



China's Foreign Policy in Southeast Asia: The Evolution of Sino-Myanmar Relations After Naypyidaw's Political Transformation of 2011

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Acronyms.....	3
Abstract.....	4
1 Introduction.....	5
2 Literature Review.....	8
3 Methodology.....	12
3.1 Type of Research.....	12
3.1.1 Qualitative Approach.....	12
3.1.2 Sources.....	12
3.2 Research Structure.....	13
3.2.1 Research Approach.....	13
3.2.2 Purposes of the Research.....	14
3.3 Research Limitations.....	15
4 Liberalism and Realism Theories and Their Relevance in China-Myanmar Relations... 16	
4.1 Liberalism.....	16
4.1.1 Fundamental Assumptions of Liberalism.....	16
4.1.2 Limitations of Liberalism in Foreign Policy.....	19
4.2 Realism.....	20
4.2.1 Fundamental Assumptions of Realism.....	20
4.2.2 Limitations of Realism in Foreign Policy.....	23
4.3 Relevance of Liberalism and Realism in China-Myanmar Relations.....	24
5 China and Myanmar Relations Before and After Naypyidaw's Political Changes of 2011.....	27
5.1 China-Myanmar Relations During the Military Regime.....	27
5.1.1 Political and Strategic Relations.....	27
5.1.2 Economic Relations.....	31
5.1.3 Natural Resources.....	33
5.2 Myanmar's Political Changes of 2011.....	34
5.3 China-Myanmar Relations after 2011.....	35
5.3.1 Political and Strategic Relations.....	36
5.3.2 Economic Relations and Infrastructures Projects.....	38
5.4 External Influences in Sino-Myanmar Relations.....	40
6 Conclusion.....	42
Bibliography.....	44

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CNOOC	China's National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
IR	International Relations
MOGE	Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
NLD	National League for Democracy
OBOR	One Belt One Road
SINOPEC	China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nation Security Council
US	United States
YMIEC	Yunnan Machinery Import and Export Corporation

ABSTRACT

This thesis compares the characteristics of the Sino-Myanmar relations during the era of the military regime in Myanmar and after the transformation of the country's government in 2011. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the evolution of the Sino-Myanmar relations by focusing on the changes of their political and economic ties. The study is based on the application of two main International Relations theories, namely Liberalism and Realism, to the case of Sino-Myanmar relations, in order to enhance the understanding of this evolution and the motivations behind it. Indeed, from a liberalist perspective, Sino-Myanmar relations are mainly characterized by a deep economic cooperation, that determined an increasing relation of interdependence between the countries, and by the external influences of the international community and organizations on the stability of the relationship. On the other hand, a realist approach to Sino-Myanmar relations has underlined the relevance of both countries national interests in determining the evolution of their interactions. During the years of the military regime, relations between China and Myanmar were generally shaped by positive connotations and the two countries experienced important improvements not only in the interaction between each other, but also in their own national development. However, the relationship of China with Myanmar's military junta was also defined by challenges and issues, as both governments experienced strong criticisms from the international community. After Naypyidaw's political changes of 2011, the former stability of Sino-Myanmar relations declined, in particular due to the renewed interests of the international community in establishing relationships with Myanmar. As a result, China's influence over the nation started to decrease and the Chinese investments and infrastructures projects underwent a problematic phase. Despite the negative trend undertaken by the relations, China and Myanmar still promoted the importance of maintaining and fostering their relationship. As a result of Myanmar's 2011 political transformation, the relationship between the two countries changed from a close stable bilateral relation to a weaker multilateral relation, that involved new external actors. In conclusion, Sino-Myanmar relations encountered different challenges during their evolution, but both nations still managed to adjust their foreign policy in order to preserve their historical positive relationship.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the economic and political relations between China and Myanmar, focusing on the changes that occurred in their interactions after the 2011 political transition of Myanmar from a military rule to a democratically elected government. This study will illustrate the main agreements and issues that characterized the relations between China and Myanmar from the beginning of the 2000s to recent years. The analysis will be outlined in its negative and positive assumptions from a neutral perspective in regard to both countries, underlining the reasons and objectives pursued by the Chinese and Burmese government in enhancing these relations. In addition, the relations between China and Myanmar will be examined in the context of the international scenario, as the consequences brought from the intervention of Western countries, especially the United States, in the Sino-Burmese relations are considered fundamental to delineate a holistic overview of the Sino-Myanmar relations in the current global environment.

Historically, the relations between China and Myanmar were always underlined as an important aspect of China's foreign policy in Southeast Asia. The Sino-Myanmar relations were officially recognized in 1950 and, in the years following the diplomatic recognition, the interactions between the two countries were mainly delineate as neutral, but they were still shaped by numerous challenges, especially due to Myanmar's strategic geographic position between China and India. However, in 1988, when the military junta came into power in Myanmar, the country relationship with China experienced a significant improvement. Indeed, China and Myanmar dramatically strengthen their diplomatic relations during the first period of the regime. One of the main reasons behind the development of Sino-Burmese relations was the West isolation and criticism towards Myanmar, that influenced the military junta to seek economic and military connections with China. During these years, China prioritized a "government-to-government" approach to its relations with Myanmar, mainly helping the military junta to gain economic and political power in order to ensure stability for the Chinese investments in the country and along the border (Shee, 2002; Transnational Institute, 2016). Nevertheless, China was also aware of the importance of political stability in Myanmar, in order to maintain its benefits in the country. Therefore, Beijing made various efforts to have contacts with the ethnic minorities

living on the border between China and Myanmar, to secure that these ethnic groups reached an agreement to have ceasefires with the military junta, in order to promote internal political stability in Myanmar. As the Chinese investments in Myanmar kept growing, in the mid-1990s, Myanmar started promoting relationships with other Asian countries, such as India and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to avoid total economic dependence from China. After the election of 2011, a new military-backed government took power in Myanmar and the country relations with China started to face strong difficulties, especially in regard to the Chinese investments in major infrastructure and natural resources exploitation projects. Indeed, Myanmar started changing toward an “opening up” foreign policy, that included relations with the West and other Asian countries, thus weakening its bilateral relations with China. Moreover, the interactions between China and Myanmar are also facing new challenges, especially due to the rising of a nationalist and anti-Chinese sentiment among Myanmar population in recent years. Nowadays, after the second election of 2015 and the came into power of the National League for Democracy (NLD) of 2016, China is realizing that, to maintain a good relationship with its neighbouring country, changes in its foreign policy are necessary as Sino-Myanmar relations are now facing new challenges (Clapp, 2015; Li & Char, 2015; Shee, 2002; Transnational Institute, 2016).

The analysis of the relationships between China and Southeast Asian countries is important to gain an additional insight on the Chinese economic and political development. The specific case of Myanmar is extremely relevant due to the strategic geopolitical position of the country and, also, due to the changes that its internal government experienced in the last few years. The behaviour of China in managing the issues and concerns arose in its relations with Myanmar, is a demonstration of how China handles difficult aspects of its foreign policy and how China adapts to new challenges in the international scenario while it struggles to preserve its main objective of increasing the Chinese economic development (Li & Char, 2015; Tea, 2010; Transnational Institute, 2016). Furthermore, the decision of choosing Myanmar as the subject of this research derives from the willingness of improving knowledge on a country of the Southeast Asia that it's often little researched, in respect of others ASEAN countries, such as Malaysia or Thailand. As the relations between the West and Myanmar are still a growing topic in International Relations, understanding the position of Beijing in regards of Naypyidaw, by analysing the strength and weakness of Sino-

Burmese relations, is helpful to gain a wider comprehension of the Chinese strategies in foreign policy (Li & Char, 2015; Tea, 2010).

The research is divided in five chapters. Firstly, the literature review will present and evaluate the available productions of various scholars on China-Myanmar relations and explain the ideas that shape the basis of this thesis. Secondly, the chapter of methodology will specify the approaches, sources and methods applied to produce this thesis, the research structure and purposes of each chapter and the limitations encountered during the production of this study. Thirdly, the theories chapter will explain the International Relations' theories chosen for the composition of this thesis, namely Liberalism and Realism, in their major assumptions and limitations and it will determine their importance in analysing Sino-Myanmar relations in order to enhance a holistic overview of the relations. Moreover, in the fourth chapter, the theoretical framework previously depicted will be applied to the Sino-Myanmar relations focusing on the changes that occurred in these interactions before and after Myanmar's political changes of 2011. The chapter will delineate a comparative study of the advantages and disadvantages that shaped the Sino-Burmese relations during the military rule of the junta and after the change of government, precisely from the beginning of the 2000 to the recent years. Lastly, the fifth chapter will illustrate the conclusions reached in accordance with the analysis conducted in the previous chapters, in order to give possible answers to the research questions and to present the findings that were deduced during the study of Sino-Myanmar relations.

The thesis is based on finding solutions to the following research questions and sub questions:

- How did China and Myanmar relations evolve before and after Myanmar's political transformation of 2011?
- Why did this kind of evolution take place in the relationship between China and Myanmar?
- How are political changes in Myanmar affecting the Chinese investments in the country?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relations between China and Myanmar has been researched by scholars in their various aspects and challenges. However, the existent literatures on the topic is not exhaustive, as is often a neglected and little researched argument in the field of International Relations. Also, the former literatures tend to focus on the characteristics of the Sino-Myanmar relations either before or after the change of Myanmar government in 2011. The following literature review of the relations between China and Myanmar shows the previous theoretical findings of various scholars that are fundamental as background of this thesis, a comparative study of the Sino-Burmese relations before and after the election of Myanmar's new government in 2011.

