pressure brought to bear by civil society actors than was the case on the Yadana pipeline when Western TNCs were involved. Despite the Chinese state demonstrating an increasing recognition of the need for sustainability in projects within its own borders, it has not given any indication of similar concerns for projects in Myanmar. As a result, with two largely authoritarian regimes playing central roles in the project, for much of the campaign there was little likelihood any opening of channels for domestic public protest.

This started to change in late 2011. In response to Energy Minister U Than Htay's statement in parliament in October 2011, in which he confirmed that eighty % of the Shwe gas was to be exported to China – with the rest to be used in central Myanmar – and emboldened by government reforms and the successful campaign against the Myitsone Dam (Simpson 2012a), the local campaign became more prominent. One aspect of the campaign was the writing of several letters in both Rakhine and Shan states – the two ethnic states the pipeline traverses – to the provincial governments making what could be considered procedural complaints about issues that related to the pipeline construction such as infringing on farmer's land, lack of compensation and road destruction.[10]

---

[5] Aye Tha Aung (2010, 27 December). *Interview with author*. Translated by Zaw Myat Lin. General Secretary, Arakan Leaugue for Democracy (ALD), Secretary of Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) Yangon, Myanmar.

[6] Wong Aung (2009, 6 April). *Interview with author*. Global Coordinator, SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[7] The government's figures in 2005 suggest the per capita consumption of electricity in Rakhine State is 0.6 of one % of that of Yangon Region (Thiha Aung 2005, 8)

[8] Soe Myint (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. Editor and Founder, Mizzima News. Delhi, India.

[9] Kyaw Han (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. President, All Arakan Students and Youth Congress (AASYC), based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. New Delhi, India.

[10] Patrick (2012, 13 February). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

A more confrontational, substantive and dissenting argument in the campaign was the demand that the gas be used to provide 24 hour electricity to Rakhine State before any gas was exported. This campaign linked up with the more formalized political parties in Rakhine State, the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), which participated in the 2010 elections and had parliamentarians in the national parliament, and the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), which boycotted the 2010 elections but agreed to register as a party in late 2011 along with the NLD.[11] Both parties adopted a less confrontational approach than activists, however, and saw potential developmental benefits to the pipeline projects, with the Secretary of the RNDP, Oo Hla Saw, noting that they were much less socially and environmentally damaging than the Myitsone Dam in Kachin State.[12] Indeed he 'welcomed' foreign direct investment in Rakhine State although preferring US/EU investment rather that which came from China due to 'greater transparency and respect for international norms'. While Oo Hla Saw conceded that they 'cannot stop this project' the RNDP argued in parliament that the 20 % of the gas allocated to Myanmar should be used for development in Rakhine State and they set up a '24 hour Electricity Committee' to pursue this objective. The ALD Secretary, Aye Tha Aung, voiced similar opinions from outside the parliamentary system, but argued that more public participation was necessary in the decision-making process and that Rakhine State 'received nothing' under the existing contracts with all technical labour brought in from China and many of the manual labourers brought in from central Myanmar.[13]

The more permissive political atmosphere in Myanmar at this time convinced domestic activists that is was possible to protest openly for the first time and across the state t-shirts, posters, stickers and calendars emerged bearing the message '24 Hours of Electricity Now. We Have the Right to Use Our Gas' (*Mizzima* 2012). Despite the easing of security concerns restrictions remained, with some activists forcibly required by police to remove these t-shirts when engaged in a *Rahta-Swe-Bwe*, or traditional tug-of-war, in Sittwe in early February 2012. Other 'protests' in Sittwe and other towns were muted, with no slogans shouted, but the visibility of the campaign had certainly improved. Even in the new political climate, however, protesting in Rakhine State, far from the international media, is much riskier than campaigning in Yangon. Indeed, although early 2012 saw the well publicised return of several exiled dissidents to Yangon for the first time in two decades Rakhine exiles argued that while it may be safe for 'prominent Burman (Bamar) activists to return it [was] still too early for ethnic activists'.[14]

Local activists were now therefore very openly arguing against allowing the gas to be sold to China in liberal international energy markets but the politicisation of energy markets in relation to Myanmar, and indeed globally, is not in itself a radical argument. In relation to the Shwe gas itself India had actually offered a higher price for the gas than China in the tendering phase but it lacked China's UN Security Council veto that provided such useful diplomatic and political cover (Alamgir 2008, 981; Clarke and Dalliwall 2008; Egreteau 2008, 953).[15] Similarly, in 2005, CNOOC, one of China's state-backed oil corporations, announced a

---

[11] Soon after the ALD decided to participate in the elections the plainclothes security personnel who had been posted outside the Secretary's house for over two decades were removed. Aye Tha Aung (2012, 20 January). *Interview with author*. Translated from Arakanese by Zaw Myat Lin. General Secretary, Arakan Leaugue for Democracy (ALD), Secretary of Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) Yangon, Myanmar.

[12] Oo Hla Saw (2012, 20 January). *Interview with author*. General Secretary, Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP). Yangon, Myanmar.

[13] Aye Tha Aung (2012, 20 January). *Interview with author*. Translated from Arakanese by Zaw Myat Lin. General Secretary, Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Secretary of Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) Yangon, Myanmar.

