

INDIA, CHINA: BROTHERS, BROTHERS

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China and India have had an often turbulent relationship. At the state level, strategic and diplomatic relations between the two are fraught with complications, tensions and misgivings that many observers believe are destined to continue for the foreseeable future. The purpose of this paper is to detail the various opportunities for cooperation that stem from the common challenges that China and India face as they continue to develop into major global powers. We argue that the key to successful cooperation will not occur at the intergovernmental level; rather, it will be based upon the building of social and cultural bridges between the Chinese and Indian people.

Despite gloomy predictions about the inevitability of competition between China and India, cooperation between Asia's two emerging powers is possible. It will, however, require a much more concerted effort to bridge the gap in sociocultural understanding that exists between the two countries. While growing economic ties have warmed relations between them, there remains a fundamental lack of appreciation on the part of each country of the underlying cultural and societal norms that define the other—norms that influence each country's perception of its own national interest. We argue that greater appreciation of these elements is critical if China and India are to successfully address issues such as the ongoing border dispute and the mounting trade imbalance. This essay is devoted to exploring avenues for cultural *rapprochement* and analyzing efforts made thus far. It also explores ways to make the process of engagement more effective, not only at the intergovernmental level but also in terms of person-to-person contact. With the remarkable economic resurgence of Asia, especially that of China and India, we contend that it is urgent for each country to gain a more direct and nuanced understanding of the other.

In present and future scenarios, strategic and diplomatic relations between

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China and India are fraught with complications, tensions and misgivings on both sides based upon the historical legacies of relations between the two countries. Much of the mistrust and misgivings emanate from the legacy of the 1962 war between the two countries. The following five decades have seen generations of Indians growing up with an inherent wariness of China and anything Chinese. The public popular imagination in India was fuelled by the oft repeated stories of the “great betrayal” by the supposed ally nation. In the decade after India gained

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its independence from Britain in 1947, there was a lot of popular hope for a strong and mutually beneficial partnership between the two nations. This was reflected in the popular phrase that was chanted by Indian children in the 1950s: “*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*,” literally meaning “Indian-Chinese brothers, brothers”. The general atmosphere of *bonhomie* and friendship was such that most Indians could not imagine the advent of Chinese military aggression on their relatively unguarded northeast frontier. Without going into the details of the 1962 misadventures, it suffices to say that they caused a dent in the national psyche of India, that lurks uncomfortably in the background even today.

Conversely, traditional Chinese perceptions of India as being beset with irreconcilable socioreligious cleavages within an inherently unstable polity with weak leadership that is easily contained through proxies also aggravate tensions between the two. In a changing multipolar global power equation, Beijing could see India’s economic and military rise as prolonging perceived American hegemony in Asia. This may in turn be viewed as a hindrance to China’s establishment of a post-American Sino-centric regional order in the Asia-Pacific.

Realist hardliners contend that Sino-Indian relations will continue to be characterized by competition and tension, interspersed with endless talks and limited cooperation on issues of mutual concern. According to this view, each party will inevitably attempt to employ strategic maneuvers in an effort to prevent the other from gaining an advantage or expanding its spheres of influence.

There was a freezing of diplomatic relations after the 1962 conflagration, which only thawed in 1976 when relations were tentatively restored. From 1976 to the present, the salient feature of bilateral diplomatic negotiations has been the cloak of confidentiality and secrecy maintained by the governments and key nego-

tiators on both sides. By far the most vexing issue has been the demarcation and resolution of the boundary line denoting the border between the two countries. To further complicate the issue, while there appears to be a tacit understanding of mutually respecting a notional Line of Actual Control (LAC) between the two countries, there has been precious little achieved in terms of actually defining this LAC on the ground.

Since the 1976 restoration of diplomatic ties, major high-level exchange visits between the two countries have taken place in 1988, 1993, 1996, 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2010. To the casual observer, this impressive succession of high-level diplomatic and strategic meetings and negotiations over the past few decades might suggest that serious headway has been made in resolving some of these core issues. Nothing could be further from the truth. Under various names, such as the Joint Working Group (JWG), Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and High Level Meetings of Special Representatives, among others, there has been a remarkable exchange of platitudes and avowals of friendship, peace and cooperation—but mostly these have been just words and a façade for the lack of meaningful progress on substantive issues.

