



## **China's Tryst with Media Tools of Statecraft**

### **A Case Study of Border Dispute Resolution with India**

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#### **Abstract**

China's ascend as a global power tends to embolden Zhongnanhai mandarins to use ever new instruments of statecraft to tilt the swings of geo-political advantage to its favour. It included leveraging of 'networks, technologies and demographic of target nations besides the traditional foreign policy tools'. Countries of Asia-Pacific region in general and the competing powers such as India in particular face the challenges straightway. The development has multidimensional aftermath for the stakeholders in question.

The paper, in its perspective, explores the dynamics as much as the bearings of China's 'flip-flop tactics' on future engagements on the border disputes. A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the Chinese print and electronic media over the last one decade and host of plain facts, seen through the prism of Anthony Giddens's Theory of Structuration besides state centric theories of Dependency and Strategic Coalition prima facie suggest a long drawn battle of wits in store before the two Asian giants close in amicably and settle the issue.

The paper takes note of the position of the two sides as detailed out in their various notes, memoranda and letters in the wake of fateful Chinese aggression of 1962. The findings, inter alia leaves a calling first, for the Indian stake holders and then for the 1.336 billion Chinese laobaixing (common people) to keep fingers crossed about the intents of Zhongnanhai mandarin in their larger interests.

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## ANALYSIS

### Introduction

A close look on strategic moves of the Chinese political elite over the years suggest that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is close to use ever new tools of statecraft to brace the ground realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Novelty included modulation of traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments such as leveraging of networks, technologies, and demographics of this interconnected world. This is discernible in China's articulations to actualize core interests with one and all counties in Asia-Pacific region including India.

Sino-Indian engagements on long standing border disputes present a veritable case. The pace and progress of the dialogues at all levels stand circumscribed to what Lora Saalman euphemistically called 'stagnant embrace'.<sup>1</sup> It broadly approximates the Chinese strategic household cliché *bù huò yuè de xìn feng*. The scenario is little innocuous. As heir of a strategic culture of unparallel depth, the Chinese political elite have since been assiduously using media tools to get best of the bargains on the negotiation table.

The paper, in its perspective, delves into the dynamics as much as the bearings of China's flip flop tactics on the efficacies of the dispute settlement mechanism hitherto put in place. Quite evidently, China's approach on the issue contradicts its professed policy lines of *hexie shijie* (harmonious world) and *mùlín yǒuhào* (good neighbourhood) policies.<sup>2</sup> Had it been otherwise, the two and odd decades were but too long an epoch to end up in Chinese legendry a *wō xíng niú bù* (snail's gallop). It lends credence to rather studied apprehension short of null hypothesis that the 'Chinese media stories on the Sino-Indian Border dispute often carry invisible foot prints of the Chinese official strategic moves'.<sup>3</sup>

Schematically thus, the paper dwells on: Home Truth of Counter Territorial Claims; Strategic Foreground of the Media Mongering; Hindsight on Stand and Stance Quirks; Perception and Stratagem Quandary; and, Options and the Landscape of Upcoming Engagements. The assumptions of the study poignantly cover some conceptual and some applied research space, which are: 'territorial nature of state' normally stands a fixer and could more often than not lend situations amounting to 'fierce competition' between States; no player including India and China can be expected to give up genuine stakes in lieu of positive reward of any denomination; coercive strategies such as the one practiced by the PRC held potentials to impact the momentum of reconciliations, whatsoever adversely; and, the new generation of leadership can ill afford to be oblivious of the ground realities in the interests of Chinese *laobaixing* (common people).

<sup>1</sup> Lora Saalman, "Divergence, Similarity and Symmetry in Sino-Indian Threat Perception", *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring/ Summer, 2011, Vol. 64, No. 2 [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Divergence\\_Similarity\\_and\\_Symmetry\\_in\\_Sino\\_Indian\\_Threat\\_Perception.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Divergence_Similarity_and_Symmetry_in_Sino_Indian_Threat_Perception.pdf) (accessed on June 13, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Scholarship in the field consider the two concepts of *hexie shijie* (和谐世界 Harmonious World) and *mùlín yǒuhào* (睦邻友好 Good Neighbourhood) as the strategic policy pillars of China's three stage grand strategy of *heping jueqi* (和平崛起 Peaceful Rise). They are: first, acquiring *zhudaoxing diwei* (主导性地位 Leading Position) in east Asia by 2010; second, assuming *zhun shijie daguo* (准世界大国 Quasi-World Power role) in Asia-Pacific by 2020; and the last, growing into *shijie xing daguo* (世界性大国 World Level Power). Those who have contributed to the discourse included Men Honghua (門洪華), a scholar with China's Central Party School.

<sup>3</sup> Almost all the media in China including *Xinhua tongxunshè* (新华通讯社 Xinhua News Agency), China Central Television (CCTV), over 2200 news papers, 9,000 and odd periodicals, 400 TV Stations, and nearly 200 Radio Stations are all owned by the Chinese governments and acquit themselves little different than just mouth piece. Loosening of the strangle hold in the selection of news items on the parts of editors in the recent past does not yet ensure full journalist play on the part of Chinese media.



The analytics draw, inter alia, on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the Chinese print and electronic media to get to the Chinese policy and perceptual inklings. This is broadly aimed at unraveling the real intent and purpose of the utterances in the media stories.<sup>4</sup> The proximity of the Chinese media with the Communist Party of China (CPC) and thereby the Chinese government machinery at all levels promise leeway in getting to know the hearts and minds of the Chinese leadership. For the sake of objectivity, the paper would go to look for and examine the texts how best they espoused '*engagement without estrangement*' and otherwise.

Adhering more or less to Huckin (1997), the texts of the reportage has been placed in their respective genre to deduce the intent and purposes of the statements.<sup>5</sup> It takes into account the angle, slant and points of view to either extreme. In the topic position, the dissenting voice, whatsoever present the counter views. Certainty, doubt, possibility, impossibility, contingency, or necessity stand explicitly expressed through the use of an array of modal phrases. Secondary data make up for the other parts of the narratives. Nonetheless, the conceptual base for generalization eclectically takes cue from Anthony Giddens's *Theory of Structuration* and the common strands in the state centric theories of '*Dependency*' and '*Strategic Coalition*' on territorial dispute settlements.

