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China–Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership: A Regional Threat?

LI Chenyang

Abstract: This paper analyses the China-Myanmar ‘comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership’ in the framework of China’s diplomacy in the post-Cold War era and concludes that the partnership has no ‘significant negative impact’ on regional relations. China pursues its partnerships with Myanmar and other states to create a ‘stable’ and ‘harmonious’ surrounding environment, itself a ‘major’ prerequisite for China’s peaceful development. The author argues that China has not focused its diplomacy on Myanmar at the expense of other states; rather, he notes that in fact China established a ‘comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership’ with three other ASEAN states (Vietnam in 2008, Laos in 2009, and Cambodia in 2010) before it did so with Myanmar in May 2011. The article argues that the scope and depth of China’s partnerships with states such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are actually above that of its partnership with Myanmar. It also argues that Myanmar’s strong nationalism will prevent China from, for example, building a base on Myanmar’s soil. The author also asserts that China does not seek to use Myanmar as an ally to weaken or dilute ASEAN or its unity on the South China Sea issue.

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Introduction

From May 26 to 28, 2011, President U Thein Sein, together with a high-profile delegation, paid a three-day visit to China, the first he ever made since his inauguration on March 30. It was during this visit that China and Myanmar leaders released the Joint Statement on Establishing Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership. This has aroused a flurry of suspicion in the international communities about China's purpose and future China–Myanmar relations. This paper attempts to analyse China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in the framework of China's post-Cold War diplomacy. By comparing the textual content with those declarations of partnership between China and other Southeast Asian countries, this paper will shed light on the specific content and features of the China–Myanmar relationship, as well as the future impact of China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership on the regional relations.

1 China's "Strategic Partnership Strategy" since the End of the Cold War

The year 1991 witnessed the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar structure shaped by the Yalta System. The pattern of international relation underwent one of those significant changes with which the old confrontation-through-alliance strategy was incapable of dealing in the newly emerging international situations. In an effort to adapt to this change and, most importantly, to break the blockade chain of Western countries as the aftermath of the 1989 "Tiananmen Square Event," China determined to adjust its relations with major powers and improve relations with neighbouring countries. One of the important measures was dubbed as building "strategic partnerships" with big powers and neighbouring states.

1.1 Establishment and Deepening of Strategic Partnership between China and other Major Powers

The relationship among major powers is most crucial as the cornerstone of global stability. To prevent the world and regions from being trapped into the long-term stress of confrontation, since the end of the Cold War China has regarded its relations with major powers as a priority. In an effort to further ties with them, China has established strategic partnerships respectively with Russia, the United States, France, Britain, India and Germany.

1.1.1 China–Russia Strategic Cooperative Partnership

The China–Russia strategic cooperative partnership is the first-ever strategic partnership forged between China and other big powers. In 1992, China and Russia agreed to view each other as a “friendly country;” in 1994, the two countries established “constructive partnership;” in 1996, China–Russia relations were officially promoted to “strategic partnership of cooperation.” Since then, the China–Russia strategic partnership has been steadily enhanced and substantiated. The two countries launched multi-level cooperative initiatives in various fields. In July 2001, China and Russia signed the Good Neighborly Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which has laid a solid foundation for the development of bilateral relations over the long term. In May 2003, China–Russia issued a joint declaration, stating that however the international situation may change, the strategic priority of foreign policy for both countries will be to deepen good-neighbourly friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation. Furthermore, during President Medvedev’s visit to China in September 2010, China and Russia signed a joint statement on deepening the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

1.1.2 Sino–US Constructive Strategic Partnership

During former Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s visit to the United States on October 29, 1997, the two sides issued a joint declaration, stating that China and the U.S. wished to work together to build a constructive strategic partnership. Although the following Bush and Obama administrations have not stressed this statement to develop a strategic partnership with China, ever since the actual cooperation between China and the U.S has escalated.

1.1.3 Sino–French Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

China established comprehensive strategic partnership with France during President Hu Jintao’s visit to France in January 2004. A joint declaration was issued between them in November 2010 to strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership.

