

INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS CHINESE TIBET FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDIAN THINK TANKS

Zhang Shuai

Xi'an International Studies University, China

Abstract

India is the main challenge to China's rise in a secondary strategic direction. For a long time, around China's Tibet, India has launched the so-called Tibet policy and the Tibet card as important bargaining chips in Sino-Indian border negotiations and diplomatic strategy with China, aiming to grab more practical interests. India has given full play to its advantages as a think tank power, and attempts to improve the effectiveness of Tibet-related decision-making through the Tibetan studies of think tanks. It is of positive practical significance and research value to carry out research on tibetology of Indian think tanks and gain insight into the dynamics and trends of India's Tibet-related policies from the new perspective of think tanks. By arranging the public materials, this paper divides think tanks related to Tibet into three categories: government-run, non-governmental and university-related, and uses text analysis method to analyze their Tibet-related research results. It is found that official think tanks tend to be conservative, focusing on the study of Tibet's history and practical issues; non-governmental think tanks are more radical and have a strong anti-China tendency to borrow the Tibet question; think tanks based on university are relatively neutral, but they play a role in the driving force behind the scenes. Although the views and positions of Indian think tanks on Tibet-related studies are not consistent, it is necessary to pay attention to the ways, methods and means of influencing decision-making. In particular, Indian think tanks play an

important role in Tibet-related administration, legislation and public opinion. In this regard, China should improve its ability to fight against India from four aspects: improving the discourse power of tibetology research, strengthening the struggle of Tibet-related public opinion, strengthening intelligence analysis and judgment, and attaching importance to the struggle for the rule of law related to Tibet.

Keywords: India; Think Tanks; Tibet; Sino-Indian Relations

Introduction

The Tibet question¹ concerns China's core interests and has always been an extremely unstable factor affecting China-India relations.² The Tibet question between China and India has various and complicated causes. This article argues that its root lies not only in the historical origin of the establishment of the British colonial system in South Asia, but also in the attitude and position of the Indian government towards China's Tibet after independence. In fact, with the disintegration of the British colonial system in South Asia, the founding of the PRC and the peaceful liberation of Tibet, the Tibet question originating from the British colonial period should no longer exist in legal terms. However, in order to seize more illegal power and interests, the post-independence Indian government attempted to inherit the British heritage and practice the India-centric theory, under the banner of the so-called Tibet complex, surrounding the 14th Dalai Lama and the China-India border and other issues continued to improve and develop the Tibet policy during the British colonial period, and successively launched a series of Indian versions of Tibet-related policies, which led to the continuation of the Tibet question and has become an important issue affecting today's China-India relations.

¹ The so-called Tibet question is the product of the imperialists' attempt to divide China from the very beginning, and it is part of the modern imperialist powers' attempt to turn China into its colony and semi-colony. It is not an issue of ethnicity, religion or human rights at all, but an attempt by the anti-China forces in the West to contain China, split China, and demonize China. "White Paper on Democratic Reform in Tibet," The State Council of the PRC, March 3, 2009. http://www.gov.cn/test/2009-03/03/content_1248830.htm.

² Subramanian Swamy, *India's China Perspective*, New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2002, pp. 39-98.

It is worth noting that since the conflict in the Galwan Valley, new changes have taken place in India's Tibet-related policy. In October 2020, the Indian Army put forward a plan to fight against China by tibetology, and decided to set up a tibetology training course for the Indian troops stationed on the China-India border.³ According to the basic information of the seven so-called Tibetan Studies Colleges selected by senior Indian military officials, almost all of them are important think tanks that have long influenced the Indian government's Tibet-related decisions. In a nutshell, the current Indian government of Modi is making full use of the rich think tank resources to strengthen the research on tibetology and improve the effectiveness of playing the Tibet card to China. Therefore, this article will firstly sort out the most important Tibet-related think tanks in India, and then analyze their basic views and propositions on the Tibet question, as well as their influence on the government's decision-making related to Tibet. Finally, consider China's policy tools to deal with India's the Tibet card.

I: Indian Think Tanks Involved in Tibetan Studies

Indian think tanks can be traced back to the British colonial period, and their think tanks related to Tibet studies have deep roots in British colonial expansion in the Himalayas. The Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE), established in 1930, is regarded as the first think tank in India.⁴ Its predecessor was the Servants of India Society established in 1905, specializing in economics and political science. After nearly 100 years of development, India has established more think tanks, and its focus has expanded to fields such as education, health, and international relations. By 2020, the number of think tanks in India has grown to 612, ranking third in the world, and together with the United States, China and the United Kingdom, it constitutes the four largest think tank countries in the world. There are not only a large number of think tanks in India, but also have a great influence on Indian policy formulation and public opinion orientation, especially many Indian think tanks, which have a military background. According to their affiliation, Indian think tanks are mainly divided into three categories: government-run, private and university-based. At the same time, this paper uses text analysis method to sort out the research results of Indian think tanks, and divides the think tanks involved in Tibet studies in India into the following three categories.

