Chapter 1
Perception of Images in India-China Relations

1 Introduction

The images we have implanted in our minds as regards the civilizational connections between India and China are benign. The period has been portrayed as that of splendour, glory and friendship. The "learning from civilisations" rather than Huntington’s thesis of the “clash of civilisations” has dominated the discourse in contemporary India and China. While there is substance in this paradigm, however, there are aberrations too, which have been shunned by both the sides. There is no denying the fact that the circulatory movements of ideas, technology, commodities and people, not only enriched these civilisations, but various other polities in the vicinity too. The connections during the colonial times are mostly looked through the prism of British sources, while these are important, but it is important to look beyond these and one could make a case of continuity of the civilizational cousinhood. In modern and contemporary times too, the narrative is either dominated by evoking friendliness of the ancient times or animosities of the British period and those of the 1950s and 1960s. In the light of this, it is pertinent to have a correct understanding about the civilisational dialogue between India and China, which could be conducive for a better understanding between the two.

2 India-China and the Civilizational Dialogue

In April 2018 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met for an informal summit in Wuhan, I remember President Xi telling Prime Minister Modi through an interpreter that the bronze statue of “antlered crane” that attracted PM Modi’s attention in Wuhan Museum dates back to 433 BC and that it was discovered from the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng of the Spring and Autumn Period. A little later, PM Modi was seeing striking the famous 64 bianzhong or the chime bells
discovered from the same tomb. It is in these bells that the date has been inscribed exactly showing that the artefacts are 2400 years old.

The Spring and Autumn Period was the time when Chinese silk had already entered India. Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* mentions of *kauseyam cinapattasca cinabhumijah* (cocoons and Chinese fabrics are the products of China), the Greek and Roman businessmen sailed to India long time ago and bought Chinese silk in the Indian markets. The line “What characteristics does the moon have, that it perishes and rises again? What is that good thing it has? Isn’t it that rabbit in its belly” in Qu Yuan’s narrative poem *Heaven Questioned* of 4th Century BC is believed to have come from the Indian legend of “rabbit on the moon”. These are the findings of the great Chinese scholar Ji Xianlin on whom the Government of India conferred Padma Bhushan in 2008 for his contribution towards Indology. Professor Ji (Yu and Liu 2014, 515) is of the view that the line “God releasing his disc and decapitating Yin from Yang” of the above poem is the depiction of *Samudra Manthan* story in which Indra decapitates Rahu and Ketu. Now, how many in India and China knows that during the time under reference, the civilizational dialogue between India and China was already in place, and the traces of it could be discovered in the textual tradition of both the countries.

In the same vein, the selection of Mamallapuram or Mahabalipuram, which falls within the district of Kanchipuram, the capital city of the Pallava Dynasty (275–897) also reinforces civilizational linkages between India and China. For example, the first ever reference to Kanchipuram found in the Chinese texts dates back to first century AD. A detailed description of the sea route between China and Kanchipuram, spelled as Huanhzhi (Kanchi), is found in Chinese historian Bangu’s Han Annals (Geng 1990, 6). The reference states:

Huangzhi is big and population huge, and abounds in exotic products…The interpreter, who is a royal official accompanied other assignees to the sea to buy pearls, beryl (vaduriya), precious stones and other exotic products and bartered it with gold and varieties of silks… During the Yuanshi Era of Emperor Ping when Wang Mang executed government affairs, as he wished to show off the brilliance of his majestic virtue, sent rich gifts to the king of Huangzhi, in return Huanzhi sent an embassy along with the present of a live rhinoceros… To the south of Huangzhi lies the country of Sichengbu, (Present day Sri Lanka) it is from here that Han interpreter returned.

Now, what does these records refer to? As pointed out by President Xi (2015, 573) during his UN speech entitled “A new partnership of mutual benefit and a community of shared future” on 28 September 2015 that “We should increase inter-civilisation exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness, and respect for differences. The world is more colourful as a result of its cultural diversity. Diversity breeds exchanges, exchanges create integration, and integration makes progress possible.” It was owing to the interactions between diverse civilizations that integrates these in the process of healthy cooperation and benefits.

