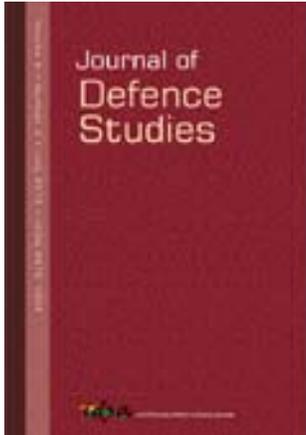


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Enduring Legacy of 1962 Cementing the Conflict of Perceptions in Sino-Indian Ties

*Shruti Pandalai**

Fifty years since the 1962 war, India and China have moved on to become world powers with engagement and competition characterizing their relationship in keeping with the rules of realpolitik. Both sides argue that the past has been forgotten, yet the border dispute remains unresolved. Despite the rapprochement and robust economic engagement undertaken, the relationship has a constant undercurrent of tension and is often described as fragile. This article argues that the 1962 war cemented an enduring discourse of contested perceptions that have woven themselves into the nationalistic narratives in both India and China and are independent of the climate of talks between both the governments. There is a case to make that while India still carries the scars of 1962 psychologically, China has done little to assuage Indian concerns through deeds and actions. In perception, the Chinese often dismiss India as a non-priority in foreign policy agendas and accuse India of being inflexible and playing the victim card. While the war may not factor in the current strategic calculus of either state, it has deepened perceptions of suspicion and mistrust and polarized public opinion over the years.

INTRODUCTION

Five decades after the 1962 war, Sino-Indian relations wear the garb of progress and civility. The road has been rocky. China's meteoric rise and India's gradual ascent in the international world order have thrown up equal opportunities of engagement and rivalry. Yet, 50 years on, the

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territorial dispute remains unresolved. While it is no longer a precondition to Sino-Indian talks, it is a constant reminder of a bitter past and feeds the nationalistic discourse on both sides of the border, taking away from the idea of perceived progress. In medical terms, a doctor's prognosis on the current phase of Sino-Indian relations would be described as 'critical but stable'. So, the question is: 50 years on, are Sino-Indian relations free of the baggage of the 1962 war? Has closer economic engagement changed perceptions? What do the Indians and the Chinese really think of each other? What are the trends in perception over the last 50 years that define the contours of this relationship?

This article will attempt to address these questions and argue that the answers are not heart warming. The 1962 war was much more than a limited act of aggression. It was the product of a history of misperceptions and misjudgements which left an unpleasant aftertaste in Sino-Indian ties. 'It was, in fact, a conflict between two different—sometimes almost diametrically different—world-views, which was externalized and focused on the conflict over territory and border claims and through demonstration of force and the actual use of it.'¹ Both countries are said to have never recovered from the trust deficit after the war. This article will also demonstrate that self-perceptions of both states and their mutual understanding of each other were always at odds with their attempts at laying a strong foundation of political partnership. The interests may have converged but the perceptions never did, even during the best of times.

THE HISTORY OF MISPERCEPTIONS

No political speech from Beijing or New Delhi ever ends without drawing on similarities between the ancient civilizations of China and India and their claims to pre-destined leadership roles and the much-talked about Asian Century in international relations. Yet, the two nations couldn't be more different in their conceptualization of the construct of a nation and its territory. This is perhaps where one can source the earliest discord in perceptions over the boundary dispute in the normative sense.

A majority of scholarship refers to 'ideas of India that emerged out of plural notions of nationalist elite, but these included no single clear definition of India as a unified political community'.² 'The idea of India' was underpinned with a conviction of beliefs about India's

unbroken civilizational unity, superiority and great power destiny that would set an example for the rest of the world.³ There was an absence of sense of geographical territory from ancient India to the medieval times, as definitive control over territory was regarded as secondary to the Hindu conception of kingship; upholding 'dharma' or 'moral duty' was primary. So, in the strategic sense, the perception of territorial consciousness was absent till the British Raj.⁴ It has been argued that this conception is in striking contrast with ancient China where 'the impulse (was) to create a territorial heartland and then to protect it against attacks from the periphery, (which resulted) in turn pushing boundaries of the heartland to incorporate boundaries of the periphery and repeating the cycle to consolidate a territorial state'.⁵ This contrasting perception of territory help in understanding the contested narratives on Tibet, made by both India and China, and will be discussed in greater detail later in the article.

The scope of this article is limited to observing the trends of perceptions of the Sino-Indian relationship and will not repeat the ample observations available on the conversations among the great powers and the two actors in the run-up to the 1962 war. It is however imperative to look at specific historical episodes to infer that the Sino-Indian relationship was always asymmetrical in perception. India always seemed way more invested in China.⁶ Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of Sino-Indian camaraderie, in hindsight, never really existed.