Poon Kim Shee (2002) argued that Myanmar is not a “strategic paw” or an “economic pivot” of China, thus the relations between China and Myanmar can be described as asymmetrical but mutually beneficial. However, China recognized Myanmar as strategically important for its geographical position and to achieve regional stability in Southeast Asia, while Myanmar is economically important for enhancing the economic development of the Chinese inland provinces, such as Yunnan and Sichuan.

Niklas Swanstöröm (2012) described the relations between China and Myanmar by focusing on the main aspects that he recognized principal characteristics of their interactions until 2010, namely economic development, regional stability and security along the countries' shared border. He argues that, despite the existing strong ties between the two countries, different challenges were already shaped and that the change of government in Myanmar influenced China in reconsidering its foreign policy towards the country, as Naypyidaw is becoming increasingly aware of the need of reducing the great influence that Beijing is having on the country. Also, he underlined how other Asian and Western countries started showing interest in improving their relations with Myanmar, due to its changing internal political scene, to counteract the dominance of China in the nation.

Billy Tea (2010) shaped its research on the relations of China's government with the military junta that was ruling in Myanmar before the governmental change of 2011. He provides a framework of Sino-Myanmar interactions depicting the objectives and strategies followed by both countries. He stressed that China's main aim in its relations with Myanmar

was the exploitation of Burmese natural resources to sustain its economic development, therefore China was determined to strongly engage with Myanmar's government to maintain its higher benefits in the relations. On the other hand, Myanmar aimed at seeking political recognition and support for the military junta, obtained through the economic ties with China.

Chenyang Li and James Char (2015) argued that the political changes that occurred in Myanmar had a huge impact on Sino-Myanmar relations, highlighting new challenges for Beijing's role in the country. They recognized five main issues in the relations between China and Myanmar after the change of government in 2011: the growth of an anti-Chinese sentiment in Myanmar; the inclination of Myanmar government and civil society towards Western countries influence; the politicization of Chinese investments in Myanmar; the inclusion of other foreign interlocutors in relations with Myanmar and the uncertainty about the future of Sino-Myanmar relations. Despite these new problems in their bilateral relations, Li and Char determined that China was already implementing new strategies that aimed at enhancing Sino-Myanmar relations, thus a further collaboration between the two countries should still be feasible as long as Beijing is able to adjust to the internal changes of Myanmar.

Yun Sun (2014) focused his study on the role of Myanmar in the context of the relations between China and the United States. He argued that China saw the US interest in enhancing its relations with Myanmar as a danger and a competition for its economic dominance in the country, while the United States was interested in the internal political changes of Myanmar, hoping to influence the country in developing democracy and human rights. Thus, regardless of an improved cooperation of China and the US in their interactions with Myanmar, challenges in US-China relations are likely to deepen as concerns Myanmar internal and foreign policy.

Shihong Bi (2014) focused the study on the economic relations between China and Myanmar, after Myanmar's political change of 2011. While the internal changes of Myanmar brought new opportunities in Sino-Myanmar economic relations, they also determined new issues in regard to Myanmar's "opening up" policies towards Western countries. China has to improve its responses to the difficulties faced in its relations with Myanmar and ensure a stable environment to help their economic relations to grow, in order to maintain a bilateral relationship that bring strong benefits to both countries.

Maung Aung Myoe (2015) argued that the changes in China-Myanmar relations after the election of the new government in 2011 are influenced by different aspects. Indeed, challenges in the two countries relations are mainly based on the shift of Myanmar foreign political towards an inclusion in the international scenario. Myanmar underwent a process of renewal of its domestic and foreign policy, to achieve a better integration in the international community, especially to improve its relations with the United States. This opening up policy is perceived as a threat to the strong relations between China and Myanmar, and in association with other issues, such as the growing anti-Chinese sentiment in Myanmar, China and Myanmar borders security and the dominance of Chinese investments in Myanmar economy, it destabilizes the current dominant position of China in Myanmar's foreign policy. However, the aim of Myanmar's new policies is not to separate itself completely from China, but to gain more power in their bilateral relations, to avoid complete dependence from the country.

Priscilla A. Clapp (2015) presented an overview of China-Myanmar relationships from the 1980s, especially taking into consideration the challenges faced in their interaction after 2011, focusing on the economic, diplomatic and security relations established between the two countries. In her publication, she described the major problems that affect the relation between China and Myanmar, such as the protests of Myanmar population against Chinese infrastructure projects, illegal cross-border trades, instability of border security, Myanmar's strong dependence from China's investments and the internal political changes of Myanmar toward a Western-type mentality. She also delineated the aspects of Myanmar's growing relations with other Southeast Asian countries and suggested feasible solutions that United States should apply to influence Myanmar political changes towards democracy and to strengthen US-Myanmar relations.

A study conducted by the Transnational Institute (2016) argued that the political changes in Myanmar domestic scenario arose new challenges in the relations of China with the country. Criticisms against China increased in Myanmar's public opinion and together with the change of government, brought instability to the previous Chinese relations with the military junta. However, China recognized the evolution of its relations with Myanmar and it is working to increase the internal stability of Myanmar to secure good relations with the nation. Moreover, Myanmar is also determined to perpetuate positive relationship with China, thus it is focusing on decreasing the bad influence connected to the "anti-Chinese

sentiment” that is growing inside its society. Both countries are aware of the necessity of consolidating a positive relation based on mutual respect and equality.

Lixin Geng (2006) stressed that Sino-Myanmar relations were characterized by a “friendly” relationship that they maintained during the years of the military regime. Indeed, China showed support to the military junta through different fields of their relations, from politics to economy. Despite going through rough paths in their relationship, China and Myanmar became extremely close during the military regime, as China was one of the few countries that recognized the legitimacy of the military junta and that helped Myanmar overcome the sanctions and limitations imposed by Western countries. Thus, Geng argued that positive reciprocal relations between the China and Myanmar are still fundamental and necessary.

Hnin Yi (2013) analysed how the relations between China and Myanmar changed since 1989 and the response of Myanmar to the rapid development of its neighbouring country by describing the benefits and the challenges that both countries had to face in their relationship. The major changes that the new government brought to the domestic political structure of Myanmar in 2011 affected its relations with China. The former positive and deep relations between the two countries had to face new issues and to involve new stakeholders, therefore China saw its dominant role slowly decreasing as other countries started to interlace relations with Myanmar. However, Myanmar understood the importance of keeping positive relations with China, as it is striving for development and modernization and its relationship with Beijing keep bringing huge economic and political gains to the country.

Toshihiro Kudo (2006) argued that China and Myanmar relations experienced a critical improvement since the military junta came to power. China became one of the major countries that export goods to Myanmar as well as one of the major investors in infrastructures projects in the country. Despite this relevant growth in their relationship, China’s influence in Myanmar was solely supporting the military regime in maintaining its power, while it was not helping Myanmar to develop and overcome its backwardness, as Myanmar’s economy became dependent on China’s investments.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Type of Research

3.1.1 Qualitative Approach

This thesis is mainly based on a qualitative analysis of data and focuses on the case of China and Myanmar diplomatic relations. A qualitative approach to research is determined by analysing, interpreting and contextualizing the sources, with the addition of the researcher subjective contribution. Therefore, the qualitative research method is a holistic approach to the analysis of sources, as it aims at describing and explaining phenomena and improve the researcher engagement in relation to the analysed situation. This type of research method is important for collecting different ideas, motivations and notions on the chosen topic, by achieving a complete understanding of the argument and its contextualization. Therefore, qualitative method presents extensive advantages in shaping different ideas on a similar topic, as well as expanding the existent knowledges on the researched subject. On the other hand, the qualitative approach may present various disadvantages and obstacle as the analysis and interpretation of sources may be influenced by the subjective opinions of the researcher (De Vaus, 2001; Williams, 2007; Wyse, 2011).

In the context of this thesis, the qualitative approach will be applied to the analysis of the data on Sino-Myanmar relations. The diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries will be analysed through the characteristics presented in their interactions before and after 2011, the year that determined the shift in Myanmar's government structure, and through the effects that this change brought to the relations between the two nations. Moreover, in order to reach an enhanced understanding of the topic, the relations between China and Myanmar will be also analysed in the context of the international system, by explaining the consequences that Myanmar political changes had on the global scenario.

3.1.2 Sources

This thesis has been conducted by analysing and interpreting information principally collected among primary and secondary data extracted from literature, publications and via Internet. Moreover, sources describing both theories, Liberalism and Realism, were used for the realization of the theoretical framework. All primary and secondary sources are

articles, books and publications consulted through the Aalborg University online library or found via Google scholar, Research Gate, Academia and JSTOR. As regards the analysis chapter, official reports and documents, articles and newspapers were consulted to delineate a relevant and pertinent study of the relations between China and Myanmar. However, due to a lack of contacts of relevant people informed on the topic, direct interviews and surveys were not considered in the elaboration of this thesis.

The following thesis is drafted by applying a specific theoretical framework of International Relations, based on assumptions of Liberalism and Realism, to the context of diplomatic and economic relations between China and Myanmar. The research is pursued firstly by achieving a holistic understanding of the topic, then by performing an analytical selection of the relevant sources. Indeed, the sources are selected according to the researcher's willingness to present reliable and truthful data. Moreover, the data are critically studied and interpreted with the aim of providing an impartial analysis of China-Myanmar relations. However, an unbiased approach to the research is not completely feasible, as sources are often connected to different interests and agendas. Nevertheless, this thesis is composed by presenting data produced by both nations, maintaining neutral opinions on the results found.