First, for example, Buddhism disseminated from India to central Asia and then onward to China, absorbed various components of other local cultures especially Taoism and Confucianism and enriched itself as a religion and philosophy. It emerged as a new entity creating innumerable new images such as Vimalkirti, Guanyin
and Mulian and associated sutra unfamiliar to the Indian Buddhism. Along with Buddhism, travelled various thought systems of India and Central Asian polities such as astronomy, literature, music, languages enriching the knowledge systems of the region. To cite an example, A Dictionary of Buddhism compiled by the Japanese scholars lists more than 35,000 entries of Sanskrit in Chinese language. According to professor Yu (1987, 2):

These entries are not coined by the compiler, but created by various masters through Han, Jin, and Tang dynasties, and added to the Chinese language as a new component. Every vocabulary is a concept and it could be said that 35,000 new concepts have been added to the Chinese language.

In the process of translation, new theories were invented such as “Five Losses” and “Three difficulties” by Dao’ an, “Ten qualifications” and “Eight prerequisites” by Yan Cong, “Five Untranslatable” by Xuanzang, and “Six Cases” by Zan Ning (Yu 2015, 96). In the same vein, the mystery fiction in the Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties had a solid Indian imprint. In the words of Lu Xun (2001, 27):

Since the Wei and Jin Dynasties, with the gradual translation of the Buddhist canons, Tianzhu (Indian) tales also spread to China, the literati loved the mysteries hidden in these stories and used them consciously or unconsciously in their writing, and these gradually became the Chinese products.

Secondly, the technologies such as sugar making, paper manufacturing, steel smelting, silk, porcelain, tea travelled from China to other countries and the world without being patented by anyone. For example, China learned the brown sugar making technique from India, and India in turn the technique of making granulated white sugar from China. Volume 221, Collected biographies of the western regions of the New Tang Annals: Magadha State records says (Deepak, 2018a, b: 289–93):

Emperor Tai Zong (of Tang Dynasty) sends envoys to learn the technique of manufacturing sugar. they were instructed to gather all the sugarcane in Yangzhou, squeeze and extract the liquid from it, and adjust the technique so that it’s colour and taste would be even better than the one from the far West.

Thirdly, the unimpeded flow of the people was instrumental in this exchange, understanding and harmonizing relationship between various polities, especially between India and China. The translation industry, for example, it created in China, had people from India, China and many Central Asian polities. Most importantly, these were the people who were responsible for creating the entire repository of Buddhist literature in China and Northeast Asia, which in fact preserved many of the sutras that have been lost in India. The Kaiyuan Era Catalogue of Buddhist Canons and Zhenyuan, New Buddhist Catalogue records that in a span of 734 years starting from 10th year of the Yongping Era in Han Dynasty (67 A.D.) to the 16th year of Zhenyuan Era in Tang Dynasty (800 A.D.), in all 185 prominent translators translated 2412 sutras running into 7352 fascicles (Jiang 2014: 208–09). The stories of Faxian, Xuanzang and Yi Jing’s travels to Nalanda, and Parmartha, Kumarajiva, Bodhidharma’s to China are known to all; moreover, the biographies and travelogues they
left behind have been instrumental in constructing various historical developments in South Asia.

It would be wrong to argue that all was hunky-dory, there were a few aberrations too. If we look at the Han Annals by Ban Gu, we will find references of regime changes in Jibin kingdom and the killing of Azes II by the Chinese forces (Sen 2004, 3–4). Similar incident happened in Kannauj when Harshvardhan’s usurper Arjuna maltreated Tang envoy Wang Xuance; Wang with the help of Tibetan and Nepalese forces defeated Arjuna and took him as a prisoner along with his entire family to Tang capital Xi’an (Ray 2011, 57; Sen 2004, 23–24). During Zheng He’s voyages in the Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century, there are also incidents of regime changes and kings being taken to China. For example, China’s regime change in Annam (Vietnam), extending Chinese tributary system to Siam (Thailand) and Java prior to Zheng He’s voyages, but the defeat of Palembang (a Srivijaya principality) ruler Chen Zuyi and his decapitation in Nanjing during the first voyage (Hsin 1436, 53), as well as the dethroning of Sinhala king Alagakonara (Hsin 1436, 64–65), and taking him all the way to China in 1411 during the third voyage albeit he was released and sent back the next year are some of the incidents revealing some unpleasant incidents. However, we may also argue that such incidents in the history of two thousand years of exchanges are miniscule. Furthermore, China, perhaps owing to its continental mindset, did not seize territories in the littoral states in Indo-Pacific even though it was in a position to do so. Interestingly, most of the information is found in the Chinese sources, which remains invaluable to reconstruct the history of many ancient polities including India.

