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Winter 2017

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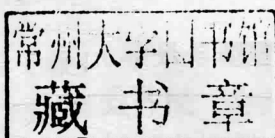
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The Analysis on the Current Situation and Prospect of Sino-Myanmar Traffic Connectivity: From the Perspective of Infrastructure Construction in Yunnan

YAO Qinhua

Abstract: Yunnan Province is the frontier of promoting “The Belt and Road initiative” (BRI), and also the gateway to South and Southeast Asia. BRI relies on infrastructure development. Yunnan invests heavily in the construction of transport infrastructure and plans to build a highway network consisting of seven provincial highways and five cross-border highways, a railway framework consisting of eight provincial railways and five cross-border railways, and a water transport network consists of two provincial waterways and three cross-border waterways by 2030. By doing so, Yunnan hopes to achieve the goal of “convenient transportation” within the province itself, with surrounding provinces, and with neighboring countries. Myanmar is an important fulcrum of BRI. Sino-Myanmar transport has an irreplaceable role in the Trans-Asian transport

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network. The interconnection of transport networks between Yunnan and Myanmar will contribute to the implementation of BRI and accelerate the construction of Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM), which will play an exemplary role for achieving BRI.

Keywords: Traffic between China and Myanmar; Interconnection; Yunnan Perspective

In 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping's proposal of BRI is not only related to China's deepening reform, upscaling and development, but also linked to China's further opening-up and common development with countries along the "Belt and Road". The BRI is an important platform for international community to construct a mutually benefiting bi/multilateral relations in the new century. Myanmar is a close neighbor of China, one of the first linkages between China's "go global" strategy and the outer world. A well-established interconnected transport network between China and Myanmar will have a strong demonstration effect on promoting the implementation of the BRI.

Myanmar as an Important Fulcrum for BRI

The geographical location of Myanmar has determined that it has an important strategic position in the transport interconnection of BRI. The complementary nature of Sino-Myanmar economy has determined that both countries have high agreement on promoting the BRI.

Myanmar's landform makes it suitable for South-North interconnection rather than East-West interconnection.

Myanmar's territory area is 676,000 square kilometers. It is about 925 kilometers from east to west, and 2,090 kilometers in length from north to south. Its territory shapes as a rhombus. Myanmar's geographical pattern is high on the North and low on the South. The north is the extension segment of Hengduan Mountains, a region that has the highest altitude in Myanmar. Within the region Hkakabo Razi, which neighbors China, has an altitude of 5,881 meters. In the east there is Shan Plateau, with an altitude of 750–1,200 meters. In the west there are the Naga Hills, with an altitude 1,500–2,100 meters, and Arakan Mountains, with an altitude above

2,000 meters. Myanmar is surrounded by mountains on its east, north, and west sides, making its transport routes with the neighboring countries extremely perilous in history. Its central region and south region are broad plateaus. Irrawaddy river and Salween River run through the north-south direction, which served as the main artery of Myanmar in north-south transport. Myanmar's highways and railroads follow a north-south pattern due to the north-south trend of mountains and rivers in the country. Thus north-south traveling in Myanmar is relatively easier, as compared with east-west traveling. Myanmar has a long coastline of more than 2,600 kilometers. Directly toward the south of Myanmar is the Andaman Sea. Due to the sedimentation from the rivers, the coastline water is less than 10 meters in depth. Hence Myanmar lacks suitable harbors for large modern ships to berth and load. The southwest of Andaman Sea is next to Bay of Bengal, and there the coastline of Andaman Sea below -15 meters is well-developed, which provides the natural conditions for constructing deep water ports.

Myanmar is situated at the junction of Indochinese Peninsula, South Asia Peninsula, and Southwest China

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is situated in the east-western part of Asia and it is to the south of Indochinese Peninsula. It shares borders with five countries: the north and northeastern border sides with China, the east border neighbors with Laos, the southeastern and the southern border connect with Thailand, the western border intersects with Bangladesh, the northwestern border links to India, and the south and southeastern border overlooks the vast Indian Ocean.

