

China-India Brief

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Guest Column

The Anniversaries Provide Opportunities, but Sino-Indian Relations Cannot Be Left on Autopilot

By Jingdong Yuan

In the annals of Sino-Indian relations, 2025 marks two important anniversaries. In April 1950, India became the first non-socialist country to recognise the newly established People's Republic of China. The Bandung Conference in 1955 showcased India-China solidarity as emerging leaders of the Asian and African countries.

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The *China-India Brief* is a bi-monthly digest focusing on the relationship between Asia's two biggest powers. The Brief provides readers with a key summary of current news articles, reports, analyses, commentaries, and journal articles published in English on the China-India relationship. It features a Guest Column weighing in on key current issues in China-India relations.

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Chinese and Indian leaders **exchanged congratulatory messages** to mark the 75th anniversary of the bilateral diplomatic relations. Meanwhile, China and Indonesia celebrated the Bandung Conference and promoted the “Bandung Spirit” and, by extension, the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.” **These principles**, also known as “**Panchsheel**,” were jointly initiated by China and India, which were later endorsed at the conference.

China and India should seize the occasions to develop a more stable bilateral relationship based on mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. After all, representing nearly 40 percent of the world’s population and with economic development a priority for both, China and India have much to gain through cooperation. However, given the historical baggage of past grievances, unresolved territorial issues, emerging security issues, and the complexity of regional and global geopolitics, a stable Sino-Indian relationship requires vision and leadership. Both countries must prioritise managing existing and potential conflicts and seeking opportunities for cooperation.

Defining the Sino-Indian Relations: Six “T”s

Scholars of China-India relations typically take one of two approaches to describe the two great civilisations. They either highlight the **deep connections** between China and India through culture, religion and, in the mid-20th century, the brief period of

“Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai” (the Indians and Chinese are brothers), or—more commonly, they focus on their **strategic rivalry** and ongoing **border disputes**. Indeed, apart from the 1950s, when China and India enjoyed a decade of friendship, bilateral relations have largely been characterised by six “T”s: territorial disputes, threat perceptions, trust and distrust, Tibet, triangles (China-India-Pakistan and China-India-US), and trade imbalance.

Territorial disputes remain the most intractable sources of bilateral conflicts and animosity. Over the years, border skirmishes, faceoffs, and direct military conflicts, including a brief war in 1962, have defied solutions even with prolonged but inconclusive negotiations seeking to find solutions to their disputed 3,488 km (2,167 miles) border. The 2017 **Doklam** standoff and the 2020 military clash in the **Galwan Valley** represent the most serious bilateral confrontation in recent years. The subsequent military buildup and infrastructure enhancement on both sides of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) have further heightened tension.

Sino-Indian distrust and mutual suspicions are another barrier to a stable bilateral relationship. These tensions further reinforce mutual threat perceptions and **security dilemma**, which in turn reflect and intensify the strategic rivalry between the two. Ever since the 1962 war and the 1963 Border Agreement between China and

Pakistan, India has viewed the China-Pakistan **“all-weather” strategic partnership** as aimed directly at undermining Indian national interests. Likewise, Beijing views **Delhi’s relationship with Washington** as driven by the latter’s interests in containing China in the Indo-Pacific. Although China may not always support Pakistan’s actions and India might not see its **membership** in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) as China-driven, both sides perceive the other’s policy choices as deliberate, threatening, and hostile in intent. Furthermore, **China’s growing presence** in South Asia, notably via its geo-economic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is perceived by India as directly encroaching its traditional sphere of influence.

Tibet remains a sensitive issue in Sino-Indian relations. China always views India’s position on Tibet, including hosting the exiled Tibetan government and the Dalai Lama with deep suspicions if not open hostility. Delhi recognises Beijing’s sovereignty over the ethnic region, but that has not prevented China from **warning** against Indian “interference” in its domestic affairs, including the succession of the 14th Dalai Lama. Meanwhile, China’s dam-building in Tibet, especially the recently announced \$170 billion **mega hydropower dam**, has become another controversy in bilateral relations and a serious issue for downstream India.

