



T.V. Paul (Ed.). (2019). *The China-India rivalry in the globalisation era*. Orient BlackSwan, 2019. xi + 351.

Harish K. Thakur

China and India, as the Maddison tables projected, are the two new emerging global actors who ascend steadfastly as economic powers not only in Asia but across the continents. Their mutual relationships are likely to impact and determine the twenty-first-century international order. Since the two great powers continue to redefine the strategic landscape across the continents through their growth stories, economic expansion, military modernization, technological competition, and competing future visions, their mutual relations marred with distrust and confrontations at times become an area of investigation for the scholars and policymakers alike. In this background the edited volume of T. V. Paul, *The China-India rivalry in the globalisation era* (2019) (after Garver, 2009), offers an interesting, theoretically rigorous and empirically rich examinations of China-India relations available in twenty-first century. Since the volume offers some important insights and theoretical points to understand the complex Sino-Indian relations, its review could be helpful to the foreign policy students and scholars. The volume presents twelve chapters by the scholars of international relations, security studies, and Asian politics. The study transcends conventional descriptive accounts and offers a sophisticated analytical framework for understanding why rivalry between India and China continues despite deepening economic interdependence and increasing participation in global governance institutions.

The chief contribution of the volume lies in its narrative of existent positives in the domains of economics, climate change, global financial reforms and trade against the conventional war polemic and consistent conflict-ridden descriptions. According to T.V. Paul India-China ties imply a “managed rivalry” characterized neither by persistent hostility or genuine strategic partnership evolution. The continued rivalry, however, gets softened by several factors like trade, economic interdependence, nuclear deterrence, institutional engagement, and diplomatic pragmatism. The volume offers an intermediary buffer that mitigates the recalcitrance of conflict and war and offers liberalist view of market, globalization and trade diminishing the geopolitical competition.

Prof. Harish K. Thakur, Department of Political Science, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla-171005.

The volume has been thoughtfully organized into five thematic sections – Introduction, Sources, Strategies, Mitigators and Conclusions that explore the sources of rivalry, strategic interactions, and factors that moderate competition. According to Paul with the Chinese expansion into South China Sea and Indian Ocean a new rivalry between China and India takes shape. However, it is limited or managed rivalry and “has remained less intense than the India-Pakistan rivalry due to several mitigating variables, ranging from economic to diplomatic factors. Among these factors is the growing asymmetrical economic interdependence between India and China (p.5). This power asymmetry has forced India not to harden its posture on issues of territory, water and imbalance in trade, holds Paul. However, the Indian reluctance to turn hard is more due to its overdependence on China for supply of several important items, which have poor supply chain alternatives,

By adopting a multidimensional analytical framework, the volume makes a significant scholarly contribution, convincingly demonstrating that the China–India rivalry cannot be reduced to the Himalayan border dispute but instead represents a comprehensive geopolitical contest shaped by competing strategic interests across multiple domains. Instead of focussing on the traditional territorial conflict the volume offers new insights into the multi-layered dimensions of conflict and contestations between the two states. It discusses the strategic competition between them in Asia, South Asia and the oceans, territorial claims, great power ambitious, their visible power asymmetries, competing views of international order, resource competition, strategic culture, and military balancing.

Mahesh Shankar in “Territory and the China-India Competition”, observes that while India’s territorial dispute with China is different from that it has with Pakistan, Tibet has added another dimension to the dispute. Nehru, in order to assuage China not only reconciled with Tibetan occupation with China but also compromised with China through 1954 Panchsheel agreement. Indian concern for territory focussed more on the Eastern Sector around McMahon Line than on the disputed Western Sector of Ladakh. India’s ‘forward policy’ of 1961, unaccompanied by required military strength caused it the 1962 loss. According to Shankar, “what is notable, nevertheless, about China-India relationship is that as the vector along which the two sides compete have expanded, the territorial aspect has become ostensibly less important” (47). In the aftermath of Doklam, the role of ‘robust management mechanism’ to help diplomatically de-escalate their tensions in future would be indispensable.

