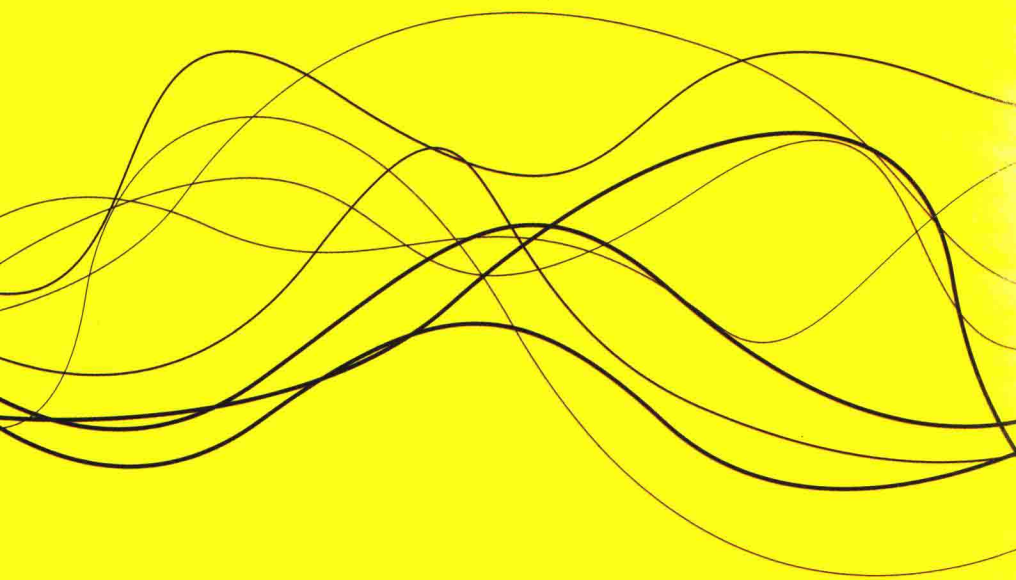


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Asymmetrical Threat
Perceptions in
India–China Relations

Tien-sze Fang

Series Editors

Sumit Ganguly

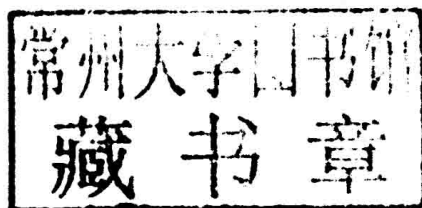
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THE OXFORD INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA SERIES

Asymmetrical Threat
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SERIES EDITORS

Sumit Ganguly and E. Sridharan

After a long period of relative isolation during the Cold War years, contemporary South Asia has grown immensely in its significance in the global political and economic order. This ascendancy has two key dimensions. First, the emergence of India as a potential economic and political power that follows its acquisition of nuclear weapons and its fitful embrace of economic liberalization. Second, the persistent instability along India's borders continues to undermine any attempts at achieving political harmony in the region: fellow nuclear-armed state Pakistan is beset with chronic domestic political upheavals; Afghanistan is paralysed and trapped with internecine warfare and weak political institutions; Sri Lanka is confronted by an uncertain future with a disenchanting Tamil minority; Nepal is caught in a vortex of political and legal uncertainty as it forges a new constitution; and Bangladesh is overwhelmed by a tumultuous political climate.

India's rising position as an important player in global economic and political affairs warrants extra-regional and international attention. The rapidly evolving strategic role and importance of South Asia in the world demands focused analyses of foreign and security policies within and towards the region. The present series addresses these concerns. It consists of original, theoretically grounded, empirically rich, timely, and topical volumes oriented towards contemporary and future developments in one of the most populous and diverse corners of the world.

Sumit Ganguly is Professor of Political Science and Rabindranath Tagore Chair in Indian Cultures and Civilizations, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA.

