B. R. Deepak

India and China

Beyond the Binary of Friendship and Enmity



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Introduction

Both India and China often talk about their civilizational connections rather glorify them by citing historical records right from the *Records of a Historian* by Si Maqian (145BC–90BC), followed by Buddhist fraternity upheld by Fa Xian, Kumarajiva, Xuan Zang, Yi Jing, Bodhidharma and many other scholar monks, and finally trade and diplomacy between them over the Maritime Silk Route right up to the advent of the western powers on the political stage. Of late, as some of the researchers have blazed new trails in Sino-Indian relations during the colonial era, both India and China have been talking about their colonial connections. If the former seems to be a distant past, the latter seems to be fresh in our historical memory, for the Indian soldiers stationed in China joining hands with Taiping rebels during the 1860s; the activities of the Ghadr revolutionaries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Hankou, Nanjing, etc., places during the 1920s and 1930s; the controversial visit of Tagore to China in 1924; and the supreme sacrifice of doctor Dwarkanath Kotnis during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in the early 1940s, find an instant echo in the minds and hearts of the Indian and Chinese people, albeit most of the people in both the countries remain ignorant about these connections owing to various constraints.

Nevertheless, if the civilizational connections are tarnished by the incidents of regime changes by Han envoy in Jibin (parts of present Jammu and Kashmir), by the Tang envoys in Kannauj and finally the Ming Admiral Zheng He in south and Southeast Asia, the brilliant side of the colonial connections is eclipsed by the negativity in mutual perceptions. Right from the first ever official envoy, Huang Maocai to Ma Jianzhong and Wu Guangpei, who came to India during late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), demonstrate how little China knew about India, and the same may be true for India if we go through whatever scanty information the Indian soldiers like Gadadhar Singh left behind in wake of the Boxer Rebellion (1901). Most of the Chinese perceptions about India originate from the "Sino-centrist" approaches. From Huang Maocai to Kang Youwei to Lu Xun, the Chinese scholarship has referred to India as a subjugated good for nothing nation, Indian people lazy and Chinese more civilized and advanced. Kang goes on to say that no wonder why the British keep three Indian servants whereas they could have managed with a

single Chinese (Kang 1995). Even Lu Xun, whether you call it his jealousy towards Rabindranath Tagore for getting the Nobel Prize or the misunderstanding of India or otherwise, he also prefers a blind Russian poet B. R. Epomehk (1889–1952) than Tagore and calls Indian people "inferior slaves" in a cage. That was not all, he further compares Tagore to "a beautiful yet poisonous *datura* flower" (Deepak 2014, 152).

These images of India more or less remained intact and did not alter even after the liberation. Even though the Republican China viewed Gandhi's pacifist techniques as "revolutionary" but Mao's China did not think highly of the Indian Independence struggle. China considered the Indian leadership as bourgeoisie and stooges of the British imperialism. Therefore, according to them, it is little wonder that India inherited one and all British legacies in the neighbourhood including Tibet. It was due to these privileges of India in Tibet that China looked at India with an eye of suspicion. Wang (1998, 76) posits that Nehru's friendly attitude towards China died with the demise of the Kuomintang (KMT) government. He maintains that soon after the communist takeover in China, "Nehru never raised the issue of Sino-Indian alliance, but tried to bring China under the fold of a certain Asiatic union with India as its centre, thus enabling Asia to have a voice, and meanwhile, enhance his personal and national ego". An agreement on trade and intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India signed on 29 April 1954 was short lived as India refused to renew it in the wake of hostilities in the late 1950s that culminated into a small-scale armed conflict in 1962 and froze relations for almost three decades. Even during this period in time, the helmsman of China compared India to a cow in 1974, which according to him "had no talents and is only food or for people to ride and for pulling carts. The cow could starve to death if its master did not give it grass to eat. And even though this cow may have great ambitions, they are futile" (Garver 2004: 79).

India's neighbourhood policy was also viewed by China as an extension of former's "hegemonic" ambitions; India's military intervention in Bangladesh (1971) and Sri Lanka (1987) has been viewed from this perspective. Nehru's *The Discovery of India* has been made a reference point by various Chinese academics to illustrate India's "expansionist" mindset. The nuclear tests by India in 1974, especially those in 1998, have also been seen as a step in this direction and realizing her aspirations to become a great power. China, however, continues to perceive India as a non-player in the world affairs and accords very low priority as far as its foreign policy is concerned, rather it seeks parity for its client state Pakistan in the region and beyond.

