

Clash of Cultures: Implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) into Myanmar

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Abstract

China has embarked on a massive infrastructure development project across and through its Southeast Asian neighbors such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). While China is the world's second largest economy, Myanmar is on the United Nations' list of 48 least developed countries (LDCs) with over 70% of the population living in rural areas and depend on agriculture. While China has no religion Myanmar's culture is immersed in Theravada Buddhism. We used a dataset from the World Values Survey to analyze the cultural variances based on the Value-Orientation Framework. Our findings show that the two countries differ significantly in almost all of the value orientations. Challengers such as a lack of a common history, religion and language had already raised tensions and conflicts in past projects and would lead to an erosion of the project-benefits upon the completion of the CMEC. This paper highlights the implications and pitfalls to avoid for both countries.

Keywords: China, Southeast Asia, Belt and Road Initiative, Asian Cultures, Economic Development

Introduction

"The most important distinctions among peoples are [no longer] ideological, political, or economic. It is cultural." as theorized by Samuel Huntington in his controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* firstly published in 1996. He posited that cultural characteristics within civilizations are an embodiment of civilization identity that people would fiercely protect without compromise as opposed to political and economic differences that could be easily resolved. Civilization identity relates to cultural variables such as history, language, ethnicity,

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customs, religions, institutions, etc. Huntington further conceded that cultures have clashed for 1300 years between Western Christianity and Islamic civilizations due to their differences (relationship between God and politics) and similarities (monotheistic religion) (1996, p. 21).

In the sphere of international trade and investment, it is paramount to understand variations of cultural values between trading partners so as to avoid cultural conflicts. China's investment in Myanmar's direly weak infrastructure had culminated in several outbursts and protests that epitomized the catastrophic cost of conflict resolutions faced by both countries. China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world enriched with a 5000-year history (Allison, 2017). Trade flourished through the ancient Silk Road in the 2nd century. So did the spread of culture, religion, science and politics between continents (Beazley, 1903; Ma, 1996). The rise of China's economic power in the 21st century was affirmed by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Six economic corridors stretching from Southeast and Central Asia to Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean would expedite connection to China with the rest of the world (Sacks, 2021). One of the economic corridors, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) alone is worth \$100 billion investment and aims to develop seaports, railways and roads (Figure 1). Thus, linking economically impoverished Myanmar to the rest of the world of trade and investment (Chaudhury, 2020).



Figure 1. China-Myanmar Economic Corridor

Source: Adapted from CTGN (<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-01-17/How-does-BRI-bear-witness-to-China-Myanmar-friendship--NjUdAy3FHG/index.html>)

The CMEC opens the umbrella of two differing cultures coming together to ensure successful project implementations. The most salient cultural variable contrasting these two countries is religion. The government of China is officially atheist (Albert & Maizland, 2020) and Buddhism is the official religion in Myanmar (Windfield, 2010). Buddhist values and practices permeate the daily lives of the Burmese (Brohm, 1963). It is only natural that the asymmetrical set of values and norms when come into frequent direct interactions would clash resulting in

disagreements, discord, mistrust, antagonism and violence could occur eroding the project benefits toward the path of damaging losses for both parties.

Institutional reports from global think tanks such as the International Crisis Group, The Asian Foundation, Observer Research Foundation, and International Growth Center focused primarily on political and economic implications between China and Myanmar riveted at border securities of both countries, the humanitarian ethnic-based crises, and estrangement of Myanmar from the West, etc. Limited research exists in examining the cultural context and its implications arising from the highly publicized protests by the Burmese on China's investment. In particular, the impact on the CMEC. This paper evaluates the differences between China's and Myanmar's cultures to identify possible areas of conflict and the pitfalls that both countries need to avoid.

Introduction Background: The New Silk Road

In September 2013, during his speech at Kazakhstan University, the newly elected Chinese President Xi boldly announced his grand vision to build the Silk Road Economic Belt to facilitate free trade and investment through policy and law (President Xi proposes Silk Road economic belt, 2013). The Silk Road Economic Belt also known as One Belt One Road (OBOR) metamorphosized into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI comprises six overland economic corridors connecting China to Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, through infrastructural development of seaports, roads and railways estimated to cost up to \$304 billion (World Bank, 2019).

The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) previously known as Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor was sealed by a Memorandum of Understanding during the First Belt and Road Forum in May 2017 (Chanda, 2021). The CMEC opened at China's landlocked southwest Yunnan Province bordering Myanmar through the economic cities such as Mandalay and Yangon. Central to the CMEC is the development of the Kyaukphyu Deep Sea Port and its Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Rakhine State, as well as the Three Border Economic Zones in Kachin State and Shan State (Soong & Aung, 2020). The construction of the Kyaukphyu Deep Sea Port is expected to create 100,000 jobs and when completed (Kyaw P, 2019), it would provide China direct access to the Bay of Bengal, bypassing the perennial congestion at the Strait of Malacca that is delivering 85% of China's oil imports from the Middle East (Markey, 2016).

China-Myanmar Trade Relations

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia located at the geographic crossroads of India, China, Bangladesh, and Southeast Asia, a region that has experienced major economic growth (Malik, 1997). Myanmar's rich oil and natural gas reserves are sources of energy that is much needed by China, its relatively close and economically rich neighbor. For the past three decades, Myanmar's economic landscape has been densely populated by China and Chinese firms' investment in its industrial, infrastructure and energy sectors (Kudo, 2008). Cross-border trade between China and Myanmar plied along part of the 85-year Burma Road stretching from Ruili city in the southwest China's Yunnan Province to Mandalay, the second largest city in central Myanmar (Kudo, 2008). The connectivity had octuplet cross-border trade between Yunnan and

Myanmar from a mere \$1 billion in 2007 (Kudo, 2008) to \$8.13 billion in 2020 (Table 1). Between 2010 and 2020, Yunnan's share of China's total trade averaged at 40%.

Table 1. *China's Trade and Border Trade with Myanmar (2010-2020)*

Year/\$ billion	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
China Exports	3.48	4.82	5.67	7.34	9.37	9.65	8.19	8.95	10.55	12.31	12.55
China Imports	0.97	1.68	1.30	2.86	15.60	5.45	4.10	4.53	4.68	6.39	6.35
Yunnan Exports	1.11	1.40	1.53	2.44	3.47	2.50	2.49	2.70	3.01	3.35	3.74
Yunnan Imports	0.65	0.67	0.74	1.74	3.58	3.34	3.58	3.61	3.57	4.78	4.39
% of Yunnan Exports	31.95	29.03	26.95	33.18	37.02	25.93	30.40	30.18	28.57	27.19	29.79
% of Yunnan Imports	67.17	39.99	57.23	60.84	22.94	61.27	87.27	79.73	76.28	74.84	69.20

Source: Adapted from China National Bureau Statistics 国家统计局. (2010-2020) and People's Government of Yunan Province 云南省人民政府. (2010-2020). Retrieved from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/yearbook/>. and https://www.yn.gov.cn/sjfb/tjnj_2/

China's investment in Myanmar averaged at about \$450 million between 2009 and 2018 (Table 2). In 2010, China's investment in Myanmar peaked at \$875 million (Table 2) due to the development of the suspended Myitsone Dam Project in Kachin State, the Letpadaung Copper Mine in Sagaing Region, and the Sino-Myanmar Gas Pipeline in Rakhine State making China the largest foreign investor in Myanmar (Sun, 2013).

