

ICS SPECIAL SEMINAR REPORT

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Topic: Dynamics of National Interest and National Identity: A constructivist approach to the India – China relations from 2003-2012.

The relationship between China and India can be broadly categorized into four different phases or periods since 1949. The first phase can be classified to be around 1950 to 1960, when the notion of “Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai” (brothers) came into existence. There was development of mutual trust and understanding between both the countries during this peaceful period. However, that trust was shattered when Sino-Indian War broke out in 1962. Due to the armed conflict of 1962, the period from 1962 to roughly the late 1980s is the period of lack of trust between these two nations. This period or the change of relationship between India and China is often referred to as “Hindi-Chini Bye-Bye”. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 to roughly 2000, relations between China and India became more normal. And finally, since the early 2000s till the present moment, this period can be characterized by the rapid development and growth of bilateral trade and economic relations between both the countries. After Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s landmark visit to China in June 2003, the bilateral and most importantly, economic relations, between China and India have entered a new stage of overall development of cooperation between two countries. This period of growing economic interdependence between China and India is marked by “Hindi-Chini Buy-Buy”.

In this period, the relations tend to be multi-layered and multi-faceted. There exists a mixture of competition and cooperation in each area. Thrust of the research is to understand and explain current Sino-Indian relations (2003-2012) mixed with both competition and cooperation. The explanation is set in a social constructivism framework. The terms ‘national identity’ and ‘national interest’ are constructed and constituted in the social reality, which includes subjective as well as objective attributes. For constructivists, the concept of national interest is considered as an important explanatory tool within the international politics. According to constructivism, national interests are constructed and constituted through social interactions, and are further defined in the context of domestic as well as in international norms and values. Alexander Wendt a renowned political scientist and constructivist, shares the view that a nation’s behaviour can be motivated by a variety of interests rooted in its very own identity. In other words, national identity can be seen as a motivational force which further provides direction to the national interests of a nation. Therefore, for the construction of national interest, identity plays a critical role.

This leads us to a set of sub-questions, in order to discover the national identity and national interests of both China and India at the domestic or international level. These questions are;

- 1) What are India's and China's national identity and interest within the framework of current international system?
- 2) How do India and China perceive each other at the international stage?
- 3) What are India's and China's foreign policy guidelines?
- 4) What are their foreign policy strategies towards each other?

Self-conception or identity of China is generally based on three broad ideas; a positive self-identification that is created on a civilization-state concept, on a nation state that has an ambivalent mixture of a negative historical experience due to foreign aggression and invasions, and through the country's positive historical experience which came through Deng Xiaoping's massive economic reforms that allowed it to achieve the status of an economic power. China also identifies itself as a rising power, as a developing country and a regional power. On the other hand, China's national interests include economic development, security, territorial integrity, and status that enhancing its ranking in international community.

India generally identifies itself as a nation, whose strength lies in the unity of its diverse cultures, religions and languages. It further identifies itself as a rising regional power within South Asia, a rising power as well as developing country. India's national interests include increasing economic development, especially at the domestic front, achieving territorial integrity, achieving strategic autonomy, and further working towards the quest for achieving great-power status and greater global acceptance.

Chinese foreign policy has changed rather significantly over the past few years, and can now be considered to be more pluralistic in nature. The number of actors playing a key role in the formation of the country's foreign policy has now grown within the Chinese Government, as well as outside of it. Non-governmental actors that are now playing a role in China's foreign policy include: private enterprises, financial institutions, research institutes, media and even the NGOs. Although the Communist Party of China still commands and controls its foreign policy directly, but the circle of other actors who also play a key role in coming up with strategies in relation to Chinese foreign policy, has become more diversified in nature over the years within China.

In terms of foreign policy strategies, under the guiding strategy of Deng Xiaoping, China maintained a low profile at international level and further worked towards the goals of self-development of its own society first. When Hu Jintao came to power in 2002, an intensive discussion on China's new role in international politics started in terms of China's rising and the new international challenges. On the

basis of Deng, the fourth generation developed a new foreign strategy under the concept "Peaceful Development".

