

Myanmar's Political Reform under the New Civilian Government and Its Impact on Myanmar-China Relations

Tin Tin Aye*

Abstract

Since Myanmar has been about to embark on the next phase of its remarkable journey to the democratic state, the new transformation with firm destination, a clear roadmap, and a deep sense of responsibility has undertaken with Three Waves of Reforms. Taking office on 30 March 2011, the new civilian government has laid down several steps towards democratization. Consequently, Myanmar experienced some relaxations over the sanctions previously imposed by the US, Japan and the European Union. The new government has issued amnesty order for a number of political prisoners and taken several steps to liberalize the state-controlled economy. Although Myanmar has been on good terms with China since 1988, the relationship between Myanmar and China has little strains after suspended China's investment in the Myintsone dam project since September 2011. Therefore, this research attempts to explore how does the new civilian government carry reforms. It also analyses how far reform process affects on Myanmar-China political relations and why China attempted to improve China's public diplomacy on Myanmar-China relations.

Key words: political reform, Myanmar, China, foreign relations

Introduction

Introduction

Although the relationship between Myanmar and China has had a series of ups and downs before 1988, dramatic changes have emerged under the military government. The military government oppressed democratic movements, the United States (US), the European Union (EU), Japan and some Western countries imposed sanctions on Myanmar. Due to the political and human rights conditions, relations with the Western and European countries dramatically deteriorated. Therefore, Myanmar maintained friendly relations with China aiming to get the diplomatic protection and supporting in the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations.

Under the military government, Myanmar-China relations reached at its peak through the significant Chinese investment and infrastructure projects as well as significant military-to-military relations. In fact, during the first fifteen months of U Thein Sein government, the

* Assistant Lecturer, Dr., Department of International Relations, University of Yangon

relationship between Myanmar and China was normal and cordial though President U Thein Sein agreed to suspend hydropower project in Myintsone Dam Project. At that time, Myanmar and China call each other '*Paukphaw*' which is not used for any other foreign country, reflecting the strengthened and cordial Myanmar-China relationship in political, economic and social arena since bilateral relations has always been emphasized on five principles of peaceful co-existence.

However, the President U Thein Sein began to seek out ways to improve its relations with Western countries and the US. In this context, the relationship between Myanmar and China has little strains. China is the most important trading partner of Myanmar and one of its most important investors. This research attempts to explore how does the new government come reforms. It also analyses how reform process affects on Myanmar-China political relations. It also examines what kind of relations between Myanmar and China under the new civilian government.

Political Reform in Myanmar

Political reform in Myanmar is importance. The military government implemented reforms such as abolishing the one-party system, holding 1990 general election, holding referendum and approving the constitution. In addition, the military government laid down seven-step road map of the State on 30 August 2003 and took step-by-step measures for writing a constitution in order to practice multi-party democracy.

When the government held the national referendum on the new constitution in May 2008, political reform in Myanmar accelerated. After approving the new constitution, the government is paving the way for the 2010 general election. As a result, a new civilian government has been known to all that the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is moving forward with multi-party democratic system alongside changes and developments. Myanmar has faced Western sanctions for over twenty years. Therefore, in order to adapt the new international environment, the new civilian government has reconsidered its foreign policy

strategy. The government is able to practice an active, independent and perspective foreign policy, making good strides in restoring Myanmar's status in the international arena. Again in March 2011, the new civilian government has carried out three waves of reform with the aims to carry out democracy and national reconciliation. The first wave of political reform process in Myanmar is one of the most promising efforts at democratization in the world.

From the point of internal recognition, the new civilian government has already set the reforms to address the main concerns of the political opposition such as national reconciliation, concession on political repression and release of political prisoners, amending the political parties' registration law, freedom of assembly and free processing, establishment of human rights commission, press censorship and the manipulation of the economy. In order to begin a process of reconciliation with the political opposition such as the National League for Democracy (NLD), By-election was held in April 2012. The NLD had triumphed in by-elections, bringing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi into parliament. Besides, the government also initiated a peace process with ethnic armed groups to address their long-standing differences with the government. It released many political prisoners and established a commission to review remaining cases. Press censorship was eased with abolition of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division and private journals began to engage in wide-ranging political reporting, with independent dailies allowed to begin publication in April 2013. Through these processes, the space for civil society organizations has opened up and non-governmental organizations have been allowed to form and participate in political, economic and social development. It can be said that as a first step, it opens doors to political dialogues and political activities.