1.1.4 Sino–British Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

During Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to Britain in May 2004, China and Britain announced the establishment of Sino–British comprehensive strategic partnership and the mechanism of regular meetings. When British Prime Minister Cameron visited China in November 2010, Premier Wen expressed the

view that the Sino–British comprehensive strategic partnership is extensive and substantive.

1.1.5 China–India Strategic Partnership

During Premier Wen’s visit to India in April 2005, the two sides agreed to enhance bilateral relations and build a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity.

1.1.6 Sino–Germany Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

During German Chancellor Merkel’s visit to China in July 2010, the two countries issued a joint communiqué, and officially upgraded their bilateral relations to a strategic partnership and their mutual dialogue to ministerial level.

In summarization, although the strategic partnerships of cooperation between China and the major powers may bear different titles, their essences have no substantial differences.

1.2 Establishment and Deepening of Strategic Partnership between China and its Neighbouring Countries

In the hierarchy of Chinese diplomacy, relations with the major powers remain the key factor, while the principle of a stable and prosperous periphery is a major prerequisite for China’s peaceful development. China attaches great importance to its relations with neighbouring countries, not only trying to resolve territorial disputes, but also by participating in various cooperation mechanisms. Most importantly, China has established the policy of making friends and partners in the surrounding areas and fostering an amicable, stable, and prosperous neighbourhood. With the deepening of cooperation and interdependence with them, both sides have come to believe in a closer partnership is in line with their common interests. Therefore, China has taken the initiative and expanded its strategic partnership from the major powers to the neighbouring states, demonstrating its efforts to create a harmonious periphery.

1.2.1 The China–Pakistan Closer Bilateral Strategic Cooperative Partnership

During Premier Wen’s visit to Pakistan in April 2005, the two states agreed to promote a closer bilateral strategic cooperative partnership on the existing

foundation of traditional friendly relations. It is a comprehensive one covering economic, education, media, tourism, anti-terrorism, and security cooperation.

1.2.2 China–Indonesia Strategic Partnership

In April 2005, China and Indonesia issued a Joint Declaration between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Indonesia on a Strategic Partnership. In January 2010, the two countries signed an action plan to promote and deepen their strategic partnership. This partnership focuses on such topics as ministerial-level dialogue, UN reform, Asia–Africa cooperation, security, and economic cooperation.

1.2.3 China–South Korea Strategic Cooperative Partnership

During South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun’s visit to China in July 2003, the two sides announced the establishment of comprehensive partnership of cooperation. In May 2008, China and South Korea issued a joint statement during President Lee Myung-bak’s visit to China, in which an agreement was reached to escalate bilateral relations to a strategic cooperative partnership and to build up a regular dialogue mechanism between the leaders. This discussion also involved free trade negotiations and the issue of peace and stability in northeast Asia.

1.2.4 China–Laos Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership

During former Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s visit to Laos in November 2000, the two countries agreed to develop stable comprehensive cooperative relations based on good-neighbourliness and mutual trust. In September 2009, during the Lao President Choummaly’s visit to China, the two sides decided to upgrade their relations to comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. It concluded that leaders and ruling parties of both countries share common experiences and would support and coordinate with each other in respect to important issues, and facilitate regional peace and stability in such frameworks as the Greater Mekong subregional cooperation, the ASEAN regional forum, etc.

1.2.5 China–Cambodia Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership

During former Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s visit to Cambodia in November 2000, the two sides agreed to consolidate and develop traditional

relations in the new millennium. In April 2006, China and Cambodia announced the establishment of all-round cooperative partnership during Premier Wen's visit. In December 2010, the two sides agreed to establish a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, which lay stress on such fields as investment, agriculture and energy cooperation, and education and youth exchanges.

1.2.6 China–Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership

As introduced in the foreword, the China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership was newly forged in May 2011 during President U Thein Sein's visit to China.

1.2.7 China–Philippines Strategic Cooperative Relation

In January 2007, during Premier Wen's official visit to the Philippines, the two sides issued a joint statement to strengthen bilateral relations into strategic cooperation for peace and development, which was reaffirmed when President Aquino visited China in August 2011. To further this partnership, a joint action plan detailing the strategic cooperation was released in October 2009, which set forth a 5-year plan on two-way trade, exchanges among social organizations, legislatures and cooperation on sports, and tourism.

