NEAR BUT NOT DEAR: BURMA'S RECOGNITION OF NEW CHINA AND THE ORIGINS OF CONTEMPORARY SINO-BURMESE RELATIONS

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded. On December 16, by recognizing it, Burma became the first non-socialist country to do so. [1]On June 8, 1950, diplomatic relations between China and Burma were established. However, in the subsequent years, relations between the two countries were generally cold and alienated. Why didn't Burma, distrustful and fearful of New China, recognize it promptly to avoid resentment instead of holding off for another two and a half months? And why did the establishment of diplomatic ties fail to give impetus to a rapid warming of their relations?

In the past two decades, issues concerning Burma's recognition of New China have drawn the attention of several scholars, whose research perspectives can basically be divided into internal ones and external ones. Drawing on secondary documents from both China and Burma, Japanese scholar Takeji Maruyama and Chinese scholars Fan Hongwei and Jiang Fan outline the discussions from the Burmese side on the recognition of the PRC[2]. Japanese scholar Yasuyuki Miyake digs into

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[1] Strictly speaking, under international law, the recognition of a state and the recognition of a government are two different legal categories. In a narrower sense, the latter applies to the situation where there is only a change of government in a country without any change in territorial sovereignty, in which case the external recognition involves only the recognition of a new government rather than a new state. Therefore, by international law, it was the new CCP regime that Burma recognized at the end of 1949. However, this article follows the conventional reference of the Burmese recognition of the PRC, without making a strict distinction between the recognition of the new state and the new government as is stipulated by international law.

[2] Maruyama, Kôji. "*On the Establishment of Sino-Burmese Diplomatic Relations*", *Minutes of the Faculty of International Studies, Bunka University*, 10, 2000, 2, pp. 45–59; Fan Hongwei. "*Sino-Burma Relations in Early Years of Diplomatic Relations (1949–1953) as Viewed from Declassified Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs*", *Yunnan shehui kexue*, 2008, 2, pp. 135–139; Jiang Fan. "*Historical Contribution of the Overseas Chinese Members of Communist Party of Burma*", *Tanqiu*, 2016, 2, pp. 34–41.

archival documents from Burma, China, Britain, the United States, and India to explore Burma's considerations in determining the opportune moment to recognize New China from the perspectives of how Burma perceived New China and how it communicated with the British Commonwealth countries, all in the context of the long-term development of Sino-Burmese relations. By using archives from multiple countries, Miyake's study provides a more detailed historical account. It explains why Burma, as the first non-socialist country to recognize the PRC, did not establish diplomatic relations with the PRC soon[3]. The existing research has revealed the general history of the establishment of Sino-Burmese diplomatic relations and expounded important historical facts therein. However, due to inadequate access to Burmese and British archives and the absence of relevant Russian archives, these studies have failed to discuss in depth the pros and cons of Burma's decision to recognize New China, the explanations given for the failure to establish Sino-Burmese diplomatic relations promptly are speculative, and there is no analysis of various roles that third parties (such as Britain, India, the US, and the Soviet Union) played in the process[4].

This article conducts in-depth research into the documents from the Burmese National Archives, supplemented by official literature from China, Russia, Britain, the United States, and India. It explores the policy considerations and coping strategies of both sides in Burma's recognition of the PRC and during the negotiations of the establishment of Sino-Burmese diplomatic relations against the general setting of the two countries' foreign strategies, and goes on to analyze the marked improvement in distrust-marred Sino-Burmese relations from 1949 to 1954 from the perspectives of historical memory, geopolitics, ideology and national interests.

1. *Diplomatic Strategies and Mutual Perceptions of China and Burma*

The general backdrop of the establishment of Sino-Burmese diplomatic relations had to do with the overall concept and preliminary practice of the

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[3] Miyake, Yasuyuki. "*On the Process of Establishing Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of the Union of Burma and the People's Republic of China*", *Lengzhan guojishi yanjiu*, 25, 2018, pp. 33–51.

[4] For example, Miyake Yasuyuki in his article speculates that the failure to quickly establish diplomatic relations was due to a lukewarm response from the Chinese side to Burma's recognition of the PRC, and the fact that China proved to be less "threatening" than the U Nu government had thought. But as will be shown later in this article, the British and Russian archives reveal that the actual situation was just the opposite and that the failure was due to mutual distrust and precaution against each other, whence both sides wished to delay the exchange of ambassadors.

two countries' foreign strategies, and their mutual perceptions and judgments.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, Huang Hua, then Director of the Foreign Affairs Office under the Military Control Commission of Nanjing, verbally drew the attention of the Burmese Embassy to Mao's wishes and principles about establishing diplomatic relations expressed two days earlier. On October 5, the Military Control Commission of Nanjing handed the Burmese Embassy an official letter signed by Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai. In the letter, Zhou enclosed a copy of the Proclamation and stated that China considered it necessary to establish normal diplomatic relations with other countries in the world[5]. That started formal communication between China and Burma on the establishment of diplomatic relations. However, it should be noted that there was nothing particular about that official letter sent to Burma. The PRC had submitted letters of the same content to all foreign consulates that had stayed in Beijing[6].

The CCP was in no hurry to establish diplomatic relations with Burma, not only because of the general principles set in this regard by Mao Zedong and other New China's leaders but also because of their negative perception of the U Nu regime in Burma. Burma gained national independence from British colonial rule and seceded from the British Commonwealth on 04 January 1948. Yet in the eyes of the CCP, Burma did not achieve true independence and remained a typical colony economically, politically and militarily, and the U Nu regime was a "henchman" of imperialism and a "reactionary authority implementing the fascist rule"[7]. The CCP advocated internationalism and supported in every way the national liberation movement in Burma against imperialism externally and the U Nu regime internally[8]. In other words, at least before 1952, with Asian nation-states like Burma, which had just emerged from colonial rule, the CCP leaders attached more importance to inter-party rather than inter-state relations.

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[5] "Telegram From Burmese Embassy in Nanking to Foreign Office", 7 October, 1949, National Archives of Myanmar (NAM), 15/3(21)-57, p. 132; Liu Wendong. *Dangdai guojifa de lilun yu shijian*, Tianjin, Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2009, pp. 201–202.

[6] Jin Guangyao. "*UK's Recognition of the PRC during 1949–1950*", *Lishi yanjiu*, 1994, 5, p. 123; Li Ruiju. "*An Exploration of Canada's Recognition of the PRC (1949–1950)*", *Lishi jiaoxue*, 2016, 11, p. 68.