“C”-ing A Way Forward: Rethinking Sino-Indian Engagement

Addressing these challenges require China and India actively pursue four “C”s: communication, crisis management, consultation, and cooperation. Keeping communication channels open can help dispel misunderstandings and apprehension of each other’s intentions and actions. Past experiences suggest that regular and effective communication has proved beneficial to both sides in **dealing with border disputes** and preventing outbreaks of clashes as a result of such activities like patrols, intrusions, encampments, and troop movements along the LAC . This kind of communication has become crucial at a time when their growing capabilities and interests bring them into more frequent contact. **This** leads, in certain areas, to overlapping patrolling and presence, which cause friction and raise mutual concerns. Meanwhile, China’s growing ties with South Asian states, and India’s increasing engagement in Southeast Asia, in addition to its Quad membership, are viewed by each as the other’s encroachment of one’s spheres of influence. Nevertheless, both countries’ policies appear guided by their strategic calculations rather than deliberate, zero-sum designs to undermine the other.

Developing effective crisis management mechanisms and protocols for handling bilateral conflicts in the border region are

are becoming ever more imperative between the two nuclear-armed Asian powers. The Sino-Indian agreements on confidence-building measures (1993/1996) and **political principles** for settling border disputes (2005) commit both sides to pursue a political settlement of their territorial disputes and impose specific restrictions on **the use of arms**. These restrictions have helped prevent greater casualties during the recent border skirmishes. The ongoing corps commander-level meetings have reinforced mutual commitments to the agreed protocols, reduced tensions, and facilitated orderly **military disengagement** from the LAC. Crisis management and conflict prevention mechanisms should be further strengthened. Neither China nor India can unilaterally gain territorial advantages without risking escalation to a serious conflict.

China and India are both rising powers in regional affairs and on the global stage. They share **memberships** in many multilateral groupings from the Group of Twenty (G20) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS. As two of the largest developing countries, **China and India can exert significant influence** on key issues such as climate change, financial reform, global governance, international trade, and development aid, through closer consultation and policy coordination. Such cooperation can advance their mutual

interests while also advancing the interests of the Global South.

Promoting economic development remains the policy priorities for both China and India. China has recently faced significant headwinds, including slowing economy, declining population, and challenge of restructuring its development model. In contrast, India has registered vibrant growth rates, enjoyed a population dividend, and is attracting foreign investment. **The two countries' economies** remain rather complementary and the potential for future expansion remains promising. China has overtaken the US as India's largest trading partner. However, the size of **the trade imbalance**, at close to \$100 billion in China's favour, is not sustainable and needs to be addressed through greater market access for India and investment flows from China. In addition, China and India should also promote trade and investment with the expanded BRICS to facilitate **intra-block economic cooperation**.

China and India have gradually restored bilateral relations since the fatal clash in Galwan Valley in 2020. Official contacts have resumed, as have been leaders' meetings. The 75th anniversary in diplomatic relations and the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference provide a unique opportunity for the two countries to build a stable relationship through effective management of their disputes and differences. The "dragon-elephant tangle" and the realisation of

the “Asian Century” will remain elusive, with the “boom and bust” cycle in bilateral relations likely to repeat itself. This will continue unless the leaders commit to setting a vision for the bilateral relationship. Without such leadership, both sides risk becoming victims of great power politics, allowing the Sino-Indian relationship to be defined as an emerging strategic rivalry.

This leadership needs to be clear-eyed, pragmatic, and bold, and must be able to chart a new course for the bilateral relationship. It should focus less on tactic manoeuvres and gains; rather, it should offer a strategic vision for Beijing and Delhi to agree on and work with. It must overcome the entrenched and stereotyped views of each other and redefine Sino-Indian relations from the perspective of what can be achieved together. **Rajiv Gandhi’s historic 1988 visit** to China was an instance of visionary leadership that looked toward the future rather than being burdened with the past, and one that is much needed today.

