

EMERGENCE OF THE BURMA ROAD AND SUBSEQUENT JAPANESE ADVANCE INTO BURMA (MYANMAR)

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Abstract

Burma Road was constructed in 1937-38 by Chinese nationalist troops on one side and British troops on the other in order to supply Chinese Chiang Kai-shek Government in its war with Japan. The road was opened officially on 10 January, 1939. Burma Road was a strategic road to decide the victory in Sino-Japanese War. Therefore it was the main cause for the advance of Japan into Myanmar. This paper will discuss how the Burma Road was strategically important between China-Japan War. It will also present Col. Suzuki's plan for aiding the Myanmar independence movement, which will possible for cutting Burma Road, and the creation of Minami Kikan. Moreover Burma (Myanmar) Campaign was strategically important will be revealed in this paper.

Keywords: Burma Road, Colonel Suzuki, Minami Kikan, Sino-Japanese War, Second World War

Introduction

Two world famous roads for military purposes have been existed in Myanmar during the Second World War. One of which is called 'Burma Road'(China-Myanmar Road or Yunnan-Myanmar Road) connecting to Kunming in Yunnan Province of China to Lashio in Shan State in Myanmar . The construction of this road in western and southwestern part of China was begun by the end of 1937 after the Second Sino-Japanese War as the best out-let for China.¹ The second road is popularly famous as 'Ledo Road'² which is 1,079 miles long which is connected to Assam State in India to Yunnan Province of China which was built by crossing Shin Bwe Yan, Myitkyina and Bahmo in Kachin State in 1942. This road joined with the 'Burma Road' at Mong-Yu (near Muse) at Myanmar-China border. These two roads left as very strategic roads in military history of the Second World War³.

Before these two roads were built, Myanmar remained as less geographic importance and disconnected country between China and India surrounded by mountain ranges. In military strategic point of view, Myanmar was not a well-known country which was far away from strategic positions of World War II.

The research paper is to examine the emergence of 'Burma Road' to reinforce Chiang Kai-shek's government as a supply road of military assistances and how this road was decisively important for the victory of Japan in Asia theater, and how the Japanese Imperial Army advanced to Myanmar to cut this road. This paper describes how the British Government begun the construction of this 'Burma Road', communication and transportation conditions of 'Burma Road', relations between Japan and Britain and U.S on account of 'Burma Road', the Japanese campaigns in Asia Theatre and the importance of the Japanese Imperial Army to cut the 'Burma Road' and how the Japanese advanced into Myanmar which turned as militarily strategic positions for Japan.

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¹ P.M. Roxby, (December, 1940) "The Burma Road", *Geography*, Geographical Association, Vol.25, No.4, p.170

² The road is named as Ledo Road after a small town –Ledo which was situated at the place where Bengal-Assam Rail Road ended. It was also renamed as 'Stilwell Road' in honor of General Stilwell by General Chiang Kai-shek.

³ LedoRoad ,en.m.wikipedia.org

Aim and Objective

Myanmar exists between two superpower of China and India and it served as a bridge of commerce between two countries. Nowadays, the border trade between Myanmar and China is markedly improving and China is now initiating its BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) project. This research paper aims to reveal the background history of historic “Burma Road” which was built to connect between Myanmar and China in 1937.

Materials and Methods

The materials required for to collect about the “Burma Road” have been mainly extracted from the articles described in journals written English during World War II, from documents from History Research Department, National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Tokyo, from lists, articles and books compiled by Japanese professors who specialized on Japanese Occupation period and books written by Japanese veterans who involved in East Asia front. The data and materials gathered for this paper are analyzed and the narrative with interwoven interpretation is applied to compile this paper.