[7] *Renmin ribao*, 3 April, 1948, p. 2; *Renmin ribao*, 10 May, 1948, p. 4; *Renmin ribao*, 7 November, 1948, p. 2.

[8] Liu Shaoqi. *Jianguo yilai Liushaoqi wengao*, 1, Beijing, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2005, pp. 50–53, 175–180.

Therefore, in early 1951, the International Liaison Department of the CCP CC was officially established, whose primary responsibility was liaising with and helping fraternal parties in the Eastern countries[9].

On the other hand, for the U Nu regime, the post-independence situation was characterized by both domestic and external problems: the American-Soviet Cold War was already underway, and in its immediate vicinity were the two major powers of China and India; internally, there were anti-government movements led by the communist party and ethnic minority forces, and with just over 30% of the territory under effective government control, the prospects for economic recovery and growth were bleak. In such a situation, those in power were very concerned about the security of the country and the regime and saw Burma as "hemmed in like a tender gourd among the cactus"[10].

Soon, the Burma government leaders began to give more attention to its foreign policy. On May 25, 1948, Prime Minister U Nu put forward the "Programme of Leftist Unity", which contained 15 points, declaring that his government would establish "political and economic relations with the Soviet Union and East European democratic countries in the same manner as we are now having with Britain and the United States", and would reject any external aid which would "compromise the political, economic and strategic independence of Burma". On 28 September 1949, U Nu further explained his diplomatic position in a speech to the National Assembly: Burma had no intention to be anti-left or anti-right, but was only interested in non-aggression treaties; Yangon's diplomacy would not be dictated by Britain, the United States, or the Soviet Union; Burma wished to maintain equally friendly relations with Britain, the US, and the Soviet Union. On December 11 of that year, U Nu officially declared the policy of independence and nonalignment[11].

Amidst intense East-West confrontation and challenging internal and external pressures, was U Nu's diplomacy truly free from bias? Did Burma ever

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[9] Shen Zhihua. "*Mao Zedong and the Eastern Information Bureau: The Transfer of Revolutionary Leadership in Asia*", *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, 2011, 6, pp. 33–34.

[10] Cavoski, Jovan. "*Arming Nonalignment: Yugoslavia's Relations with Burma and the Cold War in Asia (1950–1955)*", *Cold War International History Project, Working Paper*, 2010, 61, pp. 16–17; Egreteau, Renaud and Jagan, Larry. *Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma: Understanding the Foreign Relations of the Burmese Praetorian State*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2013, pp. 72–73.

[11] Liang Chi-shad. *Burma's Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1990, pp. 60–61.

consider seeking alliances among the Cold War powers? On the surface, shortly after gaining independence, Burma adopted a neutral stance, maintaining a balance between East and West. However, the immediate backdrop to U Nu's statement was the armed insurgency waged by the Communist Party of Burma (CPM), which had been active since the country's independence. In order to appease the CPM and re-integrate them into the ruling party, or at least to gain as much support as possible from other left-wing forces in the country, U Nu proposed to form a unified left-wing party and develop relations with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, in order to eliminate Britain's "misperceptions", on more than one occasion, Burma stated unofficially that U Nu's Programme of Leftist Unity was issued with domestic public opinion and internal political difficulties in mind; that rather than an official policy statement of the government, the Programme only represented the position of the ruling party, i.e., the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League; and that the Burmese government would continue to oppose the Communist Party with all its might, as it had done in the past[12].

As a matter of fact, when Burma first gained independence, the U Nu government pursued a pro-Western foreign policy. As early as 29 August 1947, just before independence, Burma signed a defense agreement with Britain, under which Britain would provide Burma with military equipment and a military advisory group[13]. In other words, Burma had maintained a *de facto* alliance with Britain. Moreover, on 14 February 1950, General Ne Win, Burma's Deputy Prime Minister, sent emissaries to talk with US Embassy officials in Yangon to discuss the issue of an alliance with the West, especially Britain and the US, in exchange for long-term economic and military aids from the West. US Secretary of State Dean Acheson replied that the US considered Burma to be part of the free world and was willing to enter into a mutually supportive relationship with it. So there was no need for a formal alliance between the US and Burma[14].

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[12] *British Documents of Foreign Affairs* (*BDFA*), 4, from 1946 through 1950, E, Asia, 1948, 7, Burma, Ceylon, India and Pakistan, October 1947–December 1948, Washington, University Publications of America, 2001, pp. 38, 52–53.

[13] Cavoski, Jovan. "*Arming Nonalignment: Yugoslavia's Relations with Burma and the Cold War in Asia (1950–1955)*", *op. cit*, p. 24.

[14] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1950, 6, East Asia and the Pacific, Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1976, pp. 232–233; Taylor, Robert H. *General Ne Win: A Political Biography*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015, p. 137.

It is conceivable that the pro-Western and anti-communist Burmese government was fearful of and hostile to New China. But this fear and hostility stemmed not only from the fact that the PRC was a socialist state but also from Burma's historical memory of China. Due to the long-standing suzerain-vassal relationship between China and Burma and the several large-scale wars since the 13th century, the memories of China's invasions had stayed with the Burmese people[15]. As a result, Burma had publicly expressed its concern about the "China threat" long before its independence. Around the end of the Second World War, Pan-Asianism, which advocated the self-determination of Asian nations, emerged. In December 1945, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India (August 1947 to 27 May 1964) formally proposed an Asian conference to "help recognize Asian issues and promote understanding among Asian people." From March 23 to April 12, 1947, the First Asian Relations Conference was held in New Delhi, India, with Burma participating[16]. During the conference, the Burmese delegation was outspoken in stating that while Western rule, such as that of Britain, had wreaked havoc on Burma, Asian rule, such as those of China and India, would be even worse. But it soon became clear to Burma that the greater threat came from the CCP's victory in mainland China, rather than from India[17]. With this mindset, the U Nu government kept a close eye on developments of the Chinese Civil War and soon began to give serious consideration to the recognition of the imminent CCP regime. In this process, it was only natural for the pro-British and pro-US Burma to refer to the attitudes of the US and, more importantly, the Commonwealth countries towards China.

2. *Burma's Recognition of New China*

In mid-September 1948, the CCP launched the Liaoxi-Shenyang Campaign, which ended in early November with a crushing defeat of the GMD troops, showing the first sign of the outcome of the Chinese Civil War. During

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[15] Yu Dingbang. *Zhongmian guanxishi*, Beijing, Guangming Daily Press, 2000, pp. 26–39; He Shengda. "*The Sino-Burmese War from Late Jiajing Era to Wanli Era and Its Effects*", *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu*, 2002, 2, pp. 73–79; Miyake, Yasuyuki. "*On the Process of Establishing Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of the Union of Burma and the People's Republic of China*", *op. cit*, p. 35.

