

Sino-Indian Competition of Concepts and Narratives: Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

China and India are hectically engaged in a competition of developing concepts and establishing narratives in the Asian ambience. For controlling concepts and narratives is tantamount to controlling behaviours, actions and finally everything. The Chinese connectivity concept is speedily spreading and is resultantly creating a ripple effect in the South Asian region. New Delhi is the strategic rival of Beijing in the region, hence it is giving equal response to the Chinese concept, especially to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. As a qualitative and analytical study with neorealist-constructivist wedlock, this study uses secondary data from various sources, including books, research and newspaper articles etc. and content data analysis technique for analyzing the competitive behaviours of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India (ROI). The study finds that China and India are developing concepts and establishing narratives for fulfilling their global ambitions and objectifying their hegemonic aspirations. Towards that end, they are using all the available sources of conflict, even their longstanding territorial disputes, contested border and zones of influence. The study finds that the CPEC concept is supporting and strengthening the Chinese connectivity narrative, hence the Indian responses are CPEC-specific or in other words Pakistan-specific. Therefore, Pakistan is becoming a scapegoat between Beijing and New Delhi.

Keywords: Sino-Indian competition, belt & road initiative, CPEC, Mausam & Spice Projects, concepts & narratives.

Introduction

China and India are speedily courting financial prudence, regional dominancy and global prominence. Both the neighbours are strategic competitors and both are hectically engaged in a competition of developing concepts and establishing narratives. China is hastily developing its connectivity concept by chasing the footprints of historically-based trade routes. India, on the other hand is adopting a twofold strategy. One, to give an equal rejoinder to the Chinese connectivity idea through revisiting the old trade routes, India also

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develops its own concepts. Two, New Delhi adopts a chasing and challenging strategy against the Chinese strategic dynamics.

Historically, the people of present day China and India belong to two yesterday's famous civilizations (Garver, 2001, p. 3). During their civilizational times they enjoyed good relations, due to cultural and religious contacts, in terms of Buddhism and Confucianism (Lal, 2006; p. 132). After China and India emerged as modern nation-states in 1940s, sans a very brief period of their peaceful cohabitation in 1950s, they engaged in a direct border war in 1962, which implanted the seed of lingering rivalry between the two countries (Garver, 2001, p. 3). This war diplomatically scissored the two neighbours and bitterly disturbed their bilateral relations for many years. Diplomatic relations were then re-established in 1970s and attempts were made in 1990s to resolve border-related issues and to develop an environment of good neighbourliness between the PRC and the ROI (Zhang & Li, 2013). These attempts, however did not completely eliminate the DNA coded sense of conflict and competition between the two countries. In 1998, India openly carried out its first nuclear tests and interestingly connected its achievement with the Chinese factor, to provide it justification (Garver, 2001, p. 9).

The first decade of 21st century brought some hope for bringing normalcy and for unfreezing the cooled relations between Beijing and New Delhi. During this period, two important developments encouraged normalcy in the Sino-Indian bitter relations. One, in 2003, a bilateral agreement, titled "Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation" was codified between the PRC and the ROI. This agreement laid down principles for developing good relations between the two nations (Ministry of External Affairs, 2003 online). Two, the 2003 agreement was followed by another synergetic agreement between the two nations in 2005. The 2005 agreement known as "Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement" of border-related issues between Beijing and New Delhi, repeated the same principles of the 2003 agreement and recalled the 1990s synergetic attempts for developing constructive relations between the two states (Ministry of External Affairs, 2005).

The 2003 and 2005 codifications theoretically provided for the development of synergetic rapprochement between the PRC and the ROI during the first decade of the 21st century. However, they practically did nothing. The two states entered into the next decade in dissonance and uncertainty. The first half of the second decade saw a new twist in the Sino-Indian relations, in terms of contesting for developing concepts and establishing narratives for actualizing global ambitions, securing hegemonic designs and maintaining national prestige. In 2013, the

Chinese President, Xi Jinping floated an idea of revisiting the old trade routes, in terms of the “Silk Road Economic Belt”, represented by the word ‘belt’ and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, represented by the word ‘road’. The wedlock of both the representative words makes the famous Chinese connectivity slogan i.e. the ‘belt and road’ initiative (Mayer, 2018, p. 2).

