

## **China's Territorial Claims on Arunachal Pradesh and its Implications on Development Paradigm: A perspective**

**TABANG MIBANG**

Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University  
Rono Hills, Doimukh, Papumpare (Arunachal Pradesh) India

### **ABSTRACT**

From the colonial period to the respective independence and liberation, the territorial disputes remain the clearest points of divergence between India and China. Despite the normalization of relation on many occasions, agreement on the territory remains elusive. The North East Frontier (Administration) Regulation of 1954, provide for a full scale administration of the area claim by People's Republic of China under collective designation of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). However, the area was placed under the Ministry of External Affairs and continued the British policy of Inner Line Regulation which ensures non-interference from the people of plains and curved the area for self-development. This attitude of reluctance and bewilderment reflected unclear stand of India on Arunachal Pradesh in the beginning and resulted in snail pace development of the region. In the aftermath of Chinese aggression, the efforts toward politico-administrative and political integration were implemented. However, many bordering districts in Himalayan ranges of Arunachal Pradesh such as *Taksing, Mechuka, Vijayanagar, Chaglagam, Gelling*, etc., still remain unconnected and left to tend themselves of the basic needs.

**Key Words :** Territorial disputes, Development paradigms, Political integration, Bordering district, Arunachal Pradesh

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Sino-India relation in the contemporary times is shaped by several key issues. Some are old, others new, but among all the issues, the territorial disputes over Arunachal Pradesh remains the clearest points of divergence between the two despite the normalization on many occasions, many round of talks, visits at highest level and the signing of the major agreement on confidence building measures. The prospects of negotiated settlement in the near future also seem as remote as ever for several reasons. India claims around 40,000 square Kilometres of Chinese controlled territory (Aksai Chin) on the western flanks of Himalayas and China claims around 92,000 square kilometers of Indian controlled territory (Arunachal Pradesh) on the eastern flanks (David, 2008). An unsettled border provides china the strategic leverage to keep India uncertain about its intentions and nervous

about its capabilities, while exposing India's vulnerabilities and weakness, and ensuring New Delhi's "good behaviour" on issues of vital concern to China (Malik, 2009). India perceives Chinese territorial claim of the "lost Chinese territory" as baseless and outfall of the aggressive, expansionist and revisionist approach to territorial issues. Power and perceptions seem to be particularly powerful factors in the relations. This is reflected in current Sino – Indian relations based on competition and "balance of power" calculations in and around their respective neighborhoods for great power status in Asia (David, 2008). Further, the new development in the world politics in the changed global environment in the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century and the subsequent dramatic shift in India's Foreign Policy from the traditional practice of non – alignments and the multi-polar concept to "military alignment" with United States aggravated the stress in relations between the two

(Kamal and Anuradha, 2007).

A look into the course of relations between the two also reveals a conflict of national agenda or national interest and “Asymmetrical threat perceptions” in terms of projection and perception of power, and security strategies thereon (John, 2002). Hence, even if the territorial dispute was resolved, china and India would still retain a competitive relationship. Other factors apart from the territorial disputes includes nuclear arm race, the legacy of cold-war alignments, encroachment into each other’s spheres of influence, resource competition, encirclement and alignment strategies or strategic collaboration, rivalry for the leadership of developing world and multi-lateral forums (Mohan, 2004). The difference between the Asian giants on the “unresolved chronic territorial disputes” and politics of “power game” to prevent the rise of a peer competitor in Asia manifested to “Security dilemma” and at the same time, affects domestic development paradigms in the bordering states.

#### **Dynamics of China’s Territorial Claim on Arunachal Pradesh:**

The Chinese claims on the present Arunachal Pradesh is not new. It goes back to September 8, 1959, when it was first officially unveiled in a letter by Premier Zhou Enlai to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Thereafter it has remained the official Chinese position, articulated by the Chinese officials and analysts in the strategic community at different times (Dutta, 2008). But during 1990s, it was kept out of public posturing as the two sides tried to build a stable relationship and reach a territorial compromise. The territorial controversy once again gained significant public focus in the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century when the Chinese ambassador to India told a media channel that Beijing does not recognize Arunachal Pradesh as a part of India but as part of China. In May 2007, China denied visa to an Indian Administrative Officer (IAS) from Arunachal Pradesh, who was to be a part of a one hundred seven IAS officer study visit to Beijing and Shanghai on the ground that Arunachalees are Chinese citizen and hence could visit China without a visa. In 2009, in a new act of diplomatic affront, China demanded Prime Minister of India not to undertake official visit to Arunachal Pradesh and again, a few months later insisted the Indian government not to allow Dalai Lama to visit Tenzing Gao and Tawang- famous for its Buddhist monastery. China also sprung a surprise to India by showing Arunachal Pradesh as part of Chinese territory

in the maps on their new e-passports (Arunachal Times, 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2012). In response to China’s posture, India declared Arunachal Pradesh to be “core” concerns and rejected Chinese claims as unrealistic