[16] Zheng Xianwu. "*The Bandung Conference and the Development of Regionalism in Southeast Asia*", *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, 2015, 9, pp. 34–35.

[17] Roy, Nabarun. "*Assuaging Cold War Anxieties: India and the Failure of SEATO*", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 26, 2015, 2, pp. 327–328.

this period, the Burmese Embassy in Nanjing kept a close watch on the changing situation of the Chinese Civil War. In his first fortnightly report in November, the Burmese Ambassador U Myint Thein analyzed that the CCP was more likely to come out as the winner. Once the CCP occupied Nanjing, the GMD capital, Burma would have to face the issue of recognizing the CCP regime in the north. This issue should be put on the Burmese government's agenda immediately. Moreover, it was very likely that the CCP would eventually unify China. Once that happened, the resource-rich Yunnan would be industrialized on the Soviet model, thus posing a threat to Burma and even Southeast Asia[18]. On December 9, in another special report, the Burmese Embassy in Nanjing again urged its Foreign Office to ponder on how to respond to the CCP capture of Nanjing and even its occupation of the whole China in the coming years[19]. In response, on December 21, the Burmese Foreign Office stated that, if a GMD-CCP coalition government replaced the GMD government, or if the CCP achieved an outright victory and established a new government, Burma would have no choice but to recognize the new Chinese government. What was most worrisome was the possible emergence of two Chinas, one under the CCP rule and the other under the GMD rule. In that case, the Burmese government should refer to the attitudes of India, Pakistan, and Siam (now Thailand) on the issue of recognizing China under the CCP rule[20]. The above could be said to largely represented the Burmese government's subsequent policy trend on the issue of recognizing New China.

In the first half of 1949, Burma took several measures to cope with the potential CCP threat. In order to prevent the possible invasion via Yunnan, the U Nu government set about strengthening its border defense and, for that matter, requested military assistance from Britain[21]. Meanwhile, Burmese Prime Minister U Nu proposed to Indian Prime Minister Nehru that India, Pakistan, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Burma sign a defense and economic treaty[22]. It should

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[18] "Extract from Fortnightly Report of the Burmese Embassy at Nanking for the period ending 15th November 1948", 18 November, 1948, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 69.

[19] "Extract from Special Report of the Burmese Embassy, Nanking, dated 9th December, 1948", 9 December, 1948, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 70.

[20] "Letter from Burmese Foreign Office", 21 December, 1948, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 1.

[21] *BDFA*, 4, from 1946 through 1950, E, Asia, 1949, 9, Burma, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia, The Philippines, and South-East Asia and the Far East (General), January 1949–December 1949, Washington, University Publications of America, 2003, pp. 15–16.

[22] *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (*SWJN*), 2, 11, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 372.

be noted that, at this time, the Burmese Embassy in Nanjing was taking a more cautious approach to its China policy. In U Myint Thein's view, there was a need to take preventive measures along the Sino-Burmese border, but one should not provoke the CCP by launching meaningless offensive propaganda against it[23]. Similarly, influenced in part by Soviet assessments, the CCP at this time also regarded Burma as a threat. In the view of the CCP leaders such as Mao Zedong, Burma remained within the British "sphere of influence" and functioned as a military base for imperialist powers such as Britain and the United States in their efforts to contain the People's Liberation Army. The U Nu government was therefore characterized as a reactionary regime. Accordingly, the CCP supported the Burmese national liberation movement, which opposed imperialism externally and the U Nu government internally[24]. Even with regard to the Burmese Communist Party, Mao Zedong did not extend full trust. He maintained that many members of its Politburo were American and British agents, and that interactions with them required a high degree of caution[25].

In January 1949, in order to gain diplomatic initiative against the future CCP regime, Britain and the US joined forces with other countries to resist a request from the GMD government to move their embassies from Nanjing to Guangzhou. Additionally, the two countries also sought to coordinate a common policy on the recognition of the CCP regime[26]. On May 28, Burma's Foreign Minister E Maung told Jerome K. Huddle, US Ambassador to Burma, that Burma would align itself with the US, India, Pakistan and Ceylon on that issue. However, two days later the Burmese Foreign Office changed its position. It wanted the US, India and other countries to consult with Burma on their China policies and apologized for E Maung's failure to articulate Burma's position in previous talks[27]. It was quite obvious then that the Burmese

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[23] "Copy of Confidential D. O. Letter No. S. N. 15(a)", 10 June, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 87.

[24] *Renmin ribao*, 10 April, 1948, p. 2; *Renmin ribao*, 17 April, 1948, p. 2; *Renmin ribao*, 3 June, 1949, p. 3; *Renmin ribao*, 17 June, 1949, p. 4; Shen Zhihua. *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: Zhongsu guanxi*, 2, March 1949–July 1950, Shanghai, Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2015, pp. 58–59, 67.

[25] Shen Zhihua. *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: Zhongsu guanxi*, 1, January 1945–February 1949, Shanghai, Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2015, pp. 410–411.

[26] Wu Quancheng. "On the British Embassy Moving Southward and the 'Common Front' during the Liberation of Nanjing", *Lishi jiaoxue wenti*, 2021, 5, pp. 42–48.

[27] "Telegram From American Embassy in Rangoon to the Secretary of State", 13 June, 1949, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Burma, Classified General Records, 1945–1961, Box 6, National Archive II, College Park, MD.

government wanted to maintain flexibility on this issue, instead of being entirely subject to other countries' will. On June 7, US Embassy in Yangon informed E Maung that the US government was willing to consult with Burma on its China policy. At that time, the shared attitude of the relevant countries was not to initiate discussions with the CCP on recognition, but to wait for the CCP to raise the issue and then to consult with each other before preparing to recognize the CCP government. That was known as the "common front policy", proposed by the United States. On August 9, the Burmese Foreign Office said it totally agreed with that policy[28].

