



HAL
open science

China and India: an uneasy peace

Martina Bassan

► **To cite this version:**

| Martina Bassan. China and India: an uneasy peace. China Analysis, 2014, pp.5 - 7. hal-03470439

HAL Id: hal-03470439

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03470439>

Submitted on 8 Dec 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

2. China and India: an uneasy peace

Martina Bassan

Sources:

Li Li, "An analysis of the reasons for the maturing of China-India relations", *Xiandai guoji guanxi – Contemporary International Relations*, No. 3, 2013.³

Wu Yongnian, "Commentary: 'Chinese dynamism' inspired the Indian Prime Minister's visit to China", *Jiefang ribao – Liberation Daily*, 23 October 2013.⁴

Shi Hongyuan, "A comment on defence cooperation between India and the United States", *Xiandai guoji guanxi – Contemporary International Relations*, No. 11, 2012.⁵

Chinese scholarship on China-India relations focuses on ways to preserve China's national interest and to strengthen mutual trust between the two countries. It mostly centres on the border disputes between the two countries and on the growing defence cooperation between India and the United States.⁶

Li Li writes that a "gradual maturing process" (走向成熟的过程, *zou xiang chengshu de guocheng*) has been taking place in China-India relations since 1988.⁷ As proof, she points to the fact that the two countries have managed to avoid open conflict over their territorial disputes for decades. Moreover, the two sides have repeatedly tried to find a peaceful solution to the disputes. In a press release after Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, the Indian leader announced that both India and China were focused on finding a solution to the border disputes. This visit was the beginning of a new phase of normalisation in China-India relations, and considerable progress has been made since then. A working group on the demarcation

³ Li Li is an associate research fellow at the Institute of South Asian and Southeast Asian Studies at CICIR. Her research is focused on India and South Asia.

⁴ Wu Yongnian is a researcher at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies.

⁵ Shi Hongyuan is an associate professor at Guizhou University of Finance and Economics.

⁶ The territorial dispute between China and India dates back to the 1950s. It intensified during the brief Sino-Indian war of 1962. China claims the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing considers to be part of Tibet, contending that it was illegally given by Tibet to the UK in 1914, when it fell on the Indian side of the McMahon line drawn up under the Simla Accord between China, the UK, and Tibet. Another area of contention is the desert Himalayan plateaux of Aksai Chin. The region is strategically important for Beijing, because it connects Tibet to Xinjiang. India considers Aksai Chin to be an extension of Ladakh, attached to Jammu and Kashmir. In 1963, China also gained back the Shaksgam valley to the north of Kashmir, which was ceded to China by Pakistan. India disputes China's claim to Shaksgam.

⁷ Li identifies three phases in China-India relations: the period of friendship until 1962, the "cold period" (冰凉期, *bingliang qi*) between 1962 and 1988, and the period of improving China-India relations since the visit of the Prime Minister of India to China in 1988 and the beginning of a process of normalisation.

of borders was set up at the same time as the Indian leader's visit. Subsequently, two major agreements were signed, in 1993 and 1996. The 1993 agreement, Li says, confirmed that both sides would commit to keeping the peace in the areas near the "Line of Actual Control" at the borders.⁸ The 1996 agreement banned all military activities near the border. In 2003, the two countries also implemented a "mechanism for meetings between Special Representatives" (特别代表会晤机制, *tebie daibiao huiwu jizhi*) on border issues. This mechanism resulted in the 2005 Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question Agreement. Li says that the 2005 agreement was a genuine "breakthrough" (突破, *tupo*). In 2006, it was followed by a Joint Declaration by the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China.⁹

Li says that the two countries' efforts to settle the border issue peacefully are unprecedented and should be "obvious to all" (有目共睹, *you youmugongdu*). She says that the failure to arrive at a definitive solution is mainly down to the lack of trust and mutual understanding between the two countries. She believes that this failure of understanding is exacerbated by the malicious assertions made by Western researchers and part of the Indian media. Li accuses these writers of working to create a "confrontational point of view" (对抗视角, *duikang shijiao*). They always present relations between China and India as antagonistic and they "over-apply the concept of 'war between the dragon and the elephant' in interpreting China-India relations" ("龙象之争" 成为他们解读中印关系的惯用标签, *longxiang zhi zheng" chengwei tamen jidu zhong yin guanxi de guanyong biaoqian*). To confront the media hype around the China-India conflict, the political leaders of the two countries have increased the number of high-level meetings and have set up a formal exchange mechanism. They have also encouraged the development of bilateral relations in some areas.