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Guest Column

Strategic Duality: India and China in the EU's Connectivity Agenda

By Jagannath Panda

The European Union (EU) frames its Global Gateway Strategy (GGS) as a rules-based initiative to enhance global connectivity, pledging around EUR 300 billion through 2027 to develop “**smart, clean, and secure**” infrastructure that aligns with EU standards. Brussels presents the GGS as a model for “**equal partnerships**” in infrastructure and digital development, emphasising democratic governance, strong environmental and social safeguards, and transparency. This framework positions India and China very differently. India is considered a like-minded partner, while China is implicitly regarded as a strategic rival—albeit one with indispensable economic significance.

These divergent perspectives pose the central question of this piece: How is the EU's GGS positioning India and China, and what do their differing reactions imply for the EU's broader connectivity ambitions? And what do India's and China's responses tell us about the viability of Europe's strategy?



Image Credit: Flickr/Scottish Government

Duality in EU Perspective

EU–India statements underscore New Delhi's role as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific. EU President von der Leyen described India as a “**leading voice of the Global South**” and a “**bridge**” between Europe and the Global South. In June 2025, India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jozef Síkela **reaffirmed their commitment** under GGS, emphasising “investing together in sustainable development projects that create jobs, connect communities, and strengthen our global resilience.” These projects are specifically chosen to reflect shared values.

While India remains a like-minded partner for much of Europe, it has not yet emerged as a preferential one. India has to work hard at building confidence, especially in the wake of its **stance** on Russia. Although Prime Minister Narendra Modi's well-known declaration that "**this is not an era of war**" had resonated in parts of Europe, policymakers remain wary of India's continued energy imports from Moscow. Many continue to perceive India as leaning toward Russia—a stance some interpret as implicitly opposing Ukraine, and by extension, Europe. For a continent rallying behind Ukraine, this perceived ambiguity has made full political trust elusive.

The EU–China relationship, meanwhile, stands at a pivotal juncture, as commemorated by the 50th anniversary EU–China Summit in Beijing on July 24, 2025. While diplomatic lines remain open, structural mistrust over trade and security casts a long shadow, making any substantial breakthroughs elusive in the near term. The EU is pursuing a policy of "de-risking, not decoupling", aiming to safeguard critical supply chains and diversify dependencies while staying engaged across climate, energy, tech, and regulatory dialogues.

Since its launch in 2021, the GGS has **often been billed** as a values-based, **high-standard** alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). GGS **pledges** to uphold open procurement and high environmental and social criteria—features that distinguish it from the BRI, whose contracts often favours China's state-owned enterprises and financial institutions. The

initiative appears designed to address critiques commonly associated with the BRI, including unsustainable debt burdens and limited developmental spillovers. Though China features rarely—if at all—in the official rhetoric on the GGS, its presence is implied. This has inevitably shaped China's view of the initiative as a geo-strategic gambit of the EU. While Brussels sees GGS as a vehicle to "**tackle pressing global challenges**" and promote EU norms, a leaked EU strategy document goes further to describe GGS as a tool in a geopolitical "**battle of offers**" with China.

In short, the EU has positioned India as a strategic ally in building resilient, rules-based connectivity, whereas China has been implicitly framed as the competitor whose model GGS is meant to counter. This duality has elicited markedly different responses from India and China.

China's Strategic Response

China's state media have been quick to dismiss the GGS, along with similar initiatives like the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC). They portray GGS as "**another rubber check**" from the West, which lacks "**credibility**" and is subtly framed as attempts to counter the BRI. These commentaries openly question the strategic viability of the Global Gateway, arguing that such projects "will never be taken seriously" unless Brussels abandons what they describe as a narrow, agenda-driven approach. They further highlight EU's constraints—ranging from war-induced fiscal deficits to growing debt

fatigue—arguing that the EU’s funding for GGS is both limited and heavily conditional.