In August, as the time for the establishment of the CCP regime drew nearer, Burma's concerns about the threat from China became more apparent. For example, E Maung believed that the CCP would not hesitate to cross the border and take over almost the entire Kachin State, and even invade Burma to plunder rice. Therefore, Burma wished to exchange intelligence and pursue a common policy toward China with such countries as Britain, the US and Pakistan[29]. One thing that the U Nu government was most anxious to learn about was the British policy on the recognition of the future CCP regime. The advice given by the British government was that recognition should not be rushed, but neither should it be deliberately denied[30]. At this time, the CCP was also closely monitoring the progress of the Burmese national liberation movement, Burma's participation in the formation of an Asian anti-communist alliance, and its efforts to seek assistance from Britain and the United States[31].

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[28] "Letter from U.S. Embassy in Burma to E Maung", 7 June, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, pp. 82–83; "Letter from James Barrington to Jerome K. Huddle", 9 June, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 84.

[29] "Record of Conversation between Mr. Dening and the Burmese Foreign Minister on 10 August", 10 August, 1949, The National Archives (NA), London, FO 371/75685; "Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Burmese Foreign Minister", 22 August, 1949, NA, FO 371/75685; "Conversation between the Minister of State and the Burmese Foreign Minister", 10 August, 1949, *BDFA*, 4, From 1946 through 1950, E, Asia, 1949, 9, Burma, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia, The Philippines, and South-East Asia and the Far East (General), January 1949–December 1949, *op. cit*, pp. 37–38; "Telegram From the Department of State to American Embassy in Rangoon", 27 August, 1949, RG 59, General Records of Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1945–1949, Box 6132, National Archive II, College Park, MD.

[30] "Telegram from Foreign Office to Burmese Embassy at London", 17 September, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 122; "Views of H.M.G. on Situation in China", 21 September, 1949, NA, FO 371/75815.

[31] *Renmin ribao*, 26 July, 1949, p. 1; *Renmin ribao*, 15 August, 1948, p. 3; *Renmin ribao*, 20 August, 1949, p. 3; *Renmin ribao*, 5 September, 1949, p. 3.

Underlying these concerns were the CCP's opposition to the U Nu government and its apprehension that Britain and the United States might use Burma as a base from which to threaten the future CCP regime. All of this foreshadowed that, in the initial period following the founding of the People's Republic of China, the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Burma would face considerable difficulties.

Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the United States explicitly told Burma not to rush to recognize New China because its government had not committed itself to international obligations, its sovereignty was not yet clear and the US had not yet severed its ties with the GMD government[32]. The US concerns about Burma's eagerness to recognize New China were not totally unfounded. According to British observations, a growing number of Burmese people believed that the recognition of New China was just a matter of time[33]. These observations proved to be largely accurate. On November 9, Maung Gyee, Burma's Acting Foreign Minister, suggested to Foreign Minister E Maung that all signs pointed to the imminent recognition of Communist China by Britain and India. It was obvious that Burma could not afford to lag behind on this matter and should immediately make the decision to recognize New China without having to consult with other countries. This was also in accord with the common policy of keeping pace with Britain, India and possibly Pakistan[34]. At least from this point onwards, the Burmese government mainly considered the position of the Commonwealth countries rather than that of the US, which had so far refused to recognize the CCP regime.

The Burmese government then initiated intensive communications with other countries, particularly Britain and India, to determine whether and when they would recognize the new Chinese government. However, the responses were mixed. The Burmese Ambassador in London reported that the British government was likely to recognize Communist China soon, and the British Ambassador in Nanjing was expected to return the following week for consultations on the matter. Meanwhile, the Burmese Embassy in London learned from the Ceylon government officials that the Commonwealth countries might

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[32] "Telegram from Burmese Embassy at Washington to Foreign Office", 17 October, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 146.

[33] "Outwards Telegram From Commonwealth Relations Office", 5 November, 1949, NA, FO 371/75819.

[34] "Telegram from Foreign Office to Burmese Consulate at New York", 9 November, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 149.

simultaneously recognize New China in about a week. However, India and Pakistan were opposed to such idea and favored doing it separately[35]. According to the Burmese Embassy in New Delhi, the Indian Foreign Ministry had said that Britain and India might recognize New China at the same time, no later than December 15, and that India did not object to the Burmese recognition of New China earlier, but suggested the recognition of New China take place simultaneously[36]. Burma was very anxious about the imminent recognition of New China by Britain. E Maung immediately checked with Britain, but the British official denied it. According to the British official, E Maung appeared quite relieved at that, who then explained that the recognition issue was very important to Burma, for it might affect its border security. He pleaded with Britain to include Burma in consultations on that issue[37]. Britain quickly promised to communicate with Burma in a timely fashion before a decision was made on the issue[38].

After gaining a preliminary understanding of the positions of relevant countries and receiving assurance from Britain about consultation, on November 19, E Maung set forth his views on the issue systematically. In his opinion, a common front with the US, Britain and other countries on the recognition of New China did not mean Burma could not act promptly. Burma had made this clear to both the US and Britain, who had seen that Burma was facing a different problem from theirs. Recognition was a certainty; it was only the matter of timing that needed to be deliberated. It was very unlikely to recognize the CCP regime before the close of the UN General Assembly meeting, because doing so might bring very negative effects. If the Sino-Burmese border remained in GMD's control after the recognition, Burma would be under great pressure. It was a special issue that set Burma apart from other countries. Burma did not want to be the first country in the region to recognize the CCP regime, as other

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[35] "Extract from telegram No.156 dated the 10th November 1949 from the Burmese Ambassador in London", 10 November, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 154.

[36] "Telegram from Burmese Embassy at New Delhi to Foreign Office", 11 November, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 155.

[37] "Recognition of the Chinese Communist Government", 14 November, 1949, NA, FO 371/75821.

[38] "Recognition of Chinese Communist Government: Burmese Government Wish to have Early Information on H.M. Government's Decision to Ensure Co-ordinate Action", 10 November, 1949, NA, FO 371/75820; "Telegram From Foreign Office to Rangoon", 14 November, 1949, NA, FO 371/75820.

countries might suddenly change their minds. But neither could Burma afford to be the last to recognize the CCP regime by constant delays[39].

Soon India's position became clear too. On November 20, India delivered a note to Burma making clear its position on the recognition of New China: the CCP regime had been formally established and for now, it was solid, or at least would continue to rule China for a long period of time; the recognition of the CCP regime was inevitable, but recognition in itself did not mean endorsement of the policies pursued by the regime; delay in recognition would only lead to unfavorable political and economic situations and exacerbate xenophobic sentiments of the new Chinese regime; however, it would also be unwise for Burma to rush to recognize the CCP regime any time soon; Burma should wait until the UN General Assembly had discussed the China issue; all things considered, it was proper to recognize the CCP regime between December 15 and 25[40].

