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Indian Perspectives on the Rise of China: Geopolitical, Geoeconomic, and Geocivilizational Paradigms

Vincent Wei-cheng Wang*

One of the most significant developments in the still nascent twenty-first century is the rise of China and India. While the implications for the rise of China have been debated in the global or systemic contexts, as well as regional or bilateral contexts, relatively sparse scholarly discussion has been devoted to either the rise of the other great power – India, or how these two Asian great powers – India and China – perceive the ascendancy of the other state. Yet how these two very different Asian giants perceive each other and consequently negotiate their paths in substantially changed global and regional contexts will be important for scholarly interest and policy making. This paper analyzes this complex relationship and examines how Indian elites – in political, security, and economic arenas – perceive the rise of China. Based on the author’s field research in India and secondary sources, this paper examines this important yet complex relationship by three contrasting perspectives -- geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocivilizational, and assesses the alternative prospects: “Chindia” (Indo-Chinese partnership), rivalry, or pragmatic management of bilateral relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant developments in the still nascent twenty-first century is the rise of China and India. The economic takeoffs of the world’s two most populous nations are occurring simultaneously. China’s and India’s ascent entail far-reaching and complex geopolitical and geoeconomic implications. As one of the growing number books on this subject put it, “rarely has the economic ascent of two still relatively poor nations been watched with such a mixture of awe, opportunism, and trepidation” (Engardio 2007:16).

While the implications for the rise of China have been debated in the global or systemic contexts, as well as regional or bilateral contexts, relatively sparse scholarly discussion has been devoted to either the rise of the other great power – India, or how these two Asian great powers – India and China – perceive the ascendancy of the other state. Yet as constructivists (Wendt 1989) would certainly agree, how these two very different Asian giants perceive each other and consequently negotiate their paths in substantially changed global and regional contexts will be important for scholarly interest and policy making.

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5 Meredith (2007) describes these two nations as “The Elephant and the Dragon.”
This paper analyzes this complex relationship and examines how Indian elites – in political, security, and economic arenas – perceive the rise of China. It also assesses the prospects of Indo-Chinese partnership (“Chindia”) (Engardio 2007) or rivalry in future bilateral relationship. Three perspectives -- geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocivilizational -- are used to study this important yet difficult relationship.

ELEMENTS OF A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

History

Although China and India were two adjoining civilizations, there was remarkably little historical evidence of direct political interaction between them (Sidhu and Yuan 2003:9). However, there was mutual intellectual fascination. Many Chinese scholars visited India in the first millennium to study Buddhism and other subjects, and many of them spent a decade or more in India. Chinese monks such as Faxian in the fifth century and Xuanzang in the seventh played important roles in introducing Buddhism to China and bridging the two cultures. Many Indian scholars also went to China and worked there between the first century and the eleventh (Sen 2005: 161).

However, religion was not the only relationship between the two. Trade was also important. Indian intermediaries facilitated trade between China and Western Asia for centuries (Sen 2005: 166). A branch of the famous Silk Road extended into the plains of northern India.
But for the most part there was little interaction – mostly indirect – between China and India before the arrival of western imperial powers.

Colonialism afflicted both India and China and pitted the two civilizations against each other. During the Opium War (1839-1842), Britain tried to forcibly sell in China the opium from its East India Company.

These two nations’ shared colonial experience contributed to empathy – a kind of Asian and anti-imperial pride – between them. Both Nehru and Gandhi were friendly with the Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang and his wife visited India in 1942 to appeal to Britain and coordinate wartime effort against Japan (Ghose 2006: 112). India gained independence from Britain in 1947. When Mao Zedong established a communist regime in China in 1949, India was among the first to recognize the People’s Republic of China on 1 April 1950. Nehru, typical of Indian leaders, personally invested in maintaining friendly ties with China and cultivating personal relationships with Chinese leaders, especially Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Nehru, who promoted the slogan “Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai” (India and China are brothers), reportedly said, “China was my most admired nation.”