### Home Truth of Counter Territorial Claims

The PRC has since been questioning India's sovereignty over altogether 135,148 sq km of territory, which included: first, 43,148 sq km in the Western sector, over the 'Aksai Chin'; and the other, 90,000 sq km over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh including the monastery town of Tawang. Nonetheless, it has voiced equally unsustainable claim over 2,000 sq km in the middle sector. In its stealth move, it tends to create one after another 'dual use strategic assets' in all the three sectors. It included the *Zhongguo Guódào 219* (National Highway 219 in the Western sector, which belonged to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>6</sup> As the scholarship in the field bear out, this was perhaps the one that triggered the 1962 Sino-Indian Border War (*Zhōng-Yīn Biānjìng Zhànzhēng*) and continues to imperil congenial relations.<sup>7</sup> While innocuous in form and shape, each of these Chinese dual uses strategic assets holds potentials to set off future wars.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Based on the central tenets of critical theory and critical science approach, credited primarily to Habermas, J (1973, *Theory and practice*. Boston, MA: Beacon) and McGregor, S (2003, *Kappa Omicron Nu Working Paper Series*), the CDA promises to enable analysts to explore the intent and purpose of the texts beyond the stated words. Besides others, those who have richly contributed to the field included Foucault, M., Fairclough, N., Huckin, T. N., Lemke, J. L., and van Dijk, T. A.

<sup>5</sup> Huckin, T. N. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. Miller (Ed.), *Functional approaches to written text* (pp. 78-92). Washington, CD: US Department of State. [http://eca.state.gov/education/engteaching/pubs/BR/functionalsec3\\_6.htm](http://eca.state.gov/education/engteaching/pubs/BR/functionalsec3_6.htm) (accessed on June 17, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> The Indian territory under Chinese occupation in the western sector constituted of 38,000 sq km that the PRC occupied in its 1962 invasion and 5180 km that it got wrongfully ceded by Pakistan in 1963, which the latter had occupied in 1947-48 war, code named "Operation Gulmarg".

<sup>7</sup> Shelly Zhao, China's Territorial Disputes with India, *China Briefing*, June 10, 2011 <http://www.2point6billion.com/news/2011/06/10/china-territorial-disputes-with-india-9450.html> (accessed on June 17, 2012)

<sup>8</sup> The Chinese dual use rail, road and air arteries across the Indian position now held promises of facilitating movement and sustenance 8 to 10 Divisions of troops during the 120 days critical campaign period during mid-Aug to mid-Dec. This included stockpile of provisions of 300 tons per Division of 10,000 to 15,000 troops in moderate combat role.



None of these Indian territories have ever had its border with 'China proper', which lay far across two entities 'Sharqi Turkistan' ('Eastern Land of the Turks) and Tibet.<sup>9</sup> If there can be any issue now, it has to be just with 'China peripheral'.<sup>10</sup> China's suzerainty much less sovereignty over 'Sharqi Turkistan' and Tibet is yet far from being settled.<sup>11</sup> In the bargain, China's right to be sole arbiter on the issue of border demarcation with India can not be absolute.

India is a distinct geopolitical unit. For much of the length, the northern frontier stands delineated by the crest of *Kārākōrama* and *Himalaya* mountain ranges. An early testimony to this fact is available in the literary works of Vedic (1500 - 500 BC), Mahajanapada (600 - 325 BC) and Maurya epochs until Ashoka (322 - 232 BC) of the ancient Indian history, which coincided in time span to Shang (1600 - 1050 BC) and Zhou (1046 - 256 BC) dynasties of China.<sup>12</sup> The border alignment of the Indian State, as discernible from very sight of India's map (Fig. 1), follows the geographical principle of watershed which, in most places, is the crest of the high mountains from the north-western tip of Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in the west to the north-eastern point of Arunachal Pradesh.

<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the ground realities, the terminology 'China Proper' tends to engage a section of Chinese scholarship in hair splitting game. They dispute it as being an equivalent of the Chinese term *zhongguobentu* 中国本土. They fight shy to the fact that the dynasties in China have more often than not involved in blood letting to expand their empire and the communist dispensation hitherto exhibit no different praxis. Sharqi Turkistan' and 'Tibet' did not figure as part of 'China Proper' either under Ming's 15 (13 provinces and two directly governed areas or Qing's 18 province administrative systems in place.

<sup>10</sup> China seized political control over *Xinjiang* (新疆 new frontier) and Tibet in two separate military campaigns. The PRC marched First Army Group of the First Field Army of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), led by General Wang Zhen through Hexie corridor in Gansu Province to take military control over the land in September 1949. The story is little different in the case of Tibet. Unlike what the Chinese call *héping jiefang* (和平解放 peaceful liberation), it is but the armed PLA contingent and not a political process that is at work in the annexation of 'Sharqi Turkistan' and 'Tibet' into China.

