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**SINO-INDIA ECONOMIC RELATIONS: A DIFFUSED ADVENTURE
THROUGH THE AGES**Seema Parihar ^{*1}¹Associate Professor, Department of History, CT College, Ludhiana, Punjab, 142024* Corresponding author email address: pariharseema1@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.59415/mjacs.v2i4.176>**Abstract**

Sino-India relations have a long and complex history, often referred to as Sino-India Relations or Indo-China Relations. This relationship describes the mutual interactions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India (RI). While the two nations have experienced numerous conflicts and disputes, there have also been periods of alliance and amiable engagement. Historically, Chinese travelers, such as Fa Hian, visited India to gain knowledge and insight. Fa Hian, a prominent Chinese traveler, journeyed to India during the Gupta period in the 4th century CE. Diplomatic and cultural exchanges flourished during various Indian dynasties, establishing a foundation of mutual understanding. The Silk Route played a pivotal role in facilitating trade and cultural exchange between India and China. This route not only enhanced commerce but also allowed the spread of Buddhism to China and Southeast Asia, strengthening spiritual and intellectual ties.

However, challenges emerged over time. During the 19th century, the growing opium trade between China and the East India Company led to the First and Second Opium Wars, straining relations. Later, during World War II, both nations played crucial roles in countering the expansion of Imperial Japan. In modern history, formal bilateral relations began in 1950 when India was among the first nations to recognize the PRC, severing ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan). Today, India and China, as the two most populous nations and major emerging economies, hold significant influence in global diplomacy and trade. Enhanced cultural and economic collaboration remains essential, as their bilateral relationship shapes the geopolitical and economic landscape of the world.

Keywords: Sino-India Relations, Indo-China Relations, People's Republic of China (PRC), Republic of India (RI), Border Disputes, Economic Collaboration, Silk Route, Buddhism, Opium Wars, Imperial Japan

1. Introduction

India and China are two prominent South Asian nations, engaging in bilateral dealings marked by both cooperation and contention. India aspires to maintain a friendly, cooperative, and mutually beneficial relationship with China, emphasizing the principles of Panchsheel, established in 1954.

The Panchsheel Agreement, a cornerstone of Indo-China relations, laid the foundation for peaceful coexistence. It was formally codified in a treaty titled the "Agreement with Trade and Commercial Relations between the Tibet Region of China and India", signed in Peking (now Beijing) on April 28, 1954. This agreement outlined five guiding principles: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

India and China, as two of the world's oldest civilizations, share a long history of cultural and economic interactions. Their historical ties underscore the potential for harmonious and cooperative engagement in the modern era.

2. Ancient India-China Relations

The earliest documented interactions between India and China date back to the 2nd century BCE, with Buddhism playing a pivotal role. Buddhism spread from India to China around the 1st century BCE, fostering significant religious connections between the two civilizations. In addition to spiritual exchanges, the Silk Route served as a major channel for economic interaction, facilitating trade between the two realms for centuries.

The Indian epic Mahabharata, composed between the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, makes references to "China," identified as the Qin state, which later formed the Qin Dynasty. While precise details of early India-China relations remain unclear, evidence from the Mauryan period provides insight. Chanakya, the prime minister of the Maurya Empire, mentions Chinese silk in his treatise Arthashastra, referring to it as "cinamsuka" (Chinese silk dress) and

"cinapatta" (Chinese silk fabric). These records highlight the strong economic ties between the two civilizations during this era.

Historical texts by Chinese historians Zhang Qian (113 BCE) and Sima Qian (145–90 BCE) mention "Shendu," a term believed to refer to the Indus Valley or Harappan civilization. "Shendu" derives from the Sanskrit term "Sindhu", reflecting linguistic and cultural links. When Yunnan was annexed by the Han Dynasty in the 1st century CE, Chinese records noted an Indian presence in the region.

By 65 CE, two Indian Buddhist monks, Kashyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna, arrived in China, marking a turning point in cultural and religious exchange. The period from the 5th to 12th centuries CE is regarded as the golden age of Buddhist influence in China. During this era, Buddhism emerged as a dominant religious and philosophical force among both the people and rulers of China.

Simultaneously, economic and political ties flourished, as both civilizations sought to overcome barriers and establish enduring connections with the broader world.

3. Middle-Age Tamil Kingdoms: Trade and Influence

Economic and Trade Relations

During the Middle Ages, Tamil kingdoms established strong trade and industrial ties with several South Asian nations, including Malaya, Burma, and Malaysia. These regions served as key markets for Indian goods, while Tamil cities in the southern peninsula became hubs of commerce. Evidence of these interactions is supported by the discovery of Chinese coins in the Thanjavur and Pudukkottai districts of Tamil Nadu.

The Chola Dynasty and Trade with China

Under the rule of Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola, the Chola dynasty strengthened trade relations with China, particularly the Song Dynasty. The Cholas even extended their influence by conquering the Sri Vijaya Empire in Indonesia and Malaysia, securing critical maritime trade routes to China.

Bodhidharma and Cultural Exchange

Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk believed to be a prince of the Pallava dynasty, traveled to China in the 5th or 6th century CE. He is credited as the founder of the Zen school of Buddhism and is recognized as its first patriarch in China. According to legend, he also initiated the physical training of Shaolin monks, which eventually evolved into Shaolin Kung Fu. In Japan, Bodhidharma is revered as Daruma.

