

## **The Role of Danu Ozi (Drum) in Ethnic Identity in Pindaya Township, Southern Shan State, Myanmar**

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### **Abstract**

The Danu, a sub-ethnic group of the Shan people, mostly live in Pindaya Township, in southern Shan State, Myanmar. Danu Ozi (Drum) performances are an integral part of the Danu's cultural activities. The aim of this research is to examine the ethnic identities through their performance of Ozi culture in relation to social and religious role. Specific objectives are to describe the important role of Danu Ozi in the social life of Danu ethnic group and to explore how Danu has been maintained Ozi culture and passed down on generation to generation among the Danu ethnic group. Qualitative research methods such as key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews IDI and informal group interview were applied in the data collection. The findings show that Danu Ozi plays a dynamic role in social life and cultural experience; it can be a means for individual or collective self-understanding, for strengthening a group's group cultural identity. The role of Danu Ozi is essential in social life activities of Danu people such as donation ceremony, New Year Festival (*Ta Tet*), Robe Offering ceremony (*Kahtina*), *Tazataung* festival, novitiation ceremony and victory ceremony. This study is an attempt to not only maintain the culture of Danu Ozi, but also pass on the cultural experience to future generation.

**Key words:** Danu Ozi, identity, culture, role, value

### **1. Introduction**

Where the term "identity" was already popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, "ethnicity" and "ethnic identity" have only become buzzwords since the 1960s (Glazer/ Moynihan 1963; Niethammer 2000; Wikan 2022). Ethnic identity is derived from affective ties that stem from the facts of birth or the givens of blood, race, language, and custom (Viranjini Munasinghe, 2018). Culture is one of the marks by which a community of people of a nation is normally identified. Every society has culture including arts, beliefs and institutions of a people that are passed down from generation to generation. Music is an effective art form for friendship and peaceful coexistence.

Drums are found in nearly every culture of the world and have existed since before 6000BC (Aladesami, 2019). They have ceremonial, sacred and symbolic association. There are two distinct groupings of drums in the traditional sense of the word. The Klong Phen (drums) used in religious ceremonies to indicate the passage of time and to commemorate significant events are mentioned Klong Yao, Klong King, Klong Seng, and other popular Thai-Lao ethnic drums are used for entertainment in Buddhist customs and rites (Sitthisak Champadaenget.al, 2021). Drums are intrinsic part of most culture. In Myanmar, Drums are also known as "Ozi". The basic Ozi model originated in China during the Nanzhao kingdom (present day Yunnan province) and migrated south with the various Thai/Shan populations circa 800 AD (Gavin

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Douglas, 2013). There are three main types of Ozi in Myanmar: Burmese Ozi, Shan Ozi and Danu Ozi. In addition, Pa-O and Inthar ethnic group also have their traditional Ozi.

Danu ethnic group, that is included in the Shan national group, has its own orchestra such as modern Danu “hsaing waing” that is similar to the structure of drum circle of the Myanmar orchestra, ancient “bjo” (instruments based on long drum) and traditional Danu “Ozi” group. Among the three, the role and importance of Danu Ozi, which is the identity of the ethnic group as well as the necessary showpiece in their social life, will be studied and presented.

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of Danu Ozi (dram) in ethnic identity in Pindaya Township, Southern Shan State, Myanmar. Specific objects of the study are;

1. To describe the important role of Danu Ozi in the social life of Danu ethnic group
2. To explore how Danu Ozi culture has been maintained and passed on generation to generation among the Danu ethnic group

## **2. Literature Review**

Ethnic identity encompasses the perceptions of and personal affiliation with ethnic groups and cultures. Specifically, ethnic identity consists of: the perception of differences among ethnic groups; the feelings of attachment to and pride in one ethnic group and cultural heritage as opposed to others; and, at least where there are perceived physical differences between groups, the perception of prejudice and discrimination against one's own ethnic group (Keefe, 1992).

According to Turner Victor, festivals are the most common contexts for playing gong and Ozi music, where they are enlisted as primary tools for building communities (Turner Victor, 1964). Drums all over the world, are instruments of celebration during festivals, marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies and celebration is never complete without drums except mourning. Drums are also instrumenting of announcement, notice, warning against danger and war. Drums can be used to constitute chaos and also used to settle disputes. Drums are used to bring peace to society. In Africa, drums are very important in people’s daily life. They are used in different ways; drums are used for sending messages to people even in distant places (Ovunda Ihunwo, 2018).

