Neighboring competitor? Indian image in Chinese media

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Abstract
Despite being two of the most populous and neighboring countries in the world, India and China have long been unfamiliar about each other. Although both of them are tagged as “emerging economic powers” in today’s world, China and India are much different in terms of political system, social structure, and cultural traditions. Owing to such differences and even prevalent stereotypes between the two countries, most of the information about them is channeled by their media systems. The review of literature presented in this article shows that the Chinese media and communication scholars are concerned more about Chinese media in India and not vice versa. As a reaction to this unbalanced literature, this article demonstrates a pilot content analysis of three different types of online news media in China, namely Sina News, Caixin Net, and Global Net. The major findings are as follows: Indian image on these media platforms is mainly negative, followed by neutral and positive. Among others, India–China relations, military expansion (some with territory/border issues), and oddities in the Indian society are most reported topics. Moreover, Indian portrayal by the online media is nationalist and defensive, being deemed as a “neighboring competitor,” and is subject to political or geopolitical agenda. All in all, the image of India presented by these Chinese online media platforms is a critical entry point for China’s self-reflection about its cultural ego-centrism, orientalism, and Westernizing political-economic modernization process. For a future with better mutual understanding and brighter China–India relations, this article offers a series of suggestions for both scholars and practitioners of different professions, including the epistemological revitalization of both countries’ geopolitical position in
the Global South and in the grouping of emerging economies like Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa against the former Western dominant powers.

Keywords
Chinese media, ego-centrism, India–China relations, India image, modernization, orientalism

Media and the dynamics of China–India relationship

Media and the power of representation

Media, as a power of representation, play a significant role in shaping the image and attitudes of the people about countries and societies (Mughees, 1997; Saleem, 2007), and “the world outside” created by media influences the “pictures in our heads” about the world (Lippmann, 1922). In the contemporary era, where time and space have compressed by the explosion in information and communication technology and the civil aviation system has bridged the geographical constrains and socioeconomic status, few people have access to the events and happenings outside their own world. Most of the time, people depend upon various media for accessing information about people, events, and other countries. Thus, media have become a mirror that reflects the world and its happenings. Furthermore, theorists have recently developed the concept of “mediatization” in order to highlight the wider influences of media in shaping the overall social transformation, though many debates about the limited interpretive capacity of this new concept are also vibrant (Couldry, 2008; Couldry & Hepp, 2013).

As the world’s most populous and neighboring countries, the relationship between China and India is vital for many reasons. However, since India is depicted as China’s “distant neighbor” (Zhou, 2010), and arguably vice versa, the relationship in between is to a large extent channeled by their respective media. Media representation is therefore critical for the investigation of how people understand each other with regard to their similarities and differences in choosing the path toward modernization.

The economics between China and India

In the neoliberal economics, the utopian narrative of “the world is flat” propagated by Thomas L. Friedman (2006) underlines the flattening trend of the world’s economy and especially the process of incorporating developing countries through outsourcing and subcontracting in production, in which India is depicted quite successful. According to David Harvey (2005, p. 120), China’s market-oriented reform also happened to coincide with the neoliberal turn of the global economy led by Britain and the United States. By incorporating itself into the global capitalist circuit at the neoliberal turn in 1980s, China has made remarkable economic progress in the last three decades, which has increased its contribution in the international affairs (He, 2010). Therefore, from an economic point of view, both China and India have made remarkable growth in the past decades and share a similar growth path characterized by the dependency on the overseas markets’ demand.

However, Friedman did not acknowledge the actual process of reconfiguring, or in a more precise sense, reconsolidating the global economic power in the 21st century, as Harvey (2005, p. 19) did in defining neoliberalism as “a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.” In other words, the hierarchical structure
and shortsighted unstable partnership still characterize the international economic relations, particularly questioning the “utility” of the emerging economies, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), including China and India (Sparks, 2014). No matter how eagerly both countries want to upgrade their respective economies, the fact that the economic growth of China and India is overwhelmingly manufacturing-driven is still self-evident, which is on a basis of the so-called “competitive advantages” in both labor and raw material markets.