Myanmar is a vital transport hub connecting South Asia Peninsula and Indochinese Peninsula. It is an inevitable route along the way of India's Look East policy, a bridge tower to South Asia market, and an important passageway for China to enter South Asia Peninsula and the Indian Ocean. Myanmar is the cross point of Chinese economic circle, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) economic circle, and South Asia economic circle. It has the geographical value of being the integrating location of all the provinces in the country. In the grand blueprint for BRI, Myanmar is a crucial strategic fulcrum of the transportation hub and an important member of BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) economic corridor.

To inland China, Myanmar is an important marine outfall for Yunnan, Sichuan, Chongqing and other provinces or cities of China to the Indian Ocean. Take Kunming City, Yunnan as an example, from Kunming to Kyaukpyu port in the Indian Ocean is 900 kilometers, which is about the same distance from Kunming to Port of Fangcheng, Guangxi (China) on the West Pacific, while it takes more than 2,400 kilometers to go from Kunming to the deep-water port in Chonggang Yangshan in Shanghai on West Pacific. Obviously Kyaukpyu port of Myanmar is the most convenient route of portage entrance for entering South Asia, West Asia, Africa and Europe—it avoids detours around China's Eastern ports and thus greatly reduces the transportation time. This demonstrates the importance of Myanmar to China's new complete opening-up policy.

Sino-Myanmar friendship establishes the foundation of interconnecting development

Linked by the same mountains and rivers, people in China and Myanmar, since ancient times, have been brothers and sisters who "love each other immensely, drink from the same river". After the establishment of diplomatic relation with People's Republic of China and Myanmar, leaders from both countries have been visiting each other frequently, and the two countries have kept a good relation. In the 1950's, China, Myanmar, India and other countries collectively initiated the Five Principles for Peaceful Coexistence. In the 1960's, the two countries also appropriately solved the boundary problems left from history. In the 21st century, Myanmar has achieved big democratic progresses and Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's political leader visited China twice and continued to pursue friendly foreign policies with China. The Sino-Myanmar relation rises to the height of comprehensive strategic partners. The friendly relation between two countries is not only visible in the harmonious interactions between two countries' governments, but also in the deep friendship among people of both countries. The good Sino-Myanmar relation has promoted a steady progress in the peace and stability of China's south-eastern border and China's "Western Development" strategies, and it is beneficial for China to fully open and expand the investment and trade in South Eastern Asia and South Asia.

Both China and Myanmar are developing countries, thus they have a relatively high complementary nature in economy. China is Myanmar's

largest country of trade; it takes up 36%¹ of Myanmar's total volume of foreign trade. At the same time, China is also Myanmar's largest country of investment, it takes up 26%² of Myanmar's total amount of foreign capital. Myanmar is the resource country for China's energy, mineral products, and agricultural products, while Myanmar imports machinery, electric appliance, chemical fertilizers, etc. from China. Myanmar is weak on its infrastructure and does not have strong industrial production capability. It needs China's funding and technology on road construction, hydroelectricity, mining development, processing and manufacturing and the relating fields. There is very broad prospects in terms of economic cooperation between the two countries.

China's proposal of the BRI and the envision on establishing the BCIM economic corridor, which happened to coincide with Myanmar's launch on people-oriented ideology for sustainable development. There is a general welcome and support of China's proposal among all walks of life in Myanmar. Thit Linn Ohn, Myanmar's ambassador to China, points out: "It is through the interregional cooperation of this kind, that our focus can be truly achieved. Through elevating the people's living standard and balancing development, people can truly get a share of the fruits of regional cooperation."³

Yunnan Province is the Gateway of "Belt and Road" to South and Southeast Asia

In 2015, while inspecting Yunnan, Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed out that Yunnan is to serve as an impact hub⁴ in China's opening-up to South Asia and Southeast Asia.

¹The Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Union of Myanmar, <http://mm.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zxhz/201606/20160601330397.shtml>.

²*The New Light of Myanmar*, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/2016-02-19/doc-ixprqea4738249.shtml>, February 16th, 2016.

³Wang Fengjuan, "The Myanmar Embassy: Sino-Myanmar Cooperation has Broad Prospects" [In Chinese], *China Report*, vol. 4, 2016.