Conversely, many people in India have attempted to interpret the imprints of Indian culture on the Chinese culture with some sort of superiority complex, as could be reflected in the statements of some Indian scholars and statesmen thus interpreting these images quite differently. For example, during the Parivartan Parav, a nationwide tourism festival in 2017, one of the Indian ministers said that “If China has been controlled culturally by any country, it is India and this fact was accepted by Hu Shih” (Singh 2017; Hu 1932, italics added). Singh was perhaps referring to a China Daily report of September 2014, where the writer on the eve of President Xi Jinping’s India visit had mentioned that it should not take India 20 centuries to reciprocate the tribute Hu Shi once paid to the relationship between India and China during ancient times. “India conquered and dominated China culturally for 20 centuries without ever having to send a single soldier across her border” was what was quoted in the article. The original quote from Hu Shi’s article titled “Examining China’s problems”《中国问题的一个诊察》is like this: “Rather than sending soldiers, India sent a few missionaries to conquer China culturally.” According to Klyer (2014), “Today China has conquered the hearts and minds of peoples around the world, including [the] Indians.” India perhaps does not appreciate China winning hearts and mind of people across the globe for obvious reasons, as well as the false glory of the ancient times. As a matter of fact, India-China civilizational dialogue has been a two way rather multidimensional dialogue that is proved by the circulatory movement of ideas, people, technologies and commodities between these two and other nations along the various routes of communication, especially the northern, southern and
the maritime silk routes. The spirit of these exchanges has been summarized by President Xi (2014, 345–46, italics added) in, one of his speeches, when he said that “for hundreds of years the spirit embodied by the Silk Road, namely peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefits has passed down through the generations.” He further said that in order to promote the Silk Road spirit, “We need to respect each other’s choice of development path, need to focus on mutually beneficial cooperation, and advocate dialogue and peace.” It could be established from the available historical records that India-China interaction had been a two-way traffic and besides a few aberrations, had promoted this spirit throughout the history. Therefore, the dialogue of the civilizations essentially reflects harmony in diversity or the unity of the opposites as is expounded by the Indian and Chinese philosophy.

3 India-China and the Colonial Connections

It could be discerned that whether the Western civilization represented by the Greeko-Romans or the Oriental civilizations represented by the Islamic, Chinese and Indian cultural systems, there was mutual learning and common development. It was owing to the inclusivism of the Orient that the Indian and Chinese civilisations produced more than 50% of the world GDP and maintained that for around 1700 years since our common era. According to studies by Angus Maddison, in 1000 AD, China produced 22% of total world production, and in 1820, it was 32% (Perez Garcia 2019, 3). However, owing to the Western military conquests and plunder, China had to suffer a century of humiliation and India subjugation of the British for over 200 years.

It is perhaps during the colonial period, that contemporary images of India and China find their foundations. As Qing [Manchu] China became apprehensive of the threat from the British India, she sent officials to study the reasons behind the demise of the Indian civilization. These eyewitness accounts could be found in the writings of Huang Maocai, Ma Jianzhong, Wu Guangpei and Kang Youwei. If Huang Maocai expressed his nostalgia of the “Five Indies”, Ma Jianzhong and Wu Guangpei held Indian people responsible for their own fate, for they called the Indians as ignorant and their government impotent as they were unable to defend themselves against the British colonizers. Indians were treated as “people of a lost century” and “no more than slaves” (Lin 1994, 39; Sen 2017, 264; Deepak 2018a, b, 300–303). A little later, the fugitive official of the Reform Movement, Kang Youwei lamented how tragic is it to be subjugated nation. So much so, Lu Xun despised Rabindranath Tagore as a “poisonous dhatura” and Indian people as “inferior slaves” in a cage (Deepak 2014, 152). In his opinion, colonized India had become a “shadow country”, namely, a defeated country, and therefore, it was impossible for India to produce great writers and works any longer (Liu 2013). Of course, the deployment of Sikh policemen in Shanghai and other places and their involvement in some of the massacres generated
further hatred for the Indians. So much so ‘a’san’ that was used to abuse the Sikhs once upon a time, has become a swear word for the entire Indian people!

