

The Eastern Sector Border in Relations between India and China in the 21st Century: An Analysis

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Abstract

This Paper basically aims to discuss about the contemporary discourse of the India-China border dispute in the eastern sector in the beginning of the 21st century. It includes the study of changing patterns of India- China border dispute in the eastern sector and about the official attempts to settle border dispute, particularly in the eastern sector. Because, in the last century, both India and China had taken considerable measures for settlement of boundary question in several times. Also, both the country had agreed and forwarded their will to boundary settlement, ensuring peace and tranquilities across the border areas. It was extended in the beginning of the 21st century for resolving boundary dispute with a permanent solution between India and China. But, after all these significant events, the world's longest and most complex boundary dispute had not been resolved till today. Rather, China has increased their aggressive territorial claim over Indian jurisdictions. As such, this environment directly affects in the both countries' relationship that has been challenged the stabilities and peace across the Asian theatre. Thus, it provides tremendous scope to study the political geography of the India- China border dispute in the eastern sector as the Chinese has started claiming their territorial rights aggressively in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, in the eastern sector borderland.

Keywords: India, China, Border, Eastern sector, Geopolitical, Dispute

Introduction

Beginning of the twenty first century is marked as a period of transition in relations between India and China in many ways. The geopolitics has changed in the Asian theatre with starting of this new century. In this changed geopolitical environment, India and China have emerged as competitor, particularly in economic terms following their aged old dispute over boundaries. In this case, the political geography is the major aspect to understand relationship between both these two leading Asian countries. However, the political geography has been directly and indirectly linked in the centre stage of the longstanding India-China border dispute in the Himalayas at the eastern sector.

This paper basically aims to discuss about the contemporary discourse of the India-China border dispute in the eastern sector in the beginning of the 21st century. Also, it includes the study of changing patterns of the India- China border dispute in the eastern sector in the new century. It attempts to analyse the political geography of the India-China border dispute in the eastern sector. Because, political geography of the eastern sector border dispute has a critical strategic calculation. For this reason, China has a burning desire to occupy the easternmost region of the India union. Thus, this study attempts to critically analyse the strategic aspect of the political geography of the eastern sector border dispute between India and China in the 21st century.

Thus, it provides tremendous scope to study the political geography of the India- China border dispute in the eastern sector as the Chinese has started claiming their territorial rights aggressively in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, in the eastern sector borderland.

Map 1.1: Geopolitical Location of Arunachal Pradesh, the eastern sector



Source: *The Dialogue of Multiple Identities* by Ananya S Guha, 2012.

The Eastern Sector as the Geopolitical Flash Point

The Political geography is one of the key elements for strategic thinking in relations between countries. In case of India and China, there are many geopolitical interpretations in relations between both the countries. There are couple of differences between India and China, but both these two countries somehow intersect in their geopolitical ambitions in several ways. In this case border dispute becomes as the flash point in their geopolitical competition which necessarily impacts on the relationship between India and China. As former India's Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha stated that both India and China need to ensure that each has sufficient strategic space (Scott 2008).

China has built up massive military establishment in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and as well as they have build-up communication and infrastructure across the border with India. However, China has surprisingly increased her military presence in the southern and central Tibet. Apart from this, they have installed nuclear missile in the TAR which can hit all of the major cities of India in few minutes. Though, it is assumed that these missiles are basically targeted to the Russian and American bases in the South and East China Sea. Although, it necessarily creates kind of suspicions in the mind of Indian for her long-standing bitterness with the China, which is basically the dispute over border (Chansoria 2011).

In this context, the eastern sector borderland has emerged as the flash point of the geostrategic rivalry between India and China. There are two intriguing reasons. First one is the strategic rivalry between India and China, in which Chinese see the border dispute in Arunachal Pradesh as element of "balance of power" and "security dilemma". Second one is to secure Chinese interest in the TAR. This tension has arisen when Chinese officially articulated Arunachal Pradesh, particularly Tawang, as a part of the southern Tibet. It was officially announced by then Chinese vice- foreign minister Liu Shuqing in a border talk between India and China in 1986 (Dutta 2008).

This Chinese claim was, after twenty years later in 2006, again extended by Chinese ambassador to India Sun Yuxi. In regards, he stated that the whole of the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory and Tawang is only a small part of it (Ramesh 2006; Huchet 2008). Thus, it necessarily shows that Chinese aggressive move towards the eastern sector of the India- China boundary.

As Goswami observed that Chinese position on the eastern sector has been changed over the time. It is a smart geopolitical diplomacy of Chinese. As matter of fact, Indian realizes that now dispute over border in the eastern sector would be major flash point for a war between India and China. In this, one of the major geostrategic logic is that Tawang is one of the major handful Himalayan mountain pass which provides India to access the Himalayan range. Also. Tawang is closely linked up India with Bhutan and Tibet and provide a huge scope for military establishment.