3.2 Research Structure

3.2.1 Research Approach

This thesis is elaborated following a deductive approach. This kind of approach firstly delineates a general framework of theories and, afterwards, it applies the theories to reach a deeper and specific comprehension of a topic. Specifically, this research method starts analysing a matter from a larger context and then arrives to the details (De Vaus, 2001).

As concerns this thesis, the deductive approach was selected for the necessity of depicting a general overview of Liberalism and Realism before applying these IR theories to the relations between China and Myanmar. This structure is preferred in the specific case of this thesis because it follows the logical progress of improving knowledges on a topic, from depicting the tools of the analysis, the theories, to applying them to the chosen subject. Therefore, the deductive approach, in the context of this research, firstly enhances the understanding of the nature and characteristics of international relations and, after, it applies those features to a real-life situation, namely Sino-Myanmar relations.

3.2.2 Purposes of the Research

This thesis is based on the resolution of the main research question and its sub-questions, that aims at defining the evolution of China and Myanmar relations in the last two decades, the reasons behind the changes that this evolution brought and their effects on China's foreign policy in Myanmar.

The purpose of the second chapter, the literature review, is to provide the background information that are needed to gain a holistic knowledge on China-Myanmar relations and to present the objective of this thesis, producing a new and different point of view on the existing relations between the two countries, by presenting the recent evolution of the Sino-Burmese relations.

The aim of the fourth chapter is to describe the features and limitations of two main theories of International Relations used, Liberalism and Realism. Also, the chapter explains which assumptions of each theories is considered relevant for the analysis of the relations between China and Myanmar. Therefore, another aim of the chapter is to provide the intellectual properties for researching and interpreting policies and actions implemented by China and Myanmar in the context of their relations with each other. Hence, the theoretical framework is fundamental in helping the researcher to elaborate an extensive analysis of Sino-Myanmar relations.

In the fifth chapter, the theories presented in the previous section of the thesis are applied to the diplomatic and economic relations between Myanmar and China before and after Myanmar's political changes of 2011. The relations between the countries are examined by illustrating the changes that occurred in their diplomatic relations, describing both the positive and beneficial aspects as well as the obstacles and difficulties encountered by both actors. This chapter aims at answering the research questions by explaining the intentions and concerns of the two countries in developing their relations and providing interpretations of the liberalist and realist assumptions in the specific circumstances of China-Myanmar relations.

Finally, the last chapter is outlined through the presentation of conclusions and findings obtained from the data collected during the draft of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the results obtained in the analysis of Sino-Myanmar relations and to explain the observations presented in the thesis by answering the problem formulations and the relative sub-questions. Moreover, the chapter aims at formulating feasible explanations on the evolution and the current challenges in China and Myanmar relations.

3.3 Research Limitations

One of the main limitations encountered during the drafting of this thesis was determined by time constraints. A longer period of research and written production is necessary for the creation of a more profound and analytical study; however, the possibility of extending the research for a longer time was not provided. For this reason, the topic of this thesis had to be narrowed to a specific period of Sino-Myanmar relations.

Furthermore, another limitation to the research was determined by the decision of focusing on the relations of the two main actors, the governments of China and Myanmar. The exclusion of other local and smaller actors in the analysis of Sino-Burmese relations was driven by the necessity of narrow down a topic that is multifaceted and too vast. For the same reasons expressed above, the analysis was pursued by selecting to a specific period of Sino-Myanmar relations, as an exhaustive description of the history of China-Myanmar relations would have not be possible to present. However, even though the focus of the thesis was directed to the most recent years of the relations between China and Myanmar, it is not possible to depict an up-to-date analysis of the topic, as the effects of the recent policies and reforms implemented by both countries are still not visible.

In addition, the thesis encountered another limitation in the use of theories, as they are mainly based on a Western comprehension of IR. Indeed, Liberalism and Realism are created through concepts and assumptions formulated by Western scholars. As a consequence, these theories are based on examples derived from the experiences of Western countries and then applied to the Asian mentality and foreign policy.

Lastly, a further limitation to this thesis is depicted by the absence of exhaustive data on the current situation of relations between China and Myanmar. Indeed, the relations between the two countries are rarely studied, especially compared to the relations of China with other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia or Thailand. Thus, collecting a vast and important number of sources on the topic was difficult for the scarcity of existing literature. Due to all the limitations presented above, the research cannot be generalized to any other case of relations between China and other Southeast Asian countries or between Myanmar and another nation.

CHAPTER IV

LIBERALISM AND REALISM THEORIES AND THEIR RELEVANCE IN CHINA-MYANMAR RELATIONS

4.1 Liberalism

Liberalism is a line of thought of International Relations formed by a diversified and complex set of theories. Liberalism takes into consideration the influence that institutions, citizens interests and economy have on the power of a state. Liberalism emphasizes the importance of democracy as form of government and recognizes the principal of free trade and market capitalism as model for economic development. Indeed, this theory find its concrete validation in “the two most profound trends in contemporary international politics - the spread of democracy after the Cold War and the globalization of the world economy” (Burchill, 2009, p. 57). This type of approach to International Relations focuses on the domestic level of a state to define the consequences of the state’s behaviour in the international level. In other words, Liberalism underlines how the domestic characteristics of each state shape the international system. Therefore, Liberalism depicts a more positive view of the world system compared to other IR theories, taking into account other stakeholders involved in international relations, such as individuals and international organizations. (Burchill, 2009; Meiser, 2017; Segbers, 2006; Slaughter, 2011).

4.1.1 Fundamental Assumptions of Liberalism

The basic belief of Liberalism is the right of individuals to life and freedom. Liberals believe that a state has to pursue the wellbeing of its citizens by limiting its power through the creation and acceptance of institutions and by maintaining individuals’ liberty. Therefore, according to Liberalism, a political system should not have unlimited power over its citizens, but it should guarantee fundamental rights and have fair elections that allow individuals to control the government power. The domestic characteristics of the state are then connected to the realm of International Relations through the belief that the internal aspects of a nation shape its behaviour in its relations with other states (Doyle & Recchia, 2011; Meiser, 2017).

One of the major contributions of Liberalism to International Relations is the democratic peace theory. This approach explains the lack of aggressive behaviours between democratic

states. Liberalism argues that democracies rarely go to war with other democracies, while, on the other hand, it assumes that democratic states are likely to start militarized conflicts with other non-democratic states. Liberals present a vast range of arguments to support the democratic peace theory. Indeed, they underline that a conflict between democratic states is unlikely to start, because democracies are characterized by internal limitations of power that restrain the government ability to make decisions that may threaten the state safety and its citizens freedom. Moreover, the influence of public opinion on the decision-making process of evaluating the risks of war may jeopardize the support given to the elected government. Thus, if the state's citizens protest against war because the costs and disadvantages of engaging in a conflict are too high, the state will be discouraged to start the conflict. Also, democracies are often characterized by a tendency of cooperation with each other, because the state recognizes other democracies as reliable and unthreatening. Lastly, cooperation between democracies often creates strong economic ties that are beneficial for both states and a war between them would put at stake the existing positive relations. As a result, Liberalism believes that war is an approach to International Relations that is experiencing a decline and that a peaceful world order can be formed by promoting a predilection towards liberal democracy among the nations (Burchill, 2009; Doyle & Recchia, 2011; Meiser, 2017; Slaughter, 2011).

Liberalism promotes cooperation between states in different sectors, especially in economy, through the development of free trade. Free trade is defined as the exchange of money, resources and goods without the limitations of artificial and national barriers. As a consequence, states aim at developing their economy by joining the global market and by creating exchanges and competitions between nations to improve their use of money, resources, services and labour. Moreover, free trade is seen as a fundamental feature to create positive international relations, as nationalism and trade barriers can create issues and divisions between nations. Therefore, free trade shapes another important aspect of Liberalism in International Relations, as "trade would create relations of mutual dependence which would foster understanding between peoples and reduce conflicts" (Burchill, 2009, p. 65). Hence, Liberalism emphasizes the relevance of free trade in helping underdeveloped countries to overcome their economic backwardness, achieve modernization and join the international economic system, thus decreasing conflict and national competition, while increasing relations of interdependence (Bösz, 2017; Burchill, 2009, Meiser, 2017).

Specifically, Liberalism defines interdependence as “a situation in the world politics where all the actors including states as well as non-state actors, are dependent upon one another” (Rana, 2015, p. 291). In other words, Interdependence is a condition in which states, or actors in various states, have influence on each other. However, interdependence is not characterized only by cooperative relations between states or transnational actors, it may also include relations of conflict and competition between stakeholders. This specific and multifaceted model of interdependence is referred as Complex Interdependence by scholars of Neoliberalism. Complex Interdependence theory argues that in matters of International Relations, states are not the only actors that should be considered in analysing global issues and policies. Indeed, world politics is characterized by numerous types of relationship, such as transnational, interstate and trans-governmental interactions. Moreover, Complex Interdependence theory stresses the lack of hierarchy that define the importance of global issues. Therefore, world politics should not be divided in “high politics”, that concerns military power and national security, and “low politics”, that includes economic, environmental and social matters. Consequently, Complex Interdependence underlines that military power is not effective in resolving issues that concerns economy or society. The use of military force is not recognized as a way to solve problems between actors that are connected by strong interdependence, as the result of an aggressive behaviour may have consequences on the positive economy or on other types of relations. Despite the decreasing importance of military power in the globalized world, it remains an important tool that cannot be completely neglected. The threats of militarized conflicts are always present, especially in cases of strong exploitation between actors, as competition may evolve into a conflict. However, military power still has a minor role in the international community. In the current world politics, Complex Interdependence assumes a major role in explaining the relations between different actors on global issues, but it fails to cover all the numerous aspects of International Relations (Bösz, 2017; Burchill, 2009; Rana, 2015; Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Another fundamental theory strictly connected with interdependence concerns the analyses of the role of institutions in International Relations, which is a specific strand of Neoliberal assumptions that scholars indicate as “neoliberal institutionalism”. Liberals describe institutions as “sets of rules which govern state behaviour in specific policy areas” (Burchill, 2009, p. 66). Thus, institutions are tools to help the states in achieving and organizing cooperation with one another. Indeed, cooperation between states is considered fundamental

in order to deal with global concerns and institutions have a crucial role in changing the goals of a state by decreasing the importance of self-interest in favour of cooperation. Thus, states will shift their interests on achieving “absolute gains”, that regard general benefits for welfare of all stakeholders, instead of “relative gains”, that concern the improvement of a state welfare in comparative terms with other states. Through institutions and regimes, namely rules, principles and norms that influence actors’ decisions on specific issues, the behaviour of states is controlled and the international system assumes a more predictable and legitimate structure. Hence, the role of international institutions is to control and restraint negative attitudes between nations and to present information to both stakeholders to enhance cooperation (Burchill, 2009; Meiser, 2017; Rana, 2015).

