
Salient Issues in Disputed Territory: A Case Study of Tawang

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ABSTRACT:

This article deals with the challenges involved in a border dispute between India and China. It demonstrates that there are two dimensions of issues, i.e. tangible and intangible, that determine India's zero sum claim on Tawang. This article outlines India's policy towards its border dispute with China by analysing the case study of Tawang. The article also demonstrates the social construction of intangible issues in a disputed border through the process of material, functional and symbolic entrenchment process. It is argued that due to the process of entrenchment, salient intangible issues are constructed, which has made compromise difficult and protracted, thus making zero sum claim on Tawang.

Keywords: border dispute, tangible and intangible issue, entrenchment process, Tawang.

INTRODUCTION

There is no dearth of literatures dealing with the vexed problem i.e. territorial dispute between India and China yet the heart of the concern remains unaddressed, i.e. why the states have not been able to resolve the dispute? What determines India's zero sum approach towards Tawang? This article argues that the literatures dealing with the India China border dispute mainly focus on the tangible issues and ignores the social construction of intangible values in a disputed territory due to major events and processes of nationalising space in the disputed border.

Understanding the complexities of the documents and the narratives of the disputed frontier, A.G Noorani points out that there are differences between the western and eastern sectors, in the border dispute between India and China. According to Noorani, the western sector lacks valid historical documents while the eastern sector has valid historical documents to support the claim on the disputed frontier. (Noorani 2011) This article shall take the case study of Tawang to understand India's policy towards its disputed borders.

The literatures about the territorial disputes have been soundly documented by Issue Correlates of War project (ICOW). (Hensel and Mitchel 2005) The literatures basically provide issues which can be tangible or/and intangible in a border dispute and it is argued that disputes with intangible issues are difficult to solve if not impossible to agree upon. ICOW has given list of issues involved in a territorial dispute and this article shall use the lens of issue based approach. This article outlines India's policy towards its border dispute with China by analysing the case study of Tawang. It argues that India's policy towards its disputed border is guided by

both tangible and intangible salience. It argues that India has pursued a policy that imbue intangible values in the disputed border of Tawang.

The article begins with a genealogy of the India China border dispute. This section shall discuss about the literatures that narrates the 'Great Game' and the security dilemma as a reason for the geopolitical importance of Tibet. It highlights the continuation of the Great Game in the post-colonial era albeit with new actors and new power relations. The third section shall discuss the perspectives about India China bilateral relation. The fourth section shall highlight the process in which intangible issues can be infused in a territory with a given tangible properties, it shall highlight the social construction of salient issues between India and China. The fifth section undertakes a case study of Tawang and the last section concludes the article.

THE GENEALOGY OF INDIA CHINA BORDER DISPUTE

There is a plethora of significant work by scholars, for instance, Alastair Lamb, Parshotam Mehra, H.K Barpujari, Nevilie Maxwell and so on have delved in the archives and produced detailed accounts of India China border disputes. (Lamb 1966; Mehra 1947; Barpujari 1981) The Great Game during the colonial era had three primary actors i.e. British, Russia, China and one subject actor i.e. Tibet on whom the decision was cast upon. The critical geopolitical factor for the British policy towards Tibet was due to the advance of Russian influence in central Asia.

There is an arsenal of literatures concerning the legacy of British diplomacy in Tibet and China, which had far reaching consequences for India's northern frontiers. It is argued that the Anglo Chinese Convention 1906 and Anglo Russian Convention 1907 introduced China as one of the crucial actor and hence effectively restored China's position over Tibet. (Chowdhury 1983; Banerjee 2007) It is argued by Jyotirindra Nath Chowdhury that the British pursued a policy of appeasement towards China by perpetuating the myth of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet. (Chowdhury 1983) However, the events took a U turn and later proved that the earlier British policy towards Tibet was a diplomatic defeat. In 1910 Chinese troops entered Lhasa under the command of General Chung Ying. (Mehra 1980) It was the Chinese threat growing large in the north eastern frontier that led the British government to formulate its undefined policy of outer line¹, which later came to be known as Mc Mahon Line.

The present predicament of Tawang dispute between India and China was born out of the womb of Mc Mahon Line. A section came up, within the British administration, known as 'Forward School' and advocated "forward policy" i.e. to establish British control over the Tawang tract. Tawang was and is still considered as a military strategic location and shortest route to Tibet and also that the British argued that the Chinese would be able to exert pressure on Bhutan through the dangerous wedge of the Tawang tract and strongly recommended that British India's boundary should include Tawang and also territories to its north. (Hoffman, Steven A. 2006) In later years to come India continued the British policy towards North East Frontier Agency, later

known as Arunachal Pradesh, was driven and guided by the strategic advantage provided by Tawang.

