

Myanmar's Democracy Skiing Between Tug-Of-Power

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Abstract: Myanmar held a free and fair election in 2015 as the first remarkable election in 60 years after her independence from the British colony in 1948. General Nay Win coupe the country's power and his government ruled Myanmar for 26 years from 1962-1989 and Myanmar lost democratic government since 1962. The entire military government ruled Myanmar from 1989 to 2010; the democratisation transition has been going on since 1988 by the head of Aung San Su Kyi, leader of NLD (National League for Democracy) and Myanmar's Democracy Struggle restarted again in 2010 by United States' pragmatic engagements with Myanmar during Obama's administration. After the 2015 election, Aung San Su Kyi's democratic government hand over power from U Thein Sein's civil government but the military is still powerful by the 2008 Constitution. The new Democratic country Myanmar is keeping her democratic way to get full Democracy government among domestic and international challenges. This article explains "how Myanmar was trying her democratic transition between her development neighbour Chinese's pressure and the U.S.A's support to keep on the democratic way and standing for the human right".

Keywords: Myanmar, Democratic Transition, United States, China.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most Myanmar People did not know what the exact meaning of Democracy was! Even they got Democratic Government by 2015 free and fair election. That is why there is a question "why they wanted to be a Democratic country even they did not know about Democracy?" However, Democracy was not a stranger for Myanmar, look back to country's history a bit, she got her independence from the British colony since 1948, and the country exercised the Parliamentary Democracy System till 1962. Unfortunately, the country was under the military rule from 1962 to 2010 no matter what names the military government changed many times to continue to rule the country. After 1988 Myanmar's Democratic Reform, the country was under a black cloud and in a prison that was protecting with four walls by the brutality to see outside the world. People lived in their small and blind society in a just residential area; they did not know much about what was happening outside of the country. Among western's sanctions, military's brutal govern, poverty, corruptions, Dark Age Education, Ethnic Insurgents conflicts, the people could not breathe very well, and 2008 Cyclone Nargis hit the country, and the world was interested in Myanmar's affairs, and they saw what was happening in this country a bit.

Moreover, 2009 Obama's Asia Pacific Pivot focused on Myanmar's politics extremely warm maybe because of Chinese development not because of Myanmar's Democratic Transition and Aung San Su Kyi. No matter what he interested in Myanmar's Democratic Transition, military government changed her name to be civil government by 2010 election, and the country had at least hoped her transition and foreign support while the country has been being isolation state except China's economic investments and protection at UN for human right for so long. So in these decades, Myanmar always depended on China in many ways since she was isolation state in 1991. Both the government and the people wanted to look for some exits apart from China to develop their country's economy and politics.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. History of Myanmar Governments

David I. Steinberg explained that Burma got independence from British in and emerged as a civilian government country headed by Prime Minister U Nu (David I. Steinberg-2013).¹ In 1962, general Ne Win kicked U Nu out from his position

¹ DAVID I. STEINBERG, BURMA/MYANMA, 2013, p/41

and military coupe and ruled the country by Socialist Government², and also changed the name of the country as Myanmar in 1989³ without knowing ordinary people. From 1989 to 2010, the military government changed the government name as SLORC State Law and Order Restoration Council and then SPDC State Peace and Development Council before U Thein Sein government in 2010. Losing Democracy of Myanmar since 1962, the people have been living under the Burma Socialist Programme Party for 28 years, and the government system destroyed the country's economy, society, and education systematically.

A. The Historical Background of Myanmar's Democratic Transition

After 1988 landslide democracy reform, the military government coupe the country's power to make peace and restoration. However, hundreds of University students went underground, politicians and the people who participated in the demonstration were put into prison for many years. Aung San Su Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy Party (NLD). The next University Students demonstration happened in December 1996, and the government stopped Arts and Science University Education for four years. Under the military government, Myanmar's democracy spirit was hiding inside the people's mind for a long time without showing.