Myanmar has received unprecedented international recognition of the political changes that have taken place with high profile visits by foreign world leaders including US President Barack Obama, Britain Prime Minister David Cameron and UN Secretary, Ban Ki Moon. Not only political reform is supportive to exchange between Myanmar and the rest of

the world but also Myanmar takes steps to strengthen its cooperation with the world such as the US, EU, United Kingdom (UK), Norway, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other Western governments, etc. Because of Myanmar's political reform processes, Myanmar took the responsibility of ASEAN Chairmanship on 1st January 2014. As the Chair of ASEAN and as a responsible member of international community, Myanmar has played its role with comprehensive approach in dealing with all the matters related to ASEAN, East Asia, Asian and Global affairs. It can be seen that these are significant changes of political reform in Myanmar.

Moreover, the EU has reacted relatively to Myanmar reforms since 2011. In April 2011, the suspension of high-level meetings was temporarily lifted by allowing for dialogue with new members of government unaffiliated to the military. Furthermore, the EU lifted the visa ban and suspended all restrictive measures except the arms embargo in 2012. In 2013, the inaugurated EU representative office in Yangon became an official EU Delegation. The EU announced the decision to review and exclude Myanmar from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). In addition, the EU is planning to give Myanmar up to €90 million a year or a total of over €600 million in its 2014-2020 development-aid budget. The increase in support comes as a form of recognition of the reforms in Myanmar that have taken place since the new civilian government took over in 2011. It can be said that they are influx because of step in political re-engagement in Myanmar.

Within the political reform framework, a good example of the impact of sanctions, by recalling twenty years of sanctions, is remarkable that Myanmar is establishing amicable relations with all world countries through its unbiased foreign policies. Therefore, political reforms in Myanmar have been made significant changes in their respective policies towards Myanmar. Furthermore, the reforms will promote political stability, social justice, and transparency in Myanmar, while the establishment of a normal state system and the rule of law can favorably facilitate Myanmar's return to the international community.

Impact on Myanmar-China Relations under the New Civilian Government

Myanmar and China formally established diplomatic relations on 8 June 1950. Under the military government, China has significantly expanded diplomatic contacts, commercial ties and investments in infrastructure and energy projects such as Lapadaung Copper Mine Project, the oil and gas pipelines Project and the Myitsone Dam on Ayeyarwady tributaries. But, Myanmar-China relations has cool under the new civilian government. It has been affected on political, economic and social, and strategic point of views. In reality, the relations between the two countries have undergone a series of ups and downs.

In the post-Cold War era, Myanmar and China have improved their mutual friendships because of international isolation, mutual interdependence in economic and strategic views. Therefore, the relationship between Myanmar and China is best characterized as a source of investment and a key economic partner. At the international level, Myanmar enjoyed a reliable protection from China as in the case of the vetoes opposed the so-called Saffron Revolution in 2007 and UN Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Resolution against the Cyclone Nargis in 2008 at the UNSC, together with economic assistance and the Chinese support in dealing with domestic threats.

In the context of multifaceted relationship, Chinese foreign policy toward Myanmar encompasses three objectives: (1) to safeguard the security of the Myanmar-China border; (2) to look at Myanmar as the transfer station for exportation of Chinese commodities of Yunnan and importation of resources; and (3) to make Myanmar a new oil transportation lifeline. Compared to the historical *Paukphaw* relationship, the Myanmar-China relations has developed mutual benefit. China has realized that Myanmar politically stable and economically prosperous is Chinese long-term interest. Under the President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang government, China began to upgrade its periphery diplomacy and launch

new diplomatic initiatives. On the one hand, China has adopted a hardline approach towards neighbours who posed challenges to Chinese core interests, especially territorial sovereignty. On the other hand, China is wooing other neighboring countries with whom it does not have major conflict of interests.

