

Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies

The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies

Volume 9 | Issue 2

Article 2

9-1-2011

Sino-Indian soft power in a regional context

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Recommended Citation

Dellios, Rosita and Ferguson, R. James (2011) "Sino-Indian soft power in a regional context," *Culture Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cm/vol9/iss2/2>

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Keywords

Sino-Indian, soft power, strategic culture, mandala, harmonious world

Sino-Indian Soft Power in a Regional Context¹

By Rosita Dellios and R. James Ferguson

Abstract

This article examines the possibilities of new ‘mandalas’ - or schemas - of cooperative power in the geopolitics of India and China as it affects their common Indo-Pacific region. As Asia’s two great civilisational states and reputed arch rivals, India and China need not be on a collision course as they rise to become the 21st century’s new global powers. There is much scope for cooperation in their mutual quest for resources, security and prestige via an understanding of the dynamics of today’s geopolitics and the role of ‘soft power’ embodied in aspects of the strategic cultures of both India and China. The study therefore entails a comparative analysis of the strategic cultures of China and India, and the prospects of sustained cooperation across the Eurasian landmass and surrounding maritime zones. The key concepts in this article are soft power (as the power of attraction rather than coercion), ‘strategic culture’ (a people’s distinctive style of dealing with and thinking about the problems of national security), ‘mandala’ (from India’s traditional strategic cultures) and ‘harmonious world’ (from Chinese strategic culture).

1. Introduction

The Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China are emerging as the newest superstates of the 21st century. Their status will be forged not in war, as occurred with the emergence of the first modern superpower, the United States (after the Second World War) but in the performance of ‘soft power’ across regions of cooperation. Soft power will be the currency of international relations to a degree not witnessed since its articulation in the 1990s when globalisation became the dominant theme of the post Cold War world. India is more developed than China as a global soft power, but China is likely to catch up quickly as it harnesses traditional philosophy to contemporary problems. What China lacks in attractive institutions and norms it makes up for in capability. Like the railways it constructs across Eurasia and elsewhere, China is engineering a new modality of regionalism. India has long understood this mandalic quality of integration with differentiation. The coordination of two distinctive Asian strategic cultures, the Indic and the Sinic, is likely to lay the groundwork for new mandalas of cooperation. The most significant implication of the rise of India and China is likely to be the real opportunity for sustainable regional development in the wider Indo-

¹ The views in *The Culture Mandala* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, position or policies of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies (Bond University). Bearing in mind the controversial debates now occurring in International Relations and East-West studies, the editors endeavour to publish a range of diverse, critical and dissenting views.

Pacific. Before elaborating on this perspective, however, four key concepts employed in this article need to be introduced.

2. Key Concepts

2.1 Soft Power

‘Soft power’ is the power of attraction. By contrast, the power of coercion, or ‘hard power’, entails the application or threat of military force or economic sanctions. Soft power acts as a means of attraction, persuasion, or convergence of values that gives a state or international actor extra influence on the international system, either in relation to other actors, or increased influence on institutions or organisations (Nye 2008). It often mobilises ‘cultural diplomacy’, but also engages values, norms, ideologies and even religious values to draw support from national and transnational groups (Gupta 2008). The term ‘soft power’ was introduced into the international relations lexicon by Joseph S. Nye in his 1991 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. For Nye, soft power cannot be obtained even by payment or rewards. In soft power, people should be attracted without monetary inducement. Examples of such attractions are a country’s free society, women’s rights, the arts and entertainment, and its educational system.

It is possible to think of soft and hard power applications as a spectrum, for example, co-option of supporters, attraction in terms of values or culture, and agenda-setting in terms of norms, coalitions and International Governmental Organisations (IGOs), while inducements, then coercion and commands form increasingly hard power behaviours (Nye 2004:5). It is also useful to think of them dialectically. Soft power, such as China’s ‘military operations other than war’ (MOOTW, see The State Council Information Office, 2009) that include peacekeeping and anti-piracy missions to the Gulf of Aden, hold the seed of emergent hard power. This comes from enhanced expertise with deployments in foreign terrain. Similarly, hard power may be useful in times of danger, but a sustainable peace depends on soft power resources, such as the perception of a just and equitable world order.