Although significant progress had been made in establishing the positions of the Commonwealth countries on the issue of recognizing New China, leading officials in the Burmese Foreign Office were still worried at this time. In late November, E Maung viewed the threat from the CCP as more serious than that in early October, especially with regard to the possibility of infiltration into Burma across the border[41]. By this time, the main battleground of the Chinese Civil War had moved to the southwest. On November 29, Zhou Enlai issued the following public statement: "It is the unshakeable policy of our government to completely eliminate all GMD reactionary armed forces. Wherever the defeated GMD forces might flee, the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China reserves the right to inquire into the matter, and the government of any country that harbors the GMD forces must be held responsible and bear all the consequences arising therefrom"[42]. The Chinese

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[39] "Telegram from Foreign Minister to Foreign Office", 19 November, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 171.

[40] *SWJN*, 2, 14, 1, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 513–514; "Telegram from Burmese Embassy at New Delhi to Foreign Office", 23 November, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 174.

[41] "Memorandum of Conversation", 26 November, 1949, RG 59, General Records of Department of State, Central Decimal File, 1945–1949, Box 6132, National Archive II, College Park, MD.

[42] Zhou Enlai. *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao*, 1, Beijing, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008, pp. 593–594.

Foreign Ministry then handed over the text of the statement to Burma[43]. The Burmese government was very upset because if the GMD forces should flee across the border, the CCP forces might enter Burma on the pretext of chasing them down[44]. Such concerns, in turn, prompted the Burmese government to consider further the possibility of recognizing the CCP regime at the earliest opportunity.

On December 5, the Burmese Foreign Office telegraphed its embassies in London and New Delhi, ordering the embassy officials to immediately convey to the British and Indian governments that, in view of the special position Burma was in, the recognition of Communist China must not be delayed too much and Burma was considering doing it at any time after December 11[45]. On hearing that, the British Government said that it did not want to delay too much on this matter and that a decision would be taken between December 12 and 19, probably on December 15; that Britain would push the relevant countries to recognize Communist China at about the same time and hoped that the Burmese government would not do it before Britain had made a decision; and that Britain would contact Burma again once the decision had been made[46]. The Indian government, for its part, replied that it would wait until December 19 for Britain to make a decision on the issue before determining when to do so[47]. Soon, the Burmese government agreed to postpone the recognition of New China until the British government had made a decision[48].

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[43] "Statement by Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai to 12 Countries on the Elimination of Remnant KMT Troops and Replies from the Countries Concerned", 29 November, 1949, Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (CFMA), 102-00093-01; "To Secretary-General of United Nations", undated, NAM, 12/6-499, pp. 14–22.

[44] *BDFA*, 4, From 1946 through 1950, Series E, Asia, 1949, 9, Burma, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia, The Philippines, and South-East Asia and the Far East (General), January 1949–December 1949, *op. cit*, pp. 45–46.

[45] "Telegram from Foreign Office to Burmese Embassies, London and New Delhi", 5 December, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 177.

[46] "Proposal of the Burmese Government to Recognise the Chinese Communist Government soon after 11th December", 6 December, 1949, NA, FO 371/75826.

[47] "Telegram from Burmese Embassies at New Delhi to Foreign Office", 7 December, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 180.

[48] "Recognition of the Chinese Communist Government: Agreement of the Burmese Government to Defer Action until H. M. Government have Taken a Decision", 8 December, 1949, NA, FO 371/75826.

On December 15, the British Cabinet discussed the issue of recognizing New China. It approved the proposals by Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin that the CCP government should be recognized at the earliest opportunity and that the rest of the Commonwealth, the United States and other friendly countries should be informed once the time of recognition was set, to ensure that as many countries as possible would recognize the CCP government in tandem or largely in tandem with Britain[49]. It could be said that this Cabinet meeting remained undecided as to when Britain would recognize New China.

At this point, the Burmese government decided that it could not wait any longer. On December 15, the same day that the British Cabinet discussed the issue, the Burmese Foreign Office sent an urgent telegram to its Embassy in Washington, stating that in view of recent developments in southwest China, Burma must recognize the CCP regime immediately, and requesting the Embassy to inform the US State Department of this at once[50]. The following day, the Burmese Foreign Office informed James Bowker, the British Ambassador to Burma, that although on the previous day the British Cabinet failed to set a date for recognizing the CCP regime, this should not prevent the Burmese government from making its own decision. Because of the developments in China, particularly in Yunnan, the Burmese government decided to recognize the CCP regime on that day[51]. At the same time, the Burmese Foreign Office sent a similar briefing to Abdul Rauf, Indian Ambassador to Burma[52].

In terms of international law and practice, there are two types of recognition: Express Declaration and Implied Recognition. The former generally refers to the explicit recognition of a new state or government through such means as direct communication with the other party or issuing public statements; the latter generally refers to the indirect recognition of a new state or government through signing a formal bilateral treaty with the other party[53]. Burma chose to recognize New China by express declaration.

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[49] *Documents on British Policy Overseas* (*DBPO*), 1, 8, Britain and China, 1945–1950, London, Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp. 425–426.

[50] "Telegram from Foreign Office to Burmese Embassy at Washington", 15 December, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 185.

[51] "Letter from J. Barrington to R. J. Bowker", 16 December, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 191.

[52] "Letter from J. Barrington to M. A. Rauf", 16 December, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 193.

[53] Grant, John P. and Barker, J. Craig. *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of International Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 507–508.

On December 16, E Maung sent a telegram to Zhou Enlai, saying that he had received the Proclamation issued by Mao Zedong on October 1 and sent to the Burmese Embassy in Nanjing. "The Government of the Union of Burma, believing that the Central People's Government of China is supported by the Chinese people and in view of the traditional friendship between the people of China and Burma, hereby decides to recognize the People's Republic of China and looks forward to the establishment of diplomatic relations and the exchange of envoys"[54]. So, after over a year of deliberation and communications with relevant countries, Burma decided to recognize New China and thus became the first non-socialist country to recognize the People's Republic of China.

3. *Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and Burma through Negotiation*

On learning that Burma had recognized New China, on December 19, Mao Zedong, who was visiting Moscow, telegraphed Liu Shaoqi, "The Burma government's request for establishing diplomatic relations should be followed up by a telegram asking whether it is willing to sever diplomatic relations with the GMD. Meanwhile, we should ask their government to send a representative to Beijing to negotiate the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Burma. The establishment of diplomatic relations will be decided depending on the outcome of the negotiations. Such a procedure is absolutely necessary for all capitalist countries"[55]. It can be seen that Mao classified Burma as a capitalist country and made severing diplomatic relations with the GMD government and negotiating with New China prerequisites for all capitalist countries to establish formal diplomatic relations with the PRC. Two days later, Zhou Enlai telegraphed E Maung in reply to express the above position[56].

