

# Chapter 8

## India and China: Sifting the ‘Generic’ from the ‘Specific’

Raviprasad Narayanan

### 8.1 Introduction

Asia’s largest countries, China and India, have developed a bilateral relationship that for the larger part has remained prickly and plagued with self-doubt. This state of affairs has led to a situation where both countries have conditioned themselves to a reflexive obduracy at the expense of rationality and pragmatism. To test a rather deterministic approach, this paper bases itself on two arguments:

1. The boundary dispute between China and India is displaying characteristics of an internal political deadlock and institutional intransigence in both countries.
2. The lack of institutional mechanisms and weakness of existing ones encourage powerful domestic constituencies to monopolise discourse and opinion building, thereby making for poor foreign policy decision-making on both sides.

To explain these arguments, the paper is divided into three parts: political variables, strategic variables, followed by a critical analysis of Sino-Indian relations. I argue that contemporary relations between China and India display a growing comprehensiveness with the coming of age of newer variables like growing trade relations, complementarities on global issues such as climate change and nascent cooperation on nontraditional security issues. Owing to the discursive nature of relations between the two countries and limitations of space, this chapter will focus, in the first two sections, on two salient components that are also the most prominent in bilateral relations. The two factors making up the political variables are the boundary dispute and Tibet and the Dalai Lama. The strategic variables explained in the paper are by far of more recent origin and comprise the Indo–US civil nuclear

---

R. Narayanan (✉)

Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of International Relations and Assistant Professor,  
International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies, College of Social Sciences,  
National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan  
e-mail: [raviprasad.narayanan@gmail.com](mailto:raviprasad.narayanan@gmail.com)

energy deal and the growing salience of the Indian Ocean to China and India's strategic calculations. The final section will critically appraise bilateral relations between the two countries, raising issues with policy implications.

## 8.2 Political Variables in Sino-Indian Relations

### 8.2.1 *The Boundary Dispute*

I wish to argue that the boundary dispute between China and India is foremost a political issue with important strategic components subsumed within it—and not the other way around. To be resolved, it requires domestic political consensus in legislative forums and institutional acquiescence in both countries from respective stakeholders and domestic actors. Any intervening agreement or understanding on matters pertaining to the boundary dispute must, therefore, be seen as being tentative and one that reiterates the status quo ante.

The Line of Actual Control (LAC) that passes for the 'border' between China and India remains undefined, un-delineated and un-demarcated. It is a moot point as to when the two countries will display the much-needed sagacity to advance beyond current 'claims' largely based upon historical angst, creative fiction and bureaucratic stonewalling. To China, the irresolution of the boundary dispute has two clear legacies—historical and contemporary. It is to be interpreted that the historical relates to the unfairness of the treaties drawn up by colonial powers, while the contemporary relates to India's position on the boundary dispute being 'Nehruvian'.

The paucity of institutional structures and bilateral mechanisms addressing the Sino-Indian boundary dispute is obvious. Perhaps the only politico-institutional arrangement existing between India and China to address the boundary dispute is that of special representatives. During India's former premier Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to China in June 2003, the two countries issued a joint declaration calling for the setting up of special representatives with the express brief of finding a political framework to settle the boundary dispute.<sup>1</sup> As a political mechanism directly reporting to the prime minister in India and the premier in China, an audit of the annual (sometimes biannual) meetings of the special representatives would reveal that it has not fared better than the bureaucratic–institutional mechanism it succeeded—the joint working group (JWG) (Fang Tien-tze 2002; Sidhu and Jing Dong Yuan 2001). The JWG was set up in 1988 during Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China. In 2001, after 14 meetings between the two sides in as many years, it was yet to achieve any institutional breakthrough in settling the boundary dispute, and the forum had deteriorated into a ritualised exercise in stating well-established positions by either side. To quote Satu Limaye:

---

<sup>1</sup> See Government of India (2003). The declaration stated: 'The two sides agreed to each appoint a Special Representative to explore from the political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship the framework of a boundary settlement.'

On Nov. 21, 2002, India and China conducted the 14th joint working group meeting on their border dispute. From all indications, and notwithstanding the stated commitment to accelerate clarification of the disputed border and to exchange maps on the middle sector, progress on settling the border dispute is likely to inch along rather than accelerate ahead (Limaye 2003).

In the absence of any new initiatives to resolve the boundary dispute, the two countries, it appears, are interested in maintaining 'peace and tranquillity along the LAC' according to the agreement signed in 1993 and do not want to advance any further.<sup>2</sup> Even the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) signed during Manmohan Singh's visit to China in October 2013 is to be interpreted as another layer of institutionalised restraint that stays clear of identifying an eventual solution to the lingering dispute.<sup>3</sup> With India headed to the polls in 2014, it is highly unlikely for any significant breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations to settle the boundary dispute in the next couple of years.

The disputed boundary is undoubtedly the principal obstacle casting its influence on Sino-Indian relations. To quote Zhao Gancheng, a leading expert on South Asian security at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies:

China has accomplished the demarcation work with most land neighbors except India and Bhutan. After decades long efforts, China has achieved progress with far-reaching significance in its periphery which will impact the security situation in the region, and also the stability in China's border areas (Zhao Gancheng 2009).

