

The border according to China¹

During the year 1960, long negotiations were held between India and China over their 'disputed' border.

The background of these talks was the visit to Delhi of Zhou-Enlai, the Chinese Premier early that year and his offer to 'solve' the issue.

Zhou Enlai was in Delhi for nearly one week (April 19 to 25, 1960) "to discuss certain differences relating to the border areas which had arisen" between the two countries.

The Nehru-Zhou talks however failed. According to a communique, the two Prime Ministers "decided that officials of the two Governments should examine the factual materials in the possession of the two Governments in support of their stands."

The 'officials' led by Jagat Mehta for the Indian side met for several months, but could not arrive at an agreement.

The proceedings of their meetings were published by the Ministry of External Affairs: "Report of the Officials of the Governments of India and the Peoples' Republic of China on the Boundary Question".

Please note that 50 years ago, the Indian Government was far more 'transparent' than today. It regularly informed the common men about the happenings on the border; today the common man is probably considered too stupid by the MEA Mandarins to grasp the intricacies of a customary border, a watershed, one (or several) LAC(s), etc.

The old Report of the Officials makes fascinating reading; it helps 'common men' to better understand the Chinese (and Indian) mindset.

¹ Published in ***Niti Central*** on May 20, 2013 (URL not available)

At one point during the discussions, the 'Indian side' argued that because China had not mentioned earlier the contentious issue, Delhi was under the impression that there was no border issue.

The Chinese answer is worth reading: "The Indian side also contended that according to international law, if one side does not raise an issue when it has an opportunity to do so, it has no longer the right to set forth its views on the issue. The Indian side attempted to use this contention to prove that the Sino-Indian boundary question did not exist and that the Chinese side had no right to raise this question any more. ...Is it that the boundary question must be raised even at occasions not at all meant for discussing the boundary question? Is it that the Chinese side must raise the Sino-Indian boundary question on all occasions; otherwise it would imply that the Chinese side has acquiesced in the assertion that there is no question about the Sino-Indian. ...The contention that silence means acquiescence reflects not at all the accepted principles of international law. Can it be said that a sovereign state has no right to reserve its proposition concerning questions of its own sovereignty and to raise it on suitable occasions?"

This is what China has always done, raising the issue when the occasion is suitable to them! It is what they did on the ground in Daulat Beg Oldi in Ladakh on April 15; if they decide to not to talk about the border when Premier Li Keqiang visits Delhi, it is only because it will not be 'suitable' to them.

The 1960 Chinese negotiators continue their argument: "China has never recognized the alignment now claimed by India; it has always held that only the boundary as maintained by China is the true traditional customary line. Whenever the Chinese Government refers to the Sino-Indian boundary, it can only be the traditional customary line as maintained by China, and not the other."

This brings to mind the quote of Dr. R.C. Majumdar, the great historian: "It is characteristic of China that if a region once acknowledged her nominal suzerainty even for a short period, she should regard it as a part of her empire forever and would automatically revive her claim over it even after a thousand years whenever there was a chance of enforcing it."

The Middle Kingdom's mindset has not changed much.

According to an article of *The South China Morning Post*, Luo Yuan, a People's Liberation Army general recently claimed Okinawa Island as Chinese.

The General reacted to an article in *The People's Daily* in which Zhang Haipeng and Li Guoqiang, two scholars of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences wrote: "Unresolved problems relating to the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa is the biggest of the Ryukyu Islands) have reached the time for reconsideration."

The fact that Okinawa is home to major US air force and marine bases and has a population of 1.3 million Japanese nationals did not deter the scholars to claim that the islands were a 'vassal state' of China before Japan annexed the islands in the late 1800s.

For General Luo: "Japan could not rightfully claim sovereignty over the islands, because they had started paying tribute to China half a millenium before they had done so to Japan."

You could argue, he is a mad general, just forget him!

The most interesting is however China's official reaction: when she was asked if China considered Okinawa part of Japan, Hua Chunying, the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman stated that the Chinese "scholars had long studied the history of the Ryukyus and Okinawa."

A sibylline statement with implications for the Indian border!

It may not be 'suitable' for Premier Li Keqiang to talk about the border during his visit, but be sure that China will not forget or forsake its claim in DBO and elsewhere in the Himalayas.