'There were three basic components of Nehru's and his advisers' perceptions about China: paternalism, romanticism and the sense that in principle there was an affinity and mutual need between the two nations.⁷ Nehru's 'ingrained sense of magnanimity'⁸ towards China has been well documented: from recognizing China legally as the People's Republic of China (PRC), when it was most isolated in the international forums, campaigning for China's admission to United Nations (UN), to the concessions made on Tibet or be it India's sympathetic attitude towards China in the negotiations post the Korean War. The actions stemmed from his perception of 'cultivating an India-China friendship as the fulcrum of a rising Asia that could exclude the super powers in the region'.⁹ It was rooted in the political 'idealism of leading by example rather than by force'.¹⁰

In his book, *Discovery of India*, Nehru romanticizes the idea of China, influenced, it is said, by the famous Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who himself was an advocate of Asian solidarity and had come away

greatly impressed after a trip to China. Nehru's visit to China in 1954 and the agreement on the principles of *Panchsheel* and peaceful coexistence 'seemed to Nehru a guarantee against the expansionist chauvinism which had characterized periods of strong Chinese centralist government in the past'.¹¹ So, he took on or assumed the mantle of playing 'big brother' to Zhou Enlai, and introducing him to other leaders of newly independent nations in Asia.¹² A gesture that was neither appreciated nor seen in the same light.

China perceived Nehru's grandiosity as patronizing. It was interpreted as Nehru's 'implicit assumption of superiority' and 'self perception as the indisputable leader of the Third world' and an 'assertion of India's hegemonic aspirations'.¹³ China also did not emphasize the civilizational bonds that Nehru so often spoke about. Yaacov Vertzberger's seminal work, which is a comparative analysis of perceptions of the border conflict, argues that:

Indian culture was never regarded as equal to that of China. Cultural ties among equals do not exist in Chinese-centred thinking. Indian culture was seen as inferior. Mao and Chou Enlai, who had deep cultural pride, obviously did not see eye to eye with Nehru on the comparison of the two cultures. A content analysis shows that while China never referred to India as a 'great culture', Nehru in his speeches in parliament referred to China as a 'great culture' in 17.3 percent of cases.¹⁴

He argues that even tales of Rabindranath Tagore's successful visit to China in 1924 were romanticized and far from reality. The trip within China was seen as a failure since Tagore's philosophy and world view had very few takers, and politically he was identified as a conservative. In fact, radical groups in China held demonstrations against him using banners with motto's reading, 'Drive out the elephant'.¹⁵

One sees similar asymmetry in perceptions when it comes to other issues like legal claims to the disputed border, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, the 1962 war itself, as well as extraneous relations (Indo-United States [US], Sino-Pak) of both actors which have remained constant flashpoints in their troubled history. Adding to this already layered and complicated narrative was India's humiliating defeat in 1962 which was seen as the 'great betrayal', and consequently cemented public perceptions of a deceitful and deceptive China that would always create obstacles in India's rise.¹⁶ China, sticking to its pattern, never assuaged

India's concerns and was almost dismissive in its attitude. It developed its own pre-conceived notions of India, largely negative,¹⁷ which have filtered down into nationalistic narratives over the years. David Malone elaborates:

...an unshakable and largely unprofitable pre-occupation with the past on the Indian side and an equally intense pre-occupation with domestic consolidation in the Chinese side have left the relationship in many aspects undertended.... And there is some asymmetry at play. China is a more neuralgic subject in Indian national debates than India is in China.¹⁸

The next section will elaborate on these specific trends in perception.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: CONFLICTING PERCEPTION TRENDS IN THE SINO-INDIAN RELATIONSHIP

The Sino-Indian Border Dispute

There are two consistent trends in perception on the Indian side vis-à-vis the territorial dispute historically. The first is of India having a stronger legal case from the inception which the Chinese, of course, have refuted. Second, the 1962 war was an act of great betrayal by the Chinese and not a consequence of provocation of India's so-called 'Forward Policy'.

India Had a Much Stronger Historical Case than China

India has always maintained its position of having a stronger legal case on the boundary dispute vis-à-vis China.¹⁹ Here, again, scholars say is evidence of two different schools of thought and perceptions of what constituted *legal*. For India, and more importantly for Nehru, the Chinese argument that the borders that existed in 1947–49 were artificial and reflections of an imperial and colonial phenomenon which need altering was an unacceptable justification to put forth to an already angry Parliament and public which had lashed out on the concessions India made on Tibet by accepting Chinese suzerainty.²⁰ 'After the Indian team on the Sino-Indian joint committee on the subject had presented its findings, Nehru concluded that the reliability and superiority of India's legal claims in both the eastern and western sectors were beyond any doubt.'²¹ In his mind, China's silence after his statement in 1950 regarding the McMahon Line constituting India's north-east border and

absence of disagreement on the existing border during his talks with Zhou Enlai between 1945–56 were open to interpretation as China's 'tacit acceptance of the McMahon line'.²² In most of these discussions, there were general assurances by Zhou Enlai that while 'China considered the McMahon line as a colonial phenomenon, it was willing to accept this line as a defacto frontier'.²³ Unfortunately for India, China later retracted from this position.

China has never formally accepted the McMahon Line. It has argued that 'China–India boundary has never been formally delimited by any mutually accepted treaty. There has existed a boundary line of actual control between the two countries. It took shape on the basis of the extent of each other's administrative jurisdiction over a long course of time.'²⁴ In doing so, it rejected India's claim of administrative writ in the western sector of the border citing that India had no idea of Chinese construction of a road through Aksai Chin in 1957 which meant that the Indian government had little influence and control in the area.²⁵ All treaties cited by India as ratified by the Tibet government were dismissed as illegitimate as then the Chinese takeover of Tibet would be legitimized as conquest of an independent state. Additionally, in their perception, China's silence on the boundary issue was not tacit acceptance but rather holding back for an opportune time to settle the border issue.²⁶ Scholars of the period also believe that China did not care for legal positions taken by India and agreed to the establishment of a joint committee to investigate boundary claims only as a tactic to 'project to Asia and the Third World the image of China as a nation preferring to negotiate'.²⁷ It was these cues that Nehru missed, say scholars in hindsight, which ultimately led to misperceptions which polarized and resulted in the 1962 war.