³ Rajat Pandit, "Army Eyes Tibetology to Checkmate China," *The Times of India*, January 28, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/army-eyes-tibetology-to-checkmate-china/articleshow/80489811.cms>

⁴ "Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics: History," GIPE, <https://gipe.ac.in/about/>.

Accordingly, this article divides think tanks related to Tibetan studies in India into the following three categories.

1. Official Think Tanks for Tibet-Related Studies

The Government-run think tanks for Tibet-related studies mainly include Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT). IDSA is India's foremost think tank for advanced research in international relations, especially defence, strategic and security issues, and providing training to civilian, military and paramilitary officers of the Indian government. It is funded by the Indian Ministry of Defence but operates as a non-partisan and autonomous body. It aims to promote national and international security by carrying out research on defence and security-related issues and disseminating the knowledge among the policy-makers and wider public.⁵ The Institute's presently focused research areas are divided in following categories: South Asia, East Asia, Russia and Central Asia, West Asia and Africa, Europe and Americas, Military Affairs, Non-Traditional Security, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Terrorism and International Security. The Institute has a strong research faculty of more than fifty distinguished scholars drawn from academia, defence, foreign affairs, media and other civil services. The Institute's state-of-the-art library, situated at the heart of the Indian capital New Delhi caters to the needs of policymakers.⁶ Although IDSA does not take tibetology as a special research project, it is an important part of the topics of Sino-Indian relations, China strategy, and Himalayan regional studies. At the same time, IDSA has also published many research reports on Tibet that have an important impact on decision-making.

Founded in 1958, the NIT is located in Deorali, Sikkim, near the southern part of Central Gangtok. Mainly dedicated to promoting Tibetan studies in the Sikkim area. Research areas include: religion, history, language, art, folk culture, etc. The library of the NIT is one of the libraries with the richest collection of Tibetan studies in the world. It also has a museum that mainly collects Tibetan statues and Buddhist artworks.⁷ The NIT has founded the Bulletin of Tibetology since 1964, and it has also published many books on tibetology over the years. The land for the construction of the NIT was donated by the late Chogyal of Sikkim Sir Tashi Namgyal in memory of his late son Paljor Namgyal. On October 1, 1958, former

⁵ "Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)," *The Statesman's Yearbook: The Politics, Cultures and Economies of the World 2017*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 80.

⁶ "Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)," Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, <https://ssifs.mea.gov.in/?2820?000>.

⁷ "About Namgyal Institute of Tibetology," NIT, <https://tibetology.net/?p=233>.

Indian Prime Minister Nehru announced the opening ceremony. The Institute building has a solemn Sikkim architectural style. In 2002, Mr. Tashi Densapa, the new director of the Southern California Institute of Tibetan Studies, presided over the expansion of the institute, re-arranging research fields, and opening the door to international cooperation.

2. Non-Governmental Think Tanks for Tibet-Related Studies

The non-governmental think tanks related to Tibet, including Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), Observer Research Foundation (ORF), and Centre for Policy Research (CPR). VIF is an independent, non-partisan institution that promotes quality research and in-depth studies and is a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. It strives to bring together the best minds in India to ideate on key national and international issues; promote initiatives that further the cause of peace and global harmony; monitor social, economic and political trends that have a bearing on India's unity and integrity; analyse the causes for social and ethnic conflicts leading to extremism and offer policy alternatives; interact with civil society and offer institutional support for exchange of ideas and interaction among conflicting groups; critique public policy and the working of democratic institutions and constitutional bodies; and evolve benchmarks for good governance and efficiency in public institutions. These are objectives that fall under a broad head called nation-building and often come within the purview of universities and institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, for reasons best known to those who manage them, these academic bodies have not been able to attend to these tasks. This neglect, it seems, is in some way responsible for the perceived failure of representative bodies and the prevailing inefficiency in the government sector. VIF believes that many of these institutions-which are central to our democratic existence-cannot be expected to work better, unless academia, think tanks and civil society engage with them and critique them on a regular basis. Given its deep and abiding commitment to the deepening of democracy and to the emergence of a strong and self-reliant India, VIF has embarked upon quality research and scholarship in a host of areas in the hope that such studies will improve governance, strengthen national security, integrate India's foreign policy to the nation's long-term objectives and bring about much-needed functional efficiency in parliament and other representative bodies and in public institutions.⁸

ORF is an independent global think tank based in Delhi, India. The foundation has three centers in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata. ORF provides

⁸ "Vision and Mission," VIF, <https://www.vifindia.org/visionMission>.