4.1.2 Limitations of Liberalism in Foreign Policy

Liberalism is mainly criticized for its utopic and reductionist view of the world politics. It is especially contested by the scholars of Realism, as the two theories present arguments that disagree as well as other that agree. Specifically, Liberalism is criticized by Realist as it refuses the assumptions that the nature of the international system is characterized by anarchy and that the objectives of states are proclaimed as merely trying to achieve security and power to survive (Burchill, 2009; Meiser, 2017; Rana, 2015).

Among the various criticisms moved to Liberalism, scholars often strongly criticize the democratic peace theory, as the Eastern countries are increasingly distancing themselves from the idea of liberal democracy as the unique form of government. Indeed, East Asia and Islamic states refuse to follow the example of the Western world and create obstacles for the expansion of liberal democracy throughout the international system (Bösz, 2017; Burchill, 2009).

In a similar way, free trade has been criticized for its schematization of the differences that nations present. Indeed, liberals expect to impose free trade to all the developing states, accepting free trade is the only way to enter the international economy. The costs of refusing free trade and capitalism as unique economic structures are to lose other nations investments and financial assistance. Consequently, all states are obliged to embrace the same structure for reaching economic development, without focusing the attention to their own specific characteristics (Burchill, 2009).

Another criticism moved to Liberalism is directed to economic interdependence. The fundamental role gave to interdependence fails to consider that in a situation of conflict,

states will always choose to seek security instead of economic gains, thus threatening the cooperation between states to follow their national interests. Therefore, the survival and security of a nation are the basis on which economy can flourish and cooperation can be created among states. Also, interdependence means that states live in an economic balanced system, which can be ambiguous, as power and economic benefits are spread in an uneven way among the states. Therefore, interdependence does not create an absence of dominant powers that lead the international system and decide the norms to follow to increase economic development. As a result, these criticisms are also moved to neoliberal institutionalism, as international institutions fail to concretely limit the power of developed countries (Burchill, 2009; Rana; 2015).

4.2 Realism

Realism is the oldest and most commonly used school of thought of International Relations. Realism is based on the importance of competitiveness and conflicts among state to shape the international system. This theory is rooted in the history of humanity, as it finds numerous analogies between the structures of the ancient world and the system of the contemporary world.

Therefore, Realism is often seen as a timeless theory of International Relations, that faces empirical restraints in some specific cases, but it is still recognized as an undoubtedly important and dominant approach to IR. Realists argues that the fundamental aspects that shape International Relations are anarchy and balance of power. However, Realism is mainly presented in two principals approaches: classical Realism and Neorealism. While classical Realism focuses on the assumption that anarchy is essential in interactions among men and that conflict and war are implicit characteristics of human nature, Neorealism shifted its attention from the nature of men to the nature of states, underlining that the structures of domestic political system combined with the international structural forces determine the actions of nations (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Segbers, 2006).

4.2.1 Fundamental Assumptions of Realism

Realism is based on three core assumptions: states are the main stakeholders in International Relations, states are unitary and rational political actors that pursue their own national interests and states exist in an international system that is characterized by anarchy, namely

the lack of an international authority. Therefore, states tend to take care of themselves in order to survive in an anarchic international environment, where an organizing structure of relations between actors is unlikely to develop. To ensure their survival, states have to struggle for achieving power, defined as the ability to gain control over outcomes, compared to the other nations. Thus, Realism argues that International Relations are primarily shaped through the decisions implemented by Great Powers, those states that possess higher capabilities. As a consequence, the international order is defined by the distribution of power in the system, known as polarity, and its balance. Indeed, the balance of power is the condition that guarantee the survival of a state in anarchy, by improving its capabilities while opposing to the capabilities of others. In this way, states limit one another from becoming too powerful (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Rana, 2015; Slaughter, 2011).

The earlier set of assumptions that lays the foundations for the theory of Realism is called “classical Realism”. This approach is based on the belief that human nature is egoistic and follows patterns that repeat themselves throughout history. Hence, human actions are solely motivated by a desire of power and by a lack of confidence towards others. Consequently, as the governmental structure of a nation are created by men, human nature also influences and determines the state behaviour and diplomacy. Therefore, states, similarly to human nature, pursue their own self-interests and they are triggered by desires of domination and diffidence toward each other. Thus, relations between nations tend to be mainly conflictual and lead to war. In this uncertain and anarchic international system, the primary obligation of each state is to ensure its own national security. States have to protect themselves by improving their defensive and coercive power. Indeed, the fundamental tools used to survive from threats in foreign policy are defined by power and deception. For these reasons, classical realists argue that is not possible for a state, that needs to survive in an anarchic system, to observe a moral conduct. Foreign policy is considered amoral, as it is more influenced by national interest than morality. However, states are not above ethical norms, rather they pursue an “ethic of responsibility”. States act according to moral considerations only when morality does not threaten the national survival, otherwise states will abandon morality and instead they will act according to power and violence to ensure their survival (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Morgenthau, 1985; Rösch & Lebow, 2017; Slaughter, 2011).

A following modernization of Realism generated a new approach to the theory that is indicated as Neorealism, or structural Realism, that abandon the centrality of human nature to focus on the anarchic structure of the international system and its effects on state behaviour. According to Neorealism, the international system is characterized by three fundamental aspects: the ordering principles of the system, the differentiation of functions of the units in the system and the distribution of capabilities among the units of the system. Firstly, the ordering principles are described as hierarchy in the domestic system, characterized by the presence of a central government that creates relations of authority and subordination, and anarchy in the international system, characterized by the absence of a higher authority that controls the actions of states on the global level. Secondly, as concerns the functions of the units, due to the anarchic nature of the system, all states carry out similar functions, which are determined by self-interest. Therefore, there are no differences in the functions performed by states. Lastly, the structure of the international system differs only for the distribution of capabilities among states. Power is distributed unevenly in the international system; thus, it changes based on the distribution of relative power, namely when capabilities are measured in comparison to capabilities of other states. For these reasons, cooperation in the international system is rare and difficult to achieve, because states are prone to focus on increasing their relative power and overcome the power of other states, in order to ensure their survival in an anarchic environment (Antunes & Camisã, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Rana, 2015; Slaughter, 2011; Waltz, 1979).

Realists, however, present different opinions as concern state behaviour, thus creating two lines of thought inside the theory of Neorealism: offensive Realism and defensive Realism. Offensive Realism argues that national security is hard to achieve, because states guarantee their survival by maximizing their power in relation to other, thus the possibilities of starting war and conflict are elevated. Consequently, the best approach to ensure security is determined by achieving hegemony over other nations. On the other hand, defensive Realism stresses that security is not difficult to reach and, therefore, states should not use domination as a strategy to maintain their survival. States should not maximize their relative power, but, at the same time, they should avoid behaving in a way that favours the other nations. Defensive realism highlights the importance of the balance of power, a balanced distribution of capabilities among states to assure that no nation will prevail on another. This strategy will guarantee the expansion of security in the international system, rather

than encouraging states to start conflicts and wars (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Rana, 2015; Slaughter, 2011).

4.2.2 Limitations of Realism in Foreign Policy

The most important critic moved toward Realism is probably determined by the lack of explanation formulated to understand major changes in IR. In other words, Realism fails to clarify the majority of situations that occur in international relations, displaying a difficult application of the theory to reality. A prominent example that arose this criticism was the failure of Realism in predicting and clarifying the end of the Cold War. This lack of cohesion to reality generated a decline in the popularity of Realism among scholars. Thus, Realism is criticized for merely focusing on constancy of international system, determined by the repetition of certain patterns in the international system throughout history, instead of giving attention to the changes that often occur in the structure of the international scenario (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Segbers, 2006).

Another major criticism moved against Realism is the fact that the theory seems to justify the use of violence among states and legitimize war as a tool of International Relations. Indeed, the assumption made by Realism on the selfish and uncooperative nature of states and anarchy governing the international system, are seen as excuses for nations to behave aggressively and merely focus on increasing their own power to prevail over other states. Realism describes an anarchic international system that is maintained by the use of violence by states. Therefore, according to these assumptions, anarchy in the international system is impossible to overcome (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009).