While relations between Myanmar and Western countries became thaw, concerns of China about Myanmar political reform became more prominent because of the development strategy of Yunnan province, Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the oil and gas pipeline projects, the Myitsone Dam Project and border security. In order to resolve bilateral issues in a peaceful and friendly manner, Myanmar maintains its neutral foreign policy. Therefore, President U Thein Sein pointed out in his inaugural speech on 30 March 2011 as follow:

“from the post-independence period to date, successive governments practiced different political and economic policies and concepts, but regarding foreign affairs policy, they all exercised non-aligned, an independent and active foreign policy, and dealt with other countries in line with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. They never came under the influence of any powers. They remained neutral in international relations . . . Hence, the new government will “also adhere to this honorable foreign policy and continue the relations with all the countries”

Since 2014, Myanmar foreign policy has been changed. The new government is effort to fulfill peace and stability, and socio-economic development. Myanmar played a role in hosting and facilitating different views, reducing tensions and identifying mutually agreeable ways ahead. President U Thein Sein pointed out in his inaugural speech on 1 January 2015 as follow:

“. . . we have also continued our path form international isolation towards becoming true citizens of the world. We were able to weave a network of international connections that will be vital for Myanmar’s future. We are also on the path of a much more dynamic and multi-aligned foreign policy. We see no reason to be friends with any single power or bloc. Unlike what we have done in the past, we should actively seek the strongest possible relations with all countries and all powers and in this way give the Myanmar people the best of all worlds.”

Although China had previously had a good relationship with the military government and continues to have strongly relations with the new civilian government before September 2011. Therefore, Myanmar and China have signed the Joint Statement on Establishing

Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership in Beijing in May 2011. It makes the agenda of future bilateral ties, emphasizes several basic imperatives: (1) to maintain and expand high-level contacts, (2) to enlarge economic exchanges between the two countries, (3) to strengthen border management cooperation, and (4) to further enhance coordination in multilateral forums. The “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership” certainly is seemed to be an attempt to lock the two countries into a closer forward-looking partnership. However, construction of the Myitsone Dam project has been suspended since September 2011. The suspension of Dam project could have important effects on Myanmar-China strains relations. Moreover, the operation of the Letpadaung Copper Mine has been suspended since November 2012, following mass local protests and demonstrations though the Rule of Law Committee headed by Daw Aung San Su Kyi who also submitted Report on Lapadaung Copper Mine Project to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. But, the Sino-Myanmar pipeline project has proceeded relatively smoothly despite vocal local criticism and opposition. But, Chinese top priority in Myanmar is to protect its existing investments from further damage caused by domestic politics and social pressure in Myanmar.

Soon after print media censorship was relaxed in early 2011, local communities and many civil society organizations (CSOs) in Myanmar began to protest many Chinese projects in Myanmar. The Myitsone Dam Project caused growing domestic protests by the local Kachin community and local NGOs till it was suspended in September 2011. China would operate it for fifty years under a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) agreement and most of the electricity is agreed to sell out to China while collection of substantial revenues is granted to Myanmar for fifty years. Therefore, President U Thein Sein announced to decide to suspend the Myitsone Dam and said that “*We have to respect the will of the people as our government is elected by the people*”. Since that time, Myanmar-China relations downgraded especially after suspending the dam project. Among Chinese projects in Myanmar, the Myitsone Dam Project represents the best example not only of the strengths and constraints

of Chinese presence in Myanmar but also efforts pursued by the new civilian government to re-establish a multidirectional foreign policy.

After suspending the dam project, the relationship between Myanmar and China is also reflected in the decreasing level and frequency of senior official visits. From March 2009 to April 2011, four members of China's Politburo Standing Committee visited Myanmar. Under the new civilian government, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Chairman, Jia Qinglin and the Central Military Commission Vice Chairman, Xu Caiho visited to Myanmar in 2011. As a reciprocal visit, President U Thein Sein paid state visit to China in 2011. Besides, Vice President and Myanmar Armed Forces Commander in Chief also visited to China. In 2012, State Councilor visited to Myanmar. However, after suspension of the project, no more Chinese senior-level has visited to Myanmar. It led to the downturn of the bilateral relations.

