

SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Volume 36

Visit of Zhou Enlai to India
(November-December 1956)

Talks Nehru-Chou En-lai (First Round)¹

...Jawaharlal Nehru: I am thankful to Your Excellency for the background material given to me. But I do not quite understand what you meant when you said that Tibet in the past had not become a province of China.

Chou En-lai: That Tibet is part of China is a fact, but it as never an administrative province of China but kept an autonomous character. Therefore, when we started negotiations for peaceful liberation of Tibet, we from the first recognised the autonomous character of the region. When I said that India knew more about Tibet, I meant about the past history. For example, I knew nothing about McMahon Line until recently when we came to study the border problem after liberation of China.

Jawaharlal Nehru: Historical knowledge is not important but is useful as background information. History is gone. My impression was that whatever it may be in theory, for all practical purposes Tibet has all along been autonomous. But at the same time, whatever government there might have been in China, Tibet has always been claimed by the Chinese Government. The

¹ Record of talks with Chou En-lai at Sutlej Sadan, Bhakra-Nangal, between 3 and 6 p.m. and partly on the train from Nangal to Delhi, between 10.30 and 11.30 p.m. and from 00.30 to 2.30 a.m., 31 December 1956 and 1 January 1957. Chou En-lai's visit to India (December 1956- January 1957), File No.EI2 (109), NGO/56 and EI21132/NGO/59. MEA.

British tried to create some trouble on account of their fear of Czarist Russia but this is past history. We recognise that China has, in law and in fact, suzerainty over Tibet even though it may not have been exercised sometime. As your Excellency has said, Tibet has behaved in an autonomous way and was cut off from other countries.

The criterion of an independent state is that the state should have independent foreign relations and Tibet had no foreign relations except with England.

The McMahon Line was put forward in the 1913 Conference between the Chinese, the Tibetans and the British.² That Conference decided not only the McMahon Line but also two other points. The Chinese Government raised objection only to the other two points. Surely, the Chinese Government always knew about it (i.e. the McMahon Line).

As regards Dalai Lama, we do not want any incident to take place about Dalai Lama in Kalimpong or while he is in India. We will do as Your Excellency and Dalai Lama decide. What kind of incident does Your Excellency fear might happen? If you can give some specific idea about the trouble, we can prevent it.

Chou En-lai: The situation is really very complicated and it is difficult for me to say as to what specifically might happen. Dalai Lama is also concerned about this matter and he also said that the situation is complicated. There are two possibilities: (1) We have already raised this matter seriously with the Dalai Lama. Now Dalai Lama will naturally go back and talk to his officials and maybe perhaps nothing would happen except some small quarrels or verbal exchanges and he returns to Lhasa safely. Alternatively, (2) a possibility is that attempts might be made at Kalimpong to detain Dalai Lama. In fact, that is exactly the slogan raised there: "Won't let Dalai Lama go back".

² This was the Simla Conference held between October 1913 and April 1914.

Panchen Lama does not want to go to Kalimpong. If he goes, he might be treated discourteously or some other trouble might be created. These are some of the possibilities.

If such incidents happen, Indian Government has power to intervene and check them, because such incidents partake of the nature of anti-Chinese activities or activities designed to create an independent Tibet or espionage Or encouragement to subversive activities. We are mentioning these possibilities to your Government in advance so that, if anything happens, the Government of India could take preventive measures.

...McMahon Line- What I meant was that people like me never knew about it till recently. The then Chinese Government, namely, the warlords in Peking and the KMT naturally knew about it. Perhaps U Nu might have told Your Excellency that we studied this question and although this Line was never recognised by us, still apparently there was a secret pact between Britain and Tibet and it was announced at the time of the Simla Conference. And now that it is an accomplished fact, we should accept it. But we have not consulted Tibet so far. In the last agreement which we signed about Tibet³, the Tibetans wanted us to reject this Line; but we told them that the question should be temporarily put aside. I believe immediately after India's independence, the Tibetan Government had also written to the Government of India about this matter. But now we think that we should try to persuade and convince Tibetans to accept it. This question also is connected with Sino-Burmese border and the question will be decided after Dalai Lama's return to Lhasa. So, although the question is still undecided and it is unfair to us, still we feel that there is no better way than to recognise this Line.

³ Refers to the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between India and the Tibet Region of China. It was signed in Beijing on 29 April 1954.

Jawaharlal Nehru: The border is a high mountain border and sparsely populated. Apart from the major question, there are also small questions about two miles here and two miles there. But if we agree on some principle, namely, the principle of previous normal practice or the principle of watershed, we can also settle these other small points. Of course, this has nothing to do with the McMahon Line.

Chou En-lai: Yes, the question can be solved and we think it should be settled early.

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Talks with Chou En-lai (Third Round)⁴

Tibet

22. At our second meeting, we continued the talk on Tibet and I wanted further clarification about Tibet's position in China in the past and in the present. Premier Chou repeated that Tibet was always a part of China, but it was never made an administrative part of China and had always been autonomous. Hence the present Government in China recognised this fact. He referred to past history and the activities of British Imperialism in Tibet. In this connection he said that the present leaders of China had not even heard of the McMahon Line till after the Revolution.

28. Premier Chou referred to the McMahon Line and again said that he had never heard of this before though of course the then Chinese Government had dealt with this matter and not accepted that line. He had gone into this matter

⁴ Note to N.R. Pillai, Secretary General, MEA, R.K. Nehru, India's Ambassador in Beijing and Apa Pant, political Officer in Sikkim, 1 January 1957. Jawaharlal Nehru Collection.

in connection with the border dispute with Burma. Although he thought that this line, established by British imperialists, was not fair, nevertheless, because it was an accomplished fact and because of the friendly relations which existed between China and the countries concerned, namely, India and Burma, the Chinese Government were of the opinion that they should give recognition to this McMahon Line. They had, however, not consulted the Tibetan Government about it yet. They proposed to do so.

31. Premier Chou added that the Central Government tried to convince the Tibetan Government to recognise the McMahon Line as an accomplished fact in India and Burma.

32. I pointed out that, apart from the McMahon Line, there were certain very minor border problems between India and Tibet. These should be settled soon to put an end to these petty controversies and so that everybody should know that there was no dispute left about the frontier. The settlement should be based on established practice and custom as well as the watershed if there was any such thing there. In these small border problems very small pieces of uninhabited territory in the mountains were involved. They had no importance and the border should be a geographical one as far as possible. Premier Chou agreed that these should be settled soon on this basis.