1962 War Was an Act of China's Great Betrayal, Not Consequence of India's Forward Policy

The Indian Ministry of Defence's 1992 report on the 1962 war (unofficially known as the 'unwritten history' after it was leaked in a newspaper report) in its introduction reads, 'the origins of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict lay in Chinese expansionism and Tibet', implying thereof the principle of self-defence in the much-criticized strategy of Forward Policy and denying any intent of provocation.²⁸ It acknowledges bureaucratic and political miscalculations made by the Indian government, but also elaborates on Chinese aggression that hastened India's 1962 debacle. What comes across in most accounts of the Indian perceptions of the 1962 war is the

'great sense of betrayal' that left Nehru 'a broken man' and came to be seen as a 'watershed' leading to a 'profound metamorphosis in the terms of reference and paradigms governing Indian foreign policy and defence postures'.²⁹ Nehru's vision of Asian solidarity lay shattered and India is said to have lost 'its normative and somewhat idealistic moorings of defence and foreign policy'.³⁰

For Nehru, the 1954 agreement where India recognized China's sovereignty in Tibet, also included formalization of the Panchsheel which, to his mind, amounted to an agreement on the border issue. He thus did not secure a Chinese endorsement on the same, which later cost India the war.³¹ It has been analysed that Nehru's appeasement of China was to demonstrate 'India's strong friendship and non-threatening nature (and) would cause Beijing to find little need to heavily occupy Tibet. Beijing could be induced to repay Indian friendship by abstaining from undertaking a military build-up in Tibet.'³² This perception was yet again not shared by China. Nehru stated in the Parliament, on 10 October 1962:

There has been an amazing cynicism and duplicity on the Chinese side. They preach against Imperialism and act themselves in the old imperialist and expansionist way. Altogether their policy seems to be one of abashed chauvinism. It is curious that acting in self defence they have occupied another 20,000 kms of Indian territory.

This cemented the perception of great betrayal of the 1962 war which has now become part of the nationalistic discourse in India.

In contrast, Chinese scholars argue that 'in defeating India in the battlefield, China had achieved its political goal of teaching India a lesson by demonstrating that if pushed China would use force', something Nehru had perceived as inconceivable rooted in his belief in Panchsheel agreement.³³ Mao's and Zhou Enlai's dislike for Nehru, despite the latter's perception of the strong friendship in Sino-India ties, had been rising from the late 1950s, and they viewed his policy in becoming subservient to 'imperialism, the bourgeoisie and feudalism...Thus, the privilege that India had acquired by its being an ally in the struggle against US imperialism, to have the principles of co-existence applied in its relations with China, was no longer justified.'³⁴ Indian Ambassador, K.P. Fabian, notes that Mao had decided to teach Nehru a lesson after Dalai Lama was given refuge in India in 1959. Consequently, it was Mao who, once again,

‘asserted that Nehru wanted to weaken China by trying to restore the pre-1949 status of Tibet...once Mao said it no one would question it.’³⁵ The rest, as they say, is history. This Chinese ‘paranoia’ on India’s hedging of Tibet is a continued strain of perception that is still prevalent in Sino-Indian ties. The 1962 war cemented these perceptions in the Chinese national discourse.

In India, the strategic community has consistently rejected Neville Maxwell’s thesis that ‘Nehru’s Forward Policy’ provoked Chinese aggression in 1962 as too simplistic an argument. Some scholars have even called it ‘intellectual laziness’ and academic failure to grasp what they call extremely sophisticated Chinese strategic calculation. While a deeper exploration of this perception is beyond the scope of this article, it can be safely argued that the antagonism against Nehru and insecurities on Tibet were the primary causes of the breakdown of political negotiations. J.N. Dixit argues that the ‘Chinese leadership viewed India through a distorted ideological prism.... China’s hostility was not just focussed on the differences of opinion about the Sino-Indian boundary but it also had larger negative political and ideological dimensions.’³⁶

The Conflicting Narratives on Tibet

There is a clear linkage between historical perceptions of the Tibet issue, Chinese misperceptions of India’s abetting of the Tibetan revolution that led to the 1962 war as well as the current posture of both countries on the Tibetan cause and the Dalai Lama. All of these are central to the current negotiations of the boundary dispute. The 1962 war assured that these perceptions were irreversible. Let’s examine how.