The security dilemma has been the major cause of the Great Game between the British Empire and Czarist Russia and later after 1914 Shimla Agreement it was extended further between China and British Empire. After the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese military in 1950, the security dilemma was heightened between India and China, as Guruswamy Mohan points out that the Great Game always existed between India and China. (Mohan 2003)

There are two schools of thought i.e. one blames India and the other blames China for the war. The events that unfolded after 1950 was clearly shaped by the colonial legacy as the Great Game continued with different actors but within the same rules of the game i.e. Security dilemma complex. The social construction of security dilemma can be traced back to the British policy towards NEFA and the continuation of the British policy by India albeit with nationalising the disputed space.

The historical discourses and literatures mostly deal with the sanctity of the legal documents and discourses of right and wrong about the implication of events such as war, rather than producing ways to lay an analysis of the ground situation. The material and functional entrenchment of Tawang under NEFA had already begun by the British. Later in the post-colonial era, India continued to entrench the colonial space i.e. NEFA materially, functionally as well as symbolically. This section has basically argued that the genealogy of India China border dispute lay bare on the chest of Colonial policy towards NEFA.

PERSPECTIVES ON INDIA CHINA BILATERAL RELATION

There is an arsenal of literature that inquire the reasons for India and China border dispute. This section puts forward various perspectives about India China border dispute. Most of literatures aver that the British Empire contributed notably to the confusion that swallowed India and China considering the importance of territory for post-colonial states.

This section makes a study of the literatures that provide the reader about the reasons and issues that shaped India China bilateral relation and border dispute. The first crucial issue is Tibet. Scholars have argued that Tibet remained the central block that shaped the bilateral relation between India and China. (ArjitMajumdar 2006)DawaNorbhu argues that Tibet is the legal foundation on which both India and China's border claims rest upon. Tibet is strategically important for China and India as it provides a buffer region between India and China. Due to this reason China was insecure and threatened by India's continuation of Colonial policy towards Tibet. Similarly India felt its entire northern security system threatened when China occupied Tibet. (Norbhu 1997)

Steven A. Hoffman argues that the struggle for power and control over the frontier territory between the British India, China and became conjoined in a security dilemma dynamic. (Hoffman 2006) Security dilemma was an inherent crisis in the Great Game between the Czarist

Russia and the British Empire which was inherited by India and China in the post-colonial era. The consequences of the security dilemma complex were clearly visible after the 1962 war. As Mohan Guruswamy argues that the Panchsheel and the slogans of 'Hindi-Chini-bhai-bhai' was a smokescreen to cover the border conflict, regarding territorial control of large tracts of disputed land. (Guruswamy, M. 2003)

A vocal writer about the India China border dispute Neville Maxwell argues that China's military action in 1962 war was reactive and preemptive because it was Nehru's forward policy and there has been no settlement of the Sino-India border dispute because Nehru's successors have adhered to it, except Narshima Rao's government. (Maxwell 1981, 1999) However, Srinath Raghavan re-examines the revisionist claim to the border dispute and argues that before concluding any remarks it is pertinent to understand the relative weakness of India and the territorial ambition of China. (Raghavan 2006)

Besides all these intricate details of the border dispute, Yaakov Vertzberger argues that the India China bilateral conflict touched many different and interconnected issues such as similarities and differences in the basic perception of international law and dispute, preferences of global system and the relation with the superpowers. Thus the conflict was not limited to the issue of territorial conflict. (Vertzberger 1982)

In another yet important dynamic between India and China is the role of confidence building measures (CBMs). The initiative is to reduce the degree of security dilemma. Scholars have argued that military security dilemma have placed the solution of the border dispute as a process rather than a progress between India and China. Jonathan Holslag argues that there has been growing interdependence between India and China yet there is no spill over in terms of military competition and has failed to mitigate the security dilemma. (Holslag 2009) Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu and Jing Dong Yuan argues that Sino-Indian CBMs are minimalist in scope and objective, and are declarative in nature. The quests for overcoming mutual distrust and threat perceptions through CBMs have not eradicated the root of the tension. It is argued that CBMs serve the purpose of institutionalising minimum measures to prevent accidents and diffuse tensions, without any significant way of transforming fundamental perceptions of threat and security outlook. (Sidhu and Yuan 2003)

The literatures expose the intricacies of the dispute and also the strategies to counter the security dilemma dynamic but there is a dearth of literature that have mapped the border dispute between India and China in terms of the issue based approach. This article seeks to fill in the lacunae and add to the existing literatures of India China border dispute albeit through issue based approach.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ISSUES IN DISPUTED TERRITORIES

The ICOW literature has given substantive ideas regarding the mapping of indicators of the tangible and intangible dimensions of issues involved in a disputed border. (Hensel and Mitchel 2005, Henselet. Al, 2008, Hensel 2001) The ICOW indicators seeks to locate the salient issues in a territorial dispute. ICOW has given us three indicators, for instance, for the tangible issues-

resources, strategic location and permanent habitation, for the intangible issues- the disputed territory should be considered as a national homeland or with ethnic, linguistic religious or other identity ties to the territory and its residents and state that has previously exercised sovereignty over the territory rather than to one that has never done so.