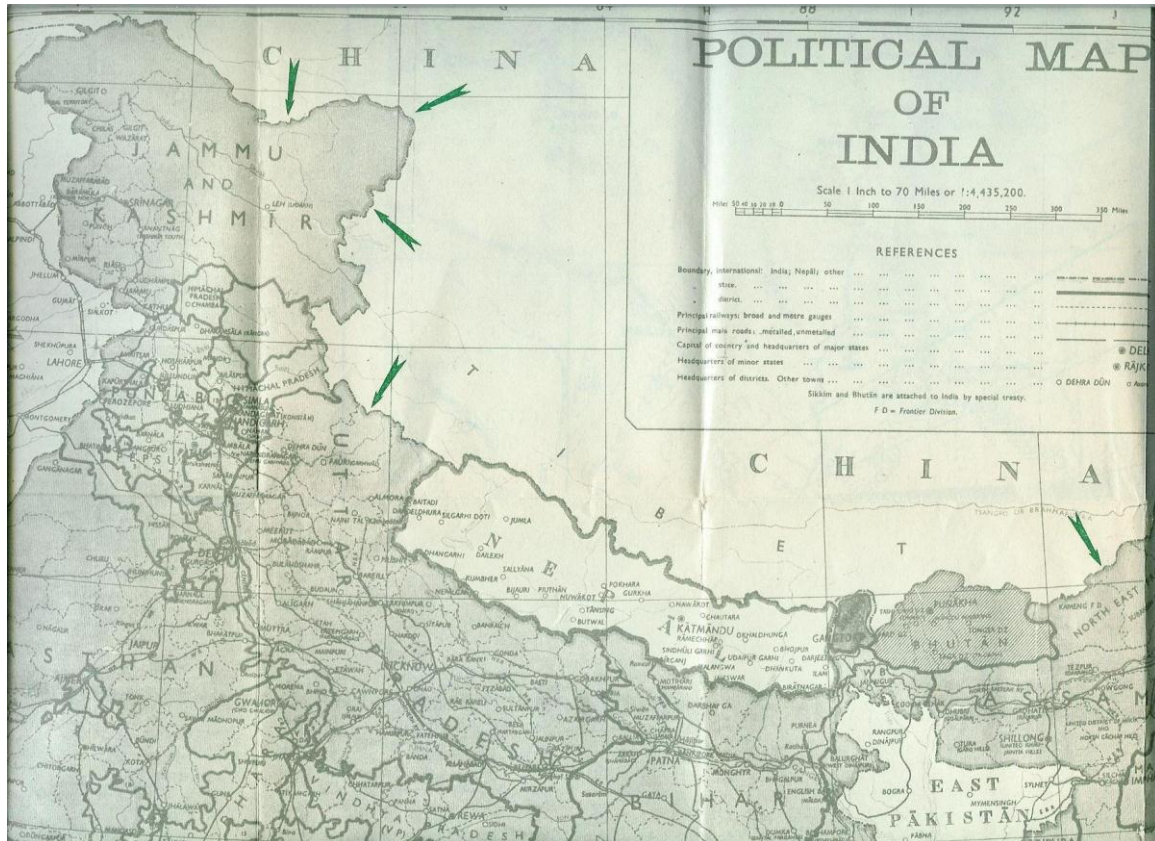
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<sup>11</sup> Tibetan scholarship in the field use the term *cho-yon* to describe Sino-Tibet relationship in the antiquity, beginning Yuan emperor Kublai Khan. The term 'suzerainty' used during the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 does not acquit well to its conceptual foreground. Tibet did not ever pay taxes nor contribute armed personnel what the vassals otherwise do to their feudal lords.

<sup>12</sup> Nearly 2,500 miles (4,023.36 km) stretch along *Karakoram* and *Himalaya* mountain ranges from west to east have always been part of India. *Vishnu Purana* delimits the territorial expanse of Bharata as being situated 'south of Himalayas and north of oceans. Rigveda (10<sup>th</sup> Mandala, 10<sup>th</sup> Adhyaya, Sukta 121.4), the Kena Upnishad, Mahabharata, Rock Edicts referred by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien, and host of other Indian master pieces such as *Kumarasambhava* speak of Himalayas as the northern frontier.

Fig 1

# Northern Frontier of India



Starting right from the tri-junction of Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, Afghanistan and Sharqi Turkistan, the Western sector of this northern frontier runs zigzag approximately 1,770 km eastward through scores of mountain passes.<sup>13</sup> It carries due recognition and reconfirmation of the opposite side by a number of treaties, beginning the Treaty of Tingmosgang (1684 AD). No wonder, scholarly works in the field including Burkitt (2003) tend to uphold Indian.<sup>14</sup> In 1842, the Tibetan ruling elite and the Indian Dogra rulers of the kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir had signed a non-aggression pact and resolved to respect the "old, established frontiers." China's confirmation of this treaty could justly resolve the issue of *Aksai Chin*.

<sup>13</sup> From the tri-junction to the area of Muztagh River, there are as many as five mountain passes including the Khunjerab pass. Subsequently, the boundary runs along the crest of the Aghil watershed through the Aghil pass, the Marpo pass and then to Karakoram pass. This traditionally well settled Indian boundary then runs along the watershed between the Shyok and Yarkand rivers. Before running along the main crest of Kun Lun Mountain and descending past to Lanak pass, the boundary runs through Qara Qash River. The Indian boundary in this sector subsequently passes through Kone pass, Kepsang pass, Chang pass, Jara pass, Charding pass, Imis pass and Kyungzing pass along a number of watersheds, notably Chang Chenmo and Chumesang in India and the streams flowing into Dyap Tso in Tibet. It crosses Pare River about 8 km south of Chumar to reach Gya peak that marks the limit of the Western sector of the Indian border.

<sup>14</sup> Burkitt, Laurie; Scobell, Andrew; Wortzel, Larry M. (July 2003). *The Lessons Of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army At 75*. Strategic Studies Institute. pp. 340–341 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB52.pdf> (accessed on June 19, 2012)





The middle sector of the Indian northern frontier extends from the Gya peak at north-eastern point of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh to the tri-junction of Bhutan, the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet. Lying west and east of Nepal, the Indian boundary in this middle sector is often referred as being West Central and East Central section.<sup>15</sup> The Indian boundary with Tibet in this sector again runs along well defined watersheds between the river systems in the south and the west on the one hand and north and the east on the other that fall in the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand opposite Ari prefecture of Tibet. It passes through a number of mountain passes along the crest of different mountain ranges including Zaskar.<sup>16</sup> The delineation is well established, sanctified and reconfirmed by a host of support evidences including the Indian revenue and other records, treaties of 1684, 1842 and 1954 besides exchanges thereon in 1889 - 90 and 1914.<sup>17</sup>

The eastern sector of the Indian border spans from tri-junction of India-Bhutan-Tibet (south of the Me La) in the west to tri-junction of India-Tibet-Myanmar (east of the Diphu pass) in the east. This is the age old traditional border between the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and the Tibetan plateau. It runs largely along the crest of the high Himalayan range and hence, sparsely populated. It was reconfirmed in the 'Shimla Conference' of 1913 - 14 by the plenipotentiaries of the two sovereign powers of India and Tibet. The borderline has since come to be known as *McMahon* line after the name of the British representative to the conference.<sup>18</sup>