First, in the very conceptualization of their discourse on Tibet, the perceptions of China and India differ fundamentally. John Garver has argued that both Indian and Chinese nationalists see Tibet as within their historic sphere of influence.³⁷ The Indian nationalist narrative sees deep attachments with Tibet, both culturally and economically, since the lines of communication from Upper Brahmaputra Valley were more tuned to India than towards China up until the Mughal conquests of the thirteenth century. In contrast, the Chinese national narrative elaborates on how the Yuan and Qing dynasties adopted Tibetan Buddhism as their dynastic religion and developed a close relationship with the Chinese Empire which was very different to the tributary system which characterized its other relationships. This ‘made Tibetans one of the “nationalities” that have long been part of the Chinese state and

today constitute the multi-ethnic, multi-national People's Republic of China'.³⁸

This premise in basic perceptions shaped both India and China's positions during the build up to the 1962 war. Second, for India, the importance of having Tibet as a buffer state against China was not lost. According to diplomatic accounts, there were also misgivings on the Indian side about 'the Chinese government's role in the systematic erosion of a culture deeply influenced by Indian traditions'.³⁹ So, during the spontaneous uprisings in Tibet in 1959, China assumed the worst and blamed India. 'Mao told a meeting of top Chinese leaders that India was doing bad things in Tibet, but that China would temporarily abstain from criticising India's evil actions in order to give India enough rope to hang itself.'⁴⁰ This was followed up with consistent pressure on India to give up claims to Aksai Chin, and accusations of abetting Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations to train Tibetan rebels to revolt against China.⁴¹ Nehru, shocked by China's sudden aggression and no longer able to fight back domestic pressure, also hardened his stand, thus making Tibet an enduring flashpoint in Sino-Indian relations.

Third, Tibet and the hardened postures of both the countries continue to trouble Sino-Indian ties today. There is a case being made that China's unwillingness to solve the border dispute with India is primarily rooted in the theory that

China wants to keep the territorial issue open as a way of keeping India sober regarding Tibet. And the reason China is so obsessed with keeping India sober is rooted in the different Indian and Chinese narratives about Tibet, which Beijing fears might impel India to 'reckless action' regarding Tibet if the territorial conflict no longer weighed heavily on India's calculations.⁴²

This Chinese paranoia of Tibet is often perceived as exasperating by Indian analysts and government officials alike. They claim that India's acceptance of 'One-China' policy despite having an independent relationship with Tibet should assuage Chinese fears. India does not agree with Chinese perceptions that the Tibet issue will be resolved once the Dalai Lama leaves the scene.⁴³ According to Professor Sujit Dutta,

China's continuing suspicion of India, without taking the necessary responsibility toward its citizens, does great disservice to the huge humanitarian role India has played for five decades, bearing the burden of Beijing's policies. By making Tibet a 'core' interest and

calling Arunachal Pradesh 'South Tibet,' China has made the resolution of both its internal problem and the territorial dispute with India even more complex and potentially explosive.⁴⁴

The Role of Extraneous Actors in Sino-Indian Perceptions

There is also a perception that Sino-Indian positions on bilateral flashpoints have been exacerbated by extraneous factors, such as the Indo-US and Sino-Pak relationship, the seeds of which were first planted in build up to the 1962 war.

'The enemy of my enemy is my friend'—this expression perhaps most aptly captures the balance of power relationships that emerged in the build up and the aftermath of the 1962 war. The all-weather friendship that emerged between China and Pakistan as well as the closer alignment of the US–India ties aggravated feelings of vulnerability and perceptions of mutual suspicion on both sides which still haunt the Sino-Indian bilateral relationship. It is ironic that as early as 1955, when Nehru took great pride in introducing Zhou Enlai to world leaders at Bandung (Indonesia), 'China had reportedly reached a strategic understanding with Pakistan founded on the convergent interests vis-à-vis India'.⁴⁵ Here on, Sino-Pakistan entente hurt Indian concerns with: agreements on territory that conceded land to China in Kashmir; they collaborated in arming insurgencies in India's north-east; and China strongly criticized India for the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. China also had been providing 'technical assistance to Pakistani nuclear and missile programmes'.⁴⁶ All of the above-mentioned claims have been well documented. Even though China maintained neutrality in 1999 Kargil conflict and today does not overtly support Pakistan's case in Kashmir, there is a perception that tides might reverse in the future. In addition, China's need to have their communication lines open with Pakistan to clampdown Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang makes the Sino-Pak relationship a permanent irritant in Indian perceptions.⁴⁷

On the other side in the aftermath of the 1962 war, India abandoned the Nehruvian anti-military ethos and used the sinking Sino-Soviet ties to forge a long-term partnership with the then *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) to profitably arm its forces. What followed is commonly known as 'security dilemma behaviour'. China tested a bomb in 1964 and India followed 10 years later. Sino-Indian rapprochement in the early 1990s was never consolidated as when India tested the second nuclear

bomb in 1998, it was hailed as a deterrent against China, with the then Indian defence minister even going on record to make the statement.⁴⁸ For India, the Sino-Pak friendship means 'a potential two-front war threat. If Pakistan stops being a threat, India's relative position vis-a-vis China would improve considerably.'⁴⁹ Many believe that India's perceptions are also conditioned by this sense of vulnerability. 'India has no means of forcing a settlement to the border dispute, yet many of its best military divisions are essentially diverted from the Pakistan front to guard against Chinese revanchism.'⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, in the wake of China's rise in Asia, countries like the US have actively courted India in what is now termed as 'a potential counterweight to Chinese power and regional influence'.⁵¹ This meant that India's fears of 'strategic encirclement by China' were matched by Chinese fears of the US putting together an anti-China coalition in the Asia Pacific. In Garver's assessment, 'Indian strategic alignment with the United States has exacerbated Chinese fears (on India's possible anti-China behaviour in Tibet)... Keeping the border issue open dovetails with China's continuing entente with Pakistan and may even be based on an understanding between Beijing and Islamabad.'⁵² Mutual suspicions have deepened and this has meant hardening of positions and perceptions on the border dispute.