1.2.8 China–Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership

Nong Duc Manh, the General Secretary of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, paid a visit to China from May 30 to June 2, 2008. Both sides spoke highly of the new progress made in the relations between the two parties and countries, agreeing to make joint efforts to develop a China–Vietnam comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership under the guidance of the principle of long-term stability, future-orientation, friendship and all-round cooperation in the spirit of good neighbours, friends, comrades, and partners. The partnership features economic and political aspects, ranging from exchanges of ruling parties to education, culture, science, and technology. A steering committee was set up to advance cooperation on all-fronts under regional frameworks such as APEC, China–ASEAN, and Greater Mekong Subregion mechanisms.

1.2.9 China–Malaysia Strategic Cooperative Relation

In May 2004, former Malaysian Prime Minister Badawi visited China and attended the celebration of the 30th anniversary of China–Malaysia diplomatic ties. In the joint declaration, both sides expressed their willingness to promote bilateral strategic cooperation. On June 3, 2009, Premier Wen Jiabao met with Prime Minister Najib Razak and signed an action plan of strategic cooperative partnership with emphasis on finance, security, energy, construction and infrastructure.

1.2.10 China–Thailand Strategic Cooperative Relation

China and Thailand issued Joint Action Plan on China–Thailand Strategic Cooperation during Former Thai Prime Minister Surayud’s visit to China in May 2007. On April 17, 2012 when Prime Minister Yingluck met with Premier Wen Jiabao, the two countries hammered out a Joint Action Plan on China–Thailand Strategic Cooperation 2012–2016, setting the objectives and schedules of political, diplomatic, and cultural cooperation.

In addition, China has established partnerships with many other countries and regional organizations, such as Brazil (1993), Nepal (1996), Canada (1997), Mexico (1997, upgraded to strategic partnership in 2003), Japan (1998), EU (1998, upgraded to strategic partnership in 2005), Egypt (1999), Venezuela (2001), Mongolia (2003), Poland (2004), Hungary (2004), Rumania (2004), Chile (2004), Argentina (2004, strategic partnership), South Africa (2004, strategic partnership, and upgraded to comprehensive strategic partnership in 2010), Uzbekistan (2004), Spain (2004), Portugal (2005, comprehensive strategic partnership), Peru (2005), Bangladesh (2005), Croatia (2005), Kazakhstan (2005, strategic partnership), Sri Lanka (2005), Africa (2006, new strategic partnership), Serbia (2009) and so on.

1.3 Character and Nature of China’s Strategic Partnership with other Countries

To date, China’s diplomatic relations with other countries can be divided into several tiers: simple diplomatic relations, good-neighbourly friendships, partnerships, and traditional cooperative friendships. Among them, partnerships can be subdivided into cooperative partnerships, constructive partnerships, comprehensive cooperative partnerships, strategic partnerships, strategic cooperative partnerships, and comprehensive strategic cooperative partnerships (Dai 2010). So far, China has established partnerships with most big powers, BRICS, the G20, and neighbouring countries at different levels. The core spirit of the partnership is not to confront each other, but

to seek common ground while putting aside differences, and to do no harm to any third country (Dai 2010). As was stated by former Chinese President Jiang Zemin in November 1997 after his visit to the U.S.:

The Sino–U.S. constructive strategic partnership contains three meanings: the two countries should be partners, not rivals; it is a long-term relationship built on an overall strategic basis, not an expedient one on a partial basis; and it is constructive rather than exclusive, not seeking hegemony (Weng 1997).

Jiang's elucidation also applies well to China's relations with other countries. There are three features in China's strategic partnership with other countries after the finale of Cold War.