[14] Jockai Khaing (2012, 11 February). *Interview with author*. Executive Director of AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[15] Under a June 2008 agreement PetroChina will buy gas at US$4.279 per million British thermal units at the wellhead (which will move in step with international oil prices every three months). The price offered by

takeover bid for Unocal, the US corporation with a 'minority non-operating interest' in the Yadana gas pipeline project, which was blocked by the US Congress on the basis of 'national energy security' (ICG 2008, 10; Miller 2010, 103). The US based corporation Chevron then launched a successful counter-bid for Unocal, despite offering a lower price. This evidence support's Litvin's (2003) contention that for all the growth of free markets and trade, energy security is paradoxically too important to the smooth running of capitalist economies to leave entirely to market forces. It also indicates, however, the forces ranged against the activists with the gas and oil pipelines central to China's search for energy security for both Yunnan Province and south-west China. Although the decision to suspend the Myitsone Dam indicated the Myanmar government's increased responsiveness to activists' campaigns it paradoxically increased the importance of the pipelines for China's energy security, and therefore greatly reduced the likelihood that the contracts for the pipelines would be amended. Indeed, a Northern activist who worked on the campaign inside Myanmar had argued nine months before the Myitsone Dam decision that while the Myitsone and other dams might be negotiable, the pipelines are of such importance to China's national security that if they were threatened we are likely to see PLA troops in Myanmar to secure them.[16]

Fortunately for the local campaign, transnational or exiled activists had been campaigning openly in international fora since the campaign commenced, providing a vital outlet for the grievances of local communities on the international stage.

The transnational dimension

The issue of the ownership and control of Rakhine State's gas as well as the potential impacts on human and environmental security of the pipeline projects have been addressed most visibly by the transnational activists' contribution to the projects' environmental governance. This campaign drew particularly on the experience of activists and groups previously involved in the Yadana campaign with the formation early on in the campaign of a transnational coordinating organisation that identified itself as the Shwe Gas Movement (SGM). According to the organisation's website, it comprises individuals and groups of people from western Myanmar who are affected by the plans to extract natural gas from Arakan State as well as regional and international friends who share our concerns (Shwe Gas Movement 2012b).

In essence the SGM is more of a coalition than an entire movement, albeit one that includes networks of individuals and one that, unlike the definition of coalition provided by Yanacopulos, is focused on a single issue (Yanacopulos 2005b, 95). The SGM qualifies as more of a coalition because at its core it has a relatively formal membership with the original core in Thailand comprising Arakan Oil Watch (AOW), the All Arakan Students and Youth Congress (AASYC) and the US/Myanmar NGO EarthRights International (ERI). It can also be considered what Tarrow defines as a 'campaign coalition', rather than an instrumental, event or federated coalition due to the combination of 'high intensity of involvement with long term cooperation' (Tarrow 2005, 168). Decision-making within the organisation emphasises not only democratic principles, with a lack of hierarchy and communal decision-making, but also a focus on justice. While ERI played a central role in the early development of the coalition it later diluted its role, and eventually left the coalition, in favour of the Arakanese ethnic groups to acknowledge their particular interest and ownership of the campaign.[17] Rather than

---

PetroChina was lower than the US $4.41 per mmBtu price offered by GAIL to pipe the gas to India (*The Economic Times* 2008).

[16] Founder of Myanmar-based Environmental NGO (2011, 6 January). *Interview with author*. (details witheld on request). Yangon, Myanmar.

[17] Smith, M. (2009, 6 April). *Interview with author*. Senior Consultant, ERI. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

displaying a lack of commitment this decision was consistent with ERI's ongoing role as a facilitator and trainer of Southern activists and groups.

Bringing these organisations together has provided the economies of scale that coalitions can afford (Yanacopulos 2005a, 259), and has allowed the publication of regular reports by drawing upon diverse resources. The SGM also has Arakanese coordinators based in Chiang Mai including Wong Aung, the SGM Global Coordinator, who focuses on international advocacy, and Phyo Phyo, who joined SGM in 2010.[18] Other activists in the region were informed about the Shwe gas project when Wong Aung presented a case study as one of three examples on the impact of foreign investment on livelihoods at a public hearing on corporate social responsibility prior to the ASEAN Peoples' Forum in Jakarta May 2011.[19] Although based in Thailand Phyo Phyo re-entered Myanmar in 2010-11 to provide education and training for Arakan youth regarding the project but this is largely undertaken in the American Centre and British Club in Yangon, which can be more easily considered foreign islands within the country rather than domestic spaces for political dialogue.[20] The other core members are the SGM-Bangladesh and SGM-India, comprised of interested individuals from various exiled Arakanese groups while exiled Shan groups such as the Ta-aung Student and Youth Organisation (TSYO)[21] and Palaung Women's Organisation (PWO)[22], based in Mae Sot in Thailand, provide occasional expertise on the impacts in Shan State.

The movement against the Shwe project is similar to others based in the South in that they facilitate a local-global connection and link into broader justice and human rights campaigns (Chatterjee and Finger 1994, 76), in this case relating to Myanmar. The linking and networking with other campaigns such as those against the Yadana and Salween Dam projects (Simpson 2007), both in eastern Myanmar, has resulted in a cross-fertilisation of ideas resulting in more effective activities, a process that della Porta and Mosca demonstrate has also occurred elsewhere (della Porta and Mosca 2007). The campaign illustrated the extensive cross-border linkages with both Northern and Southern activists cooperating across the region, even if they prefer anonymity over their involvement. One Northern activist who has been based in Thailand for almost two decades noted that for the SGM there are a number of very close support groups, including myself and my organisation that participate in most activities but [we] stay away from formal membership as we also facilitate financial support.[23]

Other formal members of the SGM who communicated regularly across the region included the Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS), the Korean Federation of Environmental Movements (KFEM) and other NGOs in India and Bangladesh.