For China, settling the boundary dispute is motivated by several caveats. First, as part of its 'periphery' policy, it has concluded boundary agreements with most of its neighbours except Bhutan and India.<sup>4</sup> Unless a border demarcation agreement is signed with the latter and institutional arrangements put in place to verify implementation of a boundary accord, China's 'periphery' policy cannot be termed a success. Second, for both countries—especially India—the 1962 conflict is a template of national vulnerability that resonates in policy-making circles and has the effect of uniting disparate institutional voices to adopt a conservative posture on relations with China. Third, to the leadership in Beijing, as long as the boundary dispute persists, it has to pander to the influential voice of its military on relations with India, since it was the People's Liberation Army (PLA) that enforced a favourable outcome

---

<sup>2</sup>An agreement consisting of nine articles to maintain peace and tranquillity along the LAC was signed on 7 September 1993. Despite regular infractions, this agreement has held.

<sup>3</sup>The Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) was signed by both countries on 23 October 2013, during the Indian prime minister's visit to China. The BDCA, containing ten articles, is to be seen as part of the welter of agreements related to the boundary dispute the two sides have signed in the past two decades. See the text at <http://www.indianembassy.org.cn/newsDetails.aspx?NewsId=437&Bid=1>, accessed on 25 October 2013. Also see Frederic Grare (2013).

<sup>4</sup>After the twenty-first round of boundary talks between Bhutan and China held in August 2013, the two countries agreed to conduct a joint technical field survey in the Pasamlung area in Bumthang in the first week of September. See 'Bhutan–China Border Talks Agree on Joint Technical Field Survey in Pasamlung', at: <http://bhutanobserver.bt/7754-bo-news-about-bhutan-china-border-talks-agree-on-joint-technical-field-survey-in-pasamlung.aspx#sthash.84Hdm70S.dpuf>, accessed on 12 October 2013.

for Beijing in 1962. Fourth, China's geographical insecurities regarding Tibet will remain as long as the Sino-Indian border is not demarcated. Independent of the ebb and flow of Sino-Indian relations, there remains in Beijing a notion that India is not above board on the Tibet issue and could be up to shenanigans from time to time.

### 8.2.2 *Tibet and the Dalai Lama*

From the outset, the Tibet issue has been closely related to China's relations with India (Chen Jian 2006). Tibet is not only a politico-strategic problem for China but also one with contesting political narratives since the conflict over Tibet's status is a conflict over history (Sperling 2004, p. 3). By seeking to constantly build an 'internal political fence' around the issue, China would want the rest of the world to ignore the impact Tibet's occupation has had on the collective conscience of the world since 1959.

For the political leadership and intellectual elite, the mere questioning of the legitimacy of Tibet's incorporation with China is akin to challenging the very acceptability of the idea that is the People's Republic of China (PRC) as constructed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Ibid., p. 5). The version China wants the rest of the world to accept as regards Tibet is a 'political product' that celebrates Han sovereignty over Tibetan—negating cultural and ethnic determinants to place 'political' triumphalism at the forefront (Carole McGranahan 2006, cited from p. 100). To the CCP, Tibet's long theocratic tradition coupled with the charismatic appeal of the current Dalai Lama is at one level an ideological conundrum where religious sanction ('spiritual') coexists with political legitimacy ('temporal'). It has been pointed out that the appeal of Tibetan Buddhism as a religious anchor to a society that has battled ideological campaigns in the past and rapid modernity in the contemporary period is an aspect the party cannot countenance (Yueh-Ting Lee and Hong Li 2011, cited from p. 252).

From an overall perspective, the recurrent influence of Tibet, especially since the March 2008 riots in Lhasa and other parts of Tibet, coupled with widely reported acts of self-immolations by Tibetans, could, in the near to middle term, be a factor exercising strains in bilateral relations. In the near future, the choosing of a spiritual successor to the Dalai Lama could also test the Sino-Indian relationship as both countries are stakeholders in this dispute, irrespective of Beijing's antipathy towards such a line of reasoning. The complexity of the Tibet issue has intensified with the Dalai Lama declaring that the 'Tibetans need a leader, elected freely by the Tibetan people, to whom I can devolve power'.<sup>5</sup> In his annual address to the Tibetan Parliament in exile on 14 March 2011, he further stated his desire to 'devolve formal authority to... an elected leadership' and seeking to be 'completely relieved of

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Legal Issues Implicated by the Dalai Lama's Devolution of Power', memorandum prepared by the Tibet Justice Center (May 2011, p. 4), at <http://www.tibetjustice.org/dalailamadevolutio/DevolutionMemo.pdf>, accessed on 22 August 2011.

formal authority'.<sup>6</sup> This announcement by the Dalai Lama cleared the way for Lobsang Sangay, an alumnus of Harvard Law School, to become the popularly elected prime minister of the Tibetan government in exile based in Dharamsala, India.<sup>7</sup> As head of government, he will marshal the popular will of the Tibetan community in exile, while the Dalai Lama will remain the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and faith.<sup>8</sup>