Despite the critical tone, Chinese diplomats have **not missed opportunities** to call for interaction between the BRI with the GGS. Some state media outlets have even suggested that the GGS should “**join hands**” with the BRI, rather than position itself as an alternative.

This blend of critique and outreach reflects China’s strategic ambivalence. Such ambivalence stems from China’s perception of the EU as a normative power leveraging connectivity to assert influence and shape global standards. At the same time, Beijing also regards the EU as a major geopolitical player whose partnership remains strategically important. Since 2023, however, Beijing has stepped up diplomatic efforts to frame itself as “**willing to synergise**” its BRI with the GGS. In 2025, Foreign Minister Wang Yi reinforced this overture, proposing to “**leverage**” the respective strengths of China and the EU.

India’s Engagement with the EU

New Delhi has largely welcomed closer EU ties as complementary to its own Indo-Pacific outreach. Europe notes India’s **active engagement** in joint GGS connectivity projects (in green energy, digital infrastructure, etc.) to diversify supply chains and develop third-country connectivity in line with a “shared” vision of connectivity across Europe, Asia, and the world. India’s **strategic significance** to the EU’s GGS further lies not only in its pivotal geopolitical and economic role, but in its

ability to either legitimise or constrain the EU’s attempt to provide a credible alternative to China’s BRI.

Despite many fundamental differences between India and the EU on normative principles, New Delhi sees the EU as a like-minded partner in countering infrastructure and technology strategies that threaten Indian sovereign and security interests—most notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a BRI project. Hence, India’s stance on Global Gateway is more positive, even if cautious. Jaishankar called it a “**step in the right direction**.” Further, arguments for GGS to become a **defining factor** of India–EU ties have shaped engagements with the normative idea of the strategy. Crucially, both the GGS and the **EU–India Connectivity Partnership** were launched in 2021, marking the start of an institutionalised approach to connectivity and laying the foundation of strategic alignment. In February 2023, the two sides launched the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC)—only the second such EU forum, the first being with the US—to coordinate on digital, energy, and supply-chain issues. This further strengthens the complementarity between India and the GGS on **digital public infrastructure** projects. In practice, this will enable India to pair its world-class digital platforms, such as unified payments and open-data networks, with EU funding for projects in Africa and Asia. This aligns with India’s efforts to position itself as a partner to developing economies.

Amidst escalating China-EU **trade rifts**, the **positive progress** of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations—pledged by both sides **to be expedited by 2025**—alongside plans to use the IMEC as a testbed for connectivity, is interpreted in Delhi as evidence of Brussels’ intent to **elevate** EU-India strategic partnership.

EU’s Global South Calculus: India and China

Having become the top trading partner for **over 120 countries** in 2023, China continues to hold more sway than the EU and India in many Global South markets. From Asia to Latin America and Africa, Chinese companies consistently outcompete Western counterparts on both price and scale. For instance, China has maintained the top trading partner of Africa for **sixteen years**. Such outpacing of the EU and India across the developing world calls for an urgent review of both **Brussels’** and **Delhi’s** game plans. In essence, Brussels now treats India as an emerging “pole” in the Global South that competes with China for influence in the same strategic space.

Under the EU’s strategic discourse, China is largely viewed as a **systemic rival**. Terms such as “strategic autonomy” and “de-risking” frequently appear in Brussels’ narratives to Beijing, reflecting caution and concern. India, by contrast, is portrayed as a partner and an emerging leader of the Global South. However, India’s global influence remains relatively modest. Currently, it is not a major lender like China and lacks large-scale, state-backed soft-

power institutions operating in Africa or Asia.

Comparatively, in the EU’s calculus, India’s advantage lies not in the economy of scale but in strategic alignment. Its democratic system, sizeable market, and pivotal geographic location in the Indo-Pacific suit Europe’s vision of a rules-based international order. As a result, Brussels is increasingly orienting its Global South strategy around **deeper collaboration** with India. The EU appears to hope that by working with India, it can present an alternative model of development—one that respects sovereignty, human rights, and financial sustainability— which it positions as distinct from the BRI. Meanwhile, Brussels must reconcile with India’s foreign policy stance on issues like Ukraine while also navigating the reality that Beijing remains an essential economic partner.