Wu Yongnian also thinks the increased number of high-level meetings is significant. He sees Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's October 2013 visit to Beijing as particularly important. During this visit, Singh announced new economic and financial measures to encourage Chinese investment in India. Wu says that by doing so, the prime minister hopes to strengthen cooperation with China and to leverage "Chinese dynamism" (中国动力, *zhongguo dongli*) to help India's economy out of its current difficulties. The two governments also announced that visa restrictions for Chinese citizens going to India would be loosened. Wu says that the measure is intended not only to promote tourism, but also to increase mutual trust between the two countries.

⁸ The "Line of Actual Control" essentially corresponds to the McMahon Line drawn up in 1914. In the agreement, both parties committed to respecting the "Line of Actual Control" without actually stating that it was an explicit recognition of the earlier demarcation of their common borders.

⁹ In October 2013, another China-India agreement on border defence cooperation was signed during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Beijing; see "China-India border defense deal 'a highlight': FM", *Xinhua*, 24 October 2013, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/24/c_132827780.htm. Li's article was published before this agreement was made.

Li says that decoupling the sensitive issue of borders from potential cooperation in other areas is aimed at promoting trade and mutual confidence. She says the two countries have invested a great deal in communication and have worked to promote bilateral trade and cooperation in the financial sector, in energy resources, and in technology transfer.¹⁰ They have also stepped up person-to-person exchanges in academia and in tourism. Whether to achieve “short-term expedient harmony” (权宜下的短暂和睦, *quanyi xia de duanzan hemu*) or because of a “long-term political strategy” (运筹中的长远有治, *yunchou zhong de changyuan youzhi*), Li says that the two countries are gradually implementing a new kind of great power partnership. India and China do not consider themselves “adversaries” (对手, *duishou*) or “competitors” (竞争者, *jingzhengzhe*). Instead, they see themselves as true partners, cooperating for the benefit of both sides.

The two countries have also established a degree of military and security cooperation. Li says Chinese Defence Minister Cao Gangchan visited India in 2004 and 2005. In 2006, Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee came to China. Mukherjee’s visit culminated in the two countries signing a Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation. In 2007, China and India instituted a system of dialogue between their defence ministries. The two countries even carried out joint military manoeuvres in 2003, 2007, and 2008. Military dialogue was suspended in 2010 because of a dispute over visas, but talks resumed in late 2011. In September 2012, Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie travelled to India. After that, the two countries revived and strengthened military cooperation. Li says that this cooperation is a sign of the maturity of China-India relations.

Li admits that, although progress has been made, trust between China and India in the military sphere remains low. Because of the difficulties of resolving the border disputes, both China and India are “unwilling to risk relaxing military preparedness” (不敢放松军事准备, *bugan fangsong junshi zhunbei*). And as the two countries’ economies have strengthened, they have new reasons to focus on achieving their own interests. In the long term, this may make competition inevitable.

Shi Hongyuan also talks about the tension between Indian and Chinese interests. He thinks India’s relationship with China cannot simply be evaluated in terms of bilateral relations. A true understanding of the relationship must also take account of the role of the US. Like Li, Shi believes that India aims to become a major power, to play an important role on the world stage, and to create an external environment favourable to achieving its aspirations. However, unlike Li, he thinks India aims to achieve this objective not by relying on China’s economic power, but by using US military might. India could work to contain

¹⁰ The two countries have held six financial dialogues on the global financial crisis since 2006. In 2006, India and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding on oil and gas cooperation and in 2010, they signed a Memorandum of Understanding on green technology cooperation.

China’s expansion in the region by reinforcing its military alliance with Washington.

Shi warns against further strengthening of India-US security cooperation. He says that China must “take precautions” (未雨绸缪, *weiyuchoumou*) to ensure cooperation does not harm China’s security or national interests. Shi says that India’s political leaders believe China will soon represent a real threat to India. India’s armed forces have publicly warned the government more than once about the growing gap between Indian and Chinese military capabilities. A former head of the Indian air force has even said that China represents a worse threat than Pakistan.¹¹ Indian leaders, according to Shi, hope that India will in the medium term build military strength equivalent to that of China. He says that they believe India must seize this unique and historic opportunity to overturn Asian power structures and create new relations between Asian countries. The Indian government is trying to confront China’s gradual emergence

Because of the difficulties of resolving the border disputes, both China and India are “unwilling to risk relaxing military preparedness”.

by strengthening India’s national power. It wants to retain the capacity to compete militarily with China and, if necessary, to

increase its ability to “act as a deterrent to China” (对中国构成一定威慑, *dui zhongguo goucheng yiding weishe*). The key to this strategy is stronger relations with Washington. Military and security cooperation with the US will enable India to consolidate its military capacity by acquiring American weapons, diversifying import sources, and gaining access to advanced American technology. Both New Delhi and Washington agree that India must strengthen its hard power if it is to counterbalance China’s moves in the region and prepare for any potential direct confrontation.