While these network members highlight their concerns over ecological damage associated with the Shwe project, the overriding concerns of the network relate far more closely to the inability of the people of Myanmar, and particularly ethnic minorities in Rakhine, Chin and Shan States, to participate in any decision making processes regarding the project, with their involvement likely to be 'limited to forced labour and land confiscation'.[24] With Arakanese exiles having personally experienced forced labour and torture under the military regime, the gas project is considered to be primarily an 'Arakan national issue', inseparable

---

[18] Wong Aung (2009, 6 April). *Interview with author*. Global Coordinator, SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[19] Premrudee Daoroung (2011, 13 May). *Interview with author*. Co-director Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA). Bangkok.

[20] Phyo Phyo (2011, 7 January). *Interview with Author*. Pseudonym for activist with SGM. Yangon, Myanmar.

[21] Mai Aung Ko (2010, 3 December). *Interview with* Author. General Secretary, Ta-aung Student and Youth Organisation (TSYO). Mae Sot, Thailand.

[22] Lwin Lwin Nao (2010, 3 December). *Interview* with Author. Coordinator of the Information and Documentation Department, Palaung Women's Organisation (PWO). Mae Sot, Thailand.

[23] Patrick (2007, 30 January). *Email to author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[24] Patrick (2005, 11 January). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

from broader justice concerns.[25] Groups like the Burma Lawyers' Council (BLC) therefore provide human rights training for Shwe activists in Chin State to enable more effective reporting of human rights abuses.[26] As with the Yadana campaign, concerns over human rights are manifest in any ecological concerns in the Shwe campaign with the founder and editor-in-chief of Mizzima News, Soe Myint, arguing that 'the right to self determination is critical; the right [for local ethnic minorities] to exploit, protect [or] use the environment as they wish'.[27]

As a result the two campaign goals of the SGM were to postpone the extraction of the Shwe natural gas deposit until a time when the affected people in Western Myanmar can participate in decisions about the use of their local resources and related infrastructure development without fearing persecution [and] withdraw or freeze all current business with the military regime, and [for TNCs and governments to] refrain from further investment until dialogue can be held with a democratically elected government (Shwe Gas Movement 2012b).

The SGM was initiated in 2002 by the All Arakan Student and Youth Congress (AASYC), an exiled Arakanese group with offices in Bangladesh and Chiang Mai and Mae Sot in Thailand. It is largely the Buddhist Arakanese from Rakhine State who have been at the forefront of the Shwe campaign with the Muslim Rohingya yet to be fully engaged.[28] Despite common opposition to the project and many other examples of multi-ethnic cooperation there remain residual ethnic cleavages that the Myanmar military have traditionally exploited, following in the footsteps of the English colonial administrations (Fink 2009, 15; Lintner 1999; Schober 2007, 58-60; Smith 1999). Nevertheless with the pipeline crossing the whole of Myanmar into China, activists saw it as a potential unifier, at least within the activist community: 'the Shwe Pipeline is now an opportunity to bring together Arakanese, [Burman] Burmese and Shan activists'.[29] As an indicator of this emerging multi-ethnic cooperation the Shan coordinator of Salween Watch, which opposes large dams on Myanmar's Salween River, attended meetings with the SGM in Chiang Mai in 2008 and 2009, indicating increased cross-campaign cooperation as well.[30]

With the AASYC at the vanguard of the campaign from the beginning San Ray Kyaw, an AASYC Central Executive Committee member, contrasted the development of the Shwe campaign with the Yadana campaign, which was slow to initiate transnational links:

We learnt from the Yadana campaign. There is [now] cooperation between activists in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Thailand and Korea before [the Shwe project even] gets underway.[31]

Campaign committees were set up in all these countries and also the US with ERI participating but allowing the ethnic groups to drive the process.[32] Nevertheless, some ERI activists were regularly involved in SGM meetings in Thailand while others helped set up the

[25] Smith, M. (2009, 6 April). *Interview with author*. Project Coordinator (Pipelines and Mining), ERI. Chiang Mai.

[26] Myint Thein (2004, 19 January). *Interview with author*. NLD-LA General Secretary and BLC Founding Executive Council Member. Myanmar Lawyers' Council (BLC) Office, Mae Sod, Thailand.

[27] Soe Myint (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. Editor and Founder, Mizzima News. Delhi, India.

[28] Patrick (2007, 30 January). *Email to author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[29] Patrick (2009, 2 January). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[30] Jockai Khaing (2009, 2 January). *Interview with author*. Executive Director of AOW. Chiang Mai. Sai Sai (2009, 9 January). *Interview with author*. Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization (Sapawa). Chiang Mai. Wong Aung (2009, 6 April). *Interview with author*. Global Coordinator, Shwe Gas Movement (SGM). Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[31] San Ray Kyaw (2005, 11 January). *Interview with author*. Central Executive Committe Member, AASYC, Chiang Mai.

[32] Angela (2005, 10 January). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Program Coordinator, ERI, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Catherine (2005, 10 January). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Assistant Director, Southeast Asia Office of ERI, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

committee in South Korea with ERI founder Ka Hsaw Wa himself travelling to Yunnan to help establish the campaign there with alumni of ERI's EarthRights Mekong School.[33]

Soe Myint of Mizzima News argued there was no shortage of volunteers for the campaign committee in India as many NGOs in India's northeast opposed the pipeline, seeing little benefit for local communities in both Myanmar and India.[34] Kyaw Han, president of AASYC, also emphasised the lessons learnt from the Yadana campaign, specifically that promises to the communities around the Yadana Pipeline had been broken with the communities reaping few benefits and promises of electricity to local communities remaining unfulfilled.[35] As a result of the lessons learnt and shared by activists in the Yadana, Salween and Shwe campaigns – some of whom had been involved in all three – the strategy in the Shwe campaign focused on approaching companies and governments asking [them] not to do business in Myanmar [but the activists] don't approach [the] Burmese regime as they have made it clear they will proceed whatever the concerns.[36]

San Ray Kyaw likewise emphasised that they attempt to 'stop [the project] through other means than contact with [Myanmar's military government]'.[37] The campaign therefore originally targeted the TNCs GAIL and ONGC in India and Daewoo in Korea.[38] When it became clear throughout 2006-7 that the gas would be sold to China rather than India and that a pipeline would be built to Kunming, the focus of activists shifted eastwards and the Chinese TNCs, CNOOC and PetroChina were also targeted.