Table 2: *China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment in Myanmar (2009-2018)*

Year/\$ million	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Investment	376.7	875.61	217.82	748.96	475.33	343.13	331.72	287.69	428.18	-197.24
Share in ASEAN countries(%)	13.96	19.88	3.69	12.28	6.54	4.39	2.27	2.80	3.03	-1.44
Ranking in ASEAN countries	2	2	7	4	8	7	8	8	8	10

Source: Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics (2009-2018). Retrieved from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/yearbook/>

In 2017, economic cooperation increased between the two countries as a result of the CMEC under the BRI. For China, the BRI aims to deliver one of the national goals of reducing the economic gap between the less developed northwestern Xinjiang province and southwestern Yunnan province and the coastal cities such as Shanghai (Cai, 2017). At the regional and global levels, the BRI aims to achieve both diplomatic and economic benefits of trade and investment that would impact over 70 countries along the corridors that have a project-investment worth of around \$575 billion (World Bank, 2019).

Project Affected by Public Dissent

The relations between China and Myanmar and its people are fraught with tension (Transnational Institute (TNI, 2016). Burmese perceived China's investment as an encroachment into their natural resources (International Crisis Group, 2020). One such example was the public pressure that caused Myanmar's government to terminate the Myitsone Hydropower Project unilaterally in the Irrawaddy River in Kachin State in 2011 (International Crisis Group, 2020). The controversial project straddled the sacred area for the local Kachin people and the Irrawaddy River or known to

be the “mother river” for all Burmese. The net benefit of the investment for the Burmese was meagre as 90% of the electricity produced would be channeled to China. The aquatic livelihood of the displaced local villages was severely impacted (Sun, 2013) to the extent that the project was suspended indefinitely by the Thein Sein government (International Crisis Group, 2020) to appease the Burmese.

The mega Lepadaung Copper Mine located in northwestern Myanmar; the Sagaing Region was daunted with massive interruptions since its construction began in the spring of 2012. The Burmese alleged China of land grabbing and causing environmental pollution. As a result, a revised contract was signed in July 2013 to include corporate social responsibility, environmental preservation, land compensation to farmers, and reducing China’s stake in the project ownership (Sun, 2013). The project resumed in September 2013 (Win & Soe, 2013).

The Sino-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipeline project lies in the western coastal Rakhine State that borders Bangladesh to the northwest was less catastrophic than the dam and the copper mine. It involved human rights issues, degradation of the environment and poor revenue distribution. Major protests erupted by the Rakhine people resulting in China conceding to their demands such as reserving 30% up from 10% of natural gas and allocating a maximum of 2 million tons of crude oil for Myanmar’s consumption annually, and increasing the budget for corporate social responsibility for the local community. The pipeline has been in operation since 2013 (Sun, 2013).

The Kyaukphyu Deep Water Seaport located in the Rakhine State was finally incorporated into the CMEC in 2018 after more than two years of negotiation. The negotiation highlights included scaling down the investment by 82% to \$1.3 billion, increasing Myanmar’s project-stake by half to 30% (Chau & Thant, 2018). The livelihood of the fishermen was threatened and little or no compensation was accrued to them (Myint, 2017). Table 3 is a summary of the high-profile mega projects that escalated tensions between the Burmese and their government to compel the two countries to renegotiate the terms of the contract to appease the Burmese. Issues such as environmental pollution, unfair land possessions, revenue and reserve distributions were readdressed.

Table 3. List of Projects Affected by Public Dissent

Projects Affected by Public Dissent				Original Investment				Revised Investment			
Projects	Timeline	Location	BRI	\$ bn	China's Stake	Myanmar's Stake	CSR \$m	\$ bn	China's Stake	Myanmar's Stake	CSR \$m
Myitsone Dam	2010	Kachin State	No	3.6	-	-	-	0	0	-	-
Kyaukphyu Deepwater Seaport	2018 - present	Rakhine State	Yes	7.3	85%	15%	-	1.3	70%	30%	-
Letpadaung Copper Mine	2010 - present	Sagaing Region	No	1.065	51%	49%	-	-	30%	70%	-
Sino-Myanmar Oil & Gas pipeline				2.54			-	-	-	-	2
- Annual Reserves Distribution: Oil	2010-2013	Rakhine State	No		100%	0%	-	-		2 mil tons	-
- Annual Reserves Distribution: Gas					90%	10%	-	-	70%	30%	-

Source: Compiled by the authors based on (Sun, 2013); Chau & Thant, 2018; (International Crisis Group, 2020)

The genesis of the above public dissent was the perceived appropriation of cultural heritage and natural resources, inequitable compensation in exchange for land, environmental pollution and Chinese dominance. The public dissent confirms that Myanmar's government is stuck in the middle between its people and China. Mounting distrust and hostility toward China and Chinese enterprise investments in Myanmar has been manifesting more deeply consequent to the

Myitsone Dam project. In particular, the project stands open in China's agenda and has not been officially terminated (Kyaw N. 2020). The direct accessibility of Myanmar's seaport in Kyaukphyu eliminates the logistic inconvenience of transporting goods through the Strait of Malacca. Myanmar's oil and gas resources are strategic assets that would help China avert its energy crisis at large.

The bilateral relations between the two countries continue to remain strong evident by the series of strategic political and economic outreach of China to support its economically challenged neighbor that owns abundant of natural resources (Malik, 1997; Joy, 2018). To this end, our research context is a departure from the sphere of political and economic influence of China-Myanmar's relations. Our research examines the underlying cultural value orientations that could be attributed to the public dissent that disrupted the infrastructural projects (Table 3). Specifically, our research question is: What are the cultural attributes of Chinese and Burmese societies that can lead to more clashes and conflict to have a negative effect on the CMEC objectives?

Literature Review

Cultural anthropologists Ferraro and Briody (2017) describe culture simply to mean everything that people have, think and do as members of their society. Earlier work by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) defines culture as a set of human behaviors and mental outlook that are shaped by values and norms shared by people, within a given society. Their value-orientation framework comprises human nature orientation, man-nature orientation, time orientation, activity, orientation, and relational orientation. It is used to study what people think and do based on the first assumption that "there is a limited number of common human problems for which all peoples at all times must find some solution" (1961:10). The second and third assumptions relate to the solutions that vary in degree and are differentially preferred within each culture. Thus, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) asserted that dominant and variant cultural values exist but to differing degrees within a culture and between cultures. For example, the Zuni community solved and made decisions using a group or all-people approach (family, workers, relative) and placed linear and individual approaches as the second and third order respectively.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's study (1961) reaffirms that shared values and norms are the inducing factors to build human trust (Huntington, 1996). Johanson and Vahlne (2009: 1425) posited that "mutual trust and commitment are based not on formal agreements but on a common history of at least minimally satisfactory, if not successful, joint business experiences." In the social context, high institutional trust and benevolence of others are contributing factors in maintaining human happiness and building a sense of common purpose (Helliwell, et al., 2021).

