

Sino-Burmese Relations:

Past, Present and (a glimpse of the) Future

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Abstract

China is almost unanimously being portrayed as the most important ally of the military junta in Burma. The notion that Burma is turning into a vassal state of China is not uncommon; it has even been suggested that Burma is becoming the 24th province of China, and that China is the puppet master of Burma. Do these descriptions depict a realistic picture of Sino-Burmese relations? If not, what is then the genuine nature of the relationship?

China and Burma share not only a lengthy border, they also share a long history. The Burmese have drawn a lesson from this history, which a little tabloid and perhaps a bit overstated, can be summed up in the words of a former Burmese Ambassador to China: “Han, Manchu, Nationalist, Communist – it makes no difference to the Burmese. A Chinese is a Chinese – and to be feared.”

Chinese foreign policy has recently shown a gradual shift from an absolute support of pariah states such as Burma, to a more pragmatic approach, taking international reputation and soft power into consideration when dealing with these states. Being associated with regimes such as the Burmese is becoming a reputational burden for Beijing. Furthermore, instability on the Burmese side of the border has grave consequences also on the Chinese side. Combined with the economic illiteracy of the Burmese military junta which is impeding bilateral trade, these factors are making Beijing increasingly frustrated with the Burmese regime. At the same time Burma remains strategically important for China, especially for future Chinese energy security. Burma on its side, is reliant on China for countering the negative consequences of Western sanctions and for diplomatic protection. Burma has a history of neutrality, and remained neutral during the cold war. Continuing this line of non-alignment, Burma has actively sought to diversify its international partners, and now counts big international players as ASEAN, India and Russia among its partners. This is all reducing dependency on China. The thesis concludes that although China is one of, and perhaps *the* most important ally of the military junta Burma, the notion that Burma is becoming a Chinese vassal state is highly unrealistic. The incentives that has led China to support the Burmese junta is slowly changing, and this may in turn subtly modify the Chinese attitude towards Burma’s current regime.

Note on the use of place names

The Burmese military government in July 1989 changed the country's name, from "the Union of Burma" to 'the Union of Myanmar'. Whereas 'Burma' is derived from the Burmese word *bama*, the colloquial name for the main ethnic group in Burma, 'Myanmar' is derived from the literary version of the same word, *myanma*.¹ At the same time a number of other place names were changed to conform better to the original Burmese pronunciation.

These changes were subsequently adopted by the United Nations, and a variety of international organisation, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Burmese opposition has rejected to recognize the name alteration, arguing that the regime lacks the legitimacy to rename the country and its cities. Some nations, like the US and Great Britain have followed this line and refused to accept the name changes.

This study will use the old and better known names, like Burma instead of Myanmar, and Rangoon instead of Yangon as these are more broadly understood. Quotations and references will be cited as they were originally published.

¹ Burmese is a language having diglossia, i.e, there is a significant difference between the spoken (low) version and the literary (high) version. (Ammon, 2006, *Sociolinguistics: An international handbook of the science of language and society* Vol 3, p.2012)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU – African Union

CPB – The Communist Party of Burma

ILO – International Labour Organization

NDF – National Democratic Force

NLD – National League for Democracy

PLA – People’s Liberation Army

PLA(N) – People’s Liberation Army (Navy)

PRC – People’s Republic of China

SPDC – State Peace and Development Council

UN - United Nations

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

USDP – Union Solidarity and Development Party

UWSA- United Wa State Army

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Introduction

*“May I propose a toast for the long-lasting
Sino-Myanmar pauk-phaw friendship”*

Li Jinjun, Chinese Ambassador to Burma,
June 9th 2005²

“On November 7 [2010], Burma held general elections as scheduled in a steady and smooth manner.”³ These are the words of China’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei, speaking of the same elections that American President Barack Obama described as “anything but free and fair”.⁴ UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stated that the elections, which resulted in a massive, rather unsurprising victory for the pro-junta party USDP, was held in conditions that were “insufficiently inclusive, participatory and transparent”.⁵

China has long had a different view on Burma than that of the West, and, as an editorial in the Chinese newspaper Global Times points out: “The West have continuously exerted pressure on China regarding the Burmese problem, often accusing China of playing an ‘immoral role’ in Burma’s move towards democracy.”⁶

Burma is normally sparsely covered in the international media, save major occurrences, such as the December 2010 release of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, and the massive demonstrations in September 2007, somewhat optimistically termed ‘the Saffron Revolution’. The protesters, headed by the Burmese monks, instantly gained massive and extensive global support, and questions were raised as for what the world could do to improve the situation for the Burmese people. China was by many singled out as the main obstacle to an effective and

² See Li, Jinjun, *Speech of Ambassador Li Jinjun on the Reception of Celebrating the 55th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and Myanmar*, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Union in Myanmar, June 9th 2005

³ Hong Lei, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s regular press conference*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China Nov 9th 2010

⁴ Beech, Hannah, *What’s Next for Burma Opposition After Elections?*, Time Magazine Nov. 8th 2010

⁵ Nesikry, Martin, Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, *Myanmar polls insufficiently inclusive, participatory and transparent, Secretary-General says*, Nov. 8th 2010

The USDP won 76 % of the Parliamentary Seats. For an overview of the election results, see Democratic Voice of Burma, *Final election results announced*, Nov. 18th 2010

⁶ 环球时报, 社评: 周边国家应支持缅甸稳定, 2010年11月9日

[Global Times, *Editorial: Neighbouring countries should support stability in Burma*, Nov. 9th 2010]

united international approach, and the criticism even contained voices advocating a boycott of the 2008 Beijing Olympics should China not cease its support for the Burmese junta.⁷

China has for the last two decades been perhaps the most reliable partner for the Burmese regime. To justify this claim, analysts can point to “Beijing’s significant past transfers of arms to the ruling military government, growing Chinese–Myanmar economic exchanges, and China’s role as a diplomatic backer”⁸ of the Burmese military junta.

Ties between Beijing and the Burmese authorities started to grow especially close after the 1988 uproar in Burma and the Tiananmen incident in Beijing the following year, and China is almost unanimously being portrayed as the most important ally of the military junta in Burma. The notion that Burma is turning into a vassal state of China is not uncommon,⁹ it has even been suggested that Burma is becoming the 24th province of China,¹⁰ and that “China is the puppet master of Burma.”¹¹

As a notorious violator of human rights, Burma has numerous times been on the agenda of the United Nations. And as a permanent member of the Security Council (UNSC), China’s voice is sure to be heard. In January 2007 China vetoed a resolution criticizing human rights violations in Burma; one of only 7 times China has used its veto power in the UNSC¹², underlining the importance Beijing attaches to its relationship with the generals in Naypidaw. This could of course also imply that Beijing regards Burma as central to its own sphere of interest. However, the geographic diversity of resolutions encompassed in China’s veto record makes it hard to see any coherence.¹³

⁷ See for instance, Reuters, *EU should boycott Beijing Olympics over Myanmar*, Sept 27th 2007

⁸ Haacke, Jürgen, “China’s role in the pursuit of security by Myanmar’s State Peace and Development Council: boon and bane?” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 23 No. 1 March 2010: 113–137

⁹ See for example

Von Hartenberg, Donata, *A marriage of (in)convenience*, Al-Jazeera, Nov 10th 2010,

Washington Post, *China’s muscular embrace of Cambodia* Nov 20th 2010

Setkyar Hein, *The United Nations has a duty*, Burma Digest, July 25th, 2007

Boo, William, *China hedges its Energy bet with move into Bangladesh*, The Irrawaddy Sept. 2nd 2009

Bo Kyaw Nyein, *Thinking outside the box*, Mizzima, June 21st, 2009

¹⁰ Boucaud, André and Louis Boucaud, *Burma – a 24th province for China*, Le Monde Diplomatique, Nov. 2006

¹¹ Stated by Vice President of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott, see

Spencer, Richard, *China’s Dilemma over Burma protests*, The Telegraph, Sept 26th 2007

¹² A record of vetos in the UNSC pre-2004 can be found at the UN webpages, see

United Nations, *Record of vetos in the UNSC pre-2004*, (annex III)

For records post-2004, see

United Nations, *Meeting conducted/ actions taken by the Security Council*

For the sake of comparison, the US has vetoed 82 UNSC resolutions. See

(Wade, Francis, *Concern greets new Security Council arrivals*, Democratic Voice of Burma, Oct. 14th 2010)

¹³ China has vetoed resolutions concerning Zimbabwe (July 2008) Macedonia (Feb 1999), Central America (Jan 1997) For references, see footnote no 12 and 13.

One of the core tenants of modern Chinese foreign policy is the doctrine of non-interference, and the implementation of this has led China to be regarded as somewhat irresponsible in dealing with repressive states.¹⁴ China referred to this principle when explaining the veto in the UNSC in January 2007, and Chinese adherence to this principle is thus evidently an obstacle to gain Chinese support for multilateral action against Burma.

Interestingly, the view that Burma is turning into a client state for China, implicitly disregards the Chinese emphasis on non-interference. The notion that China is absolutely unwilling to intervene in Burmese affairs, unilaterally or multilaterally, seemingly builds on the extreme opposite prerequisite; that China due to its strict reverence for the same principles will refrain from engaging in any sort of interference.

This paper will examine Sino-Burmese relations, the extent of China's support of the present Burmese regime and to what extent the Burmese generals rely on this Chinese support. Western media and politicians have a tendency to simplify the relations between the two nations, and this study is an attempt to contribute to a broader understanding of this relationship, and in the process review central elements in both Chinese and Burmese foreign policy.

Since the 1988 Burmese upheaval and the 1989 Tiananmen confrontation, the relationship to China has undoubtedly been a cardinal pillar in Burmese foreign relations. Western misconceptions of the Sino-Burmese relationship can have serious consequences, in the sense that it could lead to an unsuitable approach to the 'Burmese problem', i.e. an undemocratic, totalitarian government relentlessly violating the rights of its citizens.

The study will not discuss whether a Western approach, i.e economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure, is the most appropriate to bring about democratic reforms in Burma, neither will it discuss the possibility of a democratic change in Burma should China align more closely with the West's policies towards Burma. Furthermore, the thesis is not seeking to reach any conclusion as for whether China is likely to interfere in Burma or not, but rather put forth indicators for these possible future scenarios. It also aims, through illuminating various aspects of Sino-Burmese relations, to assess how best to understand the relationship between the two states. The essay will explain why Burma is important to China and vice versa, why China has proved such a reliable partner for the Burmese junta, and why China's influence in Burma is not as comprehensive as commonly believed. To determine how influential Beijing is in internal Burmese affairs is obviously a task that can get no definite

¹⁴ See Gill, Bates, *China becoming a responsible stakeholder*

answer and no specific measure. What is feasible though, is to lay down a number of indicators, such as economic cooperation, historical bonds, cooperation in international fora, strategic interests, variations in allies, and based on these, to estimate the degree of influence China in reality has in Burma. This study is thus based on second hand information, interpretations and analyses.

For not basing the thesis exclusively on Western literature and perceptions, I have strived to also draw on available Chinese sources. The databases *China Academic Journals* and *China Online Journals* have been indispensable for the task of finding relevant scholarly Chinese articles on the subject. Literature in the bibliography containing Chinese characters was written in Chinese. All information obtained from these sources has been translated by me, and any flaws in the translation should hence be accredited to the candidate.

The online Burmalibrary (Burmaliibrary.org) has been very useful in obtaining interesting and insightful articles and reports on Burmese affairs, whereas articles from newspapers mostly have found their way to the thesis through the all-encompassing, positively and negatively, tool of google. The literature used during research undoubtedly shapes the content and argument of any thesis, and it is a challenge to find the best possible sources, and to find voices with authority within a specific field. I have tried, especially on the sections where my prior knowledge has been limited, such as on Burmese history, to use literature which has been widely quoted in other scholarly work. I am therefore rather confident that the sources used here are reputed and respected. Another problem concerning the sources and the argument of this thesis is the political aspect of the topic and the possible politicized nature of literature on the subject. Questions of historical and present day bilateral relationships will inevitably be subject to different political interpretations, and political views may easily colour opinions on the matter. This is true for the Chinese literature, and it is of course also true for Western and Burmese analyses. It is my hope that this paper will depict the nature of the Sino-Burmese relationship as accurately and unbiased as possible, all the time acknowledging that the conclusions reached do not necessarily reflect the one and only Truth. I do believe however, that the assumptions made are based on substantial material, and hence could contribute to a broader understanding of Sino-Burmese relations.

International relation theory will not be dealt with extensively in this thesis, as it does not have a purely theoretical approach to foreign policy and bilateral relations.¹⁵ This may of

¹⁵For explanations on various international relation theories, see for instance Linklater, Andrew (ed), 2000, *International Relations – Critical concepts in Political Science vol IV*, Routledge,

course narrow the scope in which we understand China and Burma's foreign policies, but for the aim of this paper, investigating the extent and nature of Sino-Burmese relations and how this aligns with wider ideas in Chinese foreign policy it should be sufficient. Moreover, a rigidly theoretical investigation of a bilateral relationship could limit a comprehensive understanding, as the theory could become a straightjacket in which to suit actual observations and actions that may deviate from the theory. This study is thus primarily an empirical analysis of the bilateral relationship between China and Burma, based on the underlying assumption that states act out of self-interest, in line with the international relation theory of political realism (Moseley, Alexander, *Political Realism*).

Burma holds importance for China first and foremost as a junction and an outlet to the Indian Ocean, highlighted by the current construction of an oil-pipe from the Burmese coast to the Chinese province of Yunnan, estimated to provide approximately 60 % of China's imported oil when finished in 2012.¹⁶ Its contribution to future Chinese energy-security is, obviously, of enormous significance. However, the close association with the Burmese regime is becoming a reputational burden for Beijing, who is being dragged through the mud whenever the Burmese junta receives attention from the international community. As China's power grows, so does the international expectation that China should act as a responsible stakeholder.¹⁷ The leader of the Nobel Committee, Torbjørn Jagland, exemplified this when announcing Liu Xiaobo the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, stating that 'China's new status must entail increased responsibility'.¹⁸

The negative international attention is not the only issue disturbing Beijings relations with the generals in Burma. Mismanagement on the Burmese side of the Sino-Burmese border-area causes problems on the Chinese side of the border, and the economic illiteracy of the Burmese junta is having negative consequences for bilateral trade. This is all making Burma a thorny issue for Beijing.

I will start with a brief historical outline of relations between China and Burma, so as to give

¹⁶ Approximately 75 % of China's imported oil comes from the Middle East and Africa, and about 80% of this is estimated to be transported through the Burmese pipeline after its construction, equalling a rough 60% of total imports.

See 张洁, "中国能源安全中的马六甲因素", *国际政治研究* 2005 年第 3 期 [Zhang, Jie, "The Malacca Strait factor in Chinese energy security", *International Political Research*, no 3. 2005] and Wai Moe, *Chinese Premier coming to Burma*, The Irrawaddy, May 20th 2010

¹⁷ The term 'responsible stakeholder' in relation to China was first coined in 2005 by the then American Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick. See Zoellick, Robert B. *From the Shanghai Communique to "Responsible Stakeholder"*, Peterson Institute, May 2nd 2007

¹⁸ Norwegian Nobel Committee (The), *Announcement: The Nobel Peace Prize for 2010*

a historical backdrop for the present day relationship. The assumed suzerain-vassal relation between the two states seems to be a matter of controversy, rather than the historical fact arguers of a return to a suzerain-vassal relationship appear to assume. Besides, historical disputes have led to a rather substantial Burmese scepticism towards its big northern neighbour. Following this historical review, Chinese foreign policy will be the focus of attention, emphasizing the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and their implications for Sino-Burmese relations. PRC's historical attitudes towards these principles, and the manner in which Beijing's shifting view of core self-interest has led to different implementations of the same principles will also be illuminated. The recent Chinese focus on soft power and international reputation will then be discussed, with the aim of examining if and how this might affect Chinese policies in Burma. We will then shed some light on Burmese domestic circumstances, and how these are influencing the politics of the Burmese leadership, before we turn to the present day Sino-Burmese relationship and the factors affecting it. After first examining Chinese diplomatic support of the SPDC, we will look into Burma's role in securing China's future energy supplies, before illuminating economic relations and how instability on the Burmese side of the border is having consequences also for the Chinese.

Chinese ambassador Li Jinjun at the very beginning of this introduction toasted the 'pauk-phaw' friendship of Burma and China. When emphasising the proximity and the good nature of the relationship between China and Burma, both Burmese and Chinese officials and media frequently uses this Burmese word (translated 胞波, *baobo* in Chinese), meaning cousins, or brothers. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, in the kinship of Sino-Burmese relations, Burma is better described as China's troublesome little brother.¹⁹

¹⁹ 'China's troublesome little brother' - A term taken from Aung Zaw, founder and editor of the renowned magazine for Burmese affairs, the Irrawaddy Magazine. See Aung Zaw, *China's troublesome little brother*, The Irrawaddy, Sept. 2009

1: China and Burma – a historical overview

China's relations with the outside world, especially with her neighbouring countries, have historically been determined by the Chinese notion of China's centrality and cultural supremacy. (Fairbank, 1968, p.2)

The Chinese tended to think of their foreign relations as an external expression of the social order within the country, and China's foreign relations were hence hierarchic and nonegalitarian (ibid). Bordering nations, and nations beyond, were expected to accept Chinese superiority by paying tribute to the Chinese emperor. (ibid, p4) Situated beyond the ethnically diverse and somewhat peripheral province of Yunnan, Burma was, unlike other neighbouring nations like Vietnam and Korea, outside the sphere of direct Chinese cultural influence. As we shall see, the nature of the historical relationship between China and Burma remains a disputed topic. Chinese and Burmese sources are conflicting, painting different pictures of relations between the nations.