The other Arakanese organisation that was a core member of the SGM was Arakan Oil Watch (AOW), a small group with only three formal staff which, since the early stages of the Shwe campaign in March 2005, produced the Shwe Gas Bulletin on a bimonthly basis (Arakan Oil Watch 2008b). These publications were an essential conduit for disseminating information throughout the region via email and hard copy.[39] The main author of the report was Jockai Khaing, an Arakanese Buddhist refugee who arrived in Chiang Mai in 2000. Initially a democracy activist, he became involved with the SGM as the project gained publicity in the mid 2000s.[40] Like most activists in the Myanmar campaigns, he was committed to nonviolence:

I think that it will be difficult for me to do something against … Buddhism. I like the philosophy of nonviolence. I think that nonviolent action is the best way to resist against anything.[41]

In early 2008 Jockai travelled to China and met with Chinese NGOs for discussions on the strategy in relation to the Chinese state. As well as working with AOW, he had worked closely for many years with ALTSEAN-Burma, which used the Shwe project as well as the Salween and Yadana case studies in its security literacy training.[42] This linkage provides further evidence of the networks created between organisations and activists from different

[33] Ka Hsaw Wa (2009, 9 January). *Interview with author*. Co-Founder/Executive Director ERI. Chiang Mai, Thailand; Naing Htoo (2004, 21 October). *Email to author*. Program Coordinator, ERI. Chiang Mai, Thailand. Smith, M. (2008, 10 April). *Email to author*. Project Coordinator (Pipelines and Mining), ERI. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[34] Soe Myint (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. Editor and Founder, Mizzima News. Delhi, India.

[35] Kyaw Han (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. President, All Arakan Students and Youth Congress (AASYC), based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. New Delhi, India.

[36] Soe Myint (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. Editor and Founder, Mizzima News. Delhi, India.

[37] San Ray Kyaw (2005, 11 January). *Interview with author*. Central Executive Committe Member AASYC, Chiang Mai.

[38] Soe Myint (2004, 24 December). *Interview with author*. Editor and Founder, Mizzima News. Delhi, India.

[39] Patrick (2007, 30 January). *Email to author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[40] Jockai Khaing (2009, 2 January). *Interview with author*. Executive Director of AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[41] Jockai Khaing (2007, 19 December). *Email to author*. Executive Director of AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

[42] Hudson, M. (2007, 30 November). *Email to author*. ALTSEAN-Myanmar Myanmar Senior Training Officer SLT. Bangkok. Jockai Khaing (2007, 19 December). *Email to author*. Executive Director of AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

campaigns that are linked into broader justice and human rights movements (Chatterjee and Finger 1994, 76; della Porta and Mosca 2007). In 2009 AOW also began leading covert workshops in Rakhine State. These workshops had only 6-7 participants to avoid attracting unwanted attention by the government or army and promoted the concept of natural resource rights for local communities. They catered to two types of participants, either 'affected communities' or intellectual 'activists', such as writers, academics or journalists, indicating the importance of communicating with a broad range of societal actors.[43]

Although AOW cooperated with SGM and they coordinated their international campaigns, for security reasons they worked separately from each other on the ground in Myanmar. While they might both be undertaking research or dissemination activities in Rakhine State at the same time, the respective groups didn't communicate about where they were active and they feigned unfamiliarity if they happened to meet.[44] This security consciousness was underlined by Thu Rein, who avoided arrest by arriving in Thailand in 2010 and became the Campaign Coordinator of AOW. He had set up the Association of University Stipends and Social Affairs Rakhine (AUSSAR), a student body, in Sittwe in 2004. In 2009 eleven student members were arrested and received sentences of up to six years in prison with three years for each of two illegal activities: 'contacting unlawful [e.g. exiled] associations', such as AOW, and 'illegal border crossings', into Thailand or India.[45] These young students were taken to prisons in other states and regions – some as far away as Kachin State – which made it difficult for old or poor relatives to visit. Although the easing of security tensions under the new government meant most of the group were released in the January 2012 amnesty, four remained in jail.[46]

Apart from the regular Shwe Gas Bulletins, the main publication of AOW was *Blocking Freedom* (Arakan Oil Watch 2008a), that examined Chinese investments in oil and gas in Myanmar, with a new report to be published in 2012 on environmental and resettlement issues surrounding the oil development project on Maday Island.[47] The development and enhancement of ICT skills by activists over the duration of the campaigns was a key driver in the increasing sophistication of the information dissemination. As an activist noted: 'doing the Shwe Gas Bulletins really helped with our ability to put together Blocking Freedom'.[48] The other main reports published by the wider SGM entitled *Supply and Command* (Shwe Gas Movement 2006), *Corridor of Power* (Shwe Gas Movement 2009) and *Sold Out* (Shwe Gas Movement 2011) once again demonstrated the benefits to environmental movements of inexpensive desktop publishing and was driven primarily by AASYC with support from other groups. While *Supply and Command* lists ecological concerns such as the destruction of mangroves and rainforests (Shwe Gas Movement 2006, 38-39), much of the report focuses on the ongoing human rights abuses in the region such as forced labour and land seizure that have resulted from increased militarisation and the entrenching of the military regime through gas revenues. These issues are also connected by activists, with one arguing that mangrove swamps have been disappearing at an accelerating rate in the region since the mid-1990s when the military started confiscating coastal land to create shrimp farms to enrich the