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[54] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, Beijing, China Pictorial Press, 2006, pp. 358–359.

[55] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 360.

[56] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 359.

According to the observations and analysis of the British Embassy in Burma, upon receiving Zhou's telegram, the Burmese government and some media were surprised, disappointed, upset and even displeased. In their view, the CCP's response was cold, and Burma was not given the courtesy it deserved as the first country outside the Soviet bloc to recognize the CCP regime. On December 27, the Burmese Foreign Office privately told British Embassy officials in Yangon that Burma would not reply to Zhou for the time being[57]. According to normal international practice, the process of establishing diplomatic relations is completed by exchanging letters or telegrams between the recognizing and recognized parties expressing recognition and willingness to establish diplomatic relations without any need for negotiation[58]. In this regard, Burma was not totally unjustifiable in saying that it did not understand China's response.

In fact, the issue of Burma severing relations with the GMD government, which was the foremost concern for the CCP leaders, had already been resolved, and there was no solid obstacle to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Burma. On December 16, the day Burma recognized New China, the Burmese Foreign Office informed Tu Yun-tan, the GMD government's ambassador to Burma about the matter[59]. Two days later, Ye Gongchao, the GMD government's "Foreign Minister", publicly expressed his shock at the eagerness of the Burmese government, which was then engaged in a military confrontation with the Communist Party of Burma, to recognize the CCP regime, and he, on behalf of the GMD government, formally renounced diplomatic relations with Burma[60].

On January 18, 1950, Burma's new Foreign Minister Sao Hkun Hkio wrote to inform Zhou Enlai that Burma had severed diplomatic relations with

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[57] "Minutes from A. A. E. Franklin", 30 December, 1949, NA, FO 371/75829; "Possible Reaction in Burma to Reply from Peking Government to Burmese Note on Recognition", 29 December, 1949, NA, FO 371/75830.

[58] Luo Guoqiang. "*On the Nature of Government Recognition and Principles Applied*", *Shanxi daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, 2017, 5, pp. 100–101; Zhang Mianli. "*Mao Zedong and New China's Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with Foreign Countries through Negotiations*", *Dangdai zhongguoshi yanjiu*, 2007, 2, p. 89.

[59] "Letter from J. Barrington to Tu Yuen-Tan", 16 December, 1949, NAM, 15/3(21)-57, p. 192.

[60] Zhu Xianghui and Fan Hongwei. "*Seventy Years of China-Myanmar Relations: The Paukphaw Metabolism*," *Nanyang wenti yanjiu*, 2020, 1, p. 16; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 December, 1949, p. 12.

the GMD government. At the same time, the Burmese government-appointed U Pe, formerly First Secretary of the Embassy in China and Consul General in Kunming, as Chargé d'Affaires ad interim. If necessary, U Pe would go to Beijing on behalf of Burma to negotiate the establishment of diplomatic relations. It was hoped that China would provide all facilities for this purpose[61]. Accordingly, Liu Shaoqi instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assist U Pe in travelling to Nanjing to perform his duties[62]. However, Burma's subsequent responses and arrangements were quite slow. It was not until mid-February that Sao Hkun Hkio officially set about dispatching U Pe to Nanjing and requested China's assistance. And it was not until early March that U Pe proposed to fly to Beijing for the negotiations. Of course, there were objective reasons, such as the poor transport and communication conditions, but there was also the possibility of a deliberate delay on the part of the Burmese government[63]. On his way from Kunming to Nanjing, U Pe expressed his desire to discuss issues such as the exchange of ambassadors, the establishment of consulates on both sides, the border issue, and the postal and commercial exchanges. On April 11, U Pe arrived in Nanjing[64].

The process of the negotiation showed that, apart from the establishment of diplomatic relations, the border issue was clearly of primary concern to the U Nu government, which wanted to use the negotiation to get China to commit to maintaining the status quo of the Sino-Burmese border. As far as the negotiation

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[61] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 362.

[62] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, pp. 363–364.

[63] It is also notable that China showed no apparent eagerness in establishing diplomatic relations either and eventually decided to escort U Pe to Beijing by land transport. For details of the communications between the two sides, see Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 364; Zhou Enlai. *Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the State*, 2, Beijing, Central Party Literature Press, 2008, p. 182; Miyake, Yasuyuki. "*On the Process of Establishing Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of the Union of Burma and the People's Republic of China*", *op. cit*, p. 48.

[64] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, pp. 365–366.

was concerned, Burma seemed less eager to establish formal diplomatic relations with China than to recognize New China, and in a private talk with officials from the US Embassy in Yangon in early December 1949, then Burmese Foreign Minister E Maung expressed the view that Burma would recognize the CCP regime by the end of December but feared that such an early recognition would lead to the CCP's infiltration into Burma using Yunnan as a base. Therefore, it was hoped that the two countries would delay the exchange of ambassadors for as long as possible[65]. E Maung's concerns largely explained why Burma deliberately delayed the establishment of diplomatic relations with China and was particularly concerned about border security beyond the diplomatic issue.

In late April, U Pe arrived in Beijing. The Chinese side drew up a two-step negotiation procedure: in the first stage, the Chinese side would present the preconditions for establishing diplomatic relations to the Burmese side, and wait for Burma to respond; in the second stage, if Burma's response was satisfactory, then the exchange of envoys would be negotiated[66].

At the end of April, China and Burma formally went into negotiations on the establishment of diplomatic relations. First of all, the Chinese side asked the Burmese government what it would do with the institutions and properties of the GMD government in Burma[67], to which the reply was: the Burmese government had never recognized any GMD institutions, except for the former Chinese Embassy, and had withdrawn recognition of that Embassy immediately after recognizing the People's Republic of China; as far as the Burmese government was aware, the GMD had no property or funds in Burma, and should such property and funds be found to exist, they would be transferred to the ownership of the PRC Government[68]. The Chinese side expressed satisfaction

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[65] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, pp. 365–366.

[66] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 366.

[67] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 367.

[68] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 368.

with Burma's response[69]. Therefore, negotiations quickly progressed to the second stage. Both parties agreed to establish diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level, with Yao Zhongming appointed as the Chinese Ambassador and U Myint Thein as the Burmese Ambassador[70]. On June 8, China and Burma official formalized their diplomatic relations[71].

