

# The Reasons for the Change of India's China Policy and the Future Trend of China-India Relations

Guang Wu

School of Public Administration, Hunan Normal University, Changsha, 410006, China

## Abstract

**Through a brief review of the 70-year diplomatic relations between China and India, this paper finds that India's strategy towards China has undergone tremendous changes, and the changes of India's strategy towards China are mainly based on the changes of India's own national conditions, the interaction between China and India and the influence of the international environment. The future direction of China-India relations will also be restricted by the international system, the common interests of China and India, and the awareness of India's great power, which determines that China-India relations will maintain a moderate relationship.**

## Keywords

**Chinese Policy; Reason; Sino-Indian Relations; Future Trend.**

## 1. A Brief Review of China-India Relations

India became independent in 1947, the People's Republic of China was established in Beijing in 1949, and China and India established diplomatic relations in 1950. India was one of the countries that established diplomatic relations with China earlier. After a honeymoon period of Sino-Indian relations, the contradiction between China and India intensified in the late 1950s, mainly reflected in the border dispute between China and India, which led to the Sino-Indian war in 1962. With India's defeat in the Sino-Indian war, the subsequent Indian leadership was deeply opposed to China.

In 1987, there was a border conflict between China and India at the border, which almost led to another war between the two countries. Since 1987, there have been 10 rounds of government-level negotiations between China and India on the border issue, which have achieved certain results in easing the armed confrontation at the border. Sino-Indian relations began to pick up slowly, but in 1998, due to the outbreak of the South Asian nuclear competition, they fell into a trough again, and it was not until the 21st century that the bilateral relations between China and India rose slowly and steadily. However, the Donglang incident in 2017, the confrontation between Chinese and Indian armies, has brought great impact to the rising Sino-Indian relations in the 21st century. Fortunately, the meeting between the leaders of China and India managed the Sino-Indian conflict. From April 27th to 28th, 2018, the leaders of China and India held the first informal meeting in Wuhan. After the meeting in Wuhan, the leaders of China and India held successive bilateral talks in Qingdao Shanghe Summit in June, South Africa BRICS Summit in July, Argentina G20 Summit in November and Kyrgyzstan Shanghe Summit in June 2019. On October 11th, 2019, the leaders of China and India held the second informal meeting in Chennai, India, and the meeting between the leaders of China and India[1]. In 2020, India's "forward policy" with cross-border encroachment as the main means of implementation on the border issue led to the bloody conflict between the Chinese and Indian armies in the Galwan Valley in June 2020, which caused the first casualties since the Sino-Indian border conflict in decades, and extended the Sino-Indian competitive confrontation relationship to other fields, such as prohibiting the use of hundreds of Chinese apps in India on the grounds of national

security, discriminating against Chinese investment in India, and even promoting the decoupling of Chinese and Indian economies like the United States[2].

From opposing the "the belt and road initiative" to actively joining the trilateral mechanism of the United States, Japan, India and Australia, from provoking the confrontation between Dong Lang in 2017 to the conflict in the Galwan Valley in 2020, as well as India's aggressive border issues, decoupling in the economic and trade fields and game in the diplomatic field caused by related situations, all indicate that India's cognition of China and its policies have undergone major adjustments[3]. We can see that India has changed its policy towards China from the previous "co-existence of competition and overall stability" to "emphasizing competition and downplaying cooperation" by sending confrontation signals to China's major interests in recent years, such as Tibet issue, border issue and the belt and road initiative construction[4]. To study the change of India's China policy and the future trend of China-India relations, we should not only analyze the national conditions of China and India, but also examine China-India relations in the current international environment beyond the bilateral relations between China and India.

## **2. The Reasons for the Change of India's China Policy**

The change of India's China policy is the product of the combination of many factors, such as the international system, China-India interaction and China-India national conditions. Moreover, because a country's national conditions and the overall international environment cannot be changed in the short term, the change of India's China policy will continue for a long time.