It is also worth mentioning that the center-periphery relations exist not only in between developed and developing countries but also in any two countries with non-equal trade relations, for example, Canada and the United States. As the world’s two biggest developing countries, trade between China and India is also proved evidently uneven. Li (2013) once noted, “China is India’s largest trading partner and largest contributor to its trade deficit.” As a consequence of this uneven development, India is seeking for alternative partners, Japan, for example, in order to catch up with China and play the leading role for the global economic growth. In a word, the capitalist center is powerful enough to restructure the whole economic system, but for countries of peripheries, either racing to the top or to the bottom would be the realistic consideration, which reversely shapes the different competing positions in a globally integrated capitalist market.

Political disputes and China’s initiatives for being a friendly neighbor

Despite similar economic ambitions and the great potential for both future growth and bilateral economic cooperation, China and India have long been immersed in a series of political tensions, ranging from territorial disputes, national security, and concerns to criticism toward each other’s political system. Bhattacharjea and Ranganathan (2000, p. 387) contended that despite being “the only two major powers of the post-World War II world, with a combined population of over 2 billion and a potential consumer class of at least half that figure,” the relationship between both the countries has seen strain and divergence. Likewise, Hussain (1962) investigated that both India and China have different outlook and approach toward world affairs that diverge their interests. India and China have strategic engagement in Central Asia, and most of their interests diverge in these countries. They are considered competitors in this region with respect to energy resources for their future economic and domestic needs (Merrington, 2014).

In addition, China and India vary a lot in choosing their paths toward modernization, alongside differing approaches to inherit long-standing cultural traditions. The cultural and social stereotypes, which are often exaggerated by media, continue to dictate peoples’ understanding from both countries. Less people-to-people contacts have echoed in media exaggeration, resulting in increasing blind spots for both countries to promote mutual understanding.

However, there have been efforts by the Chinese side to draw the distance between two countries closer. The day 24 June 2014 was an important day for both China and India when China hosted the 60th anniversary celebrations of “The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” in Beijing. President Xi Jinping recalled the historic moment of 60 years ago when China, India, and Myanmar jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence. He named the Five Principles as a “critical creation” in building a new form of international relationship featuring independence, fairness, and justice. Almost 1 year later, President Xi hosted Indian Premier Narendra Modi’s visit in China and showed him around in Xi’an, one of China’s oldest capital cities, on 14 May 2015. The relationship between China and India, as China’s foreign minister Wang Yi said before the end of his visit in India in August 2016, is more about common interest than disagreement (Long, 2016).
Bridging the gap: Researching Indian image in Chinese media

With the aforementioned China–India relations and the importance of media in representing each other in mind, this article aims at paving a way for mutual understanding between the countries by offering a pilot study on how the Indian image is depicted by selected Chinese online media platforms. Since quite a few similar researches have been done in both Chinese (Tang, 2004; Yin, 2014) and English academic literatures (Thussu, 2013; Li, 2013), this article will start with a brief summary of relevant Chinese literatures, followed by a small-scale content analysis of three Chinese online news media platforms regarding Indian image in China.

The focal point of Chinese literature: Chinese image in India

Chinese image in India: Practical needs

In March 2015, we carried a simple combined keywords search in the largest and most used Chinese academic database, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The search revealed a wide gap between studies of Indian image in Chinese media and Chinese image in Indian media. Consequently, scholarly attention has been overwhelmingly paid to the latter through either traditional philosophical approaches or scientific approaches such as questionnaire survey. Figure 1 exhibits the result of a “theme” search using “Indian image” with “China” or “China’s image” with “India” as combined keywords in Chinese language. Compared to 50 items (journal articles or dissertations) about the Chinese Image in Indian media, merely seven items refer to India’s image in the Chinese media. Figure 2 shows the result of a “full-text” search using the same pair of keywords. Similarly, the items related to the “Chinese image in India” are 6591, far more than the amount of items associated with “Indian image in China,” 337.