According to Ron Hassner “Entrenchment is a process by which disputes become increasingly resistant to resolution over time, marked by enhanced reluctance to offer, accept or implement compromises or even negotiate over territory.” (Hassner 2006-7, p. 109) This section shall highlight the social construction of salient issues between India and China and argues that India’s policy of nationalising space has resulted in infusing intangible issues in a disputed frontier with China. This may result in a transformation of a perception towards the disputed territory, for instance, a state may first perceive the territory in tangible terms but in due course of time, the state may begin to perceive the same territory as having an intangible issues along with tangible issues.

The social construction of issues takes place through the process of material, functional and symbolic entrenchment. The material entrenchment manifest itself in the forms of transportation and communication link, energy and network links, legal and administrative framework, official taxation and establishment of military control across the disputed territory. The functional entrenchment manifests itself in the depiction in maps and public claims by representatives of the state to the disputed territory. The symbolic entrenchment manifests itself in the construction of museums, national shrines and memorials on the disputed land that helps in production of evidence that supports historical, religious and ethnic links between the territory and homeland. (Hassner, Ron 2003)

Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson point: “border lands are sites and symbol of power”. (Donnan and Wilson 2001, p.1) It is crucial to understand the process of construction and manifestation of national identity at the disputed border as the expression of cultural power of the host state. The border is often marked with symbolic values of a nation state. States mark the sites of seminal battle with the heroic deaths of soldiers on the landscape by means of memorials and commemoration ceremonies. Pierre Nora argues that border symbols represent a complex struggle over public memory and further argues that sites of memory, i.e. monuments, museums, archives, events, texts and so on, lends support to the notion of nation as these are the reminders of the nation-state.(Nora 1997) The basic assumption is that these expressions build a consciousness of an “imagined community”.

The process of construction of symbolic monuments is to symbolically imbue the disputed territory with a bounded national identity. The next section shall undertake a case study of Tawang from an issue based approach to observe the list of tangible and intangible indicators. It shall also analyse the process of entrenchment to substantiate the analysis based on issue salience.

CASE STUDY OF TAWANG

India's zero-sum claim on Tawang is evident as the entrenchment process-material, functional and symbolic entrenchment, tie the disputed territory to India. This section investigates the process of entrenchment in Tawang. It is understood that material and functional entrenchment of Tawang was started by the British officials but with a low pace which was sped up by India after its independence. This section also maps the issues embroiled in the disputed territory of Tawang by using the indicators provided by ICOW.

5.1. A. Material and functional entrenchment process

Hassner argues that territorial claim by the state representatives in the form of maps, negotiation positions and public statements give a clear picture about the disputed issue. Hassner points that maps are both a product and facilitating mechanism of functional entrenchment. (Hassner 2006/7) There are volumes of research that excavate the cartographic controversy between India and China. Basically the controversy dealt around the Aitchinson treaties which deals with the question of Tibet and the western and eastern boundary of the British Empire. After the Shimla agreement, international and internal circumstance pushed the entire Shimla agreement and the cartographic controversy onto the back stage. (Hoffman 1990, 2006, Gupta 1974, Mehra 1980) The point is that Tawang has historically been controversial in the cartographic and political claims, by India and China. It also means that functional entrenchment process in NEFA and particularly Tawang is a political construct of the colonial policy.

This section points out one crucial distinction between the British policy and India's post-colonial policy towards NEFA or rather Tawang. After the India China war 1962 there has been a considerable expansion in terms of not only material but also in symbolic issues which was absent during the colonial era due to Elwin's policy of isolation. The construction of inner line was to restrict contact and communication with the outer line, which shows that it was the policy of isolation towards the frontier tribal area. (Elwin 1960) Later, the reorganisation of NEFA and subsequently the process of integration of Tawang with NEFA is a shift in the perception of ambiguity, held by the moderate British officials. India diverged itself from Elwin's policy of isolation to Nehru's forward policy and middle approach of inclusion.