Politically, this subtle transition is not going to influence China's attitude towards the Tibet issue, but it does create an institutional platform for negotiations to be conducted in the future. The Dalai Lama's astute decision to hand over political power to an elected leadership is a challenge to China as the 'exile parliament' will function independently of Beijing and, in the future, could hypothetically have a say in choosing the next Dalai Lama, thereby reducing Beijing's influence on the process (Barnett 2011). It is for Beijing to acknowledge that the Tibet issue does have a political solution if handled with sensitivity—and that solution lies within the capabilities of Beijing's polity. Dialogue is the best way to ensure an accommodation and not the indiscriminate repression of a people politically and culturally.<sup>9</sup> Beijing (represented by the United Front Work Department of the CCP) and Tibetan representatives do have channels of communication and have been meeting each other since 2002. Even after the 2008 riots in Tibet, the two sides had met in November of that year where the Tibetans had put forward a 'memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People'—a proposal that remained within the parameters of the PRC's constitution (Gupwell and Ionescu 2011, p. 7).

While most countries will acknowledge Beijing's demands to not entertain the Dalai Lama—owing to purely commercial considerations in a globalised world—the reality remains that powerful stakeholders in the international system recognise Tibet as being one of China's weak points and will keep the issue alive in human rights forums, minority rights forums, refugee rights forums as well as political and religious freedom campaigns.

While the boundary dispute and the issue of Tibet have been a long-running 'constant' in Sino-Indian relations, newer categories have emerged in the bilateral,

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Lobsang Sangay was the first Tibetan to earn the doctor of juridical science (SJD) degree from Harvard Law School. His dissertation was titled 'Democracy in Distress: Is Exile Polity a Remedy? A Case Study of Tibet's Government in Exile'. The success of the Tibetan government in exile stems primarily from the 'cohesion, resiliency, and determination of the Tibetans as an ethnic group' to preserve their cultural heritage and the freedom to practice their religion and transmit the Tibetan ethos to successive generations. See Yossi Shain (1991, p. 200).

<sup>8</sup> In an interview to a popular Indian weekly, Lobsang Sangay made an interesting observation: 'Before 1959, there was a border between India and Tibet, and there was no requirement for such kind of huge defence budget [for India].' See Ashish Kumar Sen's interview with Lobsang Sangay, *Kalon Tripa* (Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile), *Outlook* (16 May 2011).

<sup>9</sup> The sensitivity shown by Beijing towards Tibet also extends to the Internet. A landmark initiative by Wang Lixiong, a prominent Chinese intellectual on Tibet, to conduct an online dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Chinese citizens on 21 May 2010 generated 282 questions, till the authorities stepped in and the Google Moderator webpage was shut down by Chinese Internet censors. See Perry Link (2010).

throwing open a diversified basket of concerns and apprehensions forcing New Delhi and Beijing to alternately appraise one another. If the events leading to the conflict of 1962 were to be considered a regrettable phase in bilateral relations, processes evolving since the late 1990s present contrasting pictures of hope and ennuï in Sino-Indian relations. The element of hope springs from the historic opportunity the two countries face in creating development paradigms that seek to emancipate in economic terms a vast majority of their respective populations. The ennuï derives from a sobering realisation for India that it can no longer compare itself with China on most indices relating to economic and social indicators. Some of the newer categories that have introduced themselves to the bilateral include: domestic economic growth models and trade (aspects dealt with at length by Li Li (Chap. 5) and Amita Batra (Chap. 3) in this volume); cooperation on climate change; complexities involving trans-boundary rivers; nontraditional security issues like energy security, terrorism and piracy; and vital strategic developments since 1998 when India tested nuclear devices.

### **8.3 Strategic Variables in Sino-Indian Relations**

The 1990s witnessed an epochal reordering of global geopolitics following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the repercussions of which were felt in most regions and bilateral engagements. The Sino-Indian relationship was no exception and went through a phase of alternating features that witnessed the tentative emergence of a structured bilateral on the basis of reciprocal agreements revolving around the boundary dispute and a display by India to not remain confined by a self-imposed straitjacket on strategic matters. This section deals with two such variables—the Indo-US civilian nuclear energy deal and the Indian Ocean—that have a benign influence on China-India bilateral relations and broadly flow from strategic developments since the late 1990s.

#### ***8.3.1 The Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Energy Deal***

The nuclear tests of May 1998 accrued for India ‘relative gains’, and the post-Pokharan phase unfolded with India seeking strategic parity with China. The culmination of the Indo-US nuclear deal only reinforced this notion.<sup>10</sup> The agreement on cooperation in civilian nuclear energy came as a shock to security analysts in China.<sup>11</sup> As expected, China’s response focused on three aspects—the United States

---

<sup>10</sup> See Lei Guang (2004).