---

[43] Jockai Khaing (2012, 11 February). *Interview with author*. Executive Director of AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.
[44] Phyo Phyo (2012, 18 February). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for activist with Shwe Gas Movement (SGM). Yangon, Myanmar.
[45] Thu Rein (2012, 11 February). *Interview with author*. Campaign Coordinator AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.
[46] Phyo Phyo (2012, 18 February). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for activist with Shwe Gas Movement (SGM). Yangon, Myanmar.
[47] Thu Rein (2012, 11 February). *Interview with author*. Campaign Coordinator AOW. Chiang Mai, Thailand.
[48] Patrick (2009, 2 January). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Chiang Mai, Thailand.

local battalions.[49] An article in the *Bangladesh Independent* in the same year, which was co-authored by Mizzima News, also highlighted this destruction to the ecosystem.

Invaded by steadily encroaching fisheries and illegal logging of species, mangrove areas in the country's coastal region, especially in the ... Irrawadday [delta], have received the most awesome blow to be depleted 80 % over the past seven decades (*Independent Bangladesh* 2005).

The damage to these areas has some gradual impacts on local communities, but it can also be devastating with the ASEAN secretary-general blaming this mangrove destruction for the enormous death toll in Myanmar from Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Kinver 2008).

While these reports were available and distributed around the region in hard copy, the main online medium of information dissemination that greatly facilitated these events was the SGM website (Shwe Gas Movement 2012b). As they have for other social movements mobile communication technologies and the internet have been crucial in the development of environmental activist networks (Eschle 2005, 21; Klein 2001). Although Northern activists assisted with the setting up of the site, it was predominantly local groups such as the AASYC that provided much of the information and research.[50] As with most projects in Myanmar, the issues of human rights and environmental protection are closely related and the website cited threats to endangered species and Burmese rainforests juxtaposed with threats to the Arakanese way of life, land confiscation and forced labour. As with many other websites of exiled groups and media organisations the website was blocked in Myanmar itself until September 2011 when, along with the other exiled sites and those of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* and *Bangkok Post*, the block was removed and access was made available.

The transnational campaign also gathered favourable international media attention around this time with reports in *The New York Times* (Perlez 2006) and Al Jazeera:

> While the gas goes abroad and profit goes to the military, locals live without electricity for all but two hours a day .... In this oil and gas-rich area, once the sun goes down and the region's resources are piped across the border to China, the locals will once again be left in the dark (*Al Jazeera* 2008).

The SGM sought out this traditional media coverage by regularly distributing press releases and in September 2011 they hired the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) to launch their latest report, *Sold Out* (Shwe Gas Movement 2011). With each organisation within the SGM having extremely limited funds the ability to pool their resources to afford such an outlay demonstrated the efficiency of forming coalitions (Yanacopulos 2005a, 259). The attention from regional and global media organisations provided publicity for the campaign throughout the North and South, communicating their struggle for natural resource rights far beyond the existing Shwe activist network.

Central components of the transnational campaign, and ones that grew in importance over time were International Days of Action against the Shwe project from 2005 (Doyle and Simpson 2006, 757). Following the changing domestic political situation, however, the seventh International Day of Action on 1 March 2012 added new tactics to the day's activities. While the regular protests were held outside Chinese, South Korean or Indian embassies for the first time there were also protests held outside Myanmar embassies and also a jointly endorsed letter sent to President Thein Sein. During previous actions the campaigning had

---

[49] Patrick (2005, 11 January). *Interview with author*. Pseudonym for Northern activist assisting SGM. Lanna Cafe, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
[50] San Ray Kyaw (2005, 11 January). *Interview with author*. Central Executive Committe Member, AASYC, Chiang Mai.

been solely focused on foreign corporations and governments because the Myanmar government was seen as totally unresponsive. The earlier report, *Supply and Command* (2006), ignored the government completely and called on

> foreign governments, institutions, and civil society … to pressure businesses involved in the Shwe gas project [and for] all corporations and businesses involved in the Shwe project, either state or privately owned, to freeze all current business with the military regime (Shwe Gas Movement 2006, 3).

The gradual opening of domestic political spaces and the announcements on the Myitsone Dam and the Dawei coal fired power station, however limited in their scope, suggested that the government was now more amenable to community pressures, resulting in a more conciliatory approach by the SGM, which addressed the president directly in a letter signed by dozens of mostly exiled and international NGOs:

> Dear President U Thein Sein [using the honorific 'U'] … We are calling for the government to postpone this project until rights are protected and negative impacts are prevented within a sustainable framework for national development (Shwe Gas Movement 2012a).

Despite the historical animosity between the government and exiled activists the relative détente currently occurring between the government and most opposition groups bodes well for future communication and negotiation, although this is only relative to five decades of authoritarianism and there remains a long way to go before serious public participation is accepted as part of the political and developmental process in Myanmar.

Conclusion

The development of transnational energy markets in Asia raises significant issues in relation to justice and human and environmental security throughout the region. The existence of both affluent powerful states and poor resource-rich authoritarian states creates a dynamic whereby the poor states are encouraged to sell their energy resources to the rich states in exchange for hard currency to create a regional energy market. Environmental activists from Myanmar who oppose the Shwe gas pipeline project do not recognise the authority of the previous authoritarian government that sold their natural resources and have challenged the establishment of this market, arguing that the energy resources could be more beneficially employed in promoting economic development within their own state. They also argue that the development and transport of energy resources, such as the Shwe gas and its associated oil pipeline, causes adverse social and environmental issues that are exacerbated by a lack of public participation in any stage of the decision making process.