### **2.1. Changes in India's Domestic Political Ecology**

The first is the change of India's ruling party. In 2014, the Indian Party became the ruling party by an absolute advantage. In the propaganda of Hindu nationalism, China has always been a potential security threat to India. How to resist the "China threat" has become a major consideration of the Indian Party's China policy, and to a certain extent, the Indian Party has continued the tough China policy of the National Volunteer Group family and its predecessor, the People's League of India[5]. At the same time, India's perception of China has also undergone significant changes. Some Indian leaders are more suspicious and defensive about China, and think that China is a potential competitor of India in the future. Some Indians have a strong game motivation and speculative psychology towards China. Although they don't think that China is India's strategic opponent and security threat, they have to define China as a threat for related game motivation[6]. In addition, we learned from Pew Data Center that Indians' goodwill towards China is rapidly declining. In short, India increasingly defines China as a strategic competitor, not a strategic partner.

Secondly, India's goal is to pursue the status of a leading power. At the domestic level, as early as 2017, Prime Minister Modi of India put forward the vision of building a "new India", which was adopted as the party program by the Indian People's Party in 2018, and then the National Transformation Council of India (NITI Aayog) specially formulated the national strategy document for the 75th anniversary of the founding of India, the core content of which turned India into a world economic power[7]; At the international level, India seeks the position of a leading power, not a balanced power, while China, as India's neighbor, severely restricts India from becoming a regional power.

### **2.2. The Result of the Interaction between China and India**

From the perspective of Sino-Indian bilateral relations, there are structural contradictions and historical problems in Sino-Indian relations, which restrict the development of Sino-Indian relations in a better direction.

Judging from the historical issues of China and India, China and India have always had disputes over border issues-mainly divided into the eastern, middle and western sections. There are more than 30,000 square kilometers of territorial disputes in the western section. China advocates dividing the territory by the traditional customary line, while India advocates dividing the territory by the Johnson line. There are about 2,673 square kilometers of territorial disputes in the middle section, which are divided into four parts. The disputed area in the middle section is relatively small, and there are basically no significant conflicts after 1962. The most controversial border issue between China and India is the eastern section, which is about 90,000 square kilometers of southern Tibet. China advocates dividing the territory by the traditional customary line, so that the Sino-Indian border lies at the southern foot of the Himalayas, with this boundary of about 90,000 square kilometers. Southern Tibet belongs to China. The division of India is based on the McMahon Line, which was negotiated by the local governments of Britain and Tibet in private in 1914. At the Simla meeting, the British representative Henry McMahon proposed that the land in southern Tibet be assigned to India with the connecting line of Himalayan ridge watershed as the boundary line. This formulation has never been recognized by China, and successive Chinese governments have regarded McMahon Line as an illegal border. Sino-Indian war broke out in 1962 because of the border issue. It was not until 1987 that Sino-Indian relations rose slowly until China and India put aside the border dispute. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China and India confronted each other in the Donglang incident in 2017, and Sino-Indian relations fell into a 20-year trough. As the leaders of the two countries met with differences in control, the relations between the two countries gradually stabilized. However, in 2020, the conflict in the Galwan Valley occurred between China and India because of the border issue, which triggered India's confrontation with other areas of China. Judging from the history of Sino-Indian relations, the border concerns the territorial sovereignty of a country. In the long run, the border issue will become a threshold that Sino-Indian relations can hardly cross.

Although China and India are both emerging economies and big countries in the process of rising, they share common interests in the international order. However, China and India are neighbors, which have disputes over border issues and are influenced by India's efforts to exert its geopolitical influence by seeking regional advantages, which has become an important reason for India's strategic change towards China. China is already the second largest economy in the world, and China's comprehensive strength in all aspects is stronger than India's. For India, which is seeking the status of a leading power, China, as a world power close to India, is a potential threat to it and will curb the radiation of India's influence in South Asia. Therefore, it is necessary for India to join hands with the United States to restrict China's development and ensure its absolute security. In addition, in India's view, although Sino-Indian cooperation is beneficial to the development of the two countries, India has gained absolute benefits from the cooperation, but India pays more attention to relative benefits, and India is in a deficit position in Sino-Indian economic and trade relations, which has led to the partial decoupling of India's economy from China[8].

In addition, the development of China-Pakistan relations and India's pursuit of regional hegemony in South Asia are both important factors affecting India's strategic transformation towards China. Therefore, India's opposition to joining the the belt and road initiative is understandable.

### **2.3. Different Positioning of China and India under the International System**

In the current international environment, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, the competition between China and the United States is further intensifying, and China has to face tremendous pressure from the United States. On the other hand, India, as a big country in South Asia, is close to the Indian Ocean and occupies an important position in the US India-Pacific

strategy. The change of the international environment makes India change its strategy towards China an important reason.

