

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Significance of Issue and Background

“Since 1988, Sino-Myanmar entente is uneven, asymmetrical, but nevertheless reciprocal and mutually beneficial.”<sup>1</sup>

“This Chinese influence on the Burmese Junta is seen as a potential threat by India, especially as far as the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean is concerned.”<sup>2</sup>

“The primary security priority of ASEAN’s constructive engagement was to offer Burma an alternative to China to stave off its growing influence in the region.”<sup>3</sup>

“Yet, accurate or not, numerous reports have played on existing suspicions of China’s aim and helped fuel a more immediate concern that Burma’s relationship with China could threaten regional stability.”<sup>4</sup>

China and Myanmar<sup>5</sup> are friendly neighbors, and the people of the two countries have enjoyed traditional long –standing friendship. Ever since the ancient times, they have affectionately called each other “Paukphaw”, which is Myanmar word for sibling or intimate. It is a reflection of the closeness of Sino-Myanmar

---

<sup>1</sup> Shee Poon Kim, “The Political Economy of China –Myanmar Relations: Strategic and Economic Dimensions,” Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Renaud EgretEAU, “India and Burma/Myanmar Relations: From Idealism to Realism,” Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi, September 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Zaw Aung, “Challenges to Democratization in Burma; ASEAN –Burma Relations,” International for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Selth, “Burma and Superpower Rivalries in the Asia –Pacific,” Naval War College Review, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> In 1989, the military junta officially changed the English version of its name from *Burma* to *Myanmar*. However, the usage of *Burma* is still common

relations that "paukphaw"<sup>6</sup> is never used for any other country. In the contemporary period, the most significant progress of Sino –Myanmar relations was after the serious massacre occurred in Myanmar in 1988. China and Myanmar have developed and maintained substantively good and warm relations in all dimensions; political security, economic cooperation and socio-cultural exchanges.

In 1988 hundreds of thousands of Burmese people, led by students and monks, took the streets to demand an end of military rule. By August, the turmoil was ended in a bloody reassertion of power by the military and the formation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In response to the bloody reassertion of military power, all multilateral and bilateral aid to Myanmar was cut off. Since the introduction of China's economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, China's Myanmar policy has conformed to its general policy of ensuring a stable external environment with neighboring states for country's modernization and development. Therefore, the tragic incident in Myanmar provided China a golden opportunity to fill the strategic vacuum in Burmese economic difficulties. Since then, China has decided to move strategically toward Myanmar for good- neighborly friendship. Due to international pressure, the SLROC had no choice and accepted close relations with China for their survival. The previous foreign policies of isolation and strict neutrality were modified to the policies of strategic alignment<sup>7</sup>.

The prospect of Sino –Myanmar relations are basically sound and could improve further in the long term according to analysts<sup>8</sup>. From the perspective of political security, China and Myanmar have enhanced their military cooperation and exchanges since 1988. Myanmar's location would be crucial for China's multi-directional access to both the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. On Myanmar's point of view, as the military coup and the killing of the students in 1988 received strong

---

<sup>6</sup> Lixin Geng, "Sino –Myanmar Relations: Analysis and Prospects," *The Culture Mandala* Vol.7 no. 2 (December 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Segal G, "China changes shape: regionalism and foreign policy," *Adelphi Paper*, no. 298 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies).

<sup>8</sup> Geng, 1.

criticism and resulted in western economic sanctions, the regime needed external support for its survival and this led to the series of arm deals with China.

Geo-economically, Myanmar is important for China to implement its western development strategy. Yunnan's provincial capital of Kunming, in particular, will benefit economically by linking up with Myanmar for trade and investments. Since 1988, economic relations between China and Myanmar have dramatically increased. China is now a major supplier of consumer goods, durables, machinery and equipment, and intermediate products as well as a market for Myanmar's export goods.

Sino –Myanmar amiable relations that have significantly strengthened since 1988 have caused serious concerns from international community, especially the United Nations, The United States, European Union, India and ASEAN. From the perspectives of The United Nations and the West; the United States and European Union, China's embrace would help safeguarding Burmese regime to survive without positive changes toward national reconciliation, democracy and human right improvement. Elaborately, dictatorship regime and human right violation in Myanmar oppose western democratic value and human freedom.

Differently from the West, India and ASEAN, as close neighboring powers have perceived China and Myanmar's friendly relations as a threat to their national interests. The development toward democracy, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of National League for Democracy (NLD) and other political prisoners or the elimination of human right abuses are not the most priority issues that India or ASEAN concern about. Nevertheless, the attempt to reduce increasing sphere of Chinese influence in Myanmar , especially since the post coup era and the enormous benefits from Myanmar's geo-strategic location as the bridge between South, Southeast and East Asia are the common interests of India and ASEAN in this regard.

For India, Myanmar's location is central to strengthening India's geopolitical position in Southeast Asia. At the same time, Myanmar also is a key

stepping stone in India's new Look East policy which seeks to develop and expand political, economic and securities ties with ASEAN. India's concern over has been growing when Myanmar has abandoned its traditional policy of strategic neutrality and adopts a strategic tilt toward China. Since 1990s, India has been sensitive to the growing influence and presence of China in the Bay of Bengal. In the same way, China's growing influence over Myanmar has resulted in anxiety for the ASEAN states. The suspicion over China's inroads into Myanmar resulted in Thailand's initiative with the support of other ASEAN members to lobby for Myanmar to become ASEAN's new member in 1997. The issue of India and ASEAN's common concerns over Sino –Myanmar cordial relation will be mainly focused in this research.

