

India and China Relations: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT: *The relations between two ancient civilizations of India and China have remained topsy-turvy since independence. From being close friends in the 1950's (signing of Panchsheel Agreement of 1954) to warring parties of 1962, this relationship has seen many ups and downs. Both were in opposite camps during the Cold War era, with India having a Friendship treaty with USSR and China befriending USA. Situation started Changing in the 1990's when China started emerging as a Global Manufacturing Hub. Close Economic ties developed between India and China. However still there remain many irritants between these two countries especially the undemarcated border which often results in clashes like that of Galwan valley recently. This paper deals with the tumultuous Indo-China relationship.*

KEYWORDS: *Cold War, Trade, Trade Deficit, Panchsheel, One Belt One Road*

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I. INTRODUCTION BACKDROP

India and China shares a centuries old history of peaceful co-existence. The people of both nations interacted in cultural and economic spheres across the 'Himalyan Gap' for centuries. There is a sense of 'Ageless Brotherhood' between the people of these two nations. There have been incessant Civilizational encounters between two countries. This can be vividly seen in case of Buddhism which travelled from India to China along with ideas, texts, values. Travellers like Fa-Xian, Xuan Zhang, Kumarajiva played an instrumental role in this cross-fertilisation of ideas. During Medieval era also, powerful empires emerged in both the nations with Qing dynasty ruling over China and Mughal dynasty over Indian sub-continent. It was during this era that both the nations dominated the World trade. Chinese Silk and Indian Cotton found their way into the luxurious wardrobes of the Western elite. Both the countries also have a shared history of Imperial exploitation. Delegation from both the nations participated in the 'Congress of oppressed Nationalities' held in 1927 in Brussels. Both were the victims of Imperialism.

For almost 50 years after their emergence as independent nation states in the late 1940s, India's relationship with China had a highly uneven trajectory, marked by extreme vicissitudes. It took almost three decades after the 1962 conflict for this relationship to start acquiring a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional character. Significant hurdles have marred the process towards normalisation, namely, the issue of Tibet, the China-Pakistan alliance, the contested boundary, and the role of major powers. Since the 1990s, the increasing power asymmetry and economic gap by 2013, China's GDP had become four times larger than that of India has further complicated India's engagement with China. The rise of China as well as slower emergence of India has contributed to an increasing significance of their relationship for each other. This paper tries to cover a comprehensive study of Indo- China relation in a lucid way.

Post-Independence dimension in Indo-China relations

The new nation states were bold and ambitious in seeking to change the course of Asia and international relations. In the ideologically carved bipolar world order of the time, whilst the PRC was unambiguously aligned with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, India opted to follow a policy of non-alignment. Indian and Chinese historical experience and common concerns, Nehru believed, called for a policy of friendship and cooperation—any other approach would only lead to confrontation and draw hostile lines across Asia. He was also convinced that given the possibility of superpower intervention, China would never attack India. India thus became the first Asian non-communist country to recognize the new regime in China and has consistently upheld the 'one-China' policy. Crux of PRC's problem with Nehru and the nature of political leadership in India, was unquestionably about Tibet. Subsequently India's role and diplomacy in the 1950–3 Korean War (which directly contributed to the PRC being invited to the Geneva peace talks), and the nationalistic upsurge in the Afro-Asian world during the 1950s, led to a change in the Chinese evaluation of the non-aligned countries and brought the desired break in India–China relations. The 'Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between India and China relating to Tibet' signed on the occasion, incorporated the *Panchsheel*—the Five Principles of Peaceful Cooperation—which can be seen as the first joint political contribution of India

and China to contemporary foreign policy semantics. With the signing of *Panchsheel* India formally renounced its traditional privileges and position in Tibet, which it inherited from the British. When the Dalai Lama sought and obtained political asylum in India in the wake of the Tibetan uprising in 1959, India–China relations were stretched to breaking point, especially with the establishment of the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala.