<sup>11</sup> See the text of the suo-motu statement made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on civilian nuclear energy cooperation with the United States to Parliament at <http://www.hindu.com/the-hindu/nic/suomotuu.htm>, accessed on 10 October 2011.

using India to contain China; the setback to global non-proliferation initiatives; and portraying India as undeserving of becoming a nuclear power since it was not part of the hierarchical structure of global power cabals. To quote Zhao Gangcheng:

The issue is that India is not only a country that wants to develop civilian nuclear power, but also a nation that has developed nuclear weapons. Thus others are concerned not about whether India could develop civilian nuclear reactors to generate electricity, but *whether it is or should be seen as a legitimate nuclear weapons state* (NWS) (Zhao Gangcheng 2009). (emphasis mine)

While the 'legitimacy' of being considered a nuclear weapon state was one aspect, India has always been flustered by China's lack of appreciation regarding its nuclear status and exemplary record in non-proliferation. There is an inescapable sanctimonious approach to China's evaluation of India's position and role in world affairs. To quote Weixing Hu:

India lacks systemic power in today's world affairs. A country's systemic power comes from its comprehensive national capability, its diplomacy, its resources of alliance, and its role in international organizations. Unlike China, India is not a member of the UN Security Council (Weixing Hu 2000, cited from p. 33).

It could also be inferred that when China sees India's nuclear deal with the United States as a threat, it does so more owing to the United States' role in it. The latter's role in building up a higher profile for India clearly discomfits Beijing. A growing and multilayered India-US relationship with deeper defence cooperation could only be seen as a strategic manoeuvre to counterbalance China's growing power in the region.<sup>12</sup> The speech made by President Bush while on a visit to India lauding common values between the two democracies raised eyebrows in Beijing. To quote:

India in the 21st century is a natural partner of the United States because we are brothers in the cause of human liberty.... As a global power... India has a historic duty to support democracy around the world.<sup>13</sup>

For Beijing, India's nuclear programme poses a 'potential security threat', but not one that challenges 'its own nation-state identity' (Lei Guang 2004, cited from p. 400). India's opposition to signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is due to a deeply ingrained domestic consensus that the global nuclear order is unfair and one that neglects universal nuclear disarmament. The nuclear deal with the US and its subsequent clearance at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) was to many Indians a strategic achievement that still has many more hurdles to clear. The progress of India-US relations is being closely watched in Beijing and any improvement (or the lack of it) will have a bearing on Sino-Indian relations. It cannot be ignored that following the civilian nuclear deal of 2005 that witnessed a 'new high' in India-US relations, China has intensified its bilateral political and economic relations with other countries of South Asia, especially Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives.

<sup>12</sup> See Jing-dong Yuan (2005, pp. 150–174).

<sup>13</sup> 'President Discusses Strong US-India Partnership in New Delhi', White House, Office of the Press Secretary (3 March 2006), at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060303-5.html>, accessed on 12 January 2012. Also see, Cheng Ruisheng (2008, cited from p. 21).

For strategic analysts in Beijing, it would appear that the vacillation and contentious debates over the India–US nuclear deal represent at the least two images of India. First, the spectacle of an immature democracy represented by fractious wrangling over a sensitive issue pertaining to national security and, second, the absence of strategic vision to exploit an opportunity that will prove beneficial in the long run. I put forward a third image, which might not find acceptance or acknowledgement in China: the contested debate in India over the provisions of the India–US nuclear energy cooperation represented a triumph for parliamentary intervention in foreign policy that in the years to come will exercise more influence and tax every coalition government holding power in New Delhi. If the controversial debate of 22 July 2008 on the Indo–US nuclear deal brought out the various arguments and contestations on the merits and demerits of signing a bilateral agreement with the United States, one can well imagine what a debate on an eventual boundary agreement with China would look like! Any eventual settlement of the boundary dispute must recognise the need to generate consensus in Parliament and avoid controversy before a political decision is arrived at. It is for China to appreciate that whatever the flaws of Indian democracy, it is a project that is here to stay and one that is evolving with every passing day. Those days are long gone when foreign policy issues could be the exclusive domain of the executive (and charismatic personalities) and the legislature bypassed. With coalition governments becoming *de rigueur* in New Delhi, every proposal to settle the boundary dispute in its entirety will be discussed threadbare, and Chinese statements and actions in forcing India to the negotiating table would rather have an opposite effect.

### 8.3.2 *Indian Ocean*

In the last decade, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has emerged a zone of ‘interest’ to Chinese security planners. China also realises that India occupies a central position in the IOR, with the capability and wherewithal to influence sea lines of communications (SLOCs) to its advantage. This advantage has translated into India ‘weaving a network of checks and balances and expanding its ability to control the Indian Ocean’ (Li 2008, cited from p. 233). The strategic nature of the Indian Ocean to China is immense. China’s vital energy supplies from the Middle East have to transit the Indian Ocean before reaching the South China Sea. For Beijing, the chokepoints are the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca. The construction of a deep-water port in Gwadar in Pakistan and upgrading and creating new port infrastructure in Chittagong in Bangladesh and Hambantota in Sri Lanka are to India indicative of China’s seriousness to initially create mercantile infrastructure in ports dotting the Indian Ocean that could also double up as future bases (Kaplan 2010). Adding to this list are Chinese efforts to secure Marao in the Maldives and alleged listening posts on the Coco Islands of Myanmar. India is worried that these activities by China are to provide berthing and docking facilities to the rapidly expanding PLA Navy (PLAN) that seeks to convert itself into a blue-water navy.