1.3.1 Non-Confrontation

In general, there are three basic forms of international relations, namely, competition, cooperation and conflict. Therefore, international relations can be divided into two types, confrontation and non-confrontation. Not only China but also other major powers like the U.S., Russia, France, and India are trying to go beyond the enemy-or-alliance model of the Cold War era and forge new partnerships with one another. The purpose of China's strategic partnership is analogue to that of the foreign policy: not to conflict with each other, to pursue international coordination, and to advocate the spirit of equality and mutual benefit under the guidance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

1.3.2 Non-Alignment and Not Against Any Third Country

China's strategic partnership with other countries in the post-Cold War era is a newly emerged type of international relations not aiming at any third country or detrimental to its interests. Specifically, all the strategic partnerships entered into by China and other countries and their declarations bear the characteristics of non-alignment and not standing against any third country. The China–Russia Good-Neighborly Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which came into force on July 16, 2001, declared “the friendly relations between China and Russia is a new kind of international relations based on non-alliance, non-confrontation and does not stand against any third country” (*Xinhua* 2001). Such a provision could also be found in Joint Declaration between China and Indonesia on their Strategic Partnership. It declared that “the Strategic Partnership should be a non-aligned and non-exclusive relationship aiming at promoting peace, stability and prosperity of the two countries and its peoples” (*Xinhua* 2005). Among those countries,

only Russia has been involved in military cooperation with China. Even so the partnership does not aim at any third party.

1.3.3 Low Political Level Cooperation

The term “strategy” is used more in “high political level” dialogue in international relations, such as in politics, military affairs, and security. However, the strategic partnerships between China and other countries are mainly involved in low political level cooperation with symbolic rather than actual meaning. Whether large or small, China’s declaration with all its strategic partners focuses much more on further strengthening bilateral cooperation in economic, scientific and cultural fields. For example, when China and Japan discuss establishing a “strategic and mutually beneficial relationship,” China views it as a long-term, all-round, and stable cooperative relationship. It is different from the Japanese understanding of strategic cooperation and cannot be simply viewed as military cooperation (*Xinlang* 2007). In November 2006, China and Africa established new strategic partnership, which only emphasized political equality, mutual trust, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange, but excluded any involvement in the military or security areas (*Sobu* 2006).

However, that doesn’t mean China is not willing to develop political and security relations with other countries. As cooperation in these fields is very sensitive and difficult to bring into effect, China tries to promote comprehensive relations based on economic cooperation.

In short, the strategic partnership strategy can be viewed as China’s efforts to contribute to a harmonious world through the establishment of strategic partnerships with other countries. It is a kind of human-centred international relations with equality and mutual respect, striving for harmony but not sameness. China has expanded its diplomatic space and improved the international environment for peace and development by seizing the opportunity of the adjustment of big powers’ relations, the multi-polarisation trend, and enhanced interdependence through strategic partnerships with other countries.

2 China–Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership under the Context of China–ASEAN Relations

2.1 The Development of China–Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership Lags behind China’s Partnership with Some other Southeast Asian Countries.

As mentioned before, China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership should be interpreted within the framework of China’s diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. It can be seen from the above that China’s “strategic partnership strategy” is not only for Myanmar. Moreover, it also should be viewed in the context of China–ASEAN relations. After listing China’s neighbouring strategic partners, we find 8 out of the 10 ASEAN member states have agreed to build strategic partnerships with China. All the four new ASEAN member states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) have established comprehensive strategic cooperative partnerships with China. Indonesia is China’s strategic cooperative partner while Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand maintain strategic cooperation with China. Only Brunei and Singapore haven’t reached agreement to build strategic partnerships with China. China has established comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with Vietnam in 2008, Laos in 2009, and Cambodia in 2010. Myanmar is more important in China’s peaceful development than Laos and Cambodia, and no less important than Vietnam. Therefore, it was normal and reasonable for China to establish comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with Myanmar’s new government in 2011. On the contrary, if China had not taken that step, it would mean that Chinese policy towards Myanmar had undergone major changes.

2.2 The Cooperation Mentioned in China–Myanmar Joint Statement Doesn’t Exceed China’s Similar Agreements with other Southeast Asian Countries and Is Not beyond China–ASEAN Cooperation Framework.