The cultural script of individuals is influenced by its national culture and sub-cultures such as those constructed by ethnicities or religions (Iguisi, 2009). For example, Myanmar's dominant value orientations are predominantly Buddhist-based values due to its history, however it is ethnically diverse. Each ethnicity has its own identity, religion, and belief system, such as the present-day Chin ethnicity has Christian values that influence their belief system and daily life (Sakhong, 2007). As such according to the value orientation theory, each ethnicity would have a preferred value-order ranking in solving common human problems.

The culture of protests in the Burmese context has its roots during the period of British colonization in the 19th century accentuating a Buddhist-cultural identity in very pronounced ways (Lewy, 1972). Traditional Buddhist values existed in the different ruling kingdoms espoused non-violence, respect for people and environment, harmony, equality, non-materialism., etc. (Bloom, 1972). Thus, cultural identity forms the social order that can lead to social strengths or social weaknesses (Yuan & Dong, 2006). Indeed, the study of Darian (1977) reaffirmed that Buddhist values and practices were instrumental in creating social order and cohesion between the rulers and the rising merchant class during the empire expansion in India. Specifically, the economic exchange did not advocate inherent power in the Hinduism caste system, rather it was inclusiveness, interaction of people from different cultures, religions and languages. In the domain of international politics, Nye (1990) posited that hard power is manifested on countries' economic strength and soft power is the ability of countries to structure preferences in such a way of "getting others to want what you want (181)."

China, on the other hand, is secular. In 1919, it rejected religions in solidarity during the May 4 Movement as they were associated to imperialism and feudalism (Zhuo, 2015). Rather, its societal values are built on the Analects of Confucius and centered on five principles: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness (Rosser & Rosser, 1998). In other words, persistence, respect, frugality and sense of shame are critical attributes of civil behavior toward each other. Relationships are hierarchical. Order and harmony are valued. Confucian values are akin to characteristics of persistence, respect, frugality and sense of shame (Muriithi, 2017). Individuals are expected to honor responsibility to family and society through humane actions creating harmony. Thus, the stream of communication is hierarchical such as government to citizens, parent to child, superior to subordinate (Robertson, 2000). In the context of work ethics, Confucian values dictate that individuals and teams comply with the direction given to them by the superiors, parents and seniors (Moon & Choi, 2001).

Buddhist philosophy holds that individuals must answer for themselves and not to seek answers from a higher authority. As such, the Buddhist teachings adhere to moralistic values of right thoughts, right actions and right speech. Greed and wealth are abhorred (Wichmann, 1965). On the other hand, deeply entrenched cultural value system tends to have an influence on a nation's foreign policy. In this case of Myanmar, policymakers and foreign entities faced challenges as they had to consider the millenniums' old Buddhist belief-system that is in conflict with achieving economic goals (Wichmann, 1965).

Strong cultural assertions bear witness in economies that achieved economic prosperity giving rise to self-confidence (Huntington, 1996). China, is a case in point. Since 2000s, it has diversified and expanded its economic influence through foreign direct investments (FDI) (Chan & Pun, 2020). Together, East Asia has become more assertive in articulating its superior cultural values and over its western counterparts that are experiencing economic stagnation (Huntington, 1996).

In an analysis of human freedom and happiness from the Buddhist perspective, Sivaraksa (1998) highlighted the operating principles of Buddhism to attain freedom and happiness lie in 3 progressive actions of *dana*, generosity traversing to *sila*, (moral) precepts and finally *bhavana*, mindfulness. From the Buddhist perspectives, these actions are deemed positive as long as the wealth and resources are distributed to the people in need and acquired by decent means. Thus,

defeating the tendency of greed arising from capitalism and consumerism that would deepen malignant business practices and crippled the *dana, sila* and *bhavana* (Sivaraksa, 1998).

In another study, Pryor (1991) analyzed the anecdotal of Buddhist values and attitudes in relation to the elements of trade, competition, and material wealth in a Buddhist economy. The analyses showed that Buddhist practices do not impede trade leading to increase in material wealth so long as the redistribution of income nourishes people (feeding the poor) and builds institutions (building of temples). Competition is not regarded as a vice so long as it does not hurt people.

Method

This paper explores the cultural variances between China and Myanmar using the five-value orientations developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) namely: human nature, man and nature, time, activity and relational value orientations. The religious dimension is supplemented to contrast the values of an areligious country (China) and Myanmar that has Buddhism as the state religion (Myanmar) (Zhuo, 2015; Bloom, 1972).

The items (questions) for each value orientation are selected from the dataset of the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 (2017-2020) comprising 65 societies and 290 questions (Haerpfer, et al., 2022). The questions measure cultural values, attitudes and beliefs towards gender, family, and religion, attitudes and experience of poverty, education, health, and security, social tolerance and trust, attitudes towards multilateral institutions, cultural differences and similarities between regions and societies. The purpose is to assess their impact on the social, political, and economic development of countries and societies.

The number of respondents from China was 3036 and from Myanmar was 1200. Forty-seven out of 290 questions are selected to apply to the five value-orientation framework (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961), and finally, the religious dimension. Responses are tabulated based on the percentage score of the selected questions of the respective Likert items that are illustrated in the next sections.

Human Nature Orientation: Human nature is classified as Good, Evil, and Bad. Trust is the dependent variable in accessing Good, Evil and Bad.

WVS Survey Questions (7)	Likert Items
Q57: Most people can be trusted	Can be trusted
Q58: Trust: Your family	Complete trust
Q59: Trust: Your neighborhood	Complete trust
Q60: Trust: People you know personally	Complete trust
Q61: Do Not Trust at All: People you meet for the first time	Complete trust
Q62: Do Not Trust at All: People of another religion	Complete trust
Q63: Do Not Trust at All: People of another nationality	Complete trust

Man-Nature Orientation: The three-point range of variation is Subjugation-to-Nature, Harmony-with-Nature, and Mastery-over-Nature. In the context of this research, man-nature

orientation is limited to the perception of control of one’s economic life and wellbeing against the natural order of things. Hence, questions pertaining to uncontrollable factors from the external environment are selected.

WVS Survey Questions (4)	Likert Items
Q48: How much freedom of choice and control	Scale from 7-10
Q142: Worries: Losing my job or not finding a job	Very much
Q50: Satisfaction with financial situation of household	Scale from 7-10
Q111: Protecting environment	Protecting environment
Q111a: Protecting jobs	Protecting jobs

Time Orientation: This relates to the attitudes towards past, present, and future that are intricately linked to society’s mental outlook. Some societies ascribe to traditions and beliefs that the present and the future are the outcome of the past (China). Some societies leapfrog into the future and disregard the past (America).