To be truly effective, any form of environmental governance requires genuine participation from local communities and civil society groups. This is particularly crucial in the development and implementation of energy policies, given energy's central importance to society and its intimate connection to environmental concerns. The formal domestic political space available for participation under Myanmar's authoritarian regime has been virtually non-existent although since 2011, under a new nominally civilian regime, the domestic opportunities are increasing. Previously, activists from Myanmar shifted their attention to transnational arenas, particularly the Thai-Burmese border region, where the influence of domestic authority structures was diminished.

This paper has argued that the environmental groups participating in the campaign against the Shwe gas project operate under emancipatory principles and therefore qualify as emancipatory groups (EGs) under the model espoused by Doyle and Doherty (2006) but that

this model is too restrictive in its definition of environmental governance and that these groups do indeed engage in a form of 'activist environmental governance'. Although they are opposed by powerful business and political forces these groups have raised considerable international awareness of the environmental and human rights concerns faced by ethnic minority and marginalised communities in Myanmar in relation to these projects.

While China sees these projects as crucial for its future energy security and will likely go to extreme lengths to ensure they proceed, its primary focus is on the oil pipeline as a transit for Middle East oil. If the Myanmar government responds favourably to the calls for greater Rakhine ownership of their gas there may be some room for either removing this from the transnational energy market or modifying the contract to ensure more than twenty % of the gas remains in Myanmar. The government will be extremely reticent to push for such an amendment, particularly in light of the Myitsone Dam suspension, but environmental campaigns against Myanmar's energy exports have achieved some successes and despite the odds, further activism may well exercise the natural resource rights that belong to all local communities.

REFERENCES

AFP (2007, 16 January). 'China's CNPC inks exploration deal for Myanmar oil, gas.' *Agence France Presse (AFP)*.

Al Jazeera (2008, 31 January). 'Myanmar resources offer few riches'. http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/9AB69756-8B71-470B-B30D-2996DE70D360.htm. Accessed:3 March 2008.

Alamgir, J. (2008). 'Myanmar's foreign trade and its political consequences.' *Asian Survey*, 48(6): 977–96.

Alcock, F. (2008). 'Conflicts and coalitions within and across the ENGO community.' *Global Environmental Politics*. November, 8(4): 66-91.

Arakan Oil Watch (2008a). *Blocking Freedom: A Case Study of China's Oil and Gas Investments in Burma*. (Arakan Oil Watch, Chiang Mai). October. http://www.shwe.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Blocking-Freedom-English.pdf. Accessed:4 February 2012.

------ (2008b). *The Shwe Gas Bulletin*. (Arakan Oil Watch (AOW)). March.

Bo Kong (2010). 'The geopolitics of the Myanmar-China oil and gas pipelines.' in E. Chow, L. E. Hendrix, M. E. Herberget al (eds), *Pipeline Politics in Asia: The Intersection of Demand, Energy Markets, and Supply Routes*. (Seattle, The National Bureau of Asian Research).

Bretherton, C. (2003). 'Movements, networks, hierarchies: A gender perspective on global environmental governance.' *Global Environmental Politics*. May, 3(2): 103-19.

Carmin, J. and A. Fagan (2010). 'Environmental mobilisation and organisations in post-socialist Europe and the former Soviet Union.' *Environmental Politics*, 19(5): 689-707.

Chatterjee, P. and M. Finger (1994). *The Earth Brokers: Power, Politics, and World Development*. (London and New York: Routledge).

Chaturvedi, S. (2005). 'India's quest for energy security: The geopolitics and geoeconomics of pipelines.' in D. Rumley and S. Chaturvedi (eds), *Energy Security in the Indian Ocean Region*. (New Delhi, South Asian Publishers).

Clarke, R. and S. Dalliwall (2008, 4 September). 'Sino-Indian competition for Burmese oil and natural gas.' *Harvard International Review*. http://www.harvardir.org/articles/1751/. Accessed: 15 September 2008.

Conca, K. and J. Wallace (2009). 'Environment and peacebuilding in war-torn societies: Lessons from the UN Environment Programme's experience with postconflict assessment.' *Global Governance*, 15: 485-504.

della Porta, D. and L. Mosca (2007). 'In movimento: 'Contamination' in action and the Italian Global Justice Movement.' *Global Networks*. January, 7(1): 1-27.

Doyle, T. and B. Doherty (2006). 'Green public spheres and the green governance state: The politics of emancipation and ecological conditionality.' *Environmental Politics*. November, 15(5): 881-92.

Doyle, T. and A. Simpson (2006). 'Traversing more than speed bumps: Green politics under authoritarian regimes in Burma and Iran.' *Environmental Politics*. November, 15(5): 750-67.

Duffy, R. (2006). 'Non-governmental organisations and governance states: The impact of transnational environmental management networks in Madagasacar.' *Environmental Politics*. November, 15(5): 731-49.

The Economic Times (2008, 30 June). 'ONGC, GAIL share in Myanmar blocks fall'. India. http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/News_By_Industry/Energy/Oil__Gas/ONGC_GAIL_share_in_Myanmar_blocks_fall/rssarticleshow/3179239.cms. Accessed: 22 July 2008.

Egreteau, R. (2008). 'India's ambitions in Burma: More frustration than success?' *Asian Survey*, 48(6): 936–57.