6 In his letter to Chiang, Gandhi expressed his admiration for China’s struggle against Japanese domination, and described their “mutual friend,” Nehru, “whose love of China is only excelled, if at all, by his love of his own country” (Gandhi 1942, in Jack 1994: 351).

7 Speech by Prof. Tan Chung at National Taiwan University, Taipei, 20 May 2008. Tan and his father, Tan Yunshan, together spent 80 years in India.
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said, “From the 1950s on, we have looked at China from an Asian solidarity standpoint – whether it was nuclear weapons (China’s 1964 explosion) or the United Nations (PRC’s entry in 1971).” 

However, the good will was short-lived. For one thing, colonial legacy also sowed the seeds for discord. The so-called McMahon Line – a demarcation line drawn on map referred to in the 1914 Simla Accord, signed between Britain and Tibet – was to form the boundary between British India and Tibet, over which China claimed suzerainty. While Britain and Tibet considered the agreement binding, China disputed the McMahon Line. India considered the line international boundary. It was the root of the thorny and persistent border dispute between India and China (to be discussed later). Figures 1 and 2 show the disputed Indo-Chinese borders on the eastern sector (today’s Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, formerly North East Frontier Agency) and on the western sector (today’s Chinese region of Aksai Chin).

8 Interview with Prof. Phunchok Stobdan, Senior Fellow, Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, Delhi, 2 June 2008.
Figure 1: China-India Border: Eastern Sector

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_India_eastern_border_88.jpg
Figure 2: China-India Border: Western Sector

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_India_western_border_88.jpg
In 1950, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entered Tibet and controlled the vast region that had historically served as a buffer (in strategic and cultural terms) between India and China. As former Indian Army Chief of Staff General Ved P. Malik put it, “The first time we (Indians) came into direct contact with Han Chinese was after 1950, when the PRC occupied Tibet. We suddenly became neighbors.”

In 1959, after the failed uprising against the PRC, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tibet’s highest religious and political leader, fled to India. Nehru in 1960 offered Dharamsala as a location for the Government of Tibet in Exile. The Tibetan refuge in India became another irritant in the bilateral relationship. Ever since then, India’s policy on Tibet has been a dilemma: On the one hand, India has lent support to Dalai Lama’s government due to humanitarian and strategic considerations, but has also imposed limits on the Tibetan Exile Government’s profile and activities. On the other hand, the “Tibet card” has served as an obstacle for Indo-Chinese relationship.

In 1962 the small skirmishes that were not uncommon along the disputed border escalated into open military confrontation. War erupted on 20 October 1962 when Chinese troops forcibly evicted Indian troops from the Dhola post in the eastern sector. Over the next month the

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9 Interview with General Ved P. Malik, President, Institute of Security Studies, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi, 2 June 2008.
10 See http://www.tibet.com/.
11 For an overview of India’s ambiguous policy toward Tibet, see Sengupta (2008).
Chinese troops easily overwhelmed ill-prepared Indian troops in all sectors along the McMahon Line. Then on 21 November, the Chinese government announced a unilateral withdrawal to points where it considered the territorial boundaries to be. Although the war did not change the status quo of the border, India essentially had lost the war, suffering territorial loss and national humiliation (Sidhu and Yuan 2003: 15). Ever since then, the 1962 war has cast a long shadow over the Indo-Chinese relationship, and India’s defeat has colored Indians’ perceptions of China.

The worsening Indo-Chinese relations became entangled in the regional alignment during the Cold War, with the Soviet Union and India on one side, and China and Pakistan (and later the U.S.) on the other. China’s successful nuclear tests in 1964 deepened Indian apprehensions. If the 1962 war taught India the importance of indigenous conventional deterrence, India’s nuclear tests ten years later in 1974 sought to respond to China’s nuclear capabilities. From 1962 to 1976 China and India were mired in a tense cold war. It was not until 1976 that the two countries again exchanged ambassadors.