China's stand, orchestrated in the Chinese print as well as electronic media over the period smack a well calibrated extra-diplomatic offensive aimed at first, obfuscating the hard truth and then to engineer bargain upshots to its advantage. In the pursuit, it ducks issues, shifts stand and whiles time in India bashing. All this has a definite pattern. Quite often spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry would raise objections to a legitimate act on the part of sovereign Indian authority in place and then the Chinese print media would raise the issue to its crescendos. There are then instances when a second rung area specialist would come out with a signed article. Such articles are often less hawkish. There is usual refrain to call the area as being 'South Tibet' (zangnan) and talk legitimacy of its claim. In over 200 and odd Chinese media stories, there is not even a single one which should have touched upon the basic fact. Instead, they sought to bank upon squarely misconceived and misconstrued logic. Quite often, the Chinese media stories quoted selectively 'India bashers' such as Alastair Lamb to drive home its stand point.<sup>19</sup> Some of the media minors tend to taunt India's capabilities to

<sup>15</sup> The middle sector of the Indian northern frontier contains all the three sections of Himalayas i.e. the Shivalik, Himachal (lesser Himalaya) and Himadri (greater Himalaya) that characteristically passes through Lahul-Spiti and Kinnaur districts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarkashi, Chamoli and Pithoragarh districts of Uttarakhand. The high mountain and narrow river valleys are the two important features of this area.

<sup>16</sup> Starting at Gya Peak, the natural boundary between India and Tibet in this middle sector by all means can be seen to follow the watershed between Spiti and Pare rivers, ascend the crest of Leo Pargial and Zaskar ranges crisscrossing Pare and Sutlaj rivers and run through quite a few mountain passes which included the Shipki, Raniso and Shimdang passes. Before it reaches the tri-junction of India, Nepal and Tibet following the watersheds between the Sutlej and Ganges, it runs through the Thanga, Tsang Chok, Muling, Mana, Niti, Tun Jun, Kungri Bingri, Darma and Lipu Lekh passes, the vivid description of which is available in all sets of Indian literature including the Buddhist ones.

<sup>17</sup> China's Betrayal of India: Background to the Invasion, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Nov. 1962, p.20

<sup>18</sup> Tibet was an independent state at the time of 'Shimla Conference' of 1913-14. It had evidently thrown off the Chinese yoke in 1912. In historic perspective, China's suzerainty over Tibet has long been questioned. China's agreement or disagreement to the proceedings of the conference thus, did not carry any legal weight. China's plea on the legality of *McMahon* line (麦克马洪线) is per se evasive. The British representative to the conference [Sir Arthur Henry McMahon](#) didn't draw it. He was just signatory to the resolutions of the conference, which had just reconfirmed the said traditional Indian boundary.

<sup>19</sup> Dwelling on both borrowed materials and logic, Alastair Lamb has been a little paranoid on the issue. Contrary to his articulations on the issue, in particular the prowess of Tibet as a nation, one could better refer to credible voice of a number of academics including W.W Rockhill, "The *Dalai Lamas of Lhasa and their Relations with the Manchu Emperors China 1644-1908*", University of Illinois Press, 1952.



withstand China's sheer weight as a world power. Hong Yuan and his ilk carry general refrain to remind India of its 1962 debacle.<sup>20</sup>

### Strategic Foreground of Media Mongering

Chinese media outpours on a sensitive issue as such don't stand scrutiny of a just and fair journalistic endeavour. Amidst all talks of improvements in media milieu, the studies in the field suggest yet a long way down the line to go before it could claim to be "free" and "independent". This is despite startling increase in the number and types of media outlets. At the close the *Wénhuà Dàgéming* (Great Cultural Revolution), the PRC has as few as forty two news papers and twenty one magazine titles. It has since over 2,200 news papers and 9,000 magazine titles.<sup>21</sup> Chinese media continues to be regulated in terms of nature and character of contents that broadly fall in three categories: (a) obligatory; (b) discretionary; and, (forbidden). 'Law on Guarding State Secrets', promulgated on May 1, 1989 is little different from a Damocles' sword against the media outfits for deviation from the governmental stand.<sup>22</sup>

This is despite the fact that Article 35 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (*Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Xiànfǎ*) proclaims freedom of press.<sup>23</sup> In reality, it is but the General Administration of press and Publication (*Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Xīnwén Chūbǎn Zǒngshǔ*) and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (*Guójiā Guǎngbō Diànyǐng Diànshì Zǒngjú*) that sets the ground rules in the last go. Though not a hall mark, the low Press Freedom Index (PFI) rating of the country speaks volumes on the score of any leeway for individual journalistic adventurism to the Chinese scribes.<sup>24</sup>

The 'India bashing stories' in the Chinese print media thus, smack of a meticulously planned 'tirade' with tacit approval of the Chinese political and bureaucratic leadership. As scores of scholarly works in field including He Qinglian bear out, the political control and a series of top-down coercive policies of the Chinese central and local government ensure Chinese media to dance at official tunes.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding, it is discernible from the pattern and context. Most events of such media mongering against India have coincided the visits of Indian officials to Arunachal Pradesh. It included Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in October 2009 and Defence Minister A. K Antony and February 2012. Strikingly, the Chinese media did not then post even a single story

<sup>20</sup> Hong Yuan, "China won, but Never Wanted, Sino-Indian War", Global Times, June 28, 2012 <http://www.Globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/717710/China-won-but-never-wanted-Sino-Indian-war.aspx> (accessed on July 1, 2012)

<sup>21</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_newspapers\\_in\\_China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspapers_in_China) (accessed on July 4, 2012)

<sup>22</sup> The laws as such superseded the provisions in the statute of 1951. The definition of state secret in the existing laws remains as sweeping as the earlier one. Censorship guidelines are issued on weekly basis to the prominent editors. Central pro

<sup>23</sup> The Chinese constitution is vogue is the 1982 version ion, adopted at the 5<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress in Dec 1982 has since undergone four revisions in the years 1988, 1993, 1999 and 2004. The provisions in the statute thus far while superseded quite a few feature of the statute of 1954, 1975 and 1978, it remains more less same on the issue of media freedom.