Research Questions

The main research questions in this paper are underlined as follows:

- To examine the main reason for the construction of the “Burma Road”
- To explore militarily and politically importance of “Burma Road” during World War II
- To discuss how Myanmar became a military center for strategic position and
- To examine the ambition of the Japanese Imperial Army in Myanmar

Discussion

Sino-Japanese war

The Japanese imperialism originated from the defeat of Chinese Qing Imperial army by the Japanese in the First Sino-Japanese War (1 April 1894-17 April 1895) and the acquisition of Formosa Island (Taiwan). Moreover, Japan had defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05 and Korean peninsula had become a Japanese colony in 1910. Japan also gained control over Liaodong Peninsula, Port Arthur, and Mukden in South Manchuria in 1930s. In 1932, Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria, a large and virtually undefended area on northeastern China’s mainland.¹

When Japan made further invasion into China apart from Manchuria, the full-scale war between China and Japan broke out in 1937. By 1937, Peking, Tientsin, and the seaports of Tsingtao, Amoy, and Swatow were under Japanese control. In October 1937, a Japanese naval force sailed into the harbour at Shanghai – China’s biggest city for commerce and banking and its last free seaport. Shanghai’s harbor was soon under Japanese control and finally closed to outside commerce. No new goods could flow in or out of the country by sea. All of China’s international trade was forced to enter the country overland. The Japanese army occupied Canton in 1938 and

¹ Thakhin Lwin(1969), *ဂျပန်ခေတ်စာတမ်းများဖြင့် (Burma during Japanese Occupation)*, First Edition, Yangon, Udann Press, p. 35 (Hereafter cited as Lwin, *Burma during Japanese*)

all the port cities in the coastal line of China were fallen into Japanese's hand in 1939¹. Because of the Japanese offensive, China's Chiang Kai-shek Government had to retreat to Chungking while Chinese communists were fleeing to the Mongolian border².

The Construction of Burma Road

The main cause for the construction of the 'Burma Road' by the British was to provide military assistances to Chiang Kai-shek's Government which was resisting the Japanese aggression during Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The 'Burma Road' said to be in use since about AD 800 by the Chinese and Myanmar envoys to carry hand woven silk. Thus, it was called as the 'Old Silk Road'.³ Since AD 13, it follows the old trail which Marco Polo traveled when he visited the Middle Kingdom.⁴ The 717 miles (1,154 km) long 'Burma Road' construction was begun in December 1937 based on a road linking to Kunming through Lungling, Paoshan and Tali from China side and from Wangting-Kyukok in Myanmar side. When it reached Kyukok, it got connected with Lashio which was the railhead city in Myanmar side⁵. This road was built with over 200,000 Chinese workers without any machinery by crossing Mekong and Thanlwin Rivers.⁶ The road, being built through mountain-tops, had many zigzag turns. For the proper flow of water under and along the road, about 2,000 zigzag drainages and over 300 bridges were built.⁷ At the height of the operations, more than 120,000 labourers—men, women and even children—were engaged on the work.⁸ The total cost of the construction of this road was about 375,000 £and it was opened officially on 10 January 1939 and the same year, the allies of Chiang's Government, the British and the United States could send military vehicles, arms and gasoline from Yangon port to Lashio and from Lashio to Kunming via this road and thence to Chungking, Chiang's capital⁹.

¹ (a) Donovan Webster (2004), *The Burma Road: the epic story of the China-Burma-India theatre in World War II*, New York, Straus and Giroux, p.23. (Hereafter cited as Webster (2004), *The Burma Road*)

(b) Lwin, *Burma during Japanese*, pp.56-57

² *History of Tatmadaw(တပ်မတော်သမိုင်း)*(1824-1945) (1994), Vol.I, Yangon Government Press, p.105

³ Ludu U Hla(1968), *သတင်းစာများဖြင့်ပြောဆိုသောစစ်တိုင်းမဟာပြည် (War Time Burma (Myanmar) as told by the Newspaper)*, Mandalay, Kye Pwa Ye Publishing House, Vol.I, p.18 (Hereafter cited as , Ludu U Hla(1968))

⁴ Walter H. Mallory (April, 1939), "The Burma Road", *Foreign Affairs*, Council on Foreign Relations, Vol.17, No.3, p.625 (Hereafter cited as , *Foreign Affairs*)

