

**The Rise of China: Implications for India** by Harsh V. Pant (ed.), New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 272, INR 795

**Chinese and Indian Strategic Behavior: Growing Power and Alarm** by George J. Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 376, INR 995

**A Resurgent China: South Asian Perspectives** by S.D. Muni and Tan Tai Yong (eds), New Delhi: Routledge, 2012, pp. 348, INR 845

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It is a commonplace to observe that the emergence of China as a great power is the most significant geopolitical phenomenon of the current decade. However, the implications of the ‘rise’ of China—a useful, if misleading shorthand for a complex historical development—are far from evident and have attracted a full-throated debate. For India, in particular, China’s rise is likely to have important and far-reaching ramifications. Five decades after the 1962 war, the prospect of having a great power in our immediate neighbourhood continues to unnerve most Indian observers. To be sure, China is the one major power that impacts directly on India’s geopolitical space and that is likely to pose the most important challenges for India’s foreign policy and strategy. The gaps in overall economic size and potential between China and India are already significant and are likely to increase in the near term. This could result in a corresponding increase in the power differential between the two countries. In consequence, getting the measure of China’s rise remains the single-most important task for India’s foreign policy.

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The three volumes reviewed here are a welcome addition to the growing literature on the topic. They differ in the key areas of focus, but complement each other. The volume edited by Harsh Pant is focused squarely on the implications of China's rise for India. The book by George Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham undertakes a comparative study of the strategic behaviour of China and India. And the volume edited by S.D. Muni and Tan Tai Yong puts together South Asian views on the rise of China. Taken together, they present a wide spectrum of views on the rise of China and provide considerable meat into which the Indian strategic community should dig its teeth.

*The Rise of China* surveys not just India's policy towards China but also domestic developments within China and China's foreign policy beyond India. However, the volume is primarily useful because it showcases a particular viewpoint that is quite prominent in public debates on India; though it is worth underlining that these are not mirrored in official thinking. From this standpoint, China is seen as possessing not just the material underpinnings of great power status but as desirous of thwarting India's rise—a posture for which India has had no adequate, or rather adequately robust, response yet. Harsh Pant writes in his introduction that 'the reality of Sino-Indian relations is getting more complicated by the day'. China, he argues, is the 'neighbourhood dragon' against which India has no 'economic, diplomatic or military leverage'. Noting the absence of progress on negotiating the border dispute, he writes, 'trouble is brewing on the issue of boundary... things are getting murkier with each passing day.' The language and tone are conspicuously out of place in scholarly discourse. Boilerplate rhetoric aside, he claims that 'China persists in refusing to recognise the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of India, laying claim to 90,000 sq kms of its land. Even as China has solved most of its border disputes with other countries, it seems reluctant to move ahead with India on border issues.'

These two lines succinctly capture the staple view in Indian public debates on the boundary dispute with China, though neither of them can stand closer scrutiny. The boundary dispute spans three sectors. In the western sector, China occupies Aksai Chin and other adjoining areas to its west, all of which are claimed by India as its territory. In the middle sector, along the border between Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and Tibet, the dispute is a minor one. In the eastern sector, China claims all of Arunachal Pradesh as its territory. The ongoing boundary negotiations are aiming at a 'package' solution covering all three sectors. In this context,

China will drop its claims to Arunachal Pradesh only when a final agreement is reached. Indeed, till such an agreement is reached, China will repeatedly press its claims—if only as a bargaining instrument. It is naive to expect China to drop its claims at this point. Conversely, few China watchers in India seem to pause to ask the question: has India dropped its claims to territory under Chinese control in the western sector? A cursory glance at the maps produced by the Survey of India will show that we have emphatically not given up our claims to these parts. The position echoed by Pant, then, amounts to saying: what is mine is mine and what is yours is also mine. This is hardly conducive to seeking a negotiated outcome.

This leads us to the second assertion about China's unwillingness to settle boundaries with India when it has done so with many other neighbours. It may be instructive to turn the question around and ask: why has India failed to secure an agreement with China when so many other countries have managed to do so? At least part of the answer lies in the assumption—held by New Delhi for many years after 1962—that the only way to resolve the dispute is for China to drop its claims. Such stubborn unilateralism led us to throw away opportunities for settlement that opened up in the early 1980s and that we now long for. Any agreement can only be the result of a willingness on the part of both countries to make some concessions and, more importantly, to convince their domestic audiences of the necessity of making these. At this point, neither Beijing nor New Delhi seems ready to do so.