Soft power also influences wider international audiences, shaping perceptions of legitimacy and influencing the ‘permissive’ environment in which economic and military power is deployed. Soft power does not exist in a vacuum, and interacts with both an economic base and hard power resources at the national level (Lee 2010). Under conditions of globalisation and global information flows, it is therefore often the nation ‘that tells the better story’ (Tharoor 2007; Lee 2010) that can sustain its comprehensive national strength, its foreign policy, and a more supportive international environment. At a more complex level, such narratives may form part of a clash of norms and perceptions, based in part on knowledge-production networks with different foci, for example, American, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and European media, publishing houses, universities and research centres.

Sometimes these efforts are a diffuse part of diplomacy and foreign policy, such as French efforts to retain a strong role for French culture and language at the global level and on the

internet. Relative dominance in these areas may be viewed as shaping both regional and global agenda. This is exemplified in Chinese claims that Western media have dominated and distorted perceptions of China externally, or Chinese efforts to build and control alternative national and now global networks. In this context, hegemons, regional leaders, and emerging powers may have strong interests in enhancing their soft power resources and channels.

2.2 Strategic Culture

Strategic culture pertains to a people's distinctive style of dealing with and thinking about the problems of national security. It essentially concerns the methods nations and other organised groups choose to achieve their key goals, and the cultural factors which affect the way they seek cooperation or competition on the international scene. For example, several thinkers have argued that China tends to have a very strong strategic tradition which influences political activity, foreign affairs and defence activities, taking it beyond a narrow political realism based on Western models, though power politics is often used, for example, in efforts to maintain the unity of China (see Zhang and Yao 1996).

Johnston (1995:1) defines strategic culture as an 'ideational milieu that limits behavioral choices', from which 'one could derive specific predictions about strategic choice'; for Ming Dynasty China (1368-1644) he found 'a defensive and minimalist use of force'. Early work on the strategic culture concept began in 1977 through a paper written by American political scientist Jack Snyder. This was during the Cold War era with its concern over Soviet strategic thinking. Snyder challenged Western-centric thought when he wrote about a distinctive Soviet 'strategic culture'.

In understanding the strategic cultures of India and China it is necessary to inspect a fuller spectrum of strategic traditions in both nations. Rather than relying on the most well-known classical texts - Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* for China and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* for India in drawing conclusions about tendencies in strategic culture, a more diverse repertoire of influential thinkers or schools of thought avoids an overly deterministic trajectory in the future development of Sino-Indian relations across their common Indo-Pacific region. It opens the framework of strategic analysis for policy and planning, allowing for more innovative thinking.

To illustrate the diversity in strategic culture, it is notable that while Kautilya's advice to the monarch Chandragupta Maurya is credited with the unification of India subcontinent, but within two generations India transitioned from a realist unifier to an idealist king. Chandragupta's grandson, Asoka (c. 268-232 BCE), is known as India's 'philosopher king'. After having seen the horrors of war, he set forth his dharma of operations: conquest by moral actions not military ones. Within the modern era, Mahatma Gandhi is also of the political idealist tradition. However, from the early 1960s India had to move towards increasing its military capabilities, partly in relation to tensions with Pakistan, but especially after its conflict with China in 1962. Likewise, K. M. Panikkar (1962) had sown the seeds of

the Indian Ocean being ‘India’s Ocean’ – that is, that India’s future will be determined by command of the Indian Ocean.

China, too, moved from realist-based unification in 221 BCE under the tutelage of the ‘Legalists’ to Confucian idealism within a short time-span. The Han dynasty took over imperial China in 206 BCE and reinstated the ‘attractive’ soft power of culture over the compelling hard power of the sword. It mobilized Confucian morality, with a lesser emphasis on Legalist administrative traditions, to control its effective military capacities (see Chang 2007). Much later in the 20th century, Mao Zedong spoke of power growing out of the barrel of the gun, but this was always within the context of the control of the military by the Communist Party. Military power was thus linked not just to defence of the state, but a particular vision of China’s significance in world affairs.

More recently, the relevance of strategic culture is highlighted by China’s use of its idealist Confucian culture for its post-2005 ‘harmonious world’ foreign policy and India’s need to develop ‘nuanced and India specific strategic thinking’ by a 2010 government decision to establish the first Indian National Defence University (INDU). This will bring together most of the existing government think tanks as well as new centres of study (Singh 2010).

2.3 Mandala

A mandala is a diagram of relationships. It represents an inter-relational whole, a cosmogram composed of concentric forms. While the word comes from Sanskrit to denote a sacred circle, the appearance and experience of mandala is universal: from a snowflake to the solar system. The term is commonly used to describe a diagram used for spiritual contemplation, especially in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is also a specialist term employed by scholars to denote traditional South and Southeast Asian political formations. Traditional geopolitical mandalas were based on the politics of a charismatic centre, with its attraction of ‘deference and obligations’ from other power centres through a demonstrated ‘ability to win allies and overtake enemies’ (Higham, 1989:240). Early political application may be found in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* or *The Science of Politics*, a 3rd Century BCE Indian ‘realist’ text (Kautilya 1967), while the repoliticisation of the mandala concept began after the Cold War and with the impact of globalisation.