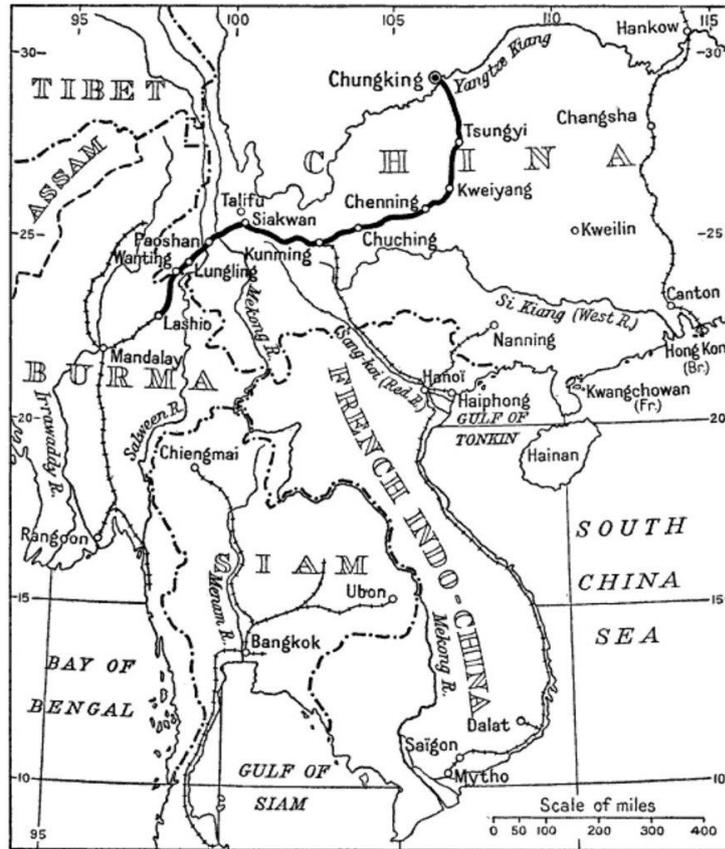
⁵ *Military Operations for the Conquest of Burma*(1967), (*Biruma Kōryaku Sakusen*), Tokyo, Asagumo Press, , p. 2 (Hereafter cited as *Kōryaku Sakusen*)

⁶ Webster (2004), *The Burma Road*, p.24

⁷ Ludu U Hla(1968), p.18

⁸ *Foreign Affairs*, p.626

⁹ Mya Han(1999), *ကိုလိုနီခေတ်မြန်မာ့သမိုင်းအဘိဓာန် (Historical Dictionary in Colonial Myanmar)*, Third Edition, Yangon, Universities Historical Research Center, p, 152,154 (Hereafter cited as Mya Han, *Historical Dictionary*)



Source: *Foreign Affairs* (April, 1939), Council on Foreign Relations, Vol.17, No.3

Burma Road Map

Medical stations, repair stations for trucks, and stables for relays of transport animals were established along the road. The British authorities had put the road on the Burma side (120 miles in length) in good condition, and warehouses were built at the railhead at Lashio for the freight. A part of the \$25,000,000 loan made to China by the American Export-Import Bank was used to purchase trucks and fuel.¹

Chinese Government had a chance to organize its road transport. The work of organization was entrusted to a semi-Government company called the South-west Transportation Company. It opened an office in Rangoon with branches at Lashio and Kunming as well as at intermediate stations on the road.² Mr. Daniel Arnstein (American transport expert) recommended the employment of American road engineers, motor mechanics, and traffic controllers to train the Chinese, and promised the immediate supply of vehicles and spare parts and other necessary stores.³

The transport situation after the opening of Burma Road

As soon as the road was opened, private traders also came in and prices of commodities in Kunming and Chungking were very high. During the first rains, an average of about 70 lorries a day about 2^{1/2} tons each, and this figure increased during the dry weather of 1939-40 to about

¹ *Foreign Affairs*, p.627

² Henry Crow (May-Jun 1942), "The Burma Road", *Geographical Journal*, The Royal Geographical Society, Vol. 99, No.5/6, p.241 (Hereafter cited as *Geographical Journal*)

³ *Geographical Journal*, p.242

250 lorries per day.¹ The average round trip from Lashio to Kunming would take two weeks. On that basis, if 100 trucks were to leave every day, each with three tons of cargo, a monthly total of some 9,000 tons could be moved.²

Towards the end of 1940, however, the situation deteriorated. There were three main reasons: the rough surface of the road and the steep gradients had put many of the lorries originally employed out of action and replacement was not rapid enough. Profits of private trade were so large, mostly Chinese pushed up the freight rates to a height. The result was that freight rates reached the impossible figure of 1200 rupees per ton, which meant that a lorry owner very nearly got back the cost of his lorry in two trips. In the meantime, the transport situation within China was becoming serious. In spite of the very large number of lorries which was being imported into China, the goods crossing the boundary were not going through. It was estimated that only 25 percent reached Kunming, the rest being dumped in depots alongside the road.³