Despite the ignorance about India’s long-standing civilization, its complex social structure, different political system, and religious traditions, the Chinese researchers decided to adopt a nationalist approach and began with considering India as an “other” to mirror the developmental status of China and to examine the recent state initiative of projecting China’s soft power image abroad. An online questionnaire survey conducted by Chinese researchers (Yu, 2013) revealed that the top five choices about Chinese culture favored by Indian respondents are Chinese kung fu, food, history, religions, and movie. In terms of the values acknowledged by Indian respondents, traditional ones including righteousness and filial piety are higher than modern ones formed during the Socialist development, for example, common prosperity, collectivism, and dialectical materialist thoughts.

In another survey co-conducted in India by Shanghai Jiaotong University and the China Research Center of Duke University, the researchers (Liu, 2014) examined four key elements regarding China’s current image in India: (1) the present and future influence of China in Asia and the whole world, (2) positive and negative evaluation of China’s influence, (3) the popularity of China’s model of development, and (4) how Indians view bilateral relations with China. The findings enriched the understanding of Chinese themselves through the eyes of Indian respondents. According to the survey, United States and China are currently the two most influential powers in Asia; however, 10 years on, India will emerge as a powerful player, followed by China. Facing the rising status of China in the international community, Indian respondents presented three types of attitudes in the survey: (1) friendly attitude based on reverence, (2) strategic contact confronting with the challenges from China and building its own military and economic strengths, and (3)
hostile attitude toward China’s rise. It is also worth noting that since the European and American news media are major sources for Indian English newspapers that serve the political elites, the China-related media agenda in India is always consistent with that of the Western media, for example, the constant criticism of Chinese nationalist emotion.

**Ego-centrism, orientalism, and Western modernity**

It is obvious that the nationalist approach adopted by those studies aims to enhance the understanding of China itself in an increasingly interconnected world, but through the eyes of Indians. As an embodiment of inter-subjectivity, the Indians’ perception mirrors Chinese self-reflection of the developmental status of contemporary China. This nationalist perspective has been proved to be a long-standing theme for international communication, which is by no means international or reciprocal, but ego-centrism, coupled with orientalism and Westernizing paths of modernization. Different from the psychologically defined ego-centrism as “the inability to differentiate between self and other” (Anderman & Anderman, 2009), as an extended use in the international arena,
ego-centrism in China is deeply rooted in rural social relations with societal characteristics. Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1992, p. 67) distinguished ego-centrism from individualism, calling attention to an ideology in which the self is central on the one hand and the elastic qualities of ego-centrism as the other. In other words, the ego-centrism of China in international relations does not refer to a single criteria by which we can define who is friend and who is enemy. Accordingly, there are no permanent enemies or friends, but relying on the respective relations with China in concrete cases. This might be one of the social or sociophysiological origins for Chinese people and media to present mixed feelings about its “distant neighbor” (Zhou, 2010). In addition, the classic notion of “orientalism” (Said, 1979) emphasizing the West-originated West–East dichotomy is parallel with the Western-led capitalist modernization processes. The neoliberal turn of economy in both China and India meant the systematic dependent on Western-developed economies. As a result, looking West also becomes a cognitive hegemony in dominating people’s minds in both countries, which leads to the ignorance of each other. Same stories also happen between China and Russia in the post–Cold War world.

Back to the literature examined, it is also evident that those studies are implicitly driven by specific policies or industry initiatives regarding the improvement of China’s multi-tiered relations with India. This imperative echoes the rise of China on the global stage and naturally becomes integral to China’s recent soft power initiatives by offering empirical evidences for Chinese elites to think about strategic solutions for the possible problems when China encounters with the world, particularly with political, economic, and military competitors like India.

The underestimation of Indian image in China and the rise of Indian think tanks

Among the few studies of India’s image in China, Shang (2011) compared the diverse perceptions of people toward each other. Similar to the differing attitudes different Indian interest groups hold about China in different historical contexts, the Chinese views of India also vary a lot based on professions. He concluded that at least three groups of views could be classified: (1) for scholars and diplomats, the focus is to emphasize common interests and the necessity of being partners and good neighbors, (2) for military and defense experts, India as a hostile neighbor is in geopolitical conflicts with China and should be watched, and (3) for the majority of Chinese society, there is a mainstream view in between, tending to recognize the rising status of India in a multi-polar world, the great possibilities for both to work together on a globe stage, as well as the not-yet threat of Indian military enhancement. Li (2013) also noted different views toward India based on the urban–rural divide in China:

for most urban Chinese, the terms that spring most readily to mind regarding India are rape, Buddhism (despite the fact that fewer than 1 percent of Indians are Buddhists) and yoga, while rural Chinese would tell you they have few associations, if any.