Elliott, L. (2004). *The Global Politics of the Environment*. Second edition. (New York: New York University Press).

Eschle, C. (2005). 'Constructing 'the anti-globalisation movement'.' in C. Eschle and B. Maiguashca (eds), *Critical Theories, International Relations and 'the Anti-Globalisation Movement': The Politics of Global Resistance*. (London and New York, Routledge).

Evans, J. P. (2012). *Environmental Governance*. (London and New York: Routledge).

Financial Express (2006, 11 January). 'Myanmar pact with Petro China for sale of gas: India's efforts to import gas hit'. http://www.financialexpress.com/fe_full_story.php?content_id=114117. Accessed: 20 January 2006.

Fink, C. (2009). *Living Silence in Burma: Surviving under Military Rule.* Second edition. (London and New York: Zed Books).

Florini, A. and B. K. Sovacool (2011). 'Bridging the gaps in global energy governance.' *Global Governance*. January-March, 17(1): 57-74.

Ford, L. H. (2003). 'Challenging global environmental governance: Social movement agency and global civil society.' *Global Environmental Politics*. May, 3(2): 120-34.

Garner, R. (2011). *Environmental Politics: The Age of Climate Change.* Third edition. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Harrison, G. (2004). *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States*. (London: Routledge).

Haufler, V. (2010). 'Disclosure as governance: The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and resource management in the developing world.' *Global Environmental Politics*. August, 10(3): 53-73.

ICG (2008). *China's Thirst for Oil*. (International Crisis Group (ICG), Brussels). 9 June. Asia Report No. 153. http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/153_china_s_thirst_for_oil.pdf. Accessed: 10 June 2008.

Independent Bangladesh (2005, 12 April). 'Myanmar's mangrove eco-system faces devastation'. http://www.independent-bangladesh.com/. Accessed:15 June 2006.

India Daily (2006, 10 January). 'Myanmar has refused to supply natural gas to New Delhi and instead preferred doing business with China'. http://www.indiadaily.com/default.asp. Accessed: 20 January 2006.

Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, S. I. (2010). 'The United Nations and global energy governance: past challenges, future choices.' *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 22(2): 175-95.

Khagram, S. and S. H. Ali (2008). 'Transnational transformations: From government-centric interstate regimes to cross-sectoral multi-level networks of global governance.' in J. Park, K. Conca and M. Finger (eds), *The Crisis of Global Environmental Governance: Towards a New Political Economy of Sustainability*. (London and New York, Routledge).

Kinver, M. (2008, 6 May). 'Mangrove loss 'left Burma exposed'.' *BBC News*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7385315.stm. Accessed: 7 May 2008.

Klein, N. (2001). 'Farewell to "The End of History": Organization and vision in anti-corporate movements.' in L. Panitch and C. Leys (eds), *Socialist Register 2002: A World of Contradictions*. (London, Merlin Press).

Kutting, G., (ed.) (2011). *Global Environmental Politics: Concepts, Theories and Case Studies*. (London and New York, Routledge).

Kutting, G. and R. D. Lipschutz, (eds) (2009). *Environmental Governance: Power and Knowledge in a Local-Global World*. (London and New York, Routledge).

Lesage, D., T. Van de Graaf and K. Westphal (2009). 'The G8's role in global energy governance since the 2005 Gleneagles Summit.' *Global Governance*, 15: 259-77.

------ (2010). *Global Energy Governance in a Multipolar World*. (Farnham: Ashgate).

Lintner, B. (1999). *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948.* 2nd edition. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm).

Lipschutz, R. D. and J. Mayer (1996). *Global civil society and global environmental governance: The politics of nature from place to planet*. (Albany: SUNY).

Litfin, K. (2009). 'Reinventing the future: The global ecovillage movement as a holistic knowledge community.' in G. Kutting and R. D. Lipschutz (eds), *Environmental Governance: Power and Knowledge in a Local-Global World*. (London and New York, Routledge).

Litvin, D. (2003). *Empires of Profit: Commerce, Conquest and Corporate Responsibility*. (New York and London: Texere).

Matti, S. (2010). 'Resources and rent seeking in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.' *Third World Quarterly*, 31(3): 401-13.

McFerson, H. M. (2009). 'Governance and hyper-corruption in resource-rich African countries.' *Third World Quarterly*, 30(8): 1529-47.

Mertha, A. (2009). '"Fragmented authoritarianism 2.0": Political pluralization in the Chinese policy process.' *The China Quarterly*, 200: 995–1012.

Miller, K. (2010). 'Coping with China's financial power: Beijing's financial foreign policy.' *Foreign Affairs*. July-August, 89(4): 96-109.

Mizzima (2012, 8 February). 'PTT ready to expand its Burma oil business'. http://www.mizzima.com/business/6558-ptt-ready-to-expand-its-burma-oil-business.html. Accessed:12 February 2012.

Mukul, J. (2007, 6 December). 'GAIL, ONGC lose out on Myanmar gas contract.' *Daily News & Analysis (DNA)*. Mumbai. http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?newsid=1137525. Accessed: 19 December 2007.

Newmyer, J. (2008). 'Chinese energy security and the Chinese regime.' in D. Moran and J. A. Russell (eds), *Energy Security and Global Politics: The Militarization of Resource Management*. (London and New York, Routledge).

O'Neill, K. (2009). *The Environment and International Relations*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Okereke, C. (2008). 'Equity norms in global environmental governance.' *Global Environmental Politics*. August, 8(3): 25-50.

Paterson, M., D. Humphreys and L. Pettiford (2003). 'Conceptualizing global environmental governance: From interstate regimes to counter-hegemonic struggles.' *Global Environmental Politics*. May, 3(2): 1-10.