About the petrol situation, China produced practically no mineral oils. Many vehicles were running on vegetable oils and mainly obtained from rape seed. The price of petrol was enormous and it could only be got on a Government permit. At the opening of the road, every lorry, or every convoy of lorries, had to take enough petrol to carry it to its destination and back. The poor surface and the steep ascents increased consumption. The normal calculation was that a 3-ton lorry starting out on the 700 miles trip from Lashio to Kunming had to carry 200 gallons of petrol on the basis of 7 miles to the gallon. This meant that of the 3-ton load one quarter had to be allocated for journey petrol. Later, the Asiatic Petroleum Co. and some of the American oil companies set up petrol depots at the frontier and at several points on the road.⁴

Relations of Britain and U.S with China

The United States was to look forward more adequate communications with China, if China was to take the offensive against Japan. For the continuation of China's resistance against Japan, China was self-sufficient in food, clothing and small arms, that she depended upon the outside for medical supplies, spare parts for special machinery and the materials for her war industries. All the necessities provisions were supported and imported from Britain and U.S. They expected China's manpower was essential to victory if Allied shipping problems will continue for some time to come to exclude the possibility of transporting a large expeditionary force to Asia.⁵

Sino-Myanmar relation

Myanmar people especially politicians in Myanmar strongly objected the use of 'Burma Road' for the military purposes of Sino-Japanese War. Since 1937, the Burmese, heretofore far more friendly towards the Chinese than to the Indians domiciled in the country. The Chinese had gone out of their way to cultivate better relations with the Burmese. In August 1939, the consulate at Rangoon had been raised to the status of a consulate general, with a branch office at Lashio. Their propaganda had taken the fact that a country of 15 million inhabitants was now

¹ *Geographical Journal*, p.241

² *Foreign Affairs*, p.627

³ *Geographical Journal*, pp.241-242

⁴ *Geographical Journal*, p.243

⁵ G. E. T, (Mar.9, 1942), "Wings for the Burma Road", *Far Eastern Survey*, Institute of Pacific Relations, Vol. 11, No. 5, pp.59-60

presented with a market of 200 million Chinese. Burmese nationalists had been made pleas in the Burmese legislature to bar Chinese immigration into the country. The Nationalist Chinese Government envoy headed by Chinese Ambassador Mr. Zeng Yangpu was deputed to Myanmar in September 1941 to discuss immigration problems with the Galon U Saw's Government. While the immigration problems were discussed between the both parties, Galon U Saw proposed to control Chinese immigration problems into Myanmar in legal ways.¹ There had been the usual border incidents and allegations of maltreatment of Burmese drivers by the Chinese authorities along the Burma Road. Besides that the people of Burma suffered, that all the profits had gone into the pockets of British capitalists.² In fact, the Irrawaddy Company owned by the British and the British Government Railway Transportation gained much more profits because of the 'Burma Road'.³

The World War II and the Japanese Offensive

The Japanese Imperial Army led military campaigns to Asia and Southeast Asia front in the Second World War. The Japanese Imperial Army proceeded to French Indochina after crossing South China. After they had succeeded French Indochina, they bombed Myanmar border from Kunming by targeting bridges on Thanlwin and Mekong Rivers. However, the Japanese failed to reach their missions with less destruction of bombing.⁴ Especially, Keitsukyo⁵ Bridge (in Chinese Huitong Bridge) in the estuary of Thanlwin River was famous for its strategic position. If this bridge is destroyed, the 'Burma Road' will be cut and the road will be disconnected to use.⁶

In European theatre, the British retreated from Dean Camp. On 24 June 1940, Deputy-minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Tani Masano called upon British Ambassador to Japan, Sir Robert Craigie and rejected the British's support of goods to Chiang Kai-shek government through 'Burma Road' and 'Hong Kong Road'. On 12 July, British Ambassador replied to new Yonai Cabinet Foreign Minister Arita Hachiro that the British would close the "Burma Road" for three months. The British government issued a statement on 17 July 1940 as follows:

1. Importation of arms and medicines from Hong Kong to China was closed since January 1939. At present situation, any military arms and ammunitions would not be imported to China from Hong Kong as the Japanese Government worries. There is no reason to import from Hong Kong in later times.
2. The British Government will suspend the importation of arms and ammunitions, gasoline, trucks and spare parts of railway to China through Myanmar for three months since 18 July of present year.