What is truth in the realm of human interaction is that conflict is unavoidable. It is almost continually present in one form or the other in human system from the family to the state and world polity. A conflict starts when there exists two different sets of interests, aims, values and beliefs. In other words, a conflict is a state of affairs characterized by the existence of incompatible or irreconcilable aspect of relationship (Kenneth, 1965). Hence, elimination of conflict requires widening of the area of co-operation. The unilateral treatment of disputes or taking one sided view in resolving the disputes without widening the area of cooperation or negotiation may prevent peaceful means of conflict resolution. The repeated Chinese demand or claims on India’s territory (Arunachal Pradesh) needs closer insight. Nye Hougyi writes, “As inheritor of the expansionist and aggressive policies of imperial Britain, Post-Independence India’s border policies were blatantly revisionist and expansionary...To realize its claims, in 1950, India placed these illegally occupied territories under the jurisdiction of Assam and in 1954, established the North East border special zone, which changed in 1971 to the Arunachal Autonomous Administrative region” (Hongyi, 2009). Chinese aggression of 1962 is considered as China’s counter attack on India’s forward policy of gradual occupation in line with Nehru’s great India plan’ along with china throughout the 1950s.

Still unresolved, the territorial disputes began with the Anglo-Tibetan treaty of 1904 which left the Aksai Chin under British control. However, the Qing Empire of the Tibet nominally a part rejected the treaty. Similar dynamics unfolded at the other end of Himalayas. In the north east, the Mac Mohan Line may have been agreed between British officials and Tibetan figures at Simla convention of 1913-14, but the Chinese authorities in Beijing refused to sign, and continued to reject the agreement (David, 2008). The area was taken under British administrative control in the wake of the Light Foot expedition of 1938 and the Mills expedition of 1944. It re-emerged as a growing issue in the late 1950s as the relation between two Asian giants crumbled. The disputed ambiguity of Mac Mohan Line was no longer sustainable. Consequently, a “new great game” on the borders of India had reached its climax as both side started

movement of troop in and around the Mac Mohan Line with Indian probes becoming noticeable in India's "Forward policy" (Maxwell, 1970). In the west largely uninhabited Aksai chin had become an important linkage between China and Tibet. Diplomatic channels for negotiations were absent; instead "misperceptions" were all too evident in their lurch to war in 1962 (Vertzberger, 1984).

The 1962 war was militarily, a Chinese victory. Chinese control of the Aksai Chin plateau was not stopped by Indian military efforts. Instead, Chinese forces after pushing India out of the disputed territory choose to withdraw to de-facto line back around Mac Mohan line. India was left humiliated, with a festering wound on India's security psyche (Baldev and Paul, 2003). These events generated a radical change in Indian perceptions of China. The defeat was a mindset shattering events and a watershed national psychology. Its effects have lasted to the present, "India's distrusted animus toward china is a toxic element in world politics.. The hostilities derives, of course, from the Indian political class wound memory of their country's humiliation in brief, fierce, border war of 1962" (Maxwell, 2003). Over 40 years after the border war of 1962, Chinese scholar could similarly acknowledge the need of more time to be healed (Wang, 2004). As such, mind-sets injured in the sentiments of humiliation on one side or hurt feelings on the other became an ongoing feature of India-China perceptions (Ranganathan, 2002).

### **Domestic Development Paradigm (Nehru-Elwin Policy) and its Implications:**

The 24<sup>th</sup> state of Indian union, the modern Arunachal Pradesh is a home of twenty six major tribes and numerous sub-tribes and minor tribes covering a geographical area of 83,743 square kilometers. It is the largest state in north east India which makes 2.25 per cent of total area of country and 32.83 per cent of the area of north east India (Arunachal Pradesh, 1981). The racial affiliation of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is described by different scholar as mongoloid, paleo-mongoloid and protomongoloid with considerable difference of opinion. Within this broad division each tribes and sub - tribes has its own dialects with different socio-political traditions and belief system. The major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are the Monpas, the Sherdukpens, the Akas, the Nyishis, the Apatanis, the Tagins, the Hill Miris, the Adis, the Mishmis, the Khamptis, the Singphos,

the Tangsas, the Noctes, the Wanchos, etc. (Choudhary, 1983).

The process of emergence of political homogeneity of modern Arunachal Pradesh began with the Inner Line Regulation of 1873, a line fixed by the British Government to regulate the commercial relations between the hill tribes and British subjects in the plains. Once a part of Assam, the present Arunachal Pradesh was known as North East Frontier tract as designated under the Assam Frontier Regulation of 1914 which promulgated that the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 would be extended to the hills inhabited or frequented by the Abors (now Adis), Miris, Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas, Khamptis, Bhutias, Akas and Daflas (now Nyishis). As such the North-East Frontier Tract was divided into three administrative section *viz.*, the Central and Eastern section with headquarter at Sadiya, the Western section with headquarter at Charduar and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract under the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur district by separating them from the then Darrang and Lakhimpur district of Assam (Luthra, 1971). All these arrangement were made necessary to enable the political officers of North-East Frontier Tract to exercise in regular manner the measure of political control over the area under its jurisdiction.

