

China-India Relations: A Complex Bilateral Equation - Explore the Historical, Economic, and Geopolitical Dimensions of the Relationship Between India and China, Focusing on Areas of Cooperation and Conflict

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Abstract:

The bilateral relationship between India and China stands as a complex interplay of historical, economic, and geopolitical factors, showcasing a dynamic spectrum of cooperation and conflict. This paper delves into the historical roots of this intricate relationship, spanning centuries of cultural and trade interactions. The economic dimensions, characterized by burgeoning trade ties and competition for regional dominance, are explored to unveil the intricate economic dynamics between the two Asian giants. The geopolitical landscape is dissected, shedding light on territorial disputes, strategic alliances, and the quest for influence in the broader Asian context. While areas of cooperation, such as trade partnerships and multilateral engagements, have been instrumental in fostering mutual growth, territorial disputes, military standoffs, and strategic rivalries have added a layer of tension. This analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of China-India relations, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities that define this critical geopolitical dyad.

Keywords: China, India, bilateral relations, historical ties, economic cooperation, geopolitical dimensions, territorial disputes, trade dynamics, regional influence, strategic rivalry.

1. Introduction:

1.1 Background:

With centuries of cultural, diplomatic, and economic interactions under their belt, China and India have a rich historical context. As ancient civilizations, both countries have a history of intellectual and commercial exchanges along the Silk Road. (Pulami, 2022) However the modern partnership has been characterized by a nuanced interaction between cooperation and conflict. Following their liberation from colonial authority in the middle of the 20th century, China and India became sovereign countries and entered the post-colonial era. These two densely populated countries, each with its own distinct socio-political structure, emerged at the same time, laying the groundwork for a partnership that would prove vital to both the participating countries and the larger world order.

1.2 Significance of China-India Relations:

The geopolitical importance, economic potential, and combined population weight of China and India make their interactions significant. Since they collectively make up more than one-third of the world's population, their cooperation is essential to the stability and growth of the entire world. (Hashemi et al., 2022) Furthermore, both countries' economic development has made them significant actors in the global economy, giving them the ability to influence trade, technology, and political dynamics in the future. Beyond their boundaries, these two countries interact, affecting regional and international politics. China and India work together on a variety of topics, from economic development to security, as members of organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The collaborative nature of this component highlights the possibility of constructive participation. (Hashemi et al., 2022)

But their relationships have also become somewhat more complicated as a result of the historical background. Tension remains because of territorial disputes along their shared border, which arose from the 1962 Sino-Indian War. These Asian superpowers' geopolitical rivalry affects not just their local neighborhood but also the distribution of power throughout the larger Indo-Pacific area. (Ransome, 2022) The pursuit of economic modernization and growth by both nations has led to a multifaceted relationship between them, encompassing trade ties, technology collaborations, and strategic alliances. This relationship's dynamic evolution in the twenty-first century is a reflection of how world politics are developing. (Ransome, 2022)

The history of China-India relations is rich, as both countries have had to overcome the difficulties of contemporary statehood. (taylorfrancis.com, 2020) With their combined economic might, geopolitical clout, and substantial demographic influence, the importance of their partnership cannot be emphasized. The historical, economic, and geopolitical aspects will be examined in detail in the ensuing sections, along with areas of agreement and disagreement that contribute to the complex fabric of relations between China and India.

2. Literature Review:

A great deal of scholarly research has been done on the intricate relationship between China and India, which reflects the complexity of their interactions. A broad range of academic fields, including international relations, political science, economics, and history, are covered in the literature on China-India relations. (Denisov et al., 2020) Scholars have endeavored to comprehend the historical foundations, economic intricacies, and geopolitical aspects that mold this pivotal bilateral association. (iiss.org, 2021) In order to understand the origins of current challenges, scholars frequently examine historical viewpoints on China-India relations. Many scholars have focused on the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian War, specifically analyzing how this conflict affected the development of diplomatic relations and strategic positions between the two countries. Understanding historical relationships, commercial routes, and cultural exchanges has also been essential. (Denisov et al., 2020)