In other words, the Indian image or the perception of India in China is filtered by different occupational and social groups, their respective practical considerations, and even geographical differences. In reality, no matter existing as a modern political entity of nation-state in the international system or as an imagined community with diverse cultural traditions, both China and India are internally complicated. Therefore, the key to unlock the gate for mutual understanding lies in the recognition of the complexity of each country.

Contrary to the fact of “the second-tier position of India studies (as a whole) in China’s academic universe” (Li, 2013), more and more think tanks and universities in India have established
China-related research projects or institutional settings. Besides the trade deficit, an academic or intellectual deficit is emerging between China and India. Arguably, India takes the lead. Regarding the existing studies in Chinese literature, which could be classified “into two categories: Indology for history, cultures, languages, and literature of India and current South Asia studies focusing on geopolitics and economy” (ibid), less attention has been given to achieve comprehensive and deeper understanding of today’s Indian society.

In conclusion, the researchers observe that the ignorance about India in Chinese literature is not intended but unconscious under the mindset of China’s ego-centrism, coupled with orientalism and the reinforcement of a Westernizing mode of modernization.

India on Chinese online news media: A pilot study

In an earlier analysis by Li (2013) with Caixin, a Chinese economics and finance magazine, ignoring India on Chinese media was obvious and easily recognized. It is mentioned that on 28 October 2013, Sina, the most popular news portal for Chinese netizens, snatched only 50 items about India out of its around 10,000 items to display on its site. The situation continues and Chinese media, compared to neighboring countries, carry out fewer reports about India, who also holds a membership in the grouping of emerging economies, like the BRICS.

Method

In order to fill in the knowledge gap of how India is portrayed in China, we conducted a small-scale content analysis with a special focus on Chinese online news media content. The content analysis is limited to the time span between 1 August and 31 October 2014. This period is important because Chinese President Xi Jinping was invited to visit India on 17–19 September 2014. It is argued that the visit by the Chinese President may bring more attention of Chinese media on India and China–India relations. Thus, this article extends the timeline to the beginning of August and the end of October in order to include the possible media warm-up and follow-up reports about for this state visit and aims at exploring the amount, highlights, and narrative of news reports during this period.

Concerning the necessity for examining diverse news sources, three online news media outlets with different institutional characteristics are selected: Sina News—China’s biggest online news aggregator, Global Net—an international news-oriented newspaper produced by People’s Daily, and Caixin Net—a well-known financial and economic news website. They represent three major types of online news websites in China respectively, namely the commercial news portal catering the tastes of the masses, the mouthpiece of the government in international reporting, and the commercial-based but professionally operated in satisfying the social elites’ information needs.

In order to measure the tone of each report, the three authors of this article, who are also the coders in the process of research, first conducted a pre-coding test in order to guarantee the inter-coder reliability. Three reports of each online news media are randomly selected. In total, nine reports are collected. Each coder is required to evaluate the attitude of each report and make comparison with the other two coders. After nine rounds of coding, comparison, and self-adjusting, the inter-coder reliability increased from 66.7% to 100%. Furthermore, in order to measure one report as singly positive, negative, or neutral, we read all comments it includes and identified the main tone that characterizes this story. If there is no clear attitude or contesting or balanced attitudes, we code it as neutral. The findings are demonstrated and elaborated in the following paragraphs.
Findings: A multi-layered analysis

The results show that on Sina News (see Figure 3), the topics reported are more concentrated on a couple of issues, namely India–China relations, military force, and social oddities. In August and October, reports that appeared on Sina News are mostly about the oddities in the Indian society, such as a little kid has bigger-than-head hands or an old woman killed a leopard singlehandedly. Furthermore, reports also concerned about the “traditional” issue or dispute between India and China, for example, the military expansion of India and some territory or border conflicts. However, Indian international affairs throughout the 3 months based on its geopolitical concerns also caught a great amount of attention from Chinese media. For example, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the United States and Japan and the Vietnamese military delegation’s visit to India. This Indian initiative was widely reported by media as a potential threat to China. In other words, for most of the time, the theme of India-related reports is strongly negative (see Figure 4).