The Burmese kingdom of Pagan was one of the mightiest kingdoms ancient Southeast Asia ever experienced, and at its height it ruled an area from the present day Burmese-Indian border to central Thailand, from the Yunnanese border to the Malay Peninsula.

In 1271, Narathipahapati, infamously named 'King Dog's Dung' by his people due to his ruthlessness, was king of Pagan. After the Mongols had conquered the Southern Song dynasty in China, Kublai Khan sent instructions to his viceroys to demand tribute and allegiance from Southeast Asian kings, and in 1271 the viceroy of newly occupied Yunnan received orders to claim tribute from Pagan. (Htin Aung, 1967) The first envoy sent by the Mongol emperor to collect tribute was executed by the Burmese king, and when the Yuan dynasty sent an army set to invade Burma in 1283 Narathipahapati fled to Bassein in the south of Burma, where he sent an envoy to Yunnan to offer his submission to the emperor of the Yuan dynasty. He was later remembered by the Burmese as 'Taruppye' (or Tarokpyemin), 'he who fled from the Chinese'.²⁰ This was not to be regarded as an honorary title, and shows the Burmese sense of self-awareness and disdain for those succumbing to foreigners, in this case the Mongols/Chinese.

²⁰ Interestingly, the Burmese term Tarok/Taoyk initially referred to the Mongols, but later came to carry the meaning Chinese. For a discussion on early Burmese perceptions of the Chinese, see Goh Geok Yian, "The question of 'China' in Burmese chronicles", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41(1), pp 125–152 February 2010.

Through most of Chinese history, Burma has been regarded as a vassal. The correctness of this standpoint remains disputed, but what remains undisputed is that the Qing dynasty launched several missions to conquer Burma in the 18th century. At the height of Qing power, Emperor Qianlong launched several missions to subdue the Burmese, and between 1765 and 1770 China invaded Burma numerous times, in what professor Yingcong Dai calls the most disastrous frontier war that Qing ever fought.²¹ Dai writes, ‘not only did one after another commander-in-chief of the Qing dynasty fail to conquer Myanmar, but the Qing troops also suffered extremely heavy casualties’ (ibid). In late 1769 a truce was reached, the invading Qing army failing to conquer Burma. Following the truce, Qing troops kept a heavy military lineup along the Yunnan-Burmese border, in order to impose a ban on inter-border trade. According to Chinese documents the content of the truce agreement was that the Burmese would have to send a tributary mission every tenth year, return all detained Chinese soldiers and officers, and never again intrude the border.²² Burmese sources on the other hand, recorded that the Qing army should retreat, that there would be a restoration of border trade and that every tenth year a mission should be dispatched for the keeping of good relations.²³ Qing and Burma resumed diplomatic contacts in 1790, which provided Chinese Emperor Qianlong with a pretext to proclaim victory in the prolonged conflict. In 1792, in the emperor’s ‘Yuzhi Shiquanji (In commemoration of the ten complete military victories)’, Qianlong included the failed Burmese campaign among his other successful frontier campaigns. (Dai, Yingcong, 2004)

Burmese historian Htin Aung has a theory regarding the reason why Qianlong was so sure the campaign in Burma was successful, and how the Chinese started to perceive Burma as a vassal state: In 1787 an envoy arrived in the Burmese capital, offering valuable presents and respectful greetings from the ‘East King’, i.e the Chinese Emperor Qianlong. At the end of the letter from the alleged Chinese Emperor, was a passage asking the Burmese king to send an envoy to China. This he did, and in 1788 a Burmese envoy carrying presents, including precious jewellery and elephants arrived in the Emperor’s capital. On October the 2nd the same year, Qianlong gave audience to three Burmese envoys, and accepted what he regarded

²¹ Dai, Yingcong, “A Disguised Defeat: The Myanmar Campaign of the Qing Dynasty”, *Modern Asia Studies* Vol 38, No 1 2004

²²何新华, “试析清代缅甸的藩属国地位问题”, *历史档案* 2006年1期
[He Xinhua, “Analyzing the question of Burma’s position as vassal state during the Qing Dynasty” *Historical Archives*, no 1 2006]

“缮具表文, 十年进贡一次”、“还所拘繫官兵”以及“永不犯边 Originally from 《清高宗实录》卷 848, 中华书局 1985—1987 年影印本, 第 17—18 页

²³Ibid, ‘清军撤退、恢复双方贸易和每十年遣使通好’, Originally from 哈维《缅甸史》下册, 商务印书馆 1973 年版, 第 453、479、566 页

as a Burmese tributary mission to the Qing dynasty. (Htin Aung, 1967) Chinese sources recorded of the Burmese mission arriving in the Beijing court in 1788, in the 55th year of Qianlong, that '[they] wished [the emperor] longevity, presented domesticated elephants and asked for a title'.²⁴ Qianlong granted the envoy with an imperial letter, imperial edict and bestowed the Burmese king with the title Mengyun (孟云), in addition to stipulate that Burma should present tribute every tenth year.²⁵ China and Burma from this point on had, according to Chinese sources, formally established a tributary relationship, and all Chinese material hereafter refers to this 'once in every tenth year' when describing the two countries' tributary relations.²⁶ For the Burmese, however, it is common knowledge that Burma never accepted the suzerainty of the Qing Emperor (Htin Aung, 1967).

Htin (and Dai, who quotes Htin), offers an explanation for this difference of interpretations. According to them, the first Chinese mission to the Burmese king in 1787 was a bogus mission staged by local traders living in the border areas. They were suffering under the inter-border trade ban and were eager to improve the strained relationship between the Burmese and China. Consequently, in order to end the trade-ban, Htin Aung argue, the traders sent a bogus mission to the Burmese king. (Htin Aung, 1967 p.199) They supposedly arranged the disappearance of the Burmese king's own interpreter during the return trip to China, and replaced him with one of their own. Then, as the mission arrived before the Qing emperor, the conspirators explained that the Burmese king was bringing tribute. (ibid, p. 200) True or not, in 1790 Qianlong lifted the ban on trade in the border areas.

As aforementioned, Qing from 1788 constantly regarded Burma as one of her vassals, and a number of Burmese 'tributary missions' is recorded in Qing documents.

Clearly though, these missions didn't show up at the Qing court 'once every tenth year' as scheduled, but rather at seemingly random intervals. He Xinhua has made the following overview of Burmese tribute-envoys to China based on "The Draft History of Qing", (清史稿), "The Qing Veritable Records of the Five Emperors" (五帝'清实录') and "Decrees and regulations of Qing" (大清会典事例).

²⁴He, Xinhua, 2006, "表贺万寿, 贡驯象, 请封号" Asking for a title (请封号), was done in order to be granted a 'title' and thereby acknowledged by the Chinese emperor. Originally from 《清史稿》卷 15 "高宗本纪", 中华书局 1977 年版, 第 547 页

²⁵ibid, 乾隆皇帝赐敕书、诏书, 册封孟云为缅甸国王, 并规定贡期为 "十年一贡".

Originally from 《清史稿》卷 528 "缅甸", 中华书局 1977 年版, 第 14661—14689 页。

²⁶ ibid, 中、缅形式上的朝贡关系在此时才正式建立。此后在中国的各种官方文献中, 都把 "十年一贡" 作为缅甸进贡中国的贡期。不过, 从实际的交往来看, 缅甸来华次数远远超过了 "十年一贡" 的规定

--Table listing alleged Burmese tributary missions to the Chinese court.--

Chinese imperial calendar	Qianlong, year 53, 55(two times) 56, 57, 60	Jiaqing, year 5, 16	Daoguang, year 3, 13, 14, 23, 24	Xianfeng, year 3	Guangxu, year 1
Gregorian calendar	1788, 1790(two times) 1791, 1792, 1793, 1795	1800, 1811	1823, 1833, 1834, 1843, 1845	1853	1875
Total number	7	2	5	1	1

Translated from He Xinhua, 2006

The term tribute had a tendency to be applied rather loosely in Chinese records. John Fairbank points out that economic relations could only be formally permitted within the political framework of the tributary system, and that “even if the foreigner did not actually comply with the forms of tribute, the terminology of tribute would be applied to him in the Chinese record nevertheless” (Fairbank, 1968, p.4). This further complicates the conclusion of Burma’s role in the Chinese tributary system, as the terminology of Chinese records can not be entirely trusted.

The rather unclear question of Qing suzerainty over Burma also came to involve a third party. As the British in the 19th century conquered and colonized Burma, the question of Chinese suzerainty became a question of dispute between China and Britain.²⁷ Qing was not at all excited by the idea of having the British Empire at their borders, and in 1885, at the eve of the third Anglo-Burmese war, offered to mediate in the conflict between Burma and Britain. China suggested they could urge the Burmese to apologize and yield to British demands, and hence avoid a British occupation of Burma. (He, Xinhua, 2006)

The Qing court wrote that ‘Burma is a tributary state just on the border to Yunnan, and if the British plans [to occupy] the north of the country, it is not only the vassal state which will suffer. We worry that they will enter our ‘stable’ [i.e. country], and we have to prepare a plan

²⁷The British conquest and colonization of Burma went through 3 Anglo-Burmese wars before the British effectively ruled Burma. The first war ranged from 1924 to 1926 and saw the Burmese cease the regions of Assam, Manipur (both in present day India), Tennassarim and Arakan to Britain. After the second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852 Britain annexed the province of Pegu, and after the third war in 1885 completed the conquest of Burma. For a thorough explanation, see Htin Aung, 1967, *A history of Burma*, ch.10-11, and 林锡星, “ 缅甸历史分期探析” , *东南亚研究*, 2002 年第 5 期 [Lin, Xixing, “An analysis of the period classification of Burmese history”, *Southeast Asia Studies*, vol 5. 2002]

to take precautionary measures.²⁸ As the British carried out the war against Burma, China, as suzerain, offered to apologize to Britain on behalf of Burma. Britain argued that China did not have any suzerainty over Burma, and found academic basis for this in official Burmese records from the court of Ava (the Burmese capital), which stated that Burma presented China with presents but did not offer tribute.²⁹ Qing did however not become directly involved when Britain occupied Burma, and Burma did not, unlike Korea and Vietnam when faced with intrusion from respectively Japan and France, call on China for help. Burma called on Germany, France and Italy. This indicates that Burma certainly did not regard itself as a Chinese vassal in the same way as Vietnam and Korea, and the rather passive Chinese response suggests that Qing did not regard Burma as particularly important for the Chinese empire. Additionally, the realization that direct confrontation with Great Britain almost certainly would be unsuccessful, probably also played a decisive role for a Chinese dynasty that was starting to realize the technological and military inferiority of China. In this period the Chinese view on its vassal states and the ideological system which upheld this system became subject of revision within China. In 1879 minister Li Hongzhang's (李鸿章) assistant Xue Fucheng (薛福成) issued a book called 'My Humble Opinion on Foreign Matters' (筹洋刍议) wherein he worded a new trend in Chinese political circles; to regard policies concerning the tributary states from the angle of national security and not, as before, a matter of China's so-called superiority and centrality.³⁰ In his book, Xue argues that different vassals should be treated differently, that 'the ones whom we must protect, we must protect resolutely; the ones we must abandon, we must actively abandon'.³¹ He lists 6 countries as tributary states, Korea, Okinawa, Vietnam, Siam (Thailand), Burma and Nanzhang (南掌 in present day Laos) (Ibid). Further Xue argues that Chinese relations with Korea, Okinawa and Vietnam were 'very close', and that these countries should therefore be

²⁸He, Xinhua, 2006: "缅甸为朝贡之邦, 与云南接壤。英人图其北鄙, 不独属国受害, 尤虑逼进吾圉, 不可不豫筹布置, 为未雨绸缪之计" Originally from 《清德宗实录》卷 216, 中华书局 1985—1987 年影印本, 第 4 页。

The character 圉 yu3 normally translates as stable, or horse stable, but can also mean enclosure. I find it probable that in this particular sentence, it refers to the country, or the borders which encloses the country. The phrase 吾圉 resembles the common Chinese way of referring to their country, 我國, *woguo*, and the 圉 yu3 could also simply be a miswriting of the character 國.

²⁹Ibid, 英国外务部“据缅甸史书但称馈送中国礼物, 并无进贡表文” Originally from 王彦威《清季外交史料》卷 69, 故宫博物院 1932 年刊本, 第 26、25 页。

³⁰吴宝晓, “清季藩属观念调适与边疆政策变化”, 《清史研究》, 2002 年第 3 期

[Wu, Baoxiao, "Adjustments in the concept of vassal states and changes in border areas policy during late Qing", *Studies in Qing History*, vol 3. 2002]

³¹Ibid: ' [薛福成]... 主张根据属国和中国的不同关系, 区别对待, 该保护的坚决保护, 该放弃的主动放弃' .

protected, whereas China was ‘just preserving relations’ with Burma, Siam and Nanzhang, and subsequently the tributary relations with these countries should cease.³² Interestingly, Burma is described as both a state paying tribute to Qing, and as a country that China was ‘just preserving relations’ with. This demonstrates the somewhat complex and blurred system of tributary relations, and further shows Burma’s rather peripheral position in this system. Not everyone supported Xue Fucheng’s new and pragmatic way of dealing with the tributary states. Chinese minister (公使) in England, Zeng Jize(曾纪泽), in 1886 explained his viewpoints in the book ‘Discussions on China’s sleep and awakening’ (中国先睡后醒论). He argues that China should strengthen control of her vassal states, and that if any of her vassals suffered intrusion from western powers ‘China must regard this country as wanting to abandon friendly relations with us and take to arms’³³. However, even if this notion of strengthening control of China’s vassal was quite widespread at the time, it was mainly focused on reinforcing control of Korea and Vietnam, and this prioritization was also prevalent within the Qing foreign ministry (ibid).

The nature of the historical relationship between China and Burma remains blurred. Dr. Laichen Sun sums it up precisely, having examined the relationship from the 9th to the 19th century. “Throughout the whole period under question, China consistently regarded Burma as one of her vassals. Burma, however, considered herself as China’s equal.”³⁴ Sun also underlines that Burma, unlike Korea and Vietnam, did not use Chinese characters when communicating with China. This is interesting, as it demonstrates that Burma was not as heavily influenced and sinified as these other states neighbouring China.

The question of Burmese vassalship to China remains open, and speaks of two countries with different views on their common past. Let us now turn to more recent history, and look into the relationship between Burma and China in the four decades following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.

1.1 PRC-Burmese relations 1949-1989

In the 19th century, Burma was being incorporated into British India, and China had more

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid ”如果欧美列强“有侵夺该藩属土地, 或干预其内政者, 中国必视此国为欲与我弃玉帛而事干戈矣。Originally from 《嗽亭杂录》卷 5, “缅甸归诚本末”, 中华书局 1980 年版.

³⁴Laichen Sun, *Suzerain and Vassal, or Elder and Younger Brothers: The Nature of the Sino-Burmese Historical Relationship*, 1997. Laichen Sun holds a Ph.D in Southeast Asian History from the University of Michigan. He is presently associate professor at California State University.

than enough keeping western powers at arm's length. World War II saw large parts of China and Burma occupied by the Japanese. After first siding with the Japanese against the British colonialists, the Burmese fought alongside the British after Japanese pledges of Burmese independence had been abandoned (Htin Aung, 1967, p.301). Following independence in 1948 Burma quickly adopted a neutral foreign policy, refusing to align with either the western bloc or the communist bloc (Johnstone, 1963). The Burmese neutralism was duly noted by the Chinese as well, and released documents from the Chinese Foreign Ministry explains the Burmese policy of neutralism as follows: "On one side, Burma is bordering China, and hence do not dare to side with the imperialists [the West] and make China an enemy. At the same time, when Burma is having controversies with the imperialists, they want the support of China and the Soviet Union. (...) On the other hand, the ruling class in Burma (...) is to a relatively large degree depending on the imperialists."³⁵

Following World War II and the subsequent Chinese civil war, the remains of the Chinese Nationalist army withdrew to Burma. The Burmese authorities were worried that China would use this as a pretext to invade the country and in cooperation with the Burmese communists overthrow the government.³⁶

At the beginning of the 1950's Burma was home to roughly 350,000 Chinese, and the Burmese suspected China would use these as 5th columnists.³⁷ The fear of a forthcoming Chinese invasion has been put forth as the reason why Burma on December 17th 1949 was the first non-communist country to recognize the new China, just a month and a half after Mao proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China.³⁸ The Burmese uneasiness regarding China can clearly be seen in the words of former Burmese prime minister U Nu, comparing China to an elephant and Burma to a lamb, underlining that 'whether the elephant gets angry or not is undoubtedly of great concern to the lamb.'³⁹ The Burmese fear seems rather understandable, as according to Chinese sources, China in this period regarded the

³⁵ 范宏伟, "从外交部解密档案看中缅关系中的华侨问题" *南洋问题研究*, 2007 年第 1 期

[Fan, Hongwei, "Assessing the question of overseas Chinese in Sino-Burmese relations through deciphering documents of the Foreign Ministry", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, no.1 2007]

³⁶ 程瑞声, "从中缅关系看五项原则的强大生命力", *亚非纵横* 2004 年第四期

[Cheng Ruisheng, "Looking at the great vitality of the five principles (of peaceful co-existence) from the angle of Sino-Burmese relations", *Afro-Asian review*, 4th issue, 2004]

Author Cheng Ruisheng is former Chinese ambassador to Burma and India.