The chapters by David Scott and Elliot Sperling in the same volume take a more measured look at the boundary issue and the Tibet problem. Scott suggests that China might 'wish to keep the issue open as a way of distracting and threatening India, but other dynamics may be leading the PRC to postpone decisive border negotiations. The PRC may well consider tightening its hold on Tibet itself as a greater priority.' This is indeed plausible. It is equally likely that Beijing might be looking for some major concession from India on Tibet, such as closing down the government-in-exile in Dharamshala. The only problem with Scott's analysis is the assumption that India is all set to solve the boundary issue. Unfortunately, no Indian government has so far indicated clearly what it is willing to give up in exchange for a settlement. Sperling, too, underscores the importance of Tibet to the boundary dispute. He rightly questions Beijing's assumption that when the current Dalai Lama passes on, the Tibetan issue will be more amenable to settlement. If anything, it

may acquire a more militant edge. For the Dalai Lama is still opposed to reverting to the option of independence for Tibet.

Beyond the boundary and Tibet, there are two other aspects of China's rise that impinge directly on India: the implications of China's military modernization; and the growing profile of China in South Asia. Chapters in the volume that touch on these issues also capture the conventional wisdom amongst the commentariat in India. Srikanth Kondapally argues that 'PLA modernization and its efforts of co-operating with Indian neighbourhood are viewed in India either as part of "strategic encirclement" or "marginalization".' Pant similarly writes that 'China's strategy towards South Asia is premised on encircling India and confining her within the geographical coordinates of the region.' Arthur Waldron, an eminent historian of China, writes in his chapter (on China and the United States [US]) that Chinese pressure on the border with India has culminated with 'the recent announcement that China plans to dam the headwaters of the Brahmaputra river'.

In fact, over the last year or so, the Indian government itself has confirmed that China is only planning run-of-the-river projects on the Brahmaputra. Before we come to these assertions, it is worth pointing out that Waldron's essay is easily the most provocative one in this volume. Waldron argues that China's recent assertiveness on a range of issues stems from the weakness of the regime. In an argument reminiscent of George Kennan's analysis of Stalinist Russia, Waldron insists that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is only interested in maintaining its hold on the power. 'Today's Chinese government... understands how fragile is its hold on power and out of fear of destabilisation, whether internally or externally caused, leads it to seek real or imaginary enemies in order to direct popular hostility abroad.' This is a familiar argument in political science, but coming from a major historian of China it deserves to be taken seriously. The corollaries that flow from this are problematic though. For one thing, Waldron skirts the issue of whether or not China is correct in perceiving a threat from the US. For another, the role of Chinese nationalism in driving its foreign policy is entirely side-stepped. Finally and most astonishingly, Waldron claims that the CCP is 'attempting to create a zone in which it can live more or less autarkically, without taking the risks entailed by opening to the world.' If the world's second-largest economy driven primarily by exports, integrated into global supply chains of manufacturing, holding 3 trillion US dollars in its reserves can be said to be aiming at autarky, then perhaps one can say anything.

The other two volumes provide important alternatives to the claims and assumptions made in the book edited by Pant. Gilboy and Heginbotham's book is by some distance the best one in this crop. It is well organized, thoroughly researched, clearly argued and lucidly written. Although aimed primarily at an American readership, it should be required reading for all China observers in India. The book's main policy-relevant conclusion may make many Indian analysts uncomfortable: 'In the twenty-first century the United States faces a complex, dual challenge from Asia's rising powers [India and China], rather than a simple singular challenge of balancing China's growing relative power.' Whatever the validity of this claim—we can leave that to the Americans to work it out for themselves—the analytical sections of the book are interesting and useful.

The central argument of the book is that 'the broad patterns of Indian and Chinese strategic behavior are not widely divergent.' This may come as a surprise to the bulk of the strategic community in India, which is used to painting their own country as bovine, supine and reactive. That is precisely why this book needs to be read. Gilboy and Heginbotham compare Indian and Chinese strategic behaviour along six dimensions: strategic culture; foreign policy; defence spending; military doctrine; force modernization; and strategic economic behaviour, especially trade and energy. But their analysis of each of these dimensions is not equally convincing. Take the case of strategic culture. The authors argue that neither 'country has a strategic tradition or culture that would lead one to be significantly more prone to aggression, conquest or peace than the other.' To begin with, it is not clear—the authors themselves seem a bit unsure—that strategic cultures can be compared in any meaningful way to deduce bases for current behaviour. More importantly, the authors reach this conclusion based on the assumption that Indian strategic culture is captured in the *Arthashastra*. This is an unhistorical and methodologically erroneous claim; for it neatly ignores the fact that the *Arthashastra* was only discovered a century ago and as such, could not have, in any serious sense, informed Indian strategic culture.

