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Playing Cards of Myanmar with the Giants

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Abstract

Myanmar's strategic location and abundant natural resources always make Myanmar as the core interests of some powerful countries. Since independence, because of historical experiences and national location, Myanmar has always used the neutral and non-aligned foreign policy and followed the five principles of peaceful coexistence. After the world economic crisis in 2008, the importance of Myanmar's strategic position is more obvious. At that time, because of China's influence, Myanmar tried to carry out the political transformation. During this transition period, Myanmar needs support and encouragement from far and near friends. From 2011, western countries and Japan began to contact with Myanmar and helped the democratic transition. Although there is no country challenges Myanmar's sovereignty, the giants have great effects on Myanmar domestic issues, e.g., national reconciliation and terrorist conflicts. So, Myanmar needs to balance national interests and giant powers. Although small countries constitute as a majority of the world, the foreign policy of small states has never been a concern of mainstream of international relations theory. Therefore, this article will describe along with the shift of the world power center, the relationship between Myanmar and China, India, Japan, the United States and the European Union, and then pointing out which policy can find Myanmar's own balance among the giants?

Keywords: Non-aligned foreign policy, National interests, Giant powers, Balance

1. Introduction of Myanmar

Myanmar founded in 849 AD (known as Burma before), has a long history, splendid culture, a good geographical position and abundant natural resources. According to the 2017 census, the national population is more than 50 million. There are seven provinces, seven states and five autonomous regions and a total of 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar. Myanmar is mainly Buddhist country, the majority of the population about 87% is Buddhism, 6% Christian, 4% Islam, 0.5% Hinduism and other religions. Geographically, Myanmar covers an area of 261,228 square miles (677,000 square kilometers), east-west longs 582 miles (936 kilometers) and south-north 1275 miles (2051 kilometers). Myanmar's east, the northeast and the southeast are bordered by China, Laos, Thailand, the west and southwest by Bangladesh, India, Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Myanmar is situated between two powerful countries China and India, on the one hand, Myanmar is the doorway to China's westward policy, and the other is the entrance of India's eastward policy. Myanmar has not only important strategic positions, but also rich natural resources, such as oil, gas, forests, water resources, jade, ruby, gold, and so on. Sometimes its own advantages not only create benefits but also create hurt itself. For example: in 1885, Burma was colonized by Britain because before of Myanmar's abundant natural resources and during World War II in 1942, Burma was the fascism of Japan because of Myanmar's strategic geographical conditions. During the world war, Burma allied with Japan to defeat Britain and allied with Britain to defeat Japan. Then Burma came to realize that the war had divided the world into two parts and that it would not be good for Myanmar to join any part. Therefore, since independence, Myanmar has always attached importance to the strategic location of the country, never allowing any foreign troops to be deployed within its borders, never waging aggression or

interfering in the internal affairs of any other state, and used non-aligned or neutral, independent and active foreign policies to deal with its relations with other countries in its foreign policy.

2. Analysis of Myanmar's diplomatic strategy

Although Myanmar has a large population and an enormous area, it has few decades of economic backwardness and no strong influence in international affairs. Therefore, Myanmar is regarded as a "weak country." Of course, Myanmar's foreign policy is also a "weak state diplomacy." For historical reasons, Myanmar, as a small country invaded by colonialism, has always been particularly sensitive to the issue of sovereignty and independence of the foreign powers. U Nu (1948-1962) government's diplomatic objective is to avoid conflicts between major powers and to avoid interference by a major state in Burma. During the reign of U Nu, Burma fully participated in international affairs and pursued an active neutrality foreign policy. U Nu defined Myanmar's neutralism as five basic principles: do not ally with any great power, to maintain friendly relations with all countries without enemies, do not accept conditional assistance, according to the merits of the matter itself, we will examine each foreign policy issue without hesitation, willing to contribute to world peace and help any country that may need help (Chi- Shad Liang. 1990).

U Nay Win (1962-1988) government's diplomatic goal is to avoid foreign interference in the civil war, to avoid being forced to choose a great power in the cold war and to avoid being involved in the post-colonial war in Southeast Asia. 1974 Constitution stipulated that: "Myanmar has always pursued an independent foreign policy, with the goal of world peace and friendly coexistence among nations and the principle of peaceful coexistence among nations." (贺圣达.1993) The government embodied "neutrality" as six aspects: neutralism and non-alignment, friendship and cooperation, maintaining peace and disarmament, supporting national liberation and opposing colonialism, supporting the principle of national self-determination; and supporting the United Nations.