Unlike China, India has varied views about China. Some political parties in India have been sympathetic not only towards China's revolutionary struggle and China's journey through different phases of its history, but also during the time of animosities with India. They were not alone in their appreciation and support for China, many leading Indian elites also viewed China's revolution as the manifestation of Asian resurgence and a clarion call for ending the colonial rule. Many in India have viewed the rise of China with envy and admiration and have called on the government to learn from the Chinese experience. There are others who view China as a threat, but believe in engaging China and propping up India's strategic assets for any confrontation with China. There are realists, who believe in a tit for tat policy; i.e., if China has courted Pakistan and is containing India to South Asia, they would like India to forge strong defence and economic ties with forces antagonistic to China's assertiveness such as Vietnam, Japan and the USA. Many believe that India has rightly exposed the bluff of China's psychological warfare against India during the Doklam standoff (2017), held its ground in Galwan (2020) and payed back China in their own coin. India exposing Pakistan's nuclear blackmail by bombing terror camps deep inside Pakistan in early 2019 was also a blow China's entente with Pakistan.

Notwithstanding the divergence in views, both India and China had reached a consensus that both will not let the border become an impediment in diversifying relationship in other areas, especially trade and investment. Since 2010, India and China created a Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) mechanism, which by the year 2019 had six working groups looking into infrastructure, energy, environment, hi-tech, pharma and policy coordination. In order to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border, various confidence building measure were signed. With peace at the border and spike in economic partnership, India-China relation were said to have transcended the scope of bilateral relations and acquired global significance.

This appeared sensible, as the global political architecture was undergoing a fundamental transformation with gravity increasingly shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This was also witnessed by convergence of their interests at the global and multilateral forums on issues such as climate change, Doha Round of the WTO and democratization of the international financial institutions. In tandem, they created new institutions of global governance such as Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), considered to be challenging the Bretton Woods Institutions of the West. Both underscored the significance of multi-polarity, initiated or became members of an array of multilateral mechanisms such as BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and G 20. No wonder, in a short span of two decades, bilateral trade approached \$100 billion. China's accumulative investment between 2017 and 2019 reached a whopping \$9.5 billion, mostly investing in the "Digital India" start-ups. Some of the most visible enterprises where China has pumped money are Paytm, Zomato, Ola, Flipkart, MakeMyTrip, Swiggy, Big Basket, BYJU's Hike and the list goes on. Presently, 17 out of 24 unicorns are supported by capital from Chinese brands such as Alibaba, Tencent and GlobalData. As the labour, intensive industries started to become unviable at home, China started to relocate supply chains such as mobile telephony, electronics, home appliances, etc., to India, localizing production and penetrated deep into sectors such as e-commerce, energy, telecom, automobiles, etc. Though balance of trade remained heavily in favour of China owing to the economic structure of both the countries, however, China promised to look into that by making more investments in India on the one hand and providing greater access to India's pharmaceutical and information technology companies in China. Meanwhile, Indian movies and Yoga captivated the imaginations of a million Chinese people, some of the blockbusters earned more revenue at box office in China than in India. Both identified themselves as civilizational states and advocated that civilizational dialogue between them through stronger people-to-people bonding should be initiated, resulting in inking High Level Mechanism on Culture and People to People Exchanges in 2018.

The above narrative started to develop fissures when China ignored India's sensitivities by building China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) a flagship of the "Belt and Road Initiative," passing through disputed territories of Gilgit Baltistan claimed by India. India's open opposition to the BRI and slow progress on the Bangladesh China India Myanmar Economic Corridor irked China to the extent that the latter was taken out of the six BRI economic corridors. Dust had hardly settled down on the CPEC, then came China's rubbing to India on issues such as cross-border terrorism, blocking India's efforts to bring terrorists like Masood Azhar under the scanner of 1267 sanction committee, and blocking India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Relations reached their nadir and culminated in the Doklam standoff in 2017. China threat theory scaled new heights, and India tried to needle China by issuing visas to the Uighur rebels for a conclave in Dharamsala. Had it not been for the slated BRICS summit in Xiamen, the 73-day standoff would have been prolonged. Two unofficial Modi-Xi summits held in Wuhan (2018) and Mamallapuram (2019) tried to put the relations back on the track; consensus that they will not let the differences turn into disputes and the issuance of strategic guidelines to their militaries in the border areas failed to stop transgressions along the LAC. The security deficit with China resulted upgradation of the Quad and India synchronizing with US's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The COVID-19 pandemic further brought bitterness to already strained relations, as India imposed ban on export of the medical equipment to China, evacuated its citizens from Wuhan, cancelled working visas of the Chinese and joined the chorus of 62 countries seeking investigations into the source of coronavirus. Some individuals and organizations in India also joined people and organizations from other countries seeking compensation from China for the health and economic hazards caused by the COVID-19. If this was not enough, the Galwan stealth attack of the People's Liberation Army on 15 June 2020 that resulted in the martyrdom of 20 Indian soldiers sounded the death knell for the CBMs and the very LAC, as China moved its own claim line further westward, occupied territories between Finger 8 and 4, at Gogra, and Depsang plains, changed the status quo and presented a fait accompli. The mobilization of the forces by China, in fact diverting troops from an exercise in Xinjiang, took India by surprised and forced her to match the Chinese deployment. Since the disengagement and de-escalation process is far from complete, any miscalculation may trigger another conflict worse than the 1962.