⁴<http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0309/c70731-26660212.htm>.

Yunnan province has given a full play to the regional advantage of frontier opening and development

Thanks to BRI, Yunnan has the advantages of timing, location, and talents during a new wave of China's opening-up policy.

First, Yunnan holds an important status in China's southward and westward opening-up campaigns. It is a key arena of China's "Go-West" strategy. When Chinese President Xi Jinping raised the initiative of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt, which has highlighted the avant-garde role of Yunnan in China's opening-up progress, and marked the Yunnan's transformation from a somehow marginalized inland border province into the frontier of China's reform and opening-up policy. Meanwhile, as part of the national strategy, Yunnan remains in the vanguard of China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (ACFTA), Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and BCIM Economic Corridor and actively participates in the formulation and implementation of national strategy. As an important border province in southwest China, Yunnan utilizes its geographical advantages, and starts off with its indigenous capability of opening-up by vigorously developing Ruili Key Development and Opening-up and Experimental Zone, Lincang Border Economic Cooperation Zone, Honghe Comprehensive Bonded Zone, Border Financial Comprehensive Reform Pilot Area, as well as China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone, etc. Meanwhile, Yunnan and neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand are actively cooperating on a wide range of fields: trade, industry, finance, tourism, and culture, for example. It has paved the way for "the Belt and Road", which is also in line with China's neighborly diplomacy that brings favorable opportunities and results to neighboring countries, namely building linkage of policy, transportation, trade, currency, and people.

Secondly, Yunnan has obvious geographical advantages and long tradition of Sino-Foreign cultural exchanges. It neighbors with Tibet and Sichuan in the north, borders with Vietnam in the southwest, borders Laos in the south, and Myanmar in the southwest and west. It has a border of 4,060 kilometers, and it is adjacent to the Thailand, Cambodia, India and the Indian Ocean. Since Yunnan overlooks the Indochina Peninsular directly, leading to the South Asia Peninsula and the Indian Ocean through Myanmar. It is the easiest way for China to enter Southeast, South Asia,

and Indian Ocean as well as the Indian Ocean for China's coastline and inland regions (Guangxi only borders with Vietnam). Therefore, Yunnan has an irreplaceable regional advantage in the big picture of China's opening-up policy. Thanks to BRI, Yunnan will not only become a regional hub for East and South-east Asia's transport linkages, but will also serve as a convenient route to bypass the Strait of Malacca and sail to the Indian Ocean through Myanmar, which held an important place in Trans-Asia Railway Network. Historically, Yunnan was the southern channel of the ancient Silk Road. The "Yunnan Zhi" (Yunnan History) of Tang dynasty not only recorded the commerce conditions of frequently traveled on Dehong (present)-Baoshan-Dali(capital of *Nanzhao*) routes between merchants from *Piao* and *Nanzhao*, but also recorded two routes from Sichuan to Myanmar and India via Yunnan: one was from Chengdu to Longlin, Ruili and Shan state (Myanmar) after climbing over the Gaoligong Mountains via Dali, Baoshan, and then to Bimiao via Taigong, finally arrived in Manipur (India) and other places. The other was from Chengdu to Myitkyina, Mogaung (Myanmar) via Dali, Baoshan, Tengchong, and then to places like Assam (India)¹. For more than two thousand years, Yunnan has long been a must stop for China's access to Southern and South Asia, and won a reputation as "Shushen Dudao" (one of the transport routes to India also known as the Southwest Silk Road) and "Chama Gudao" (meaning "the tea and horse road"). The Ancient Southern Silk Road, like Silk Road in the North and Maritime Silk Road, played a crucial part in personnel, material, and cultural exchange among ethnic groups in the areas along the ancient routes. During World War II, the Stilwell Highway, The Hump and Sino-Indian oil pipelines, bridged the material supply chain between South Asia and China and provided a strategic lifeline for the Chinese anti-Fascist war against the Japanese invaders.