<sup>24</sup> The Press Freedom Index (PFI) is an annual ranking of countries compiled and published by 'Reporters Without Borders' based upon the organization's assessment of their [press freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_freedom) records. The 2011–2012 index allowed for negative scores and has a wider overall spread of scores (-10 to 142, with previous years having 0 to 115.5). A smaller score in the index corresponds to greater freedom of the press. Among 179 nation states, China held 174<sup>th</sup> position with PFI of 136.00 now as against 84.64 in preceding 2010-11. All through since 2003-04, China's PFI never exceeded 97.00. Striking and yet true, it stood at 85.5 in the wake of 2008 Beijing Olympic. The state of press freedom in China is thus, witnessing much more draconian censorship. For details see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press\\_Freedom\\_Index](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_Freedom_Index) (accessed on July 4, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> He Qinglian, "Media Control in China", *China Rights Forum*, No.4, 2004

[http://www.hrichina.org/sights/default/files/oldsite/pdfs/CRF.1.2004/a1\\_MediaControl1.2004.pdf](http://www.hrichina.org/sights/default/files/oldsite/pdfs/CRF.1.2004/a1_MediaControl1.2004.pdf) (accessed on July 5, 2012)



thus far that carried a logical base for China's stand. Instead, one and all such stories exhibited veritable skills of the Chinese scribes to indulge in polemics with a difference.

Of the scores of India bashing media Chinese stories, coinciding and following the Arunachal Pradesh, Zuo Xuan (Global Times, October 14, 2009) quoted Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu, who had then expressed China's "dissatisfaction" over the event.<sup>26</sup> Zuo Xuan himself called the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to address people of Arunachal Pradesh on the eve of the Assembly election as "provocative". Strikingly, the gloat on the part of China in the words of the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson was the 'size' of the area of dispute being equal to a country such as Austria. It exemplifies China's unstated 'extra-territorial avarice', testified irrefutably by the history of its territorial expansion. Interestingly, Zuo Xuan's write up was little different in substance to an unsigned agency report (People's Daily, October 13, 2009) in substance.<sup>27</sup> It quoted the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman say that "China and India had never officially settled demarcation and their border, and China's instance on the eastern section of the China-India border was consistent and clear-cut". The advisory called upon the Indian side to "address China's serious concerns and not to trigger disturbance in the disputed region" The Chinese Advisory to this effect was reminiscent of China's big brother psyche, expressed in the Chinese slang '*zeda zegao*' (me alone big and tall).

Notwithstanding, one of the stories then called India a 'hegemonic power' in the region (People's Daily, October 14, 2009), inherited from the British colonial traits.<sup>28</sup> It did not have a word to testify its hypothesis. In another dispatch, the Chinese CPC mouthpiece weaved out 'India threat' story. All that it had to say was the outreach of the Indian Agni-5 missile to Harbin in Northeast China (People's Daily, October 14, 2009).<sup>29</sup> Unable to hide its Sinocentrism (*zhōngguó zhōngxīn zhǔyì*), it went on to brag China's invulnerability to India's stride in missile technology. It stopped equating the fire potentials of Agni-5 with Dongfeng-31 (CSS-10 Mod 1) missile.

Two of the relatively young but prolific Chinese journalists call for special attention. Qiu Wei has put the onus for the dispute turning sour squarely on India.<sup>30</sup> Had he advanced a single tangible reason, it was workable. He found a whipping boy instead. Rahul Gandhi had stated in a statement that the state of Arunachal Pradesh was inalienable part of the Indian Union. Qiu found the statement sufficient ground for his characterization of the Indian nation. As things stand, Qiu Wei gave out a slip to journalistic objectivity in lieu of personal bias.

Li Hongmei, another ace Chinese journalist called Indian government as being a prisoner of 'media manipulated public opinion'.<sup>31</sup> She found India's 'Look East' as being a ploy to 'encircle China'.<sup>32</sup> She has advisory for every one including the West, who, in her estimation, tend to 'peck at brittle nerves of India'.<sup>33</sup> She advised the Indian leadership to skip its 'out-of-tune' foreign policy initiatives. Notwithstanding, she speculated over India

<sup>26</sup> Zuo Xuan, "Indian PM Visit to Southern Tibet Sparks China's Ire", *Global Times*, October. 14, 2009, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/china/diplomacy2009-10/476841.htm> (accessed on July 10, 2012)

<sup>27</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6782186.html> (accessed on July 10, 2012)

<sup>28</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91343/6783357.html> (accessed on July 10, 2012)

<sup>29</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/6783227.html> (accessed on July 11, 2012)

<sup>30</sup> Qiu Wei, "China-India Border Dispute Turns Sour", *Global Times*, October 16, 2009 <http://china.globaltimes.cn/diplomacy/2009-10/477748.html> (accessed on July 11, 2012)

<sup>31</sup> Li Hongmei, "Indian Media Stinks up Public Opinion", *People's Daily*, Oct 15, 2009 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/96417/6758363.html> (accessed on July 11, 2012)

<sup>32</sup> Li Hongmei, "India's Look East Policy means Look to Encircle China", *People's Daily Online*, Oct 27, 2010 <http://english.people.com.cn/90002/96417/7179404.html> (accessed on July 13, 2012)

<sup>33</sup> Li Hongmei, "Hawks Pecking at the Brittle Nerves of India", *People's Daily on Line*, September 19, 2010 <http://english.people.com.cn/90002/96417/7145252.html> (accessed on July 13, 2012)





resuming 'nuclear tests' and called upon India's neighbours including China to keep an eye on India.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the People's Daily and People's Daily Online of late carry the tagline that the views of the author do not represent the view of the paper in question. With a caveat of the Chinese media milieu taking a shift to pluralism, it can be construed to be tactical move on the part of Chinese media establishment as well to wriggle out from inconvenient diplomatic scenario.

### Hindsight on Stand and Stance Quirks

In the backdrop, the thaw in the China-India relationship, worked out over the years through an array of 'positive and forward looking' diplomatic manoeuvres including the Sino-Indian Bilateral Peace and Tranquility Accords of 1993 and 1996 and host of other subsequent mechanism in place to address the issue could not produce the much needed cordiality much less settlement of the territorial disputes. Most pertinently, at the end of the day, the Chinese Fourth Estate can at best be intervening variable to its 'take up' and 'take down' tension syndrome.