Time	WVS Questions (12)	Likert Items
Traditions	Q28: Pre-school child suffers from working mother	Agree strongly
	Q29: Men make better political leaders than women do	Agree strongly
	Q30: University is more important for a boy than for a girl	Agree strongly
	Q31: Men make better business executives than women do	Agree strongly
	Q32: Being a housewife is just as fulfilling	Agree strongly
Present	Q158: Science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier, and more comfortable	Scale from 7-10
	Q159: Because of science and technology, there will be more opportunities for the next generation	Scale from 7-10
	Q162: It is not important for me to know about science in my daily life	Scale from 7-10
	Q163a: The world is better off, because of science and technology	Scale from 7-10
Future	Q43: Future changes: Less importance placed on work	Good thing
	Q44: Future changes: More emphasis on technology	Good thing
	Q45: Future changes: Greater respect for authority	Good thing

Activity Orientation: Doing (activity-related to accomplish desired results) and Being (non-activity to be just be and not accomplishment oriented). The being culture is one that relates to the present state of contentment.

Activity	WVS Questions (7)	Likert Items
Doing	Q39: People who don’t work turn lazy	Strongly agree
	Q41: Work should always come first even if it means less spare time	Strongly agree
	Q5: Important in life: Work	Very important

	Q109a: Competition is good	Very good
Being	Q3: Important in life: Leisure time	Very important
	Q109b: Competition is harmful	Very harmful
	Q46: Feeling of happiness	Very happy, quite happy
	Q49: Satisfaction with your life	Scale from 7-10

Relational Orientation: This relates to human's relation to other men. The extent of kinship that influences the way people think and do. Examples: The Zuni community preferred to refer to a family group (collateral relations) for a decision than to make a decision alone; the Navaho tended to seek help to alleviate misfortune from those with direct lineal relationship (lineal relations) than from within family group (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). As such, assumptions can be drawn that societies that have high collateral and lineal relations bear responsibilities to those along the chain of relations.

WVS Questions (6)	Likert Items
Q27: One of main goals in life has been to make my parents proud	Strongly agree
Q37: Duty towards society to have children	Strongly agree
Q38: It is children duty to take care of ill parent	Strongly agree
Q40: Work is a duty towards society	Strongly agree
Q1: Important in life: Family	Very important
Q2: Important in life: Friends	Very important

Finally, the questions of religion are selected on the premise that the "religion" is mentioned in the original dataset.

WVS Questions (11)	Likert Items
Q173: Religious person	Religious
Q172: How often do you pray	Several times a day
Q6: Important in life: Religion	Very important
Q164: Importance of God	Yes
Q170: The only acceptable religion is my religion	Strongly agree
Q23: Would not like Neighbors: People of a different religion	Mentioned
Q165: Believe in: God	Yes
Q166: Believe in: life after death	Yes
Q167: Believe in: hell	Yes
Q168: Believe in: heaven	Yes
Q169: Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right	Strongly agree

Taken together, the value-orientations and the religious dimension will be analyzed to answer the research question: "What are the cultural attributes of Chinese and Burmese societies that can lead to more clashes and conflict to have a negative effect on the CMEC objectives? "

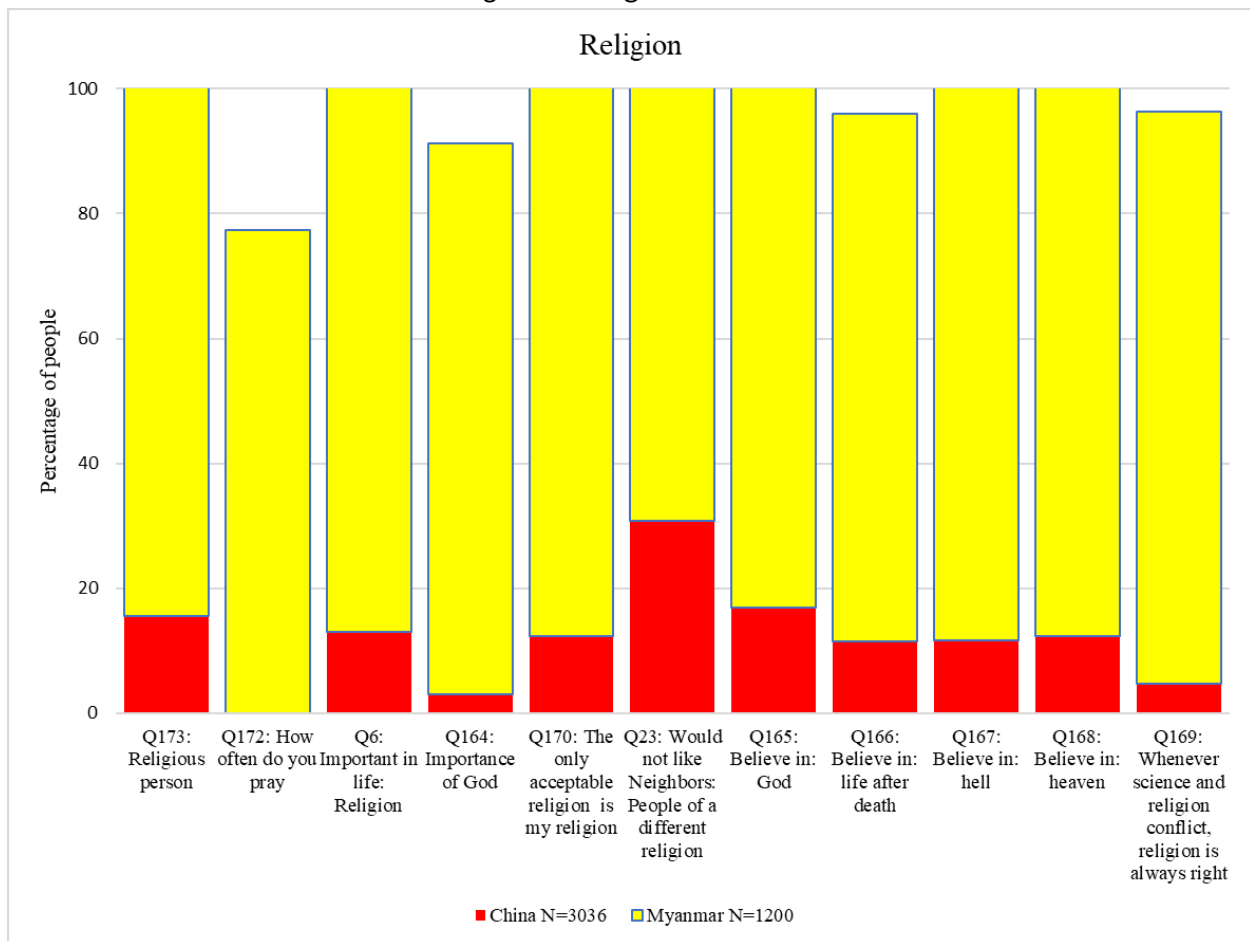
Results and Discussion

Religion

Religion is integral to the Burmese way of life. It is manifested in the self-identity culminated by religious practices, self-belief in God and the occupation of God in their daily lives (Figure 2). As a result, Burmese tend not to like people of different religions as per the survey results on Q170 and Q23 in Figure 2. This implies Buddhist-centrism i.e., preferring neighbors who are Buddhists. Religion shapes the attitudes and mindsets of people. In this case, it takes precedence over science as shown in the survey result on Q169.