The literature heavily emphasizes economic factors, with researchers examining investment flows, trading patterns, and economic cooperation. Interest in comprehending the rivalries and complementarities that characterize China's and India's economic relationship has increased with both countries' ascent to prominence in the world economy. Many topics are covered, including trade imbalances, technological transfers, and the influence of multilateral organizations like BRICS and SCO on economic cooperation. (iiss.org, 2021)

One recurring issue in the literature is the geopolitical aspects of the relationship between China and India. Scholars examine the strategic significance of the area, the influence of their dominance on adjacent nations, and the wider consequences for international politics. (taylorfrancis.com, 2020) Scholars also concentrate on areas of conflict, even when areas of collaboration, such cultural exchanges and diplomatic initiatives, have been recognized. (Chadha, 2023) Topics that garner attention include territorial disputes, water-sharing agreements, and the strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean. These issues shed light on the difficulties that both countries confront in managing their relationship. (Chadha, 2023)

3. Historical Perspectives

3.1 Ancient Relations

China and India have a long history of philosophical, commercial, and cultural exchanges that dates back thousands of years. (Chadha, 2023) This communication was made possible by the Silk Road, which promoted the trade of goods, concepts, and religious views. Silk, spices, and other goods were easily transported between the two civilizations because to the old trading routes. Thoughts from philosophy, especially Buddhism, made their way over the Himalayas and impacted both communities. The mutual respect and cooperation that characterize this partnership were established by the historical links. (Chadha, 2023)

3.2. Post-Independence Era

When China and India became independent countries in the middle of the 20th century, it was known as the post-independence era. After overcoming the obstacles left by colonial legacies, both nations set out on nation-building missions. Diplomatic contact took place in the early years, with leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai imagining cooperation among recently liberated states. But the alliance started to suffer from ideological disagreements that were exacerbated by geographical tensions.

3.3 Sino-Indian War of 1962

An important turning point in the contemporary history of China-India relations was the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The fight, which was brought on by boundary disputes, was decisively won by China and had a long-lasting effect on relations between the two countries. In addition to changing the region's geopolitical environment, the war added a climate of distrust and territorial conflict that influenced subsequent relations. (Denisov et al., 2020)

3.4 Border Conflicts

A persistent issue in China-India ties has been territorial conflicts. The Line of Actual Control (LAC), an undefined border, has been a point of dispute and a recurring source of conflict. Unresolved border disputes have exacerbated military standoffs and diplomatic squabbling, especially in areas like Aksai Chin. (Huỳnh, 2022) Although talks and negotiations have been conducted in an attempt to reach a permanent resolution, the intricacy of the border issues remains a major influence on the nature of the relationship as a whole. (Huỳnh, 2022)

4. Economic Dimensions:

- **Commerce Relations:** China-Indian relations' economic aspects are marked by a combination of cooperation and rivalry. Over the past few decades, there has been a noticeable increase in trade links

between the two countries. (bruegel.org, 2022) China is now among India's top trading partners, with significant volumes of commerce occurring between the two countries. India has been concerned about the trade balance, though, because it has always had a trade deficit with China. Although there are many facets to the trade relationship, including the interchange of products and services, imbalances and problems with market access have presented difficulties. (bruegel.org, 2022)

- **Cooperation in the Economy and Investment:** Beyond commerce, both countries participate in joint ventures and investment activities that constitute economic cooperation. China has increased its investments in India's manufacturing, technological, and infrastructure sectors, which has boosted the country's economy and created jobs. In a similar vein, Indian businesses have looked for chances in the Chinese market, especially in industries like medicines and information technology. (bruegel.org, 2022) China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) presents further opportunities for economic cooperation, but India's misgivings about the project have limited the extent of their involvement. (bruegel.org, 2022)
- **Competing Economies:** Two of the most populous countries in the world, China and India, both have quickly expanding economies. (ignited.in, 2021) They do, however, adhere to different economic paradigms. India has placed more emphasis on services, technology, and a consumer-driven economy, while China has established itself as the global factory thanks to its export-led development and manufacturing expertise. Their economic relations are made more complex by the struggle between these economic models and geopolitical issues. Both countries want to dominate the world economy, and their respective economic paths have an impact on the distribution of power internationally. (ignited.in, 2021)
- **Dynamics of the Regional and Global Economy:** In the dynamics of the regional and global economies, China and India are important players. They work together on topics like trade facilitation, financial cooperation, and economic development as members of organizations like BRICS and SCO. Both countries support multipolarity and work to improve the representation of emerging economies' interests in international financial institutions through reforms. Global trade patterns, commodity prices, and investment flows are all impacted by China's and India's economic policies and actions.