Equally impressive is Xiaoyu Pu’s chapter “Asymmetrical Competitors” on the status of China-India rivalry. Pu argues that status aspirations constitute an independent source of rivalry between the two states beyond a traditional narrative centred on material capabilities. “According to power transition theory, the onset of war between a dominant and a rising power grows more likely as the gap in relative strength between them narrows and the latter’s grievances

against the existing order move beyond any hope of peaceful resolution” (70). Both the powers wish to get recognition as major powers with legitimate claims to leadership in regions, continent and the wider international system. As a result, the global governance structures like United Nations, UNSC and regional organisations and economic forums become the zones for strategic competition. Therefore, the search for prestige and recognition introduces valuable constructivist insights into an otherwise predominantly realist discourse.

Manjari Chatterjee Miller’s chapter “China India and their differing conceptions about international order”, further deepens the theoretical sophistication of the volume by examining divergent conceptions of international order. While trade ties bind them together India is paranoid about China, especially regarding its South Asian activities. “India perceives bilateral relationship as a rivalry and remains extremely wary and suspicious of China” (94). The author forcefully argues that both the states have fundamentally different understandings of sovereignty, hierarchy, regional leadership, and global governance. It is because of these ideational constructions that the two states cooperate at platforms like BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) frequently and at the same time keep the strategic suspicion alive. An interesting part of the chapter is a discussion over the Chinese approach to international system which hinges upon its idea of “Middle Kingdom” (Zhongguo) and Indian view of the world represented by ‘Gandhism’, ‘Nehruism’, ‘Hindutva’ and ‘Neo-liberal Globalism’. The recent Modi government’s approach speaks more of ‘Vasudhaiva Kumatumbukum’ and has less active role for Indian leadership in the world. The chapter ‘Balancing Strategies and the China-India Rivalry’ by Zhen Han Jean-Francois Belanges argues that the territorial disputes may cause rivalries among states but they are not the sole reason, and there could be other potential factors behind. The India China rivalry reflects three kinds of balancing- hard balancing, limited-hard balancing and soft balancing (118). In the post-cold war era while India has found new strategic partners in the US and Japan, China’s BRI and CPEC also places it in a dominant position. China and India are not following hard balancing strategies too much and continue to follow limited-hard balancing and soft-balancing to keep the differences at the backseat.

The chapter ‘China and India’s Quest for Resources and Its Impact on the Rivalry’ by Calvin Chen enters an interdisciplinary engagement with non-traditional dimensions of security. Calvin focuses on China India rivalry in the Africa and Central Asia and believes that the two state might clash over resources in future. China and India have developed enormously in the last few decades and the two will continue to vie for power, dominance and energy in the coming times. Selina Ho in ‘Power Asymmetry and the China-India Water Dispute’ examines the transboundary water disputes between the two and explains how environmental security, energy access, and resource governance

increasingly shape their relations. The waters of Himalayas are inevitable sources for both the states and there is every possibility that they can dispute over these sources in future. The two states have to stabilise their riparian relations and upgrade their current MoU based cooperation to a higher level of institutionalisation which may bring greater stability in their relations.

Andrew Scobell in “Strategic Culture and the China–India Rivalry” (chapter 8) argues that the strategic rivalry between the two states is deeply ingrained in their distinct strategic cultures, historical experiences, and security perceptions. They have a long enduring mistrust, differing geopolitical aspirations, and divergent threat assessments that sustain the rivalry, suggesting that strategic culture remains a critical lens for understanding bilateral behaviour beyond material power and economic interdependence. According to Scobell ‘China India confront each other in a ‘Himalayan Standoff’. In contrast to the better-known ‘Mexican standoff’ in a Hollywood Western, Beijing and New Delhi confront a chronic, long-term condition, rather than an acute, short term crisis situation” (201). Scobell also discusses the two faces-of China and India and how the people and elites of the two states view each other. In ‘Nuclear Deterrence in the China-India Dyad’, Vipin Narang observes that India’s nuclear threat is most likely from Pakistan, for China India is a nuclear after-thought as it sees the US posture as a major threat. The two states are responsible states and have secure second-strike capabilities, which further lessens the chance of nuclear escalation.