To materialize its connectivity concept, China has signed the Gwadar Port Agreement with Pakistan in 2015, popularly known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Haider & Haider, 2015 online). This strategic understanding between Beijing and Islamabad brusquely attracted the attention of the policy-makers in India (Mayer, 2018). Firstly, realizing the growing influence of the Chinese concept, India comes up with its own concept-based initiatives like the Mausam, Sagarmala, Bharatmala and Spice Projects (Wagner & Tripathi, 2018, p. 3; Pillalamarri, 2014; The Economic Times, 2015; The Times of India, 2015; Pandit, 2015). Secondly, New Delhi squarely rejects the CPEC project and claims that this project is passing through an area of Kashmir, which is a disputed territory between India and Pakistan (Aamir, 2020; Hindustan Times, 2020). Thirdly, the ROI adopts a counterbalancing strategy against the Chinese Gwadar port strategy couples with its anti-Pakistan activities, in terms of developing the Chabahar Port agreement with Iran, attempting to disturb Pakistan’s relations with Iran and Afghanistan and spreading disinformation against Islamabad (BBC, 2016; Sohail & Iqbal, 2017; Mustafa, Asif, & Arslan, 2018; Machado, Alaphilippe, Adamczyk & Gregoire, 2020).

To sum up, China is developing its connectivity concept to fulfill its geostrategic objectives. To counter it, India comes up with its own conceptual framework along with the United States and other strategic bonhomie to strengthen and narrativize the Indo-Pacific conceptual framework as well.

Literature Review

An elephantine scale literature is available on the Sino-Indian relations. Some literature highlights the conflictual aspect of their relations while some other discusses the cooperative side of their engagements. One could disaggregate the available literature into two domains i.e. in the domain of conflict and in the domain of cooperation. Scholars like Astarita (2007), Majumder (2006) Kumar (2011), and Panda & Baruah (2019) highlight the cooperative aspect of the Sino-Indian relations, though not in certainty but in dissonance. Astarita (2007) gives more credence to “complementarities” than competition between the two countries (p. 25). Majumder (2006) also supports the Astarita complementarity thesis and

opines that growing trade is furthering this condition. Kumar (2011), does not squarely reject the China-India competition, but the author translates their contest into “pragmatic competition” (p. 96). For Panda & Baruah (2019) it is “compromised context of rapprochement” (p. 1). However, for C. R. Mohan (as cited in Sengupta, 2006), the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of India are natural competitors. The essence is that cooperation between the two rivals is *pro tem* and competition between them is permanent and natural. Although some scholars give prognoses for Sino-Indian synergetic relations. However, the two countries are natural competitors and strategic rivals. Garver (2001), Yuan (2007), Chatterjee (2011), Mohan (2013), Richards (2015), Iqbal & Amin (2016) and Einhorn & Sidhu (2017) highlight the rivalrous and competitive aspect of the Beijing-Delhi relations. Garver (2001) puts the two countries in a protracted competition. Mohan (2013) and Richards (2015) specifically discuss the territorial dispute between the two rivals. Yuan (2007), Chatterjee (2011) and Einhorn & Sidhu (2017) place Beijing and New Delhi in a strategic wrangle. For Chatterjee (2011) Washington, Beijing and New Delhi are entangled in a strategic triangle, which Einhorn & Sidhu (2017) consider a “strategic chain” (p. 1). Einhorn & Sidhu also accommodate Pakistan in this strategic fetter. To sum up, some writers discuss the cooperative domain, while some highlight the competitive domain of the Sino-Indian relations. However, the majority of writers place Beijing and New Delhi in territorial antagonism, strategic rivalry and geostrategic competition.

Research Gap

Most of the available literature views the Sino-Indian relations through the kaleidoscope of territorial dispute and strategic competition. In other words, the existing literature views relations between Beijing and New Delhi through the prism of traditional rivalry and territorial enmity. This instant study explores the India-China relations through the lens of concepts-development and narratives-building, which the existing literature lacks. In addition, the study explores that the Beijing-Delhi wrangle is for securing, strengthening, and narrativizing national prestige and the other elements, which the two countries persistently use are means to an end.

Methodology

This analytical study discusses two questions, in terms of (i) what is the nature of the Sino Indian competition? And (ii) what are the core

objectives of China and India? The study searches two objectives i.e. to investigate the nature of the Sino-Indian competition and to explore the core objectives of the two rivals. It is a qualitative study, discussing the competitive attitudes of the two neighbouring states with regard to global and hegemonic designs. It uses secondary data and content data analysis technique for analyzing the behaviours of the PRC and the ROI and for drawing conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

This descriptive analytical study uses the neorealist and constructivist lenses of world politics for investigating the competitive compartments of the PRC and ROI. For neorealists, states live in an environment of international anarchy. So, in the anarchic structure, each state makes calculations for survival and for the balance of power, either through the augmentation of security (defensive realism) or through the accumulation of power (offensive realism). Kenneth Waltz (1979) is considered as the defensive realist while J. J. Mearsheimer (2001) is considered as the offensive realist. For Waltz (1979), “the survival motive is taken as the ground of action in a world where the security of state is not assured” (p. 90). For Mearsheimer (2001), the structure of international system, uncertainty, and the offensive martial competence and intentions of major powers; develop an environment of fear, create a sense of self help and make it necessary [for a major power] to accumulate more power for survival (p. 30-32). To abridge, defensive realism is security-oriented and offensive realism is power-oriented. Constructivists, on the other hand give more scope to ideas and identities. For constructivists, states make concepts and then act upon the dictation of these concepts like “anarchy is what states make of it” (Blanton & Kegley, 2017, p. 35).

