

BOOK REVIEW

Recent developments in Sino-Indian relations

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BOOK REVIEW

Q2 **China and India: Asia's emergent great powers**, by Chris Ogden, Polity Press, 2017, 213 pp. ISBN-10: 9780745689876, \$25.87.

The China-India rivalry in the globalization era, edited by T. V. Paul, Georgetown University Press, 2018, 286 pp. ISBN: 978162616004. \$36.95.

Sino-Indian Relations in the Asia-Pacific Century: 5

The rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the past few decades has generated a spate of both academic and policy debates. The principal concern that has seized the attention of both scholars and policymakers alike is whether or not China's rise will be peaceful. Some scholars have argued, with considerable vigor, that the PRC is acquiring military capabilities that are explicitly designed to dominate Asia and to ensure it can effectively keep the United States and its principal allies at bay. Perhaps the most articulate and explicit statement thereof is Aaron Friedberg's *The Struggle for Mastery in Asia*. A more nuanced view of its rise can be found in Thomas Christiansen's *The China Challenge*, where it is argued that the PRC is nowhere near becoming a peer competitor of the United States. Instead, while it does pose challenges to the existing US-dominated global order the key question confronting US policymakers involves forging a strategy that could integrate it into existing global institutional arrangements. Yet other, more policy-oriented works, most notably, Graham Allison's *Destined for War: Avoiding the Thucydides Trap*, have argued that both the United States and the PRC need to pursue accommodative policies to ensure that PRC's rise does not culminate in great power war. In considerable part, these fears about great power wars stem from the extant literature on power transitions which suggests that tectonic shifts in global power are often culminate in war. 10 15 20

Though much writing has focused on the US-China relationship a body of literature is now also emerging on an important regional rivalry, that between India and the PRC. Quite recently, the French scholar, Berenice Guyot-Rechard, published a pathbreaking study of the origins and evolution of the Sino-Indian border dispute, *Shadow States*, based upon extensive and novel archival research. Among other matters, her work clearly demonstrates that neither India nor the People's Republic of China had an ironclad case in terms of their respective territorial claims. Until more archival evidence from both Beijing and New Delhi become available, her study, without question, amounts to the definitive analysis of the sources of the border dispute. 25 30

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Two more recent books, which constitute the basis of this review essay, Christopher Ogden's *China and India: Asia's Emergent Great Powers* and T.V. Paul's edited *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era* make useful contributions to an understanding of the origins, evolution and future of this intractable rivalry. Both books go well beyond the analysis of the rivalry in Jeff Smith's 2015 book, *Cold Peace: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century*.

It should, however, be made clear that Ogden's book has a broader focus. Most important, it is not a book about the rivalry of the two great powers, but a book about the

of a short, vicious war in October 1962 it has come no closer to a resolution despite multiple, high-level bilateral talks. More to the point, in recent years the rivalry has also spilled over into the entire South Asian region and beyond. This has taken place because the PRC has made significant economic, political and strategic inroads into India's smaller neighbors. These encroachments have taken on added significance with the People's Republic of China's launch of the massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a series of infrastructural projects. Additionally, India is now increasingly concerned about the emergence of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Indian Ocean littoral. 45 50

To cope with the potential threats from the PRC India has embarked upon two strategies. At one level, it has sought to mobilize domestic military resources to deal with the perceived security challenges from the PRC. To that end it has enhanced its military capabilities along the disputed border, it has created a tri-service command in the Andaman Islands and has sought to strengthen its diplomatic ties with its smaller neighbors. At another, it has improved, albeit quite fitfully, its relationship with the United States. It has also sought to bolster and broaden its relationship with Japan, which has its own misgivings about China's rise and growing assertiveness in Asia. Simultaneously, it has made overtures toward Vietnam, another country that also has concerns about China's emerging role in Asia. In effect, it has pursued, what scholars of international relations refer to as strategies of both internal and external balancing. 55 60

The two books under review, take somewhat different approaches to the central question of China's rise and its varied implications for India. Ogden's work, which is quite comprehensive, explicitly eschews a straightforward Realist account of the determinants of the Chinese and Indian foreign policies. Instead he carefully delves into the domestic sources of the foreign relations of both states and examines their respective quests to attain great power status. His grasp of the key elements that have shaped the course of the foreign policies of these two states is historically grounded, carefully argued and lucidly discussed. 65 70