China and Myanmar reached the following agreement in the joint statement issued on May 27, 2011: to maintain high-level contacts between parliaments, governments, legislatures and political parties; to enhance economic and trade exchanges between the two countries, to create a favourable environment for trade and investment cooperation; to conduct cooperation in such

areas as education, culture, science and technology, health, agriculture and tourism; to strengthen border management cooperation, conduct timely communication on border affairs; to further enhance coordination in the United Nations and other multilateral forums, jointly safeguarding the interests of developing countries.

Compared these articles with those in China–Vietnam Joint Statement¹ (June 1, 2008), China–Laos Joint Press Communiqué² (September, 2011), China–Indonesia Joint Statement³ (April 25, 2005), China–Cambodia Joint Communiqué⁴ (April 8, 2006) and other joint statements between China and Southeast Asian states, the scope and depth of cooperation between China and those countries exceed that of China and Myanmar. The China–Philippines Joint Statement⁵ signed in April 2005 is the only one simpler than China–Myanmar joint statement. Moreover, the strategic cooperation between China and Myanmar is within the confines of the Joint Declaration on the China–ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity⁶, which was issued in Bali in October 2003. Its content is much simpler than the China–ASEAN Plan of Action 2004 to implement the Joint Declaration on the China–ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2005–2010)⁷. In this action plan, China and ASEAN agreed to strengthen military exchanges and cooperation, which is not covered in China–Myanmar joint statement. However, China and Myanmar vow to strengthen border management cooperation. That is not an area of cooperation between China and other Southeast Asian countries.

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- 1 China-Vietnam Joint Statement, see: <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_45/1207/t460818.htm>.
 - 2 China-Laos Joint Press Communiqué, *Xinhua*, see: <http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2011-09/21/c_122068182_3.htm>.
 - 3 Joint Declaration between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Indonesia on Strategic Partnership, <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_43/1207/t193365.htm>.
 - 4 China-Cambodia Joint Communiqué, see: <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_14/1207/t245093.htm>.
 - 5 China-Philippine Joint Statement, <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_9/1207/t193789.htm>.
 - 6 Joint Declaration on the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity, see: <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gjhdqzz/lhg_14/zywj/t27721.htm>.
 - 7 China-ASEAN Plan of Action 2004 to Implement Joint Declaration on the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity, see: <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/gxh/zlb/smgg/t175786.htm>.

2.3 Nature of China–Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership

China and Indonesia issued a joint declaration on their strategic partnership on April 25, 2005. The declaration stated that the Strategic Partnership shall be non-aligned and non-exclusive aimed at promoting the peace, stability and prosperity of the two countries and its peoples; it shall conform to principles set out in the UN Charter, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the Ten Principles of Asian–African Conference, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and other universally recognized norms of international law. The Strategic Partnership shall be an important pillar in strengthening ASEAN–China strategic partnership as well as a critical component of South–South cooperation among developing countries, and provide a basis for close coordination and cooperation for regional, inter-regional, and international fora and organizations with a view to building comprehensive and mutually beneficial ties in meeting the challenges of the new millennium and strengthening regional and international peace, stability and prosperity. Finally, the Strategic Partnership shall focus on strengthening political and security cooperation, deepening economic and development cooperation, enhancing socio-cultural cooperation, and expanding non-government exchanges.⁸ Taking into consideration the articles in the China–Myanmar joint statement, all those are the characteristics of the strategic partnership between China and Myanmar as well.

3 How Much Is the Negative Impact of China–Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership on the Region?

There are different interpretations at home and abroad of the China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic partnership, some of which are negative. For example, some Chinese think “the cooperation may cover all areas as it is a comprehensive cooperation partnership.” China and Myanmar have intentionally left out an important content in this statement; that is, military cooperation.

