

SINO- TIBETAN CONFLICT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES AND COMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS OF RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

There is an intractable nature of Sino – Tibetan conflict in the present scenario of world affairs. Where on one hand there is institutional set-up of the Chinese State and the goal of the State is established and on the other hand there is ethnic nature of Tibetan nationalism and their religious standings. The paradoxical interplay of nation- building and ethnic -conflict management arguing that different States choose different paths in pursuit of their nation building mission is a much analytical subject. There is a wide gap between the application of laws in the the ethnic minority races and the Constitutional provisions as China is an authoritarian State and everything on paper is subordinate to the State or the party interest. Further there is an exclusive mono-nation building in China that threatens the identities of ethnic minorities in the country. The rise of minority nationalism (esp. Tibetans) as a reaction to this majority nationalism has a feedback effect on the survival of the Chinese regime. Both the sides perceive the other as a threat, further threatening any bilateral dialogues and thus this ethnic conflict is perpetuated and intensified overtime.

KEYWORDS: *Ethnic, Identity, Minority, Conflict, Nationalism, Immigrants, Autonomy.*

Introduction

“If the state as an actual social form is not universal the desire of stateness has become a truly global and universal phenomenon”, writes anthropologists Thomas Blom Hanson and Finer Stepputat. This desire breeds problems for the state as the sole legitimate “regulator of social life and locus of territorial sovereignty and cultural hegemony.”

The struggle for Tibet is over the state and over domains the modern state claims as its own culture, political possibility, public authority, social life and subjectivity. Tibet conflict necessarily involves a politicized approach to the state in its singular and plural forms including complicating biographies of the state and of histories of the regions.

Tibetan national identity and nationalism are built on and in response to three separate platforms. **1.** Historic Tibetan "Imagined community" bound by various aspects of culture, economy, language and religion **2.** Global rise in the late 19th and early 20th century of the modern nation, connected especially to concepts of democracy in which nation and state became newly linked. **3.** It is the Socialist understanding of national status as secondary to class status, combined with the Chinese Communist Party's 'social evolutionist' view of nationality which ranked the Han first, with the minority nationalities lagging behind ¹ .

With the advent and spread of modern nation, Tibetan and Chinese concepts of the nation have both incorporated a state -based political aspect. The Tibetan nation is now solidly hitched to its lost state with the exile taking the form of temporary nation state until the territorial nation - state can be regained, bringing Tibetans back under their own rule.

The Conflict

Complex for some and simple for others, contemporary nationalism in Tibet is often problematic for the Chinese State even when it is sympathetic to the People's Republic of China and to the idea of Tibet as one of the five major nationalities of China. China State - rhetoric about Tibetan nationalism is

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couched in the language of defense and unity, with continual reference to the "Unification of motherland." "National Unity" and to 'Tibetan separatists' (perhaps more recently to 'terrorists'). The Tibetan nationalists protest in Tibet itself point consistently to the desire for a Tibetan government, specifically the return of Dalai Lama to and the exit of the Chinese from Tibet.

Divergent perceptions over history that are closely associated with ethnic identity lie at the bottom of the disagreement in the Sino - Tibetan Conflict. As such nation- building and ethnic conflict management theory are helpful to synthesize the central puzzle that lies at the core of this issue, a conflict of identities. It is also useful to understand the overall picture of Sino Tibetan Conflict and Chinese State policies within the wider debate of majority minority relationship. There are manifold divergent views on Tibet - China bond and relationship where China claims Tibet to be a part of People's Republic of China and Tibet claims that it was always an independent State until the Communist troops invaded and occupied the territory.

Due to their different perspectives on the past, both parties compete for the ownership of the historical narrative. The leaders in Beijing and Dharamsala stick to their own version of the narrative and neither side is ready to compromise on that ground even though the Dalai Lama already agreed to remain within the framework of the Chinese Constitution If Tibetan were granted genuine autonomy. The divergent perspective impedes both parties from taking further steps to seek a common ground at present to resolve the ethnic conflict. For several decades the Sino -Tibetan conflict has remained such confrontational and Tibetan leader in exile single- handedly struggled to restore complete independence for Tibet. Later Dalai Lama shifted from their initial goal of restoring independence to higher degree of autonomy.

