

**India and China in Asia: Between Equilibrium and Equations**, edited by Jagannath P. Panda, New York and London: Routledge, 2019, pp. i–xvii + 236, INR 795

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*India and China in Asia: Between Equilibrium and Equations*, edited by Jagannath P. Panda, is a significant contribution among the latest books and volumes on India–China relations. The volume is divided into three parts. The first part largely deals with perceptual dimensions impacting and defining bilateral relations. The second part takes a stock of critical strategic concerns essentially of bilateral nature, such as the possibility of a local war between the two countries, the boundary dispute and the lingering Tibet factor between them. The third part strives to locate relations within the global and regional geopolitical themes.

In his chapter, J. Mohan Malik makes the point that China's 'particular set of the beliefs' (p. 21) has actually 'otherised' India, thereby shaping its policy course towards India. He argues that even though bilateral relations have seen some positive growth, an inherent continuity of perceptual gap persists that predates China's contemporary economic and military rise. He also underscores that China's exceptionalism, and expansionism, displays no spirit of accommodation towards India whose 'historical authenticity' as the nation has been doubted by the Chinese elites (p. 26). Indeed, the same elites view India's democracy as 'a tribal democracy whose long-term existence' is 'far from a certainty' and treat

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India's rise as 'more hype than substance' (p. 26). However, the normative appeal of India's democracy irks them. They view India's potential value in international alliances with concern. The nationalistic fervour, combined with incompatible grand strategies, has led the hawkish voices to push aside the moderates who want to 'manage' relations with India (p. 36). Malik believes that due to the strong continuity in China's negative perception of India, 'the threat of another war' is 'ever present'.

Contradicting Malik, Xu Jian takes an optimistic view in his chapter, arguing that 'as long as the two countries are able to bring border issues under control, alleviate strategic mistrust, and manage third-party factors, Sino-Indian relations would further improve' (p. 66). He backs his assertion by arguing that Chinese diplomacy 'has transcended the concept of "foe or friend" and the set pattern of the zero-sum game and winner-takes-all by making a new way for exchanges among countries' (p. 68). He also maintains that as China has to grapple with misjudgement by the West (p. 73), therefore it would be only in its interest to further improve relations with India. Jagannath P. Panda presents a nuanced view that suggests that the concerns about inherent negativity in China's perceptions about India, as diagnosed by Malik, may not be weighing heavy on India's 'China policy'. Panda recognises that 'China's imminent rise in Asia is in contrast to India's strategic interest in Asia.' However, India has shunned to be part of 'a China-containment policy'. Rather, it has strived to engage 'China's rise positively' and pragmatically.

John W. Garver's analysis of the 'calculus of a Chinese decision for local war with India' is a useful analytical exercise from military perspective planning. Garver elaborates upon his old thesis: whether China would 'punish' India before its advantage over it (India) is eroded?<sup>1</sup> He does not predict any imminent war between India and China. However, he reiterates that although a war with India would run counter to China's scheme for its place in the world and its interest in the current geopolitical situation when it is passing through the worst phase of its relations with the United States (US), a short and geographically limited, yet intense, war with India is still *a bad, but possibly least-bad choice* for China (p. 86). Notably, he finds the competition for regional eminence the most compelling reason for a war with India. He further pushes this logic and identifies the Indian Ocean, possibly the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where China would like to give a military surprise and jolt to India.

Ivan Lidarev applies the theory of territorial disputes as bargaining leverage (TDBL) to explain the lingering significance of the Tibet issue

in India–China relations. His core argument is that China does not have great stakes in the territorial dispute per se with India as the status quo favours it. However, China uses the territorial dispute to extract concessions from India on the Tibet issue. He appears to suggest that the border incursions by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the military stand-offs have been guided by this consideration. It is, however, a bit more complicated than this. Politically, Tibet is firmly under Chinese authority. China’s India-specific concerns with regard to Tibet appears to be limited only to the possibilities of India using the Dalai Lama to strengthen its claims on the McMahon Line as the border in Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, it is difficult to determine what concessions on the Tibet issue China might be looking for by creating tensions on the border.

In a digression from the main course of the edited volume, Tien-Sze Fang has offered a Taiwanese perspective on the India–China boundary dispute. He presents a counterfactual argument as to how a diplomatic quid pro quo of India recognising The Republic of China (ROC) and the Chiang Kai-shek government and in return they recognising the McMahon Line would have impacted the boundary dispute between India and the PRC. This interesting, counterfactual visualisation is based on the fact that ROC, being on the China seat in the United Nations (UN), still ‘had a say on the [McMahon line] issue at that time’ (p. 107). However, any such possibility would have required a reconfiguration of India and the ROC’s foreign policies amidst Cold War politics of that period. Fang’s analysis is certainly helpful as he underlines the evolution of Taiwan’s own position on the McMahon Line, and Arunachal Pradesh, which the ROC theoretically claimed as its own until as late as the late 1980s. He informs that mid-1990s onwards, Taiwan went silent on this issue in keeping with its pragmatic diplomacy. This is in contrast with the non-enforceable yet continuing ROC claims in the South and East China Seas.