Although Kautilya’s ‘mandala theory of foreign policy’ (Boesche 2002:78) focused on the conquest of one’s enemies through geopolitically-based alliances – today they would be viewed as mandalas of encirclement and containment - it is also possible to join national self-interest with international norms through mandalas of cooperation. The possibilities of new ‘mandalas’ - or schemas - of cooperative power in the geopolitics of India and China are well within the grasp of both nations’ strategic cultures. India contributes the mandalic platform and China infuses it with ‘harmonious’ form. Moreover, political mandalas were quintessentially ‘soft power’ formations in that it was the charismatic centre that exercised power rather than the enactment of force. As to China’s ‘harmony’ (*he*, 和; sometimes transliterated as *ho*), ‘value the martial and cultivate the civil’ (*shang wu, xiu wen*) is a

traditional Chinese saying which captures the essential relationship between hard and soft power (see further Keightley 1990; Zhang 2005).

2.4 Harmonious World (hexie shijie)

In the first decade of the 21st century, China took a Confucian turn in its international diplomacy to match its economic power and to dispel fears that as China rises it will become dangerous. The process of reassurance came with the doctrine of China's *peaceful rise* in 2003. This was superseded by the even less threatening and more quiescent *peaceful development* slogan of 2004. A more proactive slogan came in the form of *harmonious world*, which matched the domestic slogan of *harmonious society*. China's President Hu Jintao articulated the 'harmonious world' perspective at the United Nations' 60th anniversary in 2005. The government white paper, *China's Peaceful Development Road*, released in December 2005, includes the sub-heading, 'Building a Harmonious World of Sustained Peace and Common Prosperity'. This has become a paradigmatic slogan oft-repeated in official speeches and documents; the phrase was adopted as an amendment to the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party at the CCP 17th party congress on 21 October 2007.

When he addressed the UN General Assembly in 2005, Hu Jintao offered a four-point proposal for building a harmonious world: (1) security cooperation for peace, (2) economic cooperation for prosperity, (3) inter-civilisational dialogue for mutual respect, and (4) reforms to the UN for strengthening its global governance role. President Hu's 2009 address to the UN General Assembly was also based on a 'four-point proposal on building a harmonious world' (Xinhua 2009; full text in Permanent Mission, 2009). The contents, however, varied in accordance with changing global conditions. The four points proposed in 2005 occurred when reform to the UN was high on the agenda. Later a change occurred in favour of transnational problems – especially climate change. Thus in 2009 points 1 and 2 on security and economy remained, but point 3 became cooperation on transnational problems such as 'climate change, food security, energy and resource security and public health security' (ibid.) and point 4 retained the inter-civilisational message of tolerance and trust: 'Countries should acknowledge differences in cultural tradition, social system and values and respect the right of all countries to independently choose their development paths' (Permanent Mission, 2010). Here the cultural and economic points find common purpose. Meanwhile, the UN has been subsumed in all the points – including the need to address transnational issues and to give developing countries a stronger voice as part of the 'democratization of international relations', placing it at the centre of global governance (*People's Daily Online* 2009). In this way, the principle (doctrine) remains but the strategy alters to account for the empirical realities that China faces.

A phrase that captures Chinese strategic culture in its world order role is 'win-win cooperation'. This may sound like a formula borrowed from game theory but it has roots in *yin-yang* correlative philosophy (discussed below). Africa is commonly cited as an example of win-win cooperation whereby China is engaged in huge infrastructure construction in

return for access to resources. Despite criticisms of China's 'no-strings attached' policy, in that it does not discriminate against 'rogue regimes', there is also praise for China's efforts. They are seen as constructive and have attracted cooperation from the West. Since 2008, there has been a trilateral EU-China-Africa partnership 'to promote peace and security as well as support efforts in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa' (Pasquini 2010).

