

Coping with the Rise of China Imperatives for South Asia

by Dr. Sheo Nandan Pandey

Abstract

China's rise in power, both in regional and global perspectives, has evoked a call for a rethink of the world order in making. True or false, there is *deja vu* that the country could lead Asia's much awaited renaissance from the front. True or false again, there is fear of the unknown that the country could upset the cart and turn into a disaster. This is while the world of today is far more connected and adventures of any kind could spell disaster equally for the victor and the victim. Nevertheless, null hypothesis in either case is least likely to test positive. The correlation could, at best, stand ground only as a 'chance occurrence'.

It is a fact that China is out to project its interests far and wide and, the cost could be region and the constituent countries losing respectively 'collective' and 'individual' good as a result. It is as true about the global village as it is for the South Asian neighbourhood. It could impact on the balance of power. Could the dynamics of interdependence address issue, differently with distinct effect than what the proponents of 'balance of power', including Claude (1962), have had proposed? China talks of its *hexin liyi* (core interest) as sacrosanct. Could 'core interest' stand the test of the day absolutely and without limits? How could the poor cousins of South Asia cope with China enforcing a 'Monroe Doctrine' with a difference? The paper examines these issues and sets a positive agenda for future debate.

Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a recognised force, just short of full blown superpower.¹ The journey has been dotted with an array of events, which, in part was scripted and the rest a chance product. The mile stone is the dawn of the Deng Xiaoping epoch. It all took place basically under the sway of myriad of happenings and developments, springing from the resolutions of the Third, Fourth and Fifth plenum of the 11th Communist Party of

¹ Coined first, by Nicholas Spykman in his lectures and then used illustratively in the book, *The Geography of the Peace* (1943), the terminology, superpower primarily got to describe 'unmatched global maritime supremacy' of the US and UK. It subsequently came to be used to refer 'global reach' of dominant powers in the book of William T.R. Fox, *The Superpowers: the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union-Their Responsibility for Peace* (1944). There is yet no universally accepted definition of the term. Lyman Miller speaks of four axes power: the military, economic, political and cultural. Prof. June Teufel Dreyer considers ability to project soft and hard power globally as the criterion of super power. Measured on these parameters, China is yet not even half way a super power. It can not be ignored either. Now, the terminology 'Great Power' has found currency ever since Hedley Bull (1977, *The Anarchical Society*), came to use it. Indifferent to the controversy involved in the use of these terms, the paper refers China as 'dominant power' in regional perspective.

China (CPC) Central Committee, held respectively in Dec. 1978, Sep. 1979 and Feb. 1980. The 12th CPC Central Committee, convened in Sep. 1982 and the Fifth Session of the 5th National People's Congress (NPC) also contributed to the watershed. The operative part of the change factor was strikingly plain and simple. It just meant the dumping of 'ideological barriers' in deference to the 'objective needs of the hour', epitomized by the Cliché, "*shishi qiushi*" (seeking truth from facts), the system fit having come to be called "*you zhongguo tese de shichang jingji*" (Socialist Market Economy with Chinese Characteristics).

The trade off has thus far been a mix of delight and despair. The rosy side of the picture, in this context, are stunning improvements in the economic parameters. From a post liberation 1978 peak of Rmb 362.4 billion Yuan (US\$147.3 billion), the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of the PRC literally leaped to reach Rmb 33,535.3 billion Yuan (US\$4.98 trillion) in 2009.² In purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, it then worked out to be US\$ 8.748 trillion. In the first nine months of 2010, the GDP of PRC reached Rmb 26.87 trillion Yuan (US\$4.04 trillion). Not surprising then that Wendy Dobson and his ilk have come to visualize 'gravity shift' in international balance of economic power in not too distant a future in favour of the Asian continent with the PRC in the lead.³ While one could argue at length and dispute prognosis of this kind, the shift from the then stiff doctrinaire to present day limp pragmatic approach to development is irrefutably at the heart of the transformation of China from 'simple age old agrarian society' to 'fast emerging' industrial society at a meteoric pace. It could, as quite a few think-tanks hold, possibly lead the global economy from the front to its third historic 'super cycle' phase in the next few decades.⁴