Correspondingly, Realism has been criticized for its pessimistic perception of the international system, as it declares that confrontations and aggression are unavoidable. Also, this pessimistic view of the world is often considered a theoretical simplification of the complex mechanism that shape International Relations. Therefore, this theory is frequently seen as an important part of a pluralistic approach to International Relations (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009).

Lastly, Realism also faces various criticism for its consideration of the state as singular and solid unit. By focusing only on the state as principal stakeholder in the realm of International Relations, Realism ignores the importance of other domestic and international actors, such as non-governmental organizations, individuals, international institutions and transnational organizations. The assumption made by realists, that institutions have a minor effect on

foreign policy and state behaviours, is not realistic in the current global scenario. These criticisms also argue against the claim that security is the primary issues of a state, as nowadays an increasing number of other issues shared among nations is presented as threats to the stability of the international system, from economic and social concerns to environmental issues. Recognizing the state as the only actor in foreign policy and security as the only issue of the international system is seen as a limitation to the comprehension of the whole spectrum of the IR discipline (Antunes & Camisão, 2017; Donnelly, 2009; Segbers, 2006).

4.3 Relevance of Liberalism and Realism in China-Myanmar Relations

Based on the assumptions and limitations presented in the previous paragraphs, the combination of Liberalism and Realism is considered necessary to analyse the relations between China and Myanmar in their totality. As a matter of fact, the use of a single theory as model of the thesis, namely Liberalism or Realism, would have depicted an incomplete framework for the analysis of the topic. The understanding of International Relations between states cannot be holistic without a consolidation of different theories, as a universal approach that completely explains all the aspects and characteristics of relations between nations is not currently existent.

In particular, Liberalism is fundamental in the analysis of International Relations for its acknowledgments in the current situation of the international system. Hence, Liberalism is applicable to the relations between China and Myanmar especially for its major assumptions on interdependence, the role of international institutions and economic cooperation (Burchill, 2009; Meiser, 2017).

In the case of interdependency, China's relations with Myanmar are important to consolidate the stability of the Southeast Asian community. China and Myanmar enhance their relations to pursue shared goals for the development of the region as well as of the single nations. Thus, even though these relations are characterized as asymmetrical, the situation found acknowledgment in the concept of interdependence as a balance of power between actors is not required. In this case, interdependence is interpreted as the influences that the policies and actions implemented by China have on Myanmar and vice versa. Interdependence impose beneficial mutual behaviours on both nations to ensure the development of the Southeast Asian region as well as of China and Myanmar (Rana, 2015; Moravcsik, 1997; Shee, 2002).

As regards the role of international institutions, China and Myanmar accept the involvement of international organizations in their relations in order to control and organize their interactions. International institutions help the two nations to focus on cooperation and limit behaviour that only supports national interest, especially due to China's ability to influence Sino-Myanmar relations, as it retains more power and capabilities in relation to Myanmar. However, these restrictions on states' behaviour do not determine a deficiency in the benefits that both nations gain in maintaining these relations (Hempson-Jones, 2005; Meiser, 2017).

Furthermore, economic cooperation is the main characteristic of Sino-Myanmar relations. Indeed, Myanmar strongly relies on its economic ties with China in order to overcome its backwardness and join the global market, while China considers Myanmar an important economic partner for its strategic position in the Southeast Asian region and for the abundance of natural resources and cheap labour. The existing economic cooperation between China and Myanmar is also fundamental as it increases their relation of interdependence (Burchill, 2009; Tea, 2010).

On the other hand, Realism is a fundamental approach to International Relations and a study on the interactions between states is hardly possible to be considered without the application of Realism to the analysis. In the case of relations between China and Myanmar, Realism is relevant due to its interpretations of balance of power and hegemony (Donnelly, 2009).

As concerns the balance of power, the relations between China and Myanmar can be seen as a method to increase China's capabilities and counterbalance the dominance of other Great Powers in the region, such as India, and in the international scenario, such as the United States. By enhancing its economic and political role in Myanmar, China is presenting itself as a competitor to other nations. Sino-Myanmar relations may be understood in the optic of an alliance made by China in order to maintain stability in Southeast Asia and to assure its role as a Great Power in the regional and international scenario (Bajaj, 2010; Donnelly, 2009; Sun, 2014).

As regards hegemony, the relations between China and Myanmar assume a realist perspective for the prominent presence of Chinese infrastructures and investments in Myanmar. Indeed, China's projects in Myanmar are seen as a way to assume economic and strategic military advantages in the Southeast Asian region. The construction of maritime ports and other infrastructures in strategic positions in the Burmese territory makes other Asian nations worry about a possible future threat of a military action. China is expanding

its power in a way that is not openly coercive, but that can be interpreted as a method to prepare for future conflicts. For a realist point of view, China is trying to impose itself as a hegemonic power inside the Southeast Asian community by increasing its influence in other nations, like Myanmar, in order to ensure its survival. For these reasons, China improvements in its relations with Myanmar are considered strategies to impose its national interest instead of promoting a shared Southeast Asian community's agenda (Holslag, 2010; McDonald, Jones & Frazee, 2012).

CHAPTER V

CHINA AND MYANMAR RELATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER NAYPYIDAW'S POLITICAL CHANGES OF 2011

5.1 China-Myanmar Relations During the Military Regime

China and Myanmar relations have been always defined by the two countries as “fraternal”¹, since the beginning of their interactions. Despite this optimistic declaration, China and Myanmar relations underwent several highs and lows throughout the history of their relationship. However, since the military coup of 1988 put the State Peace and Development Council² (SPDC) into power in Myanmar, the ties between China and Myanmar had strongly increased. The strengthening of the Sino-Myanmar relationship was determined by various reasons and interests from both sides, but the main motivation behind this reinforcement was the support that Beijing provided in favour of Myanmar’s military government, legitimating its control of power. Moreover, the external isolation and the penalties that the United States and other Western countries imposed to Myanmar, due to its illegitimate military regime, influenced the country to deeply tighten its relations with China, particularly as regards their political and economic interactions, in order to ensure the survival of Naypyidaw’s domestic political scene. Since the beginning of the 2000s, relations between China and Myanmar continued their positive growth and the two countries had increasingly focused their interactions on three main fields of interest: politics and security, economy and exploitation of natural resources (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002, Yi, 2013).

5.1.1 Political and Strategic Relations

During the military regime in Myanmar, Sino-Burmese relations enjoyed critical positive improvements as regards political interactions. Indeed, the exclusion of Myanmar from the international scenario enforced by Western countries, due to the illegitimate nature of its government, helped China to strengthen its ties with Myanmar through the engagement of

¹ China and Myanmar uses the word “paukphaw” to describe their relationship. This term is used in the Myanmar’s language to express the words “brothers”, “siblings” or “intimate” (Geng, 2006).

² The Myanmar’s military regime was previously called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council in 1997 (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002).

both countries in various diplomatic visits. Therefore, China was one of the few countries that officially recognized Myanmar as a legitimate nation and as a part of the international community. In 2000, the year that marked the 50th anniversary from the start of diplomatic relations between China and Myanmar, the Vice Chairman of SPDC, General Maung Aye, visited China in June, in honour of the celebration for this anniversary. Following the same positive motivations, China's Vice President Hu Jintao visited Myanmar in July of the same year. The reciprocal visits were focused on approving future cooperation between the two countries and reaffirming China's support to the existing military regime. In the following year, Sino-Myanmar relations reached a peak of cooperation that culminated in the state visit of China's President Jiang Zemin to Myanmar. During his diplomatic sojourn in 2001, Jiang Zemin signed numerous agreements that focused on prioritizing the economic and securitization aspects of the relations as primary concerns in China-Myanmar cooperation and he renewed the importance of the "fraternal" nature of the relationship between the two countries. In 2003, Myanmar's Senior General Than Shwe visited China at the invitation of Jiang Zemin. Once again, both leaders expressed the positive and friendly nature of the Sino-Myanmar relations by engaging in higher future cooperation between the countries. In the same year, internal political tumults in Myanmar urged Western countries to impose stricter sanctions on the nation as well as presenting Myanmar's case as a major international issue at the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). Under the pressure of the international community and the United Nations (UN), China pushed Myanmar to start implementing internal reforms to achieve political stability, despite its historical policy of non-interference in the domestic issues of other countries. Nevertheless, China and Myanmar relations continued to deepen in the following years, as the other Western and Asian countries were still refusing to engage in relationships with Myanmar. In 2007, a huge protest, known as the Saffron Revolution³, burst in Myanmar due to the rise of petrol prices, to which the SPDC promptly responded by cruelly suppressing the riots. This repression was condemned by the UNSC as a violation of human rights and the UN was determined to implement strong solutions against Myanmar's government. However, the support of China, that vetoed the UNSC resolution, protected Myanmar's government from the harsh sentence

³ The Saffron Revolution was a peaceful protest started in August 2007 and it was firstly motivated by the unexpected raises of petrol prices in the nation implemented by the regime. The protest was led by pro-democracy activists and was later joined by Buddhist monks, as it quickly turned in a protest against the military rule. The military junta harshly repressed the protests, that came to an end in October 2017 (Burma Campaign UK, 2018).

of the international community. Despite showing support to the governing role of the military junta, China convicted Myanmar government for its military repression of the Saffron Revolution and expressed the necessity of improving the cooperation between Myanmar and the international community. In 2009, two reciprocal diplomatic visits between the countries, one from Vice General Maung Aye to China and the other from Vice President Xi Jinping to Myanmar, marked once again the desire of keeping close and good relations between China and Myanmar. In these occasions, the countries focused on improving their economic ties, developing infrastructures projects in Myanmar through Chinese investments, maintaining the stability of their shared border and cooperating on the international and regional level. In 2010, a diplomatic visit to Myanmar was made by China's Premier Wen Jiabao to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the cooperation between China and Myanmar and to endure the beneficial cooperation between the two countries in numerous sectors (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002; Storey, 2007; Tea, 2010; The Irrawaddy, 2017; Yi, 2013).