Perceptions of Current Negotiations on the Boundary Dispute

As discussed earlier, there exists a strong perception in India that China has no intention of solving the border dispute and statements emanating from Beijing about leaving the boundary dispute resolution to the 'next generation' are tactics to ensure that India gives ground to the position taken by China in 1962. This has led to some common perceptions on the current state of negotiations.

India Keener on Resolving the Border Dispute, China Deceives with Mere Lip Service

This article's core argument of the asymmetry in perceptions in the Sino-Indian relationship even during the best phases of the bilateral relations comes to fore here. There is a generic acceptance of the view that the Indian side has always pushed for early resolution to the boundary dispute, while the Chinese have underlined the need to increase cooperation and pushed the territorial dispute on the backburner.⁵³ This perception naturally is an extension of the deep-seated psychological baggage of the 1962 war which has led to anxieties regarding cartographic boundaries

in the national psyche, a hostile security environment and the doubled challenge of Sino-Pak threat which troubles policy makers.⁵⁴ So far, close to 37 rounds of boundary talks, perhaps the most laboured in history, are perceived to have achieved very little progress on the ground.⁵⁵ This is combined with the perception of China's increased aggression stemming from its arrogance of great power status which, to Indian analysts, has translated into more assertive position on China's claims to India's state of Arunachal Pradesh, in particular Tawang.

In pressing for talks, the Government in India has had to face public wrath and has been accused of China appeasement and projecting weakness. Mainstream strategic thought in India has been particularly influenced after China's recent behaviour. In 2006, a year after the much touted bilateral friendship reassurances, came the first salvo: the Chinese ambassador's statement that Arunachal Pradesh is part of China, on the eve of the Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to India. What followed was what is now commonly known as China's 'provocative' behaviour. Demands in 2009 to cancel the state visit of India's prime minister to Arunachal Pradesh, anger against India's refusal to stop Dalai Lama's trip to a Buddhist monastery in Tawang and incidents of issuing stapled visas to Indian citizens from the state of Jammu and Kashmir baffled the Indians. China's objection to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan for infrastructure development in Arunachal on the grounds of it being a disputed territory played into India's nationalistic discourse of China's double standards and deception. India contested that by this logic, all the infrastructure build up by the Chinese in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was illegal since the area was in dispute and India never consider the Sino-Pak 1963 border agreement as legitimate.⁵⁶ Further signs of hardening of perceptions came when India stood its ground and declared that 'Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh were core interests'. Professor Sujit Dutta writes:

...the joint statement from (President) Wen's visit (in 2010) does not mention India respecting the 'One China' policy, which recognizes Tibet and Taiwan as integral parts of China. China did want this to be included in the statement, but India countered that was only possible if China acknowledged Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India. Startled, China backed off.⁵⁷

In response to accusations of perceived aggression, China's perceptions are well summed up by a veteran Chinese diplomat and

former ambassador to India: 'China's policy is to have a long-term, stable and overall relationship with India. We don't feel any stress with regard to India, in part because China is militarily stronger.'⁵⁸ This perception of military superiority, however, has not stopped China from studying India's efforts at military modernization. A recent survey claims, 'Chinese analysts also increasingly mention India in articles on various aspects of China's military modernization. Although they have not reached the level of their Indian counterparts of embedding their neighbour in the country's security strategy and calculations, a growing number of analyses on China's military trajectory mention India.'⁵⁹

Economic Interdependence is No Guarantee against Future Conflict

As discussed in the previous sections, the threat perceptions that emerged from the 1962 war have now evolved and acquired complex layers despite efforts at rapprochement and continued economic engagement. The logic of increased economic interdependence that increases cost of conflict also does not hold water in the Sino-Indian bilateral relations, observe analysts. While China has grown to become India's biggest trade partner in the world, the economic interdependence has not reached staggering proportions as compared to that of Sino-US ties. Also looming large is the problem of the growing trade imbalance, played up in India by the media as well as opposition parties, that puts the Indian government in a precarious position. India has been asking China consistently to permit imports from India without non-tariff barriers to correct this deficit. There is significant increase of critique in the Indian discourse (both mass and political) against 'china dumping, cheap and at times poor quality equipment' and even opposition of land acquisition by Chinese companies for projects are cues of growing impatience and discontent.⁶⁰ Issues like Tibet and competition for water and resources only add more fire to this explosive mix. There is a mainstream view in perception that economic interdependence will not be enough to overcome 'fundamental differences arising out of national aspirations (and competition) within the same geographical space'.⁶¹ The China-Japan relationship is cited as evidence, arguing that despite having trade figures running over \$300 billion, China has taken on Japan over issues of sovereignty. Sino-Indian trade figures don't even come close.⁶² So, technically, there is a lot of room for China to manoeuvre. India's failing economic health has only added to this threat perception.