The dark side is equally pronounced. Thanks to the abounding negative externalities to its skewed development model, the future existence of the PRC as a nation state, leave aside a reckonable force has come to be accepted with a caveat of a whole range of 'restructuring and rebalancing'. Beyond what was in store for the Chinese nation and its people in the long run, there is widespread fear that the elements of fragility, thus generated in the process, could spell disaster for the World at large and South Asia in particular.⁵ It was slated to take place in many ways, including the PRC ransoming its rivals. The international community has just had a real taste of this set of China's insular conduct. No sooner came it close to overtaking Japan as the second largest economy as a 'chance outcome', it got to flex its muscles to hurt Japan's technological edge.⁶ Armed with near monopoly in the proven and currently available reserves of rare earth elements, it stopped its exports to Japan as a bargaining tool. This and many such other examples of behaviour exposes China's real life psycho-strategic face against much stated diplomatic articulations to project itself a responsible emerging global power. The strategic option for any competing and/ or competing power thus remains to cope with the rise of the PRC lest it should lose freedom of independent economic management.

This paper, *ipso facto*, focuses on the imperatives of South Asian nations, in particular India, getting to cope with the rise of China, both as a challenge and opportunity.⁷ The study thus

² <http://www.chinability.com/GDP.htm>

³ Dobson, Wendy, *Gravity Shift: How Asia's New Economic Power House will Shape the Twenty-first Century*, University of Toronto Press.

⁴ The first two super cycle phases, auguring epoch of high global economic growth, first during 1870-1913 and then from 1945 until 1973, belonged to the western world and the beneficiaries were a small proportion of the world. In the third epoch, coming around 2030, the beneficiaries could be around 85 percent of the global population. According to a latest estimates, credited primarily to Peter Sands, the Chief Executive of Standard Chartered, China's populace will come to garner 24 percent of the global GDP, nearly 2.6 times more than now.

⁵ Susan L. Shirk (2007), *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail its Peaceful Rise*, USA: Oxford University Press.

⁶ China's fete in overtaking Japan as the second largest economy after the US is a chance outcome, much in conformity with what is known as scissor action in development economics, discernible in comparative and contrasting perspectives of an upcoming as against a maturing economy, devoid of much needed incubating, fostering and accelerating technological conditions.

⁷ The groupings of South Asia vary quite widely. In this paper, I go by the World Bank grouping, which takes seven core countries of the region-Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The region is interchangeably

builds on the assumptions: China is a 'dominant power'; inward looking and/ or otherwise, it could, as it has done in the past, cross the rubrics and act contrary to its professed policy line, be it *hexie shijie* (harmonious world) or *heping jueqi* (peaceful rise); and, last but not least, Chinese initiatives in South Asia, including the construction of Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, Sonadip deep-sea Port at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, as a launching pad and base for China's future strategic manoeuvres in South Asia.

The analytical framework broadly draws both on the elements of Chinese and Western international relation (IR) theories, in particular where it relates to China's conflicting self-image of 'all under heaven' and the 'nation state', faced with the hard ground realities of multipolar world of 21st century. As the proponents of constructivist theory of international relations, in particular Nicholas Onuf, Richard K. Ashley, Friedrich Kratochwil, John Ruggie and Alexander Wendt, would broadly say, and even hegemonic stability theory, or realists or neo-realists differently could hold sacrosanct, the power relations of the entities, both in long and short term perspectives, shall be shaped by the degree of convergence and/ or collision of interests. The study is thus organized to examine the Contours of Interest Projections; Horizon of Response Propensities; Dominance Mechanism and the Quandaries; and, the Plausible Constructs to Cope with Dominant China.

Contours of Interest Projections

Interest projection remains central to statecraft in China. This could be true of others and yet, there is a range of difference in articulations and uncommon tenacity. The explanation lies in the constants of China's strategic culture, which subscribes and permits operational flexibility but does not forget the core objectives and goals. There is thus one or the other system camouflage in each and every overtly stated policy line and public assertion. The guiding foreign policy line of Hu Jintao epoch, for example, constitute of adherence to the tenets of 'harmonious world' and 'peaceful rise'.⁸ Notwithstanding, it has been active in the backyard of each and every adversary of its interests around the world with diverse intent and purpose.