In the meantime, trade between China and India has expanded significantly in recent years. To be specific, the trade volume between the two countries was \$1.2 billion in 1995, rising to \$3 billion in 2000 and \$51 billion in 2008.¹ The trade volume in 2010 is estimated to reach \$60 billion. Such a rate of trade growth is encouraging; however, India's trade deficit with China has become an area of concern in Indian business circles.² In 2009, China enjoyed a \$15.9 billion trade surplus.³ Indian industry leaders have successfully lobbied against imports from China and for the adoption of anti-dumping measures.⁴ These mounting tensions reflect an economic relationship that has so far been purely transactional. Yet the influence of trade and business goes beyond making profit. It involves person-to-person exchanges that promote the types of mutual understanding that can create more employment and domestic development in both countries. For example, investment in power plants by Chinese companies such as Shanghai Electric and Dongfeng Electric will supply electricity to 200 million Indians, besides generating employment for thousands of workers in both countries.⁵

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China and India have quite a few basic similarities. Each covers a large geographic territory, possesses a large population, has a substantial agricultural sector and is in the process of transforming from a traditional to modern society. Both are facing challenges such as reducing poverty, increasing access to better health care, as well as improving infrastructure and public governance. As emerging market countries experiencing rapid economic development, both are facing the challenge of maintaining sustainable, balanced and coordinated development. Both are facing the arduous task of sharing the benefit of economic growth with grassroots communities.

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Hence, it stands to reason that the two countries could significantly benefit from drawing insights from and sharing experiences with each other in the fields of public policymaking and policy implementation. For instance, an official delegation headed by Zhang Mao, Chinese vice minister of health, visited India in January 2011 to discuss exchanges and cooperation in the health field.⁶

The president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, has spoken highly of China's experiences in poverty reduction.⁷ According to the World Bank, some 42 percent of the population in India lived below the extreme poverty line in 2005, while extreme poverty in China dropped from 54 percent to 16 percent from 1988 to 2005.⁸ Putting aside diplomatic and strategic differences and tensions, India could certainly take a cue from China in areas such as alleviation of poverty, where China has had some success. Similarly, China may gain a lot from the experience of India in the micromanagement of information technology (IT) companies and the successful outsourcing of such services.

Based on the above analysis, we argue that mutual understanding and trust between China and India will be the basis for solving old security issues like border demarcation and emerging issues like trade deficits and market competition. Kishore Mahbubani commented along these lines in an interview with *Global Times*, saying "mutual trust is more important than signing treaties in Asia."⁹

It is quite ironic that the two countries' understanding of the United States is much greater than their understanding of each other. It is reasonable that both China and India, as developing countries, are eager to learn more from developed countries such as the United States and European nations in areas like technology, management and public governance. While such learning may certainly have advantages, we feel that by no means does this have to be achieved at the cost of meaningful understanding of neighboring countries and civilizations. It is

better that China and India learn directly from each other than through the prism of Western viewpoints. Some Western scholars have a penchant for provocative motifs such as “China and India: who contains who?”¹⁰ This kind of outdated Cold War thinking is no longer relevant or productive and has the potential to be quite harmful to both countries. In many cases, it appears that such analyses and judgments are based exclusively on Western value systems.

Sino-Indian relations are complicated for a variety of historical and geopolitical reasons, but, if approached correctly, they can be managed in a peaceful and constructive manner. Doing so will require that each side engages with full consideration and understanding of the other party’s concerns. As is often true, the resolution of complicated issues takes time. Both China and India are old civilizations; each has its own values, as well as its own logic and way of thinking. Both countries would be better served by making efforts to sincerely understand and accommodate each other’s point of view. Such efforts to promote greater understanding are already underway. For example, a China-India Development Forum was held in Beijing in 2010.¹¹ China also held an Indian Festival in 2010, which included more than sixty performances in thirty-five cities.¹² Premier Wen has proposed the holding of a China-India CEO Forum.¹³ To celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of their establishment of diplomatic relations, 2011 was designated as the Year of China-India Exchange. Each country will invite 500 young people to visit the other in 2011. China will donate \$1 million to rebuild the ancient Indian University of Nalanda in the eastern state of Bihar.¹⁴

In addition to the efforts made at the national level, we feel that substantial and concrete efforts need to be made to promote mutual understanding among ordinary people in both countries. Currently many foreigners—including from the United States, Europe and Australia—work for China’s English-language media such as China Radio International (CRI), China Daily and China Central Television (CCTV) International. If more people from India could work for these media outlets, it could help promote mutual understanding between peoples of the two countries. Such efforts must be undertaken with care in order to be effective. For instance, CRI has a Hindi-language channel broadcasting to India. This broadcast can also be reached at <http://hindi.cri.cn>. But since decisionmakers and intellectuals in India mainly speak English and acquire information from English-language media, the CRI Hindi language channel may not serve to accelerate and

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promote communication between the two countries and the two peoples as much as had been hoped.

We feel that there are two important fields offering broad opportunity for exchange; namely, tourism and education. China is Asia's largest source of outbound tourists.¹⁵ However, India is not as appealing to Chinese tourists in comparison to other destinations. In 2009, only 102,000 Chinese tourists out of the total number of 47.6 million travelled to India.¹⁶ During the first three quarters of 2010, only 141,300 Indian tourists travelled to China, which is lower than

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the number of tourists from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines to China. This means that there is a lot of room for growth in China-India tourism.¹⁷

Similarly, in the field of education, with the rising number of middle-class families in both countries, more high school graduates go overseas for higher education using their own funds. China's education ministry has accredited a list of universities in relevant countries for students' consideration when applying to foreign universities. Surprisingly, no universities in India are on the list.¹⁸ As a result, there are not a large number of Chinese students studying in Indian universities. If Indian universities were on the list, more Chinese students would be encouraged to study there.