Myanmar is a union State with the inhabitant of over 100 ethnic groups and each ethnic group possesses its own culture, own traditional custom and traditional musical instruments that represent its culture. The musical instruments of Kachin ethnic group are long “Ozi” (a kind of drum), bamboo flute, violin with two strings made up of bamboo and leather, banjo, bottle gourd flute, cymbal, and copper gong (Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1975).

Likewise, in Karen ethnic group, "Phasi" (ceremonial bronze drum) is valued with reverence and esteem as the pride of Karen. The delightful sound of Phasi is auspicious for Karen people. "Phasi" is played at the time of funfair, wedding ceremony, occasion of moving into a new house, New Year event and at funeral. In Shan ethnic groups, Shan Ozi is featured prominently in the commodification and branding of Shan culture (Comarof, John L, and Jean Comarof, 2009).

### 3. Research Methodology

This research conducted a field study of the role of the Danu Ozi in Pindaya township in southern Shan State. There are 12 wards and 27 village groups in Pindaya. According to the 2014 Census, the population of Pindaya Township is 79,303.

The ethnographic research design from the qualitative research method was applied in this study as semi-structured interview and open-ended questions were applied in the data collection. Total participants of this research is over 50 Danu ethnic group. These include ward and village administrators; village elders who have a thorough knowledge of the community; the band including young player and local peoples. They were asked about the history of the Ozi, the important roles of the Ozi, the values of the Ozi and how the Ozi were passed on. In addition, the men and women of the Haw Kone ward drum (Ozi) band who are actually playing drums in the ceremonies and social affairs were interviewed. The data were collected by observation, informal group interview, key informant interview (KII) and in-depth interview (IDI). Elderly, ward leader, drum makers and local people were included in the informal group interview and KII. Thirty people participated in the interview. IDI was conducted with ten-man players and ten-woman players of Danu Ozi band. This research was carried out during the period from 2022 to 2023.



Figure 1. Pindaya Township

### 4. Finding

#### The Background History of Danu Ethnic Group

Of over the 100 ethnic groups living in Myanmar, Dhana ethnic group is sub-ethnic group of the Shan people, predominantly populating the areas near Pindaya Caves, in Shan State. According to the local members of Dhanu Group Affairs, Danu ethnic people means Dhanonyastha, (ဝန်ဝဿ) who are skilful in using bows and arrows. It is learned that they were more related with Shan than Burmar in the past in terms of socio-economic condition.

The Culture and Traditional Customs of the Shan of 1968 stated that “anthropologists assumed that Danu ethnic group is included in the Tibeto-Myanmar group”. It is believed that

Danu ethnic group was a Myanmar heredity who translocated from central plain of Myanmar to the current hilly regions since before Bagan era. The Danu ethnic group lives mostly in the town named Pintaya in southern Shan State, which is an autonomous region (Proto-nations). Some said that the word “Pindaya” is derived from Pinkuya (getting spider) because the prince defeated the giant spider (Pinku), and the word “Pinkura” changed to “Pindaya” as the time passed.

Pindaya is also called the midland region of southern Shan State. It is one of the sixteen midland regions during the times of ancient kings. It was established in 1741 at 3880 feet above sea level. It is a well-known town where travellers from all corners of the world paid a visit because it has the natural Shwe Oo Min cave and Pote Ta Lote lake. Pindaya is famous for its natural beauty as well as for its unique culture of playing Danu Ozi which is the musical instrument that the Danu people value and play, and Danu and Ozi are inseparable and it is a unique culture that relates with their social lives.

### **Making of Danu Ozi**

The prominent evidence that is the showcase always accompanied with the image of Danu ethnic group is Danu Ozi. The shape of Ozi is short. The bigger the size of Ozi, the louder the sound it will growl. There is male Ozi as well as female Ozi. Female Ozi is decorated with flowers and fragrance, while the male Ozi is with alcohol and offertory. When the center of the Ozi surface is played, if it makes a short sound, it is termed as male Ozi, and if it makes is a long sound, it is termed as female Ozi. According to inquiry, it was observed that though historical evidence could not tell exactly when Danu Ozi began, Ozi originated together with the Danu people for more than hundred years. Danu people make Ozi based on very ancient craft. It was studied that Danu Ozi had been used since before the era of Ava.