In order to negotiate peace talk between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), China arranged for peace talk in Ruili in 2013. Chinese perception of insecurity towards Myanmar, especially is rising from both Yunnan and Beijing authority and China is shifting from a conservative and reactive position to a more proactive and assertive approach to resolve the conflicts between the Tatmadaw and the armed ethnic groups in Myanmar. Whatever the conclusion, there are the high political risks and vulnerabilities facing Chinese investment in Myanmar, and the negative impact on Myanmar attitudes towards the Chinese role in the Myanmar society. Although China has supported the government to solve the problems of ceasefire groups and achieve national reunification, the issue in northern Myanmar is a touchstone of Myanmar-China relations. If the issues are not resolved, refugees, smuggling, narcotics, and other problems will increase and could affect both Myanmar and China.

The conflicts between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in 2011 and the Laukkaing issue in January 2015 reinforced downgrading Myanmar-China relations. These conflicts have created threats for China because their fighting triggered a large-scale influx of

refugees across the porous Myanmar-China border of Yunnan Province. The spillover effect of the Kachin and Laukaing conflicts caused Chinese concern and anxiety. China has viewed border security and stability as its core interests. The Chinese government has paid great attention to Myanmar's situation. In response, Vice Foreign Minister of the PRC Madam Fu Ying and party visited to Myanmar. During the Chinese Deputy Chief the PLA General Staff Lieutenant General Qi Jianguo visited to Myanmar, China endorsed the reconciliation efforts of Myanmar government and Tatmadaw and would not support armed conflicts of ethnic armed groups. The facts that high officials from Chinese diplomatic and military circles all appeared in Myanmar fully demonstrates Chinese emphasised on its neighbor situation.

State Councilor and Secretary General of China's State Council Mr. Yang Jing visited to Myanmar on 11 May 2015. He discussed cooperation in the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, promotion of bilateral ties, investment in the energy sector discussed peace and stability at the border areas between Myanmar and China and the development of the Kyaukpyu special economic zone in Rakhine State. In addition, he also focused on the 21st Century Maritime Silk Route Economic Belt, a Chinese initiative to foster international investment and cooperation. Since the military handed power to a nominally civilian government in 2011, Sino-Myanmar relations have seen a steady deterioration: initially over the suspension of the Myitsone hydropower dam project and more recently over the cross-border spillover of military action taken by Myanmar's armed forces against the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in the Kokang Special Region.

The Myanmar government has started a ceasefire/peace negotiation process with ethnic armed groups. At that time, China showed no interest in the Myanmar peace-making process. But, China began to get involved in the ceasefire/peace negotiation process only when armed clashes between government forces and the KIA escalated. When the KIA called on China to be the referee in its negotiations with the government following armed clashes with government forces in late 2012, China declined to do so. However, China had decided to

involve itself in the peace negotiation process between the Myanmar government and the KIA. Thus, China arranged two rounds of talks in Ruili in 2013. When the draft nationwide ceasefire agreement was signed between the Union Peace-Making Work Committee (UPWC) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) in March 2015, Mrs Wang Yingfan witnessed the signing of the document. Ultimately, only eight armed ethnic groups signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on 15 October 2015, excluding numerous other groups, including members of the NCCT. The new Myanmar government will face challenges in advancing the peace process.

US Factor and External Impact on Myanmar-China Relations

The willingness of new Myanmar government to balance the presence of China has resulted in a wide range of other countries eager to step in invest in Myanmar economic reform measures and infrastructure. In 2009, the US has shifted to “pragmatic engagement” strategy to East Asia including Myanmar. This strategy meant the continuation of sanctions but the intent to have high-level dialogue. The US has determined that its engagement with Myanmar will continue under the new civilian government. Myanmar saw new opportunities to attract US investments, start exporting to the US, raise capacity-building and deal with pressing humanitarian and development issues. Therefore, the improvement of Myanmar-US relations poses a challenge to the role of China in Myanmar. In addition, the engagement policy has become a tool to achieve the goal of democracy in Myanmar.