The 2007 Saffron Revolution woke Myanmar People up again to try to get democracy, losing religious monks' blood and the military government's brutal press would always be in our generation's heart. Aung San Su Kyi was under house arrest since 1989, and sometimes she was released after very soon she was under house arrest again. Every time she went out, she tried Myanmar to get democracy, and the international community was always standing for her and Myanmar people. The American citizen John Yettaw's effort to meet Aung San Su Kyi on 3 May 2009⁴ and his arrest was the most prominent picture of America's involvement in Myanmar's Democratic Transition.

Catherine Shanahan wrote that the United States and European pushed the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asia Nations) to help Myanmar's democratic reform by giving pressure on the Myanmar military government.⁵

Amy Amy Kazmin addressed that the military government systematically prepared to protect them when they shift power to the new government by the 2008 Constitution. The Constitution was drawn by the military government since 1992, and the military can keep 25 per cent of government power.⁶

Judy L. Hasday indicated that Aung San Su Kyi as an activist of Myanmar Democracy⁷ and she is not only activist but also Democracy avata for Myanmar in reality.

III. "THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA'S ROLE IN MYANMAR'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION"

Obama administration dramatically warm and keen to get bilateral relations with Myanmar woke the Myanmar military government, the opposite NLD party and people up in being isolation country for many years. Myanmar has 54 million population, strategic location in Southeast Asia region, between two powerful countries China and India, membership of ASEAN but the country has been suffering by the military brutal government and economics, society and education are going down for many decades. In that situation, the United States is hope for people who need to free from the military government and the military government herself pave the way the United States to come to Myanmar.

Myanmar military government has already known the United States' warmly negotiating with Myanmar was a part of her containment policy towards China because the United States has concerned about amazing Chinese economic development since Bush and Clinton's administration and so Obama government came into Asia-Pacific region to influence her power and to rebalance against Chinese power. The United States sought a place in ASEAN first and tried to involve in Myanmar's democratic transition according to the United States foreign policy. At that time, coincidentally, the Chinese economy was rising, Myanmar's economic reform was going on, the domestic political situation was shaking, the opposite party and people tried to get foreign support, and China was very closed to the Myanmar military government more than society.

² DAVID I. STEINVERG, BURMA/MYANMAR,2013/64

³ DAVID I. STEINVERG, BURMA/MYANMAR,2013/5

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/14/world/asia/14burma.html>

⁵ www.CurrentSoutheastAsianAffairs.org

⁶ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7de93582-d73a-11dc-b09c-0000779fd2ac.html>

⁷ Judy L. Hasday, Morden Peacemakers Aung San Su Kyi Activist for Democracy in Myanmar, 2007.

Obama administration used the specific opportunity to approach Myanmar by using her democracy promoting policy and dealt with both the present military government and opposite NLD party leader Aung San Su Kyi at the same time. Hillary Clinton, the secretary of State, visited Myanmar two times and met Myanmar President U Thein Sein, and Aung San Su Kyi, Obama himself visited Myanmar for two times and he also met U Thein and Aung San Su Kyi and then he met Yangon University students and gave a speech about Democracy government at Yangon University in 2012 his visit. Moreover, many senators and U.S. officials came to Myanmar to meet Myanmar government, to support human right issues and to seek a better way to negotiate between the military government and ethnic militant groups.

Finally, the United States invited Myanmar President U Thein Sein and Aung San Su Kyi to Washington in 2012, Obama discussed with U Thein Sein about keep on paving the way to get democratic government and if Myanmar were going her democratic way very well, the United States would always with Myanmar. It means the United States showed not only how much she likes Democracy but also threatened the present civilian government that Myanmar government recognised. Obama and Aung San Su Kyi discussed very near democratic future and human right especially the Muslim people in Rakhine states. Each was a formal meeting, but Obama and President U Thein Sein's discussion was barely discussion because U Thein Sein was only a puppet president of the retired military general Than Shwe and on the other side, the United States still concerned Myanmar civilian government's condition.