The Great Betrayal of 1962 and its aftermath

The sterile hiatus following the war could be best described as a situation of ‘cold peace if not cold war’. The post-1962 period also saw the PRC readjusting its policy vis-à-vis the Indian subcontinent, which was essentially aimed at establishing a special relationship with Pakistan. The Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 provided the opportunity for the Chinese to show their solidarity with Pakistan—not only did they supply military equipment but they also threatened to open another front on the Sikkim border. The 1960s was also the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, when the domination of ultra-left factions led the Communist Party of China to ‘export revolution’ by intervening in the domestic politics of various states, including India. China also supported self-determination for the people of J&K and backed insurgencies in the north-east and the Maoist movements in India. PRC signed an agreement on nuclear cooperation with Pakistan and India began moving closer to the Soviet Union, with a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Cooperation in 1971 in the shadow of Bangladesh crisis. The Janta government did make attempts to reach out to China, which was emerging from the shadows of the Cultural Revolution. The then foreign minister A.B. Vajpayee paid a visit to China in 1979. Trade was officially resumed in 1978 and the Most Favoured Nation Agreement was signed in 1984.

Normalisation of Indo-China relations

An important intervention came from Deng Xiaoping in 1980, when he outlined a proposal that subsequently came to be known as the ‘package deal’. Indian leadership did not respond to this offer. 1986, one of the most threatening face-offs since 1962 took place between the military forces of India and China at Sumdorong Chu in the eastern sector. Indian Parliament in 1987 granted full statehood to Arunachal Pradesh. After PM Rajiv Gandhi’s visit in 1988, the shift in relations took place from a sequential (normalization after resolving dispute) to a simultaneous approach.

The ruckus after Pokhran-2

If the 1962 conflict constituted the watershed in terms of taking Sino-India relations to from one extreme to the other, the nuclear explosions of May 1998 can be seen in comparative terms. The decade of developments preceding the tests stood up to the sharp exchanges in the immediate

Aftermath. Conciliatory statements at the highest levels in India and a visit by the then Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh to China brought the ties back on track. The Chinese reassurance to him about their desire to stay neutral in the Indo-Pak conflict in Kargil, upheld the shift in the PRC’s South Asia policy, underway since the mid-1990s. A second significant indication of the developing maturity of the relationship was the fact that when the Karmapa Lama escaped into India in 2000, it did not stall or disrupt the momentum towards improvement. In hindsight, the letter of the then PM Vajpayee to the US President, citing China as the reason for the tests appeared to irk the Chinese more.

II. CONVERGENCE

Cultural aspect of Indo-China relations

India-China cultural exchanges date back to many centuries and there is some evidence that conceptual and linguistic exchanges existed in 1500-1000 B.C. between the Shang-Zhou civilization and the ancient Vedic civilization. Indian Bollywood movies were popular in China in the 1960s and 1970s and the popularity is being rekindled in recent times again. India and China have entered into an agreement on co-production of movies, the first of which based on the life of the monk Xuan Zang hit the theaters in 2016. Yoga is becoming increasingly popular in China. China was one of the co-sponsors to the UN resolution designating June 21 as the International Day of Yoga.

Economic exchange between India and China

India-China trade in goods was the world’s fastest-growing trade during 2000-12, surpassing in 2009, India’s trade with its then largest trading partner, the US. The proposed Free Trade Area (FTA), putting together the markets of two of the most populous nations in the world would be even bigger than the current FTAs such as EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, APEC etc. Statistics reveal that India and China carry out bilateral trade of \$85 billion. The participation of India and China in mega-blocs is also imperative for understanding the evolution of bilateral relations. Both countries are looking forward to an early conclusion of the

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Both sides view RCEP as a rule-based agreement capable of deterring protectionist tendencies and trade war escalation.

The Indian export basket is still extremely limited, comprising mostly primary products, and since 2005-6, we see a continuous and rising trade deficit in favour of China. India has continuously demanded that China give greater market access to Indian Pharma and IT sectors. Hitherto, security concerns have limited the possibilities of Chinese investment, though the extent of Chinese presence and operations has been described in a recent publication as 'Asia's best-kept secret'. Few would contest that Indian infrastructure, as also its manufacturing sector, are the biggest stumbling blocks in its growth story—a clear strategy has to be framed soonest, for bringing in Chinese investment and the undoubted expertise of the Chinese firms and corporations, taking on board concerns about training Indian labour and the setting up of production bases. China, meanwhile, has been frustrated with India's refusal to sign onto a massive effort to build railways, ports and roads reaching from Asia to Europe and the Middle East. The project includes a China-Pakistan economic development programme aimed at absorbing as much as \$46 billion in investment, most of it from Chinese banks. The non-tariff barriers (NTBs) are a cause of concern. The Indian scholars raised the issue of NTBs imposed by China on Indian goods. These NTBs pertain to stringent rules on product certification and labelling standards; delays in customs clearances; and even restrictions related to port operations for re-exporters.

