

Changing Dimensions of India-China Relations: From Cultural Linkages to the Trade Deficit

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ABSTRACT

The interaction between India and China is almost as old as the two civilizations themselves. This centuries-old relationship, both materially and spiritually, has been peaceful, mutually enriching, and is perhaps unprecedented in human history. Contacts between India and China are commonly believed to have started as early as the time of Christ, but no definite record has yet to be established. Trade and commerce, as well as cultural links, flourished between them through the Silk Road. The establishment of Buddhism in China was one of the most critical aspects of ancient contact. The Chinese replied to the arrival of Buddhist missionaries with great enthusiasm and then initiated a number of moves to bring Indian Buddhist monks and scholars to help educate, clarify and firmly develop Buddhism in China. With the work of the Gadar Party in China, and in retrospect, the Gadar movement figures in the history of Indo-China relations as a notable chapter of revolutionary camaraderie, this turnaround in their political loyalties and radicalization came about. The relationship with China in independent India was to figure prominently.

Key Words : India, China, Foreign Policy, GDP, Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

In developing our foreign policy we shall naturally first cultivate friendly relations with the countries of East which have so much in common with us. Nepal will be our neighbor and friend, with China and Japan, Indonesia, Afghanistan and Central Asia we shall have the closest contact (Nehru, 1927). Under the dark cloud, the sunshine period in Indo-China relations disappeared with the October 1962 border clashes, which gradually spread into a full-fledged war in which India suffered a crushing defeat. Nehru's conviction that a 'non-aligned' India would never be attacked by a communist China and his non-aligned stance as a road to national security proved illusory. In the post-Nehru period, relations between China

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and India were relatively smooth and friendly. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, unlike her father, attempted to lend an aspect of 'hard realism' to Indian foreign policy without being motivated by zeal and idealism. For example, India's position in Pakistan's dismemberment in 1974 and Sikkim's subsequent merger reinforced the premise that she was a power politics practitioner. A pragmatic step towards normalizing Indo-China relations, Narayanan has been accredited as India's ambassador to Beijing (San, 2017).

Sino-India relations entered a new phase with the path-breaking visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Beijing in December 1988. The two countries have agreed to focus on the expansion of bilateral relations in the area of non-conventional relations, as was evident from the signing of several agreements on scientific and technical cooperation, as well as on programmes for education and cultural exchange. As a turning point, the year 1998 came when India conducted five nuclear tests at Pokhran on 15 and 17 May. The fact that the Indian government justified these tests by describing China as a 'potential threat' to Indian security resulted in its acerbic rebuff. After the publication of a letter from PM Vajpayee to US President Bill Clinton and other world leaders in *The New York Times* on May 13, China's response changed dramatically. The Chinese government swept aside the Indian allegation that, if analyzed in pragmatic terms, it was 'utterly groundless', this was an unwarranted and provocative act on India's part resulting in unnecessary tensions with China (Menon, 2016).

Overlapping of Interests between India and China:

The interests of India and China are overlapping primarily in many areas. Both India and China have agreed to deepen their economic relations in the rapidly evolving international climate, where geo-economics has replaced ideology. Economic cooperation is rising year after year, and by the middle of the twenty-first century, some economic analysts expect the rise of 'Chindia'. Trade is steadily growing, with India-China trade reaching more than \$50 billion by 2011. India and China are seen by the world as emerging economic forces and will replace the US and Japan in order to become global economic forces by 2050. Economics and trade are the fields in which the two nations will benefit from mutual participation and cooperation. Economic and trade ties between India and China have shown steady improvement in the last two decades, despite the tensions in the relationship due to political issues. Trade has now surpassed \$20 billion and will cross \$50 billion by 2020. India's policy of economic liberalization, a policy to engage economically with its East Asian countries, contributes greatly to China's economic cooperation. The economic and trade interests of India and China in South and North East Asia overlap. Both are in the process of developing strategies to incorporate economic and trade arrangements with the states of these subcontinents. The best example to substantiate this argument is India's Look East Strategy. The partnership was boosted by India and China's membership in several regional and global joint economic and trade platforms such as BRIC and WTO (Ministry of External Affairs, 2016).

India and China formed a joint counter-terrorism working group in 2002. China, along with Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, is one of the five members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As a global counter-terrorism tool, the organization was established

in 2001. India is attempting to obtain SCO membership. If India becomes a member, it will raise the terrorist relationship between India and China (Chawla, 2016). Nuclear energy is an emerging field in which there is a greater possibility of competing interests. India and China are both energy-hungry countries, and nuclear power has the ability to meet their rising energy needs and reduce their dependency on the Gulf. Via nuclear energy trade with India, China can gain more. China is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Community and can profit immensely from India's supply of nuclear fuel (Menon, 2016).

Bottlenecks in India-China Relationship:

China's One Belt One Road project is one of the most aggressive foreign and economic projects in recent times, paralleling that of the post-World War Order Marshal Programme. As the transcontinental multi-mode communication network project aimed at fostering economic cooperation, OROB was also well sponsored by many observers, such as China's New Silk Road Economic Diplomacy, to conduct trade and transport around the globe. This initiative is an attempt to revive the historical Silk Road that is approximately 2000 years old with vigor to reconnect Europe with Asia and Africa with the use of modern transportation (Pantucci, 2017).