As for the South Asian countries, the PRC is the next door East Asian neighbour.⁹ While an outside element to socio-cultural and economic much less political life, the PRC has rather been a 'behind the screen factor' in the inter-country relations in the region. Notwithstanding meticulously articulated 'good neighbour policy' and 'playing-well-with-others' approach in foreign relations, the PRC broadly suffers from a lack of trust. In geographic, demographic and economic size, it towers above all countries in the region.

China's interest projection in South Asian countries tend to bypass constructively, in Joshua S. Goldstein's words, the imperatives of 'shared interest'.¹⁰ In the run up, collective interests in the region has been the victim of China's self-serving individual interests. For long, until recently, the PRC stirred up 'competing interest' with some, in particular with comparable existing and/ or potential powers and 'collaborative interest' as well as 'cooperative interests' with others. In all that, the PRC discernibly harboured long term strategic design to corner the power in the region. Scrumptious or otherwise, the Chinese machination has come to carve

referred as 'Indian Sub-continent'. I would rather use the term South Asia to avoid political sensitivity. It corresponds to Ronald B. Inden groupings on the ground that the term distinguishes the region as geographical identity separate and distinct from East Asia.

⁸The phrase 'Harmonious World' was first pronounced by Hu at the Afro-Asian Summit in Jakarta in April 2005. It later formed part of the Chinese Paper on Peaceful Development in 2005. The catchphrase serves as ploy to suggest China's philosophical tradition, contained in the Chinese character 'he', meaning harmony and peace. Nonetheless, the cliché has given China a face. It genuinely needs harmony and peace to end its alienation to be part of the global village of today and tomorrow.

⁹ UN officially identifies five regions of the Asian continent. They are: Central Asia; Eastern Asia; Southern Asia; South-Eastern Asia; and, Western Asia.

¹⁰ Goldstein, Joshua S. and Pevehouse, Jon C., (2008) *Principles of International Relations*, UK: Longman

out and build a distinct niche for itself in the region. Faced with the challenges of global village life, the PRC is projecting an overlap of the said competing, collaborative and cooperative interests, expressed in the cliché ‘strategic partnership’ with one or the other attributes such as ‘strategic cooperative partnership’, ‘constructive strategic partnership’ and the like. It encompasses both the civil and military domains and all major and minor countries of the region.

“There are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests” – is an oft-quoted saying. In fact, national or permanent interest has formed part of the political and diplomatic vocabulary for centuries. A nation, by virtue of its location, evolution and political, ideological, social, cultural or economic complexion, is bound to regard certain sets of values, goals and relationships as being in its national or permanent interest contributing to its stability, security and standing in the world community. It might regard its permanent interests, so defined and delineated, as non-negotiable. In that sense, China too has a right to its own conception of what constitutes its permanent interests. It shall be little different from what Confucian doctrine *hexin liyi* (core interest) and the four successive generations of the communist leadership have held sacrosanct in different cliché coined over the course of time.

The horizon of China’s interest projections in either form is set to muster dominance in the region both in relative and absolute terms. Not until the socio-political rumblings in peripheral China brings about cataclysmic changes in geopolitics and the political diktat of Beijing abruptly shrinks to the pre-colonial acquisitions to what is known as China proper, the PRC shall continue to tower above all countries of South Asia in its geographic expanse.¹¹ As of now, with a territory of 9,572,900 square km (3,696,000 square miles), the PRC is nearly three times larger in size than India, the largest entity in the South Asian region.¹² It is over twice the size of the South Asian region. Having entered Stage-III of demographic transition, it can not maintain this position for ever and will have to yield its place to the South Asian region. Nevertheless when the balance of World power, measured along relative share of growth and/ or decline in GDP, defence capabilities, consumer spending, size of the working age population and the technological prowess, is estimated to undergo a major shift, and China’s political and economic clout could grow up from 12 percent now to 16 percent, the dominance of the PRC over South Asia shall be but fact of life.¹³