The famous 17- point agreement signed between Chinese and Tibetan delegates in 1951 after the military occupation of Chamdo, the Provincial capital of Eastern Tibet. China promised to 'liberate' the remaining parts of Tibet peacefully on the condition of the Tibetan leaders' acceptance of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet². The agreement was signed under pressure. Tibetan leaders hoped China would keep its promise to grant autonomy but China violated and this led to outrage the Tibetans that led to a massive uprising against China in Lhasa- the capital city in 1950. Dalai Lama and 8000 Tibetans thus were forced to flee from their country and to seek political asylum in India where 'Tibetan Government in Exile TGI'³ was established as a legitimate representative of Tibetans remaining at home under Chinese government. The traditional land area of Tibet was divided into several parts and administered separately by merging large parts of Tibetan area into Chinese mainland provinces.

Tibetan peoples' behavior, the world view, the way of life, and value systems are deeply shaped by the teaching of Buddhist leaders who are incarnated. And religions leader like the Dalai Lama had to take political responsibility also for countries to make peace within the country as well with the aggressive, neighbour. Thus the influence of religious figures has penetrated within the length and breadth the Tibetan society over time.⁴ Dalai Lama- the spiritual leader is not just a holy individual or political leader- he represents and symbolisms Tibet an nation and represents Dalai genealogy. On the other hand China's ultimate nation-building goal is to establish a homogeneous and powerful State. Chinese leaders are concerned only about the national security of the state and they think that the elimination or assimilation of other ethnic groups into the majority group are the best strategies to construct a homogeneous nation- state. China's calculated assumption is that Tibet issue can be easily resolved once their religious leaders are controlled.

Ethnic Tibetans perceive the move of the Chinese State as a threat to their distinctive identities, thus they struggle against the state- power to maintain and secure their rightful place in society. The Tibetan resistance and nationalism evolved from their sense of identity insecurity that escalates the tension between the two adversaries China struggles to create homogenous nation -state while Tibet asserts its ethnic roots with strong nationalistic sentiment. In other words, the conflict can be summed up as new national identity retention for China and identity retention for Tibet. It is this conflict of identities that prevents the two sides from reaching a commonly agreeable ground despite many decades of negotiation. Tibet, for a short time period got unprecedented international support from governments and civil societies alike in the West. But China being the second largest economy in the world - the money takes precedence over moral and human rights as other State's decision on Tibet is monitored by their economic ties with China today and there is seen a notable decline of international support for the Tibetan freedom movement at least from political leaders. There has been a sharp decline in the number of meetings between Dalai Lama and international dignitaries and leaders of countries.

China also uses its military might and Veto power in the UN Security Council to block any discussion on Tibet. The state resources are used to ensure non interference of external actors in its internal issue. There has been many years of deliberations with Dalai Lama and Tibetan government in Exile but still China refuses to accept that there is a 'Tibetan Issue' other than 'Dalai Lama'. Chinese hardliners believe that the Tibetan issue will be freezed out with passing away of Dalai Lama and that breaks the primary ground of negotiations and this settles China's ultimate nation - building goal to establish a homogeneous and powerful nation - state. The greatest change for China in Tibet might lie in interaction between the Tibetan and Chinese or within China itself.