China takes pains to assure the world and countries sharing a coastline with the Indian Ocean that its motives are peaceful, invoking the glory of the Ming Dynasty's Admiral Zheng He's several voyages, which were benign and reflected the Sino-centric world (Toshi Yoshihara 2010). From an Indian perspective, using Zheng He is a feint to accommodate the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) into China's long-term plans for the Indian Ocean. Traditionally, the Indian Ocean has not been China's 'zone of influence', and the attempts by Beijing to ensure its presence in the region are motivated by a mix of strategic and commercial reasons. If Beijing were to adopt the concept of the high seas being a zone of innocent passage for commercial and naval vessels of other countries, then it should (ideally) not be a problem if PLAN were to be in the Indian Ocean and the Indian Navy in the South China Sea. But that is not the case. China very zealously marks its domain (though the much-disputed nine-dotted line), claiming the entire South China Sea as its 'historic title'.<sup>14</sup> For India, this is undoubtedly an instance of deliberate ambiguity on Beijing's part coupled with an intransigent approach adopted while advancing its 'maritime claims'. To quote India's former chief of naval staff, Admiral Arun Prakash, 'The stubborn opaqueness that China maintains vis-à-vis its accretion of military capabilities invites the worst possible interpretation of its intention' (Prakash 2011, p. 20).

Strategically, the Indian Ocean straddles the eastern coast of Africa, from South Africa to the Indonesian archipelago, and the Indian Navy has the wherewithal to interdict shipping lanes in the event of any conflict. For India, stability in the Indian Ocean is paramount since it is closely linked to its domestic economic interests and the fact that close to 95 % of its external trade is seaborne (Holslag 2009, cited from p. 825). India's maritime domain stretches from the Straits of Hormuz to the Malacca Straits, and this is discomfiting to planners in Beijing. India's maritime security periphery commences westward from the Malacca Straits, and the Indian Navy's cooperative security with the littoral states of the region is designed to co-opt friendly nations and keep China out of the Bay of Bengal and the IOR. The strategic location of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Andaman Sea and the location of India's Far Eastern Naval Command in Port Blair give the Indian Navy a unique position to overlook the SLOCS of the region, something that Beijing lacks (Scott 2008, cited from p. 9). To offset Chinese ambitions, India has entered into strategic alliances with the navies of the United States, Japan, Singapore and Australia and conducts annual exercises that drew the ire of Beijing in 2007 when they were held in the Bay of Bengal. Known as Malabar (the name of the western coast of Kerala facing the Arabian Sea), these exercises are generating a momentum of their own, but have shown a tendency to be influenced by changing political dynamics in two countries—Japan and Australia. As a zone of contestation, the IOR will not be a Chinese 'lake', and any initiatives to limit India's influence to that of a peripheral power in the IOR by Beijing would be a miscalculation.

With its blue-water navy, India still maintains an edge over China as regards the Indian Ocean, and Chinese 'intentions' have provoked its maritime strategy to visualise a scenario where it will have the capabilities to transform itself into an

---

<sup>14</sup> See Li Jinming and Li Dexia (2003).

integrated force within the next 15 years.<sup>15</sup> These two instances of new variables casting their growing influence on Sino-Indian relations come at a time when China is adopting a flexible posture to counter the ‘pivot’ strategy for the Asia-Pacific being implemented by the United States, and India positions itself as a ‘swing state’ not being constricted by any alliance—formal or informal.

Next, the paper analyses Sino-Indian relations by deriving inferences from earlier sections and teasing out the fundamental contours of the bilateral, the influences and inferences motivating decision-makers in the framing of policy as well as the interstices that exist.

## 8.4 Analysis: Factors Influencing Decision-Making of Sino-Indian Relations

The last two decades have witnessed a complete recasting of India’s external relations with the world, especially its important stakeholders. From a value-based foreign policy (nonalignment), India has subscribed to an interest-based one. The only concession it has made while making this transition is to maintain the refrain of its need for strategic autonomy—itself an advancement from the strategic ambiguity of yesteryears.