Perlez, J. (2006, 17 November). 'Myanmar is left in dark, an energy-rich orphan.' *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/17/world/asia/17myanmar.html. Accessed: 22 November 2006.

Pipeline and Gas Journal (2007, March). 'CNPC, Myanmar launch feasibility study on gas pipeline'.

Reuters (2007a, 22 April). 'China-Myanmar oil pipe work to begin this year.' *Reuters UK*. http://uk.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idUKPEK7637220070422. Accessed: 5 September 2007.

------ (2007b, 16 August). 'Myanmar confirms agreement to sell gas to China.' *Yahoo! Asia News*. http://asia.news.yahoo.com/070816/3/36hf0.html. Accessed: 5 September 2007.

Schober, J. (2007). 'Buddhism, violence, and the state in Burma (Myanmar) and Sri Lanka.' in L. E. Cady and S. W. Simon (eds), *Religion and Conflict in South and Southeast Asia: Disrupting Violence*. (New York and Oxford, Routledge): 51-69.

Selth, A. (1996). *Transforming the Tatmadaw: The Burmese Armed Forces Since 1988*. (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University).

Shwe Gas Movement (2006). *Supply and Command: Natural Gas in Western Burma set to Entrench Military Rule*. (Shwe Gas Movement, Mae Sot, Thailand). July. http://www.shwe.org/SUPPLYANDCOMMAND.pdf. Accessed: 26 July 2006.

------ (2009). *Corridor of Power: China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines*. (Shwe as Movement (SGM), Chiang Mai, Thailand). September. http://www.shwe.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/CorridorofPower.pdf. Accessed:10 February 2012.

------ (2011). *Sold Out: Launch of China Pipeline Project Unleashes Abuse across Burma*. (Shwe Gas Movement (SGM), Chiang Mai, Thailand). September. http://www.shwe.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Sold-Out-English-Web-Version.pdf. Accessed:11 February 2012.

------ (2012a). *Letter to President U Thein Sein*. (Shwe Gas Movement (SGM), Chiang Mai). 1 March.

------ (2012b). *The Shwe Gas Movement*. http://www.shwe.org/. Updated: 9 February. Accessed: 11 February 2012.

Simpson, A. (2007). 'The environment-energy security nexus: Critical analysis of an energy 'love triangle' in Southeast Asia.' *Third World Quarterly*. April, 28(3): 539-54.

------ (2008). 'Gas pipelines and security in South and Southeast Asia: A critical perspective.' in T. Doyle and M. Risely (eds), *Crucible for Survival: Environmental Security and Justice in the Indian Ocean Region*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London, Rutgers University Press): 210-27.

------ (2012a). 'Market building and risk in authoritarian contexts: The Asian Development Bank in Burma (Myanmar).' in T. Carroll and D. Jarvis (eds), *Public Organisations and Market Building in Asia*. (Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan).

------ (2012b). 'Transnational activism under authoritarianism in Myanmar (Burma): Building an "activist diaspora".' in F. Cavatorta and E. Lust (eds), *Civil Society Activism under Authoritarian Rule: A Comparative Perspective*. (London and New York, Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science).

Smith, M. (1999). *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. 2nd edition. (London: Zed Books).

Smith, M. F. (2007). 'Environmental governance of mining in Burma.' in M. Skidmore and T. Wilson (eds), *Myanmar: The State, Community and the Environment*. (Canberra, ACT Asia Pacific Press, ANU): 218-45.

Sovacool, B. K. (2009). 'Energy policy and cooperation in Southeast Asia: The history, challenges, and implications of the trans-ASEAN gas pipeline (TAGP) network.' *Energy Policy*, 37: 2356–67.

Szep, J. (2012, 27 January). 'Myanmar has no plans to export new gas finds.' *Reuters*. http://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL4E8CR3SO20120127?sp=true. Accessed: 1 February 2012.

Tarrow, S. (2005). *The New Transnational Activism*. (New York: Cambridge University Press)).

Thant Myint-U (2011). *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia*. (London: Faber and Faber).

Thiha Aung (2005). 'Hailing the 58th Anniversary Union Day: Rakhine State marching to a new golden land of unity and amity.' *New Light of Myanmar*. 6 February. http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs2/RakhineDvm.pdf. Accessed: 22 July 2008.

Tin Maung Maung Than (2005). 'Myanmar's energy sector: Banking on natural gas.' in C. K. Wah and D. Singh (eds), *Southeast Asian Affairs*. (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies): 257–92.

Turnell, S. (2007). 'Myanmar's economy in 2006.' in M. Skidmore and T. Wilson (eds), *Myanmar: The State, Community and the Environment*. (Canberra, ACT Asia Pacific Press, ANU): 108-34.

------ (2008). 'Burma's insatiable state.' *Asian Survey*, 48(6): 958–76.

------ (2009). *Fiery Dragons: Banks, Moneylenders and Microfinance in Burma*. (Copenhagen: NIAS Press).

Verma, N. (2007, 14 August). 'Myanmar to sell gas to China - India minister.' *Reuters India*. http://in.reuters.com/article/businessNews/idINIndia-28977320070814?sp=true. Accessed: 5 September 2007.

Xinhua (2007, 30 January). 'China's CNPC, Myanmar Oil & Gas launch feasibility study on gas pipeline.' *Xinhua*.

Yanacopulos, H. (2005a). 'Patterns of governance: The rise of transnational coalitions of NGOs.' *Global Society*. July, 19(3): 247-66.

------ (2005b). 'The strategies that bind: NGO coalitions and their influence.' *Global Networks*, 5(1): 93–110.