Road to Possible Solution

- **Maintain Status Quo:** In Tibet Status- Quo involves blanket human rights violates as well as the continual exits of the Tibetan Government and the Dalai Lama. Thousands of Tibetans risk their lives every year attempting to escape to India via Nepal. The Chinese army is omnipresent and there is only limited freedom of cultural expression and no freedom of cultural expansion. As Chinese plan to further develop Tibet move forward in Tandem "Go Will" campaign, including the current construction of the railway to 'Lhasa'. This solution is likely to decrease with the influx of Chinese settlers and short - term workers.
- **More Autonomy:** The grant of more autonomy is mostly superficially only. Rather there has been a significant increase in devolution of power under China that would do much to assuage local concerns. Possibly the scenario includes local control over domestic affairs, local state coordination over trade and related business, with state control over military defense and foreign relations. Dalai Lama's official demand for Tibet is meaningful autonomy as provided for in the Chinese Constitution including demilitarization of the Tibetan Plateau. With the increased autonomy framework, federation states is further possibility in the Tibetan case. Tibetans had their own functioning State at the time of incorporation into China. This state remains not just a part of living memory, but also an actual presence in exile. But this arrangement is more threatening for Tibet.
- **Accession to a Different State:** This too is not a desirable solution to the current conflict as there would be again the threat of it being incorporated into other State on equal footing with other states in it.
- **Independence:** Were Tibetans to gain independence, relations between State, Nation and Territory in China and India would have to be altered from their present forms.
- **Unilateral State decision** – China has the option of granting more autonomy in some form to the Tibetans but the chance of them doing so, in a substantive fashion is seen highly unlikely without outside incentive.
- **Domestically Negotiated Settlement:** For Tibet impetus for State- action would require the sympathy of Chinese. While they are growing in China, they still remain a miniscule proportion of the general population.
- **Bilateral / Multilateral Solution:** In Tibet the Chinese government reopened overt discussions with the Dalai Lama's exile government in the fall of 2002 level of conflict resolution negotiations, they nonetheless hold the promise of effective positive change in Tibet.
- **International Mediation:** For mediatory efforts, a truly neutral, disinterested party should be there as an initiator and must serve as a mediator and efforts, with sincerity must be made to ensure compliance with the settlement.
- **International Intervention:** In this case it seems unlikely and impractical to have a military intervention, but diplomatic and economic activities are already underway, although certainly not on a scale designed to effect drastic change.
- **Military Battle:** Tibetan political and religious leader Dalai Lama's assertion is on non - violent course to be followed regarding any settlement. While Tibet is heavily militarized any resumption of military battle there would be one sided, favoring the Chinese.
- **Plebiscite:** There was a call for referendum in 1924. But it is often visualized that holding Plebiscite, offers the only solution in which local population can individually participate.

Such solutions depend not just on individual legal parameters or past historical truths but on the policies of the present and international political approach. The real solution lies on similar sorts of debates and compromises on respect for dissenting opinions and interpretations and on a complication rather than simplification of issues.

The reality seems to be far from these solutions as Tibetans are treated as 'second class citizens' thus status is of "Statelessness" in China as the overwhelming majority of Tibetans are forbidden to hold a passport⁵. In addition the massive influx of Chinese immigrants in Tibet led to the phenomenon of 'population invasion' that Han Chinese immigrants outnumbered the existing Tibetan population in their homeland. In Lhasa too, there are more Chinese than Tibetans more soldiers than monks and more surveillance cameras than windows. The demographic invasion is one of the political tools of China to deppluralize the society. Thus Tibetans feel that economic development actually weakness them. Further Chinese leaders are concerned only about national security of the State and they think that the elimination or assimilation of other ethnic groups into the majority groups is the best strategy to construct a homogenous nation - state. On the other side of spectrum ethnic Tibetans perceive the move of Chinese state as a threat to their distinctive identities, thus they struggle against the State power to maintain and secure their rightful place in society. Unless China changes its policies to embrace the idea of multi cultural pluralism, the ethnic movements in China will grow stronger and the Sino--Tibetan Conflict will intensify beyond anyone's control. Chinese policy makers and leaders should realize that elimination of ethnic identity cannot be successful in our contemporary world as the Tibetan case proves. Instead China should accommodate proposals and solution methods that are peaceful, long lasting and that calls for autonomy arrangements as it is the Tibetan case. This way China would take ethnic matters more seriously and could recreate its national identity in the nation- building project being more inclusive to multiple identities.

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