Moreover, Myanmar represented an important strategic coalition for China, as concern ensuring its interests in the Southeast Asia region. Indeed, China aimed at strengthening its relations with Myanmar especially due to the county's geographic location, that represents an alternative route for China to achieve direct access to the Indian and Pacific Ocean. Myanmar strategic location was relevant for China as a mean to overcome the "Malacca Dilemma"⁴, namely the huge dependence of China on the Strait of Malacca for oil and gas importations. Thus, by moving natural resources through Myanmar, China was able to avoid the use of the Malacca Strait, a territory controlled by the United States and other Asian countries' navies (Figure 1). By engaging in closer relations with Myanmar, China was also able to achieve direct access to the Bay of Bengal, thus not only gaining an alternative route for oil and other energetic resources to access China's territory, but also reaching an important strategic position that may have military implications for Southeast Asian countries as well as for India and the United States. Moreover, the shipments of natural resources through Burmese territory were also helpful for China to enhance the development of Yunnan, the Chinese province that share its border with Myanmar. The increasing trades between Myanmar and China, the infrastructure projects launched by the Chinese

⁴ China relies on the Strait of Malacca for the 60/70 % of its oil and gas shipments. Two major issues that threaten China's imports through the strait are maritime terrorism and piracy and the dominance of other Great Power over the Malacca's Strait (Tea, 2010).

government in the territories around the border and the Chinese plan of developing a trade zone involving Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries, such as Laos and Thailand, all aimed at improving the poor economies of the inland provinces of China, especially of Yunnan (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002; Tea, 2010; Transnational Institute, 2016; Yonghong & Hongchao, 2014).

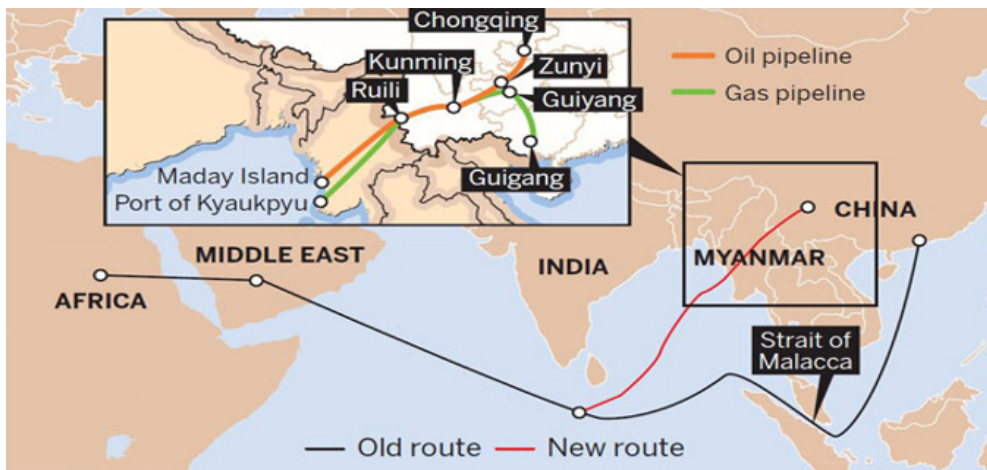


Figure 1: Myanmar's strategic position for China in order to avoid the Strait of Malacca for the transportation of natural resources (Yanrong & Juan, 2015).

These numerous political and diplomatic interactions between China and Myanmar can be interpreted as beneficial for both stakeholders. Indeed, from a realist perspective, the legitimization of a country by a Great Power helps to consolidate its role in the regional and international scenario. China relations with its “illegitimate” neighbour increased the Chinese hegemonic role in Southeast Asia as well as its role of Great Power in the international community. Thus, Sino-Myanmar relations were relevant in helping China to gain more power to counterbalance other strong countries, such as India on a regional level and the United States on the international level. As an instance, the bypass of the Malacca Strait and the creation of military port in the Bay of Bengal in accordance with Myanmar, can be interpreted as a growing dominance of China on the Asian and international community. On the other hand, Myanmar relations with China were important to Naypyidaw because they assisted the country in its struggle to be recognized as part of the international community, and, at the same time, secured beneficial and positive relations for both countries involved by deepening their interdependence. As a consequence of the growing ties between China and Myanmar, the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were influenced to recognize Myanmar as a legitimate nation of Southeast

Asia and they offered Myanmar a position as a member of the ASEAN in 1997, in order to restrain the increasing power of China in the region (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002; Transnational Institute, 2016).

The political relations between the two nations presented different aspects that can be interpreted through a liberalist or realist vision. Both countries showed a deep focus on following the aims influenced by their national interest. Indeed, during the years of the military regime, Myanmar main political aim was characterized by the legitimisation of the government, while China's objective was determined by pursuing its economic development and increasing its hegemonic power in the Southeast Asian region. Even though both countries were concentrated in achieving their interests through their relationship, a cooperation between the two nations was still promoted to foster the interdependence that defined the Sino-Myanmar relations. Also, the restricting role of the international community and the international organizations, that excluded Myanmar from the global scenario, was fundamental to define and improve the cooperation between China and Myanmar (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002; Tea, 2010; Transnational Institute, 2016).

5.1.2 Economic Relations

China and Myanmar relations have mainly developed from the strong foundations of their trade and economic ties. These historical relations experienced a critical improvement during the years of the military regime in Myanmar, especially due to the Western alienation of the country from the world economic scene. China became Myanmar's major importer of fast-moving consumer goods and other products, such as technical equipment and machineries. Furthermore, China also turned into one of Myanmar primary export markets, specifically for raw materials, agricultural products and natural resources, like gas and oil. However, Myanmar economy was not completely dominated by Chinese investments. Indeed, other ASEAN and Asian countries had important roles in helping the development of the Burmese economy. As a matter of fact, the major trading partner of Myanmar was represented by Thailand, which possessed the higher rate of foreign direct investments (FDI) and the higher rate of exports to the country. However, China maintained its role as highly relevant trading partner, covering almost for the 27% of Myanmar imported goods in 2010. To help the development of both countries' economies, China and Myanmar started numerous trade agreements during the years of the military regime. For instance, in 2004, China and Myanmar developed a program called Early Harvest Plan as a part of the

ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, which involved the free trade of numerous agricultural goods. From a liberalist perspective, the removal of national constraints and barriers to the trade between China and Myanmar determined an increasing in their relations of interdependence and fostered the positive interactions between the countries. On the other hand, the strong presence of China in Myanmar's economy influenced the growth of unfavourable opinions on the country's relations with China among the Myanmar's population. Additionally, the Chinese economic dominance and the behaviours of Chinese businesses in Myanmar, especially the prevailing mentality of Yunnan companies on the Burmese economy, had negative impacts on China's image in Myanmar's public opinion, thus undermining pacific and prosperous relations between the two nations (Geng, 2006; Shee, 2002; Swanstörn, 2012; World Integrated Trade Solutions, 2017).

Another challenge for the economic relations between China and Myanmar was represented by the increasing trend of illegal trade among the two countries' border. A huge number of interactions among the China-Myanmar border was constituted by illegal activities, such as drugs trafficking, human trafficking, prostitution and arm trafficking. The consequences of these contrabands were extremely heavy, not only for the population living in the border areas, with an increase of addiction to drugs and the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus, but also for the governments of both countries, as corruption increased and the stability of border security started to tremble. Indeed, some members of the military junta were uncovered as deeply involved in the smuggling of drugs and other illegal products, putting Myanmar domestic stability at stake. Illegal trade was addressed by both countries as a major challenge for the development of their relations, as it created a real threat for the security of the two nations. However, the issue of illegal trade was difficult to overcome due to the involvement of political figures from both China and Myanmar's governments and, also, due to the crucial role that black market had in developing Myanmar's economy during the SPDC regime, that resulted in associating Myanmar government with the problem, namely the growth of illegal trade (Shee, 2002; Swanstörn, 2012; Tea, 2010; Transnational Institute, 2016).

Moreover, another important aspect of the economic relations between China and Myanmar was determined by the involvement of China's investments in Myanmar's infrastructures projects. China financed a great number of infrastructures plans that concerned industrial development and energy consumption. During the SPDC era, China focused its finances in helping Myanmar building six hydropower generators and one thermal power station,

contributing to most of Myanmar national electric power generation. An instance of these important infrastructures constructions was the Paunglaung hydropower project, built in 2005 by Yunnan Machinery Import and Export Corporation (YMIEC) and financed by Export-Import Bank of China. This project represented the largest foreign trade investment made by Yunnan and YMIEC, as well as the biggest infrastructure project implemented by China in the Southeast Asian region. The growth of the Chinese investments in Myanmar depicted an important aspect for the improvement of interdependence between the two countries. While from a realist point of view, China and Myanmar are seeking to reach their national interests through the interactions with one another, on the other hand, both countries are achieving mutual benefits from their economic relations through the pursuit of common goals, such as maintaining the stability in Southeast Asia (Geng, 2006; Kudo, 2006; Shee, 2002; Yi, 2013).