By asking those locals who make Danu “Ozi”, it was learned that the following steps are involved in making Danu Ozi. First of all, the things needed for making of “Ozi” are Yamane or white teak (*Gmelina arborea*), cow leather, bee wax, an iron ring, and enamel paint. In old days, Ozi was made using the wood of banyan tree and of “Pauk” or flame-of-the-forest. Now, it is made from a kind of wood called *Yamane* grown in Pindaya region. The value of a *Yamane* tree is around MMK 80,000. The price of a *Yamane* tree may vary depending on the number of “Ozi” it could produce. It was learned from the inquiry that the “Ozi” made from *Yamane* wood is of the best quality. However, as the *Yamane* wood is becoming rare nowadays, the locally-called “*Mae Yon*” wood is replaced with.

An “Ozi” has a surface, decorating straps, and strings to be tightened. The surface of the “Ozi”, the decorating straps and the tightening strings were made with leather of either cow or buffalo or tiger. The leather of the whole body of a buffalo or a cow is used to make surface of “Ozi”, decorating straps and tightening strings. The bee waxes applied in the surface of “Ozi” is received from the feces of bees living in the ground. The feces are heated and the received bee wax is applied on the surface of “Ozi”. Iron ring is to hold decorating straps and tighten strings and to tighten the surface. “Wood resin” is bought from Ywa Ngan region.

Regarding the sizes of “Ozi, the height is 3 feet, and the diameter of the surface ranged from 13 inches to 16 inches. The best size of Ozi for playing it is 14 inches in diameter. To make an “Ozi”, the *Yamane* wood is first carved to get good ventilation in the form of a hollow tube with two open ends. Small notches are made in the body of Ozi so that the hanging string could move freely.

Then, the whole body is painted with wood resin and wait for about a week. The wider end of the hollow tube is covered with a leather sheet, and the leather sheet is tightened by decorating straps and tightening strings. At the center of the leather surface, the heated bee wax is stuck up. The price of an “Ozi” that men usually play, with the height of 3 feet, is around MMK 700,000, and the Ozi that the ladies play, with the height of 1 foot and a half, is around MMK 300,000. Depending on the size of the tree trunk, different sizes of “Ozi” could be made.

The sizes may range from the standard size of 3 feet through the middle size for children to the smallest decorated size of 6 cm (2 inches). The biggest part of the tree trunk is used for making the big “Ozi”, while smaller parts are used for making smaller “Ozi” in accordance with the size of the trunk. Ladies team usually use “Ozi” with smaller size to play with. In order to make good sound in playing “Ozi”, the fitting strings are to be tightened. The “Ozi” is needed to be checked and prepared 3 to 4 days ahead if there is a ceremony to play “Ozi”.

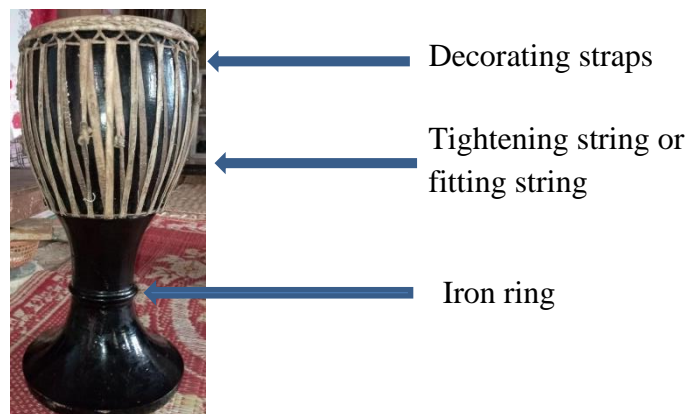


Figure 2. A Danu “Ozi” with surface diameter of 13 inches

The Danu also point to a similar Ozi and gong ensemble as a marker of their unique ethnic identity. The Shan and Danu Ozi accompany a stylized martial arts dance (let thaing) and traditional dress. A band of Danu “Ozi” consists of bronze gong, cymbal (bronze ring) and bamboo clapper apart from “Ozi”. The gong is selected depending on the size of “Ozi”. Likewise, the cymbal is also chosen and bought by tuning with the sound of the gong. Only when all the sounds of Ozi, cymbal, gong and bamboo clapper match one another, it will become a perfect Danu Ozi circle with good loud sound worth to listen.