¹ Wang Jienan and Wang Quanzhen (2019), *Chinese-Myanmar Friendship for Two Thousand Years* translated by Cho Cho Aung, Mandalay, Thit Oo Offset, p. 143

² Virginia Thompson (Sept. 22,1941), "Transit Duty on the Burma Road", *Far Eastern Survey*, Institute of Pacific Relations, Vol. 10, No. 18, pp.213-214

³ Lwin, *Burma during Japanese*, p.47

⁴ *Geographical Journal*, p.243

⁵ As this bridge was said to be built by French technology of building, Japanese spies in Shanghai read the travel account of a French engineer and studied the size and construction technique of this bridge. In April 1942, the No. 56 Division of Japanese Imperial Army occupied this bridge. Kouhei Moriyama and Yutaka Kurisaki(1976), *Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and Road to Burma-India (Dai Tōa Kyōeiken Biruma Indo e no Michi)*, Shin Jinbutsu Ōrai Press, p. 22,24 (Hereafter cited as Moriyama, *Biruma Indo*)

⁶ Moriyama, *Biruma Indo*, p.22

3. When Japanese councilor from Hong Kong or Yangon was inspecting the activities of the British whether they follow according to the agreement or not, he is free to connect the British authority friendly.¹

The British Primer Churchill closed the ‘Burma Road’ temporarily by accepting the coercive demand of the Japanese. It was closed for three months from 18 July 1940 to 18 October 1940.² The British Government stopped all traffic on the Burma Road for three months. Only the emergency transportation of human and important goods was made when the ‘Burma Road’ was closed.³ In fact, during these three months, a larger volume of traffic went over the road than in any previous months of the rains. In September, the daily average was 225 lorries. The closure was limited to munitions, aero plane parts, and petrol.⁴

Burma Road and Colonel Suzuki

From Chungking, the Chiang Kai-shek’s Government forcibly carried out the anti-Japanese resistance by receiving Anglo-American aid through the roads to China from the other countries.⁵

There were four main roads of supply to China from the other countries. They were:

- (1) The road to the inner parts of China through the center and southern coastal regions, which centered in Hong Kong,
- (2) Russia-Northwestern China Road from Russia through Mongolia,
- (3) French Indochina Road and
- (4) Rangoon (Yangon)-Lashio-Kunming Road (Burma Road).⁶

The supplies to Chungking provided from four supplied roads can be seen in the following tables:

Table The Total Amount of the Supplies from four lines of Supply to Chungking⁷

No.	Names of Supplied Lines	1914 (in Tons)	1940 (in Tons)	Percentage (%)
1.	Northwestern Road (Russia-Northwestern China)	200	500	2 %
2.	French Indochina Road	12,500	15,000	48%
3.	Burma Road	2,000	10,000	31%
4.	Coastal Road (Central China and Southern Coastal)	-	6,000	19%
Total		14,700	31,500	100%

Among these four supplied lines, French Indochina Road was the most trafficked road and the Burma Road stood the second from which altogether 31% of the supplies were sent to Chungking.

¹ *Kōryaku Sakusen*, p.4

² Ludu U Hla(1968), p.19

³ “Reopening of Burma Road”, *Toyo Economic News Report*, 19 October 1940, p.168

⁴ *Geographical Journal*, p.245

⁵ *Kōryaku Sakusen*, p.1

⁶ *Ibid*, p.1

⁷ Ota Tsunezō(1967), *A Historical Study of the Japanese Military Administration in Burma*(*Biruma ni Okeru Nihon Gunseishi no Kenkyū*), Tokyo, Yoshikawa Kobunkan, p. 38 (Hereafter cited as Ota, *Biruma*)