After Chinese forces occupied Tibet in 1950, Major Khathing, a Naga officer, was deputed in 1951 to establish the country's administrative outpost at Tawang. (Chowdhury 1983) After the 1962 India China war, India started to integrate the administrative structure of NEFA and finally in 1984, Tawang was separated and made into a new district of Arunachal Pradesh, previously known as NEFA. To speed up the development in a systematic manner, the government adopted five years planning to Arunachal Pradesh on issues such as health, education, cottage industry, agriculture, development of communications and community development

B. Symbolic entrenchment

It is symbolic entrenchment that makes the territory valuable as the symbolic entrenchment in the disputed territory imbues intangible values to the territory. These include the construction of

religious or national shrines and memorials on the disputed land. It substantiates the production of evidence that supports historical, religious, and ethnic links between the territory and the homeland. It also further systematic destruction of evidence tying the territory to the opponent's heritage. These acts argue that symbolic values are salient as it cannot be divided or compromised by the states concerned. Hassner points out that this final set of mechanisms makes it difficult for disputants to find substitutes for the territory at stake.

Karen E. Till brings in Maurice Halbwach who argues that group memory endures when they have a physical reality i.e. "a material reality such as a statue, a monument, a place in space and also a symbol or of something of spiritual significance, something shared by the group that adheres to and is super-imposed upon this physical reality". (Halbwach 1992, p.204, cited in Till 2003, p. 291) The war memorials have a significant purpose to honour the martyrs as Kathleen E. Braden and Fred M. Shelly discuss in the context of Aleksandr Chernobrovtshev, who designed the Novosibirsk monument: "designing a monument for the very place which had bloodshed and lost people, is somehow obligated to immortalize the human tragedy..... monument would be to the soldiers themselves....their names would be placed in one huge list.... Each person is a whole world". (Braden and Shelly 2000)

After 1962 India China war, India have honoured the martyrs of 1962 war by building war memorials and monuments, statues in Tawang and other places. These material structures reify the imagination of war events and the remembrances of the sacrifices that a war took away in order to save the honour and dignity of the nation. These places of memory constitute historical meanings and narratives of the historic events of the nation state, in the form of memory. (NENA 1999)

It is in the process of nation-building that the politics of memory becomes important. It is done through constructing war memorials, heroic monuments, observance of nationally important days, construction of narratives about the historic events such as 1962 war as well as the place of event, a place where the war took place, as a national memory i.e. a narrative of a collective memory, endowing a sense of identity to the territory or the place of event. It also explains that the sites of memory are crucial attributes of a nation. (Dixit 2006)

5.2. A. Issue based understanding of Tawang

Tangible issues

Analysing from the issue based approach, conventional inquiry of the value of Tawang shows that Tawang provides tangible advantage to both India and China.

Strategic Location: Tawang have been conventionally regarded as a military strategic location for military and trading route towards Tibet. (D. S Rajan 2006) The crucial geo strategic advantage is that Tawang provides security to Bhutan on the eastern flank. It is also argued that altogether Tawang and of all Arunachal Pradesh is of crucial importance to the territorial integrity and defence of India's north east and therefore remains non-negotiable. (Subash Kapila 2009)

Resources: Along with the military strategic advantage, the region is rich in mineral and natural resource potential. Major mineral deposits such as coal, dolomite and limestone along with minor mineral deposits such as copper, gold, graphite, lead, marble, nickel and tungsten. Along with these valuable resources, Tawang has substantial potential for energy security through mega dams.

Population: According to 2001 census the total population of district is 38,294, male and female composition at 21,846 and 17,078 respectively. The rural population comprises 78.48 percent of the total population, which belongs to schedule tribes such as the native Monpa, Bhotia and Adi etc. (census 2001) ICOW presents a list of tangible issues which also includes settled population as a tangible issue in a border dispute. Looking at the India China border conflict it is pointed out that India has been insisting on the settlement based on the settled population. (Rajan 2006) However, Arun Shourie highlights the issue by contending that China has turned away from this principle and this is visible when it pushes its claim over Tawang. (Shourie 2008, pp. 23)

However analysing the tangible issues of Tawang, it can also be argued that the rapid developments in the sophisticated military technologies have certainly rendered the strategic advantage of the geographic location less useful, for instance, a sophisticated missile system can penetrate the territory of an enemy state. Thus this article argues that the salience of Tawang cannot be left unexplored from intangible issues. Thus the conventional inquiry of the strategic/tangible advantage of a territory should be supplemented by other forms of inquiry such as the constructions of intangible issues.