Terrorism: The boiling issue

China decided to drop its objection to the UN listing Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. A UNSC designation will subject Azhar to an assets freeze, travel ban and an arms embargo.

Energy Scenario

A key area which still needs more policy attention from both sides is the unconventional energy sector, as the hydrocarbon dependence of both countries is very high. Shale gas, coalbed methane and natural gas hydrates are now revolutionising the energy security discourse. In China shale gas is found in the basins of Tarain, Tuha, Sichuan and Ordos, while in India there are shale gas deposits in Krishna, Godavari and Cauvery basins. Currently, both countries are looking for collaboration with other countries for harnessing their unconventional energy potential. It would be a win-win situation if India and China look at each other to address systematic gaps, develop regional storage hubs, and secure mutual cost advantages.

Cooperation at Organizational level

The RIC countries occupy over 19 percent of the global landmass and contribute to over 33 percent of global GDP. All three are nuclear powers and two, Russia and China, are permanent members of the UN Security Council, while India aspires to be one. Moreover, the RIC forms the core of both the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS. Both the countries regularly meet in various summits on regional and global forums such as BRICS, SCO, G20 etc.

Irritants

Political dimension of Indo-China Relations

China also has complained bitterly for decades over India's accepting the Dalai Lama as a refugee in 1959. The Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader has kept his headquarters in northern India since fleeing Chinese-ruled Tibet. There is a justifiable satisfaction that since the 1993 and 1996 Agreements, the border has been entirely peaceful. Changing the de facto status quo into a de jure boundary could have sorted the matter (the Deng 'package deal'). But the Chinese claims to Arunachal Pradesh goes counter to the 2005 Guidelines agreeing to respect populated areas. The lack of clarity regarding the alignment of the Line of Control has led to a rising number of transgressions over the past few years. These have in turn led to a useful—and necessary—array of mechanisms: flag meetings, border personnel meetings, hotlines between commanders, and from 2014, it was clear that the approach had shifted from arriving at a speedy settlement to border management, with the signing of a Border Defence Cooperation Agreement. A strategic dialogue, a defence dialogue, and joint military exercises have also been added to the bilateral profile. And yet, the transgressions—which occur very frequently—vitiate the atmosphere, adding grist to the mill of conflictual scenarios. Beijing's practice of stapling visas on the passports of Indian citizens from Kashmir or Arunachal Pradesh is a further source of exasperation and strong official protests are lodged.

Doklam Issue

Doklam, or Donglang in Chinese, is an area spread over less than a 100 sq km comprising a plateau and a valley at the trijunction between India, Bhutan and China. It is surrounded by the Chumbi Valley of Tibet, Bhutan's Ha Valley and Sikkim. Doklam is strategically located close to the Siliguri Corridor, which connects

mainland India with its north-eastern region. The corridor, also called Chicken's Neck, is a vulnerable point for India. Bhutan sounded the alarm that Chinese soldiers had arrived with bulldozers and excavators, and were building a high-mountain road near India's border in an area the two nuclear-armed giants have disputed over for decades.

Bhutan said the road China has been building would run from the town of Dokola to the Bhutanese army camp at Zompelri. Bhutan's Foreign Ministry called it a "direct violation" of agreements reached in 1988 and 1998 to maintain peace and refrain from unilateral action in the area pending a final border settlement. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said last week that India's border guards, in responding to Bhutan's call for help, had "illegally trespassed the boundary into Chinese territory" when they confronted the Chinese army construction team. For India, securing the Doklam Plateau is seen as essential to maintaining its control over a land corridor that connects to its remote northeastern States. India has said the Chinese road project threatens its access to the corridor, while China has questioned why India should even have a say in a matter that concerns only Beijing and Bhutan. Experts say, China has been trying for a long time to gain a tactical advantage in this sector, having already established dominance along the Indian borders at Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. Both India and China have staked rival claims to other Himalayan areas as well, including 90,000 sq. km in Arunachal Pradesh, which China refers to as "Southern Tibet," as well as 38,000 sq. km of another plateau called Aksai Chin.