Here again, only negativity has been highlighted, whereas there were stories of camaraderie and support and sympathy for each other. The anti-imperialist efflorescence of the Indian and Chinese people manifested in a major way as a challenge to the colonial order for the first time during the First War of Indian Independence (1857–59) in India and the Taiping Uprising (1850–1864) in China, as for the first-time Indian soldiers stationed in China switched over to the Taipings and fought shoulder to shoulder against the imperialists and the Qing government. The reports of Indian soldiers joining the Taiping rebels could be found in the memorials of the Qing army generals or other officials of the throne and with the foreigners who were directly involved in this peasant uprising. (Deepak 2005, 139–149). The memoirs such as *Cheen Mein Terah Maas (Thirteen Months in China)* by Gadadhar Singh (1902), an Indian soldier in China who sympathized with the Boxer Rebellion, are not even known to the people of India and China. This rapprochement continued when more organized struggle for national independence was launched by the Indian and Chinese people.

It was due to the synergy between the cultures and the plight of India and China that the nationalists and revolutionaries of India and China developed deep mutual contacts and friendship amidst their anti-imperialist struggle. They became natural allies and thought various ways to dislodge the imperialists out of their countries. The supporters of Tilak, the leader of militant nationalists, carried out activities like Shivaji’s commemorative meetings as far as Tokyo in order to make the Indian voice of anti-imperialism reach outside India. These activities had active support of the Chinese nationalists such as Zhang Taiyan and Sun Yat-Sen. Sun Yat-Sen developed strong links with various Indian nationalists and revolutionaries and by using his good offices, introduced them to the leading Japanese personages thus enabling them to carry out their anti-British activities unhindered. Nationalists like Surendermohan Bose, Rash Behari Bose, M.N. Roy, Barakatullah, Lala Lajpat Rai and many other outstanding pioneers of Indian freedom movement maintained good contacts and friendship with Sun Yat-Sen (Deepak 2001, 38–58).

Activities of the Ghadr Party that vehemently opposed deployment of Indian troops in China by the British and even joined the Chinese revolution in the 1920s (Deepak 1999, 439–456) went unnoticed as these were the people hounded by the British intelligence. Apart from operating from Japan, the Indian revolutionaries also made China as one of their centres to carry out anti-British activities. Barring a few, most of them were the members of Ghadr Party. Much of the activities were centred around Hankou, the place being the centre of Kuomintang (KMT) government, Shanghai and Hong Kong being the places where Indian settlers including policemen and troops numbered maximum. Their post-Siam-Burma Plan activities find a link with the KMT and the Communist Party of China (CPC). Ghadr support to the Chinese nationalist government and in turn enlisting latter’s support was the direct outcome of the formation of First United Front in China between the KMT and CPC. Their activities came to an abrupt end with the collapse of the United Front in 1927, though some individuals continued to be active until 1931 and 1932.
Gandhi’s arrival at the Indian political scene and his movement of satyagraha and ahimsa generated heated debates in China. Chinese people pronounced him as a symbol of “eastern civilisation.” Chinese media paid utmost attention and widely covered Indian freedom struggle in various newspapers and journals. *Eastern Miscellany* took the lead and introduced Gandhi and Indian freedom movement to the Chinese people. It covered extensively the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920–22 and Civil Disobedience Movement of 1931–34. Roughly from 1905–1948, the *Eastern Miscellany* carried over hundred articles covering different aspects of Indian National Movement. The Chinese people showered both encomiums and criticism on Gandhi when he led the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements. Sun Yat-Sen, however, never approved of his pacifist method of non-violence, for he was of the view that an armed struggle was indispensable for national liberation. Nevertheless, Sun approved of Gandhi’s other pacifist techniques such as non-cooperation and civil disobedience, for he believed, these could be effective in crippling the British economy. Gandhi even suggested these techniques and principle of non-violence to the Chinese people, but came around to the Chinese viewpoint that it cannot be applied to China’s national situation, especially when it was engaged in an armed struggle with the Japanese (Deepak 2001, 87–107).

During the War of Resistance and the Second World War, so long as China suffered at the hands of the Japanese, the reverberations were felt in India too. India dispatched a medical mission to China in 1938. Dr. Kotnis, a doctor of this mission, became a martyr when he died while serving wounded soldiers of the Eighth Route Army and other Chinese people. In 2004, Guo Qinglan, his Chinese wife, wrote her memoirs in Chinese. This author completed the translation in 2006, and when President Hu Jintao visited India, he personally handed the book entitled *My Life with Kotnis* to the relatives of Kotnis. Nehru made the bonds of friendship even stronger when he visited China in 1939. The Chinese people at first supported the Indian viewpoint that it should not join the war unless it was declared free. Later, they asked support from India for the war effort of allied powers, as the whole situation had changed with the formation of India–China–Burma War theatre. President Chiang Kai-Shek (Jiang Jieshi) visited India in 1940 specially to break the ongoing deadlock between the British and the Congress and seek India’s support for China.