Furthermore, the rapid development of Yunnan has certainly blossomed into the most popular cooperative partner for neighboring countries. Taking advantage of its geographical location, cities in Yunnan have over 30 sister cities in total in Southeast and South Asia. The number of sister cities between Kunming and cities in Southeast and South Asia ranks number one in China, including Yangon (Myanmar), Mandalay (Myanmar), Vientiane (Laos), Chiang Mai (Thailand), Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Da

¹He Shengda eds., *Burma* [In Chinese], Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1993, p. 322.

Nang (Vietnam), Calcutta (India) and Jeddah (Bangladesh)¹, etc. Kunming has become the most important foreign-related city in southwest China. More than six countries, such as Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Bangladesh have consulates general in the city. Besides, cities in Yunnan province have also actively developed friendly relations with cities in Southeast Asia. For example, there is the sister province relations between Xishuangbanna (Yunnan) and Luang Prabang (Laos), and Ruili (Dehong, Yunnan) pairing with Muse City (Myanmar). Among them, "One village across two countries", which situated in the No. 71 boundary marker of Sino-Myanmar boundary, has become great example of friendship between countries and ethnic groups. Yunnan has organized medical teams many times to go a mission trip abroad (Charitable activities such as "Marching on a bright road" and so on), and disaster relief assistance in neighboring countries like Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Nepal and Pakistan. The tremendous achievements made in Yunnan's reform and opening-up significantly raised the humanities and social indicators of education, culture, health and housing. These have also attracted neighboring countries to engage in business and trade activities, study or job-training, spend holidays, and recuperate in China. For example, more than 40,000 students have chosen to study in China from Southeast and South Asia. Yunnan has become an important destination for government visitors and nongovernment tourists from Southeast.

Yunnan actively promotes the platform construction with neighboring countries

In the cooperation between China and Southeast Asia, China and South Asia, Yunnan has initiated and participated in a number of bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms.

First, promoting the establishment of a multilateral cooperation network in the Greater Mekong Subregion. In 1990s, Yunnan actively participated in and promoted the "Greater Mekong Subregion" (GMS) Economic Cooperation. Responding actively to Chinese government's economic strategies, Yunnan set the New Decades Framework for strategic cooperation for the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation.

¹Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the People's Government of Kunming, <http://wqbk.km.gov.cn/gjyhcs/>.

Priority areas and key projects for promoting cooperation have been identified. The directional framework and guideline cooperation proposals of 43 flagship projects and the construction of the North-South Economic Corridor have been put forward. Moreover, the coordination mechanism for foreign and domestic cooperation have been established. Yunnan also built the China-ASEAN Innovation Center, the China-ASEAN Science and Technology Forum, China ASEAN Education and Training Center, China-ASEAN Agricultural Training Center, Yunnan International Technology Transfer Center and the Greater Mekong Subregion Rail Union to give full play to Kunming's leading role in regional cooperation. At present, the GMS economic cooperation has become an important economic experimental zone for the all-round cooperation in the China-ASEAN free trade area.

Second, an initiative has been launched to build a Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar multilateral cooperation mechanism. In 1998, Yunnan and its partners (including Bangladesh, India and Myanmar) launched a joint action plan and co-sponsored the "The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation". After more than ten years of unrelenting endeavor and breaking-in each conference set a theme consisting of countries held in turn. Since then, twelve meetings have been held successively. Finally, a Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar cooperation mechanism officially was formed. Yunnan successfully implemented two joint road visits and first Four Countries Rally Car (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar), as well as a thorough study of the current status quo of transportation and communications of four countries running in the Forum framework. It was rated as a historic great initiative and the revival of ancient South Silk Road by the media. In May 2013, China's Premier Li Keqiang paid a visit to India. Both China and India decided to establish a joint working group to build the "Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor" together. In December 2013, the first BCIM Economic Corridor Joint Study Group (JSG) Meeting was held in Kunming. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Regional Cooperation Mechanism was officially put into operation. As one of the six economic corridors advocated by the "The Belt and Road Initiative". Yunnan has formulated a development plan for 2016-2020 regarding its frontier economic belt, and fully implemented and promoted China's strategic guideline.