History clearly cast a long shadow on Indo-Chinese relations.

**Geography**

Historically China and India each had its own geographic orientation: China toward East Asia, and India toward South Asia. But modern Tibet
after China’s entry in 1950 connected these two spheres. The development of missile technologies, made possible by the two countries’ economic growth, had the effect of “shrinking the strategic chessboard” (Bracken 1999).

In recent years, China expanded its influence in the Central and Southwest Asian areas by its organizing and promoting the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Meanwhile, India pursued a Look East policy by strengthening its relationships with countries in East and Southeast Asia. Both countries seek to play a greater role in areas adjacent to their own, and even farther places. China and India thus maneuver on overlapping “strategic spaces.”

Ranjit Gupta, a former Indian envoy to Taiwan and a former ambassador to five countries, thinks that China, which casts a long shadow over India’s foreign policy, has always treated India with hostility, adopting a “systematic plan” to hem in India through the support of Pakistan, influence in Myanmar, Nepal, and Bangladesh, and military activities in Tibet. He argues that historically China has behaved like an imperial power, expanding when the empire was strong. Recounting his personal experience, Gupta observed how China actively pursued an East

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12 The SCO was founded in 2001 by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. All but Uzbekistan were the founders of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1996. It currently has four observers: India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan. See http://www.sectsco.org/.
Asian Summit that excluded the U.S., Australia, and India.\(^\text{13}\)

In the past decade, in an effort to ensure its energy security and shore up its oil supply route (Lieberthal and Herberg 2006), China has pursued a “String of Pearls” strategy by constructing facilities and securing access to ports around India (e.g., Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Sittwe in Myanmar) (see Figure 3). This prompts some exaggerated Indians to warn that China is turning the Indian Ocean into a “Chinese Lake.”\(^\text{14}\) In 2009, China dispatched destroyers to the Gulf of Aden under the pretext of protecting Chinese merchant ships from Somali pirates prevalent in that area. The flotilla’s passage through the Indian Ocean caused some concerns in India. There was apparently also a tense standoff involving Indian and Chinese warships.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Interview with Amb. Ranjit Gupta (retired), Delhi, 26 May 2008. Ambassador Gupta admitted that his viewpoints on China reflect that of the security community and are uncommon among the Indian foreign service.


\(^{15}\) “Indian Navy Dismisses Reports of Submarine ‘Forced’ to Surface by Chinese ships,” BBC Monitoring South Asia, 9 February 2009, obtained through Lexis-Nexis.
Territorial Disputes

Among all the issues separating China and India, the territorial disputes arising from the undemarcated border significantly inform Indians’ perspectives of China. Almost every Indian informant whom I met during a field research in 2008 raised the border issue as a major obstacle to better Indo-Chinese relationship. They feared the potential of a flare-up still exists.16

16 Interview with Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (retired), Director, Center for Land Warfare Studies, Delhi, 3 June 2008; interview with Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopal, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi, 28 May 2008.
As mentioned earlier, the border disputes can be traced back to the McMahon Line. After the 1962 war, the two sides largely observed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the eastern sector and the Line of Control (LOC) in the western sector. The results are that China claims the Indian-controlled Arunachal Pradesh, and India claims the Chinese-controlled Aksai Chin. The Chinese claim is partially based on Tawang, the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama. The Chinese argue Tawang is a Tibetan territory, and Tibet is part of China. Therefore, the entire Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory.

India claims Aksai Chin, which connects Tibet and China’s northwestern province Xinjiang, as the eastern-most part of its Jammu and Kashmir state. Kashmir itself was partitioned three-way by India, Pakistan, and China.