Shi says that security cooperation between India and the US in the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean is aimed at “containing” (牵制, *qianzhi*) China. India-US cooperation has already increased tensions over navigation routes in the Indian Ocean and has created “security challenges” (安全挑战, *anquan tiaozhan*). India’s maritime capacity has grown, which means its activities in the South China Sea and the western Pacific could extend further and take place more often. This could trigger conflict between China and India. On land, India-US security cooperation has already caused friction on China’s western borders. In the future, India will be able to use advanced technological weapons acquired from the US to extend its reach right up to China’s border territories, and “rely on US strength to pressure China” (借助美国的力量向中国施压, *jiezhu meiguo de lilian xiang zhongguo shiya*). This would give India significant leverage in any negotiations with Beijing, and could enable it to force

¹¹ Shi cites Harsh V. Pant, “China and India: a rivalry takes shape”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, June 2011, available at http://www.fpri.org/enotes/201106.pant.china_india.pdf. Neither Shi nor Pant names the official in question.

China to compromise on borders. Shi says that given the increased competition between Washington and Beijing, India's attitude towards the two powers will be decisive in defining the geopolitics of Eurasia in the twenty-first century.

3. Mongolia: China's perfect neighbour?

Antoine Bondaz

Sources:

Wei Lisu and Xia Anling, "An overview of research on Mongolia conducted by Chinese academics over the past 20 years", *Xiandai guoji guanxi – Contemporary International Relations*, No. 4, 2013.¹²

Wu Yun, "Exploratory study of China-Mongolia economic and trade relations in the twenty-first century", *Guoji yanjiu cankao – International Study Reference*, No. 8, 2013.¹³

Zhang Haixia, "The SWOT model applied to economic and trade cooperation between China and Mongolia", *Xiandai jingji xinxi – Modern Economic Information*, No. 10, 2013.¹⁴

Wang Cong, "The development of the 'silk road economic zone' is a major event", *Yangshiwang ping – CCTV Network Opinion*, No. 1043, December 2013.¹⁵

Wang Zhaobin, "The China-Mongolia dilemma in the coal trade", *I-Feng – Phoenix*, 9 January 2013.¹⁶

Yan Xiaodong, "Mongolia's 'third neighbour' diplomacy endangers China and Russia", *Development Research Centre of the State Council*, 31 May 2013.¹⁷

"China-Mongolia relations are tested by the meeting between Japan's Prime Minister Abe and Mongolia's President Elbegdorj", *Ta Kung Pao*, 1 October 2013.¹⁸

Russian influence in Mongolia began to decline after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then, China has become the most important player in Mongolia's economic development. China is Mongolia's leading trading partner and the main focus of its diplomacy. However, the relationship is asymmetric: Mongolia is not a priority for China, as evidenced by the limited academic literature written on the subject in China.¹⁹ Instead, Mongolia

¹² Wei Lisu is a professor in the Department of International Politics, Central China Normal University in Wuhan, Hubei province. He specialises in Mongolia's domestic politics and foreign policy. Xia Anling is a professor of Marxism at the Huazhong Normal University, Hubei.

¹³ Wu Yun is a PhD student at Inner Mongolia University.

¹⁴ Zhang Haixia is a graduate of Heilongjiang University, Harbin, who specialises in relations between China and the former Soviet bloc.

¹⁵ Wang Cong is a researcher on Central Asia at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR).

¹⁶ Wang Zhaobin is a senior reporter for the Chinese review, *Energy* ("能源" 杂志), specialising in coal and renewable energies.

¹⁷ Yan Xiaodong is an honorary research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).

¹⁸ *Ta Kung Pao* is China's oldest newspaper, founded in 1902. It is based in Hong Kong and financed by the Chinese Communist Party, and it is generally considered to be a mouthpiece for the country's leadership.

¹⁹ The article by Wei Lisu and Xia Anling points out that between 1992 and 2013, the CICIR published only 11 articles on Mongolia, with the leading Chinese academic journal, *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi – World Economics and Politics*, publishing only two. The research centre most active in dealing with the subject is the Institute of Northeast Asian Studies, Jilin University.