Methodological problems also call into question their claims that 'both states have followed similar foreign policy trajectories' and that 'their patterns of use of force do not appear to be sharply divergent'. The authors' comparative analysis of Indian and Chinese foreign policies is too broad-brushed to be meaningful. In fact, they are oblivious to some of the most significant differences between the foreign policy of the two

states. They might have usefully consulted the recent, outstanding study by Andrew Kennedy that underscores the salience of different beliefs by Nehru and Mao (moral efficacy and martial efficacy) in shaping their states' divergent foreign policies.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the patterns of use of force have also tended to differ considerably; although the authors rightly point out—using quantitative data—that India has not been shy of using force. While independent India has indeed used force in the pursuit of its objectives, it has seldom been comfortable in doing so. Contrary to received wisdom, Jawaharlal Nehru was no idealist. He was a realist but also a liberal. Like every realist, Nehru understood the role of force in international politics, but like most liberals, he also saw it as an instrument of last resort, to be used carefully to avoid major escalation.<sup>2</sup> Much the same was true of Indira Gandhi—who only differed from her father in that she did not agonize quite as much as Nehru about the consequences of using force, but was cautious just the same. China's leaders, by contrast, were more open to using force as a principal instrument of crisis management and sought to retain the initiative by employing force at times and places of their own choosing.

In order to press claims about similar patterns of use of force, Gilboy and Heginbotham end up twisting the record as far as India is concerned. Consider their description of how the 1971 war came about: 'the Indian leadership determined that East Pakistan... was both unstable and a threat to India's flank... New Delhi orchestrated a series of events in and around East Pakistan, including arming and supporting rebels' leading up to the invasion in 1971. There is no mention of the military crackdown in East Pakistan by the Pakistani military junta, nor of the fact that nearly 10 million refugees entered in India. Their account gives Indian strategy a lot more activism than it actually had.

The authors, however, make important points about defence expenditure in the two countries. They observe that India has actually borne a higher burden of military expenditure compared to China. Between 1980 and 2010, the real (inflation-adjusted) compound annual in the defence budget of India was 5.4 per cent and of China was 4.6 per cent. But China's economy also grew much faster over the same period with a real compound annual growth rate of 10.1 per cent to India's 6.2 per cent. Similarly, defence spending as a percentage of central government expenditure fell in China from 17 per cent in 1995 to 11 per cent in 2010. In India's case, it declined over same period from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. The authors also point numerous flaws in American

estimates of China's defence expenditure (not least its inflation by using purchasing power parity [PPP] figures) and its uncritical adoption by the rest of the world, including India. Indeed, they might have gone further and observed that much of the strategic assessment of China done in India tends to be derivative of work done in the US.

Gilboy and Heginbotham's discussion of military doctrines is undermined by their dubious assumption that India has already embraced the idea of 'Cold Start'. Nevertheless, their emphasis on the desire to shift towards a more offensive concept of defence in Indian doctrine seems correct. Similarly, they point out that the doctrine and concepts of the two navies are not all that far apart. Moreover, at this point in time, India has better power projection capabilities than does China. For an Indian audience, therefore, this book should come as a welcome reminder that for all its shortcomings, New Delhi is not behaving like Rip Van Winkle.

What about Chinese 'encirclement' of India? Here, the Muni and Tan volume comes handy. The various contributions in this book underline the nature of China's interaction with India's neighbours: Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Pakistan, of course, has been a long-standing ally of China and its principal conduit to keep India under check in the subcontinent. China has its share of concerns about the situation in Pakistan and its implications for Xinjiang. Yet, Beijing is unlikely to turn its back on Islamabad or Rawalpindi. That said, it is incorrect to read China's relations with other neighbours of India through the prism of its ties with Pakistan. Various contributions to the Muni and Tan volume point out that China's relationship with these countries is driven by economic ties; that projects like development of ports or communication networks do not imply provision of military bases or logistics support; and that whilst Sri Lanka and Bangladesh do purchase most of their arms from China, they have no incentive to become pawns in any Chinese attempt to contain India.

If China has made economic inroads into these countries, it is because India had, until recently, failed to take a more broad-minded view of its interests in dealing economically with its neighbours. Even now, India's capacity to deliver falls short of its economic promises. If India is seriously concerned about China's footfall in South Asia, then it must concentrate on getting its own act together. Otherwise, we may have to conclude like the American cartoon character Pogo that 'we have met the enemy and he is us'.

NOTES

1. Kennedy, Andrew, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Belief and the Making of Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
2. Raghavan, Srinath, *War and Peace in Modern India: A Strategic History of the Nehru Years*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010.