China's perception towards India is based on two frameworks, regionally and globally. In the region, India is an important neighbour of China. India is the regional power of South Asia, very sceptical of China's intention in South Asia. India is accelerating its pace of military modernization. Though China's security concerns are directed mainly toward the US, East and Southeast Asia, South Asia has lower priority, China need to keep concerned about the security implications on India's military build-up in the region. In the global level, on many issues such as the international order, human rights and the concepts of sovereignty they can reach a broad consensus, and cooperate in international stage. Hence, India could be a cooperative partner of China. At the same time India as an emerging power also brings pressure to China on geo-strategic level, especially on China's relations with other great powers, and competition in resources and political influence. On the premise of peaceful development and stabilising its periphery, a stable, long-term and overall cooperative relationship with India is in China's interest. However, China has realized a gradual cooperation with India is more realistic. A gradual cooperation is conducive to adjust their differences and to maintaining the necessary room for manoeuvre.

In terms of making decisions related to foreign policy in India, the authority lies in the hands of the Prime Minister to a large extent, and Foreign Minister, to a significantly less extent. The National Security Advisor, who is appointed by the Prime Minister himself, has also started playing an influential role in the making of foreign and security policies since 1998. Due to a democratic form of Government, a strong media, and increased awareness levels of the local population in India, long term planning in regard to its foreign policy often becomes difficult for the Indian Government.

Regarding the implementation of foreign policy strategies, the Indian democratic system allows a wide range of opinions to be voiced, and India's diversity is also reflected when it comes to strategic thinking. There are three main streams which control the strategic thinking process in India. These are, 'Nehruvianism', 'Neo Liberalism', and 'Hyperrealism'. All the three paradigms are not new, and they continue to have their own supporters across the various segments and institutions within India. India's foreign policy in the twenty-first century is characterized by a marked shift towards pragmatism. This change parallels with the change in the Indian politics, which now regards economic well-being of the state as its dominant policy. However, there is still a lack of long-term strategic planning in the policy-making. In this sense, India's foreign policy is reactive and issue-based. This could also been seen as a case of cautiousness of the Indian government. If the government cannot give a clear strategic plan or a concept which can accommodate various interests of civil society, it is better to stay vague in this regard to avoid provocation.

Generally there are three positions in India's perception towards China, which is useful for analysis. There is one position that considers China is hostile, while the second group considers China is friendly, and the third position is the mainstream one. These three positions could be roughly connected to the three positions in India's strategic thought mentioned before, 'Hyperrealism', 'Nehruvianism', and 'Neo-liberalism'. In official line, the aim of the Indian foreign policy is also to maintain and develop stable, long-term and cooperative relationship with China. Yet the lack of trust on China in public opinion weakened the legitimacy of New Delhi's China policy and slows the forward movement.

All in all, the evolution of Sino-Indian relations is in the process of social learning and it is the dynamics of national identity and interest determine their policies towards each other and thus their relations. It is difficult to address exact which national identity and which national interest lead to cooperation or competition, rather, if we regard the national identity and interest as a whole to explain relations, it is the combinations of various national interests and identities and the dynamics within define the keynote of the relationship. However, structural factors also play a role in it. The domestic structure in India and China, and the international structure today emphasize development rather than security, this explain the cooperation in the relations. At the same time, realist understandings are constructing identity and interests too, dominant in security related issues, and have spillover effect on other issues. This explains the competition part of the relations. Although it is evident that no quick or short term solutions are available to end the long term border disputes and other tensions between India and China, however the more both nations try to develop mutual understanding towards each other, the easier it will become for them to develop strong relations in the near future.

During the discussion, one of the participants pointed out that former intelligence and security official B. Raman, whose view on India-China relations was quoted uncritically by the speaker was not an expert of the subject and suggested that that it would have been worthwhile if the speaker had explored the views of different individuals like former diplomats with experience in dealing with China and scholars working on relations between the two countries. It would be a more authentic study if the speaker tries to capture views of other thinkers, politicians, bureaucrats, extremists, and even moderates.