The Chinese who are mostly areligious are open to people of different religions relative to the Burmese and trust science over religion. China has a more pragmatic view that is guided by Confucian-values and has a strong belief in the development of science and technology toward human progress. Science was much revered during the New Culture Movement era and was a driving force against imperialism and feudalism that were intricately tied to religions (Zhuo, 2015). The long association with science implies that China has an evident-based or data driven approach in organizing its economy and its relations with global partners and institutions.

Figure 2. Religion Variance



Source: Adapted from Haerpfer, et al., (2022). World Values Survey. (WVS7). Datafile Version 4.0. doi:10.14281/18241.18

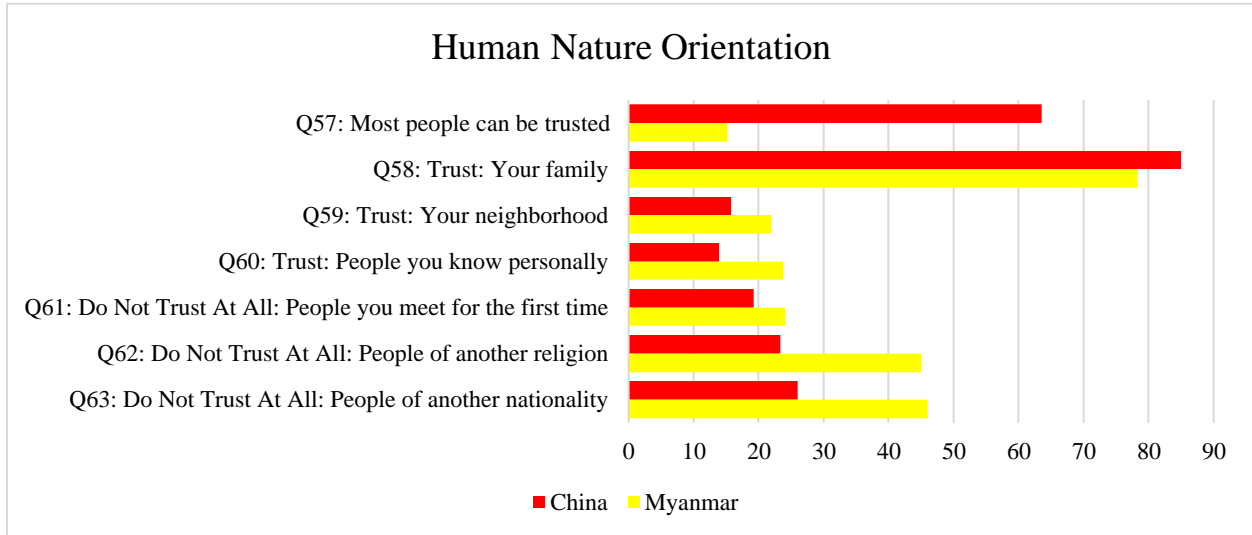
Recent report of the Global Innovation Index 2021, Myanmar's ranking was impressive and had a higher percentage of graduates in science and engineering, a sub-pillar of human capital and research (WIPO, 2021). Myanmar topped (9th rank) all the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as the prominent Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (38) such as the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. China's data was not available for this sub-pillar. The high ranking of Myanmar indicates a potential pool of resources and capabilities that China could tap by creating research institutions and engage them in joint research and development pertinent to the existential developmental issues from the CMEC project. Establishing an intellectual exchange and transfer of knowledge would enable people to find common purpose and meaning that would foster relationship building. In particular, one of the lessons learned from the public dissent was China being perceived as the main beneficiary at the expense of Myanmar's resources.

Although both cultures adopt different philosophies (Confucianism and Buddhism) that influence their behavior and attitude, there are common values such as respect, harmony, benevolence and righteousness. The Burmese are stigmatized by the negative outcomes of the Chinese projects on their land and nature. Thus, these common values could be espoused formally and informally to eradicate the negative mindset of the Burmese and to impress on the Burmese that the Chinese are similar in these cultural values. In addition, promoting these shared common values is necessary to build trust with the Burmese (Huntington, 1996). The perception of trust is distinctly different between the two countries as evident in the human-nature value orientation.

Human Nature Value Orientation

There is a default of higher trust in family by both countries, although China perceives family to be more trustworthy than the Burmese (Q58) (Figure 3). In terms of outside group trust, the Chinese has a higher propensity of trust towards strangers as illustrated in Q57, Q61-63). This implies that the Chinese are less suspicious of strangers/foreigners (Good) and the Burmese tend to be more resistant to strangers (Evil).

Figure 3. Human Nature Orientation Variance



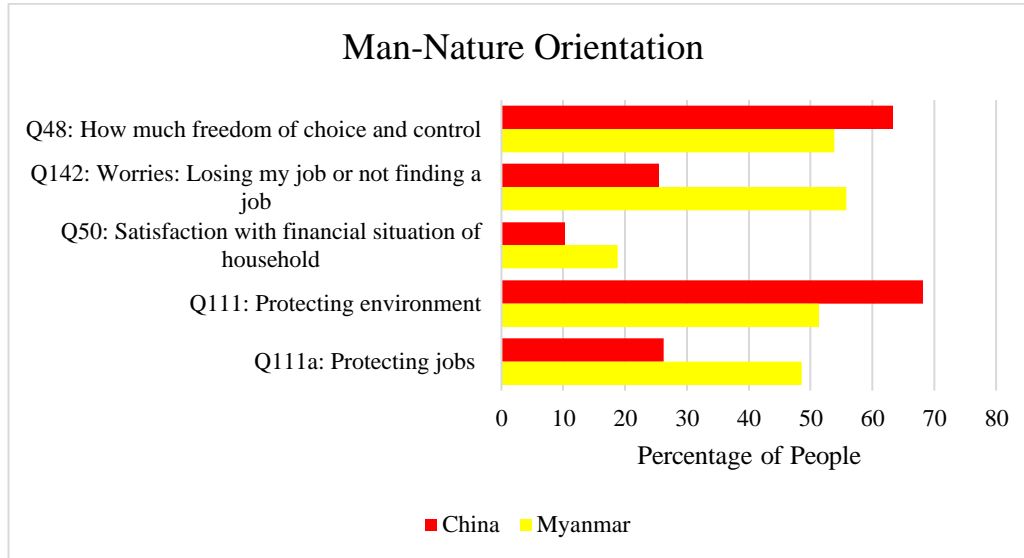
Source: Adapted from Haerpfer, et al., (2022). World Values Survey. (WVS7). Datafile Version 4.0. doi:10.14281/18241.18

The deep mistrust of non-Burmese implying that the Chinese are seen as foreigners. This is exacerbated by the vast variant in the belief and value system and also the lack of a common language that bars effective communication. Thus, more time and effort are required by the Chinese to foster trust with the Burmese. The remedial actions of China to appease the Burmese (Table 3) have significant implication that China is not all Evil as the Burmese perceived to be. Further, China was willing and did work with the Burmese to maintain harmony. To avoid similar pitfalls, China could review the CMEC project-outcomes for Burma. Specifically, to ensure fair economic distribution, to avoid sacred sites, to build and invest in local community encompassing social responsibility and cultural exchange activities to foster friendship.

