



INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS: A JOURNEY THROUGH CULTURE AND ECONOMICS

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ABSTRACT

The complex and evolving web of historical, cultural and economic dynamics frames the relationship between India and China. This essay explores the manifold connections that these agents share from cultural exchanges in history to commercial conflicts in the present day. In modern times, the notion of soft power has gained momentum in shaping Sino-Indian relations. In contrast, while China has its Confucius Institutes and cultural diplomacy of course (concentrated on the young generation), what India does with Bollywood, yoga, and spiritual activity is soft power. But this cultural exchange is often eclipsed by the bigger geopolitical competition between them. The economic relationship between India and China has evolved substantially, especially in the last two decades of the twenty-first century. So, the trading of silk and spices has evolved into strong relations with other key industries such as infrastructure, technology, and medication etc. China is already the largest trading partner of India, but there is a significant trade deficit between the two countries. This is subjective based on the truth that, with reference to cultural and economic globalisation, China, besides India, is treating global tendencies from an angle which mirrors each of their lasting distinctiveness in addition to built-in country identification. However, this dynamic depends to a far greater extent upon the exchange of technology and knowledge as well as culture, even if still largely determined by economic relations. Subcontinental South Asia is significantly affected by China and India's links. These two countries are using their economic and cultural diplomacy to gain an upper hand in places like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, etc. The paper concludes with an appraisal of the nexus between cultural diplomacy and strategic realism as well as the simultaneous need for military competition alongside economic interdependence. It also

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projects what Sino-Indian relations look like over the next decades, based on both areas of cooperation and future possibilities for flashpoints.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Economic Interdependence, Soft Power, Geopolitical Competition, Sino-Indian Relations.

INTRODUCTION

By a quirk of destiny, India and China are two great ancient civilisations, whose connections down through the ages have been everywhere in trade, commerce, culture, etc. Both nations in the past were linked by old trade routes like the Silk Road, which also acted as a bridge for not just trading items, however concepts, faiths and cultural values. These interactions over time developed their own cultures and economies, which in many ways made their mark on both societies. From collaboration to competition, this cultural exchange and economic partnership in relation between the two countries played a huge part during current times when both India and China are forcing their way into global politics.

The politics of India-China relations have changed immensely in the present times. Using the soft power tool in its strategic game, China had tried to influence India culturally and economically. China proposes to woo states through soft power diplomacy, which involves cultural and political influence via policies like BRI and establishing Confucius Institutes around the world, including in India. These institutes intend to enhance the study and exposure to the Chinese language, as well as elicit cross-cultural cooperation (through seeding friendship). But India has reacted to China's soft power overtures with circumspection, wary of Chinese strategic intentions in South Asia. In fact, the modern-day relationship between China and India is deeper than ever before--largely on economic grounds, especially in terms of trade and investment. China, which is now India's largest trading partner, has seen commercial exchanges surge in the last two decades.

However, there is a massive imbalance in this trade, with India importing far more goods from China than it exports. The ubiquity of Chinese products in Indian markets, especially in the textile, electronics, and pharmaceutical sectors, raises questions about economic dependence. Despite this, the two nations' economic cooperation is still essential as they are still fighting for supremacy in the global economy. However, the influence of Chinese culture in India now is not as great as it once was. Despite the increasing availability of Chinese technology, films, and educational efforts in India, China's cultural impact remains notably

smaller than its economic one. But India's own cultural exports, like Bollywood films and yoga, have barely taken off in China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

India-China relations have been extensively studied from historical, economic, and cultural perspectives. Scholars have examined the intricate dynamics that shape this bilateral relationship, highlighting the interplay of economic partnerships, strategic rivalries, globalisation, regional impact, and diplomatic approaches. This literature review synthesises key academic works and analyses relevant to these aspects.

India and China's economic ties have been a mix of cooperation and rivalry. Scholars such as Mohan (2019) and Sinha (2021) talk of how commerce has prospered amid geopolitical rivalry, with China as one of India's major trade partners. Still, authors like Singh and Kapoor (2020) refer to India's rising trade deficit and its attempt to curb Chinese goods dependency. Studies also concentrate on investment flows, technological cooperation, and infrastructure projects such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which, according to some researchers, is undermining India's economic and geopolitical clout (Sharma, 2022). The cultural interaction between China and India has historical roots, and one of the key unities is Buddhism. Contemporary globalisation has brought additional cultural contacts through media, education, and tourism (Banerjee, 2018). Nonetheless, economic globalisation has resulted in asymmetric dependencies whereby Chinese exports overshadow the Indian market (Krishnan, 2021). Some scholars point out that though globalisation promotes economic relationships, this does not always equate to political trust (Rao, 2020). Researchers examine the spill-over impacts of India-China relations on South Asia, particularly Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. As much as China has increased its regional influence through economic engagements in BRI, India has continued to have strategic partnerships to balance such influence (Acharya, 2022). Authors such as Gupta (2023) contend that Indo-China rivalry in South Asia has resulted in both development and geopolitical tensions, especially in border regions and maritime security. Diplomatic approaches in Indo-China relations vacillate between realist strategy and cultural diplomacy. According to some authors, soft power programs like yoga diplomacy and Confucius Institutes can increase mutual understanding (Sen, 2020). Yet others believe that realism prevails in policymaking, evidenced in border conflicts and military confrontations (Raghavan, 2021). According to the literature, although cultural diplomacy can ease tensions,