Anita Inder Singh is right in recognising that ‘whether India can really balance China in the SCS [South China Sea] is the tough question’ and ‘it is hard to see India as the principal maker of equilibrium in the SCS’ (p. 147). She is forthright in indicating that neither economic nor naval capabilities of India suggest that it can affect balance in the maritime region. Moreover, there are limits to aligning India’s strategic manoeuvre in the SCS with that of the US. Even so, it is the US–China rivalry which will shape the politics in the maritime region than India–China competition.

Namrata Goswami discusses the place of India and China in American geostrategy. India's place got upgraded in the US's geostrategy with India becoming 'the third country in Asia, after Japan and South Korea with the grant of the Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) status' (p. 163) in August 2018. This was in addition to the establishment of 2+2 ministerial dialogue between them and signing of two foundational agreements: Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016; and Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018.<sup>2</sup> This upgrading has run parallel to the sharp deterioration in Sino-US relations during Trump presidency. Goswami has also sought to highlight how the US has finally come to term China as a revisionist power and strategic competitor, the process of which had begun during the Obama presidency only.

Jiang Zhida's chapter enables the readers to grasp the Chinese vision of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The author argues that the BRI smoothen and complements Asia's rise, which otherwise has to confront several challenges, namely, 'political differences, economic disparity and cultural diversity' (p. 189). He further argues that to managing these differences and diversities, a new universal mode of governance is required. In his view, the Western universalism has proved inadequate. He opines that the 'development-oriented initiative [BRI] of regional cooperation proposed by the Chinese government' can work 'as a global governance blueprint intended to help solve issues of development and the current peace deficits' (p. 189), thus emerging as a much more acceptable universalist framework.

Sarmiza Pencea's review of China's engagement with Europe, particularly in the context of the 16+1 cooperation,<sup>3</sup> assists the readers to see the gaps in Zhida's optimism. China's contemporary engagement with Europe, or more precisely European Union (EU), is relatively new. It issued its two position papers in 2003 and 2014, respectively. To begin with, Europe's significance for China had primarily been for science and technology and other learnings. However, in recent years, Europe's importance in Chinese geo-economics has become quite notable, particularly in South and East Europe. The Chongqing–Duisburg railway is a telling example in this regard. This deepening economic presence is not without geopolitical significance. Thus, Pencea highlights the geostrategic concerns the BRI has entailed. She specifically notes India's objection to China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is part of the BRI. She also advises a redesigning of the BRI to

make it more acceptable in Europe and other parts of the world. The redesigning should involve multilateralism, transparency and respect for ‘internationally recognised principles, rules and norms’, *inter alia* (p. 228).

In a regional context, in their chapter, Niklas Swanström and Julian Tucker analyse that ‘the triangular geopolitical relationship between China, India and Russia is complicated, often tense and pertains to a regional version of the more famous trilateral relations between the Soviet Union, the US and China’ (p. 197) in what the authors describe as greater Central Asia. This triangular relationship involves varying degrees of strategic and economic convergence as well as security–strategic mistrust in the three sets of dyads in this triangle. While Russia wants to have China on its side in its struggle against the West, it is suspicious of China’s influence in Central Asia. On the other hand, even though Russia is largely a fence sitter in India–China diplomatic–military rows, China is suspicious of Russia’s potential support for India. Similarly, Russia is wary of India’s closeness with the US and its allies, and India too is no longer certain about Russian support for it in its exigencies.

In conclusion, although the book could certainly have a better classification for chapters, it is a good contribution on the subject of India–China relations, which can be used to update knowledge and perspectives on the subject by scholars engaged in research on India–China relations in their various dimensions and policy makers. Its wide coverage of the topics will attract journalists and students as well.

#### NOTES

1. John W. Garver, ‘This Standoff is China Telling India to Accept Changing Realities’, *South China Morning Post*, 16 July 2017, available at <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2102547/standoff-china-telling-india-accept-changing-realities>, accessed on 23 December 2019.
2. The COMCASA, the LEMOA and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed in 2002, are three of four foundational agreements that the US signs with its allies. It has tailored India-specific versions of these agreements to sign them with India. The fourth one, negotiations on which are still on, is the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).
3. The 16+1 format stands for the China–Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) Summit. This format of cooperation came into being in 2012.