In both cases, Ogden shows how the palimpsest of the past, has profoundly influenced the scope and direction of their respective foreign policy orientations. To that end, he shows that, quite unsurprisingly, the experience at the hands of European colonial powers in the nineteenth century has had a disproportionate effect on the conduct China's foreign policy choices. Specifically, he contends that in the nineteenth century owing to the interference of various European colonial powers in China's internal affairs its prior self-image of cultural superiority was severely diminished. As a consequence, after the successful Communist revolution of 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has made a concerted effort to restore what it deems to be the country's proper status in global affairs. Among other matters, the CCP has evinced a particular interest in protecting what it deems to be the country's sovereignty from all possible external challenges. 75 80

In this regard, he also shows that India, long adhered to a markedly similar worldview stemming from its experience of British colonialism. To that end, it had initially pursued a strategy of nonalignment steering a course away from either superpower. Subsequently, at the end of the Cold War, this aversion to ceding India's freedom of action to any foreign power has manifested itself in the quest for "strategic autonomy". While Ogden does not explicitly allude to it, this fixation with independent action was sorely compromised for a significant segment of the Cold War years owing to India's strategic dependence on the erstwhile Soviet Union. Ogden's analysis of their respective preoccupation with sovereignty to some degree echoes what another scholar Manjari Chatterjee Miller has characterized as a "post-imperial ideology".¹ 85 90

¹Manjari Chatterjee Miller, *Wronged By Empire: Post-Imperial Ideology in India and China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).

Given Ogden's obvious reservations about the utility of Realist premises, he distills the existing scholarship on strategic culture to show how the concept can be usefully applied to the study of the foreign relations of these two states. To that end he demonstrates an obvious familiarity with the pertinent literature. However, apart from highlighting the concept's structural shortcomings he has little to say about the value of the extant literature. For example, while he cites the work of a former RAND scholar, George Tanham, he provides no critique of this utterly superficial discussion. 95

His ideational perspective permeates the entire book. Accordingly, in the chapter on the military capabilities of the two countries, he emphasizes how threat perceptions have helped shape the development and acquisition of military assets. Ogden extends this argument to the Indian and Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons emphasizing the roles of prestige and status in important drivers. Given his ideational outlook it is hardly surprising that he would downplay the role of material threats as key drivers of the two nuclear weapons programs. However, the chapter would have benefited from at least a nod toward the role of external threats in precipitating the onset of their respective programs. 100 105

It is to his credit that he also provides a substantial discussion to other important determinants of the foreign polities of the two states. In this context he examines the role of economic factors. This analysis is quite deft as it summarizes how both states pursued particular strategies of economic development in their early years. It also shows how these policies underwent significant changes over time. In the Indian case, he correctly highlights how the country was bequeathed a most unenviable economic legacy at the end of British colonial rule. Distrustful of the benefits of integration into the global capitalist economic order India's policymakers pursued a strategy of economic autarchy. Unfortunately, this approach neither led to rapid economic development nor dramatic reductions in rural and urban poverty. It was only in the 1990s in the wake of an unprecedented fiscal crisis that India fitfully embraced a more market oriented economic development strategy. Since then it has managed to both diminish endemic poverty while promoting economic growth. He is also on entirely sound ground when he argues that India's hopes and prospects as a great power depends, in considerable measure, on the efficacy of its market-friendly reforms. 110 115 120

His analysis of China's economic success and its determinants is also quite sound even if it does not provide any new insights. Like India, he shows that the PRC had also emerged as an impoverished state following the success of the Communist revolution in 1949. Subsequent economic decisions, especially during significant stretches under the Maoist era, led to the adoption of disastrous economic policies that led to mass scale famine and deaths in the late 1950s. Much of this discussion, while hardly novel, nevertheless remains worth repeating. In effect, his discussion is both able and succinct in highlighting the key turning points and critical choices that contributed to the PRC's stunning record of economic growth from the Deng era onwards. 125

While Ogden quite appropriately lauds the ability of India and China to promote growth and reduce poverty he is not oblivious to some of the drawbacks that such rapid growth has engendered. To that end he highlights the problem of rampant environmental degradation as well as the issue of growing inequality in both states. 130