### **The Role of Danu-Ozi**

Drums are vital part of Danu culture that help define and give rich values to the culture. On special occasions like novitiation ceremonies, and traditional festivals, drums are used. The Ozi also serves as an emblem of ethnic identity, frequently appearing in logos representing groups on flags, calendars, and posters.

Shopkeepers put “Ozi” in their shops and play it to attract people and to be crowded with customers. Danu people believe that keeping “Ozi” at home would bring good luck, glory, and the unity of the family. Therefore, they use small models of “Ozi” at home, shops and hotels either as talisman or as the symbols of tradition. The pleasant sound made by the “Ozi” is assumed to bring good luck. The symbol of “Ozi” is used in those flags, calendars, seals, and letterheads that are related to Danu ethnic group. Some make and wear it as a brooch. The thing that Danu people valued and wear the most at the festivities and social occasions are Danu national costumes and Danu brooch. The illustration made in the brooch are Ozi, which is the sacred of Danu people, and arrow and bow, which are related to the origin of Danu history.



Figure 3. The symbol of Ozi

The shape of traditional “Ozi”, the national identity of Danu ethnic group, was firmly and beautifully carved under the signboard of “Warmly Welcomed from Pindaya” at the entrance of the border of Self-Administered Region as a means of welcome and farewell. The park on the east side of prominent *Pote Ta Lote* pond, of Pindaya, there is a statue of Danu couple playing “Ozi”. Placing the statue of “Ozi” at the prominent part of the town Pindaya apparently reveals the appreciation of Danu people to “Ozi”. The model of “Ozi” ranging from the smallest of 6 cm to the biggest of 120 cm are usually placed at the parlour.

These teams play and entertain usually at seasonal festivals of Danu people, such as building of pagoda, successful completion of pagoda, donations ceremonies, *Kahtein* festival (offering of robes to the monks between the first waning day of Thadingyut and full moon day of Tasaung Mone of Myanmar lunar calendar), *Tar Tet* festival, Tasaung Taing festival (lighting festival), religious festivals, celebration of victory or success, event of moving into the new house, and several sport matches representing townships, wards, and schools. There are no festival or event held without Danu “Ozi”, and the entertainment of “Ozi” teams is crowded. Therefore, the role of Dhanu “Ozi” is found to be essential in those festivities and events. As the word “Zi” in the name “Ozi” brings the meaning of “crowded”, events are usually crowded when Ozi is played, and it also brings the unity of the people.

#### **Importance of Novitiation and Ear-Piercing Ceremony**

Danu people usually include “Ozi” band whenever they held donation ceremonies including novitiation and ear-piercing ceremonies. In playing “Ozi”, the team first play a song to gather the people. When people hear the gathering tone of Ozi, they come to the place of

playing. When making the rounds for the donation which is called “Pwe San” in Dhanu, the team of “Ozi” band play throughout the route. Some people follow the Ozi team along the route.

Regarding Ozi teams, not only the male team but also the female team participate in the entertainment. At the night of novitiation ceremony, the teams usually entertain with “Ozi” to celebrate for the success of the event. Though there is no dancer at the time of rounding for donation, everybody, including male, female, adults and children, dance joyously with the pleasant tune of Ozi at celebration of success of the event after the donation. According to the term of the Danu people, the event was called " *Mee Shew Khan*". The purpose of playing of “Ozi” at novitiation and ear-piercing events is to maintain cultural heritage, to be crowded, and to make unity.



Figure 4. Danu Men and women's Ozi team playing at Kahtein festival

Danu people dance with “Ozi” performance when going around of Kahtein festival, and when sending the offertory to the monasteries. Moreover, when the Danu monks of Pindaya come back from another place after taking the examination, they are also welcomed with Danu “Ozi”. It is also the essential part of the lighting festival of Tasaung Taing. At Tasaung Taing, the balloon festival is usually accompanied by playing Danu “Ozi”. The slogans sung during playing “Ozi” differ from event to event.