In May 2011, the new civilian government has taken tentative steps which allowed public, direct criticism of state policies. The first relevant steps of the Myanmar internal political change towards democracy such as the 2010 general elections, the following release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, a general relaxation regarding press censorship and political opposition and the 2012 by-election was gained by a major shift in the US approach towards Myanmar. As a result, the resumption of high level contacts between Myanmar and US. In addition, not only the exchange of historical state visits between the two countries took place respectively in November 2012 and May 2013 but also

a gradual lifting of economic sanctions and trade sanctions against Myanmar, imports bans and the re-appointment of the ambassador. The landmark State's visit showed that President Barack Obama and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made on a visit. It can be seen that Myanmar is gradually re-opening the country to regional and western countries. According to President Obama's speech at Yangon University on 19 November 2012,

“ . . . Myanmar is located at the crossroads of East and Southeast Asia, and between the world's two most populated countries. It is of strategic significance for America's "pivot to Asia" policy. . . ”

It can be shown that there is little doubt that US relations with Myanmar have always been influenced by "Chinese factors". It is clear that an obvious US policy changes towards Myanmar can be seen after 2012 By-elections. Due to the rise of China, Myanmar with its significant strategic location became an important piece in the puzzle in the US plans to return to the Asia-Pacific region. The Obama Administration was eager to resume relations with Myanmar since Myanmar became a good well in democratic transformation so far. Such kind of external environment and domestic situation pushed Myanmar to say suspension of Dam project for the first time in Myanmar-China historic relations.

Myanmar as a sovereign state has the right to develop relations with the US. However, it does not mean that Myanmar will completely relinquish its relationship with China. It can be seen that prior to Secretary Hillary Clinton's visit to Myanmar in 2011, General Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, visited China. In September 2011, President U Thein Sein visited to China for the Sino-ASEAN Export before his visit to the US. And, before President Obama's visit to Myanmar, General Soe Win, deputy commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, visited to China. These events would seem to indicate that China is still the most important ally of Myanmar. Despite these facts, Myanmar-US relations is gradually and cautiously developing, Myanmar's future still largely depends on the development of the Myanmar-China relationship. Yet China does not want that relationship to be too close because China would

prefer the status quo which allows for Chinese manipulation. Therefore, the US is moving to improve relations with Myanmar, with nomination and confirmation of a US special ambassadorial coordination for Myanmar policy and President's Obama's trips to Myanmar, and with the visit of US Secretary of State Clinton.

China's Public Diplomacy on Myanmar-China Relations

Because of political reform in Myanmar, the most difficult challenges for China are the deteriorating situation of people-to-people relations. Therefore, China practices public diplomacy and people-to-people contacts to pacify local anti-Chinese sentiments and to prevent its pipeline projects. This is because China does also engage with the ethnic nationalities along Myanmar-China border as well as the political parties such as NLD. Although few of the reform measures had yet to take effect, it was already apparent that public mobilization around the dam presented a challenge to the commitment articulated by the new civilian government as reform and the public relations aspect of its on Chinese economic. Therefore, the suspension of Myintsone Dam project is an important impact on Myanmar-China relations.

During this period, most of Chinese officials visiting Myanmar were focusing on working-level, substantive issues, rather than on high-profile display and celebration of bilateral friendships. The Chairman of China's National People's Congress, Wu Bangguo emphasised three aspects of the bilateral relations: (1) to enhance bilateral strategic mutual trust, (2) to push forward the agreed major cooperation projects and (3) to deepen cultural and people-to-people exchanges". The "people exchanges" proves to China's new public relation campaigns aimed at combating the anti-China sentiment on the ground. However, the trip did not result in any major announcements about the bilateral relations.

The greatest challenge for China in Myanmar does not come out from regional countries or other powers, but people-to-people relations and its nationalism deep-rooted in

history and tradition. China is confronted that the government supervised by the Hluttaws with accountability will not only create a more stable environment for business but also lead to multiple voices especially public voices. While China is cooling down on its economic and political engagement, it has been actively reaching out to Myanmar people. The main objectives of Chinese public diplomacy are to promote China's non-interference in domestic affairs and to try to create a positive perception about those values. In order to improve its relations with Myanmar, China has been inviting with local media, civil society, opposition leaders, ethnic groups, activists, think tanks and research institutes, and government officials in Myanmar. Since 2013, China had emphasized its relations with opposition party, especially NLD party. Therefore, China finds to manage public diplomacy and people-to-people contact relations in response to Myanmar.