Man-Nature Orientation

The Buddhist precepts of harmony is synonymous to being one with nature, as man is not in control, such as adversities from the environment and illnesses from the body. The Chinese felt more in control of their life (Q48) but were less satisfied in monetary terms than the Burmese (Q50) (Figure 4). Economic wealth and wellbeing are viewed as a function of holding and protecting jobs by the Burmese. As such, their scores were significantly higher than China (Q142 and Q111a). This finding tends to support the poor economic conditions of a least developed country with limited employment and sustenance insecurity.

Figure 4. Man-Nature Orientation Variance



Source: Adapted from Haerpfer, et al., (2022). World Values Survey. (WVS7). Datafile Version 4.0. doi:10.14281/18241.18

Although Myanmar is economically poor, the citizens are proud of their cultural heritage, natural resources, arable land and forests endowment that seemingly caused the serial protests against Chinese projects (Table 3). In this instance, there is an imbalance of economic exchange perceived by the Burmese. In other words, China benefits while the environment degrades. However, a closer examination on China’s attitude toward the environment revealed that they are keen environmental protectors (Q111). There is an opportunity for China to put their environmental consciousness into action to remove negative mindset. Rather than reacting to future protests, China should be proactive. For example, working with the locals by developing sustainable programs that would preserve the environment and at the same time employment which is crucially important to allay the fear of job insecurity (Q142).

Time Orientation

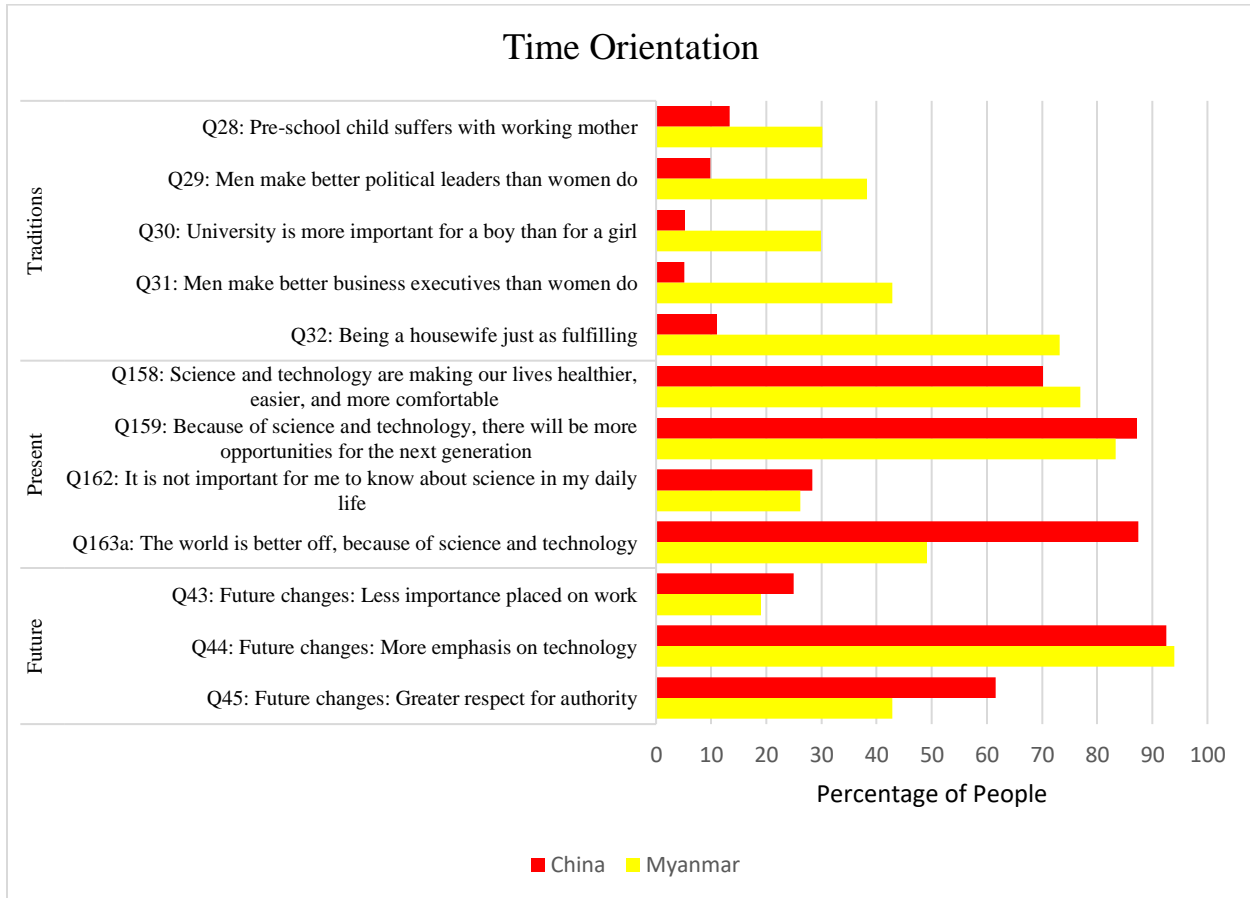
Figure 5 illustrates the contrasting scores in each mode of time orientation: past (tradition), present and future. Cultural norm in terms of gender role of societal expectations is diametrical in both countries. The traditional role of women is more profound in Myanmar suggesting a society that favors men and revers their professional competence more than women. Chinese women are perceived to be more capable than their male counterparts, and tend not to limit their value and aspiration to only nurturing children at home (Tradition-based mindset: Q28-32).

On the other hand, modernization, science and technology are viewed to have a positive impact on human lives and wellbeing by both countries to a large degree, albeit a narrow variance between individual question. However, both countries differ significantly in their view of science and technology’s contribution to make the world a better place (Q163a). Almost 90% of Chinese viewed science and technology to be a substantial driver in human progress, suggesting progressive mindset to change the world through science and technology as opposed to the

Burmese (about 50%). Indeed, China together with the Republic of Korea’s contribution of the number of registered patents had increased significantly from below 3% (1990-1999) to more than 20% (2015-2017) (WIPO, 2019).

Both countries shared similar (narrow variance) attitude about the future role of work (Q44) and technology (Q45). However, they diverged significantly in their future view on respect for authority. Chinese were inclined to authority suggesting a strong influence of Confucian-values (Q45).