Occasionally Chinese emphasis of their legal titles deeply offended the Indians. Just days before Chinese President Hu Jintao’s state visit to India in November 2006, Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi declared, “In our position the whole of what you call the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory and Tawang is only one place in it and we are  

17 Historically, Aksai Chin was part of the Himalayan Kingdom of Ladakh. Ladakh was annexed from the rule of the local Namgyal dynasty by the Dorgas and the princely state of Kashmir in the 19th century. It was subsequently absorbed into British India.
claiming all of that. That's our position.”\textsuperscript{18} In 2007, the Chinese Embassy in Delhi decided to emphasize its stance by declining a visa to an Indian official from north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh state on the grounds that he does not need one as he is a “Chinese citizen.”\textsuperscript{19}

The respective statuses of Tibet and Sikkim, which India incorporated in 1975 as its 22\textsuperscript{nd} state, also add to the complexity.\textsuperscript{20}

In reality, however, this issue is mainly a placeholder and its impact will be “bounded.” In recent years, the two sides set up working groups to deal with the border issue and try to resolve it peacefully. The two sides have also done a better job of “compartmentalizing” this issue from overall improvement of bilateral relationship.\textsuperscript{21} As an American diplomat aptly put, “The border issue is unlikely to be a serious problem in the relationship, because both sides benefit from this ‘festering’ that allows

\textsuperscript{19} Ravi Velloor, “China Reaffirms Its Claim to Disputed State; No Visa for Indian Official from Arunachal as He Is a 'Chinese Citizen,'” \textit{The Straits Times} (28 May 2007). Obtained through Lexis-Nexis.
\textsuperscript{20} In 2000, the seventeenth Karmapa Urgyen Trinley Dorje, who had been proclaimed a Lama by China, made a dramatic escape from Tibet to the Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. Chinese officials were in a quandary on this issue, as any protests to India would mean an explicit endorsement of India’s governance of Sikkim, which the Chinese still regarded as an independent state occupied by India. China eventually recognized Sikkim as an Indian state in 2003, on the condition that India accepted Tibet as a part of China. This mutual recognition led to a thaw in Sino-Indian relations.
\textsuperscript{21} Interviews with Sibi Goerge, Political Counselor, and S.D. Sharma, Head of Chancery, Embassy of India, Washington, DC, 9 May 2008.
them to justify more military spending and certain postures."

Mutual Threat Perception and Triangular Strategic Relationships

Indo-Chinese relationship exhibits characteristics of a security dilemma: the mutual fear and mistrust between them lead each nation to take measures to increase its own security. By doing so, it threatens the other nation, causing that nation to respond. The result is more insecurity.

As Table 1 shows, both countries have substantial military capabilities. Over time, each has deployed certain weapons against the other. As mentioned before, India’s 1974 nuclear tests were spurred by China’s successful tests in 1964. India, under BJP, in 1998 again exploded a nuclear bomb. India’s defense secretary George Fernandes specifically rationalized India’s actions on the threats India felt from a rising China and closer Sino-Pakistani alliance.

22 Interview with Joel Ehrendreicd, Political Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Delhi, 4 June 2008.
23 For a new theoretical discussion on this crucial concept in international relations, see Booth and Wheeler (2008).
### Table 3