In the age of globalization, no country can live close to the door, and any country must participate in the life of the international community. The military junta (1988-2010) is aware of this, so the military junta has decided to open the door, its diplomatic goal is to strengthen security, enhance national economic development and prosperity, promote as a peaceful nation and justice world order. But the military government could not get the normal relations with Western because it was a human right issue and a democratization issue, so Burma was sanctioned by the West. In the period of 1988 to 2009, Myanmar's national leadership accepted the view that "national power is much more important than human rights." Since then, Myanmar's foreign policy has promoted economic cooperation with its neighbors. Under these circumstances, China and India began to support Burma. Between 1988 and 2010, China and India became Burma's largest investors and the most important "partner" powers. Myanmar's neutrality foreign policy is to ensure its maximum independence, autonomy, and flexibility, instead of limiting its activity space. (金日.2003) After Western sanctions, although Myanmar has been using the foreign policy of "neutrality, non-alignment" policy, Myanmar's economy and security rely on China. As Myanmar's foreign trade is highly dependent on its neighbors (China and India), more and more have doubt about super powers.

Hence, the junta government proposed "a road map for Democracy," which includes such elements as the convening of the National Convention, the enactment of a new constitution, the National people's general election, etc. Since then, the junta began to enact a new constitution, in early May 2008, the military government enacted a new constitution and then announced that in 2010 will hold a national election. Myanmar began reform of domestic politics and opening-up in 2011. Despite Myanmar has transformed politics, Myanmar's foreign policy has not changed, and its objectives have remained unchanged. As stated in the 2008 Constitution: "The union has an independent, active and non-aligned foreign policy in order to achieve world peace and friendly relations between nations and uphold the principle of peaceful coexistence among nations." In addition, "The union shall not invade any State" and "do not allow the deployment of foreign forces in the territory." The "neutral or non-aligned" foreign policy of the 2008 constitution meant to balance the Sino-Burmese relationship and to reduce the sanctions and political pressure by the west, hoping to develop cooperation with many countries for more assistance.

Since 2011, Myanmar has been normalized in the west and has been closely related to democratic states. Conservative experts have long predicted that 2015 years later Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will maintain good

relations with the West, which for decades has supported her struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. However, Myanmar's foreign minister Daw Aung San Suu Kyi officially announced that the new government's goal is to foster "better relations not only with neighboring countries and between ourselves, but also with the rest of the world and our country." Myanmar's new government wants the good relations not only with the West but also with its neighbors. Myanmar, with its democratic transition, has many needs. It must engage with many countries. It must not be offended or fall with any super power. With the shift of world power center, there are more and more ways for big countries to pursue interests. Myanmar has become the connection between China's "maritime Silk Road" and "Silk Road Economic Belt", the important position of the US's "return to the Asia Pacific" strategy, the door of India's policy toward the East, and the test point of Japan to China, so these big powers re-emphasize the strategic position of Myanmar. The new government's foreign policy is to seek foreign aid strategy, as well as to improve domestic conditions and political stability.

3. Relationship between with the Giants

As Myanmar regains its place on the world stage, its role in global economic and political affairs has become significantly increased. The changing geopolitical policy of the great Powers in the 21st century has made Myanmar's geographical position increasingly important. At the beginning of China's "one- belt and one- road" project, China needs Myanmar's important position more than ever. Because "one- belt and one- road" not only can get energy resources in Myanmar area, but also can connect the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and "maritime Silk Road." As China's image in the Myanmar region continues to rise, India continues to promote cooperation with Myanmar and to change the Indian government's approach to northeastern India. In order to implement the strategy of "returning to the Asia-Pacific" and "two oceans," the United States also needs a good relationship in an important geopolitical region in Asia. Japan can't get Myanmar's natural resources but wants to control China's energy trends, so Japan needs a place to watch China's new energy road. European countries want communications with each Asian country in the second largest economy area of the world, especially with democratic countries, and then want to create parliamentary relations. Therefore, China, India, the United States, Japan and European and American countries also follow their own values and want to have friendly relations with Myanmar. Therefore, since the political transformation, Myanmar has gradually become the core interests of great powers. Since then, China, India, the United States, the European Union and Japan have begun to provide more assistance and support to Myanmar.