After the suspension of the Myintsone project, China has attempted to build better relations with Myanmar. China believed that Buddha tooth relics diplomacy is one of the important diplomacy in Myanmar-China relations. The sacred Buddha tooth relics China possesses are a unique public diplomacy instrument. China responded with a good-will gesture. In November 2011, China sent a holy Buddhist relic to Myanmar. "Buddhist culture exchange plays an important part in China-Myanmar friendly exchange, enhancing the understanding and mutual trust between the two peoples". Along with the tooth came a high-level Chinese government official delegation led by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) director, Wang Zuoan, as well as the president of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC) though China does rarely permit religious occasion. As a consequence of the exhibition of the Buddha's tooth relics, China and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding on establishing friendly relationships between the Beijing Lingguang Temple, where the Buddha's tooth relics resides, and the Shwedagon Pagoda of Myanmar. Since the acceleration of democratic transition in March 2011, Myanmar society has become

increasingly diversified and perceptions of China by different entities have become more complicated. However, China and Myanmar are both trying to guide public opinion by enhancing interaction in directions that would promote less negative views on China by Myanmar society.

While Myanmar has actively sought to diversify its external relations in an attempt to become less dependent on Chinese government, China reportedly offered Myanmar nearly USD33 million in technical assistance for its 27th SEA Games in 2013, including for the opening and closing ceremonies, while accepting Myanmar athletes for training on Chinese soil. It is known that assisting Myanmar in organizing the 27th SEA Games was a very important project for the Chinese government as an attempt to strengthen the two countries' relationship and to secure the business concessions in this resource rich country. Through assistance to Myanmar's SEA Games, China has sought to win back the hearts of the Myanmar people, and to put an end to hostile anti-Chinese sentiment. The government of China's Yunnan Province donated relief aid to Rakhine State and Sagaing Region, the worst flooding areas in Myanmar in August 2015. In addition, Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar, Mr Hong Liang donated relief goods to flood victims in these regions.

Conclusion

The new civilian government is leading its people to construct democratic politics, boost the economy, improve livelihoods and expand foreign relations. Most international organizations expressed on Myanmar's transition in 2011, following decades of isolation, and the way it embarked on an unprecedented reform process, rising hopes for a new democracy. These reforms have been welcomed by the international community with the rising levels of aid, grants and loans.

Although Myanmar-China relations based on economic and political ties since 1988, the relations has been unbalanced and has served the interests of both countries. Myanmar has realized after two decades of isolation, it has to open up to the other countries, to ease the

Western countries' sanctions and to secure the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014. Myanmar has signaled to China that it will follow a more balanced and independent foreign policy. In order to bring about a more balanced foreign economic presence in the country and re-establish the economy while regaining international recognition may have been one of the drivers behind the reforms. In order to seek balanced diplomacy among big powers, Myanmar has re-established its relationship with the US, Japan, India and Western countries. In addition, Myanmar appears to be rebalancing its ties with China. It can be seen that this rebalancing was shown in the suspension of the Myitsone Dam Project. The new government demonstrated its new attitude of being responsive to domestic public pressure and upholds the aspiration and wishes of the people. While protecting Chinese business interests and maintains border stability, China is also faced Myanmar's foreign policy which is traditional policy of non-interference and Myanmar is closing with Western countries. In response, China is adjusting its Myanmar policy.

In addition, Myanmar will attract international expertise and foreign direct investment. The improvement of bilateral relations between Myanmar and US does not aim at parting from China. Myanmar-China relations have entered a new era in the context of these potential reforms and change relationship between Myanmar and the US. China has utilized realist assumption concerning its own strategic benefits such as border security and energy security. However, on the assumption of non-interference in internal affairs, human rights, freedom and democracy has never been conducted. To protect its strategic interests in Myanmar, China requires maintaining the effectiveness of a new policy toward Myanmar in the advent of the age of democracy. After the suspension of the Myintsone Dam Project, Myanmar-China relations have turndown. In response, China has changed inside Myanmar such as reduction of Chinese direct investments, the cooling off of the political relationship, the establishment of relations with the democratic forces and major public relations campaigns.

On the one hand, the relationship between Myanmar and China has been strained by Chinese projects which have led to unease among Chinese investors. The future of Chinese investments in Myanmar depends on their bilateral relations. On the other hand, since the beginning of democratization in 2011, Myanmar faces a challenging balancing act between China's rebalancing and US pivot to East Asia. Myanmar has introduced reform processes and improved relations with US and Western countries under the new civilian government. China has made multiple efforts to reduce negative perceptions of China within the Myanmar society such as businesses and academics, media and NGOs.

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