In part IV, Mathew A. Castle in “Globalisation’s Impact: Trade and Investment in China India Relations” observes how the increased trade between China and India can mitigate their strategic rivalry and competition. However, the increased exports of China to India brings more asymmetry in their relations further compounded by the far expanding China’s BRI project. Feng Liu in “China-India Engagement in Institutions” argues that since sharing of responsibilities by global powers determine the international governance system, a shift in the role of traditional players to the new emerging powers like China and India would impact the nature of global governance. “While some enduring conflicts and contradictions between China and India are irreconcilable in short term, cooperation based on common interests is still dominant aspect of China-India relations. The two Asian powers share common interests in improving their status and influence in the post-American world order, and they are willing to take similar positions to achieve this objective” (300). It is impossible, holds Liu to to have cooperation without compromise, and while China-India cooperation has much potential, unresolved issues constrain their bilateral relations.

In the concluding chapter, “Whither Rivalry or Withered Rivalry?”, Paul F. Diehl considers the China–India ties as marked by an enduring rivalry without a decline. While globalization accompanied by trade expansion, institutional engagement, and economic interdependence which significantly moderate open

conflicts, the two states have failed to eliminate the fundamental sources of rivalry and competition. Diehl concludes that the rivalry is likely to persist in a managed form, characterized by simultaneous competition and cooperation, with globalization acting as a constraint on escalation rather than a solution to the underlying conflict. “The China India rivalry is not as severe as it once was, this doesn’t mean that relations will continue to improve or that the decline in hostility is permanent” (329). However, the volume precedes the Galwan episode that transformed the opinion of many about China’s strategy towards India and South Asia. In the new emergent situation with the US withdrawal from 66 organisations the legitimacy crisis of existing global institutions may be exacerbated and strengthen arguments for an alternative model of global governance. China’s focus on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the International Organisation for Media on (IOMed) are the attempt at raising parallel governance Frameworks (Thakur, 2025). The recent fall of relations with China owes to several factors, like China’s ‘go global mission,’ global power ambition, India standing as a hurdle in its BRI project, the revival of QUAD, the Indo-US Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) 2017 and Indo-US dynamics over the Indo-Pacific (Thakur, 2024). The developments reminisce one of the words of Stephan P. Cohen (2000), “India is not a great power in the classic sense; it cannot challenge American military or economic strength. But in a transformed international order, its assets and resources are more relevant to a wide range of American interests than they have been for 50 years. They cannot be safely ignored in the future, as they have been in the past” (Thakur, 2023). And so does it weigh for China.

The volume is equally successful in integrating strategic and military perspectives. Discussions of balancing behaviour, strategic culture, and nuclear deterrence reveal the complexities of security interactions under conditions of pronounced power asymmetry. Contributors reject simplistic balancing models by demonstrating that India’s strategy combines internal military modernization, selective external partnerships, economic engagement, and diplomatic hedging. China’s approach similarly reflects a calibrated strategy that balances competition with efforts to avoid unnecessary escalation. This nuanced treatment offers an important corrective to binary portrayals of either confrontation or accommodation.

The edited volume, methodologically represents an interesting collaborative scholarship maintaining remarkable coherence and focus on the central proposition that globalization has transformed, mitigated, but not eliminated the great-power rivalry. The theoretical consistency distinguishes the book from many edited collections that often suffer from conceptual fragmentation. In the post-2020 Galwan Valley episode the ties between India and China surely demonstrates that the ‘managed rivalry’ framework remains relevant. Although political and military relations deteriorated sharply the economic

interdependence, after initial Indian ban on Chinese items, have proved remarkably resilient. Bilateral trade has again risen to US\$156 billion in 2025, which shows that there exists a spirit of ‘competitive coexistence’ and policy of ‘managed strategic rivalry’ that balance the political journey of two states.

References

Garver, J. W. (2001). *Protracted contest: Sino-Indian rivalry in the twentieth century*. University of Washington Press.

T. V. Paul (Ed.). *The China-India rivalry in the globalisation era*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2019

Thakur, H.K. (January 19, 2025). Indian foreign policy: connecting the empty dots. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/01/19/indian-foreign-policy-connecting-the-empty-dots/>

Thakur, H.K. (January 15, 2026). The US withdrawal from 66 global organisations bells danger to multilateralism. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2026/01/15/the-us-withdrawal-from-66-global-organisations-bells-danger-to-multilateralism/>

Thakur, H.K. (February 26, 2023). Rising India falling states: the new Indian challenges. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/02/26/rising-india-falling-states-the-new-indian-challenges/>

Thakur, H. K. (2025). Restoring multilateralism: the challenge from the global south and the rising minilaterals. *The Round Table*, 113(6), 556–581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2024.2439673>