However, there is some positive media coverage right before and after President Xi’s state visit, with a series of reports on the 3-day visit and the potential collaboration between the Dragon and the Elephant. This political agenda played a dominant role in September. Obviously, Xi’s visit, together with his wife, cleared out the bad image of India as covered by Chinese media as usual and brought a wave of positivity, depicting India as a strategic partner in international collaboration. But after the visit, the theme of Indian-reported content returned to the negative side.

Compared to Sina News, Caixin Net and Global Net produced considerably less reports on India during this period of time. As an economic and financial news-oriented website, only 33
items were found on Caixin Net (see Figure 5). Among these reports, including some experts’ analyses, 14 refer to the India–China relations, particularly from a developmentalist perspective. However, while showing little attention to India’s domestic economic development, Caixin was
found being suspicious of the future of India–China collaboration, and simultaneously following the “mainstream” agenda similar with Sina in the rest of its content. The negative attitude toward India on Caixin Net (see Figure 6) is a little higher (49%) than Sina News (46%).

In case of Global Net, an international news-oriented website and produced by People’s Daily, more diverse topics were found in its relevant reports (see Figure 7). However, the most distinctive aspect of Global Net among these three news outlets is its special focus on India–Japan relations, which occupies 23% of the 39 reports in total. It is also worth noting that the reports on India–Japan relations, triggered mainly by Modi’s official visit to Japan, are framed from the view of geopolitical relevance to China’s national interest. Therefore, coverage with regard to this angle turns out to be very negative. In other words, despite the diverse topics covered by Global Net, the attitudes are arguably more negative and polarized (see Figure 8).

Figures 9 and 10 sum up the amount, highlights, and attitude measurement of India-related reports in these three online news media. They helped us reach the following conclusions.

First of all, India’s image on these three selected online news media is mainly negative (47%), followed by neutral (30%) and positive (23%), which is in accordance with our assumptions formulated on the basis of literature review. The coverage varies regarding particular topics. On the one hand, the military expansion of India and China–India territory disputes are often reported and analyzed negatively, while on the other hand, President Xi’s visit is covered in a positive way.

Second, among others, India–China relations, military expansion (some with territory/border issues), and oddities in Indian society are most reported topics by these Chinese online media in the time period under study. In addition, India–Japan relations, natural disasters (e.g. flood), the “problematic” political system, India–United States relations, and the current notorious rape criminals
have also been represented. Despite the difference in priorities, the findings of our content analysis are similar to that of Li (2013), who focus on Chinese media’s agenda about India, namely widespread poverty, democracy’s malfunctioning, social disorder, rape criminals, the expansion of
military force, especially the nuclear weapon, as well as potential contestation with China in South China Sea.

Third, Indian framing by the online media is no doubt ego-centric and defensive, which could be crystallized as “neighboring competitor” and is subject to the political or geopolitical agenda. For instance, the fact that Indian government takes advantage of the tension between major stakeholders in South Asia is not welcomed by Chinese government and the media system under its control. The media under study while reporting India–Japan and India–United States relations see China as a potential victim. So, their narrative is negative toward India in this regard. The psychological distance between the two countries seems pulling away in China’s ego-centric and elastic relations with its neighbor.
Fourth, the criticism toward Indian political system and various social conflicts is a reflection of the self-recognized advantages of Chinese political system and social stability or harmony governed by this system.

In terms of the comparison of political systems, “The practice of democracy, rather than the spirit, is often the center of talk among the Chinese who keep an eye on their neighbor” (Li, 2013). Actually, this narrative of disordered, unstable, or inefficient democratic practice is also captured by the Chinese media to report relevant news in Taiwan, Japan, and some Western countries, informing the audience that the political system in China may not be perfect, but in comparison to these countries, it is functioning and contributing efficiently.