For a while, the Sino-Burmese relationship can be characterized as "near but not dear". In other words, the establishment of diplomatic ties itself failed to promote a marked improvement in bilateral relations. On December 18, just two days after Burma recognized New China, when asked why Burma was so quick to recognize the CCP regime, Foreign Minister E Maung replied, "In the last 50 years, there have been border raids by Chinese and Burmese bandits, and this time of the year is the best season for them. Unless we have some relations with the country's government, we will not be able to stop them. That is the reason for the recognition of the new government"[72]. These words implicitly indicated that Burma did not recognize New China because it approved the CCP's position and policies. What was more, in early January 1950, in order to prevent the CCP from creating chaos in Burma, U Nu actively promoted a defense pact among India, Pakistan and Burma[73]. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, Burma's first ambassador to China, U Myint Thein, arrived in Beijing to present his credentials. At first, the Chinese government intended to arrange for the Vice Chairman of the Central People's Government to receive the credentials, which was rejected by the Burmese government, saying that if Mao Zedong, the head of state, did not come forward, then U Myint Thein would return and withdraw recognition of the People's Republic of China. Eventually, Mao Zedong accepted the credentials presented by U Myint Thein. This incident apparently led Burma to believe that China was not treating it as an equal sovereign state[74]. Moreover, it did not take long for U

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[69] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, pp. 369–370.

[70] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, p. 372.

[71] *Renmin ribao*, 9 June, 1950, p. 1.

[72] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 December, 1949, p. 12.

[73] *SWJN*, 2, 14, 1, *op. cit*, p. 505.

[74] Mende, Tibor. *South-east Asia between Two Worlds*, London, Turnstile Press, 1955, p. 154.

Myint Thein to complain to US Embassy officials in Yangon that he had a hard time dealing with Chinese diplomats because of the rigidity of their positions, the formality of their procedures and the fact that all communications must be conducted through interpreters. All this made it difficult for diplomatic representatives from non-communist countries to obtain information of value[75]. In short, due to Burma's long-standing distrust and fears of China, as well as the stark differences in social systems, especially in the way of conducting diplomacy, communication between the two countries was not smooth after the formal establishment of diplomatic relations and Burma continued to view China as a major security threat.

The CCP leaders held similar distrust of Burma. In early January 1950, Mao Zedong expressed his understanding of Burma's recognition of New China to Ivan Vladimirovich Kovalyov, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) plenipotentiary to the CCP CC. In his view, Burma was a country subordinate to the US and Britain and recognized the CCP regime firstly to protect its economic and political interests in China but also to engage in sabotage against China's new democratic system. Because of this, China would postpone the exchange of diplomatic missions with countries like Burma[76]. Based on such judgment, China publicly warned the U Nu government in early June not to allow the Anglo-American bloc to build airports in Burma that might threaten China's security[77]. Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy in Yangon kept reporting to the Foreign Ministry that the Burmese government had been cold, perfunctory and suspicious of China. According to Chinese diplomats in Burma, "the Burmese government has been two-faced by fundamentally opposing our country while pretending to be worried"[78].

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[75] "Telegram from American Embassy in Rangoon to the Secretary of State", 7 December, 1950, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Burma, Classified General Records, 1950–1952, Box 10, National Archive II, College Park, MD.

[76] Shen Zhihua. *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: Zhongsu guanxi*, 2, March 1949–July 1950, Shanghai, Dongfang chuban zhongxin, p. 220.

[77] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 June, 1950, p. 6.

[78] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives and China Pictorial. *Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949–1955)*, *op. cit*, pp. 377–378; "Summary of the National Day Celebration of the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar", 11–31 October, 1950, CFMA, 117-00038-02 (1).

In summary, although Burma was the first non-communist country to recognize New China, Sino-Burmese relations from 1950 to1952 were cold and estranged. The year 1953 saw a greater emphasis on peaceful coexistence in China's foreign policy and the beginning of genuine neutralism in Burma's approach to foreign relations. Against this backdrop, the two countries initiated economic and commercial exchanges. The following year, as a result of Burma's efforts to enhance information communication and policy coordination with China, China's desire to develop relations with Asian countries, and the apparent progress in Sino-Indian relations, Zhou Enlai and U Nu exchanged visits and relations between the two countries quickly became warmer[79].

4. *Conclusion*

Influenced by a combination of historical memories, geopolitics and ideological differences, the U Nu government, which pursued a pro-Western foreign policy, had doubts and fears about the imminent CCP regime. Therefore, as early as in late 1948, when the Chinese Civil War showed first signs of its outcome, Burma basically decided to recognize the government that the CCP would establish in the near future. In the year that followed, Burma struggled mainly to determine the proper time to recognize New China. At first, the U Nu government's basic idea was that it could not be the first non-Communist country to recognize New China for fear that other countries might change their minds and leave Burma isolated in the international community. And equally important was that neither could Burma afford to be the last to recognize New China, for that might incur the resentment and grudge of the CCP regime. In other words, as China's neighbor, Burma did not want to offend China on the issue of recognition, nor did it want to harm its own image among non-socialist countries. After learning that Britain and India were about to recognize New China, Burma asked India to hold off and made itself the first non-socialist country to recognize the PRC, using this move to show its goodwill[80]. However, contrary to its eagerness to recognize New China, in order to prevent the CCP from infiltrating Burma from Yunnan, Burma adopted delaying tactics in establishing formal diplomatic relations and in exchanging ambassadors with China. In short, the U Nu government had always

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[79] Liang Zhi. "*Toward Peaceful Coexistence: Improvements in Sino-Burma Relations and Their Impact (1953–1955)*", *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*, 2018, 11, pp. 87–100.

[80] Panikkar, K. M. *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of A Diplomat*, London, George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1955, pp. 68–69.

sought to maximize its benefits on the issues of recognizing New China and establishing formal diplomatic relations.