Ogden also provides a thoughtful discussion of India and China's relations with states in their immediate neighborhood. To that end he provides brief but useful discussions of how the presence of particular states, Pakistan and Japan respectively, have posed particular challenges to the two states. He also shows that India's policies have evolved considerably over time with recent regimes seeking to provide collective goods for the region even as relations with Pakistan remain fraught. There is little to quarrel about his discussion of China's relations with states on its periphery. However, it is somewhat 135 140

curious that Ogden has little or nothing to say about the extremely contentious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that it has undertaken under Xi Jinping's regime. This omission is all the more striking given the significance of this endeavor in South Asia and its potential impact on India's national security interests in the region.

In one of the final chapters of this book Ogden tackles the issue of the responses of the two states to American dominance. His analysis of India's relations with the United States is entirely accurate. Thanks to the absence of significant cultural, economic and strategic ties, the US, for all practical purposes, ignored India during much of the Cold War years. When it evinced any interest in the country it was mostly derivative of its other global concerns. It was only after the end of the Cold War that the two states finally embarked on a process of rapprochement. Again, Ogden quite adroitly outlines the process through which this transformation came about. 145 150

He also shows how US relations with the PRC had remained strained until Kissinger's historic ploy to align the PRC with the United States in an attempt to balance Soviet power. Since then Ogden shows how the relationship has evolved over the last several decades. Today, of course, it stands at a crossroads once again because regardless of administrations and their ideological orientations the US has now come to see the PRC as a potential and indeed likely peer competitor. He also shows that the US is now increasingly viewing India as a possible strategic bulwark against the PRC's potential revanchism in Asia. 155 160

Ogden's book, for all its strengths, nevertheless has one significant limitation. It is ultimately a work of deft synthesis. There is little here in terms of new archival material, elite interviews and declassified sources. Given that in recent years a wealth of new documentary evidence has become available it is a pity that an otherwise sound work focused on the rise of China and India as potential great powers did not avail itself of these new resources. 165

T.V. Paul's edited book, *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era*, is an important and timely contribution to the literature on the Sino-Indian rivalry. At the outset, it needs to be stated that while this rivalry is hardly one-sided,² the two sides do have asymmetric threat perceptions.³ The book covers an entire gamut of issues including the seemingly intractable territorial dispute, differing conceptions of world order, the impact of strategic culture and the question of nuclear deterrence. At the outset, the editor, T.V. Paul, makes clear that despite the periodic acrimony that has characterized the relationship it has now reached the stage of a "managed rivalry". He also shows that unlike the Indo-Pakistani rivalry, this relationship, though hostile, does not have the same intensity. In considerable measure he attributes the difference to the impact of the forces of globalization and diplomatic engagement. 170 175

As with almost any edited work this too is uneven. Some of the chapters are extremely well-crafted, clear argued and with ample evidence. Others however are more idiosyncratic and far less compelling in terms of both arguments and evidence. Also, as is the case with many an edited volume despite the apparent attempt to address as many features of the rivalry as possible it is not self-evident how a number of the chapters dovetail into one another. For example, Manjari Chatterjee Miller's chapter which focuses on Indian and Chinese conceptions of world order is thoughtful, informed and imaginative. However, the discussion fails to clearly demonstrate how these differing 180 185

²See, for example, Susan Shirk, "One-Sided Rivalry: China's Perceptions and Policies Toward India," in *The India-China Relationship: What the US Needs to Know*, ed. Francine Frankel and Harry Harding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 75–100.

³Tien-sze Fang, *Asymmetrical Threat Perceptions in India-China Relations* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

conceptions of world order directly impinge upon the Sino-Indian rivalry. Though she devotes a section of her chapter to this question the evidence that she provides is somewhat tenuous.