Horizon of Response Propensities

Response propensities of the South Asia to the Chinese overtures provides glimpses what the proponents of ‘realism’, including Niccolo Machiavelli (*The Prince*), and less often Sun Tzu (*The art of War*), Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*) and Hans J. Morgenthau (*Politics among Nations*) and some of the ‘neo-realists’, i.e., John Mearsheimer (*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*) and Robert Gilpin (*The Political Economy of International Relation*), should have spoken of to happen. *Raison d’etate* and not normative values held any worth in their transactions. Piqued and harbouring grievances against each other, the South Asian countries have constantly played at the hands of the PRC. Nonetheless, they have seldom risen to the

¹¹ Chinese civilization discernibly developed from a core region in the North China Plain. Over millennia, it expanded in the course of hundreds of conquests. Han and Tang dynasties were particularly notorious. The Fifteen and/ or Eighteen Province (*Shiwu Sheng/Shiba Sheng*) system that rules the roost during *Ming* Dynasty and *Qing* Dynasty respectively did not incorporate several political units of present day China.

¹² Encyclopedia Britannica.

¹³ Joint US-EU report, *Global Governance 2025: At a Critical Juncture*, released on Sep. 20, 2010, estimates China's global power moving up 33 percent from 12 to 16 percent. The report says that India's global power will then grow by 25 percent from 8 to 10 percent. It estimates US global power to suffer a decline from 22 to 18 percent. <http://www.acus.org/event/global-governance-2025-critical-juncture>

occasion as a cohesive group to defend their collective interests much less bargain for 'collective good'.

Among the South Asian countries, Pakistan has constantly responded positively to China's interest projection in the region. This excludes the initial few years of the founding of the PRC and subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations.¹⁴ The two sides are willing to act with nearly identical intensity of intent and purpose, the interest projection on the part of PRC and corresponding response on the part of Pakistan can be described as highly 'collaborative' and directed against India. In return for grazing land of 1949 square Km (749.8 square miles) in the disputed Hunza region, Pakistan recognized China's sovereignty over 5180 square Km (2000.0 square miles) of Indian territory in Northern Kashmir and Ladakh.¹⁵ The deal has had a negative impact on the harmony and peace in the region. Instead of rising to the occasion, Pakistan applauded the Chinese aggression on South Asian soil in Oct. 1962. Once cool, the Sino-Pakistan relation blossomed only thereafter.¹⁶ Pakistan earned the accolade of an 'all weather ally' of the PRC and the Chinese President using the metaphor 'higher than the mountain and deeper than ocean' to describe the intensity bonding of the two has perhaps the invisible costs of Pakistan harming the collective good of South Asia for petty individual gains.¹⁷

Though slightly different in form and shape, Bangladesh has been next to Pakistan in the trajectory of interest projection of the PRC over the last three and a half decades. While 'cooperative' and 'strategic partnership' in form, the Chinese moves in Bangladesh seem to have been calibrated and chiseled with nearly same intent and purpose as in Pakistan. Propensities of the responses of the Bangladesh establishment have been forthright with occasional balancing acts in the favor 'collective goods' of the region.¹⁸ Leaving aside the maxima and minima of diplomatic niceties, the statement of the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni to her Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi in the course of their meeting in June 2009 that Bangladesh saw 'China as its close friend and cooperation partner' squarely defines the pathways to its responses to China's interest projections.¹⁹

'Friendship prices' for the supply of military hardware could stand stead as 'cooperative interest projection' to certain a limit on the lines of infrastructure development initiatives. While this may not have direct bearing on the "collective good" of the region, the intent of the Chinese interest projection has to be seen and understood in the light of its vulnerability to China's pressure and persuasions.²⁰ The Bangladesh navy and missile programme is fully dependent on PRC benevolence.²¹ The situation of the Bangladesh Air Force is no different.