³⁷ Fan, Hongwei, 2007

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid "缅甸总理吴努曾[...]表示: '中国好比大象, 缅甸好比羔羊, 大象会不会发怒, 无疑会使羔羊提心吊胆。'"

U Nu was the first Prime Minister of independent Burma, and served in three different periods, the third of which ended with the military coup in 1962.

newly independent Burma as being merely a ‘lackey of the imperialists’, and the relationship is being described as ‘full of suspicion and distrust’.⁴⁰ Interestingly, there is little evidence of serious Burmese concern over the establishment of Chinese control over Tibet in 1950. Rangoon seemed eager to guard Burmese neutrality, though expressing regret concerning the Chinese actions.⁴¹ Similar considerations can be seen in Burmese reactions to China’s involvement in the Korean War, when Burma refused to brand China an aggressor at a January 1951 UN meeting (ibid). Eager to show that China would not be a military threat to its neighbour, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai in June 1954 visited Burma, and together with his Burmese counterpart U Nu issued a joint statement declaring that the ‘5 Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence’ would henceforth act as fundament for the Sino-Burmese relationship.⁴² These 5 principles have remained a central pillar in Chinese foreign policy, and will be further discussed later in the paper. December the same year, U Nu visited Beijing and met Mao Zedong who, seemingly to assure the Burmese premier of China’s non-aggressive intentions, stated that ‘the wars of the past, when the Yuan dynasty and the Qing dynasty invaded Burma was all China’s wrong.’ (ibid). In a further move to appease concern of intrusion, China and Burma in 1960 signed the ‘Sino-Burmese border treaty’, where previous disagreements about the borderline were solved.⁴³ Moreover, the same year they also signed the Sino-Burmese Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Non-Aggression (中緬友好和互不侵犯条约), the first of its kind in Asia. Zhou Enlai stated that the treaty marked a new stage in relations between China and Burma, and “was a victory for the peoples of the two countries.” (Vang, 2008). The treaty consolidated the Five Principles as fundament for relations between the two nations, something that can be observed in article four of the treaty, which said, ‘The contracting parties declare that they will develop and strengthen the economic and cultural ties between the two states in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, in accordance with the principles of equality and mutual benefit and of mutual non-interference

⁴⁰ 范宏伟, “从外交部解密档案看建交初期(1949-1953)的中緬关系” 云南社会科学 2008 年第 2 期
[Fan, Hongwei, “Assessing the early Sino-Burmese relations (1949-1953) through deciphering documents of the Foreign Ministry”, *Social science in Yunnan*, Vol 2. 2008]

⁴¹ U Thant, then Secretary of the Burmese Information Ministry, later UN Secreary General, November 1950 asserted that “Our country has not the least desire to take sides on the Sino-Tibetan affairs but (...) the Burmese government cannot but regret that the Central People’s Government of China should have seen fit to take this drastic action on Tibet. (Johnstone, William C. ,1963, p.162)

⁴²程瑞声, “从中緬关系看五项原则的强大生命力”, 亚非纵横 2004 年第四期
[Cheng, Ruisheng, “Looking at the great vitality of the five principles (of peaceful co-existence) from the angle of Sino-Burmese relations”, *Afro-Asian review*, 4th issue, 2004]

⁴³中国网, 中緬两国通过置换领土和平解决边界争端,
[China Net, *China and Burma solved the border dispute peacefully, by exchanging territory*, Aug. 28th 2009]
This site also contains detailed information of the territories that were handed to respectively China and Burma

in each other's internal affairs.' (ibid).

In 1962 the Burmese military headed by Ne Win took power in Burma, and relations with China changed for the worse (Lintner, 1992) China was then worried the Burmese would change its neutral foreign policy, and gradually stepped up its support for the Burmese Communist Party (Rüth, 2005). In a move seemingly to ensure continued friendly relations after Ne Win's takeover, China and Burma in February 1964 issued a joint communiqué in which both sides expressed the desire to establish and maintain friendly relations with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (Vang, 2008, p.388). In this period, in the immediate decades following the establishment of the People's Republic, when China was weak and had relatively few friends, Beijing made efforts to build relations with neighbouring countries to secure diplomatic recognition and ensure peace along its border.⁴⁴ This is clearly seen in its relations to Burma, as China deployed significant resources to strengthen its relationship with the Burmese, as exemplified by Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai visiting Burma a total of nine times between 1954 and 1965.⁴⁵ However, Burmese scepticism towards China did not vanish. Burma had been invaded before, and with reference to the Qing invasion two centuries earlier and the existing presence of Chinese Nationalist soldiers on Burmese soil, the Burmese ambassador to China in 1960 stated: 'Han, Manchu, Nationalist, Communist – it makes no difference to the Burmese. A Chinese is a Chinese – and to be feared.' (Butwell, 1963, p .177). Evidently, even as both nations tried to improve relations with each other, and numerous measures were taken in order to do this, uncertainty and distrust of the big northern neighbour remained apparent in Burma. The relatively good relations between PRC and Rangoon lasted till the Cultural Revolution made its way into Chinese foreign policy in the late 1960's. By then China was actively seeking to 'spread the revolution', and openly supported the struggle of Communist Party of Burma (CPB).⁴⁶ There is however some controversy regarding the extent of Beijing's support of the CPB. It has been reported that the CPB received financial aid and support from China,⁴⁷ and some claim that CPB soldiers were trained by the Chinese.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Maung Zarni, a Burma expert at the London School of Economics has suggested that Chinese soldiers even

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group publication (ICG), "China's Myanmar Dilemma", *Asia Report* No 177, Sept. 2009

⁴⁵ 新华网, 周恩来总理九次访问缅甸, 2001

[Xinhuanet, *Premier Zhou Enlai visited Burma nine times*, Dec 2001]

⁴⁶ 刘少华, "论中缅关系", *武汉大学学报*, 人文科学版, 第3期 2001年5月

[Liu, Shao Hua, "Discussing Sino-Burmese Relations", *Wu Han University Journal*, no 3, May 2001]

⁴⁷ Kudo, Toshiro "Myanmar's Economic Relations with China: Can China support the Myanmar Economy", *IDE Discussion Paper*. No. 66. 2006, Institute of Developing Economies(IDE)

⁴⁸ Htun Aung Gyaw, *The Ethnic Issue in Burma: How can they solve it*, 1998

participated in actual battles against the Burmese armed forces.⁴⁹ This issue remains disputed, and a previously secret CIA report from 1971 argues that the Chinese support for CPB was not as comprehensive as commonly believed. ‘Despite many suppositions and rumours that the Chinese were providing covert aid to the Communist insurgents (in Burma), Peking is not known to have supplied any material assistance prior to 1967, other than some portable radio equipment.’⁵⁰ The report further states that CCP mostly were providing CPB with ‘propaganda support’ (ibid). After 1967, the report argues, Chinese support of the CBP increased, but most of the Chinese support was channeled to various ethnic insurgent groups (ibid). It is difficult to estimate the extent of Chinese support to the CPB in the 50’s through to the 70’s, but it remains clear that there was some level of support.

In Burma the Chinese support for the Burmese communists led to an increased scepticism towards China, manifested above all in the extensive anti-Chinese riots in 1967, and following this, the prohibition of all Chinese-language education in the country, even private evening classes (Fan, Hongwei, 2006).⁵¹ Prior to this, in 1964, all Chinese-language publications had been forced to shut down.⁵² Burmese mistrust towards China was grave, and in March 1969 Burma notified Beijing of the termination of the previously signed Sino-Burmese treaty of Friendship and Mutual Non-Aggression.

In the 1970’s relations gradually improved, especially after Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978 and introduced a more pragmatic Chinese foreign policy. (Lintner, 1992) Later, the fall of the Berlin wall, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the end of the cold war led to a radical transformation of the established world order. In the midst of this, events in Burma and China would bring the two countries closer than they had ever been, and it has been argued that Burma would slowly move away from ‘neutralism’ as the central tenet of its foreign policy, and start ‘leaning on China’⁵³. The development and characteristics of the post-89 Sino-Burmese relationship will be further discussed later in the paper. Let us now turn to Chinese foreign policy, and its consequences for the Sino-Burmese relationship.

⁴⁹ Reuters, *China casts nervous eye at erstwhile ally Myanmar*, Jan 25th 2010

⁵⁰ CIA report, *Peking and the Burmese communists: The perils and profits of insurgency*, 1971.

⁵¹ Interestingly, a survey shows that in the 1950’s, many Chinese in Burma had a feeling of being superior to the Burmese, and this was true ‘especially for the ones that studied at Chinese-language schools’.

(刘晓民与范宏伟, 战后缅甸华侨国籍个案研究, 东南亚研究, 2005年6期)

[Liu, Xiaomin & Fan Hongwei, “A case study of Burmese-Chinesees’ nationality after World War II”, *Southeast Asian Affairs*, no.6 2005]

⁵²方积根 胡文英, “缅甸华文报刊历史略”, *东南亚华人* 1988 no. 1

[Fang, Jigen & Hu, Wenying, “A brief history of Chinese publications in Burma”, *Chinese in Southeast Asia*, no.1 1988]

⁵³ 刘务, “缅甸独立后外交政策的演变与中缅关系的发展”, *当代亚太*, 2010年01期

[Liu, Wu, “Changes in the policies of post-independent Burma and the development of Sino-Burmese relations”, *Journal of contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies* No 1. 2010: p109-118]

2: Chinese foreign policy and its implications for Sino-Burmese relations

The Myanmar issue is mainly the internal affair of a sovereign State. [...] It is also our consistent position that the internal affairs of Myanmar should be handled mainly and independently by the Myanmar Government and people themselves through consultation. The international community can offer all kinds of constructive advice and assistance, but should refrain from arbitrary interference. Based on the above principled position, China strongly opposes the inclusion of Myanmar on the agenda of the Council, and is firmly against adopting any Security Council resolution on Myanmar
Wang Guangya – Chinese UN ambassador, UNSC, January 12th 2007⁵⁴

One of the most important realities in contemporary international relations is the fast-growing power of China, and an international system where conduct and regulations predominantly have been shaped and determined by Western powers will have to adapt to the rise of The Middle Kingdom. A rising China and its foreign policy will inevitably influence international relations, not to mention regional relations. Therefore, understanding Chinese foreign policy is crucial for comprehending the frame in which Chinese policy towards Burma takes place, and examining China's policies towards Burma may in turn illustrate aspects of Chinese foreign policy in general.

I will examine briefly the changes in PRC foreign policy, and have chosen to distinguish three periods of modern China. These are the Mao period, from 1949 to 1976, the Deng Period encompassing 1978 through to 1989, and then the post 1989 period. It may be argued that this is a too simplistic, but I argue, along with Suisheng Zhao⁵⁵ that the main pivot points in PRC foreign policy have been the shift from a ideology-based foreign policy under Mao to the pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping, and later the change spurred by the end of the cold war and shift in international attitude towards China after the crackdown of the Tiananmen protests June 1989. Especially when focusing on Chinese policies regarding non-interference and dealings with pariah-states, such a three-fold distinction seems meaningful, as clearly identifiable changes in Chinese attitude towards these states observably have occurred in these periods. Furthermore, the almost categorical Chinese support of pariah states appears to have changed in recent years, as the Chinese approach to non-interference and sovereignty

⁵⁴ Wang, Guangya, *UNSC meeting 5619 - The Situation in Myanmar*, Jan 12th 2007

The proposed resolution was, among other issues,

'Expressing deep concern at the slow pace of tangible progress in the process towards national reconciliation in Myanmar and at the continuing detention of political prisoners, including the prolonged house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi'

For the full draft resolution, see

United Nations, *Security Council Draft Resolution*, Jan. 12th 2007

⁵⁵ See Zhao, Suisheng (2004) *Chinese Foreign Policy: pragmatism and strategic behaviour*

has altered (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008, p. 38). This change, as the next chapter will argue, is due to altered Chinese notions of self-interest. The country's emergence as a great power impels China to behave more responsibly, both because Beijing's interests will align closer to those of the developed nations⁵⁶, and because China seeks a favourable international reputation and recognition as a responsible power. This period, starting in 2005-2006, might be labelled a fourth period of Chinese foreign policy.

In the citation at the beginning of this chapter the Chinese UN Ambassador made clear China's principled position that 'the international community [...] should refrain from arbitrary interference', stating that 'the Myanmar issue is mainly the internal affairs of a sovereign state'. The Ambassador here touches upon two main pillars in Chinese foreign policy, namely sovereignty and non-interference. These two concepts have served as a foundation for relationships between China and pariah states, but are slowly changing along with a shift in Chinese perceptions of its interests. These two concepts will be discussed next, followed by a historical overview of how the PRC has related to and enforced these principles in the temporal periods of Chinese foreign policy.

2.1 Non-interference and sovereignty

*The main responsibility of Chinese foreign policy is to safeguard the nation's sovereignty, safety and developmental interests, so as to fully create a society where everyone has a relatively good standard of living.*⁵⁷

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

The concepts of sovereignty and non-interference have been central aspects of Chinese foreign policy since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949. It is however important to remember that the concept of sovereignty is, of course, not uniquely Chinese. The history of state sovereignty as we think of it today, commenced at the peace of Westphalia in 1648, after which interference in other state's governing prerogative became illegitimate (Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy, *Sovereignty*). As for the PRC's conventional understanding of sovereignty, it serves multiple purposes; it legitimizes CCP's

⁵⁶ Gill, Bates, *China Becoming a Responsible Stakeholder*, 2008

⁵⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *外交政策 [Foreign Policy]*

: "中国外交的主要任务是维护国家的主权、安全和发展利益, 为全面建设小康社会。"

小康社会: [A society where everyone has a relatively good standard of living] could also be taken to mean a peaceful and prosperous society, but in political context, it usually carries the meaning of everyone enjoying a relatively good standard of living.

absolute authority of Chinese territory and refutes foreign meddling in disputed topics like those of Taiwan and Tibet, and deflects criticism of its domestic policies (Gill and Reilly, 2000, p1, in Hegseth, 2009).

When defining sovereignty, the words of Lassa Oppenheim⁵⁸ serves as an important reminder that definitions not always are absolute; ‘There exists perhaps no conception the meaning of which is more controversial than that of sovereignty. It is an indisputable fact that this conception, from the moment when it was introduced into political science until the present day, has never had a meaning which was universally agreed upon.’⁵⁹ Even though there might not be one, universally agreed definition of the concept, sovereignty also has a core meaning, namely ‘supreme authority within a territory’. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Sovereignty*) A sovereign state is in other words a free and independent state, which has undivided jurisdiction over all persons and property within its territory. Other nations can not rightfully interfere in a sovereign state’s domestic affairs (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, *Sovereignty*). International fora have embraced the idea of sovereignty, and it is perhaps the most central aspect of the international system. The UN general assembly in 1970 adopted the Friendly Relations Declaration, stating that ‘No state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements are in violation of international law.’⁶⁰ This understanding of sovereignty has later been questioned by advocates of the opinion that international law is binding, even within sovereign states. And in recent decades, sovereignty has also been circumscribed by institutions like the EU, the UN's practices of sanctioning intervention, and the international criminal court (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). For these reasons, at least partly, the notion that ‘because states are limited by treaties and international obligations [...] the absolute freedom of a sovereign state is, and should be, a thing of the past,’ is generally accepted in current international practice (The Columbia

⁵⁸Lassa Oppenheim was a German jurist, regarded by many to be the father of modern international law. He died in 1919.

⁵⁹Enabulele, A.O. and C.O. Imoedemhe, “Unification of the Application of International Law in the Municipal Realm: A Challenge for Contemporary International Law”, *Electronic Journal of Comparative Law*, December 2008. The authors are lecturers with the Department of Jurisprudence and International Law of the Faculty of Law, University of Benin, Nigeria.

⁶⁰ ‘Friendly relations declaration’, UN general assembly 1970, in Chatham House (2007) *The principle of Non-Intervention in Contemporary International Law: Non-interference in a state’s internal affairs used to be a rule of international law: is it still?*, Extract from a Chatham House International Law discussion group

Electronic Encyclopedia). The Chinese view of sovereignty could be said to stick more rigidly to the more orthodox understanding of the concept, something which can be seen in Chinese emphasis on the Five Principles for Peaceful Co-existence. As mentioned earlier, the Five Principles were first formulated in the Sino-Indian-Burmese treaties in June 1954⁶¹, and has served as cardinal pillars in Chinese foreign policy since. The concept of sovereignty lies at the very heart of the Principles, which read:

- (1) Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- (2) Mutual nonaggression;
- (3) Mutual non-interference in internal affairs;
- (4) Equality and mutual benefit; and
- (5) Peaceful co-existence⁶²

The Chinese implementation of the Five Principles has sometimes meant an acceptance and protection of despotic and illegitimate regimes scorned by the West. Chinese support for regimes such as the Sudanese and the North Korean is well known. And when Robert Mugabe in February 2010 held his 86th birthday in the Chinese embassy in Zimbabwe's capital Harare, China's support for pariah states was once again broadcasted to the world.⁶³ The leadership of Cuba, Venezuela and Iran, not regimes held in high regard in Western political circles, have all enjoyed friendly relations with China,⁶⁴ and this is also true for the generals of Burma. As I hope to show, the categorical Chinese support of these regimes has changed in recent years, as Chinese approach to non-interference and sovereignty has altered, and China has become more integrated into international fora and structures. Carlson observes the same tendency, arguing that the policies of the PRC in the last decade have shown a less strict adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and corresponded more closely with liberal international practice (Carlson, 2006 p.221). Let us

⁶¹程瑞声, "从中缅关系看五项原则的强大生命力", *亚非纵横* 2004 年第四期

[Cheng Ruisheng, "Looking at the great vitality of the five principles (of peaceful co-existence) from the angle of Sino-Burmese relations", *Afro-Asian review*, 4th issue, 2004]

The Principles were further introduced to the international arena at the Bandung Conference in April 1955.