Even while economic cooperation has been important, problems still exist. Economic connections are influenced by trade imbalances, geopolitical concerns, and worries over market access. The dynamic nature of China-India relations' economic aspects is reflected in the larger changes to the world economy.

5. Geopolitical Consideration:

A crucial component of the intricate connection between China and India is geopolitical factors, which influence not only the two countries but also the larger dynamics of the Indo-Pacific area. The region, which is strategically significant due to the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean, emphasizes how important China-India relations are in establishing the balance of power. Both countries compete with one another for influence and power as rising global powers, both locally and globally. India is concerned about China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea and its plans to expand its maritime borders, particularly with reference to India's own maritime security. China and India are engaged in a strategic struggle in the Indian Ocean, a crucial geopolitical theater. (ispionline.it, 2022) China wants to secure sea lanes for its energy supply, while India wants to preserve its dominance in the region. Their geopolitical engagements are made more complex by this marine component, which takes into account factors like strategic alliances, infrastructure development in littoral states, and naval capability. (ignited.in, 2021)

The geopolitical importance of both countries is enhanced by their participation in international organizations. Often viewed as a vehicle for geopolitical influence, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a classic illustration of its efforts to expand its economic and strategic reach abroad. To strengthen its diplomatic position, India, on the other hand, has sought strategic alliances with nations that also worry about China's ambition. With the help of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, both countries have venues to influence regional and international agendas that represent their respective geopolitical goals.

Geopolitical terrain is further influenced by military postures. The ongoing border conflicts, especially in areas like Aksai Chin, have led to recurring standoffs and affected both countries' security assessments. awareness the geopolitical elements that influence the China-India relationship requires an awareness of military prowess, nuclear arsenals, and regional power dynamics. The Galwan Valley conflict in 2020 and the Doklam stalemate in 2017 serve as warnings that military tensions can rise and have an international impact. (jstor.org, 2020)

6. Areas of Cooperation

China and India collaborate in a number of areas that go beyond the intricacies of their respective geopolitical environments. Their cooperation in groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) shows the potential for group initiatives to shape economic and global governance. As significant growing economies, both countries have a stake in promoting multipolarity and changes to international organizations. They collaborate on topics like counterterrorism, economic development, and regional stability within these frameworks, demonstrating a shared commitment to tackling shared problems. (ispionline.it, 2022)

Another important area of agreement between China and India is climate change and environmental activities. Being the two largest and fastest-growing economies in the world, both countries understand how important it is to preserve the environment and pursue sustainable growth. In order to mitigate the global impact of climate change, collaborative measures to cut carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and address environmental deterioration are appropriate. (Paul, 2018) Platforms that are bilateral or multilateral offer forums for discussion and cooperative efforts to promote environmentally friendly behaviors and guarantee a more sustainable future. A major factor in closing the social and historical divide between China and India is cultural contacts. An appreciation and understanding of one another is based on a shared cultural history that dates back to ancient civilizations. Through cultural exchange programs, art exhibitions, and educational efforts, people can interact with one another regardless of political disagreements. These interactions help to foster mutual trust and goodwill between the peoples of the two countries in addition to raising cultural awareness. (Paul, 2018)

People-to-people diplomacy, which highlights the value of grassroots ties, becomes a fundamental feature of China-Indian relations. Deeper understanding and respect of one another's societies are fostered through educational exchanges, travel, and interpersonal contact. (Ransome, 2022) People-to-people diplomacy is a vital tool for dispelling preconceptions and creating long-lasting connections that transcend geopolitical concerns by enabling direct communication amongst citizens. It establishes the foundation for China and India's relationship to become more robust and cooperative. (ignited.in, 2021)

