

Report on the academic visit by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, CASS (China) to ICS on 2 August 2018
Venue: ICS Seminar Room

ICS is visited by four delegates from *The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology*, an institute belonging to the *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*(CASS). The name of the institute was adopted in December 2002 and was previously known as *The Institute of Nationalities Studies* that was founded in 1958.

The visit was chaired by Professor Sreemati Chakrabarti, an Honorary Fellow at the *Institute of Chinese Studies*(ICS) and joined by Ravi Bhoothalingam, another Honorary Fellow, and the director, fellow research staffs, interns of the institute, and few interested pupils from outside.

The visit to ICS was the first time for the delegates and to India for all except Professor Wu Xiaoli, who had done a fieldwork in Kerala for her doctoral thesis. After welcoming and introducing each other, Professor Wang laid out the purpose and interest of the visit. He said that there are mainly two purposes, one is to learn or study the developing or recent opinions among Indians regarding the Xi Jinping initiated China's One Belt, One Road (Belt and Road Initiative) and the other is to study India's minority policies.

Mr. Ashok K Kantha, the director of ICS informed the delegates of some of the concerns that India has in view to China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He said that BRI concerns India and Indians since one of the flagship projects under the BRI, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor violates India's sovereignty as the project passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). He pointed out the concern India has regarding the non-transparency nature of the BRI in its working modalities. He said that although he understands the BRI as a search engine for China's economic growth and that the initiative is contributing to the economic development in some countries, the political aspect of the BRI and the heavy presence and control by the state-owned enterprises (SOE) concerns India. He suggested that India and China "as a friend, need to discuss what it is about" and the need to work together in multilateral projects, pragmatic and project oriented.

Ravi Bhoothalingam, another Honorary Fellow at ICS referred to the President of China Xi Jinping's comment that the basic objective of the BRI is the common prosperity of all. He asked whose 'common' interest the BRI is for since it is a subjective matter with varied views. He postulated that this needs to be discussed between the two large complicated countries - India and China - and need to find the common ground.

One of the delegates, Dr. Li Chensheng, a researcher at the Department of Tibetan Studies of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, CASS expressed his desire to know how the India and Indians view the Sino-Tibet relationship.

The Director of ICS instead requested back to the delegates to share their view on the matter of Sino-Tibet relationship although he shared few points. He said that India has been mindful about the Chinese sensibilities in the Tibet issues in their policies and practices but informed the delegates that there is a disappointment among the Indian in the sense that “China isn’t reciprocating the sensibilities India shown to China. He gave the example that China has not discussed with India regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor under BRI project and also the mistrust created by the border issue. He said that India has accepted the Line of Actual control (LoC) but China is disinclined to the LoC agreement. He highlighted the need of a reciprocity in a relationship. He further stressed that both the country doesn’t want the Tibet factor to become an issue in the relationship between them.

Professor Wang agreed as a scholar to Ravi Bhoothalingam’s point in question whose common interest that BRI claims to serve as its basic objective, but also highlighted the importance of considering China as a different from India in its historical development.

About the Director’s request, Wang informed that Tibet has been part of China since the Yuan dynasty and the sovereignty issue of Tibet came to light only in during the late Qing period.

With these as a discussion, it is followed by few questions from other attendees. The delegates are informed that South Tibet (Arunachal Pradesh) was once Tibetans themselves called barbarian and asked their view regarding China’s claim of part of Arunachal Pradesh as theirs. The delegate replied that Part of the Arunachal Pradesh (South Tibet) belong to Tibet – which “is part of China since Yuan dynasty” -, that can be seen from the cultural affinity between the two, but also informed that whatever the Chinese government’s policy, it is always open for discussions and that the two country – India and China – shares more common interest than difference with the border issue.

The delegates are also asked about the recent (25 -27 July) visit to Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) by China’s Premier Li Keqiang. The visit, Professor Fang Sumei, one of the delegates, said is nothing more than to show support to some of the projects and highlight the importance of the Railway project in TAR.

Ravi Bhoothalingam noticed that there is contradictory development that the globalization has contributed to, that is breaking down the difference in the world, yet at the same time leading

to the growth in the ethnic imagined boundaries. He then asked how China dealt with the issue. Professor Wang said that India shares the same issue as China do. He also said that China learned from its history the benefits that China can gain from the outside world, so the Open-door Policy but also wish to build a harmonious society.

The delegates in turn asked about India's minority policies and official languages in India. They were informed about the multiplicity of minorities that may be of religious, ethnic, class, linguistic, and so on and the reservation and affirmative safeguards that are mandated in the constitution of India for them.

They are also informed about India having 22 officially recognized languages in India. They are told a bit about the unsuccessful bid to make Hindi as the national language in the late 1960's and 1970's by the government, facing resistance from many states around India. They are also informed about how the local languages are thriving in India through film productions, newspapers and book publications, and so on.

With this, the discussion ended thanking each other and encouraging future visits to each other's institution.