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News Reports

Bilateral relations

China's Li Qiang announces launch of Tibet mega dam project that has worried India

South China Morning Post, July 19

The launch of China's mega dam on the Tibetan Plateau has raised concerns in India and Bangladesh about the impact on their water and food security.

China, India should work towards 'win-win' cooperation, says Chinese Foreign Minister

Straits Times, July 15

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has called for both China and India to "adhere to the direction of good neighbourliness and friendship" and "find a way for mutual respect and trust, peaceful coexistence, common development and win-win cooperation."

China says Dalai Lama succession issue a 'thorn' in relations with India

Reuters, July 13

The succession of the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, remains a contentious issue in China-India relations, with China insisting that any successor must be approved by its authorities, while India maintains that China has no role in the succession process.

China and India in the Region

No India, no go? Why a new China-led South Asian bloc may falter

South China Morning Post, July 20

China and Pakistan's reported effort to replace SAARC with a new South Asian bloc excluding India is likely to falter, as India's economic weight, crisis leadership, and strategic centrality render any such regional initiative structurally fragile and diplomatically unbalanced.

Avoiding trade curbs vital for normalization of ties, India tells China

Reuters, July 14

India's foreign minister urged his Chinese counterpart to resolve border friction, withdraw troops, and avoid restrictive trade measures to normalise ties.

Looking to fast-track trade pact review talks with ASEAN: Piyush Goyal

The Hindu, July 10

India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has urged speeding up the stalled review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement to tackle trade imbalances and promote balanced growth.

Can India block China's leadership in Global South-based alliances like the SCO?

South China Morning Post, July 5

India's refusal to endorse China-led initiatives within the SCO underscores the deep-seated divisions in Global South solidarity and highlights the limits of Beijing's efforts to unify developing countries under its multipolar vision.

Trade and Economy

India resumes visas for Chinese tourists after five years amid thaw in diplomatic tensions

CNA, July 24

India has resumed tourist visas for Chinese nationals for the first time since the 2020 border clash.

Indian politician urges strengthening manufacturing to ‘compete with China’; Chinese expert highlights consistency in policy

Global Times, July 20

India's Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi said India's “small manufacturing entrepreneurs are hindered by a lack of policy support, while heavy taxes and monopolies by a few firms are stifling the industry.”

Could Trump Spur a China-India ‘Dragon-Elephant Tango’?

Bloomberg, July 19

Trade analysts warn the secondary tariff threat by the US could complicate trade negotiations and push BRICS members closer together and enhance supply chain stability.

US, Japan, India and Australia pledge mineral cooperation on China jitters

CNA, July 2

The US, Japan, India, and Australia have launched the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative to reduce reliance on China's mineral supply chains, amid growing concerns over economic coercion, regional security, and the strategic control of resources essential to future technologies.

Energy and Environment

India hits 50% non-fossil power milestone ahead of 2030 clean energy target

Reuters, July 14

India has reached its target of 50 percent installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources five years ahead of schedule despite continued coal expansion plans.

India needs to boost its petchem output to counter China's dominance, Reliance says

Reuters, July 11

Despite growing interest in cleaner fuels, demand for petrochemical products continues to rise alongside economic expansion. It is crucial for India to meet this increasing demand and counter China's growing dominance in the sector.

China leading BRICS clean-energy boom with shift into solar, report shows

Japan Times, July 3

China's clean-energy industry has spearheaded a solar-power boom in the BRICS grouping of emerging economies, with the bloc accounting for more than half of global generation last year—up from 15 percent a decade earlier.

Analyses

Trump Is Pushing India to Submit to China Foreign Policy, July 28

By Sushant Singh, a Lecturer at Yale University and a Consulting Editor with India's Caravan magazine.

Trump's America First strategy has forced India into pragmatic submission to China, as resisting Beijing without reliable U.S. support now appears too costly.