Since Hillary's visit Myanmar in 2011, Myanmar people existed about the transition from Military government to Democracy by the United States' support. Moreover, Obama's visit made Myanmar society strong to struggle to get a democratic government. U Thein Sein government released hundreds of political prisoners, suspended Ayeyarwaddy Myitsone Dam for five years, media press and tried to sign a cease-fire agreement with eight ethnic militant groups. The most important thing was Aung San Su Kyi was released from her house arrest in October 2010 after the 2010 election. These all are the great effect of the United States' involvement in Myanmar's politic.

On the other side, China was the most significant economic partner of Myanmar since 1991, isolation state always relied on China for import, export, military, and even China always stood for Myanmar government at the United Nations for many years. Chinese investment came into Myanmar by legally and illegally, China had long term good relations with Myanmar in 1949 when China proclaimed as "People Republic of China", Myanmar was a country among recognised China and always respected Chinese "One China Policy".

Throughout the military government, China dealt with this government very well and forgot to communicate with Myanmar society as people to people relations. Chinese investments made a hand of a military general, and crony class be wealthy and float among the poor native sea. Gradually, the people felt like Chinese were an opportunities class in Myanmar to do business with the military government because the local people did not get excellent benefits from Chinese investments.

On the Chinese side, there was no rule of law in Myanmar for many years, and most of the investment areas have been controlling by military officials. So Chinese investors took care of them and tried to get their attention in many ways, and they lacked to deal with the local community who lived in Chinese investment fields before Chinese investment came there. Myanmar people used to afraid of the military government and being silent for many decades, but the government and Chinese investors implemented the Ayeyarwaddy Myitsone Dam Project, people demonstrated. Moreover, Litpadoung Copper Mine made the local people heartbroken because the government sold these land to Chinese investors without noticing the local people. Suddenly, they lost their lands, their jobs, and they did not get any opportunities from both Chinese investment and the military government. Democrats were going on, and the military government used weapons to press the demonstrated groups, and some people died.

This kind of Chinese investment, local people's sufferings, the military government's behaviour made Chinese investments images to go down in Myanmar's society. Moreover, if there was any problem happened between Chinese investors and the local community, the military government always used to stand for Chinese Foreign Investors. People just knew and saw the present condition, and they did not understand Foreign Direct Investment law and the treaty between the military government and Chinese investors. The frightened changed to be hatred not only the military government but also Chinese and then the people's hope automatically turned to the United States approach.

Before Aung San Su Kyi's release, China attended to the military government, but as soon as her release, the Chinese ambassador of Myanmar was the first foreign official person who met Aung San Su Kyi at her house in 2010. China invited Aung San Su Kyi before she came into the Myanmar parliament as a president of the national reconciliation

council and China welcomed her as the state official level in Beijing. Inviting Aung San Su Kyi was China's show that China was ready to accept Myanmar's Democratic Transition although China had a good relationship with the military. In reality, Beijing was tired of Myanmar's domestic conflicts for long enough as a neighbouring country, so Beijing wanted Myanmar to be a peaceful and prosperous country.

When China saw the United States' Asia-Pacific Pivot and dramatic warm policy towards Myanmar, China got a shock and re-considered between China and Myanmar relations. China stood for Myanmar military government for human right at United Nation whenever Myanmar needed her. However, it did not mean that China likes Myanmar's shaking domestic affairs, attacking between military and ethnic groups. Because China is Myanmar's neighbour and more developed country and China is implementing her One Belt One Road initiate around the world in recent years. China does not want to accept Myanmar refugees when the ethnic and military fought and people fled into China for seeking safe and closing the border gates for security. The trading flow could not work well and Chinese people who live in bordering areas themselves afraid of Myanmar's conflicts.