**China vs. India: Rise of Two Asian Giants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator (Unit), information as of 2006</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Product (With PPP) (S bn)</td>
<td>10,000*</td>
<td>4,042*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Real Growth Rate (%)</td>
<td>10.5*</td>
<td>8.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Product (constant) (S bn)</td>
<td>2,095.9*</td>
<td>703.3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (with PPP) ($)</td>
<td>7,600*</td>
<td>3,700*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports ($ bn)</td>
<td>974*</td>
<td>112*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imports ($ bn)</td>
<td>777.9*</td>
<td>187.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main export partners (text)</td>
<td>US (21.4%), Hong Kong (16.3%), Japan (11%)*</td>
<td>US (16.7%), UAE (8.5%), China (6.6%)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main import partners (text)</td>
<td>Japan (15.2%), South Korea (11.6%), Taiwan (11.2%)*</td>
<td>China (7.3%), US (5.6%)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign direct investment ($ bn)</td>
<td>78.1*</td>
<td>17.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (pop m)</td>
<td>1,314.0*</td>
<td>1,111.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces (number)</td>
<td>2,255,000**</td>
<td>1,316,000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Battle Tanks (number)</td>
<td>7,580²</td>
<td>3,978²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery (number)</td>
<td>17,600²</td>
<td>3,640²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface Combatant Vessels (number)</td>
<td>76²</td>
<td>58²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines (number)</td>
<td>58²</td>
<td>16²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft Carriers (number)</td>
<td>6²</td>
<td>1²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat Aircraft (number)</td>
<td>3,435²</td>
<td>883²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack Helicopters (number)</td>
<td>31²</td>
<td>60²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear weapons status (text)</td>
<td>Confirmed²</td>
<td>Confirmed²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical weapons status (text)</td>
<td>Probable²</td>
<td>Confirmed²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological weapons status (text)</td>
<td>Suspected²</td>
<td>Unknown²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-range ballistic missile status (text)</td>
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<td>Medium-range ballistic missile status (text)</td>
<td>Confirmed²</td>
<td>Confirmed²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate-range ballistic missile status (text)</td>
<td>None⁶</td>
<td>None⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarine-launched ballistic missile status (text)</td>
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<td>None⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercontinental ballistic missile status (text)</td>
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<td>None⁶</td>
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<td>Strategic bomber status (text)</td>
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<td>None⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic submarine status (text)</td>
<td>Confirmed²</td>
<td>None⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMD Commitments (text)</td>
<td>BTWC, CWC, NPT*²</td>
<td>BTWC, CWC²*²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign exchange reserves ($ bn)</td>
<td>1,086.34</td>
<td>170.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: NBR, Strategic Asia data query

* World Bank - WDI
  * NBR Research Team
  * IMF - IFS
  * IISS Military Balance
  * CIA World Factbook
  * Census Bureau
  * Additional information available
China has always loomed large on India’s defense and foreign policies. The 1962 war, the border dispute, the complex *ménages à trois* of China-India-U.S. and China-India-Pakistan, and each nation’s ambitions all play a role, causing each side to suspect the true intentions of the other side’s actions. Some Indians viewed the SCO and the String of Pearls with concerns. India was especially concerned about China’s military assistance to Pakistan, which allows the latter to act as a proxy to “weigh down” India.

A hard-nosed Indian analyst asserts, “China and India are natural rivals in Asia for geostrategic, economic, and ideological (democracy vs. autocracy) reasons. In every aspect, we are contrasts. Our interests clash. We also compete for the same resources in Africa. Such rivalry is not easily reconcilable.” Many Indians feel that a rising China may make it harder for India to ascend.

**Economic Partnership and Rivalry**

In many aspects, China’s economic data are more impressive than India’s (see Table 1): China has achieved higher growth rates, higher income level, larger economy, greater trade volume, and has attracted more foreign investment. But in many ways their economies are also

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25 Interview with Narendra Kumar Tripalhi, United Service Institution of India, Delhi, 2 June 2008.
26 Interview with Bharat Karnad, Research Professor, National Security Studies, Center for Policy Research, Delhi, 4 June 2008.
27 Interviews with Rajesh Rajagopalan, Professor in International Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, 27 May 2008, and Nandan Unnikrishnan, Director, Eurasian Studies, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi, 28 May 2008.
complementary. China’s success is mainly based on becoming the manufacturing base of foreign multinationals with global sales network, whereas India’s is more domestically oriented, focusing on engineering and service.\textsuperscript{28} China’s hardware proficiency can complement India’s software prowess. Some Indians and (fewer) Chinese envision the two nations merging into a giant “Chindia” – a formidable economic partnership with the world’s largest populations and complementary economic strengths (Engardio 2007).