Under the background of great changes in the past century, with the decline of the global order dominated by the United States, the world tends to be flat, and the United States is still the only superpower in the world. However, the continuous rise of China's strength and the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in the world have further narrowed the gap between China and the United States, leading the United States to change its engagement-oriented China strategy, identifying China as a competitor in its national security strategy report, using various means such as trade war, technology war and public opinion war[9]. The international system as a whole, the game relationship between China and the United States is bound to affect the development of Sino-Indian relations.

Under the background of Sino-US competition, China has become the enemy of the United States and India, which is one of the reasons that drive India to join the "Indo-Pacific Strategy". In the current international environment, China has to face the competition and confrontation from the United States. Although the international order led by the United States is declining, the United States is still the only superpower in the world, and there is still a big gap between China and the United States, which makes China unable to despise the suppression of the United States. For example, Huawei in China is in a difficult situation after being hit by the United States, and even 5G mobile phones are hard to produce. Therefore, we still have to see that there is still a huge gap between China and the United States, and we can't underestimate the United States. As a big country in South Asia, India's geographical location is close to the Indian Ocean, which has become an important part of the American Indo-Pacific strategy. The United States has tried its best to win over India to join the Indo-Pacific strategy. However, the existence of Sino-Indian border issues and structural contradictions, as well as India's rising strategic doubts about China, India's seeking to become a global power status and other factors have made India change its strategy towards China in recent years, actively joined the Indo-Pacific strategy, signed a series of treaties with the United States and became a "quasi-alliance" state, in order to check and balance China. The performance of India's strategic competition with China is more intense, which mainly shows that India's speculation with China is enhanced politically, and it is willing to break out the Dongleng confrontation incident and the conflict in the Galwan Valley in order to seek the greatest benefits from China. Economically, it tries to decouple India's economy from China, destroy the development of Sino-Indian economic relations, seek cooperation with countries in the region, and strengthen cooperation with the United States.

Although there is a big strength gap between China and India, in the current international environment, China is a restrained strategic competitor, and India is a wooed partner. Based on this different positioning of the United States, India believes that it is in a favorable international strategic environment and has the space for strategic speculation with the United States and China at the same time. Therefore, the competitive factors of antagonistic game in India's relations with China tend to increase at this stage[10].

### 3. The Future Direction of China-India Relations

The future direction of China-India relations should be judged based on the foreign policies formulated by China and India according to their own national conditions, the interaction of China-India bilateral relations and the constraints of the international system. Therefore, judging the future direction of China-India relations is basically inseparable from the following basic facts:

India's goal is to seek the status of a leading power in the world, and the most basic thing for a big country is to achieve strategic autonomy, which determines that India and the United States will not get too close and become a pawn for the United States to control China. After becoming

the fifth largest economy in the world, India has been seeking the position of a leading power in the world, and as a big country, it must be strategically independent, which determines that India will not be tied to the chariot made in China by the United States. After the Dongleng incident broke out in 2017, the leaders of China and India managed their differences through informal meetings, which showed that India did not want relations with China to be too stiff. The fundamental reason why India joined the US-led "Indo-Pacific Strategy" is that China is the common enemy of the United States and India. By restraining China's development, it will safeguard the strategic interests of the United States and India and realize its dream of a great country at an early date. Because of India's geographical superiority in the "Indo-Pacific Strategy", cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia can enhance its leading ability in the Indian Ocean and exclude China's maritime power from the Indian Ocean, so as to exert greater influence in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, India's participation in the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" is just that the United States and India are leveraging each other for their respective national strategic interests, rather than regarding China as an absolute enemy. China, as the second largest economy in the world, is being chased and blocked by the United States. Under the background of Sino-US game, despite the structural contradictions and historical problems between China and India, China will only regard India as the goal in the sub-strategic direction. As long as it does not touch the core interests such as sovereign territory, China will remain rational about India's challenges and concentrate on facing the goal of the United States, the main strategic direction.