7. Diplomatic Relations:

The combination of high-level summits, track II diplomacy, initiatives, resolutions, and crisis management techniques characterizes the diplomatic ties between China and India. The leadership of the two countries meet and summits on a bilateral basis, which are important for discussing important topics and promoting understanding. Leaders get the chance to discuss controversial topics, have strategic conversations, and look for ways to work together during these gatherings. Bilateral summits have grown in importance as a means of establishing the general tone of diplomatic ties. (Subramanian, 2022) Track II diplomacy complements official channels in promoting communication and establishing confidence. Unofficial diplomatic initiatives are carried out by think tanks, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations from both countries. This offers a more flexible and informal forum for discussions. (Ransome, 2022) Through open and honest discussion, Track II diplomacy frequently promotes a deeper comprehension of one another's viewpoints and issues. In times of diplomatic strain, these initiatives play a critical role in laying the groundwork for formal negotiations and creating bridges. (Subramanian, 2022) In order to address enduring problems and promote collaboration across a range of areas, diplomatic initiatives and resolutions are crucial parts of China-India relations. In order to influence international agendas and policies, both countries actively participate in international conferences and organizations. These diplomatic endeavors, which range from trade agreements to climate change accords, demonstrate a shared commitment to identifying points of consensus on matters of regional and international importance. (Subramanian, 2022) Joint resolutions show that China and India can work together diplomatically even on issues where their interests may not coincide. A crucial component of diplomatic relations is crisis management, especially in light of past tensions and sporadic outbursts. Crisis management procedures are essential for averting situations that can escalate and result in confrontations. The Doklam stalemate in 2017 and the conflict in the Galwan Valley in 2020 brought attention to how crucial it is for the two countries to manage crises well. As diplomatic tools for managing and defusing tensions, hotlines, border personnel meetings, and established protocols highlight the need for coordinated efforts and unambiguous communication in order to keep tensions from building into full-fledged conflicts. (Subramanian, 2022) China and India have diverse diplomatic contacts that include official bilateral summits, track II diplomacy, initiatives, resolutions, and crisis management protocols. The delicate balancing act between collaboration and competitiveness that defines their relationship is reflected in these diplomatic efforts. Despite ongoing difficulties, the two countries' diplomatic efforts demonstrate a knowledge of the value of communication and compromise in negotiating the complexities of their bilateral relationship and promoting stability in the region and around the world. (Paul, 2018)

8. Current Developments:

The dynamic nature of relations between China and India is characterized by continuing developments that influence the course of their bilateral ties. Their relationship's character has been significantly influenced by recent agreements and occurrences. Trade agreements, cooperative and competitive joint initiatives, and diplomatic discussions are noteworthy developments. These occurrences shed light on the changing dynamics and the attempts to control and negotiate the difficulties that characterize the modern China-Indian relationship. (vifindia.org, 2022) Global events have had a significant impact on the relationship between China and India, further complicating an already difficult situation. For example, the global reaction to the COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the necessity of international collaboration and the interconnectedness of states. China and India, two significant participants in the manufacturing of

vaccines and global health, have been essential to these initiatives. But the pandemic has also strained diplomatic relations, with disputes over the virus's source and vaccination distribution escalating hostilities. Global economic patterns, geopolitical reorganizations, and changes in the power dynamics all generate external forces that impact the China-India relationship. (jstor.org, 2020)

A number of variables that are currently influencing China-Indian relations are expected to have an impact on how they interact going forward. (Ali, 2023) Three major developments that demand attention are economic diversity, technological progress, and changing geopolitical alliances. Both countries are looking into non-traditional areas for economic growth, with an emphasis on innovation, technology, and sustainable development. Their bilateral relations and worldwide influence will be affected by the strategic decisions they make in the rapidly evolving technological landscape, notably those pertaining to 5G and AI. (Ali, 2023) Furthermore, their strategic calculation takes on new dimensions as a result of the changing geopolitical environment, especially in the Indo-Pacific area. China-India relations face both opportunities and difficulties from the Quad, an alliance consisting of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, as well as other regional alliances. Both countries must balance their national interests, regional obligations, and global aspirations in order to navigate these rising trends. (Ali, 2023)

9. Future Outlook:

Because of the intricate interactions between geopolitical, economic, and strategic issues, the future of relations between China and India is both full of opportunities and problems. An examination of the opportunities for collaboration, difficulties and roadblocks, the involvement of outside parties, and possible outcomes offers insight into the changing dynamics that will mold the two-way partnership.