The Chinese government gave President U Thein Sein an honourable Doctoral Degree for taking care of Myanmar's forest after the military government sold 70 per cent of Myanmar's forest out to China. It was ridiculous, and the international community and Myanmar people did not understand China so far about it. Unfortunately, U Thein Sein government suspended Ayeyarwaddy Myitson Dam for five years because of almost the whole country's demonstrated. The investment value was over 800 million, and China suffered from it. After it happened, Chinese investments were going down in Myanmar since 2011, Myanmar watchers and some scholars wrote that China was concerning to keep invest in Myanmar because Myanmar has been under changing.

China tried to communicate with Myanmar's multi-level society since 2012 and invited Myanmar officials from different ministries to visit China and made short training courses for them as well as some conferences. China changed its approach from only the military government to both the government and people. In the Myanmar peace process, China supported by giving pressure on Wa ethnic independent state which belongs to Chinese ethnic. After Aung San Su Kyi became State Consular of Myanmar by the 2015 election, China invited her, and she met Chinese President Xi in Beijing. Beijing welcomed the new democratic government, and according to Chinese foreign policy, China did not involve Myanmar's human right issues.

Since a being a politician, Aung San Su Kyi took care of China and China-Myanmar relations as well as after her government got power, she still showed her respect of China. At that time, the United States did not keep eyes the development of Myanmar's democratic transition and the relations between China and Myanmar. On the other side, the United States could establish new tie relations with India and rebuild a new era of excellent relations with Japan at the same time. The United States supported both the military government and Aung San Su Kyi's party, and she hoped Aung San Su Kyi government would leave China for America. However, in reality, Myanmar still relied on China, Aung San Su Kyi was powerful and a real politician, so the Obama administration did not sure her promises to aid Myanmar. Francis Fukuyama said that U.S.'s uncertain commitment.

Among these dilemmas, Obama putback some sanctions from Myanmar and some are still because Myanmar's democratic government could not mend 2008 military Consitution and this Consitution protected the military power. Aung San Su Kyi could not be a President of Myanmar because the article 59 F denied someone who married foreigner could not be President. If someone asked Myanmar, did America leave Myanmar after a democratic government got power? It is not easy to give a black and white answer. Darek Mitchell said that "Promoting Democratic Transition is a long process and I can not say this is the end" when he left Myanmar after his duty.

As soon as she had power, Aung San Su Kyi government continued U Thein Sein government's NCA (Nationwide Cease-Fire Agreement) to participate more ethnic groups ethnic in NCA. Moreover, the second, government held "21st Century Pinlong" – Union Peace Conference on 31st August 2016 for national reconsolidation and to build peaceful relations among the new government and multi-ethnic groups.⁸ The democratic government asked Kofi Anan to seek the right way for the Muslim people in Rakhine state to solve the human right problem. Kofi Anan and his commission analysed this issue and made a report, but unfortunately, the Muslim society attacked border police stations and Myanmar military creat

⁸ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/01/c_137008034.htm

down them. After that Myanmar government signed an agreement to bring the Muslim people back from Bangladesh in 2017 and the government is implementing on this work in resent time.⁹

Aung San Su Kyi government's peace process is rest on both domestic people's patient and international support until now. The Union Peace Conference was held on 26 May 2017 as second meeting, and the government and ethnic groups agreed upon 41 points of political, economic, and social sectors.¹⁰ In 2018, Aung San Su Kyi met ordinary people to listen to people's voice during her government rule the country, and they were an open meeting between the present government and people throughout 70 years of country's independent period. The most challenging of government is to get peace among ethnic groups, and the government is handling this issue, and some conflicts are happening in some places. She is keeping good neighbours relations with India and ASEAN countries.