The economic interactions between China and Myanmar during the SPDC era are relevant to depict a liberal interpretation of the Sino-Myanmar relations. The reforms and policies implemented by both countries in order to enhance their economy can be analysed in the optic of free trade. Indeed, China and Myanmar facilitated the trade of a large majority of their products and goods to achieve a higher economic development and deepen their relations of interdependence. Despite being characterized by an unbalanced distribution of capabilities, China and Myanmar relations are still fundamental in shaping the leverage that both countries have on each other and on the international community. The Sino-Myanmar relations put China in a higher role of influence on the Southeast Asian region, while they gave Myanmar the determination to interlace interactions with other countries, in order to decrease the dominance of Beijing on the Burmese economy (Geng, 2006; Kudo, 2006; Yi, 2013).

5.1.3 Natural Resources

Natural resources played a crucial role in the Sino-Myanmar relations in the early 2000s. The dramatic modernization and economic development experienced by China determined the necessity for the country to find new sources of energy and natural supplies. Myanmar caught the attention of the Chinese government for its huge natural reserves of oil and gas and for the easy access to natural resources that China had from its shared border with the country. In 2004 and 2005, China and Myanmar cooperated in various projects to let the China's National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and the Myanmar Oil and Gas

Enterprise (MOGE) share the production and exploitation of Myanmar's natural resources. In the same years, other big oil and petrol Chinese corporations, like The China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC) and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), started to invest in Myanmar, focusing on the extraction and utilization of energy sources. The natural resources of Myanmar were crucial for China not only because they were helping the Chinese economic development by giving an alternative source of energy compared to the Middle East, but also because they were another solution to surmount the "Malacca Dilemma" for the importations of natural resources in the Chinese territory. Consequently, all these investments in Myanmar's territory were dictated by the China's pursue of its national interest, mainly to keep fuelling its economic development. However, Myanmar highly benefited from increasing the level of interdependence with a Great Power such as China, as Naypyidaw aimed at reaching modernization and international recognition through its positive connections with the neighbouring country. Myanmar took advantage of the need of China for natural resources to gain economic benefits and exploited the economic cooperation with China in order to ensure that the military junta was recognized as the official government of the country. Hence, in the energy sector, the strategic position of Myanmar and its reserves of natural resources conferred to the nation a higher leverage on its interdependent relationship with China (Geng, 2006; Kudo, 2006; Kudo, 2008; Tea, 2010; Yi, 2013).

5.2 Myanmar's Political Changes of 2011

In 2011, Myanmar experienced an important change in its internal politics, led by the approval of a new constitution in 2008. Indeed, the first political elections since the start of military regime were run and, in March 2011, the first elected military-backed government came into power in the nation. Despite the fact that the new government was led by President Thein Sein, a former general of the SPDC, fundamental changes in the domestic political environment were generally achieved through the implementation of new policies and reforms. With the establishment of the new government, Myanmar underwent crucial internal transformations that had repercussions not only on its own domestic stability, but also on its position in the Southeast Asian region and in the international scenario. Since Myanmar gained a more relevant role in the international community by deepening its relations with Asian and Western countries, its relationship with China started to experience new issues that mined the stability of their interactions. The uncertainties on Sino-Myanmar

relations brought by the recent improvements in Western-Myanmar interactions influenced China to adopt new foreign policy approaches to address its problems with Myanmar. Consequently, the domestic changes of Myanmar were perceived as both positive and negative for its relations with China, as they opened additional opportunities for cooperation and, at the same time, they decreased the Chinese hegemony over Myanmar and Southeast Asia (Bi, 2014; Transnational Institute, 2016; Yi, 2013).

Moreover, another crucial evolution in Myanmar internal politics was determined by the second general election of November 2015. The elections were won by the opposition party, the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. This new government in office aims at the democratization of the country and the achievement of peace between the various ethnic groups living in Myanmar, therefore it is strongly supported by the Western nations. Although the military party still detain a huge political and economic power in Myanmar, this election embodied an unexpected turn in the governance of the nation. However, the NLD recognizes the importance of maintaining friendly and good relations with its neighbouring countries, especially with China. Therefore, the new government is implementing policies that still benefits the interests of both countries in the development of the Sino-Myanmar relations. Nevertheless, the effects of the reforms that the NLD is implementing in regard to Myanmar's internal and foreign policy are still to be seen, as it is too early to conceive any result (Transnational Institute, 2016; Sun 2015).

5.3 China-Myanmar Relations after 2011

Myanmar political transition of 2011 deeply affected the relations of the country with China. While both countries underline the importance of renewing their historical bond, new challenges arose in different fields that concern their interactions, especially as regards political, economic and social relations. The new government of Myanmar expressed doubts and uneasiness about the overwhelming power that China had gained over the nation during the years of the military regime, thus Myanmar's leaders implemented new reforms and policies aiming at restoring the country independent position in the international community. For these reasons, Myanmar started to follow a new "opening up" strategy towards foreign policy, that was helped by the removal of sanctions and restrictions from the country made by the US and the European Union. As a consequence, China's relations with Myanmar experienced a transformation that was mainly determined by the renewed integration of Myanmar in the global scenario and by the inclusion of different actors, both

domestic and international, in the context of their relationship (Li & Char, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016; Yi, 2013)

5.3.1 Political and Strategic Relations

Since the political transformation of Myanmar occurred, China tried to reinforce its bilateral relations with the country by reaffirming the importance of their good-neighbourly and “fraternal” friendship through various diplomatic visits. In the first months after the election of the new government, China’s officials visited Myanmar to express support to the new Naypyidaw’s leadership and, in the same period, Myanmar President Thein Sein paid his first official visit to China to meet the Chinese President Hu Jintao. During these diplomatic encounters, the leaders of both nations expressed the desire of maintaining positive and beneficial relations with each other and fostering the already existing economic ties between the two countries. However, Sino-Myanmar relations began to face a difficult and unstable phase, as more issues and obstacles emerges in their interactions. The main challenges that China faced in its relations with Myanmar are determined by the growth of “anti-Chinese sentiment” among Myanmar’s society and politicians, the reestablishment of Myanmar’s relations with other Western and Asian nations and the Myanmar’s efforts to decrease the Chinese influence over the country (Myoe, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016; Yi, 2013). The main reason behind the rapid growth of an “anti-Chinese sentiment” in Myanmar since 2011 was the popular malcontent in regard to the former close relations that China cultivated with the military regime. Indeed, the support that China expressed to the old military junta determined the “legitimation” of the past government and prevented Myanmar from undertaking important reforms for its development. Moreover, the reduced control of the Burmese media covering anti-China protests, the unethical behaviour of Chinese businesses in the country and the poor quality of the Chinese exported goods have alimeted the bad reputation of China among Myanmar’s society, spreading negative attitudes and prejudices toward Chinese products, activities, firms and citizens. Consequently, China’s previous relations with Myanmar were perceived from the population and the new government as beneficial only for China, that followed its national interest by imposing its dominance over the bilateral ties at the costs of Myanmar’s modernization (Li & Char, 2015; Myoe, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016).

As regards the new trajectory of Myanmar’s foreign policy, the new “opening up” reforms towards the international community brought serious concerns on the stability of China’s

relations with the country. Since the withdrawal of Western restrictions on Myanmar, the country became more interested in embracing a Western development strategy in order to achieve modernization and the reintegration of Myanmar in the international scenario started to be one of the major goals of the country's new government. While relations with the US and the EU improved, China underlined the importance of prioritizing and reinforcing Sino-Myanmar relations, as new actors surfaced in the context of their interactions. Myanmar's choice of following a more open strategy in foreign policy threatened the survival of the historical close relationship with China. However, the two countries were still interlaced by a deep interdependence that influenced Myanmar in maintaining positive relations with the neighbouring country to assure stability in the international community (Li & Char, 2015; Myoe, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016; Yi, 2013).

As other nations started to improve their interactions with Myanmar, China's experienced an important decrease of its influence over the country. Myanmar's new government perceived the power that China was detaining over its domestic and international decisions and began to seek its independence from Beijing. Myanmar started to focus its domestic and foreign policy more on its own national interests rather than excessively relying on China for achieving development. Nevertheless, Myanmar still recognized the importance of cooperating with China for its integration in the international community and, at the same time, China became aware of the fact that Myanmar cannot be defined as one of its absolute allies anymore, thus Beijing was determined to improve its reputation in Myanmar and to secure its existing ties by showing support to Myanmar's new reforms and goals (Li & Char, 2015; Myoe, 2015; Yi, 2013).

With the establishment of the NLD as the new elected government in 2015, Myanmar is expected to further gravitate towards a Western type of government. Therefore, China is becoming increasingly uncertain on the future of its relations with Myanmar, however its efforts to protect its interests in Myanmar and in the Southeast Asian region are still prioritized as primary concerns in its approach to Sino-Myanmar relations. Thus, China showed a growing interest in consolidating its relations with Myanmar by supporting the establishment of the new democratic government and cooperating with it. As a result, Sino-Myanmar relations remained fundamental for the development of Myanmar, but new challenges and obstacles are expected to emerge in the future of their relations (Sun, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016).

The political relations between China and Myanmar after 2011 were characterized by increased difficulties in maintaining positive interactions between each other. Despite the efforts of both governments to promote a good-neighbourly friendship, the Sino-Myanmar relations were affected by the rise of new issues derived from the previous behaviour of China toward Myanmar's former government. As Myanmar started to become increasingly integrated in the international scenario, China was not able to merely preserve its national interest in its relations with Myanmar and the hegemony that the Great Power gained in the Southeast Asian region started to decline. Sino-Myanmar relations started to feel the pressure produced by the involvement of a higher number of external powers in their interactions, that aimed at counterbalancing the influence of China in the Southeast Asian region and in the international scenario. This fundamental change in the nature of the relationship between China and Myanmar, from a bilateral relation to a multilateral relation, shifted the interpretation of the Sino-Burmese interactions towards a more liberalist perspective, as Myanmar began to enter the globalized world and China slowly lost its position of dominance over the nation (Li & Char, 2015; Myoe, 2015; Yi, 2013; Yonghong & Hongchao, 2014).

