



A Dynamic Model of the Sino-Tibetan Negotiation Process

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The presentation focused on questions about why the Sino-Tibetan negotiations have come to naught even after three decades of talking. The analysis dealt with the negotiation approaches and transformations of positions of the two contending parties. It also demonstrated the issues and events contributing to the repeated impasse in talks between China and the Tibetan community-in-exile.

The chronological trajectory of the Sino-Tibetan engagement was delineated into three broad phases: Phase I, consisting of the period between 1979 to 1985, comprised of concrete developments in terms of meetings and discussions at the highest levels of leadership. Phase II, 1986-1996, was characterized by both parties resorting to strategies that adversely affected the engagement process. Phase III, covers the period from 1997 when informal channels of communication were reopened. While formal meetings resumed from 2002 and continued on an annual basis, differences persisted.

The negotiation theory was applied as the basis of conceptual framework for the discussion on the dynamism of the Sino-Tibetan negotiation process. The dynamics of structural processes and their impact on Sino-Tibetan engagement had also accentuated significantly. There was added emphasis on understanding events and actors that may seemingly be unrelated to the dialogue process. In particular, third party interventions, constituency pressure, politico-economic developments within China and their impact upon China's Tibet policy were briefly discussed. These factors were seen as intrinsically linked to negotiator behavior and negotiation outcomes. The Tibetan and Chinese as negotiators are themselves seen as integral to the resulting outcomes as both have made 'moves away from the table' in search of alternatives to increase leverage at the table.

China's approach to the talks was analyzed within the ambit of several pertinent questions: mainly, how sincere is China about the talks? The skepticism surrounding Chinese sincerity to talks while valid in the context of phase three of talks has tended to overshadow Beijing's initial interest and sincerity to some extent. In this context, much of the criticism was about China's current 'playing to the gallery' strategy that precluded appreciation of the dynamic nature of the Sino-Tibetan engagement process. This assertion was made on the basis of newly declassified (2013) US cables of the American embassy in Beijing, which suggested that Beijing was highly interested in settling the 'Tibet issue' at least during the early stages of the engagement process.

Specific instances of the Chinese flexibility were referred to – one being, the Chinese readiness to accept the Tibetan demand for unification of inner and outer Tibet or the 'single administration of Tibetan

nationality' as a pre-condition for talks, which in fact forms the basis of the Dalai Lama's current position.

Instead of congregating at the negotiating table, the negotiation process seemed have prevaricated or distanced from the very purpose for which they were initiated. In that context, ideological issues and fundamental differences over interrelated issues of history, unification and autonomy as an impediment to productive negotiations were discussed. The speaker discussed in length how these core issues have achieved their own dynamism thereby impacting on respective Tibetan and Chinese positions. From Beijing's perspective, conceding these issues raised questions about the legitimacy of communist China's 'liberation' of Tibet in 1951. For the Tibetans, scholarly discussions on the unification issue as being an 'exile construct' have resulted in modification/further moderation in the Middle Way approach (MWA) of the Dalai Lama, especially since 1995.

The Tibetan approach was seen as being akin to integrative bargaining which required negotiators to expand the pie and therefore, looked beyond the compromise alternatives to make mutually beneficial trade-offs. However, the intensification of its commitment to the MWA, according to the speaker had been sustained with an increased marginalisation of alternate voices and political options for the Tibetans. Additionally, scholarly assertions aside, the speaker argued that prior to the formation of the PRC and/or the formation of the TAR, the notion of Tibet had no fixed meaning for the Chinese either.

During the discussion, one participant mentioned an interesting view discussed in a Hong Kong based newspaper suggesting the Dalai Lama to return and live in Hong Kong instead of India. This was viewed as a positive development/signalling from China and an opportunity for both sides to enter into substantive talks. Discussion was held on the preparations being made by the Dalai Lama for his successors to deal with the new scenario after his death. It covered whole range of issues – eagerness to talk to the Chinese, concerns about preservation of Tibetan culture and identity, democratization of the Tibetan polity in exile, devolvement of the political powers of the institution of the Dalai Lama to that of the Sikyong and plans laid out by the Dalai Lama on the procedure for selection of his reincarnation (in response to Chinese plans regarding the same). The prevalence of alternate voices within the Tibetan community which differed from that of the Dalai Lama's approach was discussed during the presentation. The presenter agreed that other voices were gaining in currency owing to the increasing failure of the MWA and Beijing's intransigence. As the Dalai Lama holds considerable moral, spiritual and political authority, the speaker contended that there were still lots of hope in the current scenario and His Holiness was considered as wielding the power to calm and unite differing voices to a great extent.

The India factor in the Sino-Tibetan negotiations was also highlighted by several participants. In this regard, the speaker opined that maintaining status quo seemed to typify India's position. With reference to the recently declassified US cables, she commented that one of the reasons for Beijing's overture to the Tibetans in 1979 was to normalize diplomatic relations with India.

The talk ended with a discussion on whether the theoretic concept/model of "prisoner's dilemma" can be applied to understanding the Sino-Tibetan negotiations and if so, how realistic would its usage be to facilitate an enhanced understanding of the process, especially given the fact that the speaker primarily utilized a negotiation theory model/framework to analyse the problem. The speaker felt that applying the "prisoner's dilemma" model to the Sino-Tibetan negotiations was indeed important as it make us understand why two sides might not cooperate even if that it was in their best interest to do so.

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