¹⁴ While Pakistan established diplomatic relation with the PRC right on May 21, 1951, it was cool on several issues including UN seat. It was since Pakistan then happened to be an ally of the western world. Things changed after two sessions of talks between the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Pakistan Prime Minister Muhammad Ali on the sidelines of Bandung Conference in April 1955. Pakistan has since been playing second fiddle to the PRC just to counterweight India.

¹⁵ Chinese and Pakistan Foreign Ministers Chen Yi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed Sino-Pakistan Frontier Agreement and Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement in 1963. The negotiation had taken place on October 13, 1962 and March 02, 1963. This is at the back of Kashmir dispute not finding solution and, India and Pakistan spilling blood in bloody wars time and again.

¹⁶ Dobell, W.M. (Autumn 1964). "Ramifications of the China-Pakistan Border Treaty". *Pacific Affairs* 37 (3):283-95.

¹⁷ China has substantially replaced the US, especially in quality of political, economic, technological and military support. While it has been a long time story, there is perceptible change since 1990's after the US imposed military sanctions. It overshadows the US efforts. China has provided all sensitive missile and nuclear technology.

¹⁸ China took nearly five years to get over Pakistan factor to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in 1975. The often repeated Chinese advice to Bangladesh to pursue an independent foreign policy carry unstated message to get to de-link itself with India.

¹⁹ *Xinhua News Agency*, June 26, 2009.

²⁰ The long list of critical Chinese military hardware supplies to Bangladesh since include: 65 artillery guns and 114 missiles and related systems; most of the T-59, T-62, T-69, and T-79 tanks; a large number of armoured personnel carriers (APCs); and, artillery pieces and small arms. There are, besides, plans to acquire 155mm PLZ-45/Type-88 and 122mm Type-96 as well MBRLs.

²¹ The Chinese platforms in its possession Bangladesh Navy include the 053-H1 Jianghu I class frigates with 4x HY2 missiles, Huang Feng Class missile boats, Type-024 missile boats, Huchuan and P-4 class torpedo boats, Hainan class sub chasers, Shanghai class gun boats and Yuchin class LCUs. Warships such as BNS Osman are but 1500-ton China built Jianghu Class warship.

China is confident to get a foothold on Chittagong port along the lines of Gwadar port in Pakistan and Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. In this scenario, the 'collective good' of South Asia could be held at ransom.

China's interest projection in Nepal has been multidimensional and complex. It has been aimed at influencing decision making at all levels, including the political process. With proxy soldiers in the form and shape of Maoists in place, the PRC has already got a voice in the drafting of the constitution. Plausible ramifications of the development include China's inroads and neutralization of age old bonds of Nepal with South Asian sister countries. Nepal's vulnerability to China's interest projection onslaughts has been compounded due to political instability. With decades of political turmoil of its own kind, and attractions of a different kind, Sri Lanka is just as vulnerable.²² While lucrative at face value, the Chinese funded projects in the Island country, including Hambantota Development Zone, could result in China using pressure and persuasion to the detriment of the 'collective good' of the region.²³

Bhutan and Maldives are the other two constituents of South Asia. While tensions abound, Bhutan and China do not have even diplomatic relations. The two countries have hitherto engaged in 19 rounds of high level talks. Bhutan is angered by Chinese encroachments of its territory. Trade relations are minimal. China's interest projection in Bhutan has been limited for a variety of reasons. In the case of Maldives, the PRC has been far more articulate. It has since established a naval base in Marao in Maldives. The trade relations too are minimal. Neither of the two countries have the potential to counteract China's interest projections.

India's response propensities to China's interest projections have been rather measured. It has been true all through, be it when it was highly and/ or moderately competing during the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping epoch. It has been little different when the present leadership under Hu Jintao discernibly turned to a mix of assertive and accommodative postures that set real life challenges to its 'core interests'. It has been little different again when the Chinese media, in particular the hardliner the Global Times has been characteristically aggressive. Level exchanges at various multilateral and bilateral forum and robust trade characterize the positive aspects of the engagements.