**4 Post-independence and Liberation Images**

The images constructed during the colonial times were further underscored by the northern expansion of the British, especially their military expeditions in Tibet which were anticipated by Huang Maocai and others during their visits to the British India. The inheritance of the British obligations in the Himalayan states including Tibet added fuel to the fire. According to Yang (1992, 228; Li 1956, 195), the Chinese believed that once India became free, Tibet would gladly return to the big Chinese family. They believed that India would not inherit the same old British policies in Tibet, the policies under which Indians themselves had suffered. To their surprise,
“self-claimed nationalist country—India” was adhering to and continuing the same imperialist policies. Wang (1998, 55) goes a little further in his criticism and posits that independent India “after annexing more than 560 principalities, sent forces into Kashmir and embarked on expansionism… Since then the bourgeois elite of India stepped on the stage of contemporary Asian history and strived for power and hegemony, and acted as if they were leaders.” Appointment of Captain Sathe as Consul at Kashgar in Xinjiang by the Indian government, the Chinese complain, was made without consulting the Chinese government. On 9 October 1948, the KMT government sent separate communiqués to the governments of India, Pakistan and Great Britain requesting that the Trade Regulations of 1908 should be abolished. “The Indian reply, however, was shocking”. It mainly incorporated two points (Deepak 2005, 108):

Since the establishment of Government of India, the British obligations and rights under existing treaties with Tibet have been devolved to the present government. The relations between India and Tibet would be governed by the Simla Convention of 1914 and its trade regulations. As regards the Trade Regulations of 1908, they have already ceased to exist.

If India had inherited the British legacies, so had China inherited the Mongol and Manchu legacies. If the British were foreign invaders so were the Mongols and Manchus. Mongol expanded their influence to large swaths of territories including Tibet; however, they never directly intervened in the Tibetan domestic affairs. Manchus consolidated their hold on Tibet since 1791 when they drove the Nepalese army out of Tibet. Even now, when China deals with the issue of the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation, it reiterates this history. For instance, on 19 March, 2019, Geng Shuang, the spokesperson of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while responding to the Dalai Lama’s statement that the future Lama could come from a free country, emphasized on rituals and historical conventions on the one hand and the legal instruments such as “Regulations on Religious Affairs and Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas” on the other.

As regards the rituals and conventions, these were laid down by the Qing Emperor Qianlong, once his 170,000 strong Manchu force defeated the Gurkhas in the aftermath of the latter’s invasion of Tibet in 1791. Among these, the most prominent and often quoted by the Chinese is the “29-Article Ordinance for More Effective Governance of Tibet” which stipulated that the Ambans or the Qing imperial resident commissioner in Tibet will enjoy the same status as the Dalai and the Panchen; the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, the Panchen and various Hotogtu Rinpoche must follow the procedure of drawing lots from the golden urn under the supervision of the Ambans and the same must be reported to the imperial court for approval; a new uniform currency bearing title of the emperor was issued; traders were required to carry a passport; all communication with neighbouring states was to be conducted through Ambans. Some of the Chinese scholars, for example, Li Tieh-Tsong in his book The Historical Status of Tibet traces real Chinese sovereignty over Tibet from 1791 contrary to most of the scholars tracing it from Yuan Dynasty (Deepak 2019). Even then, the Chinese sources have mentioned Tibet as a “subsidiary state”
(fushuguo) in their historical records, especially those from the Qing Dynasty, the last dynasty in China. If compared to the British control in the Himalayan states, the Chinese “control” was nominal. Therefore, putting these legacies in the narrative of India and China as nation states was sure to invite trouble, which came not so long after India’s independence and China’s liberation.