The political development of Japan in world politics has changed a lot within three months. In these months, Japan invaded northern Indochina and the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy was concluded on 27 September 1940, which enraged the British Government on Japan. On 18 October 1940, the Burma Road was reopened and provided the supplies to Chiang Kai-shek's government by this road.¹ In September 1940, the Japanese Imperial Army was able to close down the most traffic supplied line, French Indochina Road, by invading Indochina. Northwestern Road (Russia-Northwestern China) was very long land road, which was unable to close down by the Japanese that they had already given up blocking. Moreover, Chiang Kai-shek disliked receiving any supplies through Russia. Although the Japanese Imperial Navy was not able to close down Hong Kong line of supply, they could block this line as much as they could. Thus, the only possible road from which Chiang Kai-shek's government could receive supplies was the Burma Road.² In the end of 1941, 15,000 tons of supplies for war materials provided to China through the Burma Road.³ Thus, measures for closing the Burma Road became serious matter for consideration for the Japanese Government.

It would not be an easy military campaign to occupy Myanmar as Japanese army could easily occupy French Indochina because the British stoutly defended Malaya, Singapore, Myanmar and India. A Japanese spy in disguise as a civilian was sent to Myanmar to find an alternative way to cut the "Burma Road" was Colonel Keiji Suzuki (Bo Moe Gyo) who later became the leader of Minami Kikan.⁴ In June 1940, Col. Suzuki entered Myanmar with the cover name of Manami Masuyo and posing as secretary of the Japan-Burma (Myanmar) Society and correspondent of the *Yomiuri* newspaper.⁵ The main duty of Colonel Suzuki was to destroy the "Burma Road" which was using for the transportation of goods from Myanmar to China. Japanese Commander-in-chief hoped that Colonel Suzuki would have some good ideas to cut "the Burma Road" as he had gained some victories in China front in 1937.⁶

Myanmar struggle for Independence with the aid of Japanese

Under the severe oppression of the British authorities, there had developed in Myanmar at that time a strong nationalist independence movement. Col. Suzuki got contact with the nationalist *Thakhin* group, who were seeking foreign assistance.⁷ In August, Col. Suzuki met Dr. Thein Maung and *Thakhin* Mya to draft a plan for Myanmar's independence struggle to supply arms, ammunition, and funds for an uprising and to give training outside Myanmar in the handling of arms.⁸ Colonel Suzuki considered that Japanese ambition to cut the "Burma Road" would be successful if Myanmar nationalist movement turns into armed resistance movement against the British.⁹

In this situation, Japan Commander-in-chief became aware of closing the Burma Road, which would gain upper hand to Japan in Sino-Japan War. For the closing of the Burma Road,

¹ Ota, *Biruma*, pp. 38-39

² Moriyama, *Biruma Indo*, p.24

³ *Kōryaku Sakusen*, p.5

⁴ Moriyama, *Biruma Indo*, p.24

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.24

⁷ Ota, *Biruma*, p.39

⁸ Izumiya Tatsuro(1985), *The Minami Organ* translated by U Tun Aung Chain, Second Edition, Yangon, Translation and Publication Department, p. 21 (Hereafter cited as Izumiya, *Minami*)

⁹ *Kōryaku Sakusen*, p.9

General Staff Headquarters arranged to join hand with Aung San who was seeking foreign assistance for Myanmar independence. The plan was to send 5,000 Japanese troops to Myanmar and to train thirty Myanmar youths as military leaders for independence struggle.¹

Thus, General Staff HQs placed two officers to work with Col. Suzuki and made preparations for establishing an organization and for forming a concrete plan to aid Myanmar independence.² On 1 February 1941, Under the direct control of Imperial HQs formally formed Minami Kikan³ headed by Col. Suzuki. It charged with the two duties of closing the Burma Road and aiding the Myanmar independence. Soon after the Japanese Government declared war on the Allied Forces on 8 December 1941, Minami Kikan was placed under Fifteenth Army under the Command of Southern Army. On 26 December 1941, the Ceremonial Parade of the recruits was held and the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was formed.⁴

Advancing towards Burma (Myanmar)

The key plan of the Minami Kikan for the Myanmar independence was to enter the trained Thirty Comrades into Myanmar where they would raise armed uprisings against the British; together with this, a small number of Japanese troops as a support command would first occupy around Mawlamyine in Southern Myanmar.⁵

