

Institute of Chinese Studies

# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Tibet: The Neighbour  
India Lost*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker :

**Dilip Sinha**

*7 August 2024*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Speaker:** **Amb. Dilip Sinha**, former Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva and Greece

**Chair:** **Dr. Sonika Gupta**, Associate Professor, Global Politics, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai

**Date:** 7 August 2024

**Venue:** Zoom

- Amb. Dilip Sinha’s analysis pertained to the long-standing question of Tibet’s statehood and sovereignty. Tracing the trajectory of Tibet’s political developments, and its relations with both China and India, the speaker aimed to address the research lacuna by dividing the analysis into three sections. First, to understand Tibet’s failure in asserting its sovereignty claim. Second, to analyse how China’s claims over Tibet have gone unchallenged in the last several decades. Third, to reflect on India’s role in resolving Tibet’s tribulations.
- Amb. Sinha pointed out that until the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1912, the relationship between Tibet and China, as per Tibetan accounts, had worn the shroud of a “priest-patron relationship”. After the fall of the Qing, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama declared Tibet to be an independent state.
- Later, after realising the futility of seeking support from the international community despite appeals for the same, the young 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, eventually had no choice but to accept Chinese suzerainty under the condition of Tibetan autonomy in accordance with the Seventeen Point Agreement of May 1951. The attendant circumstances, however,

compelled the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama to escape to India, after Communist Chinese forces invaded Tibet in 1959.

- Amb. Sinha argued that India did everything to “appease China”, despite the severity of Tibet’s circumstances. India did not offer military support to Tibet, and instead went on to recognise Tibet as part of China, when it signed the Panchsheel Agreement with China, thereby nullifying all previous agreements.
- Historicising his analysis, Amb. Sinha spoke of how the Qing was the first empire to incorporate Tibet and East Turkestan into its territorial fold. Despite periods of weakness, China was able to hold on its territorial holdings. This continued even when the Great Game between Great Britain and the Russian Empire unfolded in Central Asia during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Amb. Sinha emphasised that contrary to China’s claim of a “Century of Humiliation” starting from the First Opium War in 1839 to the Communist Party of China’s ascent to power in 1949, it was Britain which, out of fear of Russian expansion, inadvertently aided China, either by not overthrowing Chinese imperial rule or by not annexing Chinese territory. According to Amb. Sinha, it was essentially the European powers which came to China’s aid by helping it maintain its territorial unity.
- Speaking about India’s role in the Tibet issue, Amb. Sinha shed light on India’s acceptance of Chinese rule over Tibet after 1959, and how it has resulted in grave consequences for India’s national security. Today, China claims the entire the length of the border between Tibet and India, even furthering its claims to the lower slope of the Himalayas.

- Amb. Sinha argued that the world may have forgotten Tibet, but the Tibetan people have not given up and their resistance continues to provoke China. He remarked that the India-China border dispute is a manifestation of a bigger challenge that is Tibet. He concluded his presentation with a suggestion that India should seek policy alternatives in the context of the history of India-Tibet relations which China is gradually attempting to rewrite.
- Dr. Sonika Gupta highlighted the relevance of the speaker's analysis, especially in the context of India-Tibet and India-China relations. In response to Dr. Gupta and questions from the audience, Amb. Sinha suggested that there should be more active role on the part of India to counter Chinese narratives, beginning with a strong stance on the Tibet issue.

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