In the team of “Ozi” circle, the most tired person is the “Ozi” player. He/she has to do two things: to play the “Ozi” and to carry it by hanging its strap over the shoulder. When there is the football match of ward-cup or township-cup, the football players are encouraged to win the match by playing Ozi after inviting the "Ozi" team. The sound of “Ozi” makes the players active, and stimulate the strong desire to win. The monks who took the exam are also welcomed back at Aung Ban Township with the “Ozi” team. Therefore, the role of “Ozi” is important in congratulating the winners.

The sound of “Ozi” could bring auspicious things, so it is played at the housewarming ceremony. Even though some houses do not have any event, the owners, in order to have kickback and glory, would invite "Ozi" team to their house and have them play "Ozi", and provide them with food and reward with money. When visitors from other regions who want to watch and listen "Ozi" playing, also invite to entertain them, the team would go and perform Ozi playing. The time when there are many national and international guests and when there is a dinner or a party at the hotels, the team is invited to do performance. Therefore, "Ozi" playing is a unique custom that could show the traditional culture through entertainment.

The team of Ozi includes Ozi player, gong player, bamboo clapper player, cymbal player, and a singer for singing slogans. However, in order to take turns of playing, there are a total of 10 players in the ladies' Ozi team. All Danu people are amused when they hear the sound of Ozi. They could not help "dance, when they hear it". The sizes of "Ozi", cymbal and gong are different between the man and woman "Ozi" teams. The length of "Ozi" is one and a half feet and the surface is 14 inches. The gong for male is of the size that two men have to carry with the yoke, and the gong for ladies weighs about 50 Tical (half a Viss) that a person can lift up. Men team use a cymbal that weighs about one and a half viss to two viss, while ladies team use a cymbal of about a half viss weight. The bamboo clappers are of the same size for both men and ladies' teams.

### **Taboo and Mana about Ozi**

In ancient time in making "Ozi", the inside of the cow leather which is used for the surface of "Ozi" was used to be inscribed with the cabalistic signs or magic squares. The reason of doing so is to be safe whenever the "Ozi" is played, not to have quarrel when there are teams' sports, and to prevent other problems. If "Ozi" is to be made, it starts after choosing the auspicious day and receiving the eight precepts.

Nowadays, there is no more a custom as inscribing cabalistic signs or magic squares. It was learned that the monks used to make "Ozi" in ancient time. Currently, "Ozi" were made extensively in Inn Pat Let village in Pindaya, but there was just one "Ozi" maker in Haw Gone ward, who inherited his father's business. He said that the way he learned how to make "Ozi" was not by special learning. He just learned not only by seeing how the others do but also by helping them in working.

Regarding how he learned how to make "Ozi", he said,

*"Starting around 2000s, I continued family business left by my late father. Most people used to choose the auspicious day for the start of the business, but I did not do it as I do not drink alcohol".*

There is no special custom to be followed by "Ozi" makers, but as Dhanu people believe in Buddhism, they need to abide by the 5 precepts, the basis of Buddhism. If it is used for the first time, the "Ozi" is taken to the shrine of "*Koe Myo Shin*" (The Spirit of the Lord of Nine Regions) with offertory to present and to pray for his blessing. The reason of doing so is to prevent conflicts whenever the "Ozi" is played, to make amusement to the listeners, to bring good fortune and to prevent dangers.

The sound of Dhanu "Ozi" of Danu people, which is different from the sounds of other kinds of "Ozi, could make listeners feel active. It could make the hearers happy. When Danu "Ozi" is played, the sound of Danu "Ozi" could activate the mind of all Danu people, so that they could not stay without watching it. Even if there were some cases that some team players could not speak each other because of some kinds of disagreement before, they settle their anger, when they compromise playing in the chorus. The sound of "Ozi" even makes wild animals merry.



When an Ozi made of tiger leather is played, it is said that men with tattoo of tiger picture become excited and want to dance.

### **The Maintenance of Ozi**

Danu males who are good at playing “Ozi” as well as who are interested in sharing the playing technique are teaching how to play Danu “Ozi” to youths at the town hall. In the Ozi class, not only to learn how to play the drum, but also how to modify the surface to make the drum sound good. They teach the things that should be known about the Ozi, such as how to adjust the ropes tied to the side of the Ozi to be tight.