Before the founding of the PRC, Mao Zedong had already explicitly put forward the "leaning-to-one-side" policy towards the socialist camp. Guided by this diplomatic principle, and in order to bury the humiliating diplomacy of the "old China", the CCP decided not to rush to seek recognition from the imperialist countries and set the principle of negotiating before establishing diplomatic relations with non-socialist countries. On the other hand, it should be noted that the "leaning-to-one side" approach did not mean the CCP refused to accept recognition from non-socialist countries. On the contrary, the CCP wanted to establish diplomatic relations with non-socialist countries in order to integrate into the international community as soon as possible, provided that the prerequisites for establishing diplomatic relations were met (e.g., the other party severed its ties with the GMD government, etc.). In this process, the CCP adopted the strategy of not actively seeking to establish diplomatic relations with non-socialist countries while keeping the initiative in its own hands as much as possible. Even more noteworthy is that the CCP also consciously used the recognition of New China by non-socialist countries to balance its relations with the Soviet Union. As early as December 9, 1949, Zhou Enlai privately revealed to P. Shibayev, the Chargé d'Affaires at the Soviet Embassy in Beijing, that India, Burma and possibly Britain were expected to recognize the PRC very soon[81]. A week later, Mao arrived in Moscow to negotiate with the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin on the Sino-Soviet treaty of alliance. However, at first, Stalin refused to amend the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1945. On January 1, 1950, Mao once again revealed to Soviet officials that Burma, India, Britain and other Commonwealth countries were preparing to recognize New China, tactfully sending signals of displeasure and warning to Stalin. The next day, the Soviet Union agreed to sign a new Sino-Soviet treaty[82]. Meanwhile, the CCP saw the U Nu regime as a "servant" of the British and American imperialist powers and considered Burma's seeking diplomatic relations with New China as more to protect its own interests and hinder the development of New China. Based on this judgment, the CCP leaders were not in a hurry to establish formal diplomatic relations with Burma.

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[81] Shen Zhihua. *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: Zhongsu guanxi*, 2, March 1949–July 1950, *op. cit*, pp. 169–170.

[82] Shen Zhihua. "*Conflict of Interests in the Sino-Soviet Treaty Negotiations and Its Resolution*," *Lishi yanjiu*, 2001, 2, pp. 42–45; Shen Zhihua. *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: Zhongsu guanxi*, 2, March 1949–July 1950, *op. cit*, p. 207.

As far as the historical process of establishing diplomatic relations between China and Burma is concerned, as Miyake Yasuyuki suggests, the Burmese side took the initiative to approach China[83]. But there was nothing unique about this because it was part of the general result of New China's approach to diplomatic relations. After the PRC was founded, apart from positively seeking recognition from the Eastern bloc countries, Mao Zedong and his colleagues did not actively push non-socialist countries to recognize the CCP regime[84]. Besides, being "proactive" at the outset did not necessarily mean greater "initiative" throughout the process. Burma indeed had more initiative on the issue of recognition, particularly in terms of timing. But during the negotiations, China became more proactive than passive, both in setting procedures and agenda and in the choice of transport to escort U Pe from Kunming to Beijing.

In a larger context, historical memories, geopolitics and ideologies worked together to shape the mutual perceptions and relations before and after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Burma. All three factors had more of a negative impact, suppressing the pursuit of national interests such as economic and trade relations and political exchanges between the two countries. Meanwhile, Sino-Burmese relations were not purely bilateral, for third parties often played an important role in between. The positions and arrangements of Britain and India on recognition of the CCP regime had to a great extent determined the timing when Burma recognized New China, and the influence of the Soviet Union could be detected in the way the CCP leaders viewed the U Nu regime and dealt with the issue.

In 1953, the PRC directed its focus more to domestic development. The U Nu regime, aware of the intention of the US and Britain to interfere in Burma's internal affairs over the rebellions of Li Mi's forces (the GMD remnants fled to Burma) and the Karen people, rejected further economic aid from the US and terminated the 1947 Anglo-Burmese Defense Pact[85]. At this point, the demand for national interests somewhat overrode ideological differences and negative historical memories, and the objectively "near neighbors" became the

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[83] Miyake, Yasuyuki. "*On the Process of Establishing Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of the Union of Burma and the People's Republic of China*", *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[84] "Liu Shaoqi's Report to the Central Committee of the CPSU (Bolsheviks) and Stalin," 4 July, 1949, Shen Zhihua and Ding Ming, trans., *Dangdai zhongguoshi yanjiu*, 1997, 2, p. 106.

[85] Liang Zhi. "Reconsidering the Origin of Burma's Neutral Diplomacy (1948–1955)", *Shijie lishi*, 2018, 2, pp. 52–53.

subjectively "dear neighbors." And with that came the improvement of relations between China and Burma.

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Abstract

L'instaurazione delle relazioni diplomatiche tra Cina e Birmania alla fine degli anni Quaranta segna l'inizio delle contemporanee relazioni sino-birmane. La decisione della Birmania di riconoscere l'imminente regime del Partito Comunista Cinese risale al dicembre 1948, culminando nel riconoscimento ufficiale della Repubblica Popolare Cinese il 16 dicembre 1949, diventando così la prima nazione non socialista a riconoscerlo. Nonostante ciò, i legami diplomatici formali furono stabiliti solo l'8 giugno 1950, a causa della reciproca sfiducia e delle complessità geopolitiche. Durante questo periodo, le memorie storiche, la geopolitica e le ideologie influenzarono le relazioni sino-birmane, oscurando spesso interessi nazionali come gli scambi economici e politici. Inoltre, il rapporto fu plasmato dal coinvolgimento di terze parti, in particolare Gran Bretagna, India e Unione Sovietica. Tuttavia, entro il 1953, le relazioni iniziarono a migliorare, poiché la Cina adottò una politica estera incentrata sulla coesistenza pacifica e la Birmania abbracciò invece il neutralismo.

PAROLE CHIAVE

Diplomazia rivoluzionaria
Diplomazia del neutralismo
Questione del riconoscimento
Instaurazione delle relazioni sino-birmane
Relazioni diplomatiche

Abstract

The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Burma in the late 1940s marks the beginning of contemporary Sino-Burmese relations. Burma's

decision to recognize the impending CCP regime dates back to December 1948, culminating in official recognition of the People's Republic of China on December 16, 1949, making it the first non-socialist nation to do so. Despite this, formal diplomatic ties were only established on June 8, 1950, due to mutual distrust and geopolitical complexities. During this period, historical memories, geopolitics, and ideologies influenced Sino-Burmese relations, often overshadowing national interests like economic and political exchanges. Furthermore, the relationship was shaped by the involvement of third parties, notably Britain, India, and the Soviet Union. However, by 1953, relations began to improve as China adopted a foreign policy focused on peaceful coexistence and Burma embraced neutralism in its foreign affairs.

KEYWORDS

Revolutionary Diplomacy
Diplomacy of Neutralism
Recognition Issue
Establishment of Sino-Burmese Diplomatic Relations