However, in 1959, Tibetan leader Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso fled to India through Tawang. In fact, it provides accessibilities to some part of the Nepal. In addition, Chinese believe that American intelligence use this place to operate counter- communist action against Chinese and later India too. Thus, this strategic scenario of the Tawang along with the whole Arunachal Pradesh leads Chinese assertiveness over the eastern sector border dispute with India at present (M. Malik 2012; Goswami 2012b; Chansoria 2011).

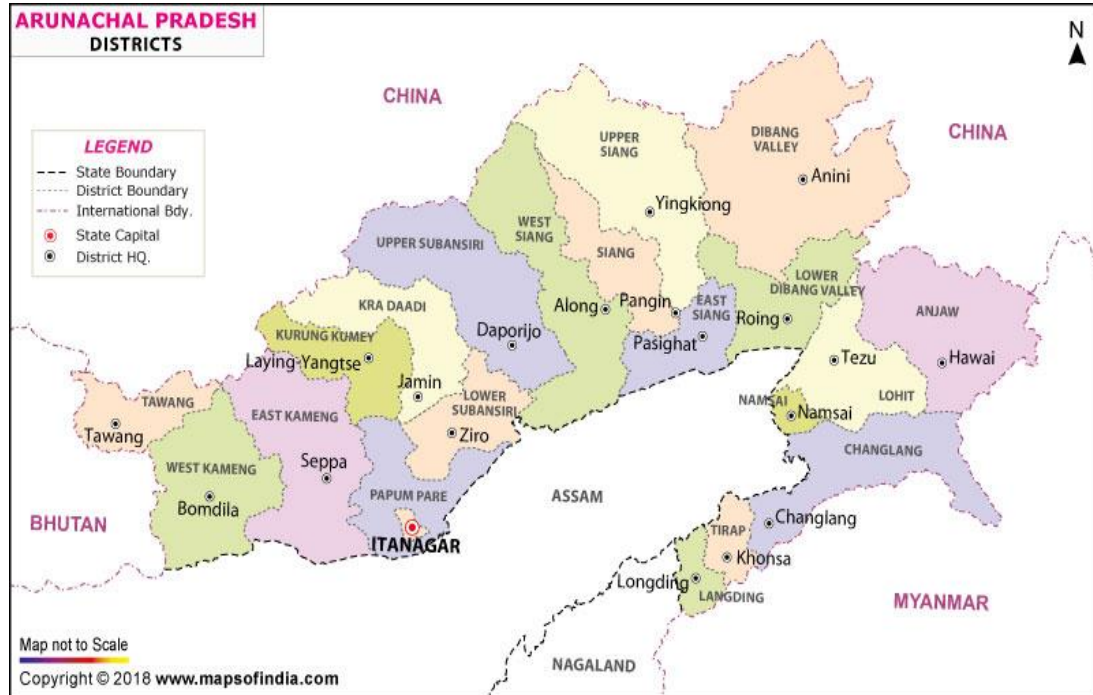
Linking the Tibet and Dalai Lama Factor into the Contemporary Discourse

It is important to understand that the increasing China's territorial claim on Arunachal Pradesh (in the eastern sector) also has a great symbolic resonance for its legitimacy over Tibet. They have been continuously referring the "historical baggage" about 400 year's old monastery in Tawang. It was the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama in the 17th century and is also the second largest Tibetan monastery after Lhasa. In this linkage, China assumes that the 14th Dalai Lama chooses his successor from the Tawang monastery. In addition, Chinese are very suspicious about India's attitude on the Dalai Lama and Tibetan issue. They think that India intentionally makes possible Dalai Lama's travel to abroad and his other activities. Indeed, it is Chinese fear that Lama's speeches around the world have kept the Tibetan issue alive and questioned Chinese legitimacy over Tibet (Garver 2002).

This suspicious attitude of Chinese was a product of the rebellious activities in Indo-Tibet border area in 1959. China still fears that India might help or support anti-China activities in the Tibet or outside of Tibet. Thus, to secure their interest in Tibet, China pursues an aggressive posture on Arunachal Pradesh as a strategic tool, as Raghavan observed.

In this regard, most of Indian academician and policy makers argue that Chinese aggressive claim on Arunachal Pradesh is to balance its growing insecurity over Tibet. However, the existing strong Tibetan culture particularly in Tawang and the Upper Siang districts in Arunachal Pradesh has always been provoked Chinese, as Goswami explained clearly. This, in view of Chinese, may cause for a strong pan-Tibetan movement for Tibetan independence across the India-China border area (Vertzberger 1984).

Map 1.2: The geographic extent of the strategic Tawang and Upper Siang District



Source: The section of State of India, Maps of India.

In 2017, as Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said that the invitation to Dalai Lama to visit Arunachal Pradesh will cause “serious damage” to India- China relations. China’s sharp response against the visit of the Tibetan leader in Arunachal Pradesh is a symbolic concern of the Dalai Lama factor in India-China relations. In fact, Dalai is one of the major factor in China’s aggressive claim over the Arunachal Pradesh in recent period. Nonetheless, India is smartly observing the seriousness of the Dalai Lama factor and the sensitivity of India-China border question (Aneja 2017; N 2017, 08-9).