The Silk Route: Trade and Cultural Transmission

During the 7th century, the Tang Dynasty gained control over the Silk Route, an extensive trade network connecting Central Asia to the Mediterranean. This route facilitated not only economic exchanges but also the transmission of culture and ideas, including Buddhism, between India and China. The Silk Route, spanning over 10,000 kilometers, remained a vital artery for trade until the 15th century, when the Ottoman Empire restricted trade with China.

Diplomatic Missions

In the 7th–8th centuries CE, Wang Xuance, a Chinese envoy, led a mission to northern India during a period of civil unrest following the death of Emperor Harsha (590–647). Despite setbacks, including unfavorable weather and attacks, Wang returned with allied Nepali and Tibetan troops to restore order.

Scientific and Astronomical Exchanges

The Indian mathematician and astronomer Aryabhata (476–550 CE) made significant contributions to Chinese astronomy. His works were translated into Chinese during the Tang Dynasty and included in the Kaiyuan Zhanjing (Treatise on Astrology of the Kaiyuan Era) compiled in 718 CE. Gautama Siddha, an Indian-born astronomer in Chang'an, played a pivotal role in translating the Navagraha calendar into Chinese.

Tamil Merchants and Yuan Dynasty China

During the Yuan Dynasty, Tamil Hindu traders from the Malabar Sultanate were active in Quanzhou, a prominent Chinese port city. Archaeological findings, including Hindu statues, attest to the Tamil presence in the region. Abu Ali, a wealthy merchant from the Malabar Sultanate, is noted for his close connections with the Yuan dynasty after his fallout with the Malabar royal family.

4. Later periods: Ming Dynasty Expeditions: Zheng He's Naval Voyages (1405–1433)

Between 1405 and 1433, the Ming dynasty sponsored seven naval expeditions led by Admiral Zheng He. During these voyages, Zheng He visited several Indian ports and kingdoms, including Bengal, Ceylon, the Persian Gulf, and Arabia. His expeditions even reached as far as Malindi in present-day Kenya. Zheng He exchanged gifts, offering Chinese silk, porcelain, and other goods in return for exotic items like African zebras and giraffes.

In Ceylon, Zheng He honored local deities and customs by erecting a monument, as recorded in the Galle Trilingual Inscription, which paid homage to Buddha, Allah, and Vishnu. During this time, Bengal sent 12 diplomatic missions to Nanjing between 1405 and 1439.

Sikh Expansion and Conflict with China (1834–1842)

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Sikh Confederacy expanded into neighboring territories, annexing Ladakh in 1834. In 1841, the Sikhs invaded Tibet, overrunning parts of western Tibet. However, Chinese forces defeated the Sikh army in December 1841, prompting their withdrawal. In retaliation, Chinese troops entered Ladakh and besieged Leh, where the Sikhs repelled them. A treaty signed in September 1842 stipulated mutual non-interference in each other's territories. This agreement came amidst rising tensions between the Sikh Empire and British India and China's involvement in the First Opium War.

The British East India Company and Sino-Indian Trade

During British rule, the East India Company expanded its territory and used Indian-grown opium as an export to China. Indian sepoy and the British Indian Army participated in the Opium Wars and Boxer Rebellion. Trade between India and China primarily involved:

- Exports from China to India: Raw silk, paper pulp, food products, and textiles.
- Imports from India to China: Iron ore, plant oils, gems, and raw materials for chemical industries.

5. India-China Relations After Independence (1950s Onward)

India became the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China in 1950. The foundation of relations was the Panchsheel Agreement of 1954, which outlined five principles:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Mutual non-interference in internal affairs.
4. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefits.
5. Peaceful coexistence.

This agreement strengthened Sino-Indian relations and paved the way for trade agreements, which were renewed periodically from 1954 to 1984.

6. Growth of Bilateral Trade (2000–2019)

India-China trade expanded significantly during the early 21st century:

- From 2002 to 2010, bilateral trade grew by 50% annually.
- In 2015, it surged by 54%, with China becoming India's largest trading partner by 2008.
- In 2019, India became China's 12th largest trade partner, with total trade reaching \$92.89 billion. However, India's trade deficit with China increased to \$74.92 billion.

7. Impact of COVID-19 on Trade (2019–2022)

- Despite political tensions, trade between India and China has grown at a rapid pace.
- By 2022, China's total foreign trade hit a record high of \$6.25 trillion, with ASEAN, the EU, and the US being its top trading partners.
- India experienced accelerated imports of goods, including medical equipment, driven by increased domestic demand.

8. Conclusion

The history of Sino-India relations is a testament to the enduring complexity of interactions between two of the world's oldest civilizations. From the spread of Buddhism via the Silk Route to modern-day trade agreements, India and China have traversed a long journey of cultural, economic, and diplomatic exchanges. These interactions, despite periods of conflict and political tensions, highlight the potential for collaboration and mutual growth. In recent decades, the economic relationship between the two nations has emerged as a cornerstone of their bilateral ties. Trade has grown exponentially, even amidst challenges such as border disputes and global economic crises. This economic interdependence underscores the importance of finding common ground to foster sustainable development and regional stability.

However, the relationship faces significant hurdles, including unresolved border issues and trade imbalances. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to dialogue and cooperation, guided by principles such as those enshrined in the Panchsheel Agreement. By focusing on shared goals, such as regional peace, economic growth, and cultural exchange, India and China can continue to shape the global geopolitical and economic landscape.

As both nations move forward, their ability to navigate differences while building on historical and contemporary ties will determine the trajectory of one of the most critical bilateral relationships of the 21st century. In this, lies an opportunity to redefine their partnership as a model of coexistence and collaboration, benefiting not only their populations but also the world at large.

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