Strategic tussle between India and China

Arguably, it is the Sino-Pak alliance and their military ties, both in the conventional and nuclear aspects, that generate greater mistrust within India. The present Chinese position is that whatever cooperation there might have been between the two states earlier, it is clearly a thing of the past and in any case, such cooperation is not directed against any third country. Indian policy-makers, however, continue to be concerned about the range of conventional military sales, China's construction of the Gwadar Port, and in particular, China's violation of the NSG rules to supply civilian nuclear plants to Pakistan. Above all, Chinese presence and infrastructure building activities in the territory ceded to China by Pakistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, have generated serious concerns in India. Chinese worries about separatist and terrorist groups in Xinjiang and their support bases in Pakistan, as well as the volatility within Pakistan, have however begun to induce some rethinking in China, though it is not yet clear whether they see it as a point of convergence with India. With gradual and further improvements in the India-China equation, Pakistan's relevance as a counterweight in China's balancing strategy is likely to come down. Better India-Pakistan relations would serve China's interests far more effectively, and in the short to medium term, India can at best hope that such positions as China might take, do not endorse Pakistan's maximalist position on the issue of Kashmir. India's increasing alignment with the US is a spoiler in China's quest to build military facilities overseas. String of Pearls and Indian Ocean Region: The growing presence of China's nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean worries India. China has maintained that its submarines have been deployed for anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, but this claim is surprising in Indian eyes since deploying submarines to tackle piracy is unusual.

Neighbourhood dilemma of India and China

China has vigorously wooed Bhutan and other, smaller countries in India's traditional sphere of influence, including Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Africa: China has been strengthening its presence and influence in Africa, as well as some of the African littoral states in the Indian Ocean. India's nervousness with the growing Chinese maritime interests is quite real. In response, India is now trying to step up its cooperation with a number of countries including Seychelles and Mauritius. The Indian Ocean region along with the littoral states will become much more vital in the coming years, with these maritime spaces carrying two-thirds of the global oil cargo, one third of the bulk cargo, and half of all container traffic. China's Belt and Road Initiative is an ambitious programme to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks along six corridors with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth. The name was coined in 2013 by China's President Xi Jinping, who drew inspiration from the concept of the Silk Road established during the Han Dynasty 2,000 years ago – an ancient network of trade routes that connected China to the Mediterranean via Eurasia for centuries. The BRI has also been referred to in the past as 'One Belt One Road'. The BRI comprises a Silk Road Economic Belt – a trans-continental passage that links China with southeast Asia, south Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe by land – and a 21st century Maritime Silk Road, a sea route connecting China's coastal regions with south east and south Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East and Eastern Africa, all the way to Europe.

The initiative defines five major priorities:

- ✓ policy coordination;
- ✓ infrastructure connectivity;
- ✓ unimpeded trade;

- ✓financial integration;
- ✓and connecting people.

The programme is expected to involve over US\$1 trillion in investments, largely in infrastructure development for ports, roads, railways and airports, as well as power plants and telecommunications networks. The BRI's geographical scope is constantly expanding. So far it covers over 70 countries, accounting for about 65 per cent of the world's population and around one-third of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The growing footprint of the two countries has led to a gradually expanding dialogue on a range of international issues: international terrorism, multipolarity, energy security, Iraq, North Korea, Afghanistan, UN reforms, globalisation etc.

III. CONCLUSION

Joint stands on some critical matters such as WTO and the unbalanced international economic order, environmental issues, human rights, reform of the UN and disarmament are also gathering momentum. Both are acquiring more prominence in trilateral (India-China-Russia) and other multilateral platforms such as the BRICS. A gradual reorganization in global economic and political power is taking shape and to varying degrees, both China and India are contributing to this process. This enlarging interaction is being increasingly grounded in a framework of accommodation where possible and cooperation where necessary. While New Delhi needs to constantly look over its shoulders for potential Chinese surprises, there is also an urgent need to adopt a multi-pronged strategy to deal with Beijing, for, after all, statecraft is not as black and white as some would like it to be. India, for one, needs to engage China a lot more at several levels: diplomatically, politically, multilaterally and economically. The two sides also need to conduct bilateral consultations on various issues – ranging from Afghan reconciliation to regional economic development. The more diplomacy, the better.

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