Soon after the Minami Kikan was formed, it immediately started its activities and drafted 'the February Plan' which was a 'Plan of Conspiracy'. The main outlines of the February Plan were:

"...a guerilla unit would first occupy the Tanintharyi region in southern Myanmar and simultaneously with the occupation would announce the establishment of an independent government. The guerilla unit would, through military means, gradually extended the area of occupation to cover the whole of Myanmar, and expelling the British, achieve the independence long desired by the Myanmar. The Burma Road would be closed as soon as possible by the Myanmar themselves..."⁶ Another purpose of aiding Myanmar independence was to support Indian independence and anti-British resistance, and on the other hand, it would help the plan for Indian Independence.⁷

When the war was started in East Asia, the military plan of the Minami Kikan has completely changed. The Fifteenth Army advanced to Myanmar with BIA occupied Mawlamyine on 31 January 1942. The Japanese failed to keep their promise to grant Myanmar as independent country soon after Taninthayi region was also annexed.⁸ The Japanese higher officers from the Imperial Army thought that they could not do as their liked to gain victory over the British if the independence of Myanmar granted earlier. It is the main reason of the delay of the Japanese to

¹ Moriyama, *Biruma Indo*, p.26-27

² *Reconsidering the Japanese Military Occupation in Burma (1942-45)*(2007), edited by Kei NEMOTO, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, p. 198

³ Minami in Japanese means 'South' and Kikan 'Organization' and it means 'Southern Organization'.

⁴ Ota, *Biruma*, p.44

⁵ Hatanō Sumio (1996), (Associate Professor in Social Science), *The Relations of Asia and the Pacific War (Tai Heiyō Sensō to Ajia Gaikō)*, Tokyo University Press, p. 32 (Hereafter cited as Hatanō, *Pacific War*)

⁶ Izumiya, *Minami*, p. 26

⁷ Hatanō, *Pacific War*, p.32

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 141-142

grant the independence of Myanmar.¹ On the other hand, the Japanese General Staff HQs has changed their plan to occupy the whole Myanmar. On 22 January 1942, the Southern Army passed Order No. 590 of the Japanese Imperial Army to occupy all the key positions in Myanmar.²

Conclusion

The British constructed a road of supply line to provide Chiang Kai-shek's government which was retreated to Chungking because of Japanese offensive in China. This road was popularly known as the "Burma Road". Although this road had very little effect on economic relations between two countries of Myanmar and China, it was a strategic road politically and militarily.

Since the Japanese closed the seaports of China in 1939, the "Burma Road" became a main road of military supply to Chiang Kai-shek's government by the Britain and U.S. Thus, the destruction of the "Burma Road" was the main decisive military strategy for the Japanese who could decide the victory of them over China. The Japanese government demanded the British to close that road. As the British government was facing military failure in the European Theatre, they agreed the Japanese demand and closed the road for three months. It means the "Burma Road" became an important tool in dealing political dialogue between the British and Japan.

Myanmar was less important country in strategic position when the Second World War began. However, it turned to main military strategic position on account of the "Burma Road". On military strategic point of view, Myanmar is bordered with China and India and it was a junction of line of connection of three allies; the British, U.S and Nationalist Forces of China. Moreover, Myanmar became western wall or outer fort for the defense of East Asia Front to the Japanese who were fighting against the British and U.S forces.

The Japanese interest on Myanmar was begun on account of the "Burma Road" and they placed Myanmar as a strategic position not only to cut the "Burma Road" for the victory of Sino-Japanese War but also to proceed their military campaign to India through Myanmar to conquer Asia. For these reasons, the Japanese changed their attitude on Myanmar to form "Minami Kikan" to help to assist gaining Myanmar independence by driving out the British from Myanmar soil and to close the "Burma Road".

Although Myanmar was included in the Japanese plan of annexation of Southeast Asia and Myanmar would be annexed by the Japanese Imperial Army in certain time, the annexation of Myanmar was soon implemented because of the "Burma Road". If the militarily strategic the "Burma Road" was not existed in Myanmar, the military assistance given to Myanmar by forming the "Thirty Comrades" would not be implemented by the Japanese.

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¹ Moriyama, *Biruma Indo*, p. 72

² Hatanō, *Pacific War*, p. 32

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