Sino-Russian-Indian relations will restrict the development of Sino-Indian bilateral relations[11]. In recent years, the interaction between China, the United States, Russia and India's quadrilateral relations mainly shows as follows: Sino-US strategic competition intensifies, Sino-Russian relations enter a good state, Sino-Indian competition rises, US-Russia relations continue to slump and US-India relations begin to move towards "quasi-alliance". U.S.-Russia relations have been in a downturn since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and Russia's strategic space has been hit by the western countries led by the United States. After the Ukrainian crisis, the western countries led by the United States further increased their sanctions against Russia. Although Russia-India bilateral relations have different views on "Indo-Pacific" and regional hot issues, they are generally relatively stable bilateral relations. Russia, as India's largest importer of weapons, has brought assistance to India unmatched by other countries in the military field. It can be said that defense cooperation is the ballast stone to maintain Russia-India relations. Moreover, India and Russia, as big countries in the world, have great common interests in bilateral relations cooperation, regional order and global order, which will restrict the relations between China and India.

The current international order was established by the western countries led by the United States after World War II, which will undoubtedly benefit the United States and western capitalist countries. However, the development of countries like China and India, which came from behind in the current international order, cannot be compared with western countries. Therefore, China and India are both developing countries, and they will reach consensus and cooperation on global development issues based on the same national identity. On the one hand, both China and India advocate the multipolarization of the world and oppose the peace under the leadership of the United States. On the other hand, both China and India oppose the current international order-the international order formulated by western countries led by the United States after World War II, because with the change of international power, the current international order is not conducive to the development of China and India. On the other hand, since the 21st century, the economy and trade between China and India have developed rapidly. According to Chinese customs statistics, at the end of 2019, China remained India's second largest trading partner, the largest source of imports and the third largest export market. The similar national conditions and national identity positions of China and India determine that



China and India speak for developing countries in the international arena and work together to promote the establishment and development of a new international order.

In short, under the background of Sino-US competition, a country, as a rational national actor, will not choose to take sides, but should form a hedging strategy to seek the greatest strategic interests. Therefore, although there are structural contradictions and historical problems between China and India, India will form a hedging strategy between the United States and China in the future due to the constraints of India's goal as a great power, China-India cooperation and the international system, and China-India relations will not be any better or worse.

#### 4. Conciusion

Under the background of Sino-US strategic competition, China and India have their own border problems and structural contradictions, which will seriously restrict the development of Sino-Indian relations. For China, it is an undeniable fact that the United States will become a lasting competitor. Therefore, it is necessary for China to control the relationship between China and India in order to reduce the pressure of China's sub-strategic direction and concentrate on dealing with the United States. How to solve the Sino-Indian border problem and the structural contradiction between China and India and strengthen the cooperative relationship with India will become an important issue for China to formulate its future strategy.

#### References

- [1] Feng Guan, Jia Wan: Public opinion research on India's border issues with China since Modi took office, *South Asia Studies Quarterly*, (2021)No.3, p.114-129.
- [2] Chunyan Wang, Jianwei Guo: Analysis of India's "economic decoupling" from China under the "Indo-Pacific" Strategy , *South Asia Studies Quarterly*, (2021)No.3, p.32-47.
- [3] Hailin Ye: Self-cognition, relationship cognition and strategic interaction-Game analysis of Sino-Indian border dispute , *World Economics and Politics*, (2020)No.11,p.4-23.
- [4] Chunhao Lou: Transformation of India's China policy and China's policy reflection ,*Modern International Relations*, (2020)No.11, p.26-34.
- [5] Yong Liu: Indian cognition and response to "the belt and road initiative", *Journal of Nanchang University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, (2021)No.4, p.62-69.
- [6] Chuanlu Feng: An analysis of the recent Sino-Indian border situation and the trend of bilateral relations, *Indian Ocean Economics Research*, (2020)No.6,p.1-17.
- [7] Minwang Lin: India's Diplomatic Strategy under the Great Change: Target Orientation and Adjustment Direction , *Contemporary World*, (2021)No.4, p.24-29.
- [8] Yaqing Qin: U.S. Strategic Change towards China and the Trend of Sino-U.S. Relations, *People's Forum Academic Frontier*, (2021)No.15, p.61-71.
- [9] Jiayi Zhou: India's third-party strategic choice in Sino-US relations, *Academic Exploration*, (2021) No.9, p.37-47.
- [10] Wei Song: The development process, situation and influencing factors of American Indo-Pacific alliance system, *Journal of Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, (2021)No.3, p. 27-38.
- [11] Honghua Men, Ting Wang: Strategic analysis of the complexity of China-India partnership, *Exploration and Contention*,(2021)No.9, p.32-43.