At the heart of China remains energy stability. Beijing has scheduled the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to reduce travel time and expenses by transporting oil, energy and commodities across the Strait of Malacca, which would reduce about 16,000 km from the travel distance between China and the Middle East. Without relying on India's transit facility via the Strait of Malacca, this project would allow China to remain energy independent. As China plans for major military accumulation in the Indian Ocean to defend its strategic interests, the military angle of the project cannot be rightly denied. The strategy of String of Pearls to encircle India inside the Indian Ocean and Gwadar's new port construction have near parallels in this direction (Economic Times, 2017). CPEC also seeks to bring growth to Xinjiang-the troubled turn of China's province that brings trade and connectivity together. This will also provide China with strategic access to and extend its presence in the Arabian Sea area. It would allow China to exert a much stronger impact on the Indian Ocean. In the disputed territory, the establishment of the project with China gives a degree of legitimacy to Pakistan's occupation of the region. And India's strong stance on the issue is that Indian territory is illegally controlled by Pakistan

In standard Tibetan, Doklam, referred to as Zhoglam, is a narrow plateau of 89 km in the tri-junction region of Bhutan, India and China. The disputed territory held by both Bhutan and China is geopolitically situated between the Yadong area of the Tibet Autonomous Region and the Ha valley of Bhutan. It is also critically linked to the territorial integrity of India. Doklam is located at the Sikkim border approximately 15 km southeast of the Nathu La pass that separates India and China. The Dok La Pass links India's state of Sikkim with either Tibet in China or Western Bhutan on the western edge of the Doklam plateau (Pradhan, 2017). The tri-junction between India and China where the border standoff takes place is not even a line or an area but a point 200 metres away from Mount Gipmochi marking the Indian border terminus of what New Delhi considers to be a strategic point of descent into the foothills of southern Bhutan leading to the strategically important Siliguri Corridor of India. It

is therefore of geostrategic significance to the territorial integrity of India (Roy, 2017).

China's continued support for Islamabad on various fronts has psychologically reinforced Pakistan's role in South Asia vis-à-vis India. Pakistan uses China against India as a defensive umbrella, while China uses Islamabad against India as a low-cost deterrent. China, along with Pakistan, strongly opposed India's offer to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). China has opposed any Indian move that demands terrorism-based action against Pakistan. It blocked India's move to the UN last year to take action against Pakistan for the release of Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakhvi, the mastermind of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai on 26/11. India's attempt by the UN to ban Jaish-e-Mohammad leader Masood Azhar was also blocked by China. Without specifically interacting with New Delhi, China has used Pakistan to draw up the balance of power in Asia (Chawla, 2016).

This is a mission unequivocally states China to return to its imperial glory headed by the son of heaven in Beijing. The implicit message is Chinese expansionism and the formation along its frontier of vassal states. Until the arrival of the British, from 1644-1911, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan were vassal states of the Qing Empire. In order to extend its presence in Tibet, the British took over ownership of these countries and India decided to inherit these properties (Global Times, 2017). As part of its grand strategy, China is using the past to serve the present and trying to reconstruct the history by creating vassal states around its border (Financial Express, 2016).

Policy options for India:

India cannot afford to lag behind China in the race for establishing regional supremacy in South Asia. At this juncture alternatives before India is to nurture its already existing projects and look both short and long term measures to counter China in the region and beyond. A 7,200 km long International North-South Corridor is emerging as a multi-mode rail, road and sea network for moving freight between India, Russia and Europe through Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia (Ministry of External Affairs, 2016). The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Moscow, Mumbai, Tehran, Baku, Bandar, Abbas, and Astrakhan etc. Project Mausam is a part of soft power diplomacy by India to reconnect and re-establish communication links between countries of Indian Ocean and enhancing their cultural values. At the same time, Sagar Mala is a port led direct and indirect development with a focus on infrastructure and connectivity. The project is to enhance the capacity of major and non-major ports and also to start their modernization process. Chabahar's location gives India access, besides Iran, to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe, bypassing Pakistan altogether and cutting down significantly current travel distances and time. India is involved in the Indian Ocean Rim Association groupings whose first summit took in Jakarta in 2017.

India was once supposed to be a pioneer of Pan-Asian initiatives and to achieve greater economic and political weight in Asia due to physical proximity and historical relations with much of Asia. Therefore, a number of factors are at the root of geography, economics, and historical relations, including the emerging presence of India in East and South East Asia. In addition, India's critical position in the fastest-growing Asia-Pacific economy has leveraged its diplomatic capacity. Its 55% of trade passed through the South China Sea and the Malacca

Straits. Stability in the region, therefore, was of great importance to India. In compliance with the principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, India has encouraged navigation and access to resources in the South China Sea. By exploring the possibility of setting up a tsunami early warning system for the area, India is trying to expand its control over the contested South China Sea. And the system will provide early warnings to South China Sea states such as Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia in the event of tsunami-high waves triggered by ocean quakes. As the chairman of RIEMS (Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System for Asia and Africa), India has put in place a system to provide Southeast and South Asian nations with tsunami warnings.

Conclusion:

There is no question that the context in which India will make its future choices is getting more complex with the rise of China, the ineffectiveness of the existing institutions of global governance, the continuing world economic crisis since 2008, the pervasive sense of insecurity in Asia-Pacific region, evident in the arms race under way in the region, and in the contested global commons in cyberspace, outer space, and the seas near China. On the other hand, China's regional strategy is primarily aimed at eroding India's predominance in the region. Undeniably,

India makes a major contribution to regional affairs, helping to keep the regional architecture open, balanced and inclusive. Generally, ASEAN nations encourage India to enhance its role as a balance in the region. For India, ASEAN is of vital importance both strategic and economic considerations. Further, India support to ASEAN efforts to obtain a legally binding code of conduct with China in South China Sea. Arguably, the recent developments emphasize the need for India to strike a balance between maritime security imperatives in the Asia-Pacific region, and its legal stance on freedom of navigation in the territorial waters.

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