4.1 Seizing the Asian Leadership

India was convinced that any allegiance with either bloc might entangle it with unnecessary problems when general attention was called for economic and social upliftment of the country. At the same time, given India’s geographical position and ties with neighbouring countries the leadership of independent India, especially Jawaharlal Nehru (1946) believed that “India is so situated as to form the centre of a group of Asian nations for defence as well as trade and commerce.” It was in this backdrop that the Indian Council of World Affair (ICWA) was given the task to organize a conference of the Asian countries. To the most controversial decision of the working committee of which Nehru was the chairperson was inviting Tibet to the conference as an independent nation. Tibetan delegate, Theiji Sambo made a speech and the Chinese made no attempts to interfere. However, the Chinese launched a protest when they pointed to the map in the conference hall that showed Tibet outside China. Yang (1992, 229) confirms in his study that the flag was lowered and the map altered. Yang maintains that the Tibetan delegation was dispatched upon the instigation of Richardson. Wang (1998, 61) mentions about Nehru’s speech at the conference, and “India’s ulterior motives in Tibet” by giving Tibet same status as other countries like Afghanistan, Nepal and Burma. Noted Irish historian Nicolas Mansergh (1947, 295–306) has noted that China was opposed to India’s cultural leadership in the region and its representatives lost no opportunity of saying that all nations in Asia were equal that there was no question of leadership.

China which had just emerged victorious from the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in which she lost 35 million people found it indigestible to see a poor and backward Asian country like India asserting leadership. Even though India adopted a reconciliatory attitude towards China, however, did punch above its weight as visible from its actions in the region and beyond. India recognized Tibetan autonomy under Chinese suzerainty until the 1954 Agreement Between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region of China and India was signed.

Thus, China all along believed that India wished to find its place on the high table with the United States and Soviet Union; Nehru could not have thought of achieving it without the support of China, a nation that accounted for one-fifth of the world’s population, asserts Wang (1998, 76). He further posits that “Nehru’s friendly attitude towards China died with the demise of the KMT government; he tried to bring China under the fold of a certain Asiatic union with India at its centre, thus enabling Asia
to have someone to speak for it, and meanwhile, enhance his personal as well as national ego.”

India’s “leadership role” was further exposed during the Bandung Afro-Asian Conference where Nehru was the prime mover behind the conference and main sponsor of the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai. Nehru’s intemperateness paved way for Zhou seeking commonalities between the Afro-Asian countries not to seek discord. India’s neutrality and its leadership aspirations were denounced by China, China levelled India as a *double-dealer nationalist country* that harboured the desire to expand outward (Yang 1992, 253, emphasis added). The Tibetan rebellion of 1959 and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India were pronounced as handiwork of India, for according to one statement from China, India “practically wants to turn Tibet into their colony or protectorate” (PRC 1959, 80–97). The hostilities along the border, the Dalai Lama’s flight to India in the aftermath of Tibetan upraising in 1959, and India’s refusal to renew the 1954 agreement on Tibet brought the relationship to a nadir culminating into a brief armed conflict over the Himalayas and then a deep freeze in diplomatic relation for almost three decades.

5 Widening Gap and New Rhetoric

It could be discerned that the territorial aggrandizement of the British and Manchus turned the peaceful Himalayan region into an area of protracted contest and military conflict on the one hand and the formulation of mostly negative images of each other on the other. However, after a period of three decades of deep freeze, and especially after the change of guard in China that initiated the policy of reform and opening up, both reached a consensus that security issues should not hijack normalizations of the relations. As a result, relations were normalized during the 1970s and given political push during Rajiv Gandhi’s China visit in December 1988. Nonetheless, it appears that both were doing adjustments at the tactical level, but the images of the yesteryears were still in their subconsciousness. These not only were manifested in different shapes and forms, but were perhaps rigidified in the backdrop of the conflict that resulted in various other spinoffs including China’s entente cordiale with Pakistan, China’s Belt and Road Initiative that goes through the disputed region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir claimed by India; the overlapping maritime interest in the Indo-Pacific, etc., issues.

5.1 India “Does not Think Big of China” Syndrome

This originates from the “spiritual superiority” of India as witnessed during our civilizational discourse, as well as post-independence infrastructure and industrial superiority of India over China, including the national economy. India inherited a better infrastructure in terms of rail and road, post and telecommunication and even
industries. For example, the first railway line to be built in India was in April 1853, and in China in 1876 during the “Self-strengthening Movement.” When China got rid of the Japanese aggression in 1945, it had 27,000 km of rails comparing India’s 53,596 km. Speaking of infrastructure, even Beijing had no big landmarks except the Russian built Friendship Hotel and the newly constructed Great Hall of the People. There was not much difference in the GDP growth and comprehensive national strength either, albeit China made huge headways in the fields of health, education and social equality. However, India never felt it could learn from China, for she believed she had better political system, a free press and an independent judiciary. Whereas, China was completely an ostracized nation in the West for its poor human right record and political movements it launched to cleanse the society of class enemies, which resulted in the death of millions of its citizens. The destruction of cultural relics, attack on its own historical figures such as Confucius was something Indian people could not have imagined.

