

## BOOK REVIEW

**P. S. Suryanarayana. (2021). *The Elusive Tipping Point: China-India Ties for a New Order*. World Scientific, 276 pp.**

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India and China's relations have risen and fallen over the last 70 years, beginning with diplomatic ties in 1950. Scholars, journalists, and practitioners, among others, have devoted great effort to analysing the tense diplomatic relationship between the two large Asian countries. As a researcher with extensive journalism experience, Suryanarayana's work adds to the current study by incorporating the implications of three recent developments on bilateral ties including the Indian Parliament's repeal of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in October 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19 at the end of 2019, and the border standoff in Ladakh in June 2020, which resulted in the deaths of soldiers from both sides.

This volume addresses many facets of Sino-India relations in ten chapters, which can be evaluated from the following perspectives. First, the author delves into the history of the two countries' engagement, discusses the current situation, and anticipates the future trajectory of bilateral relations. Second, it offers an analytical discussion of the impact of third parties (Pakistan and the United States) on India-China relations. On the one hand, the author demonstrates how India-Pakistan tensions and the China-Pakistan all-weather relationship have added uncertainty to already complex Sino-India relations. On the other hand, the US's shifting connections with India and China have influenced the relationship between the two Asian neighbours. Third, the piece goes to great efforts to examine the sensitive topics surrounding Tibet and Kashmir. It argues that India and China were unable to reach an agreement and complete a "trade-off" on these two issues (p. 85). Fourth, the author investigates comparatively new diplomacy in the areas of smart power and illustrates the two countries' rivalry on the emerging technology front (i.e., outer space, 5G, artificial intelligence, the Fourth Revolution) and the implications of these new technologies for defence and national security. This is an especially noteworthy addition. Previous studies (e.g., Malik 2011, Noorani, 2010; Panda, 2016; Kondapalli 2012) that focus on traditional economic, political, and defence issues have been unable to adequately appreciate the vital impact of developing technologies.

This book deserves credit for the following reasons. First, as a former journalist, the author used his specific knowledge to clarify various topics during discussions with Indian and Chinese diplomatic sources. For example, some reports stated that the US (rather than China) played a major role in persuading Pakistan to release an Air Force pilot seized during an aerial combat with India. Nonetheless, the author affirms, citing foreign service sources, that China (rather than the US) pressed Pakistan to release the Indian pilot. The primary sources obtained through his private conversations with diplomats, to some extent, pierced the black box of foreign policy and played a unique role in refining this book's analysis.

Secondly, this volume adds to the body of literature by presenting feasible strategies for

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resolving border conflicts between China and India. These strategies include the trade-in of Tawang for Shaksgam and the possibility of new confidence-building measures (CBM). The author offers alternatives, but they do not seem likely to be implemented anytime soon because there is insufficient political will, given that both parties claim that sovereignty and territorial integrity are not negotiable. However, such audacious creativity might encourage academics and professionals to think creatively. Political leaders might agree with the author's assertion that "each will lose more in a never-ending stalemate than through an agreed give-and-take settlement," despite the fact that they are typically unable to afford to demonstrate their willingness to accept any kind of proposal to exchange claimed territories, in part because of the rising nationalism in both countries (p. 169).

Third, the author makes a prescient forecast regarding the difficult Sino-Indian relations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and suggests a sensible course of action to reduce tensions along the two countries' borders. The author contends that it will be difficult to reach a positive tipping point for the two massively adjacent Asian countries in the post-COVID era. Despite lacking bilateral cooperation, they have tackled COVID-19 and asserted anti-COVID leadership at the regional and international levels. Additionally, the author notes that the two nations have different perspectives of themselves in terms of leading roles in "the post-modern order" (p. 219). China wants to be the dominant force in Asia and the world, while India wants to set the rules and not be a puppet of the regional or international order shaped by China. The author also offers a thorough analysis of the two countries differing perspectives on several important issues, which have consistently cast a shadow over bilateral ties in the years since their 70-year diplomatic relationship. These issues include reforms of the UN Security Council, India's admission into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), reducing reliance on a supply chain dominated by China, and the negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

However, a book's advantage in one area could be its drawback in another. To "enable a relatively easier reading of an otherwise complex subject," the author states that he intentionally offers "each chapter as a stand-alone topic as far as possible" (p. xiii). A reader with a busy schedule could find it useful to read one or two chapters at a time to increase their awareness of the relationship between China and India. This does, however, have an impact on the volume's internal coherence. A determined reader who intends to read the entire book at once will meet practically irritated repeats of narratives and facts, while the author does not avoid this lag and admits it on a lighter note (p. xiii). In other words, this book may give some readers the idea that it is a collection of eleven distinct essays addressing various facets of a topic, rather than a structurally connected volume.

In summary, the author adds significantly to the body of literature by providing readers with a deeper understanding of Sino-Indian relations through his use of primary sources gleaned from in-person discussions with diplomats, his investigation of novel angles regarding the impact of developing science and technology on the rivalry between China and India, and his proposal of workable solutions to ease tensions along the two countries' borders. Remarkably, the withdrawal of Chinese and Indian forces from Pangong Lake in February 2021 mirrored the author's recommendation to establish a "demilitarised or buffer zone" between the two nations (p. 228). This volume therefore has significant scholarly and policy significance. Although scholars from China or India may not concur with every point he makes in this book, it helps promote dialogue on both sides.

## REFERENCES

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