Unmistakably, China looms largest in the context of India’s foreign policy. The events of 1962 have more or less become a national template and lens with which India’s policy-making elite views China. No amount of collective lament and opinion making on China goes without reference to the war of 1962. The political class and strategic community in India reiterate one another in characterising the debacle of 1962 as India’s worst moment since independence. The military setback of 1962 has stiffened India’s world view about its immediate northern neighbour and informs its security calculus accordingly. At another level, it is suffocating for the Indian policy-making elite (as opposed to the political elite) to advocate closer relations with China that could lead to a situation where it sees no parity or benefit. This is not to be taken as an endorsement that relations with China need not be advanced. Rather, Sino-Indian relations are, despite their differences—manageable and unmanageable—at their healthiest and deepest today. This development has not escaped the attention of international relations (IR) scholars who expect the ‘progressively deeper and more complex interactions taking place... act as a springboard for the creation of more specific forms of mutual collaboration’ (Gillian Goh Hui Lynn 2006, cited from p. 265). If it comes as any comfort to India, it is a welcome departure from the generally subscribed view that China has always preferred a weak neighbourhood. As William S. Turley says: ‘China historically has sought to keep regional powers weak, divided or deferential and to exclude competitors in order to minimize threats (from its neighbouring countries)’.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Indian Navy, *India’s Maritime Military Strategy*, at [http://indiannavy.nic.in/maritime\\_strat.pdf](http://indiannavy.nic.in/maritime_strat.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> William S. Turley (1986, pp. 178–179), as cited in Sanqiang Jian (1992, p. 50).

In the early decades since independence (for India) in 1947 and 'liberation' (for China) in 1949, the two countries had adopted foreign policies that reflected the ideational perspectives of their leaders. This personality-dependent ideational *weltanschauung* proved alternately hectoring and moralistic, which in many ways contributed to fundamental disagreements existing between the two nations. For China, the *weltanschauung* of Nehru was illusory and not based on India's cultural or historical experiences. Six decades on, while disagreements exist and newer concerns have emerged, the two countries have a range of policy choices at their disposal to handle and correctly manage their bilateral relationship.

While the Indian media at times adopts a shrill tone and invokes a nightmarish strategic scenario for India, with China and Pakistan trying to hem it from two sides, the reality is different. India's apprehensions of an 'encirclement' have given way to a more rational assessment that spring from its own confidence that the world has moved on from Cold War scenarios to security issues that will not visualise the coming together of two states to fight a conventional war with a single state.

A blind spot that needs urgent rectifying is the absence of a wider dialogue and understanding between the two countries, especially in the public sphere. Existing institutional relations are jealously restricted to the bureaucratic sphere and one cannot but notice the need for different interests involved in the shaping of policy.<sup>17</sup> Stereotypes and animosity prevail where rational assessments ought to. For instance, the Indian political system does not find many enthusiasts in China. Most Chinese experts on India are perplexed by the dynamic processes, dynastic tendencies and personality-centric politics governing India's coalition governments. Discussions on India's political culture and constantly evolving society are negligible in China, and the few that come out are based on outdated methodologies and are rather simplistic.<sup>18</sup> It suits the authorities in China to encourage a line of thinking that 'development' and 'democracy' are antagonistic elements, pointing to India as the example, while China represents a better system, where the Party understands and creates conditions for the material fulfilment of its people (Jinxin Huang 2005, cited from p. 632). Indian commentators repay the favour by hyping and 'inventing' scenarios that pit India and China in a future confrontation (Singh 2009). India's rapid

---

<sup>17</sup>Two significant bureaucratic stakeholders deciding India's relations with China include the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). A reading of their annual reports presents contrasting views. The perspective of the MEA on China is: 'The focus is on enhancing mutually beneficial cooperation while simultaneously addressing differences' (see 'MEA Foreign Relations: China', at <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50042452>, accessed on 12 October 2011).

The MoD in its annual report states: 'India is conscious and watchful of the implications of China's evolving military profile in the immediate and extended neighbourhood' (see *Ministry of Defence Annual Report 2010-11*, at <http://mod.nic.in/reports/welcome.html>, accessed on 12 October 2011).

<sup>18</sup>Pan Wei (2007). Professor Pan Wei of the School of International Studies, Peking University, says in his paper: 'India has periodically elected leaders, but the Indian government is virtually abusing its people; while Chinese communist government is not truly elected, but it well [*sic*] takes care of people's welfare like parents.'

enhancement of defensive capabilities along its eastern flank—new airfields and raising mountain divisions—is a development that has been noticed and commented upon by observers in Beijing.<sup>19</sup> This expansion of physical infrastructure along the disputed border is clearly a response to Chinese infrastructure build-up along the un-demarcated border. For India, China's infrastructure facilities along the border are a bargaining chip to influence the eventual settlement of the boundary dispute since the infrastructure exists on what is otherwise 'contested' land (Taylor Fravel 2008, p. 5).