Yet their two economies also compete, particularly over energy sources for each nation’s economic development. While many in the Indian community see an economically rising China as an opportunity (for Indian products or services, for business alliance possibilities), more see it as a threat. During my field trip to Mumbai and Delhi in May-June 2008, I sought to study the impact of Chinese products on Indian companies and consumers by direct observation and elite interview. Indian companies that exclusively serviced the domestic market often complained about the inexpensive Chinese goods flooding the Indian market. Consumers were more ambivalent: While they generally liked the low-cost Chinese goods, they were also concerned about food and product safety, as well as the quality of the goods. Indian companies that sell to international markets invariably faced the strong competition from their Chinese counterparts. Some executives wondered the incredibly low prices of the Chinese products, which undermined the

\textsuperscript{28} See Huang and Khanna (2003) and Engardio (2007).
Indian perspectives on the rise of China

Indian companies, could only result from the Chinese government's help. In this regard, India's experience is not too much different from those of other countries with backlash against cheap and unsafe Chinese products.

Such a multifaceted relationship results from many complex causes pointing toward different directions, as analyzed above. To conceptualize this relationship and to speculate its future, three paradigms are contrasted.

PARADIGMS

Geopolitics

As soon as India and China came into direct contact through the Tibet nexus, geography has conditioned their relations. China and India are neighbors. The Chinese have a saying, "A distant relative is less useful than a proximate neighbor." Friends can change, but neighbors can't. "You can't change geography," says an Indian think tank analyst. So the logic goes, India must get along with China. Indeed, various Indian leaders have made this a priority, although many Indians feel that India's goodwill is not reciprocated. A third neighbor –

30 The following section benefits from Prof. Tan Chung's lecture, 20 May 2008.
31 Interview with Nandan Unnikrishnan.
Pakistan – further complicates the relationship between these two neighbors.

As discussed before, these two Asian giants’ strategic spaces overlap and they both have ambitions to become a major regional, if not world, power. The Chinese have a saying, “The same mountain cannot accommodate two tigers.” From the Indian’s perspectives, India cannot accept Chinese hegemony. A rising China makes India’s ascent more difficult, if not impossible. It can also explain why the Indians felt compelled to sign a landmark nuclear agreement with the U.S.

In the geopolitics paradigm, the logic of balance of power prevails. Competition, mutual suspicion, alliance, and military buildup – standard tenets of realism – have heavily conditioned Indo-Chinese relations. Power is important in this paradigm. Tan Chung depicts power politics as horizontal expansion, which leads to border disputes. As stated, historically China and India did not have border disputes. China did not occupy Tibet until 1950. Modern concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity have ensnared both China and India.

Viewing Indo-Chinese relations through the geopolitics paradigm will have a negative impact on the relationship. Many of my informants seemed to accept certain basic realist premises and their arguments confirmed the geopolitics paradigm.
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Geoeconomics

Yet at the same time, China and India are both rising economically. And there exists complementarity between their economies. In the geoeconomics paradigm, the logic is interconnectivity and mutual dependence. This creates space (complementarity) and turns the zero-sum competition in the first paradigm into a win-win situation. An increasing number of books (Engardio 2007, Khanna 2007, Meredith 2007) champion this prospect: China’s hardware combining with India’s software; China’s yang blending with India’s yin. Judging from the relatively still moderate trade volume between the two ($40 billion per year) and the fact that neither is a key trading partner to the other, there exists immense potential for a closer economic partnership to gradually emerge, which would help ameliorate the overall bilateral relationship.

However, the emergence of a “Chindia” requires a leap of faith that is not supported by evidence. While several of my informants thought Chindia was a good idea, almost nobody predicted it would happen.

Geocivilizations

The third paradigm is not the mainstay of western international relations theories. It is reflectivist, rather than rationalist. Its logic is affinity, rather than material interests.