Even if China made huge strides in infrastructure, manufacturing, new technologies and successfully built its military industrial complex, etc., India believes that in the long run, it would be its strong democratic institutions that will steer it to success. It is bound to become the third largest economy within a decade’s time, its demographic dividend, resilient private sector, and its spiritual wealth will make it more attractive than China in the times to come. Conversely, as China challenges the US hegemony, its slower growth rate, and increasingly bigger appetite for better life style by its millennial population, will question the legitimacy of the Party, the system and ideology. It is in this context India believes that China should not be too cocky about its achievements in the last 40 years whatsoever great these may be.

5.2 China “Looks Down on India” Syndrome

China on the other hand, owing to its ideological and political compulsions, levelled India as a stooge of the US imperialism and Soviet revisionism and social imperialism once its relationship deteriorated with India. The Chinese aggressive propaganda could be best summarized by a commentary published in the People’s Daily of 10 August 1968. The commentary declared: “The Indian reactionaries had sold out their national interest for aid from the US imperialists and revisionists and were living entirely by begging and borrowing from them.”

After initiating reforms and opening up, China’s economy in the last 40 years took huge strides in every sector. The gap between India and China started to yawn wider in the mid 1990s. Presently, China’s GDP is almost 5 times larger than India. China’s infrastructural development, industrial capacities, health and literacy record is unrivalled in the world, whereas India has lagged far behind, which has questioned the efficiency and efficacy of India’s political system as well as the social structure. The railways which India boasted of once have stagnated at 67,312 km comparing China’s 121,000, excluding the 30,000 km of high speed railways. In the same vein, China ranks first in the world in having constructed state of the art expressway
totalling 150,000 km. China’s Internet consumers in 2018 jumped to 730 million from a mere 420 in 2012; implying that at present around 53% of the Chinese population is wired. This is the group that has revolutionized e-commerce in China. Needless to say, China has maintained its leading position as world’s largest exporter, producer of food grains, steel, coal, electricity, etc.

In the backdrop of the dividends that China reaped from the globalization, the discourses and narratives about India in Chinese media and even academic works portray India in a pessimistic light and see no future for the country in the global arena, as I reported in an article written for *India Today* in 2011. Whereas there is truth in what my Chinese friends have seen and witnessed in India, but it is no more a “dead country” as viewed by Kang Youwei and others in the early twentieth century. In my article which was based on my talks with Chinese people, I had written (Deepak 2011), “The ‘honour’ of having the world’s largest slum is also with India’s commercial capital, Mumbai, that ‘dreams’ of catching up with Shanghai. If India is the world’s ‘largest democracy’, it is also the world’s most illiterate, backward, corrupt and chaotic democracy. Some feel that India is ridden with too many religious and ethnic conflicts, others say that the political system in India has failed to guarantee political and social stability.”

### 5.3 China Seeking Parity for Smaller Nations with India

Yet another element of China “looks down” on India is undermining its size, population, economy and military vis-à-vis smaller nations in its vicinity and seeking parity with some of the nations, particularly its pivot and “all weather friend” Pakistan. It is obvious that as the trust deficit widened in the wake of India-China border conflict, China threw its counterweight in the region to undermine Indian interests, the parity with Pakistan explains it all. It has been admitted by the Chinese think tanks and academicians (Ye 2008, 274–78) that the “mono-dimensional China-Pak relationship is focused at military security cooperation with not an endogenous aim but around external security concern that is to counter India” albeit China has shown greater interest to invest in Pakistan since establishment of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. They further posit that “this kind of cooperation, to a greater extent is due to the long rivalry of both Pakistan and China with India, as India for a long time has been number one enemy of Pakistan, and also poses major threat to the security of western China. Therefore, to keep away the common enemy is a decisive factor in this relationship”. This was demonstrated during the India-Pak conflicts of 1965, 1971, 1999 and even during the Balakot terror camp strikes by India, and more recently when India abrogated the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir. The same has been demonstrated in the areas such as nuclear weapons, entry of India to the NSG and the issue of counterterrorism.
“Look Down and not Thinking Big” Paradigms Are Problematic