A recurring question for India on the boundary dispute has been that of how much influence the PLA has in the decision-making structures in Beijing and what leverage they have in obstructing any deal on the border with India. This question arises as there are several layers to the dialectical relationship between the CCP and the PLA.<sup>20</sup> If Beijing has truly whittled down the influence of the PLA on contentious issues and there is political will to strike a deal, it will indeed be a positive signal. However, if the PLA were to be holding the veto card on any outstanding settlement of the boundary dispute with India, it is not a welcome sign (Woodward 2003, cited from pp. 237–238). For India, the influence of the PLA on Beijing's policy-making (imagined or otherwise) is a salient aspect of its overall matrix in evaluating China. India should perhaps condition itself to accept the 'hawkish line' projected by the PLA and its affiliated think-tanks as the existence of a 'powerful voice'—but not the 'final voice' on Sino-Indian relations. Sadly, there is a perceptible intellectual vacuum between the two countries in understanding each other through prisms other than those which restrict themselves to the merely strategic and security oriented.<sup>21</sup> To New Delhi and its insular policy-making class, the memories of the conflict in 1962 refuse to recede, and the unpreparedness of its armed forces and shoddy foreign policy decision-making of that time—dominated by personalities and not institutions—have been a constant reminder of its shortcomings and one that influences policy and contingency planning to date. Complicating matters has been New Delhi's blunt refusal to countenance any revisiting of the lapses that led to the 1962 war with China and subsequent loss of national pride. For a democracy like India, perhaps it is time to shed the forced anxieties it has over the

---

<sup>19</sup>About India's new air fields, see: 'India Re-activating Air Strip in Arunachal', at <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/india-re-activating-air-strip-in-arunachal-150768&cp>, accessed on 26 November 2011. With the decision to reactivate the strategic Vijayanagar advanced landing ground in Arunachal Pradesh, India has a third air base in the state after Tuting and Mechuka. The new base is located at the strategic tri-junction of India, China and Myanmar in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Also see, He Zude and Fang Wei (2011a, b).

<sup>20</sup>See Peter Kien-hong Yu (2000).

<sup>21</sup>There are exceptions though, with a few Chinese scholars taking interest in understanding how India has emerged as a software power despite having a low technological base and how states like Kerala regularly elect communist governments and have successfully introduced land reforms, achieved high levels of social development, empowered women and democratised and empowered village councils to run their own affairs—a model the CCP finds interesting to study. See Jinxin Huang (2005, cited from p. 632).

still secret Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Committee Report submitted to the government in 1963.<sup>22</sup>

Beijing has its worries, too. The episodic nature of violence in Xinjiang and its perpetrators receiving training in Pakistan must be discomfiting to China (Han Hua 2011). Complicating its 'all-weather' relationship with Pakistan is the possibility that China may have to assume a larger role in Afghanistan once the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) pulls out the bulk of its troops by 2014. If current developments are any indication, Afghanistan is set for a new round of internecine conflict, and it will require a regional initiative to avoid bloodshed. A potential role for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) stepping into the void left behind by the departure of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is worth examining (Dikshit 2011).

To conclude, Sino-Indian relations have evolved in a manner where they acknowledge the existence of differences on certain salient issues and the potential for congruence on some recent concerns. If categories were to be put in place, then it is obvious that crucial issues over which differences exist are of a bilateral nature, while the potential for congruence exists on concerns that have a multilateral and global impact. China and India share the same ideas and calibrate positions on issues such as climate change and methodologies required to alleviate the global financial crisis. However, when it comes to bilateral issues, the two countries appear to be found wanting in putting forward breakthrough solutions. There is dire need for both of them to undertake an institutional project of forging multilayered ties that are independent of security issues. The Strategic Economic Dialogue between the two countries needs to be constructed as a foundational pillar of bilateral relations and not as an anodyne bureaucratic interface that over time becomes a ritualised interaction. A comprehensive picture of bilateral relations will only emerge if the two countries undertake a calibrated exercise in developing vertical and horizontal linkages that lead to the relationship becoming self-sustaining owing to its diversity and not self-limiting owing to exclusive focus on one or two very crucial issues.

## References

- Barnett R (2011) The Dalai Lama's "deception": why a seventeenth-century decree matters to Beijing. *New York Review of Books*, 6 April 2011
- Chen Jian (2006) The Tibetan rebellion of 1959 and China's changing relations with India and the Soviet Union. *J Cold War Stud* 8(3):54–101
- Cheng Ruisheng (2008) Trend of India's diplomatic strategy. *China Int Stud* (10):20–41
- Dikshit S (2011) Plans to upgrade Afghanistan in SCO of interest to India. *Hindu*, 14 June 2011. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2101859.ece>. Accessed 20 Aug 2011

---

<sup>22</sup>On 17 March 2014, the first part of the Lt. Gen. Henderson Brooks–Brig. P.S. Bhagat report was uploaded by Australian scholar Neville Maxwell, author of the critically acclaimed *India's China War*.