China Does Not See Any Great Power Role for India

It is no big secret then that the asymmetry in perception has always played in favour of China. India has had to bear the cross, not just carrying the psychological scar of 1962 war but also of being told that it suffers from an inferiority complex. Most scholarship analysing Sino-Indian ties have described India's one-sided obsession with China, while observing that the latter never considered India as a foreign policy agenda.⁶³ Chinese diplomat, Cheng Ruisheng, says, 'very few people know there was a border war in 1962 between the two countries, unlike in India where many people have this memory. Common people in China don't know about the 1962 conflict, so usually people do not see any threat from India.'⁶⁴ China's national obsession with the US, Japan and Taiwan is evident from the scholarship devoted to it as compared to only a recent interest in India, that too after the Indo-US nuclear deal.⁶⁵ Some independent observers infer that Chinese diplomats privately still look at India with the same disdain. Garver quotes a Chinese commentary that paints India as a cow which 'is only food for people to raise and for pulling carts; it has no particular talents'.⁶⁶

A research survey published earlier this year on contemporary perceptions of India in Chinese decision-making circles observes:

In the writings and personal accounts analyzed here, most Chinese officials rather tend to portray contemporary India with less enthusiasm and positive wording. The very name of India has often been associated in the world with stereotypes of poverty and dirtiness of a caste-ridden society. This 'Mother Teresa image' many have developed, despite the country's most recent rise to power and wealth, is also very perceptible through the eyes of Chinese diplomats today. Judgemental views of India's dirty landscape, messy and confusing society, and thorny domestic politics are recurrent in the memoirs gathered and translated for this research. Like many outsiders, Chinese scholars and diplomats hardly understand, when visiting India for the first time, how such a visibly-poor country can be rising to the status of an internationally-recognized power.⁶⁷

While the author claims that negative attitudes harboured by China have not affected Beijing's policy of maintaining cordial relations with India, they do explain the perception of disdain China has for India seeking a bigger role in the international world order. China's

reluctance to support India's bid to the UN Security Council (UNSC) and opposition to the proposal of UNSC reforms, grudging acceptance of India's membership at the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO) and *East Asia Summit* (EAS) and warnings to India to stay out of the South China Sea dispute, all are interpreted in this prism.⁶⁸ These factors coupled with Beijing's current aggressive behaviour, it is said, 'has strengthened hardliners in India by legitimising the assumptions on which their worldview is built'.⁶⁹ This hardline view on China is now translating into mainstream mass perception in India with an unprecedented increase in media attention.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION AND THE MEDIA PERCEPTIONS IN STATECRAFT

In the build up to the 1962 war, it is said that Prime Minister Nehru was under sustained political and domestic pressure of not budging an inch on the Indian stand to enter talks without preconditions and was forced to move ahead with the erroneous Forward Policy dogged by internal constraints.⁷⁰ Sixty years hence, despite a period of successful negotiations from post-1990s onwards, the perception of Sino-Indian relationship in the national discourse on both sides of the border seems to be back to square one. 'Ambivalence', 'hesitation' and 'lack of convergence' are some of the descriptions used to describe mutual perceptions of ties.⁷¹ While there is a general consensus on the issue that there is no active Indian constituency advocating a conflict with China, analysts have used opinion polls like the 2010 Pew Global Project to extrapolate that there has been a steady decline in the perception of Chinese as 'favourable' in India between 2005–10, drawing a co-relation of attitudes with increase in perceived Chinese aggression.⁷² The Indian percentage of unfavourable views against China are apparently only behind those of South Korea and Japan, both traditional rivals of Beijing.⁷³

Since 2005, there has been a perceptive increase especially in controversial reportage on Sino-Indian relations in commentaries, but more importantly, on television (TV) in India. It has been observed that 'in the six years since (China Premier) Wen's last visit to the country, the media has spared no effort in documenting putative Chinese perfidy along the disputed border, at sea, and around India's increasingly contested periphery'.⁷⁴ The Indian government is often hauled up for its justification of 'different perceptions of the Line of Actual Control', when questioned

by the media on the increasing number of Chinese incursion reports at India's border. In most TV debates, the Indian government is criticized by both the media and the opposition for being cornered by China and lacking the political will to protect its own territory. Debates on prime-time TV with ultra-nationalist leanings—headlined, for instance, 'China Eating into Indian Territory', 'China's Grand Design' and 'Undeniable proof of China-Pak nexus'—are gaining more takers in public opinion if channel viewership ratings are taken on face value.⁷⁵ While I have argued elsewhere in my work that TV news in India, in its self-appointed role as an opinion maker, does not directly influence long-term foreign policy issues, there is considerable evidence to suggest limited day-to-day impact.⁷⁶ The time factor and sound bite-driven journalism has made diplomacy difficult with views and perceptions sensationalized, and consequently polarizing opinions on either side. While the media is controlled in China, there has been considerable nationalist writing recently, criticizing *Oil and Natural Gas Corporation* (ONGC) Videsh's oil exploration into South China Sea, critique of the Agni-5 missile tests conducted by India and increasing references to '1962'.⁷⁷

In India, with the current government reeling under accusations of misgovernance and corruption and with glum prospects ahead in the 2014 polls, any sway in public opinion is being taken seriously. It is in this light that the government is being seen to be pushing a firmer position on its vital interests. 'There is now a growing consensus within the political class that the earlier policy of appeasement and concessions is not working, and it is necessary to insist on reciprocity in dealing with China on core issues.'⁷⁸