Undoubtedly, this is manifestation of the regional balance of power favouring China, which has resulted in her "wolf warrior diplomacy" not only along the LAC with India, but also in the South China Sea, across the Taiwan Straits, Hong Kong, etc., places including its spat with the USA. If China and the USA are poised to fight for global hegemony, China continues to pin India down to South Asia through its pivot to Asia, where Pakistan has been a lynchpin from the very beginning. China is also employing its countervailing force to create fissures in India's relations with smaller countries in the neighbourhood. Nepal redrawing its maps, the PLA showing in great numbers across Lipulekh in the middle sector on the occasion of 65th anniversary of establishment of China-Nepal relations, and recently, Pakistan following the suit of redrawing its map are being cited as examples. China's massive investment in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood, building quasi-military infrastructure from Myanmar to Chabahar has not only created anxieties in India but also in the White House. Given the present equations, India-China rivalry will not only be contested in the border areas, Indo-Pacific, but the same will be extended to new territories across Central Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America as both strive to find strategic space, energy resources and markets to fuel their growth.

These changes at the bilateral, regional and global stage have forced countries to recalibrate their foreign policy approaches and choices. What are going to be India's choices along the LAC, in the realm of trade and investment, peopleto-people exchanges, multilateralism and the new cold war between the USA and China? What role the USA and other middle powers will play in this rivalry, how will the regional blocks such as SAARC, BIMSTEC and ASEAN playout in this contest? Will India embrace the USA as analysts have been talking about? What will happen to the BRI, especially when the notions of China's neo-colonialism and debt traps have been debated fiercely across the continents? Will China be able to overcome the Malacca dilemma by constructing ports like Kyaukpyu and Gwadar? Or will the view of the constructivists prevail that by establishing robust mechanisms, India and China relations will be back on tracks? How will the COVID-19 and Galwan impact on India-China relations? Or will the realists prevail who believe that the war is inevitable in face of security dilemmas of the nations? India-China scholarship has been arguing that India-China relations are too complex to be defined through the binary of friendship and enmity. Will this line of thinking change after the Galwan fatalities?

It is in this context that I have tried to find some answers to these questions. The book is divided into three parts, namely India-China Conflict and Cooperation: Assessment and Narratives; Pakistan, BRI and India-China Relations; and Indo-Pacific, World Order and India-China Relations. The first part consists of four chapters where I look into the perceptions and images about India and China built over a long period of time in history. I argue that these are built on shallow understanding of each other and have been further deepened due to protracted rivalry between the two, generating much of the distrust. Though it would be difficult to absolutely erase, these images and perceptions, however, policy recalibration through pragmatic constructivism could be a good beginning. Moving away from the traditional discourse on border issue, I attempt to formulate a paradigm of China's "victim psychology" and India's "tough posturing" for cause of the 1962 and provide some plausible solutions. While looking into the CBMs, I argue that these falls short of finding a solution to the border issue and do not minimize the scope of breaking out of the hostilities, as has been demonstrated by the Galwan violence. The fundamental perceptions about Tibet by different stakeholders are formulated on the basis of author's interviews and enquiries with the representatives of the Dalai Lama's Tibetan Government in Exile, the leaders of Tibetan Youth Congress, the representatives of Students for a Free Tibet, as well as the Tibetan émigré in India and ordinary Indians. I also explore some of the major differences and contradiction between India and China over Tibet; the future course of the Tibetan movement; the reincarnation issue of the Dalai Lama, and India's "One China Policy," etc., issues.