⁶² English translations taken from Kim, Samuel S (1995) *Sovereignty in the Chinese Image of World Order*

1) 互相尊重领土主权 2) 互不侵犯 3) 互不干涉内政 4) 平等互利 5) 和平共处

⁶³ See for instance Reuters, 'China throws bash for Zimbabwe's Mugabe',

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61L29O20100222>

⁶⁴ For a note on Sino-Cuban relations, see 'Trade with China Primes Cuba's Engine for Change'

<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/trade-china-primers-cuba%E2%80%99s-engine-change>

For a note on Sino-Iranian relations, see Interview with the Chinese ambassador to Iran,

http://ynfn.gov.cn/News/GMnew/200506/News_2519.html

now look closer into some cases exemplifying this trend.

2.2 New trends in Chinese approach to pariah states

The perhaps most evident example of the shift in Chinese foreign policy Carlson refers to, is the way China in 2006 played a vital role in persuading the Sudanese government to allow international forces to be deployed in Darfur (Gill, *China becoming a responsible stakeholder*). Sudan and China had enjoyed friendly relations for a long time, but after the outbreak of the conflict in Darfur in 2003 and the government of Sudan were accused of severe human rights violation, the international community strongly urged China to use its influence in Sudan responsibly. After receiving heavy criticism in western media; it was even suggested to boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics over China's involvement in Sudan,⁶⁵ China in June 2007 helped persuade Khartoum to allow UN and AU forces in the country (Hegseth, 2009 p.94). Fear of hurting its international reputation has been highlighted as the main factor explaining China's constructive role in Sudan.⁶⁶ The role of international reputation and why this is important in Chinese foreign political thinking will be further discussed in the chapter on national reputation and soft power.

Further indicators of China's foreign policy conforming to more liberal views on sovereignty and non-interference can be seen in how Beijing strongly denounced North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006, and in 2007 and 2010 voted to impose and then strengthen sanctions on Iran.⁶⁷ China also played a role when Zambia held elections in 2006. Leader of the Zambian Party Patriotic Front, Michael Sata, had a highly critical stance towards the Chinese involvement in the country, and China threatened to halt investments in Zambia should Sata win the election.⁶⁸ Beijing also, according to Sata, financed the campaign of his opponent,

⁶⁵Connecting the Chinese involvement in Darfur to the forthcoming 2008 Olympics was done by several groups and human rights activists. Mia Farrow and the high profile campaign for naming the Beijing Olympics 'the Genocide Olympic' because of Chinese involvement in Sudan were agitators for a boycott of the opening ceremony. See for instance 'Dream for Darfur' www.dreamfordarfur.org and, Voice of America (2007) *Darfur activists prepare for a possible Beijing Olympics boycott*, June 25th 2007 French politician Francois Bayrou suggested boycotting the Olympics over Darfur, see MSNBC (2007) *French pol says boycott Olympics over Darfur*

⁶⁶Michael Bristow (2008) *China's dilemma over Darfur*, BBC News

'[China] adjusted its Darfur policy because it wants to be seen as a responsible player on the world stage, with a diplomatic stature to match its growing economic might.

'International Pressure' was put forth by Bates Gill as the main reason behind China's policy shift in Darfur Gill, Bates *China as a responsible stakeholder*, 2007

⁶⁷Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, "China's new dictatorship diplomacy", 2008 and Global Times (2010) *安理会通过对伊朗制裁决议 中国投赞成票*

[*The Security Council passes resolution imposing sanctions on Iran. China supported the resolution*]

⁶⁸Washington Post (2006) *Zambian Hopeful Takes a Swing at China*, Sept. 25th 2006

the more China-friendly Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa.⁶⁹ As Sata himself received financial support from Taiwan, the Chinese support for his rival may not be seen as neither very surprising nor reprehensible. It does however, show the Chinese willingness to use its influence in internal political affairs of other nations.

Whereas the example from Darfur seemingly could be the result at least partly of international pressure and Chinese concern for its global image, the latter case from Zambia demonstrates that Beijing does not adhere inflexibly to the principle of non-interference even in absence of international pressure. Yet another illustration of this shift in policy is seen in Beijing's growing support for UN peacekeeping operations. From 1997 to 2007 China's contribution in terms of manpower to UN Peacekeeping activities saw a near 20-fold increase, from about 50-60 observers in 1997 to over 1800 troops in 2007 (Gill, 2007), making China the second largest supplier of personnel to UN missions among the permanent members of the Security Council in 2007 (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008).

China seems to have begun to adopt a more liberal view on sovereignty and non-interference, but what drives this change of approach? Carlson argues that any given state's stance on sovereignty and intervention is primarily the product of subtle shifts in the manner in which leaders attempt to realize fairly static interests. Self-interest decides choice of stance; politicians use sovereignty when it suits their larger interests, and disregard it when such interests change due to new incentives. (Carlson, 2006, p221)

It appears that China's new role as a major international power is changing the incentives that led Beijing to initially endorse the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. Being an international power, the eyes of the world will pay more attention to how China is applying its new found power. With greater power also comes an increase in the potential ability to influence both foreign countries and processes in international fora. As Chinese global influence increases, the consequences of China's actions will be felt internationally in a way they haven't been before, and the manner in which China is using this influence will subsequently inevitably gain more of the world's attention. With growing power comes expectations of a responsible international attitude, reflected in the words of the Leader of the Nobel Committee, Torbjørn Jagland when announcing Liu Xiaobo the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate; 'China's new status [as a world power] must entail increased responsibility'.⁷⁰ With a bigger international focus, the reputational burden of supporting pariah states increases, and new incentives to be accepted as a responsible power emerges.

⁶⁹Wong, Ola, *En kinesisk by – i hjertet av Zambia*, Bistandsaktuelt, 2009

⁷⁰The Norwegian Nobel Committee, *Announcement: The Nobel Peace Prize for 2010*

Chinese strenuous efforts to undermine the ‘China threat theory’ and the recent focus on ‘soft power’ testify to a Beijing increasingly aware of the importance of her reputation. This aspect will be discussed after the next section, which will focus on the historical changes in the PRC’s perception of self-interest since 1949, and how this has altered the implementation of the Five Principles and the tenets of sovereignty and non-interference. Following changes in Chinese leadership and strategic thinking, Beijing’s approach to sovereignty and non-interference has undergone coherent adaption.

2.3 PRC’s historical attitudes towards sovereignty and non-interference

Under no pretext should any country meddle in another country’s internal affairs, not to mention use one’s strength to insult the weak, invade, bully or subvert (governments in) other nations. We don’t impose our social system or ideology onto others, and we don’t allow other countries to impose their social system and ideology onto us. Every country has the right to choose a social system and ideology that conforms to the situation in that country. [...] The development of China does not constitute a threat to any country. Hereafter, as China develops, [we] will never seek hegemony. Chinese has themselves suffered aggression, repression and bullying at the hands of more powerful nations, and [we will] never impose the same suffering onto others.

President Jiang Zemin at the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Point 9, 1997⁷¹

China’s rhetoric on the principles of sovereignty and non-interference is deeply rooted in the Chinese ‘century of shame’, which ranges roughly from the first opium war in 1842 to Mao declared the birth of PRC in October 1949. The unjust interventions China suffered at the hands and guns of Western nations and Japan in the 19th and 20th century are still a thorn in the claw of the Chinese dragon. Apart from being manifested in the media, there are textbooks, novels, museums, songs, films and parks all devoted to commemorating the national humiliation. (Callahan, 2010, p.1) After suffering defeats in the two successive opium wars, China was forced to open ports for trade on terms dictated by Britain. For a nation which for most of its history was perhaps the world’s highest developed civilization, this was a strong blow to national confidence. The defeat to Japan in the first Sino-Japanese war at the end of the 19th century was another major humiliation, and when western powers

⁷¹新华网 (1997) 江泽民在中国共产党第十五次全国代表大会上的报告 (1997年9月12日)

[Xinhuanet (1997), Jiang Zemin’s speech at the 15th Party Congress, Sept. 12th 1997]

国与国之间[...] 不能以任何借口干涉他国内政, 更不能恃强凌弱, 侵略、欺负和颠覆别的国家。我们不把自己的社会制度和意识形态强加于人, 也决不允许别国把他们的社会制度和意识形态强加于我们。各国都有权选择符合本国国情的社会制度

[...] 中国的发展不会对任何国家构成威胁。今后中国发达起来了, 也永远不称霸。中国人民曾经长期遭受列强侵略、压迫和欺凌, 永远不会把这种痛苦加之于人。

entered and looted Beijing in the wake of the Boxer rebellion at the very start of the 20th century, it was once again apparent that the Chinese were severely inferior in terms of military strength and technological development. Finally, the inability to withstand the Japanese in the second Sino-Japanese war in the 1930's through 1945 was yet another proof of Chinese inferiority.

The words of Jiang Zemin cited in the beginning of this section, reflect China's painful memories of a time when the Chinese nation was suffering intrusion and interventions by alien countries, emphasising that China will 'never impose the same suffering onto others'. Chinese emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference is deeply rooted in its own modern history. Nevertheless, despite the painful experience of having been victim to foreign suppression (or perhaps because of this), China was in the 1950's through to the 70's, involved in a number of conflicts on alien soil. In this period, Beijing supported a number of movements in pursuit of national independence from the western powers, and was directly or indirectly involved in several wars, including in Korea and Vietnam, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Christensen, 2006 and Snow 1994, p. 289 in Risa, 2009). The Chinese in this period was actively involved in promoting communism globally and supported a number of communist movements, of which its support of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge perhaps is the best known. The Chinese support for the Communist Party of Burma has already been mentioned. Supporting communist movements was in the years following the establishment of the People's Republic, a policy actively advocated by the Chinese leadership. This is illustrated in by Liu Shaoqi, vice-chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, who in 1950 stated that "it is CCP and Chinese people's duty-bound international responsibility, and one of the most important means strengthening China's revolutionary victory in the international circumstances to use all possible measures to aid Communist Parties and peoples in oppressed Asian nations, and struggle for their liberations."⁷² Chinese foreign policy was during the reign of Mao based mostly on ideology and little on economic gain (Robinson 1994: 556 in Risa). The ideological aspect was in this period clearly more crucial to China than non-interference, and Beijing actively pursued a policy based on the aim of promoting the Communist cause.

It was only when Deng Xiaoping took power that the PRC changed its political objectives from spreading global communist revolution to creating domestic economic growth, and its policies changed from inflexible principle to pragmatism (ibid). China suspended its support

⁷² Fan Hongwei, "Sino-Burmese relations 1949-1953: Suspicions and Equivocations", *ICS Working Papers* no. 19 2008, p.13

of Maoists insurgencies around the world, and its approach to diplomacy also became ‘non-ideological’. (Kleine-Ahlbrandt, and Small, 2008) . However, ideology will inevitably influence policies and diplomacy of any country; conducting diplomacy completely detached from your nation’s ideology, that being capitalism or communism, democracy or autocracy, is impossible. I interpret the term ‘Non-ideological’ in this context to mean that ideology did not serve as the main (or only) tenant in China’s foreign policy anymore, but was subjected to other goals, such as economic gain. Economic growth, which in the Mao era had been subjected to ideological concerns, required investment capital, technology and human resources, and also markets for a growing export industry. “All of this was scarce in China and its traditional allies, but available in Western countries. In this [post-Mao] period China therefore started a policy of opening up to the West” (Shirk 2007: 19 in Risa 2009).

As a consequence of political principles and ideology being replaced by market economic principles, the categorical support for ideologically similar regimes and movements were replaced by respect for the serving regime of any country, regardless of its ideology (Snow 2008: xviii in Risa 2009, p29). This change in Beijing’s policy held substantial consequences also for Burma. Chinese support for communist movements, including the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), decreased significantly after the death of Mao in 1976 (Lindtner, 1990), and was a significant factor in the collapse of the CPB in 1989 (ibid). Having a good relationship to other nations was now of more importance to Beijing than the spread of communism.

After 1989, a year remembered for both the fall of the Berlin wall and the brutal crackdown of the protesters at Tiananmen Square, the world of international relations changed. The bipolar world of US and Soviet struggle for world domination was no more. Amidst the changing world situation China found herself increasingly marginalized by western sanctions following the Tiananmen incident. This led to a resurgence of Chinese political relations to the developing world. (Taylor, 2006, p.939 in Risa, 2009) These relations were based on acceptance of the respective third world regimes, regardless of ideological differences (ibid.), and the post-89 development in this sense continued and strengthened trends started with the ascent of Deng Xiaoping. China’s relations with pariah states also deepened in this period, after all, ‘in those days it [China] had veered toward pariah status itself.’ (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008). Even though the isolation and sanctions ended relatively quickly (Kim, 1994 , p.134), they clearly demonstrated that having close relations with third world countries would be useful should China be isolated by the West again. At this time, post 1989 and after the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, the West was the key to continued economic growth, whereas developing countries was a source of support in political issues were there was

tension between China and the West (Risa, 2009).

While a change in leadership, i.e. an internal factor, might be considered to be the main catalyst spurring the transition between the first two periods (i.e 1949-76, 1978-89) external factors clearly played a decisive role in the post-89 development of Chinese policies.

However, what remains central in both transitional periods, i.e 1976-78 and 1989, was a change in what Beijing considered to be of core self-interests. The shift of overriding objectives in foreign policy, from spreading communism to a pragmatic focus on economic gain, spurred a change in attitudes towards the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and to foreign policy in general. These overriding political objectives, I regard as being what CCP considered to be in their and China's self-interest. Put simply, change in core self-interests equalled change in foreign policy. China in this way acts as a rational autonomous actor pursuing its own self-interest, increasing its material capabilities and promoting its own sovereignty, in line with political realism. (Moseley, Alexander, "Political Realism")

An interesting example of the highly pragmatic foreign policy can be seen in the Chinese response to the Burmese elections in 1990. Chinese leaders were then among the first to congratulate National League for Democracy with the victory, and called on the Burmese regime to release its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi who were held in house arrest.⁷³ However, after it became clear that the junta had no intention of honouring the election results, China changed attitude, emphasizing the military's role in winning Burma's colonial independence – implying that this gave the junta legitimacy to hold onto power.⁷⁴ Realizing that the military junta would still be governing Burma, China decided to side with them, as having friendly relations with neighbouring countries, especially at a time when international friends were few and far between, was clearly beneficial to China. This pragmatic trend can further be observed in the Chinese response in the build up to the Gulf war of 1990-91. Despite the rather harsh Chinese rhetorics on sovereignty following the Tiananmen crackdown, China backed the American led initiative to condemn the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the UNSC, and supported the right to intervene. The political and economical benefits and a growing Chinese awareness that participation in humanitarian operations was central in creating an image of China as cooperative and harmless was more important than a rigid defence of the principle of non-interference. Building of reputation through actions gained importance (Hegseth, 2009, see also Choedon, 2005, Fravel, 1996, Carlson, 2006). China's recent emphasis on national image and soft power will be discussed in the following sections.

⁷³Aung Zaw, *China's troublesome little brother* 'The Irrawaddy', Sept 2009

⁷⁴ *ibid*

2.4 National reputation and soft power

*National image is particularly important in our globalized world,
and is already a crucial aspect of national interests.
Harming national image is harming national interest, and vice versa.*⁷⁵

National image emerged as a hot topic at the international arena especially after Joseph Nye coined the term soft power in 1990, and defined it as ‘the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments’.⁷⁶ Soft power is, in other words, ‘the ability to through cultural attraction, ideas, policies and political ideals to achieve another party’s respect and affinity, built on the premise that the reputation of a nation is a positive asset that can facilitate or impede individual transactions.’ (Leonard & Small, 2003). The study of soft power and national image is a new and developing phenomenon in China⁷⁷, and analysing national image as a part of international relations is even newer territory (Liu, Yanfang, 2009). Gill argues that China seeks to develop an image of a responsible, peaceful power which doesn’t seek to challenge the existing system, and, he argues, China needs international goodwill to continue her domestic economic and social development (Gill, 2007 p.105). This is crucial in, as the legitimacy of the CCP to a large degree is founded on a successful combination of economic and social development.⁷⁸ Gill argues that in order to achieve this, a number of criteria needs fulfilment, such as sufficient access to resources, subduing internal and regional conflicts, in addition to an international environment which enables China to focus on these internal challenges (Ibid, p.132). The correlation between international environment and achievement of internal issues is further emphasized by Ni Jianping, deputy

⁷⁵刘艳房, “国家形象战略研究”, *中国特色社会主义研究*, 2009 年第 1 期
[Liu, Yanfang, “Research on national image strategy”, *Studies on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, no 1. 2009] : ‘国家形象在全球化时代显得特别重要, 已经成为国家利益的重要内容。损害国家形象, 实际上就是损害国家利益, 反之亦然。’

⁷⁶ Center of Public Diplomacy, *What is Public Diplomacy?*, University of Southern California

⁷⁷ It should be noted that the notion of power of ideas has been advocated by Chinese philosophers for two millennia, and within the traditional Chinese state philosophy Confucianism, it is natural that the Chinese state should obtain its supreme status by setting an example, so the notion of soft power can not be said to be entirely new in China. Moreover, Sun Zi, around 500B.C in his ‘Art of war’, put forth ideas resembling the concept of soft power. For instance, he’s stating that it is better to attack the enemy’s mind than his fortified cities. (Beukel, Erik, “China and the South China Sea: Two faces of Power in the Rising China’s Neighbourhood Policy”, *Diis Working Paper* 2010:07, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen 2010)
Chapter 3 of *The Art of War*, further states that :‘To fight and win all battles is not the best way, to break your enemies resistance without fighting, that is the best way’. [是故百戰百勝, 非善之善者也; 不戰而屈人之兵, 善之善者也。]

⁷⁸ Several analysts argue that since the start of the reform period, the legitimacy of the CCP has been based on economic growth and stability. See for instance Foot 2006, p. 84; Hjellum 1997 p. 49, in Hegseth 2009

director and researcher at the Shanghai American Research Institute. He writes that: ‘Chinese foreign policy has in recent years stressed that its present and future essential responsibility and fundamental aim is to safeguard the development of China, [...]strive for a peaceful and stable international environment, a friendly regional environment, equal and mutually beneficial cooperation and an objective, friendly public opinion, to fully serve the construction of society where everyone is enjoying a relatively good standard of living’.⁷⁹ The strive for a peaceful, stable and friendly ‘environment’ hinges to a high degree on having a favorable reputation. This is, as pointed out by Ni Jianping, serving the domestic aim of creating a society where everyone is well off. As previously argued, the present legitimacy of the CCP rests very much on the promise of delivering economic benefits to its people, in other words in creating this kind of society. In this sense it can be argued that having a good reputation ultimately serves the aim of holding the CCP in power. Having a good and favorable national reputation and image is thus clearly a crucial issue for the CCP. This should of course not be interpreted as Beijing being willing to alter its foreign policy *solely* with the aim of attaining a good international reputation.⁸⁰ Ni Jianping underlines this point, arguing that “Foreign policy must not only serve national interest, it must devote itself to creating a good national image; [the issue of creating a good] national image can not be separated from the foreign policy of serving national interest, and exist independently. But a country’s foreign policy also can not pursue only national interest and ignore [the issue of creating a good] national image.”⁸¹ Ni seemingly distinguishes between national interest and

⁷⁹ 倪建平, “对外传播与“和平崛起”: 国家形象塑造的视角”, 人民网, 2005

[Ni, Jianping, “The spreading of information to foreign nations and ‘peaceful rise’: From the perspective of forming national image”, Renmin net, 2005]

:中国外交工作近年来则进一步强调其当前和今后一个时期内的根本任和基本目标是维护中国发展[...], 争取和平稳定的国际环境、睦邻友好的周边环境、平等互利的合作环境和客观友善的舆论环境, 为全面建设小康社会服务。

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⁸⁰ The Chinese reaction to Liu Xiaobo being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize exemplifies this difficulty, for as pointed out in the New York Times, “No amount of huffing and puffing from Beijing will do away with the fact that holding a Nobel laureate in prison for the next decade is disastrous in terms of soft power.” (Jacobs, Andrew and Alan Cowell, *Nobel Winner’s Absence May Delay Awarding of Prize*, New York Times, Nov 18 2010)

On one side the rather drastic Chinese reactions to the award can be seen as an attempt to counter the negative impact on the Chinese image internationally. These measures, including launching a ‘Chinese peace prize’ and ‘urging’ other states not to participate in the Peace Prize ceremony, did, however, receive little but ridiculing in Western media and mindsets. Either the Chinese attempt to counter the damage to its international reputation was counterproductive, or the Chinese target was not the international community, but the domestic audience. In terms of national reputation, the best thing might have been to release Liu, but there are, of course, other factors to a state’s policies than international image.