Focusing domestic peace and security does not tie Aung San Su Kyi to be busy with domestic affairs, she visited the United States, China and European countries as State Consoler early the democratic government handed power as the ASEAN membership, and a new democratic country are attracting Foreign Investment to develop the country's economy and society. Since 2014, Chinese investment increased and South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan investment are coming slowly to Myanmar. According to March 18, 2019, Myanmar Times news interview, there are five sectors to growth Myanmar's economic and they are Oil and gas prospects, Retail attraction, Growth in education, Garment demand, and Banking potential.¹¹ The United States changed the president and her policy towards Myanmar is being cold but still working somewhere in Myanmar by the American Embassy from Yangon and America is always standing for human right.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

So many scholars and politicians assumed that Democracy is very dangerous for a state which can not handle this government system by Democracy Pillars. Seeing that Myanmar has been a fail state, weak state and Democracy's three pillars are the legislature, executive and the judiciary system so getting Democracy government looks like coconut in the monkey's hands. I named my article topic as Myanmar's Democracy Skiing between Tug-of-Power because someone who does not know how to ski will face so much difficult to play on the ice at the start. Like Myanmar started playing Democracy Ski game on the lacking enough icy education plain, lower level technology slope, among ethnic conflicts mountains and deadly cold economic weather in the domestic playground. In an international playground, Myanmar's Democracy skiing is between the power competition of the United States and China.

If the United States left Myanmar for human right and relying China, Myanmar is going to face a lack of essential western aid in the social and economic area. Moreover, the new democratic state can fall under the military government again because of immature people's vote and economic requirements. There are many economic resources in military generals' hands. So the United States has already know that how much difficult to promote a country's democracy and to keep this system and Myanmar still needs the United States' support even she is trying very hard to be strong and to keep Democracy value by herself. The United States can get opportunities in Southeast Asia Region and ASEAN by helping Myanmar because of Myanmar's location. The most important thing is keeping the United States' support Myanmar is following the critical point of American Foreign Policy.

On the other side, China concerned the relations between Myanmar and the United States and Beijing changed her approach to Myanmar and stands for Myanmar till now. However, China has suffered from suspended the most significant investment of 3.6 billion \$ Ayeyarwaddy Hydropower Dam project for five years since 2011, and it cannot start until 2019. The Chinese government put pressure on both the local ethnic and government in March 2019, so Myanmar government is facing a dilemma with China.¹² The 2020 election is coming; the present government is working hard, solving many problems in domestic and international that the last military government made. In this situation, if China gave more pressure on the present government, Myanmar's government position is going to shake before the election. Myanmar government has just only a hope that China would hold her foreign policy and wait for Myanmar's political changes.

⁹ Khin Myat Kyaw Thu, Between Truths and Misconceptions about the Rakhine State, March 2018.

¹⁰ <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/union-peace-conference-achieves-agreement-majority-points-five-sectors>

¹¹ <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/five-sectors-driving-myanmars-economic-growth-2018-19.html>

¹² <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/myanmars-myitsone-dam-dilemma/>

Francis Fukuyama wrote that the Western government and multilateral development agencies gave more pressure and sought to foster instead of providing appropriate ideas to developing countries. (Francis Fukuyama's state-building/2004)¹³ In Myanmar case, Myanmar watchers and scholar should think about if American provided useful advice and help to Myanmar or undercut the higher ends seek to foster!

“Scant regard for homo sapiens of the East

Begets doubts about your move for peace

Rest'sured, however, of one important fact

That we shall not fight like the Kilkenny cats

To ensure for ravenous waves of Wall Street

Moreover, Easy life and wealthy retreat.”¹⁴

The above paragraph was written by an ordinary Myanmar nationalist when the United States President Nixon visited Myanmar in 1956. According to this paragraph, Myanmar liked democracy since many years ago and till now Myanmar still likes Democracy as other countries especially as the United States but we eastern people doubt just westerners' compression, not about Democracy. So Myanmar going forward her democratic step between the dragon and eagle, the/ dragon is a neighbour, the most significant economic partner for many decades and the biggest investor until now, whenever happened in Myanmar's domestic ethnic conflicts, this neighbour had accepted the effective through the long border. That is why, however, Myanmar respects the United States' democratic value and needs her support anywhere, and Myanmar cannot leave China for America. Aung San Su Kyi said that “we cannot change our neighbour, Myanmar must have to have a better relationship with China” and we need to keep good relationship among our international community especially western countries.

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