Likewise, there are very few Indian students studying in China. In fact, while the rest of the world seems to have taken to learning the Chinese language in a big way, this has yet to catch on in any meaningful manner in India. Hence, we are of the firm opinion that mutual educational and cultural exchanges in many areas have tremendous scope in the future. These are some of the major areas of potential growth where relations between the two countries can definitely be strengthened for mutual benefit.

China's markets for education and tourism development are quite open. In recent years, China has developed a number of models that could be used to promote cooperation and exchange between China and India. Correspondingly, the Indian education and tourism sectors are poised for major expansion and growth. The potential ground for cultural exchanges in particular appears to be very fertile. As one Chinese proverb says, "a trip of a thousand miles starts from the first concrete steps."

We believe that relations between China and India could feasibly expand quickly through exchanges based upon the following concrete steps:

- » Indian universities should hold education expos in major Chinese cities in order to recruit Chinese students, and vice versa;
- » Universities from both countries should jointly create programs in higher education following the model of the Tsinghua and Temple University master of law Program;
- » Each country should grant credit for coursework completed in the other country to promote short-term student exchange programs;
- » India could attract more tourists from China by offering Buddhist travel tours based upon the fact that India is the cradle of Buddhism and China has the largest number of Buddhists in the world;
- » India should develop travel packages targeting secondary school students in China who are interested in IT development in Bangalore;
- » India should host Chinese film festivals, and China should likewise host Indian film festivals;
- » Each country should initiate exchanges in sports and training of athletes in the other country.


Of course, the above list is not comprehensive and merely indicates possibilities. In fact, that many of these initiatives are already underway. We simply wish to highlight the potential and desirability of such proposals to be vigorously pursued by both countries for their mutual benefit, and for the enrichment of the world more broadly.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

China is presently the world's most populous nation, with India poised to overtake it by 2050 according to most projections. Together these two nations house over a fifth of humanity and represent two of the largest markets and most rapidly growing economies on the planet. The trajectory of relations between these two countries thus has direct implications for the rest of the world by the sheer weight of numbers and magnitude of their geography. Despite their public pronouncements of friendship and growing economic interdependence, China and India have made little genuine progress toward the resolution of major issues, including the border dispute and the mounting trade imbalance. Clearly, economic engagement has not been enough to overcome the legacy of distrust that has come to characterize Sino-Indian relations since the border conflict of 1962. We have proposed that what is needed is a fundamental understanding of the cultural and social

makeup of each country by the other.

Failure to foster such an understanding will increase the likelihood of hostile competition for power and domination, which would be unproductive and potentially disastrous for both countries. The regional and global implications of such unhealthy rivalry and competition could be very serious, particularly given that the intra- and interregional balance of power is very delicately poised at present. This balance of power may take a dangerous trajectory if mistrust and competitive ambitions are not kept in check. The nature of interrelationships in an increasingly complex world of globalized interactions and exchanges is such that the rest of the world is keenly observing, if not participating or attempting to participate in steering, the particular trajectory these relationships will take.

Several avenues for cultural *rapprochement* between China and India have been considered here, including knowledge sharing on issues such as poverty alleviation and job creation, more robust tourism between the two countries, and the promotion of educational and cultural exchange programs. Such initiatives will foster engagement not only at the governmental level, but also at the person-to-person, grassroots level. Greater engagement at the grassroots level will increase the likelihood that initiatives to resolve contentious economic or geopolitical issues will have popular support, thereby increasing the chances of their success. Put simply, only when China and India have more in common than just their fast-growing economies will real cooperation be possible. 

NOTES

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⁴ Amitendu Palit, “Wen Jiabao in India: Mission Business” (Brief No. 180, Institute of South Asian Studies, 13 December 2010), 4, <http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/PublicationByCategory.aspx>.

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⁷ “China is Still a Developing Country, Said WB President Robert B. Zoellick,” *What’s On Xiamen*, 9 September 2010, <http://www.whatsonxiamen.com/news14491.html>.

⁸ Thierry Geiger and Sushant P. Rao, *The India Competitiveness Report 2009*, 6, <https://members>.

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¹² Zhonghua renming gonghe guo wenhuabu [Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China], "Yindu jiebinu shi zai chuan chenggong juban" [Closing Ceremony of Indian Festival Held Successfully in Sichuan], 11 November 2010, http://www.ccnt.gov.cn/sjzz/dwzhllj/gnxw/201011/t20101111_84588.html (accessed 25 February 2011).

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¹⁵ "China's Outbound Travelers on the Rise," *China Daily*, 18 January 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2011-01/18/content_11876084.htm (accessed 25 February 2011).

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