On the eve of President U Thein Sein’s visit, Xu Caihou, the Vice Chairman of Chinese Central Military Commission, made a significant trip to Myanmar. Perhaps military cooperation has been listed in a separate

8 Joint Declaration between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Indonesia on Strategic Partnership, see: <www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_43/1207/t193365.htm>.

agreement, and that it will not be only supplying Myanmar with weapons. Just as the term “comprehensive” is used in this statement, their military cooperation may be more extensive and comprehensive, which may relate to China’s Indian Ocean Strategy?”⁹ The famous Irrawaddy website points out that President U Thein Sein wished to gain China’s support for Myanmar’s ASEAN chairmanship in 2014 and project loans. That’s why Myanmar backed its northern neighbour regarding South China Sea issues. However, ASEAN and China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) on the sidelines of the sixth ASEAN–China Summit in November 2002, and so Myanmar has an obligation as a member state to respect the DOC and take a neutral stance. Thein Sein, however, decided to side with China. Furthermore, Thein Sein’s support for China in South China Sea issues could further weaken the unity of ASEAN and is not consistent with bloc leaders’ Joint Statement on the ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations, which was issued during the Indonesia ASEAN Summit in May (Htet Aung 2011). Then, is there any negative impact from the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between China and Myanmar in regional international relations?

3.1 The Term “Comprehensive” Doesn’t Mean China and Myanmar Have to Carry out Close Military Cooperation, and Myanmar Won’t Allow China to Have Military Bases in its Territory.

Myanmar’s strong relationship with China has attracted particular attention, not least because of the stream of reports in the news media and, to a lesser extent, academic literature, claiming that China has established several naval bases and intelligence collection stations in Myanmar. This has also been cited as evidence that Myanmar has become a client state of China (Selth 2007: 279). China’s move into the northeast Indian Ocean has been perceived as a threat by its competitor in the region, notably India.

First, it can’t be denied that there are some military cooperation between China and Myanmar. For example, China is one of Myanmar’s main weapon providers since 1988, and China also helps Myanmar in the training of pilots. However, such kinds of military cooperation exist between China and Thailand as well. As was pointed out by Australian scholar Andrew Selth, an in-depth examination of the available evidence suggests that there

9 Interpretations of China-Myanmar Joint Statement on Establishing Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership see: <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_55ee69ea01017s5q.html>.

are no Chinese military bases on Burmese soil, a fact conceded by senior Indian officials in 2005, despite the fact that China still has a strong strategic interest in developing its bilateral relations with Myanmar (Selth 2007: 279).

Secondly, the opinion that the Vice Chairman of Chinese Central Military Commission Xu Caihou visited Myanmar with secret mission is misleading and problematic. In fact, Chinese military leaders have lots of normal foreign visits every year. Liang Guanglie, the Chinese Defense Minister, has visited Vietnam, Singapore and some other countries in 2010 and 2011. The assumption that all of his visits have special mission and meaning may be an exaggeration.

Thirdly, as have been pointed out in other papers (Li 2010: 113-133), the military and security cooperation between Myanmar and India is more extensive than that between Myanmar and China. More recently, Myanmar and India jointly crushed the Myanmar base of the United Liberation Front of Assam, India.

Fourth, Myanmar is a country with strong nationalism and national pride, together with deep-rooted tradition of neutral diplomacy. Therefore, no matter how close the China–Myanmar relation is, it won't let China set up military bases in its coastal area. In particular, it won't allow China to use it as a base against India. President U Thein Sein pointed out in his inaugural speech on March 30 that 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. They never permitted any foreign troops to deploy with the borders of the Union. They never launched aggression against and interfere in the internal affairs of any other country. And they never posed threats to international and regional peace and security.

All these factors are the pride of the Myanmar's foreign affairs policy. Hence, the new government will "also adhere to this honourable foreign policy and continue the relations with all the countries" (*The New Light of Myanmar* 2011). The overseas Burmese scholar Tin Maung Maung Than based in Singapore also considers China–Myanmar relation should be evaluated from a suitable perspective and the description of Myanmar as China's vassal state is much too simplistic (Tin Maung Maung Than 2004: 189-210). Although China–Myanmar relations have been unbalanced since 1988 and economic ties mainly based on political connections, it has served the interests of both

countries. Myanmar is neither a pawn state in China’s strategy nor China’s economic hub (Shee 2002: 34).

Among some Chinese officials, there may exist an aspiration to have military bases in Myanmar. This does not only deviate from the basic principles of China’s foreign policy, but also overstates the status quo of China’s military strength and economic standards. As far as the question whether China will set up military base in Myanmar in future is concerned, it depends on Myanmar itself, not China. China will never do so in a coercive way. In view of Myanmar’s national character and deep-rooted tradition of neutralism, there is little hope and feasibility to have military base in Myanmar, let alone the non-alien-military provision in the 2008 constitution.