⁸¹ Ni, Jianping, 2005, ‘外交政策不仅要服务国家利益, 更要致力于塑造良好的国家形象; 国家形象不可能脱离服务于国家利益的外交政策而独立存在, 但一个国家的外交政策也不能只顾追求国家利益而置国家形象于不顾’

the construction of a good national image. I regard these not to be separated, but integrated; having a good national image is *part of* the national interest of China, and for any other nation. The importance of establishing a good national reputation is a hotly debated issue among Chinese analysts. Chinese scholar Bin Ke argues that the focus on China becoming a 'responsible' power, is rooted in the aspiration the international community holds for China's new role. "When it comes to the problems of the democratic process in Burma, the nuclear issues in North Korea and Iran, the West demand China to [...] promote solutions the problems." This is not about China being 'responsible' or not, Bin Ke argues, "it just reflects a desire which the international community holds for China's role."⁸² The way I understand Bin Ke, he is arguing that the international community is trying to unfairly label China irresponsible if China does not act a manner the international community finds pleasing. Implicitly he is suggesting that the 'international community' (i.e the West) is using the threat of a bad reputation as a means to try to persuade China to alter its policies. This might of course hold a certain amount of truth to it, and it fully shows just how important the issue of national reputation has become. The Chinese emphasis on national image can be seen not only in Chinese academic circles, but also among Chinese politicians. This following quote is taken from a speech by Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi the first of December 2010, just after a North Korean attack on a South Korean island had seen tensions rise on the Korean peninsula. Explaining China's stand, Yang Jiechi stated that, "as a big responsible country, China decides its position based on the merits of each case and does not seek to protect any side".⁸³ It is clearly important for the Foreign Minister to stress that China is a responsible country.

For a favourable reputation to evolve and be established, China's foreign policy must mirror this aspiration, as a reputation not based on actions will be merely empty words.⁸⁴

In order to do this, China has in recent years strengthened its constructive participation in the international community. (Ni, Jianping, 2005) In handling global questions, Beijing has emphasized sharing, 'common honour', win-win, and actively contributed goods and materials to global and regional areas (ibid). Beijing has also increased the material input to international organisations. This is all measures taken to strengthen China's soft power (ibid).

⁸² 宾科, " ' 中国责任论' 与缅甸民主进程中的' 中国角色' ", *湘潮* 2008年09期

[Bin Ke, " 'Responsible China' and the 'Chinese role' in Burma's democratic process", *Xianghu* no.9 2008]

⁸³ Yang, Jiechi, *Shape the Future of Asia Pacific with Confidence and Cooperation*,

⁸⁴ The deterioration of US image after the Iraq war clearly demonstrates the correlation between foreign policy actions and its implications for a country's reputation and image.

Commentators have noted that a major problem for China to establish a favourable international image, is the mismatch between the humane image it seeks and its sometimes less than humane domestic policies.

Apart from promoting a favourable reputation, countering negative images is a central aspect in obtaining a desirable reputation. Yang Ying points out that, as a positive image creates a favourable international environment for China's development, negative representations such as the 'China Threat Theory' generates mistrust by other countries, and hampers cooperation. (Yang Ying, 2007 p 3). The China threat theory is the idea that the rise of China constitutes a threat to peace and stability in Asia and in the world, and the proliferation of this notion was obviously not beneficial to the creation of a favourable international image for China. A special issue of the Economist, published in November 1992 and entitled 'When China Wakes', together with the American Policy Review article 'Awakening dragon: The real danger in Asia is from China', have been regarded as the written origins of the China Threat Theory.⁸⁵ China rebuffed the idea as cold-war mentality, and aware of the negative effects such an image could cause⁸⁶, Beijing assured its neighbours and the world that its development only had peaceful intentions, and in 2003 the notion of China's 'peaceful rise', 和平崛起 *heping jueqi*, was put forward by the official China.⁸⁷ Interestingly, the official phrase was in 2004 changed into 'peaceful development', as the Chinese 崛起 *jueqi*, rise, bears connotations of a swift rise or a sudden change in an existing situation, which may be taken as having a slight abrupt and unwanted touch to it.⁸⁸ Since then, 'peaceful development', 和平发展 *heping fazhan* has been official Chinese rhetorics. Even though *heping jueqi* is still used quite frequently in the Chinese media, the change of rhetorics serves as an indication of just how delicate Beijing considers the issue of image.

When the China threat theory was first put forward, it met a receptive audience in the Southeast Asian nations, which had historical and territorial conflicts of interests with China (Chen, Yue, 2005). China's current relations with South East Asian countries, including Burma, are now to a large extent dealt with through the Association of South Asian Nations

⁸⁵陈岳, '中国威胁论与中国和平崛起 ---一种“层次分析”法的解读', *外交评论*, 2005年6月总第82期 [Chen, Yue, "The China threat theory and the Peaceful rise of China – A systematic analysis", *Foreign Affairs Review* June 2005]

⁸⁶ I do not mean that concern for national image was the only reason Beijing rebuffed the 'China Threat Theory'. Claiming that the idea was rebuffed because of the reputational damage can easily be misunderstood, as it seemingly implies an acceptance of the content of the China Threat Theory. I believe any nation, faced with the same accusations, would respond in a similar manner as Beijing, by rebuffing it. Both because of the reputational aspect and because its international relations would suffer, regardless of whether the accusations had been a true estimation of the situation in the first place.

⁸⁷ Glaser, Bonnie S and Evan S Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise'" *The China Quarterly*, vol 190, June 2007, p.291-310

⁸⁸ Ibid

(ASEAN).⁸⁹ ASEAN also plays a major role in Burmese foreign policy, and serves both as a larger platform and an alternative for, the Sino-Burmese relationship. ASEAN plays a crucial role in Southeast Asian politics, and in order to further contextualize the Sino-Burmese relationship, in the next section I will present a brief outline of the relations between and China and ASEAN, and ASEAN and Burma.

2.5 China - ASEAN - Burma

The relationship between China and South East Asia has undergone significant changes since the scepticism two decades ago. ASEAN's concerns over Beijing's drive for military modernization and its assertive posture in territorial disputes over the South China Sea of the early 1990s are now replaced with growing economic ties and shared geo-political interests for building regional security through multilateral processes. Since the 1997 Asian financial crisis⁹⁰, Beijing has expanded its influence as a major political force in the region and a locomotive for economic recovery and future opportunity.⁹¹ China and ASEAN has today 'formed a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity, [...] and are cooperating on a range of issues of mutual interest from maritime security to non-traditional security challenges' (ibid). Additionally, the ASEAN - China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) was launched January 2010, making it the largest free trade market in the world. ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan then said the free trade area will offer further impetus to the comprehensive cooperation already taking place between ASEAN and China.⁹² Presently, ACFTA consists of China, and the six earliest members of ASEAN, whereas Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma are scheduled to join ACFTA in 2015.⁹³

Burma joined ASEAN in 1997, 30 years after its establishment, and some hold the idea that ASEAN's decision to include Burma at least in part was inspired by a desire to limit China's

⁸⁹ASEAN was established in Bangkok in 1967, by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Burma joined in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999.

See *About ASEAN – Overview*, ASEAN

⁹⁰The Asian economic crisis in 1997 has been regarded as a turning point in China-ASEAN relations. China offered help to the South East Asian nations both through the IMF and bilateral loans. China also did not devalue the Renminbi, thereby enabling the South East Asian nations to recover through active export.

⁹¹ Yuan, Jing Dong, "China-ASEAN relations: Perspectives, Prospects and implications for U.S interests", *Strategic Studies Institute, U.S Army War College*, Oct. 2006

⁹²Xinhua net (2010) *China-ASEAN Free Trade Area sets example for mutual beneficial, win-win regional co-op*, Jan. 1st 2010

⁹³Wang, Vincent Wei-Cheng, "The logic of China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement: Economic Statecraft of 'Peaceful Rise'". Presented at 'China in the World, the World in China', International Conference University of Malay, August 2007.

growing influence in the country.⁹⁴ As for the generals in Burma, ASEAN plays an important role in rebuffing international pressure, attracting foreign investments, and diversifying political allies. A prominent feature of Burmese foreign policy has been the drive to become embedded in Southeast Asia's regional society, (Haacke, 2006) and relations with ASEAN are one of the main pillars of Burma's foreign policy.⁹⁵ China's growing influence over Burma in the 1990's caused anxiety in the ASEAN states, and resulted in Thailand's initiative - with the support of other ASEAN members - to lobby for Burma to become a full-fledged member of ASEAN in 1997. From a Burmese perspective, joining ASEAN moderates relations with China, and carries economic benefits.⁹⁶ Jurgen Haacke supplements these beneficial aspects of relations with ASEAN, noting that 'these ties [Burmo-ASEAN] have effectively relieved international pressure on the regime and helped to avoid the need to compromise its foreign policy' (Haacke, 2006, p41). For a comprehensive understanding of Sino-Burmese relations, it is crucial to also examine how the world is perceived from the perspective of the Burmese leadership. Let us therefore turn to the politics and foreign policy of Burma.

⁹⁴ Vaughn, Bruce and Morrison, Wayne M. "China-Southeast Asia Relations:Trends, Issues, and Implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service Report*, April 4th 2006

⁹⁵Li Xingeng, "Sino-Myanmar Relations: Analysis and Prospects", *The Culture Mandala*, Vol. 7 no. 2, Dec.2006

⁹⁶ *ibid*

3: The Politics of Burma

Following the adoption of a new constitution in 2008, Burma held general elections the 7th of November 2010, the first after the National League for Democracy (NLD) won more than 80% of the parliamentary seats in the 1990 elections. The military government refused to acknowledge the outcome, and have since kept NLD's iconic leader Aung San Suu Kyi in housearrest for a total of 15 years.⁹⁷ She was released shortly after the November elections, which was characterized with words like 'farce' and 'mockery', and it has been pointed out that the elections was designed to further consolidate and legitimize the power of the current government.⁹⁸ Election laws and regulations makes it difficult to disagree.⁹⁹ Following the elections, official numbers gave the pro-junta party USDP 76% of the parliamentary seats, whereas the National Democratic Force (NDF) got 1.3 %, and the democratic opposition (including the NDF) got a total of 9%.¹⁰⁰ The remaining seats were won by parties backed by the ruling junta's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and various ethnic parties. Optimists believe that the elections at least will pave way for minor improvements for the Burmese population. While the outcome is yet to be seen, it can hardly be argued that the Burmese military through the elections seemed to be preparing to give up power. The outcome and aftermath of the elections is not very likely to alter the international environment the Burmese junta is operating in. As a Chinese analyst argues; no matter the outcome, the West will continue or even strengthen sanctions, whereas China and India will continue an 'engagement policy' (接触政策) with Burmese authorities.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Den Norske Burmakomit , *Aung San Suu Kyi i korthet*, Nov. 12th 2010

⁹⁸ See for instance Mason, Margie *Philippines calls Burma elections 'farce'*, The Irrawaddy, Oct 27th 2010
The Oslo center for Peace and Human Rights, *The elections in Burma will be a farce* (2010), Aug. 13th 2010,
Tint Swe, *Not second election but second conference for Burma*, Burma digest, Nov. 1st 2010
Al-Jazeera, *US condemns Myanmar poll 'mockery'*, March 11th 2010

⁹⁹For instance, Aung San Suu Kyi was effectively barred from participating due to her marriage with the deceased englishman Michael Aris, as anyone having been married to a foreigner was prohibited from running in the elections. Additionally, no party could have members that were convicted of crimes (including political crimes), meaning that the NLD would have had to expel members who were convicted in order to run in the elections. The NLD decided to boycott the elections, whereas some former members of the party formed the National Democratic Force and decided to participate. Members of religious orders, including the monks of the Saffron Revolution, were also barred from membership in political parties, and it was illegal for anyone campaigning to 'tarnish' the ruling military government. Furthermore 25 % of the seats in parliament was reserved for the military.

For an in-dept analasys of the election laws, see

Martin, Michael F, "Burmas elections 2010: Implications of the new constitution and election laws" April 2010

¹⁰⁰ Democratic Voice of Burma, *Final election results announced*, Nov. 18th 2010

¹⁰¹ 王子昌, "2010年缅甸大选与缅甸外交", *东南亚研究* 2010年第4期

Wang, Zichang "The 2010 Burmese general elections and Burmese foreign policy", *Southeast Asian Studies*, vol 4. 2010

This section will give an outline of some central aspects of Burmese politics. After first describing the main political dogmas in Naypidaw, we will look into the domestic backdrop upon which this policy is based. The focus will be the ethnic tensions in the border areas and we will also touch upon the rather xenophobic nature of the Burmese rulers.

The primary task of the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military, is to maintain power. (Yue, Deming, 2005) The military junta officially pursues the so-called ‘Three Main National Causes’, i.e. non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and the perpetuation of the country’s sovereignty, in addition to the 12 ‘national objectives’ in the political, economic, and social spheres¹⁰²(Haacke, p17). Capturing what might be summed up as the core of the military’s domestic political-security imperative, the Three Main National Causes highlight the juntas’ fear of Burma disintegrating. This perceived threat can be said to come from two groups, the Burmese democracy movement, and various ethnic insurgent groups. Some may include fear of foreign intervention as a third factor. The regime might exaggerate threats to national unity and stability for its own purposes, but as there is no clear distinction between security for the state, the regime and the military government, significant challenges to state building remain apparent (Haacke, 2006, p.18). To thoroughly comprehend the foreign politics of Burma, and its relationship to China, we need to examine the motivations of the Burmese leadership, and how these influence the foreign policy. Both external factors, such as international isolation, and internal factors, like a highly popular democratic opposition and various ethnic insurgency groups, create conditions for a regime extremely sensitive to all threats of interference. To better understand the cause of this anxiety, it is necessary to examine the domestic situation, and the next part will focus on the ethnic diversity of Burma and the conflicts between ethnic minorities and the Burmese regime. This part will be followed by an assessment of main priorities in the foreign politics of Burma.

3.1 Ethnic conflicts and unstable border-regions

Even if ethnic minorities do not pose an immediate threat to the rule of the SPDC, they continue to be a nuisance for the Burmese central government, and ethnic groups along the Sino-Burmese borders continue to influence relations between Beijing and Naypitaw.