realpolitik dictates the direction. Indian-China relations are predicted differently in the future. The optimists predict greater economic interdependence and multilateral interactions (Mehta, 2023), while pessimists point to potential additional strategic showdowns because of pending border conflicts and shifts in global power (Patil, 2024). Emerging technologies, climate change cooperation, and regional security mechanisms are pointed out by recent research as playing a crucial role in future engagement (Verma, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative research approach, drawing mainly on secondary sources to examine the historical, cultural, and economic aspects of Sino-Indian relations. The study is organised as follows:

Data Collection: The study obtained data from various secondary sources, including -

Academic Journals & Books: Research papers and books written by specialists in India-China relations, international diplomacy, and economic globalisation.

Government & Institutional Reports: Indian Ministry of External Affairs, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, think tanks, e.g., Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Carnegie India, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).

Articles & Editorials: Perspectives from international and national media such as The Hindu, The Times of India, Global Times and The South China Morning Post to understand recent events.

Trade and Economic Statistics: The numbers-based work on Chinese foreign trade on this trade alongside other work from the World Bank, IMF and WTO, on measures of economic patterns between China and India.

Data Analysis

Historical Analysis: Reading history books and old research papers on culture and economic relations between China and India.

Thematic Roll-up: Organising the findings into high-level themed buckets—soft power, economic interdependence, geopolitical strain, and regional diplomacy.

Comparative Perspective: Exploring how China and India project their influence abroad and in South Asia through economic and cultural diplomacy.

Prediction of Future Events: Trend analysis: Emerging Economic Trends and Foreign Policy Trends in Sino-Indian Relationship.

Limitations

Analysing Secondary Data: The study had not been triangulated with primary data collection, such as interviews or field surveys, so it relied on the authenticity of the existing literature.

Types of Bias: Readily available stories from both governmental and reporting bodies may be biased toward national interests, so readers need to cross-check.

STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS AND RIVALRIES

India and China: A complex relationship | The Economist. Their economic relations have been driven by the two countries' common interest in trade and investment. China features among India's top commercial partners, and the two countries collaborate in multilateral institutions, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. The uneven nature of economic relations adds to the tension, as, of course, India has large trade deficits.

China and India's economic competition is a result of their conflicting geopolitical goals. India regards China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with distrust, perceiving it as an attempt by Beijing to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean area and South Asia. In response, India has worked to fortify its own regional alliances by taking part in the Quad alliance and implementing programs like the "Act East" strategy. Tensions are further heightened by rivalry for energy resources, infrastructural development, and influence in international organisations. Therefore, even if China and India have a great deal of economic cooperation, their economic contacts are shaped by an underlying strategic rivalry that is a part of a larger struggle for regional domination.

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION

Their relationship in the last few decades has been greatly influenced by this. In addition to economic interdependence, globalisation also involves the sharing of cultural norms, beliefs,

and social behaviour, which promotes international contact. Globalisation, both economic and cultural, has affected the dynamics between China and India in this regard, resulting in both rivalry and collaboration.

Economic Globalisation: It has spurred massive trade & investment between China and India. Globalisation is a significant reason for the mergers of economic activities on both local and global levels, with respect to China and India, pivotal in the realignment of international markets. Since those days, bilateral commerce has expanded by leaps and bounds, with China now standing as one of India's top trading partners. But the relationship is lop-sided, with India mostly exporting raw materials to China and getting back finished products. This trade imbalance has led to tensions, as India is concerned with its increasing trade deficit with China. Economic Globalisation as competition Of Economic Opponents, thus For Existing Economies in Infrastructure and Industry. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an excellent de facto example of the globalisation that has helped bolster China's economic power in various parts throughout Asia, traditionally dominated by India. In reaction to it, India has enhanced its role in international organisations like BRICS and taken a few regional trade developments of its own, such as the INSTC, etc. Both countries have seen the globalisation of their industries as well. The two economies have become increasingly interconnected as a result of Chinese investments in Indian startups and industries like e-commerce, telecommunications, and technology. Large Chinese companies, like Xiaomi and Alibaba, have made considerable inroads into India, demonstrating the growing significance of foreign investment as a crucial component of globalisation.

Cultural Globalisation: Globalisation encompasses not just economic exchanges but also the movement of ideas, values, and cultures. Though it has increased recently, cultural globalisation between China and India has been less extensive than economic globalisation. Since Buddhism expanded widely, India and China have historically had close cultural ties—Scholte sees this as an early example of cultural globalisation. Though they are still small in comparison to other places, cultural contacts have continued in the modern setting.