3. India and China: Old Hands at Soft Power

China and India - Asia's two great civilisational states - are also the world's most populous nations. Their combined populations of 2.4 billion represent a third of humankind. They include some the poorest of people with per capita GNP, for many, at below US\$200. In view of their widespread material poverty, neither country can be considered a truly great power, not even China whose permanent membership of the UN Security Council has long conferred international influence beyond its economic and strategic reach. India could be a great challenge for China – but it could also be a significant partner in a genuinely multipolar and multilaterally oriented world. After all, both are developing countries with similar needs to improve the quality of life of their populations, including environmental improvement. Both, as great powers that account for over two billion people, have a strategic stake in a multipolar world which their very presence will delineate, albeit from different perspectives. For this reason India should not benchmark itself against China in economic terms, and China should not be so easily dismissed as suffering a soft power deficit because it lacks India's political pluralism.

The present world order is not the first time the two converged. Early Southeast Asia provides an intriguing setting in which India provided the Hindu-Buddhist cosmological structure and China, without displacing this system, absorbed it within its Confucian international order. Only northern Vietnam remained a Confucian outlier in an 'Indianised' region. This Indianisation was the product of soft power as local rulers sought to imbue themselves with the prestige of Indian high culture, much like Parisian culture acted as a soft power centre for Europe and later Americanisation became a soft power process for world culture. Hindu influence in the 5th to 9th centuries CE meant that many of the Southeast Asian kings identified with Siva. 'Imperial mandalas' are said to have emerged in the 9th to 12th centuries, a period known also as classical Southeast Asia because it represented the height of material culture. Monumental temple complexes were constructed (such as Ananda in Pagan in upper Burma, Angkor in Cambodia, Borobodur and Prambanan in central Java), and economic systems of irrigation-based agriculture and maritime trade were developed. Besides Hindu-Buddhist mandalic polities, there also emerged Muslim ones, such as that of Malacca which took over from the maritime trading empire of Srivijaya.

India's early cultural success is obvious in the Indianisation of the Southeast Asian polities. Not so apparent is China's success in enrolling them as tributaries without first 'converting' or conquering them (except when the Mongol emperor of China attempted to conquer Southeast Asia in the 13th century). Imperial China's *modus operandi* may well be a case of

hard power, when it acts to impress, changing its nature to soft power. Ming dynasty diplomatic voyages in well equipped ‘treasure ships’ to Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East are a case in point. In this sense soft power can be seen to be manipulative or propagandistic, which is to be expected in any country’s foreign policy. Soft power resources advance the cause of a nation through the propagation of its values – or civilisation. In imperial Chinese history, this led it to be the centre of a vast network of tribute-trade relations. The ‘wonder’² that was India and China remains a soft power resource to this day, despite counter-narratives from the ‘oppressed’ that point to the hegemonic tendencies of both nations in privileging their elite culture rather than folk or minorities culture. ‘Great Han chauvinism’ would be readily recognised by Vietnamese and Taiwanese, for example. The mandala states of Southeast Asia reflect the influence of Indian high culture, but without adequate representation of indigenous civilisational resources.

Even if not everyone is convinced by, or comfortable with, the cultural eminence of India and China, there are more prosaic economic wonders to consider. These give India and China an attractive image despite the continued presence of widespread poverty.³ As Pranab Bardhan (2010:1) points out: ‘In 1820 these two countries contributed nearly half of world income; in 1950 their share was less than one-tenth; currently it is about one-fifth, and the projection is that in 2025 it will be about one-third.’ William Dalrymple (2008:33) adds that: ‘There is nothing new about India being perceived as a place of great and growing wealth: for much of the pre-colonial period, the West was the eager consumer of spices, silks and luxuries of the subcontinent, while India was the prosperous supplier.’ Likewise, India was the dominant source of Eurasian textiles, especially cotton products, through most of the 18th century (Darwin 2008: 197-198). China, too, has had similar recognition, with Chinese tea, silk, porcelain and other luxury products being in such high demand that the consequent imbalance of trade caused the British to use opium from India as a method of creating consumer demand in the Chinese market. This led to the infamous ‘Opium Wars’ of the 19th century that marked the beginning of China’s ‘century of humiliation’.

4. Indian Pluralism: The elephant and the blind men

With the reemergence of India and China as heavyweights in the global economy, political order, and regional security settings, their soft power capacities will become even more accentuated, not less. For example, Indian pluralism is not only about democracy but also the capacity to absorb many paths to knowledge - like the parable of the elephant and the blind men. It is the story of an Indian prince who wished to conduct an experiment on the nature of

² This is a literary borrowing from A. L. Basham’s acclaimed book, *The Wonder that was India*, published in 1954.