THE ROAD AHEAD: EXPECT NO WARM FUZZY FEELINGS IN SINO-INDIAN TIES

Tying up all the different strains of thoughts and perceptions that have been discussed, it would not be wrong to conclude that mutual perceptions of the Sino-Indian relationship continue to suffer from the repercussions of the 1962 war. The asymmetry in perceptions has, over the years, transformed into a set of world views, largely negative, which from time to time hurt the progress in diplomatic efforts made by both governments. Over the years, narratives of 'China's great betrayal' on the Indian side, and negative perceptions of India as a 'dirty, clumsy poor democracy, with unfounded claims to great power status' on the Chinese

side, have woven themselves into mainstream perception. While India's economic rise in the last few years and current courtship by many countries has given it a sense of confidence, it still carries the psychological scars of 1962, since most of its strategic community is from a generation that still remembers the war. The bilateral relationship is troubled by conflicting narratives on Tibet, extraneous pressures resulting from Sino-Pak and the US–India ties and threat perceptions of strategic encirclement on both sides, all of which can be traced back to the enduring legacy of the 1962 war which cemented feelings of mutual distrust and suspicion. China's new aggression in the territorial dispute, South China Sea and the Indian Ocean region have accelerated Indian fears of back-peddalling on the 2005 agreement which broadly defined the political parameters for the settlement of the boundary dispute. Comparisons are being made to the past when China dishonoured the Panchsheel agreement, much to the shock of Prime Minister Nehru. 'Similarly, Chinese experts still refer to Nehru's unreliable posture on the border issue to argue that India is not a trustworthy bargaining partner nowadays.'⁷⁹ In essence, 1962 continues to haunt Sino-Indian ties irrespective of the climate of talks between the governments.

The recent build up in unfavourable perceptions in public opinion in India, despite deepened economic engagement, has not helped matters. While foreign policy in India for the longest time was the domain of the elite, there has been a case made for a stronger role of public opinion in shaping India's future foreign policy goals, owing to the fragmented nature of the current political landscape. The median vote is outweighed by the marginal vote, which generally comes from the demographic of urban voters who do have an opinion on Indian foreign policy choices.⁸⁰ Public opinion is increasingly being influenced by the media, which has taken a very critical view of the current state of bilateral ties, and consequently put pressure on the government to take more assertive positions. Due to the lack of translation of much of the Chinese literature in English, the exposure to Chinese writing comes only from national dailies funded by the political establishment in China, which repeat mostly ultra-nationalistic narratives. The result has been more polarized opinions and perceptions.

There is a need for both sides to move on. In India, there has been a clamour for release of the 1964 Henderson Brooks report, still classified as top secret document, which documents the follies of the 1962 war. While most of the report is out in the media and other sources, the symbolism

of such an act, it is believed, will help India exorcise the ghost of 1962, perceptually at least. Yet, these are perhaps only cosmetic solutions. I have, in this article, tried to demonstrate that perceptions and ideologies of India and China have clashed during the most optimistic times in their relationship historically and will continue to do so. Both are in a perpetual contest to legitimize their world view and rise to their self-perceived roles as regional powers. 'The interplay between overlapping spheres of influence therefore tends to be perceived as a zero-sum game: intrusion by one player, is automatically perceived as disregard for the other's entitlement and aspirations.'⁸¹ The perceptions sadly, hence have very little scope to converge unless both countries give them enough reasons to do so.

NOTES

1. Vertzberger, Yaacov, 'India's Border Conflict with China: A Perceptual Analysis', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 17, No. 4, October 1982, pp. 607.
2. For more, see Frankel, Francine R., 'Introduction', in Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding (eds), *The India China Relationship: Engagement and Rivalry*, New Delhi: Oxford Unity Press, p. 18.
3. Ibid.
4. Former Indian Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, quoted by Frankel, where he discusses that 'idea of India' was so powerful that it subsumed territorial boundaries.
5. Frankel, 'Introduction', p. 18.
6. Based on the author's reading of all the evidence presented by analysts of the India–China relationship.
7. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 615.
8. F. Frankel, Garver, David Malone, Ram Chandra Guha, and J.N. Dixit.
9. Frankel, 'Introduction', p. 29.
10. Ibid. Also, see J.N. Dixit, Garver.
11. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 617.
12. Frankel, 'Introduction', p. 29.
13. Ibid. Also, see Feng, Huiyun, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision Making: Confucianism, Leadership and War*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 57.
14. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 619.
15. Ibid.
16. Sujit.

17. Shirk, Susan L., 'One-sided Rivalry: China's Perceptions and Policies towards India', in Frankel and Harding, *The India China Relationship*, pp. 75–100. Also, see Egreteau, R. "Are We (Really) Brothers?": Contemporary India as Observed by Chinese Diplomats', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January 2012, available at <http://jas.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/01/19/0021909611429923.abstract>, accessed on 27 July 2012.
18. Malone, David M., *Does the Elephant Dance: Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 129.
19. Vertzberger elaborates, 'The main agreements used by the Indians as evidence were: in the eastern sector—the treaty signed at the Simla Conference and the 1914 correspondence between China and Britain; in the western and central sectors—the Tibet–Ladakh Agreement in 1684, the ratification of the same agreement in 1842, a further reinforcement in an exchange of letters between the Chinese and British governments in 1852 and the fixing of the Aksai Chin border in a letter by the government of British India in 1899.' All of these were rejected by the Chinese as not representative of any agreements of the PRC.
20. Dixit, J.N., *India's Foreign Policy: 1947–2003*, New Delhi: Picus Books, 1998(2003), p. 54.
21. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 608.
22. Ibid., p. 609.
23. Dixit, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 62.
24. Xuecheng, Liu, 'Look Beyond the Sino-Indian Border Dispute', *China Report*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2011, p. 148.
25. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 609.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 610.
28. Prasad, S.N. (ed.), *The Conflict with China 1962*, New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defence (MoD), Government of India, 1992.
29. Dixit, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 56.
30. Ibid., p. 57.
31. Ganguly, Sumit, 'Border Issues, Domestic Integration and International Security', in Frankel and Harding, *The India China Relationship*, p. 109.
32. Garver, John, 'The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute: An Interpretation', *China Report*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2011, p. 104.
33. Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture*, p. 55.
34. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 611.
35. Fabian, K.P., *Diplomacy Indian Style*, New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2012, p. 110.
36. Dixit, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 64.