Figure 5. Time Orientation Variance



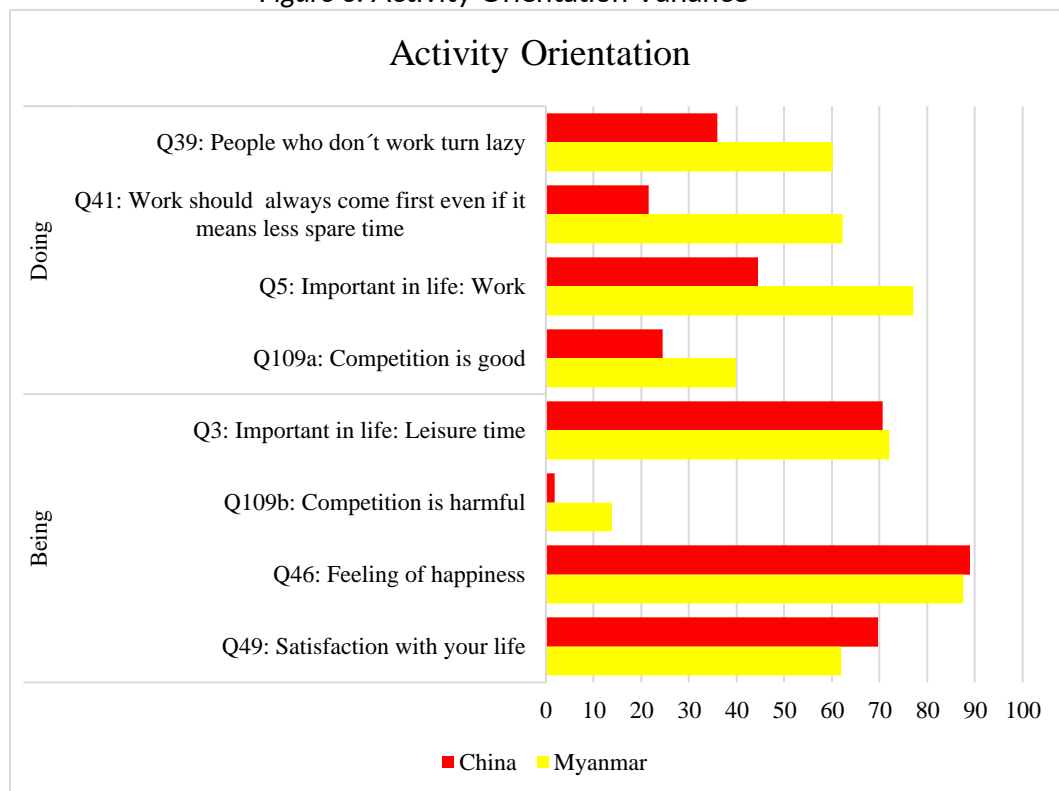
Source: Adapted from Haerpfer, et al., (2022). World Values Survey. (WVS7). Datafile Version 4.0. doi:10.14281/18241.18

It is clear from Figure 4 that China is a more egalitarian society in its view of gender role and expectations as compared to Myanmar. There is a cultural advantage for China to empower women in the workforce so as to garner their support. However, China has to exercise its authority cautiously (Q45) to align with the Buddhist values of equality. For example, the adoption of policy and procedures should be the outcome of participative decision-making instead of an assertive top-down approach that tends to be associated with aggression, the opposite of harmony and equality. Thus, China should deploy soft power to influence the Burmese and co-opt them to the Chinese agenda. This approach exudes cultural sensitivity (authority) and eliminates cultural superiority (Nye, 1990).

Activity Orientation

One of the implicit behaviors of a doing culture is competitiveness that is needed to induce hard work to acquire material wants. Such behaviors are parallel to Confucian ethics. In contrast, espoused values of Buddhism are harmony and contentment (non-materialism) which are closely associated to a being culture. Based on the results from the WVS Wave (2017-2020), Myanmar portrays a doing culture relative to China. For example, the Burmese placed work twice as important as the Chinese (Q41 & Q5) (Figure 6), and viewed competition to be significantly positive. However, when we consider the principle of *sila* (moral conduct) that is embedded into Buddhist’s way of living, it can be inferred that *sila* influences strongly the “doing culture” of the Burmese. Thus, the doing culture of the Burmese should not be perceived as indicators of disharmony and non-contentment. As a result of *sila*, the Burmese viewed work as a necessity to avoid succumbing to laziness which is not a virtuous moral conduct. Further, both countries viewed leisure time to be equally important in life. On the other hand, China is deemed to be a doing culture but is not when compared to Myanmar. This could be explained by the poorer economic opportunities and economic development in Myanmar compared to China, which is more affluent.

Figure 6. Activity Orientation Variance



Source: Adapted from Haerpfer, et al., (2022). World Values Survey. (WVS7). Datafile Version 4.0. doi:10.14281/18241.18

Burmese considered competition to be good than harmful. Competitive spirit does not go against Buddhist values (Pryor, 1991). The ratio between competition is good and harmful in China is 13:1 i.e., one in every 13 people views competition is bad, and in Myanmar is 3:1 or one in every three people views competition as negative, implying that China is still less averse to competition,

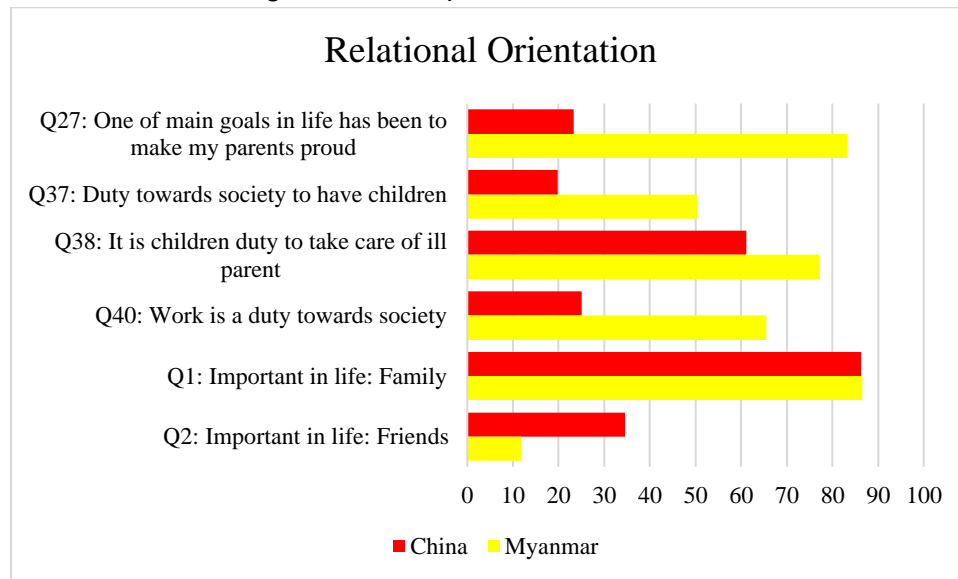
drawing closer to Myanmar’s view. Both countries showed similar results of high life satisfaction and happiness (Q3, 46, 49).