¹⁰² For a list of the 12 national objectives, see Haacke,2006 p.111

By whatever statistics one relies on, Burma has a genuine ethnic and religious plurality, and from a geographical perspective, about one half of the country is comprised of territory traditionally occupied by non-Burmese ethnic minorities, most of whom inhabit non-central areas. The simplified version of the complex issue of ethnicity in Burma operate with 8 major ethnic groups and 135 so-called ‘national’ or ‘principal races’, the 8 major groups being the Bamar, Kayin (Karen), Shan, Chin, Rakhine, Mon, Karenni (Kayah) and Kachin. (Matthews, 2001). Demographically, the Bamar make up 65% of the nation’s 50 million population (Matthews, 2001). Theoretically, ethnic minorities compromise the remaining 35%,¹⁰³ whereas the ethnic Chinese does according to the CIA factbook make up 3% of the Burmese population.¹⁰⁴ Ethnic conflict is not a new phenomenon in Burma, and after independence an effort was made to bolster ethnic cooperation. The colonial British rule, it has been argued, “stimulated sectional particularism... fostered racial antagonism and subverted the internal balance of power”(Matthews, 2001), and aware of the difficulties concerning the ethnic question the *Panglong* agreement was signed in 1947.¹⁰⁵ However, the assassination of the main architect of Burmese independence and the Panglong agreement, Aung San¹⁰⁶, in July 1947, just months before Burma’s independence, compromised the agreement, and his successor, Prime Minister U Nu ‘lacked the vision and ability to carry the ethnic accord and infant federalism forward ‘ (Matthews, 2001). Ethnic fragmentation and conflict has been used actively by the Burmese central government to legitimize its actions ever since the generals of the military coup in 1962, to which the present day regime remains heirs, justified its actions as necessary to keep the state from fragmenting into ethnic and political secessionist blocs (ibid). The ethnic and religious minorities find themselves frequently marginalized, and several groups have taken up arms against the central military regime, the most well-known in the West perhaps being the struggle of the Karen (Kayin) people in the east of Burma. Other groups, including the Shan, Arakan, and the Rohingya have also engaged in armed struggle against the central government, and it has been a central aspect of SPDC policy to to negotiate cease-fire agreements with the various rebel groups (ibid). Matthews

¹⁰³Other estimates puts the amount of non-bamar at 40%, see

Sai Wansai, “Ethnic Conflict in Burma: Historical Formation, Cause of Conflict and Contemporary Politics”

¹⁰⁴CIA, *The World Factbook : Burma*

Mixed marriages and personal identity makes it is difficult to determine who is Chinese and who is not.

Furthermore, to estimate a minority population is a politically sensitive issue , and depending on context ethnic Chinese may be over- or underestimated.

¹⁰⁵ “The [Panglong] agreement stipulated so-called Frontier Area Representation in the governments executive council, and an agreement in principle for the autonomy of the Frontier Areas in internal administration.”

For more details on the Panglong agreement, see Matthews,2001 and Chao-Tzang Yawngghwe,2001

¹⁰⁶ Aung San, regarded as the father of the Burmese independence is the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, a kinship which increases the symbolism of Suu Kyi’s struggle for a democratic Burma.

emphasises that the cease-fires were accepted by these ethnic organisations in part because they were promised a process of economic development and political dialogue. And, as he points out, ‘regrettably there is little of the former and none of the latter.’¹⁰⁷ The lack of economic development and the unstable political situation in the Burmese ethnic frontier areas have grave consequences not only for domestic matters. Instability spreads to the Chinese side of the border, and this has serious implications for the relationship between China and Burma. This will be discussed in the next chapter, now let us first finish reviewing the politics of Burma, by looking at the colonial experience and its implications for SPDC policy.

3.2 Colonial heritage

Apart from the threat coming from ethnic rebel groups, the electoral victory of Aung San Suu Kyi’s party NLD in 1990 and the large scale demonstrations led by monks in September 2007 were also powerful reminders that the military’s authority is not based on the loyalty and support of the Burmese people, but by the power of their guns.¹⁰⁸ In addition to internal threats to the military reign, the colonial experience accounts for a strong and pervasive nationalism, and the military leaders’ “collective hypersensitivity to all perceived threats of interference” (Haacke, p 19). The issue of colonial history is echoed by official Burmese sources, explaining that Burmese Foreign Policy is a product of, among other things “its strong desire to prevent interference in her internal affairs based on her bitter experience with colonialism”.¹⁰⁹ The Burmese government consistently broadcasts the message that the country will resist what it perceives as ‘attempts to subjugate Myanmar’ or ‘neo-colonial politics’. (Haacke, 2006) These factors, coupled with the perceived domestic threats of ethnic insurgency and a popular democratic opposition, are creating a fertile soil for the growth of a

¹⁰⁷ For further discussions on the ethnic conflict in Burma, see Smith, Martin “Ethnic conflict and the challenge of civil society in Burma”, Paper presented at the conference ‘Strengthening Civil Society in Burma. Possibilities and Dilemmas for International NGOs’, Dec 4th and 5th 1997, at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, and Sakhong, Lian H. “A Struggle for Self-determination in Burma: Ethnic Nationalities Perspective”, Speech delivered at “Conference on Indo-Burma Relation”, India International Centre on September 16-17, 2004

¹⁰⁸The fear of domestic uprisings is regarded as the main factor in why the Burmese leaders in 2005 moved the administrative capital from the populous city of Rangoon to the jungle outside Pyinmana, a small town in the middle of, and at least 4-5 hours by car from, Burmas two main cities, Rangoon and Mandalay. Another explanation has been that the juntas moved the capital based on advices from astrologers. The name of the new capital is Naypidaw.

¹⁰⁹Thaung Tun (2004) *Priorities in Myanmar Foreign Policy*, Bangladesh Strategic and Development Forum Aug.12th 2004

regime regularly being described as paranoid.¹¹⁰ Thaug Tun, Director-General of the Political Department of the Burmese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has summed up the core objectives in Burma's foreign policy like this;

- To enhance our security
- To bolster the nation's economic prosperity
- To promote a peaceful and equitable world order (ibid)

Jürgen Haacke echoes the official Burmese version, though emphasising the dissimilarity of the objectives' importance, stating that 'the [Burmese] foreign policy priority is clear. The basic security imperative has consistently been regarded as more important than the goals of development or improved international standing.' (Ibid p.21) The lack of economic development, the brutal crackdown of the protests in September 2007, the long-lasting detention of Aung San Suu Kyi¹¹¹, and the disregard of international pressure to make the coming elections of November 2010 conform to democratic norms, are all strong indicators that Haacke's analysis remains valid.

Eager to guard national sovereignty, the SPDC unsurprisingly shares the Chinese enthusiasm for the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, and the mutual passion for these has served as a backbone for Sino-Burmese relations.

¹¹⁰See for instance

Bumcombe, Andrew 'Paranoid Burmese junta step up security around Aung San Suu Kyi, The Independent, May 16th 2008 and

Brown, Kerry *Paranoid, insular and inept, the junta has no plan B*, The Guardian, Sept 27th 2007

¹¹¹ Aung San Suu Kyi was released the 13th of November 2010, in a move that was seen by many as at least partly motivated by the desire for a better international reputation for the military junta.

4: Sino-Burmese relations

Burma and China are friendly neighbours.

*Since ancient times, the people of the two countries have conducted close contact, as brothers. From the establishment of relations 55 years ago, the Sino-Burmese relationship has, in the face of changes in the international situation and domestic changes in our respective countries, constantly developed (forward).[...] To build good-neighbourly friendship between China and Myanmar is an important part of Chinese regional foreign policy.*¹¹²

President Hu Jintao after meeting the leader of Burma, Senior General Than Shwe in Jakarta, April 2005

There are many factors to the Sino-Burmese relationship, as is true for all bilateral relations. In this part we will look closer into some of the issues which are defining the relationship between China and Burma. Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow for an adequate discussion of all areas affecting relations between Naypitaw and Beijing. This holds true perhaps especially for the recent reports that Burma is pursuing acquirement of nuclear capability, and its implications for the relationship to China. Besides, a closer look into India's role as regional power and catalyst for Sino-Burmese relations, together with a comparison with Sino-North Korean relations would be valuable for further understanding the Sino-Burmese relationship. These topics may be sufficiently examined in additional studies, but as for this thesis, there is not enough room for these factors to be dealt with in a satisfactory manner. The topics which will be discussed, is Chinese diplomatic support of Burma, followed by an examination of the importance of Burma for China's future energy security. Subsequently the nature of the economical relations will be illuminated, and finally instability in the border areas and its consequences for the Sino-Burmese relations will be investigated. First, however, we will have a brief introduction to the present day relations.

At the same time as Beijing was being isolated by the West after the Tiananmen crackdown, Burma found itself in a somewhat similar situation. Following the August 1988 uprising and the ensuing violent crackdown which left an estimated 3000 protesters dead, Burma was faced with widespread international condemnation as well as economic and diplomatic sanctions. Beijing's reaction to the violence in Burma was to 'strictly pursue a policy based

¹¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 胡锦涛会见缅甸和平与发展委员会主席丹瑞, 2005年4月23日 [Hu Jintao meets Chairman of Myanmar's State Peace and Development Council, Than Shwe, April 23rd, 2005] 胡锦涛表示, 中缅两国是友好邻邦。自古以来, 两国人民亲密交往, 情同手足。建交55年来, 中缅关系经受住了国际风云变幻和各自国内情况变化的考验, 不断向前发展。[...]胡锦涛说, 发展中缅睦邻友好, 是中国周边外交的重要组成部分。

on the Five Principles for Peaceful Co-existence, and not interfere with the internal affairs of Burma'.¹¹³ Faced with widespread sanctions, the military leaders of Burma sought stronger relations with its neighbours, and relations with China warmed considerably (International Crisis Group, 2007). The benefits of the improved relations with China were almost immediate for Burma, and China's economic, military and political support became a lifeline for the military government (ibid). Two substantial arms deals with China in 1990 and 1994, worth 1.2billion US\$ and 400million US\$ respectively, allowed the Tatmadaw (the Burmese army) to replenish and upgrade its armaments (Haacke p.26). Liu Shaohua sums up the useful role of China for the Burmese authorities, stating that 'in safeguarding national stability, Burma needs China's support [...] Moreover, [China's support] is beneficial for the Burmese to resist the sanctions of Western nations, and to improve the international environment.'¹¹⁴ As a member of the UNSC China holds considerable power on the international arena, and combined with its geographical location and its support and aid to Burma, China has become Burma's most important ally.¹¹⁵

For China, Burma is important as a trading outlet for its comparatively poor and landlocked inland provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, as it will be cheaper for products of this region to reach either South Asia or Europe via Burma than through the ports of eastern and southern China.¹¹⁶ Beijing has started to realize the importance of reducing the economical gap between the western and eastern provinces, and in order to do this, developing relationship with Burma is of crucial importance (Liu, 2001). Because of a rather mismanaged Burmese economy and limited bilateral trade, the most important asset Burma offers China is that of acting as a transit country. The Burmese military junta is certainly prepared to let Burma act as a junction for goods going to and from China, and has told Beijing to regard Rangoon as Yunnans marine port (出海口) (ibid). Oil is a commodity of special significance in this regard and we will look further into the reasons why Burma is of decisive importance to China's future energy security later in this chapter. Now China's diplomatic support for Burma will be the focus of attention, followed by an examination of how incompetence in the Burmese leadership is impeding the economical ties between the two nations, and how the

¹¹³刘少华, "论中缅关系", 2001

[Liu, Shaohua, "Discussing Sino-Burmese Relations", 2001]

'对缅甸国内形势的变化[i.e post 1988], 中国政府严格奉行和平共处五项原则, 不干涉缅甸内部事务

¹¹⁴ibid, '在维护国内稳定方面, 缅甸需要中国的支持[...] 其次, [中国的支持]有利于缅甸抵制西方国家的制裁, 改善国际环境,'

¹¹⁵Ibid

¹¹⁶ See for instance Li, Xingeng, "Sino-Myanmar Relations: Analysis and Prospects", *The Culture Mandala*, Vol. 7 no. 2, Dec. 2006

junta's failure to stabilize its northern border is causing problems for China.

4.1 Chinese diplomatic support for Burma

Ever since Beijing following the Burmese elections in 1990 prevented the adoption of the first ever UN draft resolution on the human rights situation in Burma in the United Nations General Assembly (Haacke, 2006 p.26), China has been known as a reliable protector of the military junta in Burma. Recent development shows, however, that Chinese diplomatic backing of the Burmese regime has been undergoing adjustments, and does not appear as unreserved as it used to. A resolution in the UNSC demanding the release of political prisoners, expressing deep concern at Burma's large-scale human rights violations, and calling for the establishment of political process leading to a genuine democratic transition¹¹⁷ was in January 2007 vetoed by China. The Chinese ambassador Wang Guangya was arguing that 'the Myanmar issue is mainly the internal affair of a sovereign state' and that human rights problems were not the purview of the council unless they endangered regional security, which the situation in Burma did not.¹¹⁸ China, rather unsurprisingly, as we can see, clarifies its argument by referring to the concept of sovereignty, underscoring the Chinese emphasis on this issue. Despite vetoing the resolution, China called on the Burmese junta to 'listen to the call of its own people [...] and speed up the process of dialogues and reforms.' (ibid) Rather than alienating the Burmese regime, China acted as protectors. Worth noting is the Chinese State Counselor Tang Jiaxuan's visit to Burma in February, a month after the session in the UNSC. He met with Burmese leader, Senior General Than Shwe, and is said to have signalled that 'China's protection depended on its [Burma's] greater willingness to move forward with political reforms and take a less confrontational stance with the UN and other international institutions' (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008). This interpretation of Tang's visit is not reflected by the Chinese ministry of Foreign Affairs, nor by other checked sources, but Ahlbrandt and Smalls understanding becomes somewhat plausible seen in the light of moves made by the Burmese leadership just after Tang left Burma late February 2007. Burmese leaders then signed a new agreement with the International Labour Organisation

¹¹⁷For the entire draft resolution, see United Nations, *Security Council Draft Resolution, Jan. 12th 2007*

¹¹⁸Wang, Guangya, *Security Council Meeting 5619 : The Situation in Myanmar*, Jan 12th 2007.

Russia and South Africa also voted against the adoption of the resolution, both referring to Burma not posing a threat to regional or international peace.

Also worth noting, is that three days after China vetoed the Security Council, the Burmese government granted a Chinese company a major oil and gas exploration contract, even though it had been outbid by an Indian competitor. (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008)

(ILO), which it previously had been threatening to expel from the country. Albrandt and Small regard this to be a result of Chinese diplomatic pressure, which of course should not be ruled out, but their paper is not referring to any material backing this assumption.¹¹⁹ Having failed to find any statements from either party, or any other substantial information supporting this view, the possibility of the two occurrences being coincidental can not be ruled out, but the temporal sequence of events does imply a probable connection.

China may also have influenced the decision of resuming work with the Burmese constitutional national convention, which was announced after Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein's trip to Beijing in May 2007.¹²⁰ The Chinese role in the aftermath of the Burmese demonstrations in September later that year remains somewhat more accessible. As the demonstrations gained momentum and reached the headlines of most international media in late September and the military junta carried out its threat of using force to stop them, China faced international criticism and pressure to toughen its stance on the junta. Spokesperson Jiang Yu of the Chinese foreign ministry then stated, the 27th of September, that China called on the respective parties in Burma to exercise restraint and solve the current problem properly.¹²¹ This was the first time China publicly called for restraint on Burma,¹²² and should hence be regarded as a major step by Beijing in its dealings with the Burmese. Chinese foreign affairs envoy Tang Jiaxuan later the same month met with Burma's foreign minister, and demanded the regime to "restore internal stability as soon as possible, properly handle issues and actively promote national reconciliation."¹²³ Tang continued, stating that "China whole-heartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country," an unusual intervention by China (ibid).

The Chinese reaction raises questions as for the reason of Beijing's shift from the traditional position of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. One factor is the Chinese hope of stable regional conditions, which could be jeopardized by a violent crackdown and

¹¹⁹The International Crisis groups report "China's Myanmar Dilemma" shares Albrandt and Smalls interpretation, basing this on a Crisis group interview and that diplomats cited Chinese pressure as a major factor in the Burmese government's decision.

¹²⁰The national convention was the first step of the country's seven-stage roadmap to democracy supposedly leading to new elections and what the junta calls a 'disciplined democracy'. The national convention was formally resumed in May 2004 after an eight-year-long suspension, and in May 2007 it was reconvened to approve guidelines for a new constitution. This was approved by a 92.4 % majority in a referendum in 2008, widely condemned by the international community and the domestic opposition for not being fair. The elections were held in November 2010.

¹²¹中国网, *中方吁缅甸有关各方保持克制尽快恢复稳定*

China net, *China urges all sides in Burma to exercise restraint and restore stability as soon as possible*, Sept 27th 2007

¹²²Reuters, *EU should boycott Beijing Olympics over Myanmar*, Sept 27th 2007

¹²³Spencer, Richard, *China's Dilemma over Burma protests*, The Telegraph, Sept 26th 2007

escalation of the conflict in Burma. Another aspect is the reputational burden of being closely associated with the Burmese regime, which has been discussed previously under China's foreign policies, and I will discuss this in greater detail after finishing the section on China's response towards Burma in the course and aftermath of the massive demonstrations in Burma September 2007.

Following the demonstrations, Beijing supported the 2nd of October United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution, which was strongly deploring the 'continued violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Myanmar, including through beatings, killings, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, and urging the Government of Myanmar to exercise utmost restraint and to desisting from further violence against peaceful protesters.'¹²⁴ The resolution was adopted by a no vote consensus by the council, something that may indicate a rather passive Chinese acceptance of the resolution. The Chinese representative interestingly uses his speaking time at the session to state that 'China has always respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar'.¹²⁵ Apart from the fact that the content of this statement is rather debatable (both in the Yuan and the Qing dynasty and more recently when PRC was supporting the Burmese Communist Party, China quite clearly did not respect the Burmese territorial integrity), it seems aimed more at appeasing the Burmese than showing support for the resolution. China did unquestionably support the statement of the UNSC a few days later, the 11th of October, which 'strongly deplores the use of violence against peaceful demonstrations in Myanmar'.¹²⁶ Further, it states that 'The Security Council also calls on the Government of Myanmar to take all necessary measures to address the political, economic, humanitarian, and human rights issues that are the concern of its people and emphasizes that the future of Myanmar lies in the hands of all of its people.'¹²⁷ The Chinese support of this statement strongly contrasts to its UNSC veto in January, just 10 months earlier. The two texts are not identical, for instance the point of unconditionally releasing Aung San Suu Kyi is not included in the UNSC statement of October the 11th.¹²⁸ However, the UNSC statement

¹²⁴According to the report by the ICG, "China's Myanmar Dilemma", a point demanding the release of Aung Sang Suu Kyi was deleted from the final resolution on Chinese demand, the published resolution however, does include the point of releasing Suu Kyi. I failed to find other sources on the exact Chinese position on this. For the whole resolution, see

United Nations Human Rights Council, 5th Special Session, Resolution S-5/1: *Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar*, Oct. 2nd 2007

¹²⁵United Nations Human Rights Council (webcast) - *Fifth special session, Resolution S-5/1: The Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar*, Oct. 2nd 2007

¹²⁶United Nations, *Security Council 5757th Meeting (PM) - Security Council deplores violence used against Myanmar demonstrators*, Oct. 11th 2007

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ According to a 'ICG interview' in New York October 2007, this point as well as 'inclusive dialogue without condition'; access for international humanitarian organisations; and mention of the important role played by

‘welcomes Human Rights Council resolution S-5/1 of 2 October 2007’, which ‘urges the Government of Myanmar to release without delay those arrested and detained as a result of the recent repression of peaceful protests, as well as to release all political detainees in Myanmar, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.’¹²⁹ China thus seemingly supports the release of the detained democratic leader, a position that cannot be regarded as strictly non-interference.