Intangible issues

There are ample evidences of intangible issues embroiled in a territorial dispute of Tawang. This section examines the parameters to analyse intangible issues in Tawang. Historical analysis explains that the linkage between Tawang and India is tied to the legacy of British. For China, it is the claim that Tawang was a part of Southern Tibet. However the present scenario deserves a thoughtful analysis of the ongoing process of entrenchment in the disputed territory.

The ICOW's parameters of measuring intangible salience can be used in the case of Tawang. Firstly, a homeland rather than a colony or a dependency: Tawang stands questionable if India really counts it as a homeland state. However, the further readings of India's position on Tawang clarify that Tawang is an integral part of India, yet the historical analysis explains that the linkages between Tawang and India is tied with the legacy of the historical British rule in India. Even with the case of China, Tawang does not actually fall as the homeland state; however, China substantiates its claim that Tawang has been historically a part of Tibet.

Secondly, a given territory is considered more intangibly salient to a state that has ethnic, linguistic, religious, or other identity ties to the territory. A territory that is inhabited by one's kinsmen has much greater value as part of the nation. Tawang has been populated by Monpas who are religiously Buddhist. It has a linkage with Tibetan Buddhism. China has basically substantiated that Tawang is a part of Southern Tibet therefore culturally and religiously Tawang is oriented towards Tibet. However, this does not validate that Tawang authentically and necessarily has a Chinese identity. Moreover, historical evidences point out that Monpas were

the original inhabitants of Tawang although they followed Tibetan Buddhism as their religion. India and China have substantiated their claims on the historical basis, as China has claimed Tibet as a part of mainland China and India claimed it as the legal successor of the British legacy.

Finally, a territory is more intangibly salient to a state that has previously exercised sovereignty over the territory than to one that has not done so. Historically, the literature argues that Tibetan officials used to collect taxes from Tawang. However, after the Simla agreement it is argued that British officials made a protest to the Tibet Government and the Tibetan authorities were stopped in exercising their authority over Tawang. (Noorani2011) It is out here that India produced its argument that it is through the British legacy that India actually exercised sovereignty over Tawang rightfully after the Simla Agreement of 1914. China has no direct sources to claim that they had previously exercised sovereignty over Tawang except in a conventional sense of attaching Tawang from the viewpoint that Tibet had influence over Tawang historically.

If we analyse the intangible salience both states have, a loose definition over the questions whether Tawang is historically the homeland state of India or China, whether it has ethnic/religious/identity ties towards India or China and if India and China have historically exercised sovereignty over Tawang. It is in the midst of confusion that the process of entrenchment helps us to identify a clearer position of one of the states in disagreement.

Tawang has been materially, functionally and symbolically entrenched by India. It explains that the nation-building process has tied Tawang much more closely to India. Hence, we can hear the Indian representatives rebutting the Chinese claim in the northeastern sector and including Tawang as an integral part of India. Apart from examining the ICOW's indicators, it is also necessary to investigate the entrenchment process so as to understand the contemporary picture of the disputed territory of Tawang.

Neville Maxwell's book *India's China War* has recorded a small piece of Nehru's speech in the Lok Sabha regarding the border dispute. It signifies the values that a nation state holds for a territory. Jawaharlal Nehru argued that it is absurd to make war for two miles of territory in mountains but Nehru also argued that if it involved national prestige and dignity then it is not just the question of two mile territory but it is of nation's self-respect and dignity that is of crucial concern. (Maxwell 1970) It shows that nationalising space through the administrative and bureaucratic networks along with the construction of monument, memorials and other edifices manifest the symbolic value of the nation-state.

This section makes an attempt to grab the core issue in the deadlocked border dispute between India and China by observing a case study of Tawang. The case study attempts to analyse the value of Tawang for India in both material/tangible and symbolic/intangible terms. This section also puts forward the present scenario process of entrenchment in Tawang so as to understand the processes that imbued intangible values such as honour and dignity of a territorial national identity. The intangible values are also associated in the case of Tawang and this has determined India's zero sum claim on Tawang.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates the complexities involved in a border dispute by making a historical analysis and case study of Tawang. It also shows that Indian policy towards its disputed frontier is concerned with both tangible and intangible issues discussed elsewhere in this article. It argues that conventional understanding of a border dispute sorts out tangible issues and therefore remains silent on the problem as to why some border dispute get prolonged and protracted in due course of time? This article argues that tangible issues should be facilitated with the alternative understanding of intangible issues in a disputed border. It is argued that events such as war, monuments and memorials that reify the memories of war, which in turn harden the differences and complexities of the bilateral ties, along with the process of entrenchment construct and imbue intangible values to a disputed border thus making the compromise of tangible issues difficult if not impossible.

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