³ In the case of India, poverty has been reduced, but some 36% of the population still lived in extreme poverty through the late 1990s, defined in terms of minimum calorific intake, with the poverty rate (HPI-1) dropping to 27.5% as measured by the UNDP (UNDP 2008). The Human Development Index rank (life expectancy, education and wealth factors) was 119 out of 170 countries for 2010, improving from 2008 figures (UNDP 2010; UNDP 2008). In China’s case, successful economic growth for three decades has meant a reduction in poverty in absolute terms - from 65% to 10% - according to the World Bank (2009), though wealth disparity has grown.

knowledge. The experiment involved six blind men and an elephant about which the men were told nothing. The prince assigned each of the blind men to a different part of the elephant. He then asked them to examine and describe the object of their consideration. Not knowing what they were dealing with, each had a different story to tell. Thus the man assigned the elephant's leg thought it was a tree. He who examined the trunk, concluded it to be a snake. This was nothing like the description which came from the man examining the elephant's ear. To him it was a large winnowing fan. As for the tail, its blind investigator was confident it had to be a broom. And so the divergent descriptions went; no one imagined the whole elephant. The results of the prince's experiment about the nature of knowledge may seem obvious, but what they mean as a guide for action is not so evident. That which is obvious is that without the whole picture we cannot make informed judgements, but only prejudicial or approximate ones. The less obvious meaning is whether this is necessarily a problem. According to Steven Warshaw (1994: 25): 'Through this parable, the Jains emphasised that all knowledge was relative and subject to varying points of view. The whole truth was a mystery for which men groped blindly. In India, this doctrine resulted in a growing tolerance for the opinions of others.'

While India's soft power allows for diverse expressions of global culture, it does so without losing sight of a guiding centre. In its own symbolic language, India may be thought of as a mandala or wheel of integration and differentiation; but one with a secular constitutional core. Its tensions threaten to spin the nation out of control, but they are also held by the centripetal forces of state, institutions and economy. India is one representation of the world in all its complexity but also its core concern with representational values and freedom of expression. India's soft power strength lies in its ability to project a democratic image without masquerading as a Western nation. The West is merely another part of 'the elephant'.

The rise of India will entail a more differentiated global order. Currently this is termed 'multipolarity'; but with India the term carries a latent meaning of inter-polarity. Essentially this means that within the context of the wider mandala, multipolarity is ultimately an illusion as no one pole in global politics stands alone. Rather, as seen through Hindu-Buddhist philosophy and the conditions of globalisation, the poles are in a state of 'causal interdependence'. This accords with both the elephant and blind men metaphor (as all the parts are inter-subjective) and the mandalic notion of interconnectedness. It also leads India towards a ready pattern of inter-regional engagement, building strong ties with the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), the US, the BRICs,⁴ the developing world and to a lesser extent Central Asia (for debates on limited influence in the latter region, see Kavalski 2010).

⁴ 'BRIC' is the acronym for Brazil, Russia, India and China, coined by economist Goldman Sachs (2003), who argues that the economies of the BRICs are rapidly developing and by 2050 will eclipse most of the current richest countries.

5. The Chinese harmony of opposites

China, too, has a traditional philosophy of inter-subjective parts: it is best illustrated by the yin-yang symbol of two mutually regarding parts forming a whole. Also known as the theory of correlativity, it is a Chinese dialectics of harmonisation (*bianzheng siwei*, meaning dialectical thinking). The complementary polarities of yin-yang are the female (yin) and male (yang) principles. Yin-yang may also be thought of as waning-waxing, negative-positive, receptive-proactive, hidden-open, defensive-expansive.

Yin-yang thinking is another latent force shaping an emergent multipolarity. China also seeks to bring greater non-Western representation in an international system that is rebalancing from West to East. In this, India and China are of common cause. Beijing has officially invoked the classical discourse of 'harmony' to give developing countries a stronger voice as part of the 'democratization of international relations' (*People's Daily Online* 2009). But China is not simply seeking to redress an imbalance. There is a deeper project, one which has long occupied the socio-political history of Chinese thought, the dialectics of harmonisation in the maintenance of public order. When President Hu Jintao articulated his country's 'harmonious world' foreign policy perspective at the UN, he addressed the needs of an international public order: that is, 'to preserve the diversity of civilizations in the spirit of equality and openness, make international relations more democratic and jointly build a harmonious world where all civilizations coexist and accommodate each other' (Xinhua 2005).