3.1. Myanmar and China

China is an important neighbor to the north, northeast, and east of Burma, and the Sino-Burmese relationship is more than 60 years "Pauk- Phaw relations." China is the exporter of Myanmar's natural resources and the biggest investor in Myanmar. Myanmar is the energy generation site of China (southwestern) and one of the most important seaports. After the political transformation of Myanmar in 2001, some scholars believe that China-Myanmar relations will gradually calm down. After the 2015 election, the idea of academics was even more powerful because of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's personal reasons. Therefore, the new Government attaches great importance to the balance of power diplomacy. Her first visit to the destination was a small ASEAN country "Laos." In August 2016, she visited China, the former president U Htin Kyaw visited India in the same month, and then Daw Aung San Suu Kyi visited the United States in September. This sequence indicates that Myanmar understands that "far away relatives are not as close neighbors," hinting that Burma's foreign strategy priorities Beijing in front of Washington. This has made China feel at ease. The new government hopes to rebuild the damaged bilateral cooperation and continue to strengthen the Pauk- Phaw relationship.

The foreign policy of China and Myanmar is the best explained by the geopolitical angle. Because of the unchanged historical and geographical reasons and the common ethnic relations between the two countries, China and Myanmar continue to observe the five principles of peaceful coexistence and establish good-neighborly relations. The most important reason is the reason for Myanmar's national reconciliation. Myanmar's national reconciliation is vital not only to Myanmar but also to maintaining the stability of the China-Myanmar border and the friendly cooperation between China and Myanmar. (中国驻缅甸大使,2017) China needs Myanmar's strategic position because it will be the deep sea-port for China's southwestern province, and then

China can avoid some of the dangers of energy and trade routes. When China officially started the "One- Belt One- Road" project in 2015, China wanted Myanmar's domestic peace because it was going to achieve a safe and stable "Silk Road Economic Belt." China has not interfered in the domestic affairs of other countries, but these years China has had to push the ethnic armed groups in northern Myanmar to actively participate in the peace process and help the Government to achieve the peace process. At the Second and the third Pinlong Peace Conference (May 2017 and July 2018), we can see the impact of China in Myanmar national peace process. As requested by Myanmar government, China has publicly supported the country's participation in peace after the national armed group. China is also concerned about the Rohingya terrorist organization in order to build "the Maritime Silk Road" and the "Bangladesh- China-India-Myanmar economic corridor." On the Rohingya issue, China is prepared to mediate between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Myanmar and Bangladesh are conducting bilateral discussions to solve this problem. China, like the international community, can provide productive assistance. Under the project of "one- belt and one- road," China envisages an economic corridor, extending from Yunnan, China, to Mandalay in the central part of Burma, then to the east to Yangon, and to the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone in the West. This economic corridor will link Myanmar's Central economic zone and the less developed parts of the west can balance the country's development. Therefore, China and Myanmar are carrying out good-neighborly and friendly relations with their respective values to achieve common interests.

Myanmar got along well with the world's largest population, the second largest economy of the neighboring country, China and then bilateral cooperation has gradually built up all over the country. At the same time, China has an impact on all aspects of Myanmar, especially on the domestic peace issue in Myanmar and its dependence on China for its economic, trade and investment. So, during the military government, Burma leaders began to worry about Burma becoming a small country dominated by China. So Myanmar has long been looking for a partner to balance its relationship with China, and of course, it is looking for neighboring countries, for example India.

3.2. Myanmar and India

India has often been worried about China's influence on Myanmar, also hoped to get the natural resources and strategic position of Myanmar, so India began a new Indo-Burma relationship in 1990. India's proposals for cooperation with Myanmar are based on China's commitment to Myanmar.

From the geopolitical point of view, the importance of India to Myanmar is similar to that of China. India is an important neighbor to the west of Myanmar. India's goal is not only to establish good relations with Myanmar but also to change the Indian government's approach to northeastern India. India also is the exporter of Myanmar's natural resources and the second- biggest investor in Myanmar and then Myanmar is one of India strategic neighbors and the only door for India's East policy. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Commerce of Myanmar, China-Myanmar trade is 10 times larger than that of India-Myanmar trade. But Myanmar has not ignored India-Myanmar relations. Myanmar State Counsellor chose Beijing as her visit abroad ahead of New Delhi, but the president chose the first trip to New Delhi at the same month. It indicates that Myanmar understands that "it cannot choose its destined neighbors," expresses that Myanmar's foreign strategy priorities on China and India are the same. Since 2011, India, like the Western countries, supported Myanmar's democratic transition and economic and social development. Myanmar will not leave India on the issue of democratization and the Rohingya issue in Rakhine, and the opportunities for contacts with India have become increasingly great. On the Rohingya issue, India, like China, prepares to mediate between Myanmar and Bangladesh. India intends to strengthen security and counter-terrorism, trade and investment, infrastructure and energy cooperation and cultural cooperation in these regions.