Though the role of China in these resolutions and statement is somewhat unclear, it remains unambiguous that China from January to October 2007 had a clear change of approach to Burma. This does not necessarily imply any concrete changes in Beijing policy towards Burma, or any significantly reduced Chinese support of the Burmese leaders, but it is a clear change of rhetoric, demonstrating Beijing's willingness to criticise the military junta, at least at the international stage of the UN. The most plausible explanation for this change of approach is the massive media coverage the demonstrations in Burma attracted, and the subsequent international criticism of China acting as protectors of the Burmese regime, where some even suggested a boycott of the forthcoming Beijing Olympics based on China's role in, and support for Burma.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, China is still Burma's most reliable diplomatic supporter, something which can be seen in Beijing's response to the November 2010 Burmese elections. The elections which was widely criticized in the west, was by the Chinese Foreign Ministry described as ‘steady and smooth’ and lacked any hint of criticism. Why is China still so hesitant of criticizing the junta in Naypitaw? What importance does Burma hold for China? The answer, first and foremost, is Burma's geographical location. And future Chinese energy security.

4.2 Burma's strategic location and future Chinese energy security

*We will continue to strengthen cooperation with other nations,
striving to achieve energy security.*

Liu Jianchao, Spokesperson of The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dec. 2004¹³¹

Myanmar neighbours were dropped from the final draft at China's urging. (ICG, China's Myanmar Dilemma, 2008)

¹²⁹See footnote no. 126.

Daw is a polite, respectful Burmese term for a woman, resembling the English ‘Lady’, or French ‘Madame’.

¹³⁰Vice President of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott, the 26th of September 2007 stated that "China is the puppet master of Burma." [...] "If China does nothing and the persecution continues, the civilised world must seriously consider shunning China by using the Beijing Olympics, to send the clear message that such abuses of human rights are not acceptable"

Spencer, Richard (2007) *China's Dilemma over Burma protests*, The Telegraph, Sept 26th 2007. See also Reuters (2007) *EU should boycott Beijing Olympics over Myanmar*, Sept 27th 2007

¹³¹ CCTV (2004) *就能源安全与能源合作等问题答问*

[Questions and answers concerning security and energy cooperation, Dec. 16th 2004

‘我们将继续加强与其它国家的合作，为实现能源安全作出努力’

China in 2003 surpassed Japan and became the world's second largest consumer of oil, and Beijing's pursuit of overseas energy resources to feed its fast-growing economy has given rise to observations that energy is now the driving force behind Chinese foreign policy.¹³²

In 1993 China became a net importer of oil, in 2002 China imported 80 million ton, in 2004 100 million ton, and according to estimates, in 2020 China's import needs of oil will have increased to 450 million ton. China's reliance on foreign oil will in 2020 perhaps be as high as 60%, making China very vulnerable to disruptions in its oil supplies.¹³³ China's reliance on foreign oil has made energy security central to the survival of the country, and is therefore an important matter on the national strategy agenda. (Tang, 2006) A rough 75% of Chinese oil imports now comes through the Malacca Strait, hence stable and uninterrupted transport of oil through the Strait is critical to China's economic security. (Zhang, Jie, 2005) The Malacca Strait is known as a region where pirate and terrorist activity may occur¹³⁴, and this could obviously lead to a severe disruption of supplies (Rüth, 2005). Potentially even a greater threat, as pointed out by Dr Jingdong Yuan, is that control of the strait by foreign powers would seriously undermine Chinese security interests.¹³⁵ President Hu Jintao in November 2003 highlighted this fear, suggesting that foreign nations were attempting to control the Malacca Strait (Tang, 2006). Chinese scholar Zhang Jie also points out the danger of the US or other nations using the Strait to 'impose restrictions' on China. He further emphasises that the Malacca Strait is important not only for China's economic security, but also for her political and military security.¹³⁶ Securing the Strait, or finding a way to bypass the potential danger the Strait poses, would thus be of crucial importance for Chinese national security.

A means of avoiding the potential threat of the Malacca Strait is presently under construction in Burma; an oil-pipe from the Burmese coast to the province of Yunnan, will after its completion in 2012 provide China with an estimated 20 million ton of crude oil each year,¹³⁷ enhancing the strategic importance of Burma in Beijing. When news of starting construction

¹³²Tang, James Dr., "With the grain or against the grain? Energy security and Chinese foreign policy in the Hu Jintao era", The Brookings institution Centre for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, Oct. 2006

¹³³张洁,"中国能源安全中的马六甲因素",《国际政治研究》2005年第3期

[Zhang, Jie, The Malacca Strait factor in China's energy security, *International Political Studies*, no. 3 2005]

¹³⁴ Ibid. Zhang Jie points out that 60% percent of all the world's piracy activity occurs in the Malacca Strait (this being prior to the explosion of pirate activity outside Somalia.) In 2001 alone, Zhang writes, more than 600 ships in the suffered piracy in the Malacca Strait, leading to a economic loss of more than 10 billion US dollar.

¹³⁵ Yuan, Jingdong, "China-ASEAN relations: Perspectives, Prospects and implications for U.S interests" Oct. 2006 p.50

¹³⁶张洁,"中国能源安全中的马六甲因素",《国际政治研究》,2005年第3期

[Zhang, Jie, "The Malacca Strait factor in China's energy security", *International Political Studies*, no 3 2005]

¹³⁷张哲馨,中缅外交政策新趋势与中缅关系新发展,《国家展望》2009年02期

[Zhang, Zhixin, *New Trends in Sino-Burmese foreign policy and the new development of Sino-Burmese relations*, Global Review, vol 2. 2009]

of the pipeline was released, China energy net wrote: ‘The strategic significance of the Burmo-Chinese oil-and gas pipe is extremely big’.¹³⁸ Apart from easing the comparably impoverished inland provinces of China’s strained energy supplies, the pipeline will also reduce the transportation distance of oil by at least 1200 km. But the most crucial point is that by this pipeline, China bypasses the troublesome Malacca Strait.¹³⁹

Strategically, Burma is also important for China to establish a presence in the Indian Ocean, and to contain India’s influence in Southeast Asia. China has also been accused of establishing military bases on Burmese islands, and these allegations led to the birth of the notion that Burma was becoming a Chinese client state.

4.3 Chinese military bases on Burmese soil – Burma, a Chinese client state?

In the 1990's observers started to take the view that Burma was on course to becoming a ‘client state’ of China, basing their conclusions partly on reports of China delivering and allegedly operating equipment for SIGINT¹⁴⁰ activities on various islands off the Burmese coast, the most recognized being the Great Coco Island. (Haacke, 2006, p26) The aim of this activity was allegedly to gather intelligence on air and naval movements in the north-eastern part of the Indian Ocean, and monitor movements in the Indian Andaman Islands. (ibid) The idea of Burma as China’s client state was further based on claims of Chinese involvement in massive civil and military development projects, including upgrading airstrips and ports, believed to potentially serve as operating bases for the Chinese Navy (PLA[N]) and even support a future permanent Chinese military presence in Burma (Selth, 2007).

There is no doubt that Burma invested in the development of new and existing military equipment, the extent of the Chinese involvement however, is unclear. The Indian government has categorically ruled out the existence of Chinese military presence of bases on the Coco Island or any other places on Burmese soil, and as Andrew Selth of Griffith Asia Institute points out, ‘New Delhi could be lying or confused, but, given its long term strategic interests and apparently improved access to the main sites in question, this seems unlikely’ (Selth, 2007). The early reports of Burma becoming a client state for China, thus seems to

¹³⁸中国能源网 (2009) 中缅油气管道9月开建 破解‘马六甲困局’,

[China Energy net. *Construction of the Sino-Burmese oil and gas pipeline starts in September – solving the ‘Malacca Strait difficulty’*, June 2009]

¹³⁹ Ibid

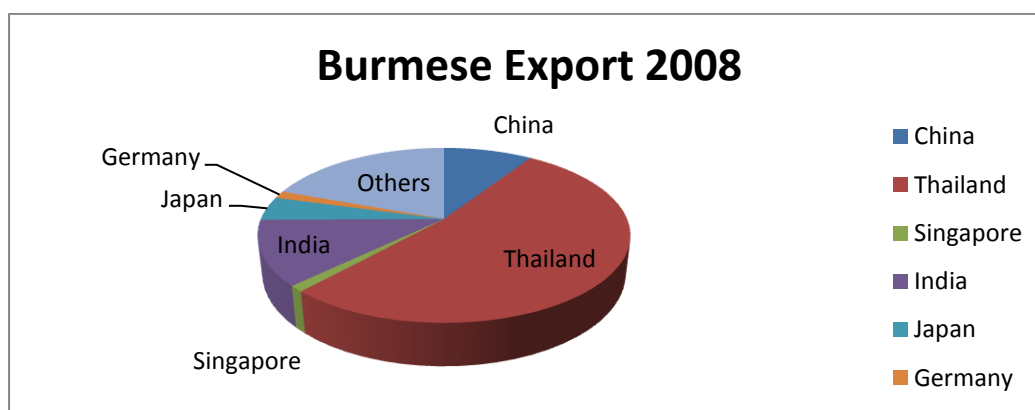
¹⁴⁰“SIGINT, (Signal Intelligence) are designed to detect transmissions from broadcast communications systems such as radios, as well as radars and other electronic systems. “, see Federation of American Scientist, *SIGINT overview*

have been built on false premises.

Another issue prone to spark notions that Burma is heavily dependent on Beijing has been the Burmese economic reliance on its northern neighbour. The military junta has since the 1990's been seeking to reduce the overwhelming reliance on China, and in terms of economic reliance, this policy has proved rather successful.

4.4 Economic relations and Burmese diversification of partners

China is one of Burma's most significant trade partners, though the figures seem somewhat unreliable. According to the Burmese Governments own statistics, China in 2008 overtook Singapore as principal origin of imports.¹⁴¹ As for major Burmese export market, China in 2007-08 ranked third, totalling just around a fourth of Thailand, and a little less than Burma's second largest export market, India. (ibid) The US state department's figures for 2008 are somewhat different, ranking China fifth among Burma's export markets and second among Burma's import suppliers.¹⁴²



Source: Asian Development Bank

In terms of total trade volume, China was in the late 1990's surpassed by Thailand as Burma's main partner.

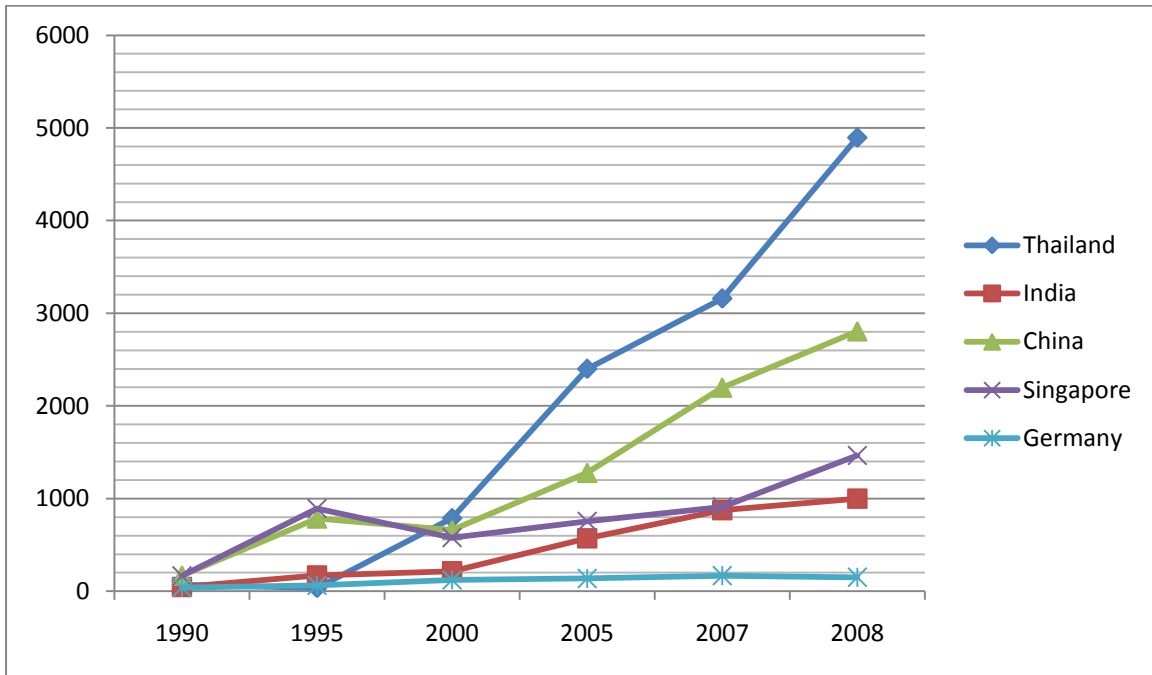
¹⁴¹ Myanmar Directorate of Trade, *Statistics*

¹⁴² US Department of State, *Background note - Burma*

Apart from the perhaps not too reliable Burmese statistics, non-registered border trade is thought to constitute a significant amount of total Burmese trade. This border trade takes place chiefly between Burma and Thailand and China, and its value is believed to make up as much as 25% of Burma's total trade. (Aung, Winston Set, "The role of Informal Cross-border trade in Myanmar", *Asia Paper* Sept. 2009, Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm)

Burmese trade

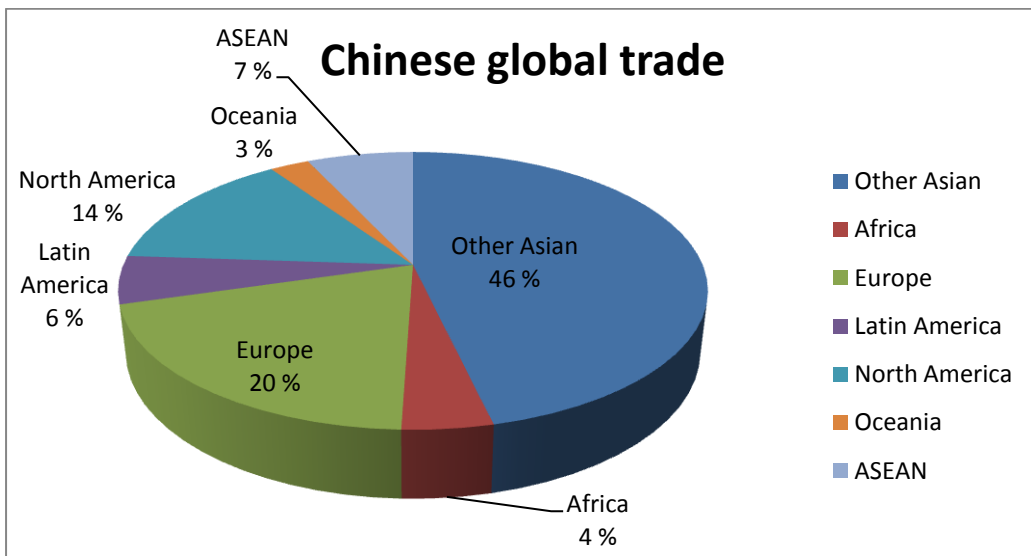
Million US\$



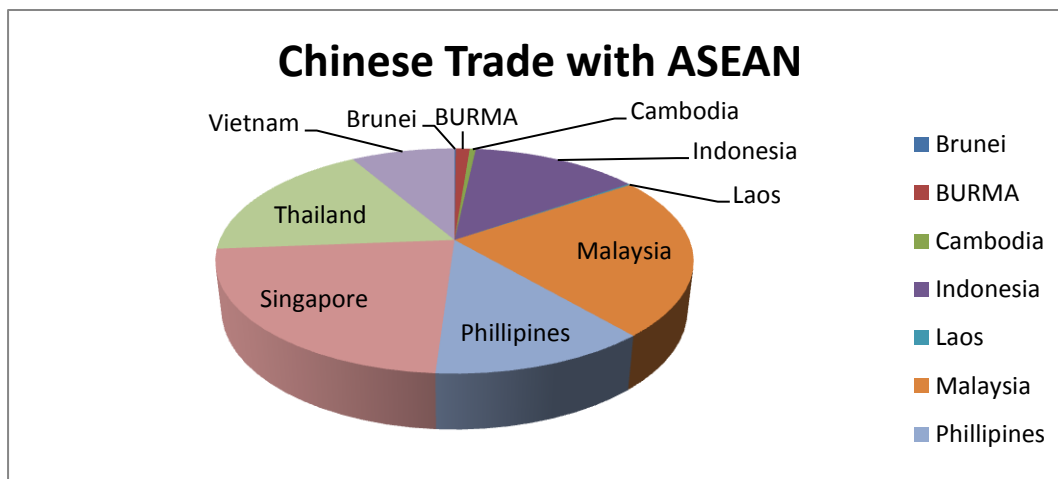
Source: Asian Development Bank

China's economic importance for Burma is certainly significant, it is however far from being a total dependence.