In Part II, there are three chapters. I argue that India needs to live with the patron-client relationship between China and Pakistan, which has resulted from Sino-Pak animosities towards India. India's abrogation of Article 370 and joint offensive of Pakistan and China on India's move, including some Chinese scholars openly suggesting that the abrogation was the main reason behind China's posturing in Eastern Ladakh has been analysed exploring various viewpoints. While enhancing capacities and capabilities to deal with the challenges arising out of this axis, I opine, India must shift its focus to our northern borders, and deal with Pakistan without making a fuss about it: nonetheless, must continue the policy of strategic engagement with both the countries. As regards the BRI and MSR, apart from examining the triggers and contours of the MSR, the study focuses on responses from various stakeholders. China's energy security with the BRI countries has been explored, elements of cooperation and competition along with India's options have been discussed. I have argued that though both India and China have initiated their own domestic, peripheral and external energy strategy, it is pertinent that they cooperate in international energy markets, so as to curb the crude oil prices, bring down the prices of the bids, transportation and share their experience and technologies, which certainly is easier said than done, but not impossible.

The last three chapters in Part III focus on the Indo-Pacific, multilateralism and post-COVID-19 pandemic and Galwan Incident. The study evaluates approaches of India and China towards the Indo-Pacific, and as to how the modernization of respective naval forces and overlapping interests has not only given rise to the rivalry between India and China, but also China's rivalry with the USA. I posit that while maritime exercises have enhanced some mutual understanding between the two, however, effective or inefficient handling of soaring maritime ambitions in the Indo-Pacific will have far reaching security consequences in the region and world. The study concludes that the narrative of "emerging India," which was based on India's robust economic growth, demographic dividend and capacity to handle domestic and global challenges pragmatically has entered unpredictability post-COVID-19 and Galwan; therefore, the kind of equilibrium and understanding India seeks with China is extremely difficult, for China has been vocal to remind India of her asymmetric relationship more often than not. China will have no compulsion to accommodate India's interest whether bilateral, regional or global. Therefore, India must free herself from any delusion that China will be sensitive to India's sensitivities; the best India could do is to undertake a comprehensive review of her China policy and formulate a new policy which is long-term, goal oriented and sustainable.

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Abbreviations

AAGC	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
ACBMMF	Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field
	Along the Line of Actual Control
AEP	Act East Policy
AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMPT	Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the
	Line of Actual Control
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ARIA	Asia Reassurance Initiative Act
BASIC	Brazil-South Africa-India-China
BCIM	Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor
BDCA	Border Defense Cooperation Agreement
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic
	Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRM	Bali Road Map
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CBMs	Confidence Building Measures
CMC	Central Military Commission
CMEC	China Myanmar Economic Corridor
CMMs	Crisis Management Mechanisms
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CRI	China Radio International
CTA	Central Tibetan Administration
DBO	Daulat Beg Oldi
DTTI	Defence Trade and Technology Initiative
FOIP	Free and open Indo-Pacific

FTAAP	Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific
GCSM	Gu-Chu-Sum Movement
GHG	Greenhouse gases
IAFS	India-Africa Forum Summits
IGNCA	Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts
INDCs	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
IOC	Indian Oil Corp
IPEC	Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor
ISA	Industrial Security Annex
ITSN	International Tibet Support Network
JuD	Jamaat-ud-Dawa
KMT	Kuomintang (now written as Guomingdang)
KMI	Kyoto Protocol
KSEZ	Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LAC	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
LENIOA	Look East Policy
LEF	Logistics Support Agreement
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
NAM	
	Non-Alignment Movement
NASAMS NDPT	National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System
	National Democratic Party of Tibet
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NSA	National Security Advisor
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group
NSTC	North-South Transport Corridor
PCART	Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PPPGP	Protocol on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles
PRC	People's Republic of China
QTTA	Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROC	Republic of China
RSS	Rashtritya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SFT	Students for a Free Tibet
SIPRI	Stockholm Institute of Peace Research Institute
SJM	Swadeshi Jagran Manch
SLOCs	Sea lines of communication
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt

SRF	Silk Road Fund
SRs	Special Representatives
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline
TCPI	Trade Promotion Council of India
TCV	Tibetan Children's Villages
TGIC	Tibetan Government in Exile
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
TR	Tibetan refugees
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
TWA	Tibetan Women Association
TWsA	Tibetan Writers Association
TYC	Tibetan Youth Congress
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
USIPC	US Indo-Pacific Command
WHO	World Health Organization
WMCC	Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on
	India-China Border Affairs
WPNS	Western Pacific Naval Symposium

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