Explaining the Chinese Aggressive Claim over the Arunachal Pradesh

The rise of India and China has warmed up debates on Asian security within the same geographical space, whether both these two rising powers will lead the co-operation or conflict in Asian theatre. China’s current aggressive posture towards India in many directions necessarily draws a question mark on the new Chinese strategy. There is a huge on-going debate internationally, whether it would lead a major war between India and China in near future, as many Indian observe in different circles.

In this context, Malik said that China’s aggressive claim on India’s Arunachal Pradesh can be taken as a strategic and diplomatic response to balance India’s rise in the Asian regional order. However, it is an open secret that Chinese view India as a competitor for power and influence globally which would have an adversarial effect on Chinese ambition for great power.

As such, for China, the geopolitical disagreement and territorial dispute with India is the strong point to counter India’s rise in different level. Thus, dispute over the eastern sector, Arunachal Pradesh, remains as a good option for Chinese to push back their strategic competitor within the global race both economically and materially.

In May 2007, China denied issuing visa to an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, Ganesh Koyu, a resident of the Indian state Arunachal Pradesh, who was selected as a team member of 107 IAS officers for official visit to Beijing and Shanghai. This became as a breaking news in Indian media after Chinese

denial which had mirrored Chinese intention towards the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Clarifying this position, China unsurprisingly pointed out that IAS Koyu is basically a Chinese citizen since he belongs to Arunachal Pradesh, a part of Southern Tibet and hence Koyu could visit any part of China as a Chinese citizen without a visa. Thus, this was one of the direct provocation and assertion by Chinese (Routray 2013, 36).

China again tried to provoke India blocking economical support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in June 2009. India sought an amount of US\$2.9 billion loan from the Asian Development Bank for her internal infrastructure development. This included an amount of US\$60 million for flood management, water supply and sanitation project in Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, Chinese took this issue seriously and China sought to broadcast its claim on Arunachal Pradesh in a multilateral forum for the first time (Kanwal 2009).

Apparently, China opined deep dissatisfaction and worry of Prime Ministerial visit in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Former Indian P.M. Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Arunachal Pradesh in October 2009 and had lectured in an election campaign for the state assembly elections. Regarding this P.M. visit in Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu stated that such visits in the 'disputed region' necessarily sparked disturbances and instabilities in relations between both the nation (Raman 2009; Routray 2013, 36).

Subsequently, China opposed the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. This is a regular act of Chinese against the Dalai Lama's visit to the state. In this regard, the spokesperson for China's foreign ministry Jiang Yu once stated that China's stand on the so-called Arunachal Pradesh is consistent and China firmly oppose the Dalai Lama's visit in Arunachal Pradesh. Simultaneously, China had reacted angrily to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in 2015 and after. In this context, Beijing warned India that such move will consider as provocation and against resolving the festering border dispute between both the country (Thakker 2018; Patranobis 2015; Aneja 2017).

Also, China has been opposing the on-going India-Japan ties of 2017 under "India-Japan Act East Forum", which will take forward development of India's northeast, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh, under a larger effort to synergise India's Act East policy and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. This aims for economic modernization of India's North-East region (NER) including connectivity, infrastructure development, as well as people-to-people contacts through tourism, culture and other related activities. Thus, such project of India in the state of Arunachal Pradesh has become as worry for Chinese (A. Krishnan 2017; MEA 2017).

These complexities between India and China is historically rooted and evolved due to poor border management and lack of proper border demarcation of the eastern sector border. This discord is based on the so called "the McMahon line" of 1914 which India considers as a legal boundary line between India and China and China questions on the line. Chinese consider this eastern sector, Arunachal Pradesh, belonged to the Southern part of Tibet historically, which is presently Chinese territory. Also, China argues that Tibet and Tibetan Dalai Lama has tributary relationship with the Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh. If Tibet is presently an integral part of China, hence Arunachal Pradesh must be administered by the Chinese, should not be interfere by any other, in view of Chinese.

Conclusion

The 21st century is marked for a serious transition in relations between India and China in various ways. Each country has been sharply transformed their domestic development and international status every

possible way, from economic rise to the nuclear programme. Both these two countries have been engaging in such co-operations in a parallel shape of development with the rise of Asia. Thus, the bilateral relations between the region's two largest countries, India and China, have improved remarkably soon after the Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988. And the recent trend of increasing India-China co-operations has boosted up by the former Indian PM Manmohan Singh government.

However, there are many convergences between India and China, but both these two Asian giants have some serious drawback due to their undefined and disputed borders. Despite of their increasing trend of co-operation, both the countries still have not able to resolved their longstanding disputes over border, which need to be managed and defused carefully. This paper basically discussed about the contemporary discourse of the eastern sector in India-China border dispute. The study argues that the eastern sector has become as the major flash point in India-China border dispute with beginning of the 21st century due to its geostrategic position. Chinese view Arunachal Pradesh as a "security dilemma", for which they have become aggressive for territorial control in the eastern sector border areas. Also, it argues that Chinese has changed their position over the time which has hardened the settlement process, particularly in case of the eastern sector in the new century.

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