E. Sridharan is Academic Director, University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India, New Delhi.

To my parents and my wife, Yu-li

Preface

The rise of China and India is undoubtedly a major feature of contemporary global politics. The interactions between the two rising Asian powers will not only exert a profound and far-reaching influence over Asian security, but is also seen as a decisive factor reshaping the international order. However, compared to their significance, Sino-Indian relations do not attract appropriate attention. People still lack due and comprehensive understandings of the complex and complicated relationship between the two neighbouring giants.

To shed light on these important issues, this book draws on evidence from interactions between China and India over the past few years to make an empirical case for the existence and impact of asymmetrical perceptions of threat between the two countries. The major issues of China–India relations, including the nuclear issue, the boundary problem, the Tibet issue, regional competition and cooperation, and China–India relations in the global context, are examined.

The first aim of the book is to provide a new perspective for understanding China–India relations by highlighting the asymmetry of the threat perceptions between China and India. The book observes the main interactions between the two countries: India tends to be deeply apprehensive of threats from China, while China appears comparatively unconcerned about threats from India.

The second contention in this book is that Sino-Indian relations are constrained by the asymmetry between their threat perceptions. The asymmetry in perceptions of threat will result in a dilemma for India. India will try to reduce the sense of insecurity by adopting some counter-measures, such as developing nuclear weapons. However, India is also very cautious and avoids angering China. On the contrary, China will be in favour of the *status quo*, and feels no urgent need to sort out the boundary disputes. The Chinese side has ignored the asymmetry and is in no mood to share India's expectations and concerns.

Thus, this book concludes that this asymmetry has made it difficult for China and India to forge a shared knowledge and to set a common agenda around which their expectations could converge. India will be on a perennial quest for changes in Sino-Indian relations, such as a final resolution of the border issue and securing a more credible nuclear deterrent against China. The asymmetry in threat perceptions has been a destabilizing factor in China–India relations.

Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a decade that I have devoted to research regarding the relationship between India and China.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Christopher Hughes at the London School of Economics and Political Science, for his significant and helpful guidance and support of my PhD study and research. Without his guidance and inspiration this book could not have been completed.

I worked in India for six years as a Taiwanese diplomat and had very good interactions with Indian academics. I would like to thank Professor Alka Acharya, Professor B.R. Deepak, Professor Sabree Mitra, and Professor Srikanth Kondapalli of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, Dr Jagannath Panda of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), Dr Jabin T. Jacob of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Dr Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), and Professor Madhu Bhalla of the University of Delhi, for numerous discussions on related topics that helped me improve my knowledge in the area. Needless to say, the author takes full responsibility for the views expressed in this publication and for any errors of omission or misinterpretation.

I extend gratitude also to Professor Lih. J. Chen, Professor Da Hsuan Feng, Professor Wei-Chung Wang, and Professor Hsiao-Chin Hsieh of National Tsing Hua University, for personal encouragement and academic insights. With their support, I have wholeheartedly enjoyed the challenges of academic life as a teacher-cum-researcher.

In addition, I extend sincere thanks to all the people who directly or indirectly helped me while I worked at the Taipei Cultural and Economic Center in Delhi (the *de facto* Taiwanese Embassy in India). I would also like to thank Ms Solvig Topping for proofreading my draft manuscript.

Last, but not the least, I convey my deepest gratitude to my family for their love and support. In particular, I am indebted to my late father, who shares my suffering and happiness in heaven. Without the support of my family members, this book would simply have been impossible.

Abbreviations

ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BIMSTEC	Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CBM	confidence-building measures
CECA	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DF	Dongfeng
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FDI	foreign direct investment
FMCT	Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IGMDP	Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme
IRBM	intermediate range ballistic missile
ITBP	Indo-Tibetan Border Police
JWG	Joint Working Group
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LOC	Line of Control

MGC	Mekong-Ganga Cooperation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRBM	medium range ballistic missile
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group
NSSP	Next Steps in Strategic Partnership
NWS	Nuclear-Weapon State
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PMC	Post Ministerial Conference
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTI	Press Trust of India
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCIO	State Council Information Office
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SRBM	short-range ballistic missile
SSM	surface-to-surface missile
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
TMD	Theatre Missile Defence
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