This view, if it is not dismissed outright as a deception, may be deemed idealistic at best, subversive at worst. Its challenge to the status quo could cast 'harmony' as a dangerous, revolutionary idea. Still, its classical origins are a clue to harmony's soft power utility. The ideals of Confucian thought were not developed by ignoring the realities of power and conflict, but were a direct reaction to them. Within the limits of the time, they sought to create a language and ideology of governance that would regulate the action of rulers, aristocrats, officials, and ordinary people. In doing so they moved beyond regulation and punishment to an embracing theory of how order could be achieved within a diverse society made up persons with different abilities and shared needs.

6. India and China: Greater than their parts

India may be an exemplar for soft power, a 'guru' to a world of 'blind men', but China's words often sound hollow in Western ears. Its political system, after all, is far from attractive to the dominant Western discourse of democracy and human rights. At the tactical level, China's soft power necessarily concerns positive image building, persuasion, reassurance. Soft power also flows from respect for China's economic success and its Confucian cultural area of East Asia, often seen as a model for high growth development. If India presents the democratic ideal, then China offers the economic one. Yet at the grand strategic level the pursuit of 'harmonious world' represents China's best chance of civilisational sustainability.

Only then can it contemplate becoming a genuine global soft power, as preeminent soft power philosophers, Lao Tzu and Confucius, would have instructed.

Similarly, India is more than a democratic alternative to authoritarian China for inspiring developing countries or deriving benefits from developed ones. Its capacity to integrate many points of view provide it with an ability to spiritually accommodate China, just as it had done through its 'export' of Buddhism in the 1st century AD. Indeed, it was through Buddhism that the wider Indo-Pacific region became mandalically linked. China's ability to relate to the religio-political system of Southeast Asia, much of which it absorbed within its tributary system, came through its Indian-derived Buddhist credentials as well as its Muslim population. Notable Chinese Muslims were the Ming admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho) who came from Yunnan and the classical poet Li Bai (Li Bo) who was born in Central Asia. Buddhism became the dominant spiritual philosophy of the Chinese from the mid-4th to the 8th centuries - that is, during the Six Dynasties period (222-581), the Sui (581-618) and the early Tang (618-906 CE) dynasties. The Tang saw China reach its civilisational heights, partly based on an outward-looking engagement with Central, East and South Asia. Buddhism was resumed as the emperor's religion under Kublai Khan of the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty in the 13th century, when a spatial and relational polycentric mandala stretched from the Mongolian heartland to the Balinese court. It was based on a common religious understanding among the political elite. Buddhism retained its role in Chinese imperial history as it received royal favour under the Manchus of the Qing Dynasty – China's last.

In the 21st century the ruling Chinese Communist Party has reactivated China's philosophical heritage as the soft power path to overcoming resistance to China's rise and to contributing to global development. The notion of a mandala as a regional structuring concept, a device for the accommodation of difference within an ordered whole, is compatible with 'harmonious world'. In this regard, neither India nor China has fully tapped its cultural resources in the context of the other as cooperator. The tendency has been to act as peer rivals. It should be remembered that this is not only a bilateral relationship but one embedded in the multilateral dynamic of divisive geopolitics.

American and Russian geopolitical influence on Sino-Indian relations was especially evident in the Cold War. Just as India and China replicated, in terms of the Tibetan buffer zone and adjacent territories, the Great Game between Britain and Russia, so too they simulated the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, with the difference that democratic India looked to Moscow and Communist-ruled China tilted to Washington. In other words, China's primary adversary, the Soviet Union, was India's supporter. In turn, China supported India's foremost foe, Pakistan. Today the US is the primary power in the maritime regions of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, while Russia remains a strong but by no means overpowering presence on the Eurasian landmass as it is ringed by other players, including China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey.

Moreover, bilateral relations are marred by a border dispute. China's land border is shared with 14 other countries: North Korea to the east, Russia and Mongolia to the north,

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the northwest, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan to the west and southwest, and Burma, Vietnam and Laos to the south. China has settled all existing boundary disputes except with India and Bhutan. India says China occupies 38,000 square kilometres of its territory, while Beijing claims the whole of the northeast Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which is 90,000 square kilometres, on the basis that historically it formed part of Tibet. Efforts to resolve the border issue began with the appointment of a joint working group in 1988, but after the inconclusive 14th round of border talks held in Beijing in November 2010, there was still no solution in sight. China's unresolved border disputes with India may be viewed as symptomatic of a larger latent competition, that includes China's growing interest in the Indian Ocean - which is understandable in view of its reliance on maritime trade and oil imports from the Middle East - and the knowledge in New Delhi that Tibet is China's (not India's) buffer zone and source of rivers that flow into India.