A policy of peaceful penetration was persuaded in the beginning to ensure minimum interference compatible with the necessity of protecting the tribes from unprovoked aggression, and preventing them from violating either British territory or Chinese territory. In 1919, on the recommendation of Sir Beatson Bell, the then chief commissioner of Assam, the central and eastern section was renamed as the Sadiya Frontier Tract and western section as Balipara Frontier Tract. The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract however, continued to be known as such. Under the government of India act 1919, all the tribal areas in Assam including North-East Frontier Tract were designated as "Backward Area" and diarchy had no meaning for these Frontier Tracts. Till 1943, these areas were loosely administered as 'excluded areas' as designated in Government of India Act, 1935 but in 1943 a change in administrative set up was effected with the creation of new frontier known as Tirap Frontier Tract which was curved out of Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract with headquarter at Margerita (Nyori, 1993). In spite of too rapid punitive expeditions, the British were cautious enough not to disturb the functioning of traditional political institutions of the Tribal. But, the Assam Frontier

(Administration of justice) Regulation, 1945 was a clear indication of interference in tribal system of administration. In this way, the government control was extended. After independence, the position of North-East Frontier Tract was hotly debated in the constituent assembly, which ultimately led to the constitution of a committee popularly known as Bordoloi Committee under the aegis of the constituent assembly to recommend special administrative framework for the tribal areas. But the committee did not favour any change in the existing administrative set up of the North- East Frontier Tract. For administrative framework convenience, the Balipara Frontier Tract was already divided into Sela sub-agency and Subansiri area in 1946 (Arunachal Pradesh code, 1981). Subsequently the remaining portion of the Sadiya Frontier Tract was divided into administrative unit viz. Abhor hills district and Mishmi Hill district with headquarter at Pasighat and Sadiya, respectively.

The North East Frontier (Administration) Regulation of 1954, provide for a full scale administration of the area under collective designation of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), and erstwhile Frontier Tract were re-designated as Frontier division, each under a political officer. As a result, the whole area was divided into six Frontier divisions. The Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two separate administrative unit called the Subansiri Frontier division and Kameng Frontier division with their headquarter at Ziro and Bomdila, respectively and the Tirap Frontier Tract, the *Abhor* hills district, the Mishmi hills district had been renamed as Tirap Frontier Division, Siang Frontier Division and Lohit Frontier Division with their headquarters at Khela, Along and Tezu, respectively. The *Naga* tribal area known as Tuensang Frontier Division which was until then also a part at the territory was excluded from the territory and transferred to Nagaland in 1957 (Talukdar, 1987). However, NEFA administration was still placed under the ministry of external affairs and followed the British policy of Inner Line Regulation which ensures non-interference from the people of plains for unimpeded self-development of the tribes of the region. This attitude of reluctance and bewilderment reflected unclear stand of India on Arunachal Pradesh in the beginning and resulted in snail pace development of the region.

Indian policy till Chinese Aggression in 1962 suffered from severe deficiencies in terms of strategy, tactics, and approach to advance country's Foreign policy and border issues. It failed to grasp the full implications of the rise of

powerful Chinese nationalism on India's border; the role of power and the need to maintain power symmetry in order to maintain peace and sense of security in course of history. Moreover, India's reluctance in raising the boundary issue with China and settling it before finalizing its political map was also diplomatically unhelpful, especially when India did not physically occupy the border areas in many places. It also failed to realize the possibility that China would use massive force, if necessary, to affirm its claims and its political will.

### **Development in the Aftermath of the Chinese Aggression, 1962:**

The region witnessed a drastic change in national policy in the aftermath of Chinese aggression. The vision and confidence of the nation got shattered. This brought back the colonial approach, considering the region as 'Frontier' that needs to be protected and defended militarily. All the development efforts of the government henceforth were launched based on security related approach. Thus, Nehru-Elwin policy of gradual integration was replaced by policy of progressive politico-economic development. To ensure greater homogeneity and political integration, a committee was set up by the Governor of Assam in May 1964 to consider the feasibility of the introduction of modern democratic decentralization in the then NEFA under the chairman of Dr. Daying Ering, the then Parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. The purpose of appointing the Ering Committee was to bring a change in political structure of the territory (Talukdar, 1987). The committee submitted its report in January 1965 with an epoch making recommendation. The recommendation became the basis for enactment of the NEFA (Panchayat Raj) Regulation of 1967, which virtually ushered into the introduction of the three-tier panchayat Raj system in NEFA. Further, as a result of the Ering Committee recommendation, the administration of NEFA was handed over to the Home Ministry of India from the Ministry of External Affairs with effect from August 1, 1965. From September 1, 1965, the nomenclatures of administrative divisions were changed to districts, and administrative cadres were also enlarged and streamlined. Correspondingly, the Political officers, additional Political Officers, Assistant, Political Officers, etc. were re-designated as Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Deputy Commissioner and Extra Assistant Commissioner, respectively. These efforts toward rapid politico-administrative and cultural