The phenomenon can be conceptually attributed to 'contradictions' in China's stand and stance on the issue, which the Chinese call *máodùn*. It is *inter alia* attributable to apparent hiatus of approaches within the old and the new actors of the Chinese foreign policy and then among their relatively conservative and liberal components.<sup>35</sup> Official policymakers and interest groups that strive to influence foreign policy formulation all interpret China's national interests based on their own, sometimes narrowly defined perspectives and preferences. There is no one overarching official formulation that unambiguously defines China's 'core interests'. Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox (2010) attributed this cacophony of voices as a factor to China's diverse and often contradictory foreign policy goals.<sup>36</sup> It has turned China's long held *duikou guanli* system ineffective, whereby the coherent and cogent policy options were formulated and articulated by the individual entity. 'Practice deficits' to the Chinese precepts of *héping juéqi* (peaceful rise) or *hexie shijie* (harmonious world) in pursuance to its unstated *hexin liyi* (core interest). No wonder, China's much talked *mùlín yǒuhào* (good neighbour) policy is presently under tremendous pressure and a host of analysts including John W. Graver looked at it as a proverbial 'wolf in sheep's clothing'.<sup>37</sup> Any breakthrough to the impasse thus, broadly impinges upon the elements of pluralism within the Chinese policy formulating and implementing mechanism.

There has been little in the name of secular trend of the order of positive development even while the two sides have often displayed political will to get to amicable settlement. The eight rounds of border talks in 1980s (Dec. 1981 - Nov. 1987) typically produced just 'agreements on disagreements'. Positive tone for the event set in the course of Delhi sojourn of the Chinese vice- Premier and Foreign Minister Huang Hua (June 26 - 30, 1981)

<sup>34</sup> Li Hongmei, "Possible, India Resumes Nuclear Tests?", *People's Daily on Line*, <http://english.people.com.cn/90002/96417/7362433.html> (accessed on July 13, 2012)

<sup>35</sup> The Communist Party of China, the Chinese Government and the People's Liberation Army constituted the old actors of the Chinese foreign policy mechanism. Expanding pluralism within Chinese society and China's growing interdependence with the international community has led to the emergence of new players on the margins of the traditional ones. These new actors, as various studies in the field suggest, include resource companies, financial institutions, local governments, research organizations, the media and netizens.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, "New Foreign Policy Actors in China", SIIPRI Policy Paper, 26, September 2010 <http://books.siipri.org/files/PP/SIIPRIPP26.pdf> (accessed on July 14, 2012)

<sup>37</sup> John W. Graver, "China's Good Neighbour Diplomacy: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?" Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Asia Programme Special Report No 126, Jan 2005. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIAreport/No126.pdf> (accessed on July 14, 2012)



faded in the face of China's counter productive diplomatic articulations. It included Sino-Pak protocol on the opening of the Khunjareb pass (August 22, 1982), reports on China supplying weapon grade uranium and transfer of nuclear weapon design to Pakistan (1983) and Sumdorong Chu crisis (1986 - 87) dampened the spirit.<sup>38</sup> The fifth round (September 1984) of the talks stands apart with the two sides agreeing to 'maintain peace and tranquility at the border' until a final settlement was reached. It meant little more than *status quo*.

As most Chinese analysts including Liu Xuecheng constantly hold, China's strategy in all the eight-round border talks comprised of two main aspects: One was to insist on a package deal, and the other was to develop their bilateral relations in other fields with the border dispute shelved.<sup>39</sup> Broadly attributed to China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese strategy gravitated on seeking legitimacy for its 1962 war booty and gratuitous Pakistan gift of 1963 in the Western sector. By implication, in the eyes of Liu Xuecheng, the said Chinese package deal proposal tacitly legitimized Indian position in the Eastern sector. It meant China bidding for the existing 'line of actual control' (LAC) as the 'boundary'. It was against India's sector-by-sector approach which called going through the very merit of the claims.

China yielded to India's logic and gave up its insistence for package deal in the course of eighth round (November 14 - 17, 1986). Putting across all the principles and concerns on table for discussion were to be the guiding measure for future engagement. 15 rounds of Joint Working Group (July 1989 - March 2005) and 15 rounds of Special Representatives Talks (September 2005 - January 2012), constituted respectively after much hyped China visit of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (December 19 - 23, 1988) and India visit of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (April 9 - 12, 2005) have been less than half way in getting to the set objectives. Little different could be said about the four rounds of the annual defence dialogues (November 2007 - December 2011). On ground, constructively, the endeavours have facilitated 'high level interactions' of the civilian and service personnel, fostered general environment for 'disengagement' and squeezed the scope of acrimony to 'war of words'. This is of course not deriding the lateral gains that hold future for positive developments in course of time.

The momentum of the negotiations on all points of concern pending ultimate objective of demarcation of the boundary has been rather skewed. There is a distinct pattern. Chinese analysts, holding allegiance to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and engaged in strategic studies, pre-empted the just concluded 15<sup>th</sup> round of China-India special representative talks and 4<sup>th</sup> China-India Annual Defence Dialogue with a slew of papers. These papers carried pejorative references about the potentials and capabilities of the Indian armed forces.

The analytics of Hao Ding, a researcher with the Academy of Military Sciences (*Jūnshì Kēxué Yánjiūyuàn*), Ma Kang, Deputy Director, Institute of Strategic Studies, National University of Defence Technology (*Guófáng Kēxuéjìshù Dàxué*), Jin Yinan, head of the Strategic Research Institute at National Defense University, Hu Shisheng and Fu Xiaoqiang, a scholar at the state-run China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Liu Lin, a researcher with the Academy of Military Science of PLA and some other frequent dabblers on the issue among the Chinese academics including Colonel Dai Xu, He Zhude, Fang Wei, Ze Mo etc., have notably been cast in sarcasm. While one can see a trend to this effect right since 2006, the rhetoric acquired stringent

<sup>38</sup> A number of press reports suggested that China then gave Pakistan 15 tons of uranium hexafluoride gas for production of bomb grade uranium, 50 kilograms of weapons-grade enriched uranium enough for two bombs, and a blue-print for a nuclear weapon. Some studies including Monterey Institute of International suggest that the Chinese had then passed over Chic-4 design.



connotation only then. The tone and tenor of the Chinese media aroused a combative spree among the Indian analysts.