The complex social conflicts are another perceptual negative side of the Indian society often reported by the Chinese media. Without contextual understanding of the religious, political, economic, cultural, and social fiber of the Indian society, those reports just focus on individual and fragmented stories. Therefore, it is argued that as a result of the process of “cultivation,” a specialist at China’s national travel agency responded to Caixin, “China is crowded, polluted and chaotic enough. Why go to another country to see the same thing?” (Li, 2013).

Regarding the media representation of social conflicts in both countries, Song (2009) made an interesting comparison between the two countries. Song argues that although both countries embraced the neoliberal globalization one after another, the power structure is differently driven by different political and economic ambitions of both countries. She maintained that both countries have concentrated media ownership but respectively in a single political system in China and in a net of multiple private capitals in India. According to her, against this background, media represent distinctively on social conflicts in each country. Her research revealed that the conflicts represented by Chinese media are mostly between social groups and partly between society and the government, while the Indian media mainly focus on the contradictions between social groups and government as a result of the adoption of neoliberal policy and its social consequences of uneven development. Therefore, the study of comparative media system is also necessary to overcome the obstacles of the nationalist perspective.

All in all, China reflects or rethinks itself through the representation of India and its role in international or regional order. Li (2013) pointed out, “It’s no surprise that India’s political, judicial and social fabric were examined through the prism of Chinese current affairs.”

Fifth, if we put it in a historical and philosophical way, thinking of the mutual recognition in broader world structure, India and China, as each other’s “other,” complete the self-identity recognition through “self-orientalization” and “self-westernization” (Zhou, 2010). That is an orientalist stereotype, exemplified by the ignorance about the complex social structure and ordinary people’s life in India, the “specialization of India civilization and the persistent perceptual focus on the oddities in Indian society.”

The ignorance about India on Chinese media lies on the long path of modernization for both “oriental” countries in the first place. The orientalist perspective is definitely Western-centric. In this perspective, the West is the source of reference and comparison for development and modernization. In the process of neoliberal globalization, the competition to get resources, ranging from technology to sub-contracts from the advanced West, has intensified. The “Make in India” project launched by the new Modi government is clearly an example of the process of “racing to the bottom.” That who is the best sub-contractor with the Western clients characterizes this uneven relationship. On the other hand, the orientalism also frames the developing or underdeveloped world as a place of old, full of “exotic tales” (Li, 2013), and inconsistent with or absurd to the “modern”
rules. This is exactly how Chinese media select social news stories in India, no matter what the news sources may be.

Sixth, at the concrete level, it is worth noting that people of different professions show different views and attitudes toward India. As Shang (2011) summarized, “For scholars and diplomats, the focus is to emphasize common interests; for military and defense experts, India is a hostile neighbor and should be watched; for the majority of Chinese society, there is a mainstream view in between.”

Seventh, the agenda-setting role of the international media on both countries is of great significance. In addition to comparative media system analysis, the systematic following and analysis of how the India-related news flows from one node to another in the internationally connected network of production and circulation deserves attention by the scholars.

Banyan (2012) opines that media of both countries need to be cautious and critical toward their counterpart. He pointed out that *Global Times* “takes a strongly nationalist and hence sometimes anti-Indian line” against the hawkishness in India press. This influences the perception of people about the other country and vice versa.

The researchers conclude that China and India are both complicated and fractured in social structure; therefore, we should be cautious while making any generalized judgment on the so-called national image in each country’s media. The elites’ knowledge about each other’s country is always dominated while quite few researches try to get average people in their framework.

**Promoting mutual understanding for a better future of China–India relations**

Despite the multidimensional differences, and obviously deep-rooted stereotypes, between Chinese and Indian societies, a better mutual understanding could be achieved through the promotion of a better mediated or non-mediated communication process. Based on the findings of this article, the researchers suggest that at least from China’s side, three further steps are expected to be taken for relevant groups, organizations, or just individuals.

At the international level, the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” should be revitalized by the Chinese government, rather than holding a “zero-sum” competing logic with its biggest neighbor. The solidarity of the Global South is the key to building a new global order to reorient the neoliberal uneven development and challenge the Western political–economic domination and cultural hegemony.