The growing appeal of Bollywood movies in China is a notable illustration of the globalisation of culture. Chinese viewers have a strong affinity for Indian cinema, especially for films with family-friendly and socially conscious themes. This cultural bridge has contributed to the development of a favourable perception of India in China, demonstrating the ways in which cultural globalisation may support diplomacy and soft power. On the other

hand, Chinese culture has had less of an impact in India. But at Indian institutions, there has been a rising interest in Mandarin language instruction and Chinese cultural customs, indicating a modest but significant interchange of cultural influence. Though not as quickly as commercial links, educational exchanges, tourism, and cooperation in industries like science and technology are also expanding.

Influence on Relations: Economic globalisation has boosted investment and commerce between China and India, but it has also created rivalry, especially in the areas of geopolitical influence and regional supremacy. Though beneficial, cultural globalisation has not yet advanced to the point where it can lessen political and economic conflicts between the two countries. According to Scholte's (2005) multifaceted perspective, globalisation may foster tighter ties between nations, but it can also exacerbate rivalry when geopolitical and economic objectives diverge. Therefore, the dynamics of globalisation—both economic and cultural—have moulded India-China ties in a variety of intricate ways. Opportunities for economic collaboration have been brought about by globalisation, but it has also increased rivalry, especially in trade and regional influence. Cultural globalisation has a smaller but increasing impact on how people view each other.

IMPACT OF INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS ON SOUTH ASIA

The geopolitical environment of South Asia has been significantly impacted by India-China ties, as both countries aim to increase their influence in the area. China's growing influence across South Asia, particularly through economic investments and geopolitical alliances, has unnerved India, which considers the region to be within its sphere of influence. This dynamic has been profoundly influenced by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, transforming countries along the BRI, like Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, into key players in Chinese-led infrastructure endeavours. Therefore, the friction between China and India has been intensified, as China feels that the China-U.S. competition is surrounding China, while India feels that China's strategic actions have surrounded India.

China's partnership with Pakistan is the major impediment to India's power in South Asia, as seen in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India's security concerns have grown over China and Pakistan's deepening military and economic ties, particularly in connection with the disputed territory of Kashmir. More than anything else, India has become more assertive and aggressive in its foreign policy across the region, largely because India

believes that these occurrences undermine its own security and strategic interests. Consequently, India has taken steps to balance against Chinese influence through infrastructure projects and has strengthened its own regional relationships, most notable with Bhutan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and India's "Neighbourhood First" doctrine aim to consolidate its status as a hegemonic regional power.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY V. STRATEGIC REALISM

Two opposing perspectives may be used to analyse the relationship between China and India: strategic realism and cultural diplomacy. India and China may interact more softly and non-confrontationally by using cultural diplomacy. In cultural diplomacy, ideas, artwork, and ideals are exchanged to enhance understanding between people. India and China have strengthened their cultural links via the employment of Bollywood films, yoga, and educational exchanges, among other things. China has also undertaken similar, albeit smaller-scale, activities. By fostering interpersonal relationships, this type of diplomacy may be able to reduce strategic conflicts. Cultural endeavours are frequently eclipsed by underlying geopolitical rivalry. The foundation of India-China relations is still the fight for power and influence in the area, where strategic considerations and security considerations trump soft power initiatives, even though cultural diplomacy helps to improve perceptions.

FUTURE OF INDO-SINO RELATION

Mutual mistrust and strategic competitiveness are likely to continue to define India-China relations. There will inevitably be conflict between these two rising countries since their respective domains of influence in Asia intersect. The likelihood of a cooperative future is dubious due to border issues, especially in the Himalayas, and India's expanding alliance with the United States. According to Miller, India's regional supremacy is directly challenged by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its connections with Pakistan, especially through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

China and India are both significant actors in global governance and have similar goals in reorganising international organisations like the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations. Acharya highlights the value of international platforms where China and India work together on problems, including trade, counterterrorism, and climate change, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS. Despite their geopolitical rivalry,

both nations could cooperate in several sectors. Depending on how both countries manage their interests, the future of Indo-Sino relations is likely to be a delicate balance between collaboration and rivalry, with the potential for both conflict and positive engagement.

CONCLUSION

Over years of exchange and engagement, between India and China has shaped the basis of their relationship today—a multifaceted interplay driven by soft power diplomacy efforts, economic ties and geopolitical competition. Traditions in trade and Buddhism used to be a basis for dialogue. But their exchanges are marked by outreach attempts, geopolitical conflict and economic friction. Despite the strong business ties, tensions between the two countries have deepened, driven by rising trade frictions along with geopolitical issues like the long-standing border disputes. China has deep eyes on the Belt and Road Initiative, extending its reach in South Asia, and India's growing presence in the region. Competition for influence has become hot now.

Long-term relations between the two nations will be created through strength in dialogue, tackling imbalances, and reaching agreements on large regions. There is room to enhance understanding and strengthen ties between the two nations, particularly through agreements of cooperation, but also by promoting relations between the two peoples in areas such as education, culture and sport. Larger cooperation can include working on concerns such as infrastructure development, technology advancements and climate change mitigation. Prioritising the more collaborative aspects and addressing security issues could lead to a more mutually beneficial partnership that advances the interests of both countries and the broader region.

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