Thanks to a measure of balancing act by the two sides, the situation has quite often been saved before touching nadirs. As the Chinese media plays second fiddle to Zhongnanhai mandarins, it has all along been dropping immutable hints about the plausible corrections in the pipeline. As the scholarship in the field verily bear out, the write up with 'discretionary' contents as against 'obligatory' and 'forbidden' ones can not appear in the Chinese media without tacit official nods.<sup>40</sup> The same holds good for the stories with positive notes as well. Of scores of time series events, the latest Sino-Indian standoff over Indo-Vietnam joint oil exploration project in Phu Khanh basin in South China Sea, postponement of the 15<sup>th</sup> round of China-India special representative talks and the like stand testimony to the fact.

The Chinese media first, went whole hog in combative spree and denounced every thing that India stood for. The People's Daily (Oct 14, 2011) dropped ominous hints that the PRC could take "actions to show its stance" on Indo-Vietnam joint oil exploration bid in South China Sea.<sup>41</sup> While calling upon the two sides not to "go for the throat", the People's Daily (Nov 29, 2011) literally mocked at India holding its gun on border dispute with just a third of China's GDP. It surmised "tough road ahead" in Sino-Indian relations for various reasons including the US factor.<sup>42</sup>

Following discernible change in the strategic estimation and stance of the Zhongnanhai mandarin on the issue, the tone and tenor of the Chinese media turned full circle as a balancing act. Rong Ying called for a new starting point and new framework beyond 'geopolitical calculations' to address the strategic trust deficit, clouding course correction efforts of the two sides.<sup>43</sup> The scores of Chinese media stories have subsequently projected plausible good streak in the resolution of the standing issues. The counsel in such piece of stories called upon China and India to handle the disputes from a 'strategic perspective' and surmised the possibility of the two countries going for 'friendly cooperation' rather than 'walking towards conflicts and war'. They sought to project China full commitment. They have since quoted academics such as Hu Shisheng and Ma Jiali, Senior CPC officials such as Wang Jiarui and Zhou Yongkang to suggest that the two Asian giants jointly held promise for the world at large.<sup>44</sup>

Strange but true, the Chinese media has been up with the advisories in the next breath. It called upon India to work with China to maintain peace and tranquillity at the border. It quoted the Chinese academic Fu Xiaoqiang who purportedly blamed India for the lack of progress on the negotiation table.<sup>45</sup> There has been a shot in the arms on the eve of India visit of the Chinese President Hu Jintao for BRICS summit. People's Daily (March 21,

<sup>39</sup> Liu Xuecheng, "Look Beyond the Sino-Indian border Dispute", *China International Studies*, China Institute of International Studies, Aug 10, 2011 [http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2011-08/content\\_4401017\\_2.htm](http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2011-08/content_4401017_2.htm) (accessed on July 15, 2012)

<sup>40</sup> Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, "China's Media in an Age of Capitalist Transition," pp. 126-145 in *China's Emergent Political Economy, Capitalism in the Dragon's Lair*, edited by Christopher A. McNally, Routledge Press, New York 2008.

<sup>41</sup> <http://english.people.com.cn/90780/7617302.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012)

<sup>42</sup> <http://english.people.com.cn/90780/7659839.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012)

<sup>43</sup> Rong Ying, "China-India Relations: New Starting Point and new Framework", *China International Studies*, China Institute of International Studies, Aug 10, 2011 [http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2011-08/10/content\\_4395790.htm](http://www.ciiis.org.cn/english/2011-08/10/content_4395790.htm) (accessed on July 15, 2012)

<sup>44</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7707639.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012);

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7723906.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012);

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7723865.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012);

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7723871.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7740601.html> (accessed on July 15, 2012)



2012) and China Daily (March 22, 2012) quoted Luo Zhaohui, DG, Department of Asian Affairs, Foreign Ministry of China to project a positive roadmap to bilateral relations.<sup>46</sup> The caveat being 'management of the differences', it is hard to imagine a secular positive movement of the graph towards settlement of the disputes.

### Perception and Stratagem Quandary

The geographic settings of China and India did not historically leave grounds for either land or maritime border. China proper did not extend to India's territorial region at any point of time in the historical past. Of the Han Chinese dynasties, the second-last imperial Ming Dynasty governed 15 administrative entities, which included 13 provinces (*Bùzhèngshǐ Sī*) and two directly governed areas. Even under the 18 provinces (*Yīshíbā Xíngshěng*) system of the Qing dynasty, the territorial expanse of China proper did not extend to Indian territorial expanse. There was little change in the shape, size and extent of China proper when the Qing dynasty was succeeded by the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912. Indian territorial expanse bordered only with Tibet and part of East Turkestan or say XUAR as the Chinese call.<sup>47</sup> In the light of this ground reality, where did an occasion come up for the Indian as much as Chinese establishments of the historic past to go into delimitation and demarcation of land and maritime border with China at all?

The Sino-Indian border dispute is thus, borne of China's 'strategic territorial expansion ambitions' stretched far beyond 'China proper'. This is quite poignantly the case with China's border disputes with 14 countries by land and seven countries by maritime boundaries, involving as many as 23 skirmishes short of a theatre war of different denominations.<sup>48</sup> It included some of the warlike skirmishes such as those with India (1962), erstwhile Soviet Union (1969) and Vietnam (1979) but has strategically sought to call them 'conflict' (*zhongtu*) and not 'war' (*zhanzheng*). In handling the territorial disputes with one or the other country over the times, China's approach approximates to what John Mearsheimer and his ilk call 'offensive realism' with a difference, characterized by pacifist looks and stern contents, meticulously camouflaged with policy cloaks such as 'harmonious world' (*hexie shijie*) and 'good neighbour' precepts.