Dominance Mechanism and the Quandaries

The risen China can be quintessentially a different entity to engage with. Conceptually speaking, the pathways to the PRC to further its 'core interest' in the South Asian countries would constitute of a mix of pressures and persuasions techniques. The task will be easier once the PRC is able to build on the existing level of propensities of different constituent countries of South Asia to its interest projections. It may also need to recalibrate its interest projections to ward of avoidable rough patches.

Provided the words of Chinese think tanks, expressed on various websites, including <http://www.wyzxsx.com>, conveyed the mind set of the Chinese ruling elite, the

²² China and Sri Lanka have leaped forward in their engagements after Mahinda Rajapaksa took over the rein of the Island country in 2005 in the backdrop of the former endorsing and supporting Sri Lanka in its ethnic strife, spearheaded by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Chinese lure to Sri Lanka included aids and financial assistance. In 2009, Sri Lanka received US\$1.2 billion in aid from the PRC, which accounts for over half of the total aid received from rest of the world. Since 2006, the PRC has provided US\$3.06 billion in financial assistance for various projects.

²³ A consortium of Chinese companies, led by China Harbour Engineering company and the Sino-Hydro Corporation has financed 85 percent of the estimated total cost of US\$ 1.5 billion for the Hambantota Port Project, which, on completion, will include a liquefied natural gas refinery, aviation fuel storage facilities, three separate docks that will give the port transshipment capacity, dry docks for ship repair and construction, and bunkering and refueling facilities. Besides, China is involved in the construction works of a second international airport at Hambantota, a \$248 million expressway connecting the capital Colombo with the airport at Katunayake, an \$855 million coal power plant at Norochcholai, and a performing arts theater in Colombo.

PRC could then exude more confidence, draw on its increased comprehensive national power (CNP) to pit its 'core interest' over and above others, and last but not least, use all means, including increased military muscles concomitant to its increased economic strength to sustain its new found dominance.

The issue has of late been addressed by Chinese intellectuals as well. Views, in common, tend to gravitate around China's future role in the international system. The forum included national and/ or international seminars organized by different Chinese institutions. In quite a few cases, the participants seem to fight shy to accept the proposition that the risen should demonstrate bellicose, emanating from its superiority over its rivals in its economic, scientific, technological and military strength. For long until the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee took a decision to withdraw the term from all official documents of reference, the Chinese academics, including Shanghai based think-tank Xia Liping and Jiang Xiuyan used to take cover of 'peaceful rise' thesis and rejected all suggestions that suggested the PRC taking to western route of super power behavior.

The two extreme positions taken by the Chinese think-tanks suggest a measure of ambivalence. It may be real. It could be cloak as well. In either event, it is a testimony of the Chinese nation and its institutions working together to underline China's new role of a 'dominant power' on its own terms.

This is substantiated from a large number of Chinese strategic documents, written over the past decade, crystallizing approaches, methods and instruments that could support China's efforts to bind, dilute, circumvent or supersede rival powers. These documents also talk of the ways and means to weaken the enthusiasm of potential players, who stand supplementary and complementary to the rivals in the region. The documents go on to postulate different plausible pillars of the plan, including the imperatives to exploit temporary 'windows of opportunity' such as rifts or drift. The suggested measures comprise economic aid, military assistance and cooperation in multilateral forum. All this is supposed to add to China's existing political leverage with all prospective players.

The predicaments of the South Asian countries in accepting the dominance of the PRC as such passively appear to be quite critical to their core interests. There is a broad perspective for all the six countries of the region, where China's interest projection measure a mix of collaborative, cooperative and strategic partnership as such. It has a very specific perspective for India, where China's interest projection fall largely competing and in a small measure strategic. This is while China's longer-term ascendance as the most dominant power is replete with significant hurdles.

A dominant China firstly, shall have strong interest in selling its brand of authoritarian capitalism to others and redefining both regional and international institutions to go by and work to serve largely its 'core interest'. The assertion has a caveat of such regional and/ or international institution turning pliant to China's power game. India's rise with nearly equal socioeconomic fundamentals and its evident potentials to carry other constituents of South Asia may keep China in its place. Moreover, in the multipolar world of tomorrow, it was unlikely that the diktat of one power such as the PRC will rule the roost.