37. Garver, 'The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute', p. 102.
38. Ibid.
39. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance*, p. 142.
40. Garver, 'The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute', p. 104.
41. Ganguly, 'Border Issues', in Frankel and Harding, *The India China Relationship*, pp. 103–33.
42. Garver, 'The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute', p. 102.
43. Dutta, Sujit, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving posture', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2011, p. 134.
44. Ibid.
45. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance*, p. 129.
46. Ganguly, 'Border Issues', in Frankel and Harding, *The India China Relationship*, pp. 103–33.
47. For a more detailed analysis, see Ibid.
48. ???
49. Dahiya, Rumel and Ashok Behuria (eds), *India's Neighbourhood Challenges in the Next Two Decades*, New Delhi: Pentagon Security International, 2012, p. 72.
50. Joshi, Shashank, 'Why India is Becoming Wearier of China', *Current History*, Vol. 110, No. 753, April 2011, available at http://www.currenthistory.com/pdf_org_files/110_735_156.pdf.
51. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance*, p. 131.
52. Garver, 'The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute', p. 99.
53. Dahiya and Behuria, *India's Neighbourhood Challenges*, p. 61.
54. Ibid.
55. 'So far there have been around 37 rounds of talks at various levels. In the 1980s, the two countries held eight rounds of vice-minister level talks; the Joint Working Group (JWG), instituted after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, has met 15 times; and the special representative mechanism, an outcome of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit in 2003, has held 14 rounds of talks. The last round of special representatives' talks took place in October 2010. All that these talks have managed to achieve are two CBM agreements signed in 1993 and 1996; the exchange of maps in the Central Sector in 2000; and the setting of political parameters for resolving the boundary dispute in 2005' (Ibid., p. 59).
56. Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China', p. 133.
57. Ibid.
58. 'An Interview with Cheng Ruisheng', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 2, 2011, p. 219.

59. Saalman, Lora, 'Between "China Threat Theory" and "Chindia": Chinese Responses to India's Military Modernization', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011, pp. 87–114, available at <http://cjp.oxfordjournals.org/content/4/1/87.full>, accessed on 31 August 2012.
60. Dahiya and Behuria, *India's Neighbourhood Challenges*, pp. 56–9.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. For more, see Susan Shirk and Steven Hoffman in "The India China Relationship: Engagement and Rivalry" (2004) Edited by Francine R Frankel & Harry Harding, pp 109 (pp.103-133) Oxford Unity Press, New Delhi
64. 'An Interview with Cheng Ruisheng', p. 219.
65. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance*, p. 142.
66. Garver, quoted by Shirk, 'One-sided Rivalry', in Frankel and Harding, *The India China Relationship*, p. 79.
67. Egretreau, 'Are We Really Brothers?'
68. Dahiya and Behuria, *India's Neighbourhood Challenges*, pp. 74–5.
69. Ibid.
70. Vertzberger, 'India's Border Conflict with China', p. 624.
71. Hoslag, Jonathan, 'Still Hesitating: Gloomy Perceptions Thwart Sino-Indian Partnership', *Asia Paper*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 8 January 2008, available at [http://www.vub.ac.be/biccs/documents/Holslag,%20Jonathan%20\(2008\),%20India%20China%20Perceptions,%20Asia%20Paper,%20vol.%203%20\(1\)..pdf](http://www.vub.ac.be/biccs/documents/Holslag,%20Jonathan%20(2008),%20India%20China%20Perceptions,%20Asia%20Paper,%20vol.%203%20(1)..pdf).
72. Sujit Dutta elaborates, 'In 2010, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found a steady decline between 2005 and 2010 in the percentage of Indian respondents who viewed China favorably, as Chinese assertiveness steadily grew. It was 56 percent in 2005, 47 percent in 2006, 46 percent in 2007, 2008, as well as 2009, and then fell sharply to 34 percent in 2010. In 2010, the percentage of respondents who viewed China unfavorably had grown to 52 percent, a figure exceeded in Asia by only South Korea, with 56 percent, and by Japan, with 69 percent.' See Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China', p. 134.
73. Ibid.
74. Joshi, 'Why India is Becoming Wearier of China'.
75. Search results which come up when you search for China stories on website of Indian news network, *Times Now*, available at www.timesnow.tv.
76. Pandalai, Shruti, 'Who Sets the Agenda: Does Prime Time Really Pace Policy: The Indian Experience', Upcoming IDSA Monograph series (to be published), 2012.
77. Dahiya and Behuria, *India's Neighbourhood Challenges*, p. 76.

78. Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China', p. 134.
79. Hoslag, 'Still Hesitating'.
80. Kapur, D., 'Public Opinion and Indian Foreign Policy', *India Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3, July–September 2009, p. 290.
81. Ibid.