Chinese Language Newspapers and Journals

<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	People's Daily
<i>Pingguo Ribao</i>	Apple Daily
<i>Renmin Wan</i>	People's Website
<i>Huanqiu Shibao</i>	Global Times
<i>Zhongguo Dalu Yanjiu</i>	Mainland China Studies
<i>Nanya Yanjiu Jikan</i>	South Asian Studies Quarterly
<i>Nanya Yanjiu</i>	South Asian Studies
<i>Wenti Yu Yanjiu</i>	Issues and Studies
<i>Xiandai Guoji Guanxi</i>	Contemporary International Relations

<i>Zhanglue Anquan Yanxi</i>	Strategic and Security Analysis
<i>Zhongguo Shibao</i>	China Times
<i>Zhanlue Yu Guanli</i>	Strategy and Management
<i>Ya Fei Zongheng</i>	Asia and Africa Review
<i>Dangdai Yatai</i>	Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies
<i>Guangming Ribao</i>	Guanming Daily
<i>Guoji Xianqu Daobao</i>	International Herald Leader
<i>Guoji Guancha</i>	International Review
<i>Shujie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi</i>	World Economics and Politics
<i>Guoji Wenti Yanjiu</i>	Journal of International Studies
<i>Guoji Luntan</i>	International Forum
<i>Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu</i>	Studies of International Politics
<i>Nanyang Wenti Yanjiu</i>	Southeast Asian Affairs

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Introduction

Understanding the Instability of India–China Relations

ON 11 MAY 1998, the Government of India shocked the world by conducting three rounds of nuclear tests in the Pokhran desert in its northwestern Rajasthan state. The new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had been elected to office barely two months earlier. Two days after the nuclear tests, *The New York Times* published a letter from Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee to US President Bill Clinton. Aiming to explain the rationale of the nuclear tests, Vajpayee said,

We have an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapons state. At the hands of this bitter neighbour we have suffered three aggressions in the last 50 years.¹

Since the late 1980s, China and India have sought to reduce the tensions along the frontier and expanded trade and cultural exchanges. However, following Vajpayee's statement, China not only demanded that India should roll back its nuclear weapon programme, but also boycotted the decade-long bilateral dialogue for solving the border dispute.

The nuclear tests episode once again exposed the fragility of Sino-Indian relations. India was the first non-communist state to establish

diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The slogan *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* (Indians and Chinese are brothers) was trumpeted by Beijing and New Delhi in the mid-1950s. However, Sino-Indian relations soon deteriorated after 1959 when the Dalai Lama fled to India and the Sino-Indian border dispute surfaced, culminating in a brief but significant war along the disputed frontier. The border dispute remains unresolved, albeit diplomatic relations at ambassador level were restored in 1976.

The normalization of relations gained new momentum when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Beijing in 1988, the first visit by an Indian head of government since Jawaharlal Nehru's visit in 1954, and was reciprocated by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to India in 1960. Since then, high-level exchange visits had increased and the cooperation in various fields had been expanded. Following the Pokhran II nuclear tests in 1998, Sino-Indian relations went into a deep chill again. Two sides then took strides towards reconciliation. However, their bilateral relations went into a 'tailspin' again (Jha 2010: viii).

Recurrent tensions seem to be a significant feature of Sino-Indian relations. Therefore, the central question that will guide this book is: Why are China and India not able to develop long-term stable and friendly relations?

Threat Perception in International Studies

Most studies about Sino-Indian relations emphasize the boundary dispute or the border war, but the conclusions of various writers are irreconcilable with those of others. Some blame China's ambition to expand its territory as the cause of the deterioration of China–India relations. Others blame India for misconduct or failure in foreign policymaking.