The PRC is investing heavily abroad with an eye to secure oil and other strategic resources. It has been transforming its green-water PLA Navy into a robust blue-water naval force with express geo-political objectives. Having put its 'String of Pearls' strategy in place, the PRC has not just secured the sea lane from its mainland coast through the littorals of the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on to the littorals of the

Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf, it has the potential to pose challenges for all others in the South Asia and the rest of the world.²⁴ It could serve China's neocolonial ambition at an appropriate junctures in times to come, and South Asia with its geo-politics in flux could suffer the brunt of risen China. This second predicament of the South Asian country can test positive subject to the caveat that the fundamentals of various institution of South Asian countries, including India fall short of the minimum of their required standard, and the international system suffer irredeemable atrophy.

The third tight spot for the South Asian countries involves the risks of living with China's astute mercantilism, which has led most, if not all trading partners around the world, to huge trade deficits, and a negative impact on their economic health. This, too, could hold well on a caveat of array of factors, including the relative edge or otherwise of the South Asian countries to negotiate terms of trade and neutralize negative externalities of the Chinese business practices, in particular exchange rate manipulations and economic espionage.²⁵ Finally, the forging of viable coalitions to deny, delimit or even contain China's interest projection has so far worldwide proved illusory. No South Asian country with notable exception of India today or in the foreseeable future was likely to contest China in whatsoever manner. The scenario puts China in total command to use the instrumentalities of pressure and/ or persuasion to carve out its niche in South Asia. It could hypothetically cost freedom of action for the South Asian countries in their conduct of international relations. 'Collective interest' of the region thus, could suffer a blow.

Plausible Constructs to Cope with Dominant China

Writing in the July 23, 2010 issue of *The Diplomat*, an international current-affairs magazine, Patrick Cronin and Paul Giarra maintained that China's growing assertiveness gave glimpses of Chinese version of a Monroe Doctrine.²⁶ China's maritime territorial claims in South China Sea and China's vitriolic response to U.S.-South Korean manoeuvres in the Yellow Sea then happened to be the cases in point. The fact remains that the architects of the Monroe Doctrine coveted American primacy in the Western Hemisphere. Unlike China, they never dreamt of laying claim to waters that washed against their nation's shores, or of excluding foreign navies from these expanses. Quite a few Chinese think-tanks, including Vincent Wang continue to deny such a possibility when China will profess a similar doctrine or strong-arm its neighbours.²⁷ China's territorial claims in South Asia and its diplomatic manoeuvres thereof stand living testimony contrary to the contentions of the Chinese academics and officials. Interestingly, the Chinese version of Monroe Doctrine touches upon far more realms beyond territorial integrity and sovereignty of the South Asian region.

While the imperatives to cope creatively with China's rise to dominance remain open to all the constituents of South Asia, it is just India who could meaningfully call the shots. "Strong abroad but fragile at home" China was prone to hitch a "Local War under Informatization Conditions". It was yet possible only when the calculations to throw China's 'peaceful rise'

²⁴ The 'String of Pearls' refers to China's naval strategy, which, in China's calculation, has had potentials fulfilling its ambition of attaining a great power status in conventional terms of balance of power besides securing a self-determined, peaceful and prosperous future. Each "pearl" in the "String of Pearls" is a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence.4 Hainan Island, with recently upgraded military facilities, is a "pearl." An upgraded airstrip on Woody Island, located in the Parcel archipelago 300 nautical miles east of Vietnam, is a "pearl." A container shipping facility in Chittagong, Bangladesh, is a "pearl." Construction of a deep water port in Sittwe, Myanmar, is a "pearl," as is the construction of a navy base in Gwadar, Pakistan.5 Port and airfield construction projects, diplomatic ties, and force modernization form the essence of China's "String of Pearls."