Economic historian Angus Maddison opined that in the past one thousand years, China’s population had constituted 1/3 to 1/6 of the
world’s population, and India’s population had sometimes been larger than China’s. Tan Chung opined that this meant that these two countries were most hospitable. He described the two’s relationship as “made in heaven.” With population congregating, wealth was created. With their shared origins in the Himalayas, Ganges and Indus gave rise to the Indian Civilization and Yellow and Yangtze gave rise to the Chinese Civilization.

As Sen pointed out, before the advent of modern history, there was a lot of mutual admiration between China and India. In the twentieth century, the two also shared Asian pride and anti-colonial solidarity. Their mutual suspicion and antipathy was a more recent phenomenon.

Mao Zedong in his lifetime only visited two “countries”: the Soviet Union and the Indian Embassy. Nehru, whose affection for China was legendary, was welcomed by 500,000 people when he visited China. Every Chinese believe when they die, they “return to the west” (India). Buddhism originated in India but flourished in China. One Indian scholar hailing from Ladakh summarized his visits to China this way, “People conjure up India as ‘the land of the Buddha,’ or land of poverty.”

Although some Indians rightly feel that Chinese may have behaved in a condescending or overbearing way toward the Indians, China’s current advantage is not preordained or can be expected to last

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32 Interview with Phunchok Stobdan.
forever.

This paradigm will call for a total reconceptualization of the Indo-Chinese relationship. It may be far-fetched to think of an Indo-Chinese partnership that is as cordial or close as the U.S.-United Kingdom bond. But appreciating each other’s civilizational attractiveness can form a deeper and more enduring bond that is currently missing in the Indo-Chinese relationship.

WHITHER?

What would the future hold for Indo-Chinese relations? Largely speaking there are three scenarios. The first is continued, perhaps even heightened, rivalry. -- guided by the logic of the geopolitics paradigm. Indications of this are not difficult to find. China figures prominently in Indian defense planning. China’s growing military and economic power may deeply unsettle India. With newly accumulated wealth from almost two decades of fast growth, India may devote greater resources into the military. It will become more aligned with the U.S. -- in a reversal of its stance during the Cold War. The U.S.-Indian nuclear agreement epitomized this trend. China may enhance its support of Pakistan and increase its influence in the South Asian continent, the Indian Ocean, and Southwest Asia.

The second possibility is “Chindia” -- driven by the logic of the geoeconomics paradigm -- to jointly promote a multipolar world and a
more equitable global order (e.g., reforming the United Nations). However, an Indo-Chinese entente aimed at the U.S. is unlikely, as each derives many benefits by maintaining a good relationship with the U.S.

The third possibility is pragmatic management of their relationship, seeking solutions to their unresolved disputes while exploring areas of cooperation. Compared to the hot war of 1962 and the cold war that ensued, Indo-Chinese relationship has shown promise of normalization. However, irritants still exist. The two sides should not be satisfied with prolonged but indecisive talks on settling the border issue. The Chinese had border disputes with just about every one of its land neighbors. For long periods of time, the China typically remained stuck in principled positions without any real progress, but it had shown in a number of cases that it could make concessions and conclude an agreement. 33 Both China and India need to show greater political will in order to settle the border dispute (one example would be mutual recognition of each other’s actual control). Other confidence-building measures, such as greater Chinese sensitivity to Indian concerns about China’s support of Pakistan and greater transparency and better communication to prevent accidents or misperceptions, would help. For a truly solid relationship, the two will benefit from the insights of the geocivilization paradigm.

China and India are two large developing countries, both making

remarkable transformation. Their choices, including interpreting the other’s intentions, will importantly shape our future world. Just like Alexander Wendt (1992) cogently said, “Anarchy is what states make of it.” The future of Indo-Chinese relationship is not condemned to rivalry and hospitality; nor will a “Chindia naturally result, just because it “makes sense.” To return to the constructivist’s axiom, it depends on the evolving structure of elite identities and preferences, informed by the three paradigms and socialized through interactions.
References


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