Still, two-way trade had risen from \$270 million in 1990 to \$60 billion in 2010, with China strong in manufacturing and India in services. An opportunity for broader cooperation is captured by the term 'Chindia' (*The Economist* 2010). This concept (following Jairam Ramesh) argues that India and PRC share interests as developing Asian countries that seek a multipolar global order in which they both can have leading roles (Randol 2008).

In view of both India and China being energy importers, and both being dependent on water sourced from the Himalayas, cooperation represents the optimum solution: it is cheaper than competition and it provides greater certainty of security than zero-sum rivalry which entails a loser. The Eurasian Mandala provides a cooperative framework for energy and water issues.

7. The Eurasian Mandala

7.1. Energy

Encompassing the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia, Eurasia represents one of the world's richest, largely untapped, sources of oil and natural gas. Eurasia may be viewed as a geopolitical region framed by the emerging powers of the current century: China and Turkey to the East and West; and to the North and South by Russia and India. At the gravitational centre is Central Asia. Its most stabilising regional body is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This was China's first initiative in forming a multilateral organisation. It was originally established in 1996 as the 'Shanghai Five' - comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan - to demilitarize the old Sino-Soviet border and resolve border demarcation disputes. In 1999 'Islamic fundamentalism' was seen as the most pressing danger for Central Asian governments; fighting 'terrorism, separatism and extremism' came to dominate the agenda. For China the restive Xinjiang region was its primary concern, and to this day Beijing maintains tight security against separatist trends among the Turkic Muslim Uyghurs. The 'Shanghai Five' became the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in July 2001 with the addition of Uzbekistan. Mongolia joined as an SCO observer in 2004, with India, Pakistan and Iran becoming observers in 2005. This has

expanded SCO's regional range to South Asia and the Middle East. Even Latin America is relevant when considering the BRICs - Brazil, Russia, India and China – that represent the rising powers of the 21st century. Through Sino-Indian coordination of bids for the African oil (see below on enhanced energy cooperation), that continent also globalises the Eurasian energy mandala whose heartland is Central Asia.

In some respects this parallels Sir Halford Mackinder's popularised geopolitical term, the 'heartland' (1904), to indicate the wealthy and pivotal interior of Eurasia. Mackinder's Eurasia, however, was largely contiguous with today's Russia. His thesis, that whoever controlled the 'heartland' would eventually control the world, was written at the time of the Great Game fought by imperial powers over Eurasia. Today the proposition is more likely to read - whoever globalises the Central Asian 'heartland' will eventually connect the continents. In this regard, Sun Yatsen (1866-1925), the father of modern China, was more prescient:

Sun's *The International Development of China*, published in 1922, calls on nations reconverting from war production, to help China "leapfrog" from its pre-industrial condition to an advanced economy. This would primarily benefit what was then a population of 400 million, but would also be a boon to the United States and Europe, by creating a huge market, both for China's own production, and for the advanced technologies which would help transform the nation . . . Sun's program leads with a strategic plan to develop a 160,000 km (100,000 mile) national rail system, connected to a Eurasian system to link China to Russia, Central Asia, India, and Europe—and, eventually, Africa (Burdman 2010).

Indeed, under the framework of cooperative regionalism in Central Asia, China has now been able to construct transport networks and pipelines. The railway system alone represents another of China's famed grand projects that have spanned its history, from the Great Wall and the Grand Canal to the more recent Three Gorges Dam and the railway to Tibet. This time the project is international: China has commenced planning the construction of rail lines and very fast trains capable of spanning the Eurasian continent by 2020.

Beijing's plan to build a high-speed railway network across Asia and Europe through Central Asia is its key project for the continent. A reflection of the rise of China on the global stage, the proposed network will connect 17 countries and comprises three major routes linking Kunming in China with Singapore via South Asia, Urumqi and Germany through Central Asia, and Heilongjiang with Southeastern Europe via Russia (*Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2010).

This vast infrastructure development not only helps the local economies but also China's growing need for resources and their transportation routes, in conjunction with the need to reach markets by land and not only sea routes.