Third, creating and promoting multilateral and bilateral cooperation

actively. Yunnan has held Kunming Fairs, China-ASEAN Business Association, The China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO), the South Asian Countries Commodity Fair and China-SAARC Senior Officials' Meeting, the China-South Asia Business Forum, and the China-South Asia Think Tank Forum, etc. In 2015, it hosted the First Lancang-Mekong River Cooperation Foreign Ministerial Meeting commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Yunnan has also actively promoted multilateral cooperation mechanisms and construction of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism. Meanwhile, Yunnan has expanded its bilateral cooperation with Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and India, further strengthened economic and trade cooperation with North Myanmar, North Laos, North Vietnam, and North Thailand, and has explored ways of cooperation with the northeastern region of India. The ports like Ruili-Muse, Sino-Myanmar; Mohan-Boten, Sino-Laos; Hekou-Lao Cai, Sino-Vietnam have become the model of bilateral economic and trade cooperation. Furthermore, the level of cross-border economic cooperation has been continuously raised. Yunnan has actively promoted tourism with Southeast Asian and South Asian countries. In 2015, Yunnan attracted 10,753,200 overseas tourists, including 5,502,400 tourists arriving through inland ports. Among Asian tourists, the number of Thailand tourists reached 503,400 with an increase of 10.37% over the same period of last year; Malaysia tourists reached 257,600, same as from the previous year; Singapore tourists reached 251,800 with an increase of 4.71%¹ over the previous year.

Yunnan Speeds up Building of Transport Network and Opening-up

The Achievements of Yunnan's Transport Network Construction

Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Yunnan CPC Provincial Committee and government have made vigorous efforts to develop infrastructural facilities. By the end of the "12th Five-Year Plan" period, the mileage of Yunnan's highway reached 236,000 km, of which the mileage of high-grade highways (Level 2 and above) totaled 16,200 km, and expressway 4,005 km². The railway had a

¹Yunnan Provincial Tourism Development Commission, <http://www.ynta.gov.cn/Item/27951.aspx>.

²Yunnan Provincial Department of Transportation, <http://www.ynjtt.gov.cn/Item/39810.aspx>.

total mileage of nearly 3,000 km. Shanghai-Kunming high-speed railway has become the longest east-west high-speed rail line in China. With the rapid development of Yunnan's civil aviation, roughly 13 civil airports in Yunnan are now open to the public. Even the remote prefecture-level cities have civil aviation routes connecting Kunming. The popular tourist attractions, such as Shangri-La, Xishuangbanna, and Tengchong, have direct flights to major cities in China. Yunnan has now dramatically changed the original situation of backward transport infrastructure and has formed a convenient Kunming-centered transport network consisting of highway, railway and air routes.

Transportation Planning and Project Development in Yunnan

In view of Yunnan's role as a major transit corridor in the "Belt and Road", it will exert influence on transportation infrastructure construction during the "13th Five-Year Plan" period. Yunnan enacted *Yunnan Transport Plan (2014–2030)*, the *Yunnan Medium and Long-term Highway Network Plan (2016–2030)*, *Yunnan Medium and Long-Term and the 13th Five-Year Railway Network Planning*, and *Yunnan Plan of Constructing Postal, Highway and Waterway Networks for the 13th Five-Year Plan Period* successively.

In the aspect of highway construction planning, the highway network has been considered as the skeleton, the national highway and provincial road as the trunk line, and the county road as the supporting artery. Yunnan planning to accomplish the province-wide highway layout, with a total length of 14,500 km, which is five times that of current highway mileage. During the period of "13th Five-Year Plan", Yunnan plans to complete 74 highway projects with the total length of 6,690 km. Among them, a total of 3,248 kilometers are now under construction (35 projects) and another 3,443 kilometers have just started (39 projects)¹.

In terms of railway construction planning, the railway routes and high-speed railway will be opening up in the whole province. Meanwhile, the goal of achieving high-standard railway in major tourist destinations and important cities with large population (over 3 million) will be completed by 2020. The total mileage of both existing and under construction railway will be 8,000 km, of which the mileage of railway operation will reach 6,000 km, and the operating length of high-speed

¹Yunnan Provincial Tourism Development Commission, <http://www.ynjtt.com/Item.aspx?id=43879>.