Buddhist and Confucian ethics promote conscientiousness in the pursuit of life satisfaction (Q49) and happiness (Q46). The variances were slim. The CMEC project expounds the economic opportunities to develop Myanmar and connect it to the rest of the world through trade and investment on the one hand, and secures China’s energy needs and the Kyaukphyu seaport provides an expedient transportation hub avoiding the congested Strait of Malacca, on the other. Thus, both countries are interdependent of each other. This interdependency needs to be recognized through investing in collaborative education, training and development. China has a track record of cultural diplomacy especially in the African continent (Liu, 2008) and should create opportunities for cultural exchange such as establishing institutions of learning and exchange.

Relational Orientation

Higher level of lineal respect and greater responsibility of children toward their parents in the Burmese culture (Q27 and Q38) (Figure 7). In particular, Burmese parents have a 4-fold influence on their children’s accomplishments than Chinese parents (Q27). Burmese took it upon themselves more than twice as much as Chinese that it is their duty towards the society to work and to have children (Q40 and Q37). This reflects a collectivistic responsibility and commitment that drives personal accomplishments toward parents and society. Myanmar valued family more than friends relative to China (Q1 and Q2). However, both considered family to be very important.

Figure 7. Activity Orientation Variance



Source: Adapted from Haerpfer, et al., (2022). World Values Survey. (WVS7). Datafile Version 4.0. doi:10.14281/18241.18

Both countries are collectivistic. However, the challenge is to merge this collectivism to avoid a “us and them” phenomenon that tends to precipitate conflict (Huntington, 1996). The CMEC project communication should avoid this pitfall especially when China has an authoritative

approach and Myanmar does not take aggression lightly as evident by the protests. The differences in the underlying philosophy between both countries could strain friendship and hinder relationship building.

Conclusion

Our research uses the Value Orientation Framework to analyze the cultural variables selected from the World Values Survey database to understand the value orientation variances between China and Myanmar (Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of Cultural Value Variations

Value Orientations	China	Myanmar
Religion	Science	Religion
	No God	God
Human-nature	Trust strangers	Kinship trust
	Trust non-Chinese	Distrust non-Burmese
Man-nature	Protect nature	Protect jobs
	Less fearful of losing jobs	Fearful of losing jobs
Activity	Not content	Content
	Being	Doing
	Competition is good	competition is bad
Time	Future orientation	Past orientation
	Gender equality	Traditional gender role
Relational	Authority	Democratic
	Friends	Family

Source: Compiled by the authors based on WVS Wave 7 (2017-2020)

The analysis shows that the two countries differ significantly in almost all of the value orientations. In particular, a lack of a common history, religion, and language challenged the two countries to achieve the benefits of the CMEC. Religion has caused numerous conflicts even in present day China and Myanmar. To wit, the ongoing crisis between mainstream Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar, the Buddhist and Han Chinese conflict in Tibet as well as the atheist Chinese faceoff with the highly religious Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang, northwest China.

The deep mistrust on the Burmese side is manifested from China’s trajectory of investments in Myanmar. For example, the more recent projects affected by pervasive public dissent highlighted earlier provides the background for discussing the differences in cultural attributes between China and Myanmar (Table 5) that can lead to more clashes and conflict to have a negative effect on the CMEC objectives. The public dissent was resolved to avoid further social disorder by the people to protect Myanmar’s cultural identity (Yuan & Dong, 2006): culture disrespect and labor issues; erosion of nature; depletion of resources; and project beneficiary.

Table 5. Summary of Public Dissent of Four High-Profile Projects

Projects	Reasons for Public Dissent				Area Religion
	Culture/Labor Issues	Erosion of Nature	Depletion of Resources	Beneficiary	
Myitsone Dam	Sacred area for Kachin people	Irrawaddy River	Electricity	China's economy	Buddhism
Kyaukphyu Deepwater Seaport	Fishermen subsistence	Mangroves	Crude oil	China's economy	Islam
Letpadaung Copper Mine	Farmers' subsistence	Pollution	Land	China's economy	Buddhism
Sino-Myanmar Oil & Gas pipeline	Human rights	Pollution	Natural gas and crude oil	China's economy	Islam

Source: Compiled by the authors based on (Sun, 2013); Chau & Thant, 2018; (International Crisis Group, 2020)

Although Myanmar is a Buddhist country, the ethnic minority in some areas made up the majority, who identify themselves with their religion. It is bounded by ethnic armed organizations (EAO) of varying power and influence that are significant actors in the operation of the economy (Buchanan, 2016). As seen in the Area Religion in Table 5, two projects are located in Islam-majority inhabitants. While the Chin State in western Myanmar has a Christian majority. Regardless of intra-religion differences, the Burmese identify themselves as one civilization and stand in unity against the inequitable economic distribution and environmental pollution inherent from the Chinese projects. This solidarity epitomized the extent of civilizational identity such as history, language, religion, ethnicity, customs, religions, and institutions that civilizations are adamant to protect against outside forces (other civilizations) (Huntington, 1996).

The low degree of trust toward non-Burmese and non-religion people especially in the absence of a shared common history (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009) could explain the high-profile dissent. The lessons suggest that China needs to implement a structure to build trust. A structure that comprises distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justices (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2021) to address issues arising from the CMEC projects. Fair distributive justice ensures Myanmar is adequately compensated in exchange of labor and resources, clear procedural justice covers rules of fairness to ensure all parties be heard, consistent interpersonal justice demonstrates all people perceived that all are treated fairly, and finally transparent informational justice provides seamless information and communication whenever any decision is taken. For example, Confucian values require a top-down paternal decision-making process and implementation, but Buddhist values are egalitarian. China has to ensure a structure that combines both value systems.

The core value of Buddhists is the averseness to materialism while the Chinese will go to any extent to amass wealth. Just these differences lend to a breakdown between the two cultures. Both Myanmar and China need to take proactive measures such as educating their people and preparing them for contact with each other. Emphasizing science tends to be a progressive approach since China has the technical know-how and Myanmar has capabilities to absorb the knowledge that China has to offer.

China and Myanmar are interdependent of each other albeit a declining China's investment in Myanmar relative to other members of the ASEAN over the years from 2nd to 10th ranking (Table 2). Successful implementation of the CMEC projects is paramount to China in gaining access to raw materials and energy on the one hand, and creating jobs in Myanmar on the other. Specifically, Myanmar would gain about \$1bn each year over 30 years upon the CMEC completion. Other benefits include about \$35m transit fees from the oil and gas pipelines, and exporting the gas would reap about \$1.5bn. Besides, Myanmar would keep 2 billion cubic meters of natural gas for domestic use (Singh, 2018). Thus, understanding the value orientation systems of both countries are significant to avoid subsequent protests that could be detrimental to the CMEC implementation. It is vital for China not to fall into the trap of blaming the Burmese. Joy (2018: 3) expressed eloquently: "There is often a failure on the Chinese side to genuinely engage with the complexity of community demands, instead blaming anti-Chinese sentiment for protests and complaining that Burma is asking to be overcompensated for projects which, from their perspective, are already mutually beneficial."

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