Moreover, most of these studies are based on historical accounts or are from the perspective of 'mainstream' international relations theory, namely neo-realism and neo-liberalism. The underlying premise is that, just like other states, China and India are driven to secure the support of other powers to maximize their interests in a condition of anarchy. Treating national interests as exogenously determined, the realists often ignore the possibility of cooperation between states, and fail to explain or predict the re-engagement between Beijing and New Delhi in the post-Cold War era. Many earlier studies assumed that any improvement

of relations between the two sides would involve a settlement of the boundary problem (Lamb 1964: 2, Rao 1968: 2). Belying such arguments, China and India have agreed to expand contacts and cooperation in many fields with a high frequency of government-to-government exchanges and a significant increase in bilateral trade, even if there is still no foreseeable final solution to the border dispute.

In order to offer some fresh insight into this topic, this book will take account of the constructivist understanding of international relations in order to develop an alternative approach to that of the existing literature. Thus, the constraints to the development of Sino-Indian relations will be studied in terms of mutual perceptions and expectations, particularly the perception of threat. In addition, as Indian scholars pointed out, India needs to get a first-hand pulse of China for formulating its China policy instead of relying on western sources (Singh 2011: 38). Considering that Sino-Indian studies in English suffer from a sparseness in the Chinese perspective compared to the Indian one, an attempt will be made to make greater use of Chinese language sources in order to fill this information gap.

Regarding perception studies, Robert Jervis has identified perception as a variable in analysing international politics and foreign policies. He explored the process of perception and identified common forms of misperception, which are perceptions of centralization, overestimating one's importance as influence and target, the influence of desire and fears on perception, and cognitive dissonance (Jervis 1976). His pioneering study has thus provided a foundation in this area.

This book tries to narrow the focus on the perception of threat to understand China–India interactions. Threat perception refers to perceived intent and perceived capability of an opponent. In this book, threat perception is defined as an expectation of harm to assets or values of the state (Baldwin 1971: 71–8, Maoz 1990: 13). The loss or damage caused by a perceived threat might be in the areas of military, economic, strategic, national sovereignty and national prestige.

There are three major sources of threat perception. The first one is historical enmity. States tend to rely on past experiences and interactions to forecast how other states will behave. As David Singer states, historical memories easily help to transform vague suspicion into concrete hostility (Singer 1958: 93). Moreover, the existence of historical enmity will often amplify present perceptions of threat (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 59). The second source of threat perception is the sense of separate identity. Since a state's

identity informs its interests and preference, states which do not hold a shared identity are uncertain as to each other's intentions and plots. On the contrary, a sense of shared identity can reduce the perception of threat (Rousseau 2006: 213–14). A power gap between the competing states is the third major source of the threat perception. A substantial gap in power between the competing states will increase the sense of insecurity for the state with less power.

In addition to illustrate the perceptions of threat between India and China, this book tries to understand how China and India interact under their own threat perception. A state will not mobilize available resources against a threat if it does not perceive the existence of threat. On the contrary, the threat perception will encourage a state to take counter-measures against its perceived threat. Several counter-measures for dealing with the threat are often discussed, such as the following.

The first is balancing. Internal balancing is to increase one's own strength and to reduce vulnerability; external balancing is used to ally with states which share common concerns (Buzan *et al.* 1998). However, an increase in capabilities, especially militarily, may intensify the security dilemma and is not conducive to a reduction in the perception of threat.

According to Stephen M. Walt's 'balance of threat' discourse, which modified the popular balance of power theory, a state's alliance behaviour is determined by the threat they perceive from other states. That is, a state aims for balance against perceived threats rather than against the most powerful states (Walt 1987: 21–6). T.V. Paul has proposed the concept of 'soft balancing' as a variant of the traditional 'hard balancing', which is based on countervailing alliances and arms build-ups. According to his idea, soft balancing involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances. The features of soft balancing are limited arms build-up, *ad hoc* cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005: 72–3, Paul 2005: 46–71).

The second way to deal with threat perception is to bandwagon the perceived threat (appeasement of or subordination to the main source of threat) (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 58). Weak and small states are more likely to 'jump on the bandwagon' with the rising threat in order to protect their own security (Waltz 1979: 123–8). The third option to reduce the threat perception is a policy of constructive engagement, such as conducting Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) to reduce both military capability and estimated military intent.²