

China's claim on Arunachal Pradesh fake¹

Look at this map: in the left corner between Bhutan and the rest of Arunachal, there is dark green patch, corresponding more or less to the Tawang district. Why is Tawang depicted in a different colour?

In the East (Myanmar), the caption is 野人山地区 (mountainous area inhabited by savages).

It is a Chinese map published by *China Tibet Online*, a Chinese website affiliated with Xinhua news. The website gives what it calls 'fast facts on controversial Arunachal Pradesh'.

The map with China's 'original border (sic)' is part of an article which affirms: "The recent Indian President's visit to the so-called Arunachal Pradesh has triggered the controversial discussion of border issue between China and India again."

Xinhua had earlier reported that China had 'urged' India "to refrain from moves that complicate boundary issues and work with China to create conditions for talks". The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang was commenting on President Pranab Mukherjee's visit to what Beijing terms the so-called Arunachal Pradesh."

Beijing's spokesperson added: "China's stance on the disputed area on the eastern part of the China-India border is consistent and clear."

What is 'clear' for Beijing is utter confusion for an independent witness!

China Tibet Online tries to justify China's position: "The so-called 'Arunachal Pradesh' was established largely on the three areas of China's Tibet -- Monyul, Loyul and Lower Tsayul currently under Indian illegal occupation.

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These three areas, located between the illegal 'McMahon [McMahon] Line' and the traditional customary boundary between China and India, have always been Chinese territory."

These are wrong 'fast facts'!

The website then gives a lesson in (Chinese) History: "In 1914, the colonialists secretly contrived the illegal 'McMahon Line' in an attempt to incorporate into India the above-mentioned three areas of Chinese territory. None of the successive Chinese governments have ever recognized this line."

The exchange of maps during the Simla Convention in 1914 was perfectly legal and binding on the 2 parties (India and Tibet). Though present at the Convention, Ivan Chen, the Chinese Plenipotentiary was not interested in the Indo-Tibetan border; he did not interfere or object to what Beijing today calls the 'colonialist' Line.

It is only after invading Tibet in 1950, that the Communist regime in Beijing began concerning themselves with Tibet's border with India; earlier, their worry was only the undemarcated Sino-Tibetan border in the East.

In fact, there is no correspondence from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Tawang and other areas under 'Tibetan influence' in NEFA before the end of the 1950s', except for a small area in the Lohit Valley.

In 1946, a Note from the British Foreign Affairs Department discussed a complaint from the Chinese, they had protested against some British 'intrusions' (it was in India's territory) in the Walong sector, the easternmost part of the India-Tibet border.

Tellingly, the Chinese never complained about the Tawang area.

London was not sure why the Chinese raised the Lohit border issue, though they guessed that the Chinese letter was linked to the British setting up posts in Lohit. China may have also been unhappy about the visit of F.P. Mainprice, the Assistant Political Officer (Lohit Valley) to the McMahon Line in 1944. London considered the APO's tour as a routine 'promenade' within India's border area.

What is interesting is that today China speaks of "three areas of China's Tibet -- Monyul, Loyul and Lower Tsayul currently under Indian illegal occupation."

The mere fact that Beijing has to constantly mention 'China's Tibet' is an indirect admission that they are not very sure of their own claim on 'Tibet'.

Does Delhi speak of India's Kerala or India's Uttarakhand or even India's Kashmir? These States are integral part of India and do not need constant labeling as part of the Indian State.

It is true that the 3 mentioned areas (Moyul, Loyul and Tsayul), (respectively connected with today's Tawang, Upper Subansiri and Lohit districts) had close cultural and trade links with Tibet in the past. But there was no Tibetan presence in these areas (it seems that China's criteria for claiming territory is 'Tibetan presence' in a region).

Though the local dialect of some areas south of the McMahon Line has close affinity with Tibetan, Monpa, Memba or other tribal languages from Arunachal are different from classical Tibetan. The same remark is valid for Ladakh, Kinnaur, Lahaul, Spiti or some areas inhabited by Bhotias in Uttarakhand and Sikkim.

Does the 'Tibetan influence' in Ladakh make the region part of the People's Republic of China? It does, if one goes by Beijing's logic!

I recently came across an interesting map prepared by the Government of India in 1945 about 'Tibetan influence' in NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh).

The pockets of 'influence' are very small and limited. Very often, for example in the Siang valley (Jido on the map), the 'Tibetan influence' was limited to occasional raids by the Tibetan Dzungpen from the other side of the border. The purpose of these raids was 'tax-collection'; the local tribes were terrified and had to request the British APOs (Assistant Political Officer) in Balipara or Sadya Frontier Tracks to protect them.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Assam Rifles' posts were progressively set up and raids could thereafter be stopped. At that time, the Chinese were nowhere to be seen.

Even small areas like Pachakshiri (today Menchuka and Manigong) were 'mixed'; local Adi tribes represented about half of the population while Membas (a Tibetan 'influenced' tribe) made the other half.

During my recent visit to Menchuka, I could verify this fact.

Once again, 'influence' mainly meant that the populations were Buddhist, owed their religious allegiance to the Dalai Lama or other Tibetan High Lamas and their language was a dialect from the Tibetan.

That is not a proof of 'ownership'.

Ma Zhaoxu, former spokesman of the Foreign Ministry of China, told China Tibet Online: "The repeated visits by Indian leaders can make others believe the area is part of India and solidify the existing strategies they have applied to control the area, such as using administrative jurisdiction in the area and courting sympathy from the international community."

Visits or no visit, Arunachal is a very important part of the Indian Union and will remain so. President Mukherjee was right to reiterate the obvious.

A question: why has China shown Tawang with a separate colour (green) on their map?

One answer is that Tawang would probably satisfy the Chinese appetite for territory ...for now at least! Unfortunately for China, the people of Tawang are very happy to be Indians and particularly after the 1962 conflict, they are proud to belong to the Indian nation and are ready to fight for Bharat.