²⁵ Dr Pandey, Sheo Nandan, China's Economic Espionage Prowess, *ISPSW Publications*, Nov. 08, 2010 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/publications/Detail/?id=123518>

²⁶ Patrick Cronin and Paul Giarra, China's Monroe Doctrine, *The Diplomat*, July 23, 2010 http://www.realclearworld.com/2010/07/23/china's_monroe_doctrine_113638.html

²⁷ Vincent Wang, China ASEAN Free Trade Area: A Chinese "Monroe Doctrine" or "Peaceful Rise", *China Brief*, Vol:9, Issue 17, August 20, 2009.

and/ or 'harmonious world' to the winds overweighed the perceived all round gains. Notwithstanding, It will entail China to muster a thoroughly integrated technological, doctrinaire, operational, and organizational capabilities, which it cannot acquire overnight.

China is undergoing a transformation process, which is unparalleled in its living history. South Asian countries, including India have to reckon and live with this truth. The dynamics of policy responses must take the present balance sheet with its strategic cultural past. Areas of mutual interests and areas of potential conflicts have to be crystallized and weighed. China's Achilles heel, in particular the difficulties in managing dissents, has to be one of the bargaining chips.

Much as an objective fact, the PRC has dropped past the rhetoric regimes. Occasional outbursts are more often than not calculated moves to gain bargaining points. Global China is part of both the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization. At regional level, in particular in Asia Pacific region, the PRC is active at Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP), ASEAN plus three Mechanisms together with Japan and South Korea. No wonder that the PRC of today is far more positive and rational with international commitment than what it was in the past.

There is perceptible change in its approach with rivals. It has since engaged the Russian Federation in a strategic partnership. The path was of course quite tortuous in over all perspective. It happened only when the Chinese leadership weighed the cost of estrangement to the benefit of engagement. 'Treaty on Good Neighbourly Friendship' (2001) and 'Mechanism of Bilateral Security Consultations (2005)' have since been working well. Inconsistencies and ambivalence apart, the PRC has displayed a far better understanding of the Indian position now than ever in the past.

In keeping with what China can ultimately afford to be, the policy and programme responses of South Asia as while and India in particular has to be creatively even handed. It has to run on merit, keeping independence of decisions as the guiding principle. It has done it in the past even during thick of estrangement. Be it UN seat or any other issues in the multilateral forum, India has lived up to principles.

There is the theoretical option to go by 'Balance of Power', 'Balance of Threat' and 'National Security' theories, sacrosanct to Realist and/ or Neo-realist schools of international relations. One could think of a hybrid of the three theories. The same could be said to be true with the six approaches of Moore and Turner (2005).²⁸ The crux is to cope with the rival power in the anarchical world to evade outbreak of disastrous war. In the context of interest projections, the scope of such a war encompasses all conceivable forms of show of dominance.

Almost in consonance to Realist and/ or Neo-realist approaches, the Chinese think-tank talk of comprehensive national power (CNP), which is a sum of hard and soft powers. Hard power relates to military prowess while soft power is all about economic and cultural attributes. According to a Chinese government sponsored think-tank group, the PRC and India respectively stood at 6th and 10th pedestal with a score of 59.10 points and 50.43 points each in 2006. USA was then the top scorer. With better performance of the economic component of the Soft power in post global recession world of today, China's ranking must have improved by a few notches. The same is expected about India. The South Asian countries

²⁸ The six approaches of Moore and Turner are anthologies of the approaches, proposed by different schools of international relations at different points of time. They are: Balance of Power Approach; Collective Security Approach; World Federalist Approach; Functionalist Approach; Democratic Peace Approach; and, the Incentive Approach.

with India in lead role have to improve its CNP still further to cope with China's apparent dominance.

Interdependence is the hall mark of existence in the new millennia. It would perhaps mark end of Darwinism. No big fish can exist without small fishes around in the same pond. China's hard power ascendance is discernible. However, it can not be sustained endlessly. While an open question, the PRC has to address dissents lest the soft factors will give way. South Asia, too, has its share of gloom on this score. It will have to address them promptly and adequately. It will simultaneously have to focus on 'collective good', which they tend to sacrifice as a group for avoidable historic reasons.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.



Dr. Sheo Nandan Pandey, born Jan 14, 1947, served both institutions of higher learnings and the bureaucratic set up as member of Civil Services in India. He speaks several languages including Chinese mandarine. In area studies, China is his first love.