Fifth, the term “comprehensive” is a qualifier, which doesn’t mean all-round cooperation must be carried out. It can be inferred from the content of the joint statement that the strategic cooperation between China and Myanmar mainly focuses on economic and socio-cultural areas.

3.2 China Won’t Make Use of Myanmar to Prevent ASEAN Reaching Agreement on the South China Sea Issue.

It can’t be denied either that the divergence of China and ASEAN on the South China Sea issue is growing. However, Myanmar has never publicly expressed its stand on the South China Sea. According to its diplomatic tradition, it won’t publicly support China in the future. What is more, I found no information about China and Myanmar discussing the South China Sea issue or President U Thein Sein’s support for China on this issue during his visit in May.

3.3 China Won’t Strengthen its Relations with Myanmar to Weaken or Disunite ASEAN.

An Indian scholar has pointed out that ASEAN also worried about the increasing influence of China over the other countries in the region in 1990s. To balance this and to adopt a common strategy towards China, ASEAN (under Thailand’s insistence) decided to accept Myanmar and Laos as members of the grouping in 1997 (Kuppuswamy 2011). However, an internal united and stable ASEAN is more favourable for China’s peaceful development. In fact, China has always supported ASEAN’s integration process and its leading role in East Asia. Thus, even if the development of China–Myanmar relation has negative impact on the formation of ASEAN Community, it’s not China’s intention. In addition, since Myanmar joined

ASEAN in July 1997, it has not participated in the discussions about ASEAN's various programs and plans as long as they don't harm Myanmar's own interest. In other words, Myanmar has little influence within ASEAN. Even if China wants to use Myanmar to affect ASEAN's decision, Myanmar does not have such ability.

Other scholars, like Professor Poon Kim Shee from Singapore National University, argue that since 2000 China's policy toward Myanmar should be inspected in the background of China's effort to promote East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA) and the China–ASEAN economic integration in the framework of ASEAN plus China (10+1) and ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea (10+3) (Shee 2002: 51). Such opinions of Poon Kim Shee, Tin Maung Maung Than and Andrew Selth are more subjective and match the reality of the China–Myanmar relations.

In summary, there is no significant negative impact on the regional relations from the establishment of China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

4 Conclusion

Strategic partnership is a major innovation of China's diplomacy in the post-Cold War era, which has the characteristics of being non-aligned and non-confrontational. This kind of partnership was for big powers at first, seeking to avoid their confrontation against China. Then, it extended to other countries. As it is more difficult to deal with politics and security issues, China chooses to promote its comprehensive relations with other countries from developing economic cooperation. China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership should be viewed within China's foreign policy strategy and the China–ASEAN cooperative framework. In fact, the development of China–Myanmar relation to comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership is already behind those of China and some other Southeast countries. The cooperation mentioned in the joint statement is within the confines of China–ASEAN cooperation areas as well as those between China and other Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, the strategic partnership has no significant negative impact on the region. China will not use its close relation with Myanmar to disunite ASEAN or prevent ASEAN from reaching a common position on the South China Sea issue. Their border management cooperation is for the peace and stability of the border area and not against any third country.

There are several reasons for the two to establish a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. From the perspective of China, in the first place, China's Myanmar policy has been in accordance with its overall policy

towards a stable external environment for its own modernization and development. Second, China wants to express its support for the new Myanmar government. Third, the improvement of bilateral relations can promote economic and socio-cultural cooperation. For Myanmar, closer relation between the new government and an UN standing member of the Security Council like China will help to consolidate the new regime, promote its international status, and gain more development assistance.

The comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between China and Myanmar is non-aligned and not against any third country. China is Myanmar's most important partner, but not the only one. It's no doubt Myanmar will develop its relations with other big powers such as U.S., Japan, the EU, and even to balance the influence from major powers on Myanmar. The development of China–Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership also faces various kinds of challenges, such as Myanmar's unilateral declaration of the suspension of Myitsone hydropower station construction on September 30, 2011, and the expansion of contradictions between Chinese enterprises and citizens with Myanmar local people, the challenges from U.S. and other countries. However, in the long run, regardless of which political party is the ruling power, Myanmar will commit itself to developing its friendly relation with China, because China is the biggest neighbour of Myanmar, and neighbours cannot be removed.

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Appendix I:

Joint Statement Between The Republic of the Union of Myanmar and The People’s Republic of China on Establishing a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, Beijing, 27 May 2011 (*The New Light of Myanmar*, 29 May 2011, page 10)

At the invitation of President Mr. Hu Jintao of the People’s Republic of China, President U Thein Sein the Republic of the Union of Myanmar paid a state visit to the People’s Republic of China from 26 to 28 May 2011.

During the visit, President Mr Hu Jintao held talks with President U Thein Sein. Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council and Chairman Mr Jia Qinglin of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference met with President U Thein Sein. The two sides had in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of common interest in a friendly atmosphere.

The two sides agreed that since the establishment of diplomatic relations on 8 June 1950, the good neighbourly friendship and cooperation between China and Myanmar have been developing smoothly.

Especially since the beginning of the new century, the leaders of the two sides have maintained close contact, friendly cooperation in political, economic, cultural, scientific, and technological areas have kept expanding, and the traditional Paukphaw friendship between the two peoples has been growing from strength to strength. The two sides are satisfied with the development of the bilateral relations.

The two sides stressed that China-Myanmar relations, which are based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence jointly initiated by the two sides, have stood the tests of the changes in the international situation and in the respective domestic situation and enjoy broad prospects for development.

The two sides agreed that the world today is undergoing great development, great changes and great adjustment, and the trend towards multipolarity and economic globalization have gained momentum. Countries have become more interdependent. Peace, development and cooperation not only represent the trend of the times, but also serve the common interests of the countries and peoples in the region. Under the new circumstances, further promoting China-Myanmar relations on the basis of the existing friendly cooperation meets the need of the two countries to realize common development, serves the fundamental interests of the two countries and their people, and is conducive to peace, stability and prosperity of the region. On the basis of the above-mentioned common political will, the two sides agree

to establish China-Myanmar comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and reached the following agreement:

1. The two sides will maintain close high-level contacts, continue to promote strategic mutual trust and further enhance friendly exchanges and cooperation between the parliaments, governments, judicial departments and political parties of the two countries.

2. The two sides will continue to carry out consultations between the foreign ministries of the two countries on an irregular basis, have timely exchange of views on bilateral relations and international and regional hotspot issues, and hold regular meetings on bilateral and multilateral occasions to strengthen strategic communication.

3. The two sides will follow the principles of equality, mutual benefit, drawing upon each other's strengths and emphasizing practical results, further enhance the size and level of the economic cooperation and trade between the two countries, work to strengthen healthy, stable and sustainable business ties, make joint efforts to create a favourable environment for trade and investment cooperation, enhance the closer economic and trade exchanges between the two countries in accordance with their economic and trade policies.

4. The two sides will continue to conduct friendly cooperation in such areas as education, culture, science, and technology, health, agriculture and tourism on the basis of mutual benefit, strengthen people-to-people and cultural exchanges, increase mutual visits, and deepen mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

5. The two sides will strengthen border management cooperation, conduct timely communication on border management affairs, and strive to maintain peace, tranquility and stability in border areas.

6. The Chinese side reaffirms its respect for Myanmar's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and its support for Myanmar's pursuit of its development path suited to its national conditions. Myanmar reiterates that it adheres to one China policy, recognizes that the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China and that Taiwan is unalienable part of the Chinese territory, will continue to support the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and China's cause of peaceful reunification.

7. The two sides will further enhance coordination and cooperation in the United Nations and other multilateral areas, jointly safeguard the interests of developing countries, strengthen cooperation in such mechanisms as the ASEAN plus China, Japan and the ROK, ASEAN plus China and Greater Mekong Sub Regional Economic Cooperation, and promote common development and prosperity of the region.