The issue of Sino-Myanmar growing close ties is not significant only for the internal stability of Myanmar and China, but it is also important for the regional stability of Asian. The rivalries over the Burmese geo-strategic position<sup>9</sup> and the conflict of interests between neighboring powers; China, India and ASEAN states seem to be major obstacles toward positive changes in Myanmar as well as the consolidation of Asian regional security and economic development as a whole.

## **B. Scope of Study**

This research will focus on the study of the cordial relationship between China and Myanmar that has been developed significantly since the post –coup era in 1988 as well as to analyze the implications of this amiable Sino –Myanmar relation for neighboring powers; India and ASEAN.

Primarily, warm relationship between China and Myanmar that has been enhanced gradually since the 1988 student uprising, common interests as well as similar fundamental characteristics of foreign policy that both China and Myanmar have shared will be explored. As the result of Sino –Myanmar close ties, the paper

---

<sup>9</sup> Seth, 1.

will study further mutual benefits in national's political security and economic development gained by both sides.

In the later part, the research will analyze the implications or possible effects of this Sino –Myanmar friendliness since the post coup era for two significant neighboring powers like India and ASEAN. Finally, future prospect of Sino – Myanmar relation and the probable position of neighboring powers; India and ASEAN in this relation will be concluded.

### **C. Objectives**

1. To study the development of Sino –Myanmar relation since the post-coup era in 1988.
2. To examine common interests, foreign policy and mutual benefits gained by both China and Myanmar from their cordial relationship.
3. To analyze implications of Sino –Myanmar friendship for two important neighboring powers; India and ASEAN.
4. To analyze the future prospect of Sino-Myanmar relation and the possible position of India and ASEAN on this power relation.

### **D. Research Questions**

1. What is the development of Sino –Myanmar relation since the post - coup era in 1988?
2. What are the common interests and benefits shared by both China and Myanmar that have enhanced the relation between them?

3. What are possible effects of Sino –Myanmar friendliness on two key neighboring powers; India and ASEAN?

4. What is likely to be the future of Sino -Myanmar relation and what is the possible position of India and ASEAN in this relation?

### **E. Hypothesis**

The cordial relation significantly developed between China and Myanmar since the post-coup era in 1988 has concerned India and ASEAN, neighboring powers over their national interest.

Elaborately, the most significant change of Sino –Myanmar relation can be seen obviously after the military coup reigned in power in 1988. The military coup decided to adopt the Open -Door Policy due to difficulties from economic sanctions by the West (The United States and European Union), while China has moved strategically toward Myanmar aiming for political, economic and security benefits. China has continuously implemented its Myanmar foreign policy that encourages exchanges and cooperation in all fields; political, economic and cultural, similarly, the Burmese regime has found China as its only true friend during a difficult time.

India and ASEAN, two significant neighboring powers have witnessed the development of China and Myanmar’s friendliness with concerns. India, South Asia major power has felt Sino-Myanmar closer tie as a threat to its national security and obstacle for its economic expansion to East Asia. In the same way, ASEAN, another vital player in Asian power relations has felt fear of too much Chinese sphere in Myanmar. More Chinese influences in Myanmar mean fewer benefits that ASEAN will gain from this country.

## **F. Theoretical Framework**

In the analysis of Sino –Myanmar cordial relation since 1988 and its implications for India and ASEAN, the approach of *National Interest* will be applied. Expectedly, this theoretical framework will bring more clarification for the research's debate.

### **National Interest**

The approach which is relevant in analyzing the research issue is the National Interest. National interest or Raison d'état is an important fundamental notion in international relations of Realist school. The national interest of a state is multi faceted. Primary is the state's survival and security. Also important is the pursuit of wealth and economic growth and power.

The thesis by Hans Morgenthau (1951), the most influential realist advocate, the idea of national interest defined in term of power as the central motif of state behavior had an objective and therefore discoverable reality. In essence, at the root of the idea of the national interest is the principle of national security and survival. In international relation, national interest can be used as an analytical tool identifying the goals or objectives of foreign policy<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, Kenneth Waltz, a classical realist, defines that national interest is the basic guide of responsible foreign policy: it is a moral idea that must be defended and promote by state leaders”

According to Charles O. Lerche and Abdul A. Said (1995)<sup>11</sup>, national interest is state's ultimate goal that must be preserved. Every state has its own fundamental national interests which are;

---

<sup>10</sup> Evans Graham and Newnham Jeffrey, “National Interest,” Dictionary of International Relations (Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Said and Charles O. Lerche, Jr., “Concepts of International Politics in Global Perspective,” 4<sup>th</sup> ed.(Prentice Hall, 1995).

- i. Self Preservation
- ii. Security
- iii. Well –Being
- iv. Prestige
- v. Ideology
- vi Power

The national interest which is the core concept in international relation of states can be applied to evaluate ultimate goals and strategic moves of China and Myanmar in their relations as well as to explain India and ASEAN's responses in this regard.

### **G. Research Methodology**

To conduct the research proposal, the Documentary Research and the Descriptive Analysis will be mainly employed. The documentary research by both quantitative method and qualitative method utilized in this research is comprised of the following sources.

#### 1. Primary source

Policy statements, official interviews, government reports, speeches and direct quotes of states leaders and Foreign Ministers

#### 2. Secondary source

*Qualitative method:* Reviews and articles from text book, periodical issues and research studies, articles and news from internet relevant to the research topic

*Quantitative method:* Data statistics