To put Beijing and New Delhi within the frames of neorealism and constructivism, one could conclude that the PRC and the ROI are in a competitive tug of war for the augmentation of security and power. Security, both conventional and nonconventional is the primary focus of the two for survival and maintaining prestigious position at regional and international level. As both the competitor have global objectives, hence the accumulation of power is the most important factor, which compels them to compete with each other. For these two objectives i.e. security and power, New Delhi and Beijing are developing concepts, which in turn are giving birth to a contest of concepts and narratives between the two nations.

China & India in a Tug of War: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

The two competitors have glocal [global & local] aspirations. Glocalism (as cited in Caves, 2005, p. 308) is to “think globally, act locally”. It is the exclusive feature of the Sino-Indian contest that the two contesters are bitterly entangled in a race of thinking globally but acting locally for quenching their geostrategic thirst. This unique nature of the China-India competition compels them to construct well-thought-out concepts and narratives at regional level with universal outlooks. For mastering well-established concepts and narratives is to master everything (Newman, 2020). Quoting G. Orwell (1984) (as cited in Samuels, 1986 online & Newman, 2020 online), “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past”. It is the case that the PRC and the ROI, both the glocal competitors in close proximity are searching the past to control the future and making strong concepts in the present scenario to control the past. Jin Guantao (as cited in Jacques, 2009, p. 197) writes that, “China’s only mode of existence is to relive the past. There is no accepted mechanism within the culture of the Chinese to confront the present without falling back”.

For strengthen their positions at regional level, the PRC and the ROI are narrativizing their concepts, with regard to their territorial disputes, contested shared border [Line of Actual Control], areas of influence and historical blueprints [old trade routes]. Historically, today’s China and India were yesterday’s famous civilizations and global markets. China was connected to rest of the world through silk trade and India through spice trade (Conklin, 2006, p. 23; Henriques, n.d.). To revisit the ancient blueprints, the PRC is making a conceptual framework of mass connectivity projects, based on its historical understanding. The ROI, on the other hand is also giving an equal response to the Chinese concept, based on its own historical understanding. As Islamabad is becoming the central point and a main tool for translating the Chinese concept into concretion, hence New Delhi is creating political, diplomatic, and security problems for Pakistan. This paper analyzes the Sino-Indian competitive comportments and its repercussions for Pakistan.

The Chinese Conceptual Framework: CPEC

In 2013, China openly floated its idea of connecting the world by revisiting the old trade routes, in terms of the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)’ and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (Xiaolu, 2015, p. 1; Bowring, 2018). This Chinese concept is popularly known as BRI (belt & road initiative). To theorize and objectify it, Beijing is developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. From the Chinese perspective, this corridor could bring prosperity in the region, could secure China’s energy

transportation, could connect regional countries and could boost their economies through cooperation (Xiaolu, 2015).

China is an emerging economy and energy security is its core objective. Approximately, its 80 percent energy transportation is done through the Strait of Malacca. However, India and the United States have strong footing in the Indo-Pacific and they could disturb this important choke point and could cause problems for China. Beijing cites this potential threat to the Chinese energy transportation, in terms of the ‘Malacca Dilemma’ (Berkofsky & Miracola, 2019, p. 50).

Therefore, China is designing its geostrategic designs, primarily for lessening its dependency on the Strait of Malacca for energy transportation due to the Quad countries (an alliance of Australia, Japan, India and U.S.) presence in the Indo-Pacific (Berkofsky & Miracola, 2019, p. 50; Heydarian, 2020, p. 6). Towards that end, Beijing is trying to skip the Strait of Malacca and to discover an alternative route for its energy security and safe trade. Nonetheless, India and the United States are giving equal response to China, both in conceptual as well as in concretionary calculations, in terms of narrativizing the Indo-Pacific concept and increasing their presence over there (Heydarian, 2020).

Indian Conceptual Responses to China's Narrativism

As discussed above, like the PRC, the ROI was once a big civilization, which was connected to the world through spice trade. Today, both the offspring of retrospectively famous civilizations are emerging economies, major powers in regional politics, and glocal competitors in inseparable proximity. The two rivals are bitterly entangled in a contest of concepts and narratives. Constructivists give credence to “ideas and identities” in shaping the behaviours of the states (Blanton & Kegley, 2017, p. 95). **Firstly**, to counter the Beijing’s idea of mass connectivity, New Delhi comes up with its own ideational constructs, in terms of the Mausam (*Weather*), Spice, and Bharatmala and Sagarmala projects (Wagner & Tripathi, 2018, p. 3; Pillalamarri, 2014; The Economic Times, 2015; The Times of India, 2015; Pandit, 2015). However, studies posit that the Indian conceptual responses couldn’t counterbalance the Chinese conceptual framework. For, these ideational constructs are “hardly comparable or valid as alternative narratives” (Anand, 2017; p. 20).

