

**Tom Long. 2022. *A Small State's Guide to Influence in World Politics*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.**

Small states' position in world politics is contested due to the inherent nature of asymmetrical relationships between small states and major powers. In this context, Tom Long's book, *A Small State's Guide to Influence in World Politics*, serves as a compass to navigate between the question of relevance and the marginal position of small states in world politics. His central argument is that small states as units of the global system can achieve important international goals and exercise influence, but not without overcoming significant constraints. Long's book systematically reviews the major academic literature on the agency and power of small states before proposing the Typological Theory and Scorecard to analyze small states' behavior. His analytical framework is based on Womack's (2016) "asymmetrical approach," which separates the importance of relative capability from the presumption that relative power will prevail.

The book is divided into eight chapters: the first four chapters cover conceptual and theoretical aspects of small states, followed by three empirical cases and a conclusion. Foundational concepts and definitions of small states are covered in the introductory chapter. It begins with a "relational approach to small states" to define, theorize, and investigate them in the context of their salient asymmetrical relationships. It proposes material, ideational, and relational views on whom to call a "small state." Subsequently, Long proposes a typological theory that provides contextualized explanations with multiple causal conditions rather than simplistic cause-and-effect relationships. This theory integrates small states' constraints, possibilities, and probable strategies. Long argues that the small states' positions,

international environment, internal characteristics, and relational conditions with major powers significantly influence their ability. Chapter Four focuses on the means and strategies available to small states. Small states have limited foreign policy options and resources, requiring more consistency in their decisions. Long identifies the three sources of power of small states: particular-intrinsic, derivative, and collective—that remain useful to overcome their relative deficits in traditional material capabilities or foreign policy power.

In the following three empirical chapters, we can see the application of the author’s framework to analyze various cases. He aims to examine small states’ policy success and failure. Long argues how these nations can turn their vulnerabilities into strengths by shaping agendas or petitioning for special resources. He concludes that the security situation of most small states has improved since the end of the Cold War. However, the crucial question is whether they have been able to achieve their security objectives. Four pairs of cases from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Central America are analyzed to answer this question.

In Chapter Five, Long makes a case comparison on how Nepal and Bhutan manage their asymmetrical relations with India on security matters. He highlights the difficulties landlocked states face, which must adopt strategies of distance and approximation to maintain these relations. His observation is that success is not always guaranteed. Long discusses Nepal’s 1989 attempt to achieve greater autonomy from India in security matters and concludes that it suffered notable failures. Bhutan has limited freedom in its defense and foreign affairs and always seeks guidance from India. However, Bhutan successfully concluded a new treaty with India in 2007, whereas there has been little progress in revising/updating the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty.

For small states, there is no silver bullet to achieve economic objectives, but having well-supported plans, multiple partners, and a persuasive narrative makes a difference, as illustrated in Chapter Six. The success stories of Rwanda in foreign aid mobilization and Malaysia in renegotiating infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China are illuminating for other countries like Nepal. Small states’ actions and asymmetrical relations have more proximate effects, while location, history, or wealth shape their constraints and opportunities. Chapter Seven examines how small states use smart diplomacy to become “niche diplomacy champions” through four cases. In the concluding chapter, Long makes a

cross-regional comparison of the cases. Small states' foreign policy success has no single recipe, and they do not always comply with great powers. If they do, it is usually in pursuit of their interests or because of negotiation.

Long's Typological Theory and scorecard help research Nepal's relationships with neighbors and major powers. These can be used as analytical tools to assess how Nepal has fared in foreign policy turning points by undertaking a within-case study. For example, this framework can be helpful for studying the role of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), the controversy surrounding the parliamentary ratification of the compact with the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the implementation status of BRI in Nepal. This book claims that the within-case approach facilitates contextualized hypotheses instead of universal claims; it is better suited to the needs of policymaking. Thus, by analyzing such cases through Long's framework, one can shed new theoretically grounded insights into Nepal's foreign policy behavior.

It can be argued that Nepal's decision to engage with the UN after signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006 was an exercise of the country's agency and power in world politics. Instead of relying on any specific country's help in conflict transformation, Nepal invited a neutral international organization like the UN for a focused mission of limited duration. Both parties to the CPA wanted the UN to be involved in its smooth implementation. This exercise can be characterized as a Green Case (1b2a3a) according to Long's scorecard where policy divergence was low (1b), relational issue salience was high (2a), and preference cohesion was high (3a) between the parties involved. It can be argued that Nepal made the optimal use of the UNMIN in conflict transformation, monitoring the cantonment process and garnering support for the elections. The Mission was also utilized to ensure the implementation of the CPA and it essentially helped keep the peace process on track.

Long's framework is also effective in studying Nepal's involvement in MCC and BRI in two ways. First, it can be used to make a comparative study of these agreements through cross-case comparison. Second, the framework can help examine Nepal's agency and power in managing the behavior of two superpowers (US and China) towards Nepal. Long has assumed that small states adopt broadly cooperative policies on many marginal issues in their dealings with salient great powers. There is a difference between cooperation and compliance in asymmetrical relations, where the small

powers should find a “middle ground” to pursue their priorities. Nepal seems to have taken the same middle ground position to formalize MCC by disassociating itself from the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US. Thus, the within-case study of MCC’s evolution (from green to blue to green case) between 2017 and 2022 would provide new insight into why small states largely adopt cooperative policies vis-à-vis great power. A similar case study can be undertaken using Long’s framework on Nepal’s association with BRI. Overall, such studies are required in Nepal given the country’s geographic position, where asymmetrical relationship dynamics with neighbors and major powers produce recurring constraints and opportunities. Therefore, balancing these relations is always considered the most arduous act of Nepali diplomacy, and this is where Long’s book can serve as a guide for Nepal’s policymakers.

This book is a milestone in small states’ research through broader empirical coverage and theoretical contribution. The analysis is easy to follow, as the theory and analytical procedures are elaborated in the preliminary chapters before presenting the empirics. It claims that policymakers can use the approach “to assess their state’s challenges and identify situations most amenable to change” (p. 2). In asymmetrical relationships, the perception of weakness can increase the risk of small states becoming irrelevant or becoming a hindrance to great power (Vital 1967). This book proposes several strategies and approaches small states can use to overcome such weaknesses. Since the central argument of this book is developed on the asymmetry theory, its premises stand closer to the constructivist standpoints. Long brings the study of small states into closer conversation with the mainstream debates in International Relations theories. Small states are no longer overlooked in international affairs. Then the question arises: Do small states matter in world politics? The book answers robustly in the affirmative.

Finally, the book achieves its aim of providing a framework for scholars and policymakers to analyze small states’ external relations and global influence. It offers valuable perspectives on the relationships and personalities of small states. However, it has some limitations. Although it proposes typology theory and scorecard to analyze such relationships, it does not examine cases that have evolved in different color spectrum, i.e., within-case analysis. Additionally, it does not give enough consideration to the insights of policymakers in case analysis. Nonetheless, it is an essential

read for those interested in small states' agency, power, and position in world politics.

References

- Vital, David. 1967. *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Womack, Brantly. 2016. *Asymmetry and International Relationships*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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