- Fang Tien-tze (2002) The Sino-Indian border talks under the joint working group. *Issues Stud* 38(3):150–183
- Gillian Goh Hui Lynn (2006) China and India: towards greater cooperation and exchange. *China Int J* 4(2):263–284
- Government of India (2003) Declaration on principles for relations and comprehensive cooperation between the Republic of India People's Republic of China. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi
- Grare F (2013) An agreement among unequals. *Indian Express*, 29 October 2013. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/an-agreement-among-unequals/1188419/>. Accessed 29 Oct 2013
- Gupwell D, Ionescu R-V (2011) Dalai Lama hands over temporal powers: impact on China–Tibet relations. European Institute of Asian Studies (EIAS) paper, Brussels, August 2011
- Han Hua (2011) Fight terrorism with Pakistan. *China Daily*, 12 August 2011. [http://www.china-daily.com.cn/opinion/2011-08/12/content\\_13097707.htm](http://www.china-daily.com.cn/opinion/2011-08/12/content_13097707.htm). Accessed 18 Aug 2011
- He Zude, Fang Wei (2011a) India's increasing troops may go nowhere. *People's Daily Online*, 15 November 2011. <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90777/7644825.html>. Accessed 15 Nov 2011
- He Zude, Fang Wei (2011b) India's border troop surge aimed at rising China? *People's Daily Online*, 10 November 2011. <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90780/7641109.html>. Accessed 12 Nov 2011
- Holslag J (2009) The persistent military security dilemma between China and India. *J Strateg Stud* 32(6):811–840
- Jing-dong Yuan (2005) Foe or friend? The Chinese assessment of a rising India after Pokhran-II. In: Dittmer L (ed) *South Asia's nuclear security dilemma: India, Pakistan, and China*. M.E. Sharpe, New York
- Jinxin Huang (2005) A new Chinese discourse of India. *J Contemp China* 14(45):631–641
- Kaplan RD (2010) The geography of Chinese power: how far can Beijing reach on land and at sea? *Foreign Aff J* 89(3):22–41
- Lei Guang (2004) From national identity to national security: China's changing responses toward India in 1962 and 1998. *Pac Rev* 17(3):399–422
- Li Jinming, Li Dexia (2003) The dotted line on the Chinese map of the South China Sea: a note. *Ocean Dev Int Law* 34(3/4):287–295
- Li Li (2008) India's security concept and its China policy in the post-Cold War era. *Chin J Int Polit* 2(2):229–261
- Limaye SP (2003) The weakest link, but not goodbye. *Comp Connect* 4(4):6–7. [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/0204qindia\\_easia.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/0204qindia_easia.pdf). Accessed 25 Nov 2013
- Link P (2010) Talking about Tibet: an open dialogue between Chinese citizens and the Dalai Lama. *New York Review of Books Blog*, 24 May 2010. <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/may/24/talking-about-tibet>. Accessed 14 Oct 2011
- McGranahan C (2006) Tibet's cold war: the CIA and the Chushi Gangdrug resistance, 1956–1974. *J Cold War Stud* 8(3):102–130
- Pan Wei (2007) The Chinese model of development. Paper presented to the Foreign Policy Centre, London, 11 October 2007. <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/888.pdf>. Accessed 7 Nov 2013
- Peter Kien-hong Yu (2000) The dialectical relationship of the Chinese communist party and the PLA. *Def Anal* 16(2):203–218
- Prakash A (2011) India's maritime growth: rationale and objectives. *Varuna Vāk*, Policy paper No. 1, July 2011. National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi
- Sanqiang Jian (1992) Foreign policy restructuring as adaptive behavior: China's "independent foreign policy of peace" 1982–1989. PhD dissertation, Kent State University
- Scott D (2008) The great power "great game" between India and China: "the logic of geography". *Geopolitics* 13(1):1–26
- Sidhu WPS, Jing Dong Yuan (2001) Resolving the Sino-Indian border dispute: building confidence through cooperative monitoring. *Asian Surv* 41(2):351–376

- Singh R (2009) Indian Army fears attack from China by 2017. *Hindustan Times*, 26 March 2009. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Indian-Army-fears-attack-from-China-by-2017/Article1-393140.aspx>. Accessed 17 Sept 2011
- Sperling E (2004) *The Tibet–China conflict: history and polemics*, Policy studies 7. East-west Center, Washington, DC
- Taylor Fravel M (2008) *Strong borders, secure nation: cooperation and conflict in China's territorial disputes*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
- Toshi Yoshihara (2010) China's "soft" naval power in the Indian Ocean. *Pac Focus* 25(1):59–88
- Turley WS (1986) Vietnam/Indochina: Hanoi's challenge to Southeast Asian regional order. In: Young Whan Kihl, Grinter LE (eds) *Asian Pacific security: emerging challenges and response*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder
- Weixing Hu (2000) New Delhi's nuclear bomb: a systemic analysis. *World Aff* 163(1):28–38
- Woodward D (2003) The people's liberation army: a threat to India? *Contemp South Asia* 12(2):229–242
- Yossi Shain (ed) (1991) *Governments-in-exile in contemporary world politics*. Routledge, London/New York
- Yueh-Ting Lee, Hong Li (2011) Spiritual beliefs and ethnic relations in China: a cross cultural and social psychological perspective. In: Zhiqun Zhu (ed) *The People's Republic of China today: internal and external challenges*. World Scientific, Singapore, pp 239–258
- Zhao Gangcheng (2009) Features and changes of geopolitical situation in China's periphery. *Foreign Aff J* (91):87
- Zhao Gangcheng (2009) India's nuclear plan needs to be transparent. *Global Times*, 16 September 2009. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/opinion/commentary/2009-09/468107.html>. Accessed 8 Oct 2011