- **Opportunities for Collaboration:** There are great opportunities for cooperation between China and India, despite past difficulties and sporadic conflicts. (vifindia.org, 2022) Both countries understand the advantages of working together economically, and programs like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) offer chances to strengthen connections in terms of investment and trade. Collaborative activities can be fruitfully pursued in areas such as environmental conservation, public health, and technological innovation. Furthermore, cooperative participation in multilateral forums offers venues for collaborative and diplomatic interaction. (vifindia.org, 2022)
- **Challenges and Barriers:** But there are a lot of difficulties and roadblocks ahead. The rivalry for regional dominance, historical enmity, and unresolved border concerns present formidable obstacles. (iiss.org, 2021) Territorial disputes continue to be controversial and have the potential to worsen, as seen by events such as the clash in the Galwan Valley. Trade-related issues are exacerbated by disparities in developmental models, economic imbalances, and worries over market access. It will need diplomacy, realistic methods, and a dedication to resolving fundamental problems that have traditionally caused tension in the relationship to overcome these obstacles. (iiss.org, 2021)
- **Function of External Parties:** The future prospects of China-India ties are further complicated by the involvement of other actors. For example, the Indo-Pacific area is impacted by the strategic rivalry between China and the US and can affect the foreign policy decisions made by both countries. The external environment is also shaped by global forums, international organizations, and regional forces. (Huỳnh, 2022) The United States, Japan, Australia, and India, together known as the Quad alliance, adds a new dynamic to the geopolitical scene that could affect China and India's strategic calculations as well as the balance of power in the region. (Huỳnh, 2022)

- Possible Situations: There are a variety of potential futures for China-India relations, depending on how both countries handle current difficulties and take advantage of opportunities. A situation of enhanced cooperation would entail both nations coming to consensus on matters of the economy, engaging in diplomatic means to settle border conflicts, and working together to address global concerns. (Huỳnh, 2022) Conversely, greater competitiveness can result in trade disputes, elevated geopolitical tensions, and strategic posturing. In a third situation, there is a fine line between handling continuous difficulties without resorting to full-scale conflict and occasionally cooperating on specific subjects. (Subramanian, 2022)

The future prospects of ties between China and India are defined by a careful balancing act between cooperation and competition. It will take diplomatic tenacity, strategic acumen, and a dedication to resolving fundamental challenges to navigate the future course. Whether the future brings about a positive and stable relationship or one defined by ongoing problems and tensions will depend greatly on the role of foreign players and both countries' ability to adjust to the changing global landscape.

10. Conclusion:

In summary, a complex combination of historical, economic, geopolitical, and diplomatic elements affects the relationship between China and India. The historical perspective establishes the framework for a relationship characterized by collaboration and conflict. It is molded by post-colonial experiences and is founded in ancient relationships. In addition to highlighting opportunities for cooperation in trade, investment, and regional development, economic elements also make problems like trade imbalances and rivalry evident. Geopolitical factors underscore the region's strategic importance, as both countries strive to establish their dominance and manage a precarious power equilibrium. The variety of their participation is demonstrated by diplomatic contacts, which include bilateral summits, track II diplomacy, and crisis management techniques.

There are areas of cooperation amid these complications, from working together to address global issues like climate change to taking part in international groups like BRICS and SCO. Beyond political divides, cultural interactions and people-to-people diplomacy help to promote understanding amongst people. Recent developments, which are impacted by continuous diplomatic efforts, new trends, and world events, demonstrate how their relationship is always changing. While there are opportunities for collaboration in the future, there are also many obstacles because of unsolved border conflicts, economic inequality, and outside influences.

Additional layers of complexity are introduced by the role of other parties, especially in the form of the Quad alliance and the larger geopolitical setting. Future possibilities range from greater collaboration to greater rivalry, and the result will depend on both countries' ability to negotiate and make calculated strategic decisions. Finding points of agreement, resolving conflicts, and taking advantage of mutual interests will be crucial as China and India negotiate this complex terrain. The way ahead calls for diplomatic dexterity, pragmatic economic thinking, and a dedication to stability, acknowledging that a positive China-Indian relationship is critical for the peace and development of the region and the world at large, in addition to being vital for both countries.

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