5.3.2 Economic Relations and Infrastructures Projects

The economic relations between China and Myanmar and the Chinese investments in Burmese infrastructure have been strongly affected by the change of government that occurred in 2011. Although the economic interactions remained the most important aspect of Sino-Myanmar relations, increasing criticisms towards China's economic projects in Myanmar arose throughout the country. One instance of this deep changes in Sino-Myanmar relations was represented by President Thein Sein's decision of suspending the construction of the Myitson Dam, a big infrastructure project financed by China. The suspension of the project was influenced by the growth of popular protests against the environmental risks and the displacement of local citizens brought by the construction of the dam. As a consequence, China's investments in Myanmar started to sharply decline and the Sino-Myanmar economic relations experienced a problematic phase. However, after the suspension of the Myitson Dam, Myanmar's government focused on underlining the importance of its economic relations with China. Indeed, Myanmar's government stated that China remains one of the major economic partner of Myanmar and the suspension of the project did not aim at excluding the neighbouring country from Myanmar's economic

scenario. Both countries reaffirmed the willingness to overcome their problems by fostering their cooperation and renewing their close relation of interdependence, through the achievements of shared goals (Bi, 2014; Clapp, 2015; Li & Char, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016; Wagner, 2015; Yi, 2013).

On the other hand, China continued to finance numerous infrastructures projects in Myanmar and the presence of Chinese businesses in Myanmar was still perceived as important for improving the country economic development. Consequently, China has launched various policy adjustments in order to enhance the economic relations with Myanmar. Among the new programs implemented by China, major emphasis was given to the new “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) initiative launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. OBOR project aimed at connecting China to Europe, Asia and Africa to expand economic cooperation between the continents and generate benefits for all the countries involved. China’s included Myanmar as a relevant actor in the OBOR initiative, to show its support for the integration of the country in the international community. Moreover, China started to understand that changes in its behaviour towards Myanmar’s economy were necessary, because Myanmar was more prone to accept financial aid and infrastructure projects that involved and helped the local communities and that did not endanger the internal stability of the country. For these reasons, China implemented new policies in Myanmar, that focused on the respect of local groups and the inclusion of civil society in the economic relations, showing that both countries decided to follow a liberalist approach in regard to their economic development (Bi, 2014; Jinchen, 2016; Li & Char, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016).

China and Myanmar’s economic relations were deeply shaken by the political changes that occurred in 2011. Indeed, the positive trend of the Chinese investments in Myanmar started to decrease and China’s infrastructures projects experienced troubling circumstances, that are still not resolved nowadays. As other countries interlaced economic relations with Myanmar, China’s products and goods were replaced by other nations’ exports and the desire of gaining more independence from its powerful neighbour, pushed Myanmar to foster its economic development by differentiating trading partners. However, China remained important for Myanmar economy, as its investments are still helpful in enhancing the development of the nation and both countries are still characterized by a strong relation of interdependence in regard to their economic ties (Bi, 2014; Li & Char, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016).

5.4 External Influences in Sino-Myanmar Relations

One of the motivations that influenced the weakening of the relations between China and Myanmar was the involvement of new international actors in their interactions. Indeed, Western countries, such as the United States and the EU, played an important role in influencing the changes that reformed the political structure of Myanmar, shaping one of the new challenges that arose in Sino-Myanmar relations (Li & Char, 2015; Transnational Institute, 2016)

Since 2011, the improvements that occurred in the relations between Myanmar and the United States brought great concerns to China for the preservation of its interests in Myanmar and its regional dominance in Southeast Asia. Both China and the US showed increasing competition in Myanmar, as both aimed at gaining a greater influence over the nation. China perceived the renewed ties between the US and Myanmar as an American strategy to limit the Chinese power in the Southeast Asian region, while the United States affirmed that its increased engagement in Myanmar derived from the desire of promoting the implementation of democracy in the country, in order to help the national liberalization and development. Nonetheless, China's dominance over Myanmar and Southeast Asia influenced the US decisions to improve its Myanmar's policies. Indeed, the increasing positive relations between Myanmar and the United States undermined the stability of Sino-Myanmar relations as well as threatened the security of China's energy transportations and shared border with Myanmar. Indeed, China interpreted the suspension of the Myitsone Dam project and the growing influence of international and domestic organizations in Myanmar's development as a consequence of the Myanmar's increasing interactions with the United States and as examples of the US strategies against Sino-Myanmar relations. China and the United States treated Myanmar as a mean to counterbalance their power in the global scenario by increasing their influence on the nation. Moreover, the reinforcement of Myanmar-US relations was also interpreted by China as a strategy followed by the US in order to strengthen its presence and influence over the ASEAN, in opposition with the rising power of China over the Southeast Asian region. Thus, ASEAN gained a relevant role in Sino-US-Myanmar relations, assuring that both nations were cooperating in order to achieve the interests of Myanmar. Indeed, despite the Sino-US competition over Myanmar's alliance, China and the US engaged in various activities of practical cooperation that pursued the shared goals of Myanmar's integration and development. Nevertheless, as the

relations between the United States and Myanmar continue to steadily increase, China-US cooperation in Myanmar is becoming harder to achieve and the current trend in the Sino-US engagement in Myanmar seems to lean towards competition. With the victory of the National League for Democracy, the relations between the United States and Myanmar experienced additional improvements for the achievement of Myanmar's democratic transition. Thus, the victory of the NLD also brought new concerns to China in regard to the preservation of Sino-Myanmar relations' stability and the Chinese dominant role of power in Southeast Asia (Clapp; 2015; Myoe, 2015; Sun, 2014; Transnational Institute, 2016; Yi, 2013).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The aim of the thesis is to compare the main characteristics of Sino-Myanmar relations during the military regime in Myanmar and after the 2011 political changes of the nation. According to this analysis, the relations between China and Myanmar experienced a great transformation in 2011, due to the internal political changes that reshaped Myanmar's governmental structure. Indeed, during the years of the military regime, Sino-Myanmar relations were characterized by deep and close interactions in different sectors, from diplomacy to economy, that aimed at pursuing a positive and friendly relationship between the countries. The main reason that shaped the peculiar characterization of these relations was in the alienation of Myanmar perpetuated by the international community. Therefore, before 2011, Myanmar heavily relied on China to improve its national development, as other Western and Asian countries had limited interactions with the nation. Despite the fact that Sino-Myanmar relations were perceived as positive for the majority of their interactions, issues and concerns were still present in their relationship, especially due to the Chinese dominant role in Myanmar, the growth among Myanmar's population of malcontents toward Chinese activities and the international criticisms moved to both nations. After the 2011 political changes of Naypyidaw, China and Myanmar underwent important evolutions in different aspects of their relationship. As Myanmar started to improve its relations with other countries, new challenges arose in regard of the Chinese dominance in the nation. The inclusion of other international and domestic stakeholders in Myanmar development weakened the influence of China over Myanmar's economic and political improvements. Thus, the relations between China and Myanmar became unsteady and less tighten, as Myanmar started to seek more independence from China. At the same time, Myanmar and China expressed the desire of continuing to cooperate and foster good neighbourly relations, as both recognized the importance of their positive interactions for the development of a stable international and regional environment.

Furthermore, the evolution of Sino-Myanmar relations was driven by a series of different influences and motivations. Specifically, the increasing integration of Myanmar in the international community improved the country's relations of interdependence with other global actors, thus affecting the existing relationship with China. Also, the acceptance of Myanmar as a legitimate state transformed the relations between Myanmar and China from bilateral ties to a bigger narrative, that included a larger number of countries involved in the

regional and global level. The changes in Sino-Myanmar relations were a logical effect of the development of both countries on a domestic and international framework. Thus, the evolution of Sino-Myanmar relations was caused by the new external actors that were included in Myanmar's foreign affairs, the internal changes experienced by Myanmar's political structure and the inevitable adjustment that both countries applied to their policies in order to overcome the different challenges that started to emerge.

Additionally, the transformation that happened in the relations between China and Myanmar deeply affected the economic aspects of their relationship. Indeed, the decrease of the Chinese investments in Myanmar experienced after 2011, was strictly connected to the changes in the political reforms that Naypyidaw undertook to improve its development and its image internationally. By gaining investments from other countries besides China, Myanmar had the freedom to shift its attention on accepting financings that primarily benefitted its economic development and thus it was able to interrupt the already funded projects that created popular malcontent, environmental risks and international criticisms. This situation contributed to shape a different behaviour of Myanmar towards Chinese investments. Indeed, Myanmar paused all the big infrastructures projects that were perceived as harmful for the stability and development of the country. As a consequence, Chinese investments in Myanmar decreased and China understood the necessity of implementing a new approach to its economic relations with Myanmar, based on the respect and involvement of Myanmar national interests in Chinese plans for economic development.

In conclusion, China and Myanmar are still facing major problems for the improvement of their relations. As their relations evolved from state-to-state interactions to cooperation and dialogue with an increasing number of actors involved, China and Myanmar are still working to improve their existing reforms in order to adjust their foreign policy to the new challenges and requirements of their relations. Despite the uncertainties on the future of Sino-Myanmar relations, both nations still believe in their deep historical "fraternal" bond even nowadays.

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