Since 1948, Sino-Indian influence in the Myanmar region has always existed, but it does not harm the other side, because China, Myanmar, and India have adhered to the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." When China and India are competing in the Myanmar region because of geographical factors, Japan, another powerful Asian country, is also participating in the competition.

3.3. Myanmar and Japan

Since 2011, the relationship between Japan and Myanmar has increased markedly. Although Japan is not a big neighbor of Myanmar, Japan's trade with Myanmar has greatly increased than India-Myanmar trade. Japan thinks that China imports oil through Myanmar while avoiding the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea, which is not conducive to Japan. So Japan wants to control China's energy trends. In 2011, U Thein Sein government formulated the five special economic zones for economic development. The core of the economic cooperation between Japan and Myanmar is the Special economic zone of the seaport, such as Thilawa port in the economic capital Yangon and the Dawei port near the Thai-Myanmar border. The Dawei port is located in the Bay of Bengal and 150 miles away from Bangkok. Japan imagines that Dawei port through the Bay of Bengal leads directly to the Indian port, other Southeast Asian countries also imagine that their exports send to Dawei port and then through the Bay of Bengal to the Indian port, rather than through the Strait of Malacca. Otherwise, Dawei port can help Japan to invest in other Southeast Asian countries. Thus, Myanmar can create greater regional connectivity for itself and another mainland Southeast Asian countries. When Myanmar started democratization, Japan strongly supported five projects in Myanmar: national reconciliation, economic cooperation, the promotion of private sector investment, personnel exchange and human resource development.

Although the relations between India-Myanmar and Japan-Myanmar are growing, China is still Myanmar's biggest reliant. Besides, China's economic rises, the Myanmar government realizes that it is not enough to cooperate with India and Japan in order to balance Sino-Myanmar relations. So the junta wants normal relations with the West.

3.4. Myanmar and the West

In 2008, the world had an economic crisis, so America's diplomacy shifted to Southeast Asia. After the 2008 financial crisis, Clinton expressed: Southeast Asia is also inclusive of the world's most dynamic trade and energy routes, from the Indian Ocean through the Straits of Malacca to the Pacific Ocean. So the United States wants to establish a good relationship with Southeast Asia. Both China and the United States are trying to make economic progress through development assistance and major projects. These efforts to consolidate the heritage in their respective activities in the Southeast Asian region are very evident in Myanmar.

Clinton's visit in 2011 and the visit of President Obama in 2012 and 2014, were marked by America's encouragement of democratic transformation to Myanmar. Myanmar, which has not yet been democratized, also needs the support and guidance of the major advocates of human rights and democratic countries of the world. With the guidance and assistance of the United States, Myanmar can smoothly implement the second general election in 2015. The democratization and human rights under the guidance of the United States have reversed the adverse effects on Sino-Myanmar economic cooperation, such as the Myitsonne dam problem, Letpadaung copper and gold mines, and oil and gas pipes from Myanmar's Rakhine state to China's Yunnan province. For Myanmar, in the case of big countries squeezing each other, small country seizes the chance and pursues national interests or realizes the way to survive to maximize benefits. (方天建, 何跃. 2013) Although the United States has little influence on Myanmar's economy, it can play an important role on the multilateral development banks, from 1988-2012 because of the United States' economic sanctions, Myanmar did not get international loan assistance for a long time. In 2013, United States re-engaged with the international banks for Myanmar, so, from this time Myanmar got international loan assistance.