Regarding the carrying over knowledge of playing instrument Danu “Ozi”, a 45-year-old local said,

*“Starting from 2019, Danu Literature and Culture Committee has taken the lead opening the course on playing of instrument Danu “Ozi” during summer.”*

The lady team said that they would teach how to play the instrument “Ozi” to whoever interested in it. However, only few people are now found to be willing to learn.

Similarity, there are many people who are interested in playing Ozi, however there are only a few young people who are interested in making Ozi. And also, many youths are not interested in playing Ozi by themselves, but interested in watching others play it. It was also learned that it is planned to publish a book by recording details about making “Ozi” in order to pass down the knowledge.

An Ozi maker also recorded the making of the drum as follows.

*“I have carefully noted and recorded every step of making a drum so that future generations who are interested can watch this record and make the drum.”*

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Concerning musical instruments, Ozi is one of Danu’s identities. Ozi’s plays an important role in social, cultural and religious activities. With regards to social and cultural beliefs on Ozi, Danu believe that if Ozi is displayed in visiting rooms, shops, hotel etc., they will enjoy good luck. Ozi is also cultural symbol of Danu in Pindaya Township. Ozi is displayed at the entrance of Pindaya Township, Pone Taloke Pond, and the Shwe Ou Min pagoda. Danu use Ozi in seals, stickers, decoration, tourist commodities and calendar. These findings clearly show that how much Danu ethnic values Ozi. Danu also use Ozi in religious festivals and social activities.

There is a tradition that Danu offer new Ozi to the traditional local spirit to prevent conflict between Ozi players and to make peace between them. Therefore, Ozi is clearly an identity of Danu. Although the Danu ethnic group interacts closely with the Burmese and Shan ethnic group, the different styles of Ozi still remain unchanged and are still valued and used. Therefore, the Danu ethnic group builds their identity by maintaining their own cultural, social, and religious traditions.

According to Turner Victor, festivals are the most common contexts for playing gong and ozi music, where they are enlisted as primary tools for building communities. The social aggregation that comes from transient and liminal moments (festivals, rituals, etc.). Feelings of social togetherness by playing Ozi drum is linked to Turner Victor. It was found Ozi culture in seasonal festivals and social activities in Danu community. Therefore, Ozi play an important role in unity among them. If they hear the sound of Ozi, they feel happiness, warmth and pleasure. Therefore, it is assumed that Ozi makes unity as social togetherness within the Danu ethnic community. Ozi culture is firmly tied solidarity in Danu community. Therefore, Danu Ozi is inseparable from Danu culture. It is a vital part of Danu Culture that help define and give rich values to the culture.

It is linked to Bath's ethnic identity. Barth (1969) inquired into the construction of ethnic identity by emphasizing boundary construction. A group persist a significant unit if it maintains its identity when members interact with people of different cultures. Among the various Ozi in Myanmar, it has been observed that the Danu ethnic group continues to preserve the identity of the Danu Ozi by using it as an integral part of their social life, such as religion and society. Therefore, Ozi culture transmission became important in Danu community as older persons pass down Ozi culture to their younger generation. Not only that it is necessary to encourage and motivate young people to be more interested in making and playing drums. By doing so, Danu maintain their Ozi culture as their identity and further build their ethnic identity.

In conclusion, Ozi culture plays an important role in describing culture value, unity and Danu identity. An Ozi figure can be seen at the entrance of Pindaya. It shows the value on Ozi by Danu in Pindaya Township. It displays the landmarks of Pindaya and it is used as tourist commodities, Danu calendar, seals, hotel, shop etc. All Ozi also serves as an emblem of ethnic identity, frequently appearing in logos representing groups on flags, calendars, and posters. All of these things became one of Danu's identities. Danu continue maintaining Ozi culture from generation to generation as identity of Danu ethnic group. At the same time, Ozi making process is passed down their younger generations by older persons. Therefore, Ozi is used in social and religious festivals as a cultural symbol and it clearly exists as an ethnic identity that represents the entire Danu ethnic group.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank the Rector Dr. Tin Maung Tun, Pro-Rectors Dr. Khin Chit Chit, Dr. Cho Cho, and Dr. Thidar Aye, University of Yangon, and the director and members of JARC, for all the support in doing this research and publishing this research paper. We would also like to express our gratitude for financial support from the Asia Research Centre, University of Yangon, Myanmar.

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