The Limits of Pragmatic Intentions: The Evolving Story of China-India Rapprochement

The Diplomat, July 25

By Dr. Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, the Founder and President of Mantraya Institute for Strategic Studies (MISS), India.

Despite renewed diplomatic gestures and shared frustrations with U.S. policy, enduring mistrust and unresolved structural tensions—especially China's assertiveness—pose formidable obstacles to a durable China-India rapprochement.

Jaishankar's China Visit: The Paradox of China-India Relations

ISAS, July 22

By Dr Ivan Lidarev, a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS).

Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's first visit to China since 2019 signals growing momentum in the China-India thaw, with potential for renewed bilateral cooperation, particularly on the global stage.

India-China Border Dispute Deepens Amid Mutual Mistrust

Energy Intelligence, July 16

By Scott Ritter, a former US Marine Corps Intelligence Officer.

Efforts to stabilise China-India ties remain stalled as both sides grapple with unresolved border tensions, Pakistan's disruptive role, and conflicting alignments in multilateral fora.

Back-to-back BRICS and Quad meetings highlight India's increasingly difficult balancing act

Chatham House, July 4

By Dr Chietigj Bajpae, a Senior Research Fellow for South Asia in the Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House.

India's nimble diplomacy between the West and the Global South underscores its foreign policy adaptability, but growing global fragmentation is making this balancing act harder to maintain.

Books and Journals

Where India and China Meet: Competing Regional Statecraft in Southeast Asia

Political Science Quarterly, July 2025

By Xue Gong, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the China Programme of S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University; and Daniel Balazs, a Research Fellow of the China Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

The prevailing academic discourse predominantly highlights the competitive dynamics between China and India in South Asia. Yet, there is a dearth of scholarly examination concerning these two powers' competitive engagement with Southeast Asia. This study adopts a regional statecraft framework, positing that major powers actively endeavor to influence the contours of regional integration to further their strategic interests. Employing an analytical approach informed by a novel compilation of data points related to diplomacy, defense, institutional initiatives, trade data, and investment patterns, this research delineates notable disparities in the motivations, approaches, and outcomes of China's and India's regional statecraft. The two states' approach to Southeast Asia is asymmetric, characterised by China's push for regional primacy and India's efforts to prevent such a scenario. China's regional statecraft is proactive, characterised by its

assertive efforts to enhance its influence and maintain its dominance in Southeast Asia. It leads to institutions that directly challenge the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) centrality in Southeast Asia, imbalanced trade relationships, and massive investments. In contrast, India's approach is reactive, defensive, and selective, shaped by persistent concerns about China's economic and strategic ambitions. It leads to measures that indirectly challenge ASEAN centrality in Southeast Asia, protectionist practices, and trade diversification efforts. Against this backdrop, Southeast Asian nations are confronted with the imperative of safeguarding their autonomy and upholding the centrality of ASEAN. A nuanced comprehension of these intricate dynamics is indispensable for policymakers and businesses navigating the increasingly complex terrain of the Indo-Pacific region.



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OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

- *Partnership or Polarization? Southeast Asian Security between India and China* edited by Evan Laksmana and Byron Chong (Contemporary Southeast Asia, 2023)
- *Asian Conceptions of International Order: What Asia Wants* edited by Kanti Bajpai and Evan Laksmana (International Affairs, 2023)
- *How Realist Is India's National Security Policy?* edited by Kanti Bajpai (Routledge, 2023)
- *Deterring Conflict and Preserving Peace in Asia* edited by Drew Thompson and Byron Chong (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, 2022)
- *What Can the United States Learn from China about Infrastructure?* by Selina Ho in *The China Questions 2* (Harvard University Press, 2022)
- *India Versus China: Why they are Not Friends* by Kanti Bajpai (Juggernaut Books, 2021)
- *Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose* by Drew Thompson (Strategic Forum, 2021)
- *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations* edited by Kanti Bajpai, Selina Ho and Manjari Chatterjee Miller (Routledge, 2020)



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