The reconfiguration of global political and economic power also presses China to re-evaluate the position of India in its diplomacy and soft power building. A new world order is in the formulation, in which the BRICS countries are eager to challenge the dominant position of those Western countries. The pursuit of being “the dominant among dominants” by these emerging economies is a certain future to predict if the entire hierarchical structure driven by global capitalist market relations—or in other words the “world system” characterized by the center-periphery’s “accumulation by dispossession”—does not change in essence. The reception of India in China lies on the recognition of the world system and its separate ties with the core countries. In the course of upward mobility on a world stage, both China and India are required to work hand in hand, at least symbolically, to get a greater space for their own respective development, let alone the shared long history of anti-colonialism. For example, India was reported to defend the interests of developing countries by strongly requiring that developed countries should take the lead in reducing carbon
emission (Wang, 2014). From China’s side, India’s support to be the official member of China-launched Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a signal for this new wave of regional and geopolitical grouping. However, on the other hand, the global capitalist logic of economic growth is reconfiguring the market relations between China and India and between these two manufacturing-based economies and the rest of the world. In a narrow sense of economics, the demographic “comparative advantages” are flowing in between, mainly from China to India. Despite various problems and obstacles still existing, Li (2013) pointed out that

> China is coming to realize that a big power may also be a neighbor, and India’s importance is elevated with such a shift in focus. To China, India is not simply one target in a renewed charm offensive on its neighbors, but also a vital part of BRICS that China sees as a new force capable of challenging existing international institutions dominated by Western powers.

It is, therefore, important to recognize the potentials for both China and India working together in shaping the world’s political and economic order. However, the dynamics of the world process also opens space for regional connections and mutual understanding. By forming a theory of “asymmetrical interdependence,” Arjun Appadurai (Straubhaar, 2010) argued that “the process of globalization is not necessarily and primarily driven by economic forces, but is full of dynamism in terms of the scopes of financial, technological, ethno/migration, media and ideological interactions with separate and inconsistent logics.” In this context, China and India are in complex and dynamic relations with the core countries, with each other and with other less developed nations. Relevant studies should take account of this notion of asymmetrical globalization.

At the professional level, particularly for news media and journalists, more first-hand experiences are required to understand each country’s social complexity and to develop the narrative accordingly. More contacts may lead to a deeper and broader view toward each other. It is evident that Indian universities and think tanks are establishing more research centers or projects targeting China, the Chinese counterpart should also get into action for not only practical goals of politics and economy but also the updating of the knowledge system about its neighbor.

At the epistemological level, Chakrabarty (2007)’s critical claim of “Provincializing Europe” and Zhao’s suggestion of “Looking East, Going South” (2010) are still of great significance for both India and China to demystify the European or Western origin and approach of modernity. The dynamics of modernization process, in both China and India, although full of contestations and conflicts, deserves contextual understanding through a lens of what we called “local knowledge.”

Media in China are undergoing a new wave of transformation characterized by the policy-led “convergence.” The power of mainstream media is strengthening while the cultural leadership or ideological control is still at the center of any media reform in China. On the other hand, the Internet is still steadily growing in terms of access to average Chinese people—especially through mobile Internet carried by various cheap devices—and the multiple applications for a higher connectivity. As a result, the media’s role in China–India relations is arguably more important in a new information and communication environment in which the mainstream media carry the major discourse of international communication on bilateral relations while the diversity of people’s voices, or even connection beyond national borders, emerges. If the aforementioned steps are considered by both researchers and practitioners, it is fair to say that the perceptions of each other is more likely to change toward a better mutual understanding between the worlds’ two most populous countries.
Acknowledgements

The main findings of this study was first presented by Prof. Zhengrong Hu at a colloquium entitled “India, China and the Future of the Media,” which was organized by the Centre for Media and Communication Research, School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University, on 2015 March 13. The authors are grateful to Dr. Waruna Chandrakeerthi Hettiarchchi for his insights into the Indian society.

Funding

The authors received financial support from China’s National Social Science Foundation (project No. 12&ZD017) for the research of this article.

Note

1. They are (1) mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, (4) equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful co-existence. Retrieved from http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18053.shtml.

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