Secondly, in 2016, the Republic of India signed the Chabahar Port agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran to counterbalance the China’s Gwadar Port concept (Hindustan Times, 2016). This could be termed as a port versus port response of India. Thirdly, India along with other strategic partners like the United States, Australia and Japan develops the Indo-

Pacific concept, instead of the Asia-Pacific, primarily to counter the Chinese growing role in the region (Heydarian, 2020, p. 6). Fourthly, the ROI removed the Kashmir region from the position of its special status and incorporated it in the Indian Union Territory (Gettleman, Raj, Schultz & Kumar, 2019). This dynamicity could possibly be aimed at countering the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which passes through the part of Azad Kashmir.

Sino-Indian Wrangle: Implications for Pakistan

As discussed above, the PRC and the ROI are bitterly engaged in a wrangle of concepts and narratives. Pakistan, being the starting point of the Chinese conceptual framework is becoming a scapegoat between the two Asian giants. To counter CPEC, India is creating political, diplomatic, and security related problems for Pakistan. To cut short, India is causing the below-cited problems:

- Through establishing strong relations with Tehran and Kabul, New Delhi is disturbing their relations with Islamabad. In addition, India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) is creating security headache for Pakistan, especially through fomenting sectarianism and sabotage activities in the country. In 2016, Pakistani forces caught Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian RAW agent in Balochistan Province. Later investigations revealed that Jadhav was stationed at Chabahar (Iran), who later admitted his involvement in creating instability in Pakistan (Dawn.com, 2019). For Einhorn & Sidhu (2017), Jadhav's case provide substance to Pakistan's claim that India is involved in disturbing the security of Pakistan due to the CPEC factor.
- India has established various consulates alongside the Pak-Afghan border. On one hand, these consulates are used for reuniting the dismantled terrorist organizations and on the other hand, they are used for fueling sub-nationalistic feelings in Pakistan. New Delhi has also developed a CPEC-specific force of about 700 personnel to disrupt CPEC (Siddiqui, 2020).
- In the context of CPEC, New Delhi is trying to diplomatically isolate Pakistan (Bhatti, Waris & Muhammad, 2019) and is spreading disinformation against it (Machado et al., 2020). Although, in the present scenario, India is disturbing Pakistan, not because of traditional enmity, but because of its supporting behaviour with regard to China. It however, is intensifying the traditional territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. The most recent example is the Indian policy of dropping the Indian Occupied Kashmir from its special status on August 5, 2019 and incorporating it in the Indian Union Territory (Gettleman et. al., 2019).

Findings

Key findings are:

- China and India are bitterly engaged in a race of developing concepts and establishing narratives in regional context, to cash their global imperatives. The two competitors are recalling their past for framing their future and solidifying their present.
- The Chinese BRI framework in general and its CPEC extension in particular is considered by India as a challenge and threat to its global imperatives. Thence, India is giving an equal response to the Chinese concept, in terms of strengthening the Indo-Pacific concept, announcing its own connectivity initiatives and extending its relations to Iran and Afghanistan.
- The CPEC concept is supporting and strengthening the Chinese connectivity narrative, hence the Indian responses are CPEC-specific or in other words Pakistan-specific. Pakistan is becoming a scapegoat between the two Asian juggernauts. India is causing political, diplomatic, and security implications for Pakistan.

Recommendations

- To fulfill their energy and trade requirements, China and India should cooperate, instead of tending towards competition. Cooperation between the two emerging economies could translate the whole region into a pooling ambience and their competition could further aggravate the already fractious morphology of the region.
- India and Pakistan should adopt a benign approach towards their territorial disputes. Both the longstanding antagonists should choose the cooperative elements of their relations. It could not only develop their relations but could ease territorial dispute between the two countries as well. In addition, Pakistan should also adopt a more balanced policy towards all the major powers in general and the People's Republic of China and the Republic of India in particular.

Conclusion

Beijing and New Delhi are rival countries. The two countries are emerging economies in the world. Territorial disputes and their badly demarcated Line of Actual Control (LAC) are the direct sources of conflict between the two rivals. Their economic ascendancy is compelling them to competition in the region. This competition is assuming the shape of constructing concepts and narratives in the region. Thence, it is a competition of concepts and narratives. Pakistan is the ally of China and the strategic rival of India, therefore, New Delhi is creating multiple problems for it.

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