When the Trump administration came to power in 2016, they didn't announce any foreign policy toward Myanmar. However, in November 2017, a visit to Myanmar by Rex Tillerson, the US Foreign Minister, showed Trump's renewed interest in Myanmar or Southeast Asia. In fact, Trump's Southeast Asia policy began five months after President Trump took office, for example, in May 2017, the US Secretary hosted the US-ASEAN special session, in November 2017, President Trump attended the ASEAN Summit in the Philippines and the APEC Summit in Vietnam. According to President Trump's personal business identity, the priority of American diplomacy is "economic power." When Sino-US economic war broke out in early 2018, both countries refused to export and import each other. Therefore, in order to defeat China, the United States must reconcile with other Asian countries. Similarly, to defeat the US, China must also look for other partner countries all over the world. Therefore, the small and medium-sized countries should prepare early how to face this economic war and how to take their own national interests from this situation. At these days, some of the small countries worry about their

economies will not be able to continue their relations with the United States. At this point, Myanmar doesn't need to worry about that. Although Myanmar's economy is small, Myanmar's strategic geographic position can bring a lot of economic and security benefits to major powers. Therefore, there has been no change in the relationship between the US and Myanmar. The United States continues to provide assistance in the following categories: national reconciliation, support for democratic institutions, expansion of economic reform, building resilient and productive communities, and funding for humanitarian assistance.

The United States and western countries generally believe that democracy promotes economic development. If democratization leads the rule of law to be held in the country, other countries will not hesitate to do business in this country. It is said that democratic countries have a freer economic policy and open trade than non-democracy countries. This mechanism could lead to a democratic country becoming part of global trade. For these reasons, the United States and European Union countries adhere to democracy in their foreign policy.

Since the democratic transition started in Myanmar, the European Union has stopped sanctions and strengthened investment in Myanmar. According to the official statistics of Myanmar in 2016, the EU is the fourth largest foreign investor after China, Singapore, and Hong Kong, accounting for about 10% of the total investment. The European Union also provides to help Myanmar's democratization. As the invitation of the Union Election Commission of Myanmar, the EU, together with some 100 observers, deployed the largest international electoral observer Mission in the 2015 general election, confirming the EU's emphasis on electoral reform in the country. When the NLD government came to power in 2016, the European Union provided 3 million euros in aid of the Rohingya conflict and national reconciliation. Since 2011, the EU is firmly committed to supporting democracy, the rule of law and good governance, the peace process, human rights, poverty reduction and sustainable development, economic warfare in the country, and their hope is to help the democratic transition in Myanmar, and to achieve more democracies in the South-East Asian region after the successful democratic transition.

The United States and European Union countries are increasingly willing to reduce economic sanctions and increase investment in Myanmar and Myanmar is happy to do so. In Myanmar's democratization and human rights routes, the West and Japan offered their own help, and the country was greatly encouraged. China and India have been encouraging Myanmar's economic and social development for a long time. With Myanmar's growing contacts with giant countries, Myanmar pays special attention to its neutral foreign policy and is confident that it will strengthen its independence and non-alignment policy without falling to one side. Myanmar more actively encourages greater cooperation with big powers, rather than competing with each other. In fact, Myanmar is only trying to use its strategic values to develop its country. In the absence of any provocation, Myanmar will continue to be friendly with China, while making strategic partnerships with India, the United States, the European Union, and Japan.

4. Conclusion

Myanmar has been used non-aligned foreign policy since independence and got the national objectives and benefits. At present, the new government has a historic opportunity to shape Myanmar's political and economic trajectory, aroused the attention of the big powers. Although no country challenges Myanmar's sovereignty and interests, its political, economic and security issues are affected by the great powers. There is no other country's influence on Myanmar's domestic reconciliation except China. In fact, China cannot achieve Myanmar's national reconciliation, but China can offer a lot of assistance, Myanmar also needs China's assistance. As the Myanmar government turns to the Democratic line, the Rohingya case is becoming more and more serious. The United States and Western countries are beginning to put pressure on Rohingya problems, and they also want to step in to solve this problem. So, the domestic reconciliation and Rohingya issues have great influence and great assistance by China and the Western countries. In the case of anarchy, Myanmar, at the crossroads of great interests, faces many opportunities and challenges. When socioeconomically backward Myanmar seeks powerful partners, Myanmar wants to build a good relationship with any super power. Although Myanmar foreign policy opens based on these national needs, Myanmar, one of the leaders of non-aligned movement countries, will not do alliance with other countries. But, may be, Myanmar will implement a "quasi-alliance" foreign policy with some big countries in accordance with the needs of the national interests, and to adhere to the independent, neutral and free policy of non-alignment. In order to balance power, balance interests, and balance threats,

Myanmar actively participates in the giant partnership and establishes friendly relations with many countries, and Myanmar will continue to implement the "non-alignment policy."

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