On the other hand, Mahesh Shankar's chapter on the territorial dimensions of the rivalry is entirely apposite. He forthrightly deals with the centrality of the question of Tibet in Sino-Indian relations. What is especially intriguing about this issue is that despite India's early concessions to the PRC of a range of inherited colonial rights in Tibet it nevertheless came to haunt bilateral relations. In considerable part, of course, this stemmed from India's decision to grant asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959. To Shankar's credit he also addresses the PRC's misgivings about India's role in working with and covertly aiding the Khampa rebels who challenged China's rule in Tibet in the late 1950 s. Missing, however, from his otherwise accurate analysis is any reference to John Kenneth Knaus' excellent account, *Orphans of the Cold War*. This omission is significant as Knaus was the CIA case officer who had organized and trained the Khampas in the wake of the outbreak of their rebellion.

Vipin Narang's chapter also demonstrates a supple grasp of the nuclear dimension of the Sino-Indian conflict. To that end he provides succinct discussions of the nuclear strategies of both states. Also, he shows that despite their on-going nuclear modernization and expansion plans the dyadic relationship is unlikely to lead to a situation of significant strategic instability. Instead he contends that stability at the nuclear level is likely to also ensure that local disputes and skirmishes will not escalate. However, he does see the relationship remaining fundamentally competitive for the foreseeable future.

Other chapters in this book are also theoretically informed and substantively sound. For example, Andrew Scobell's chapter on the role of strategic culture in Sino-Indian relations makes an invaluable contribution. This approach to the study of foreign and security policy, briefly stated, assumes that countries have distinctive orientations toward the world based upon own they interpret their historical experiences. At the outset, Scobell makes deft use of the pertinent literature on strategic culture. He then demonstrates how the respective strategic cultures of India and the PRC have not only influenced their strategic behavior but have also profoundly shaped how elites in both states view themselves as well as their adversaries.

The multi-faceted features of this book make it an invaluable contribution to the current literature on the Sino-Indian rivalry. Apart from the particular themes and concerns that it addresses the book is also significant because a number of the contributors, especially Paul Diehl, in a concluding chapter, makes an explicit effort to place the rivalry in the wider stream of current literature on rivalries in international politics.

Even though the Sino-Indian rivalry appears to be managed it is likely to endure for the foreseeable future. Based on the extant literature on rivalry termination it is, of course, entirely possible that it may conclude in one of several ways.⁴ It could, for example, end with another major Sino-Indian military confrontation which deals one of the two parties a decisive defeat. Despite the growing conventional military asymmetries between India and China another 1962 like debacle this outcome nevertheless seems unlikely. Indian capabilities along the Himalayan border are far superior than they were at that time, its forces are far better quipped and trained and its military readiness is at a wholly different level. Consequently, while another conventional conflict would be sanguinary it would not result, once again, in another Indian military rout.

⁴Karen Rasler, William R. Thompson and Sumit Ganguly, *How Rivalries End* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

Another possible end to the rivalry would involve one side making significant concessions, especially in the territorial realm, to facilitate its end. This prospect also seems downright unlikely. The PRC, which is in a highly advantageous position, has little or no incentive to make any such concessions. India, though decidedly the weaker party in the relationship, cannot cede much ground either, in considerable part, because of the imperatives of domestic politics. Consequently, it appears most unlikely that one of the key elements of the rivalry, namely a one-sided resolution of the territorial dispute, is in the cards. 235

This then suggests a third and potential pathway to the end of the rivalry. Given the growing disparities between India and the PRC on any number of dimensions, ranging from military capabilities to economic growth, the rivalry may simply cease to be of any significance. India may well continue to be wary of the PRC but may no longer remain in a position to compete with its behemoth northern neighbor in any meaningful sense thereby emerging as the loser of this rivalry. Of course, this outcome is far from inevitable. At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century the gaps between the two states do appear to be yawning and getting worse. However, it may be premature to assume that both states will proceed in an entirely linear fashion along a range of material dimensions. Either or both states could face significant and unanticipated endogenous or exogenous shocks that could boost or retard their progress along a number of different socio-economic axes. Consequently, this possible avenue to the eventual termination of the rivalry remains open-ended. 240

A fourth and final possibility, though extremely unlikely in the present political context, is a rapprochement between the two states. This would, as the theoretical literature suggests, require one party to make a significant conciliatory gesture designed to alter the adversarial image that characterizes the relationship. Though difficult to envisage how either Beijing or New Delhi could proffer such an olive branch it is nevertheless a possible course to the end of the rivalry.⁵ 255

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⁵Charles Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).