A long drag to final settlement is not some thing peculiar to India. This has been the case with all the countries in territorial disputes with China. Where it has gone for demarcation, it has never been full and final in one go. Chinese way is characterized to go for half boils it reaps imponderable gains. It does concede the other side but only when the long term gains and/ or losses are clearly in sight. The latest in the row are the cases of Russia and Vietnam. There are then big power-small power considerations while giving concessions to the other side. A case in point is border demarcation with the Russian Federation along the Heilongjiang River, where China

<sup>46</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7764518.html> (accessed on March 23, 2012); [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/22/content\\_14890517.html](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/22/content_14890517.html) (accessed on March 23, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> *Xinjiang* (新疆) means new frontier. Until the Qing dynasty, the region was known as *Xiyu* (西域) having geographic reference point of being Western Region right from the time of Han dynasty who drove out Xiongnu empire. During the yesteryears of historical past, all or part of the region has been ruled or influenced at various times by the [Tocharians](#), [Yuezhi](#), [Xiongnu Empire](#), [Kushan Empire](#), [Han Empire](#), [Former Liang](#), [Former Qin](#), [Later Liang](#), [Western Liang](#), [Tang Dynasty](#), [Uyghur Khaganate](#), [Kara-Khanid Khanate](#), [Mongol Empire \(Yuan Dynasty\)](#), [Dzungar Khanate](#), [Qing Dynasty](#), [Republic of China](#). It has been carved as an autonomous region under the communist rule since 1949 and called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (新疆维吾尔自治区).

<sup>48</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, Princeton University Press, 2008.



gave out half of the *Heixiazi* Island while it could have held the full in terms of agreed *thalweg* principles.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, China entered into a settlement to demarcate 1350 km long land border with Vietnam only after the latter conceded China's right to use and operate railways on 300 meter stretch on its soil at the junction of at Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (GZAR) of China and Lang Son province of Vietnam, occupied by China in 1979 war. Concessionary approach, applied in the case of Myanmar (Oct.01, 1961), Nepal (Oct. 05, 1961), Mongolia (Dec. 26, 1962) and Pakistan (March 2, 1963) carried enormous hidden cost to their detriments.

### Options and the Landscape of Upcoming Engagements

Halting progress and limited success of SR level talks and ADD on border dispute must not surprise any one. It conclusively stems partly from a structural problem in the historic geopolitical stance of the Chinese state in the region. As elsewhere, the PRC got first, suzerainty over Tibet. This is true again with East Turkestan. Even while sovereignty eludes, it has brazenly repudiated their international obligations and commitments in contravention to both the 'naturalistic' and 'positivistic' laws of international conducts and thus, compromised its own legitimacy.<sup>50</sup> Worse, as and where it got an opportunity, it got to squander them in its vanity. This is writ large in China's retraction to various conventions, treaties and agreements of yesteryears including McMahon Line and Simla Accord (1914), formalized by the then sovereign entities of what is now Xinjiang and Tibet with the Indian sides in one way or the other. For a breakthrough, it is but essential that the Chinese political elite rise to the occasion and accept the ground truth. For appreciating Indian position in all the three sectors of dispute, the Western, Middle and Eastern, they could better look up and draw on a wide range of Chinese and Tibetan literature, beginning the epoch of Emperor Ming of Han Dynasty (58 - 75 AD).<sup>51</sup>

On the negotiation table, in their strategies, the Chinese sides first, hammered home 'package' deal as against India's 'sector-by-sector' approach. The PRC was yet agreeable to accept the watershed principle in the Eastern sector. It did not go down well with the Indian side. The Chinese approach smacked the tenets of *quid pro quo* at the altar of natural justice. In fact, PRC stood a net gainer in either way. It served its strategic design. Nonetheless, it did not have a real stake. The disputed area did not form part of China proper. China ultimately gave in and the approach of the sector-by-sector review within the framework of comprehensive settlement in 1984. As historical-legalistic arguments could not find a meeting ground, the two sides have little leeway except toying for political solution. The line of actual control (LAC) device is a way forward to find time.<sup>52</sup> With occasional jitters, the two sides have held to level exchanges including scores of summit meetings. While political

<sup>49</sup> The *thalweg principle* is the principle in which the [boundary](#) between two political states separated by a watercourse is denoted as the thalweg of that watercourse, if those two states have agreed to use the thalweg definition. Various states have also defined their watercourse international boundaries by a median line, left bank, right bank, etc.

<sup>50</sup> Going by both Westphalian and non-Westphalian constructs of sovereignty, largely represented in the works of Thomas Hobbes, Jean Bodin and Emer de Vattel, sovereignty has a 'domestic' and 'external dimension, where the key lies in people's mandate to represent. China's coercive as well as positive actions have failed to garner support of the masses either in Tibet or East Turkestan.

<sup>51</sup> In Chinese literature of antiquity such as *Book of Later Han*, the Indian state is referred as Heavenly India (*Tianzhu* 天竺) and the regions thereof are referred as Upper India (*Shang Tianzhu* 上天竺), Middle India (*Zhong Tianzhu* 中天竺) and Lower India (*Xia Tianzhu* 下天竺). There are then a large number of references of the Kingdom of *Tianzhu* in the south of the Himalaya (*Zai Ximalaya Shan Nan* 在喜马拉雅山南) in a large number of works of Chinese scholars.

<sup>52</sup> As per the agreed principle, the two sides were to hold on without prejudice to their respective positions on the issue. The force level was to be kept at minimum compatible to otherwise good neighbourly relations. Simultaneously, the two were to work out effective confidence building measures (CBM).





parameters and guiding principles on the settlement of the China-India border dispute have been set, the settlement eludes gingering effects of the Chinese side.

Common interests of the PRC and the Indian state in the new millennia outweigh the points of differences in the border dispute. The stake holders have to work out meeting of minds in respect of grey areas. In the Western sector, the main area of concern relates Aksai Chin and the Trans-Karakoram Tract. While there is little merit in China's territorial, it has assiduously built a stake in National Highway 219 that connects XUAR and TAR. The negotiation has thus, to focus on some sort of arrangements that gives China use rights while India retained its territorial rights. China can very well replicate its experiments with Vietnam to settle the issue. Namka Chu, Thag La, Sumdorong Chu, Tulung La, Asaphi La, Longju, and Chen ju along McMahon Line in the Eastern sector continue to be contentious.

China's efforts to garner its interest through multilateral mechanism such as ADB have proved disastrous in frictions of healthy relations. Increased convergence of multi faceted interests of the two in this new millennium should go as a touch stone in the settlement of the dispute on rational grounds. The jitters in the relationship of the two emerged powers of Asia with the stake of welfare as much as potentials of 36.6 percent of world population must weigh over emotional factors such as those surfacing out of journalistic adventurism on the parts of intellectual community of the two sides. This includes South China Sea issue as it turned a flash point. The new 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> generation leadership of China must see the writing on the wall and settle the issue.

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**Remarks:**

Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the authors.



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