Both the “looking down and not thinking big” approaches are problematic, for they see India-China relationship through the prism of enmity. It would be a gross mistake if India-China relationship is put in the binary of friendship and enmity. India may not have performed as good as China in the last 70 years; however, there is consensus among various political parties in India that India will be a key driver of global economic growth, as well as an important pillar of multi-polarity. India believes that its robust economic growth since the economic reforms in the early 1990s and a mature democracy are two pertinent factors that have won it respect and put India in a very advantageous position as far as changes in the global political architecture are concerned. It acknowledges the fact that China adapted better to the period of deep globalization and has raced ahead of India in various developmental indices; however, India has faith in its booming information technology, pharmaceutical sector, young work force and its legal and financial institutions. India also believes that its consumption led economic growth will make it immune to the global financial crisis to some extent as was the case during 2008–09 crisis, and that it will adapt well to re-globalization and protectionism initiated by China and the USA, respectively. Politically, India has always aspired to play a leading role in the world affairs, and this has been demonstrated by its role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Korean crisis, Geneva Conference, Bandung Conference, Colombo Conference and so on and so forth during the Cold War. India believes that crossing of the nuclear threshold in 1998 and its impeccable nuclear record has found resonance among the USA as well as European countries, and the signing of the civil nuclear deal with the USA in 2006 is the testimony of this. India’s steadfast fight against terrorism, both internal and external has again resonated well across the globe and has resulted in various bilateral counter-terrorism dialogues and exercises. Having long been acknowledged as a South Asian giant, India believes this is the time to transcend that role and play a more assertive role in the international order. The post-Covid-19 adjustments in the international order provide her an excellent opportunity to recalibrate its priorities.

Conclusion

It is self-evident that India and China lack mutual understanding owing to the historical baggage they carry. The perceptions and images they have formulated about each other over the period of time are part of the problem. It is owing to these perceptions that “China looks down upon India” and “India doesn’t think big of China”. Both the paradigms are problematic and must be corrected by having a better understanding of history, historical memories and perceptions. The best they could do, especially in the aftermath of the 15 June 2020 bloody clashes at Galwan, is to reset their relationship, identify what is workable and what is not. Channels of communication at
military and foreign affairs levels must remain open, and both must exercise restraint and show sensitivity towards each other’s core interests.

Two areas, where policy can be realigned, are the areas of people-to-people exchange and trade and investment. In this context, I believe, the first ever India-China High Level Mechanism on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges inaugurated on 21 December 2018 by the then Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj and her counterpart and State Councillor Wang Yi in New Delhi is of great significance. The mechanism is product of the consensus reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the unofficial Wuhan Summit in April 2018. The summit marked the rebalancing of India-China relations after a dangerous 73-day military confrontation at Doklam. Equally important is the High-Level Mechanism on Trade and Investment signed between the two countries during the “Chennai Connect” meeting. The Galwan stand-off has certainly derailed these exchange mechanisms; however, these are likely to be reactivated gradually once the disengagement and de-escalation is complete albeit there are going to be riders as far as investment in some sectors including 5G is concerned. Chinese supply chains in the areas such as mobile phone manufacturing clusters, electronics manufacturing, white electrical appliances facilities, automobile, optical fibre industry and solar panel manufacturing are here to stay. This scope is likely to expand and diversify in other areas as China and USA continue to lock horns over issues concerning geopolitics and trade.

One of the areas that demands attention is strengthening and consolidation of Chinese language and China studies in India. If we are thinking of recalibrating our China policy, the same must be long-term, goal oriented and sustainable. Academic collaborations such as work on “mutual translation project” in both countries must be encouraged. The project is likely to be completed in 2021; upon its completion, readers in India will have access to 25 classics, modern and contemporary literary works of China in Hindi. The project not only enhances mutual understanding, but also builds bridges between the scholars, academic institutes and publishing industry of both the countries.

Finally, the people-to-people dialogue must be accompanied by the resolution of thorny issues, which call for abandoning the Cold War mentality and the zero-sum games between the two. Both must negotiate mutual, equal and sustainable security as envisaged in some of the confidence building mechanisms. Both India and China need to be mindful of the fact that the bilateral security boundary is not just limited to the border issue, but has sprawled into various other fields such as maritime, rivers, cybersecurity, counterterrorism etc., non-traditional security. Both must agree that India-China relationship is one of the most important relationships that is capable of shaping the future international order.
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