While China is one of Burma's main trading partners, Burma holds just a marginal role among China's economical partners, as can be clearly seen from the diagrams below.



Source: China Statistical Yearbook, 2009



Source: China Statistical Yearbook, 2009

Even among the 9 ASEAN countries, Burma only ranks 7th in terms of total trade volume with China, and the fact that ASEAN constitutes no more than 7% of total Chinese global trade, further helps to put Burma's economic significance for China into perspective. China's trade with Burma is limited because of the weak Burmese economy (Rüth, 2005 and Arnott, 2004). The main reason for this is the economical incompetence in the Burmese leadership, or as put by David Arnott, "the generals' lack of understanding of economics, inadequate banking and taxation systems, the absence of the rule of law, military monopolies in key sectors of the economy, an unfriendly investment climate, corruption, economic sanctions, and inadequate infrastructure" (Arnott, 2005). A stronger Burmese economy would be beneficial to China, as it would generate welfare gains through a bigger bilateral trade volume (Rüth, 2005), and this would be especially valuable for the relatively poor Yunnan-Province (ibid). The Chinese would thus reap benefits of a more competent Burmese leadership and a more prosperous Burma, and for several years China has encouraged the Burmese military leaders to undertake economic reforms (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008). It is also worth mentioning that Beijing for a long time supported former Burmese Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, whom it regarded as a Deng-style reformist,¹⁴³ but in 2004 he was charged with corruption and insubordination and placed under house arrest; a verdict widely regarded as a

¹⁴³ Khin Nyunt has further been described as 'more willing to move toward political liberalization and accommodate Aung San Suu Kyi and foreign nations critical of the junta for its poor human rights record and failure to hand over power to a democratically elected government.'
The Irrawaddy (2005) *Junta hands Khin Nyunt 44 year Suspended jail term*, July 2005

political decision undertaken by the hardliners within the Burmese leadership.¹⁴⁴ Chinese confidence in the Burmese regime's willingness and ability to reform faded following this incident. (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, 2008)

Regardless of Chinese dissatisfaction of the economical management of Burma, China undoubtedly remains a major trade partner for the Burmese, and holds an important role in Burmese economics. The close ties between China and Burma, economically as well as strategically, have, however, presented the Burmese authorities with a dilemma: How can Burma avoid getting too dependent on Beijing, maintain its independence and strategic neutrality, while still preserving good relations with its neighbouring countries, including China? Diversification of partners seems to be the preferable measure. After China became Burma's prime supporter and partner in 1988, and provided the nation with large quantities of goods, including weapons¹⁴⁵, Burma quickly diversified its sources of weapons procurement, as illustrated by the purchase from Russia of helicopter gunships in 1995 (Haacke, 2006 p 27), and 12 MiG-29 fighters in 2001, whereupon Burma also sent 300 military personnel to Moscow for pilot-training, and to acquire rocket technology.¹⁴⁶

The strategic significance of this, as the same report points out, is clearly that Russia offers Burma a potential alternative to balance China and India. Russia's diplomatic support for the Burmese generals in international fora such as the UNSC¹⁴⁷ proves the significance of this relationship, and also underlines the fact that Burma is not reliant on China alone for diplomatic protection. Furthermore, the strategic location between China and India, two nations competing for influence in the region, is actively used by the junta, playing the two neighbours up against each other in order to prevent either one from gaining an excessive hold over its economy, policy and society (Rüth, 2005). In the late 80's and in the beginning of the 90's, India openly supported the democratic movement in Burma, but this changed in the mid-90, when India, in order to enhance its influence in Southeast Asia and to curb the

¹⁴⁴ It has been indicated that one of the reasons for Khin Nyunt being ousted, was indeed his close relationship with Beijing. To quote expert on the Burmese Military, Mary Callahan, "In the Tatmadaw, being too close to Beijing has never been regarded as a good thing" Callahan, Mary – lecture in Oslo Oct.21st 2010.

For an extensive report on Khin Nyunt and what led to his expulsion, see Aung Zaw, *The Spring before Khin Nyunt's Fall*, The Irrawaddy, Oct. 2008

¹⁴⁵ In 1989 arms deals was signed with China, which over the next five years delivered up to US\$ 2 billion worth of arms and ammunition, in addition to the services of Chinese trainers. (Arnott, *China-Burma relations*, 2001)

¹⁴⁶ Poon Kim Shee, "The Political Economy of China-Myanmar Relations: Strategic and Economic Dimensions", *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies*, Vol.1 2002. pp. 33-53, The International Studies Association of Ritsumeikan University:

¹⁴⁷ Russia did, along with China and South Africa, veto the January 2007 UNSC resolution on Burma. See footnote no.118

growing influence of China in the same region, initiated its ‘look east strategy’.¹⁴⁸ India now started to develop relations with the Burmese junta, a move which was warmly welcomed by the Burmese generals, who themselves were starting to get concerned over growing Chinese influence in Burma. (As we read in the part on Burmo-ASEAN relations, it was just in this period the Burmese junta started to work towards a ASEAN membership, further reducing their dependence on China).

Let us now leave the realm of international politics and diplomacy, and take a closer look into the instability in the Burma-China border areas, and its consequences for the relationship between the two neighbours.

4.5 Ethnic tension and border problems

The border between China and Burma is a frontier between the most ethnically diverse regions of the two countries, on one side Yunnan on the Chinese side the Shan and the Kachin State.¹⁴⁹ The areas on the Burmese side of the Sino-Burmese border remain volatile, and the central government’s control over the area is sometimes disputed. This carries substantial consequences for local administrative organization and governance,¹⁵⁰ and accordingly for the Sino-Burmese relationship.

When the remains of the Communist Party of Burma was dissolved in the late 1980’s, many elements within the Communist forces entered the ranks of the then newly established United Wa State Army. The Wa formed the biggest ethnic group within the CPB¹⁵¹, and now continued the struggle against the central Burmese government under a new banner. The United Wa State Army presently holds the biggest non-state army in Burma, believed to

¹⁴⁸See 岳德明, “冷战后缅甸对华政策刍议”, *外交评论*, 2005年8月总第83期 [Yue, Deming, “Opinions on Burmese policies towards China after the cold war”, *Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 83 Aug. 2005],

Batabyal, Anindya, “Balancing China in Asia: A Realist Assessment of India’s Look East Strategy”, *China report* 42:2, 2006, Sage Publications, and

BBC (2007) *Explaining India’s silence over Burma*, Sept 26th 2007

For more indepth reports on the Indian Look East policy and its implications for Sino-Burmese relations, see the abovementioned articles, and

Jaffrelot, Christophe (2003) “India’s Look East Policy: An Asianist strategy in Perspective”, *India Review*, 2:2, 35 — 68

¹⁴⁹Burma consists of 7 states and 7 divisions, the divisions having a Bamar (the main ethnic group) majority and the states have a non-bamar majority. The Shan State and the Kachin State are the two northernmost states in Burma.

¹⁵⁰ La Bail, Helene & Abel Tournier, “From Kunming to Mandalay: The New “Burma Road” – Developments along the Sino-Myanmar border since 1988”, *Institut francais des relations internationales, Asie Visions* 25, March 2010

¹⁵¹Boucaud, André and Louis Boucaud, *Burma – a 24th province for China*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Nov. 2006

consist of approximately 20 000 men. It has been claimed that the Wa-region today is an ‘independent state and has much closer links with China than with the rest of Myanmar.’ (Haacke, 2006, p. 28) This situation has proved challenging not only to the Burmese government. As the situation stands today, Burma's lawless borders permit all sorts of poisons - not just insurgency, but drugs and AIDS - to enter China. The trade in opium and heroin into China, which is partly fostered by some of Burma's ruling generals and partly conducted by the rebel armies the junta has failed to suppress after decades of fighting, brought drug addiction into China's southern provinces, where ethnic minorities are clustered. Shared needles from that plague produced China's first HIV epidemic.¹⁵²

Prostitution and gambling are other cross-border problems affecting China. After Chinese officials started to gamble heavily and pawned official vehicles, China in July 2005 sent a military police unit to retrieve the official vehicles that had been seized as security. The failure of the Burmese government to react to this violation of Burmese sovereignty has been regarded as an indication of Chinese influence.¹⁵³ It could, however, simultaneously be regarded as an expression of Burmese fear of provoking further Chinese reactions.

Kokang is another area in northern Burma, with similar characteristics as those of the the Wa State. The people of Kokang are largely ethnic Chinese, using Chinese yuan in business, speaking Chinese, and has established what has been described as ‘a country within a country’.¹⁵⁴ As with the Wa State, Kokang presents China with a somewhat unstable border frontier. August 2009, following clashes between Kokang forces and their allies in the UWSA, and Burmese troops, left 37 000 people fleeing Burma to seek refuge in China.¹⁵⁵ Being preoccupied by stability in its region, this is obviously not a desirable situation for Beijing. The Burmese decision to enter Kokang territory despite Chinese concern was seen by some observers as a way of demonstrating that they will not be constrained by Beijing. (Ibid) The Chinese reacted by making a rare comment on the internal affairs of Burma, stating that the government in Beijing ‘hopes that Myanmar can properly deal with its domestic issue to safeguard the regional stability of its bordering area.’¹⁵⁶

Being the most unstable border region in China, the Burmese border poses a challenge to the Chinese policy of promoting and ensuring a peaceful and stable regional environment. The

¹⁵² Wen, Liao, *China's Black Cat, White Cat Diplomacy*, Foreign Policy Magazine, July 2009

¹⁵³ Boucaud, André and Boucaud, *Burma – a 24th province for China*, Le Monde Diplomatique, Nov. 2006

¹⁵⁴ See 刘斌, ”解密缅甸‘国中之国’”, 南方周末

[Liu, Bin, *Unraveling the secrets of Burma's 'country within the country'*, Southern Weekly, Sept. 9th 2009]

¹⁵⁵ Wai Moe, *Fighting stops as Kokang Surrender Arms to Chinese*, The Irrawaddy Aug. 29th 2009

¹⁵⁶ Stated by Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu.

Fuller, Thomas, *Fleeing Battle, Myanmar Refugees Head to China*, New York Times, Aug 28th 2009

conflict in Northern Burma has been described as “the longest-running armed conflict in the world” and has continued, in one form or another, from independence [1948] to the present day¹⁵⁷

Along with the burden of being ‘dragged through the mud every time Burma’s rulers commits a new outrage’, the failure of the current Burmese government to stabilize its northern border, are, in the words of Burmese analyst Aung Zaw ‘becoming a major headache for Beijing’.¹⁵⁸ This might, for a pragmatic Beijing seeking regional stability and an international recognition as a responsible power, spur a subtle shift in its support of the Burmese junta. Wen Liao, an analyst in Foreign Policy Magazine argues that Beijing may be looking to re-evaluate its backing of the SPDC. ‘It’s not that China is concerned that such a government is morally suspect; it’s that Beijing worries that Burma’s leaders are incompetent.’¹⁵⁹

China may have little interest in promoting a democratization of Burma, and a democratic, western-leaning Burmese government is not in the interest of Beijing. However, to bolster relations with the Burmese democratic opposition, Beijing has expanded its network of contacts within the exiled dissident community, and Chinese officials based in Yunnan have with increasing frequency been meeting with Burmese exiled groups in Thailand.¹⁶⁰ The Chinese has also allowed conferences and seminars on Burmese issues to take place in China, a move which was seen as remarkable.¹⁶¹ International Crisis group reports the same increased contact between Burmese democratic opposition and Chinese officials, dating the ousting of Khin Nyunt in October 2004 as a catalyst for the escalating contacts. (International Crisis Group, 2009) This should however not be seen as Chinese support for the Burmese opposition, but more of a pragmatic realization that if the day comes when democratic forces will hold power in Burma, it will be of major importance to be on friendly terms and prevent Burma from seeking too close relations with western countries and the US in particular. Burmese opposition likewise knows that China could be a crucial partner and a potentially positive influence, and the NLD has several times sent letters to the Chinese embassy in Rangoon, expressing desire to build a ‘fraternal relationship’ with China and asked for Beijing’s support in Burma’s national reconciliation process.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps*, 2006, p. 258 in ICG’s report “China’s Myanmar Dilemma”.

¹⁵⁸ Aung Zaw, *China’s troublesome little brother*, The Irrawaddy, Sept. 2009

¹⁵⁹ Wen, Liao, *China’s Black Cat, White Cat Diplomacy*, Foreign Policy Magazine, July 2009

¹⁶⁰ Aung Zaw, *China’s troublesome little brother*, The Irrawaddy Sept. 2009

¹⁶¹ *ibid*

¹⁶² *ibid* (The National reconciliation process has two components, reconciliation between the military and the democratic opposition, and reconciliation between the various ethnic minorities and the Bamar-led junta.)

Conclusion

Being neighbouring countries, Burma and China have a long history of close relations. Always being the bigger and stronger power, the Chinese have to a considerable degree been regarded with a sceptic Burmese eye, since Narathipahapati fled the Yuan army, to present day leaders seeking to minimize their dependence on their northern neighbour.

The Burmese leaders, many of whom have spent their military career fighting Chinese-backed groups, both in the Burmese communist party and various ethnic rebel groups, continue to stress the Five Principles of peaceful co-existence, emphasizing non-interference and sovereignty. This suggests that the leaders are interested in good working relations with China, though suspicious of Chinese long-term strategic intentions, and well aware of the dangers in relying too heavily on China. To diversify its sources of diplomatic support, the Burmese regime has focused on developing bilateral relations with India, Thailand, other ASEAN countries and Russia. Fears about possible future Chinese economic domination also seem to have spurred Yangon to enhance economic ties with the ASEAN states. (Haacke, 2006 p.28)

China has historically regarded Burma as one of her vassals, and through the Mao-era, Beijing was pursuing a highly interfering policy in relation to Burma by supporting the armed revolt of the BPC. Since Deng Xiaoping took power, China's policy towards Burma has been in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence and its general policy of ensuring a stable external environment with the neighbouring states so that Beijing can continue to implement its domestic modernization and development policy.

However, since the ascent of China as a global power, and the recent Chinese focus on international image and soft power, its support for the world's pariah states has become a reputational burden, and seems to have undergone adjustment. Coupled with a growing frustration over Burma's incompetence in stabilizing its northern border and creating economical growth, and Beijing's realization that a prosperous Burma would also benefit China, Beijing is slowly altering its stance and unconditional support for the Burmese junta.¹⁶³ Recent Chinese statements in the UN reinforce this trend, for instance when China in 2007 for the first time criticized the Burmese military leaders. This trend of not siding categorically with pariah states can be seen in Chinese reactions to conflicts in other nations

¹⁶³ Leaked documents published by Wikileaks reveal that Beijing is fed up with the Burmese generals and fear they can no longer protect China's interests in the country. See Democratic Voice of Burma, *China tired of Burma's foot-dragging*, Dec.10th 2010

as well, notably Sudan in 2007 and in 2006, when China criticized Iran for their lack of cooperation with the international community in regard to their nuclear program.¹⁶⁴ This can be regarded as a way of improving China's international reputation, as China seeks to establish an image of themselves as a responsible big power, but perhaps more accurately, the new Chinese emphasis on international reputation can be understood as a continuation of the pragmatism which has characterized Chinese politics since 1978; as the notion that a favourable international reputation serves Chinese interests gains foothold in Beijing, Chinese foreign policy has to a larger extent taken the perspective of image into consideration when implementing Chinese policy. Other factors should of course be examined as well; following the rise of China, Beijing's potential ability to influence other countries increases, and the tenants of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-operation may not serve China's interests as well as they have in the last 30 years.

Burma holds importance for China first and foremost as a transit country, as an outlet to the Indian Ocean, highlighted by the construction of the oil pipe. Beijing has vast interests in the country, and preserving friendly relations with Burma remains a central aspect of China's regional policy.¹⁶⁵ China most probably remains the nation with greatest power and influence over the Burmese leadership but the notions that Burma is becoming a Chinese vassal state, or that Burma is merely a pawn in Chinese international politics, seem highly exaggerated. This is both because of Burmese caution and fear of excessive reliance on China, and because China seemingly does not attach too much diplomatic importance to Burma, having comparably few diplomats in the country.¹⁶⁶

China does not want a Western leaning state on its border, but neither does it want the world's pariah. It does not seem very likely that Beijing at this stage will dramatically change its policies towards Burma, like it did in the 1980's when it stopped supporting the Burmese Communist Party. What seems more likely is that Beijing will subtly be altering its policies towards Burma, which in turn might weaken the alliance that has been the Burmese junta's main support for the last 20 years.

¹⁶⁴ Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy" - "China in July 2006 supported UN Security Council Resolution 1696, which demanded the suspension of Iranian enrichment activities and threatened sanctions in case of noncompliance."

¹⁶⁵ 朱振明, "中国的睦邻外交与中缅关系", *东南亚南亚研究*, 2009年第2期 [Zhu, Zhenming, "China's good-neighbour policy and Sino-Burmese relations", *Southeast and South Asian Studies*, no.2, 2009

¹⁶⁶ Within the Chinese foreign ministry, more diplomats are assigned to Thailand and Indonesia, for example, than Myanmar. Most Chinese experts on Myanmar are located in Yunnan. Myanmar's low priority as a foreign policy issue, particularly at the Beijing level – was an opinion expressed by most diplomats interviewed. -No think tank in Beijing has a full-time researcher dedicated to Myanmar; rather the country is covered under the umbrella of South East Asia and ASEAN. (ICG, "China's Myanmar dilemma")

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