integration associated with programmes for rapid modernization and political integration, implemented in a massive scale ended the previous policy of isolation and brought the region under national mainstream. However, despite all efforts of the national government towards rapid development of the region; many bordering districts in Himalayan ranges of Arunachal Pradesh such as Taksing, Mechuka, Vijayanagar, Chaglagam, etc. are still unconnected with mainland of the country and left to tend themselves of the basic needs. This negligence on the part of government in providing basic road infrastructure could become a major hurdle for the nation in case of any emergency.

To conclude, Arunachal Pradesh has never been a part of Tibet as considered by China. There is no evidence of any kind in the folklores or oral tradition of the people of the region narrating the Kings or Kingdoms. The 1904 Anglo-Tibetan treaty and Shimla convention of 1914 can't be considered the basis of China's claims. The bone of contention between India and China is their quest for power or the clashes of perceptions rather than the petty border issues. Historical and territorial isolation of Arunachal Pradesh is used to hedge India's rising powers and balance the regional threats thereof, in terms of security and diplomatic perceptions on issues of vital concern confronting national interest. Positive steps require on both the sides for stable and peaceful relations, therefore are general agreement on the terms of co-existence—equality, a fair of compromise on diplomatic issues, appreciating each other's security concerns and treating each other as good neighbors.

## REFERENCES

- Arunachal Pradesh, Some basis figure, 1981, p.2.
- Arunachal Pradesh Code (1981). Vol.1, Itanagar.
- Arunachal Times, (24<sup>th</sup> November, 2012), Vol.1, No.188
- Arunachal Times, Vol.23, No.251, February 20, 2012; Vol.23, No.298, April 9, 2012; Vol.24, No.6, June 11, 2012.
- Baldev, N. and Paul, N. (2003). *India in the world order*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge.
- Choudhary, J. N. (1983). *Arunachal Pradesh from frontier tract to union territory*, Cosmo publications, New Delhi.
- David, S. (2008). Sino-Indian security predicaments for the Twenty-First century, *Asian Security*, 4(3) : 250.
- Dutta, S. (2008). Revisiting China's Territorial Claims on Arunachal. *Strategic Analysis*, 32 (4).
- Hongyi, N. (2009). Explaining Chinese solutions to territorial disputes with neighbour states, *Chinese J. Internat. Politics*, 2 : 487-523.
- John, G. (2002). Asymmetrical Indian and Chinese Threat perceptions. *J. Strategies Studies*, 25 (4) : 109-134.
- Kamal, M. C. and Anuradha M.C. (2007). India's foreign policy shifts and the calculus of power. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 42 (35) : 3547-3554.
- Kenneth, R.H. (1965). New directions in research on conflict resolution. *J. Social Issues*, Worcester, pp.44-46.
- Luthra, P. N. (1971). *Constitutional and Administrative growth of North-East Frontier Agency*, NEFA, Shillong.
- Malik, J.M. (2009). India's response to china's rise, In K.J. Cooney and Y. Sato (Eds.), *The rise of China and international security: America and Asia respond*, pp.177-212. London and New York : Routledge.
- Maxwell, N. (1970). *India's China war*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Maxwell, N. (2003). Forty years of Folly: What caused the Sino-Indian Border war and why the dispute is unresolved, *Critical Asian Studies*, 35 (1) : 99-112.
- Mohan, M. (2004). India China relations: Giants stir, corporate and compete; special assessment, *Asia-Pacific centre for security studies*, p.18.
- Nyori, T. (1993). *History and Culture of the Adis*, Omson Publications, Gauhati.
- Ranganathan, C. (2002). The China threat : A view from India, in Yee, H. and Storey, I. (eds.), *The China threats*, London: Routledge Curzon, pp.288-301.
- Talukdar, A.C. (1987). *Political Transition in the grassroots in tribal India*, Omson Publications, Gauhati.
- Vertzberger, Y. (1984). *Misperception in foreign policy making: the Chino-Indian conflict (1959-1962)*, Boulder – Westview.
- Wang, J. (2004). China's changing role in Asia, In Kokubun, R. and Wang, J. (eds.), *The rise of China and a changing East Asian order*, Tokyo Centre for International Exchange, Tokyo, pp.3-22.

\*\*\*\*\*