India, too, would be well served by joining China in strengthening energy access. To appreciate the gravity of their common energy needs, the following statistics are worth citing: China and India, the world's second and sixth largest consumers of oil, respectively, are still industrialising, and their combined oil imports in 2030 are expected to exceed today's

combined oil imports from the US and Japan (International Energy Agency 2007; see also Energy Information Administration, 2008). By then, India would have overtaken Japan to become the world's third largest net importer of oil (after the US and China). A net importer of oil since 1993, China's proven oil reserves are expected to be depleted by 2018 (Wright 2004:A3). By 2025, its energy requirements would have quadrupled, while in the first five years of this new century China alone was responsible for a third of the growth in oil demand worldwide (*The Economist* 2004, 2005). India is also a net importer of oil, as domestic production is inadequate for current and future consumption requirements. Oil accounts for 30% of India's energy needs and 70% of that is imported (*Commodity Online* 2008). Small wonder that besides investing in energy-rich countries, China and India are also looking at more futuristic plans: one of the objectives set for their space programs is to extract lunar energy reserves (isotope helium-3) as a replacement for fossil fuels (*Chinanews.cn* 2005; Crawford 2008).

In 2006, the two countries signed a 'Memorandum for Enhancing Cooperation in the Field of Oil and Natural Gas' in which they agreed to cooperate in sourcing crude oil in third countries, as well as coordinating in the oil industry across a range of activities from exploration to marketing (*China Daily* 2006; Fernando 2010). Expanding the relationship to Russia, in November 2010, the RIC group (Russia, India and China) 'agreed to promote cooperation in the fields of energy security and ensure contact between their innovation centres' – two new areas of cooperation, according to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (*Voice of Russia* 2010).

The Eurasian energy mandala is not so much a new Great Game but a platform for energy investment and investigation in a fuller sense. In their 'shared vision for the 21st century' joint communiqué of 2008, India and China emphasised the need to continue developing green sources of energy:

The two sides are convinced that it is in the common interest of the international community to establish an international energy order that is fair, equitable, secure and stable, and to the benefit of the entire international community. The two sides are committed to making joint efforts to diversify the global energy mix and enhance the share of clean and renewable energy, so as to meet the energy requirements of all countries (Joint Communiqué 2008).

7.2 Water

The Himalayan sub-system of the Eurasian mandala represents a vital strategic heartland for water resources, just as Central Asia does for energy. Ironically, it is China's quest for hydropower – and hence carbon reduction – that has disturbed downstream countries including India. Tibet is so resource-rich in water that it is known as the 'third pole' (after the North and South Poles) and as the 'water tower of Asia'. It is the source of rivers that flow to countries on the Indian subcontinent and mainland Southeast Asia: namely, China, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Concerns that

China would build a large dam on the Brahmaputra, diverting its waters, were met by China's 'assurance' that this was not the case (*The Economic Times*, 2010). However, China has much work to do to reassure its neighbours that it is not engaged in zero-sum politics. The correct handling of dam-building in Tibet could increase China's stocks of soft power considerably. As matters stand, China does not fully consult affected countries when planning new dams, it is not a full member the Mekong River Commission, it still has large dam projects planned for the Salween River, it has also not ratified the 1997 UN Convention on Non-Navigable Use of International Watercourses, and has no watersharing agreements with India (Arpi 2010; Nicolas 2009). Finally, Tibet is a seismically-active region. The damage caused by an earthquake would be amplified if the safety of a dam was breached (see Yauch 2010).

Any concern by India that China could try to control the waters that flow from the glaciers of the Tibetan plateau is ultimately overtaken by the impact of climate change and the overriding requirement for cooperation. A Chinese documentary revealed in 2009 the extent of change on the Tibetan plateau: 'The TV team found bare rock where glaciers had retreated. Lakes had dried up. Lush grassland had turned to desert. The livestock was dead, the farmers impoverished' (Sheridan 2009). Moreover,

The Chinese government, in its studies, acknowledges the changing condition of Tibet's water supply. Last summer, the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research, a unit of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, reported that the area and mass of the region's glaciers had decreased 7 percent since the late 1960s. The Chinese scientists reported that the melting phenomenon was widespread, though it was not known how many of China's 46,298 glaciers were affected (Schneider and Pope 2008).

Here lies a major project for Sino-Indian cooperation in a regional context in which hundreds of millions of people are affected. While China builds railways to connect the Eurasian mandala, its engineering feats at dam-building on the 'the roof of the world' are still perceived to be disruptive. In soft power terms, perception is more powerful than any objective reality.

8. The Indo-Pacific Maritime Mandala

The Eurasian Mandala meets its maritime counterpart across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This maritime region is characterised by above world-average economic growth and development, and has the densest shipping routes for trade. Southeast Asia, Australia and India occupy a diagonal axis across the Indo-Pacific Oceans and this triangulation's economic and strategic significance is second only to the Chinese-Japanese-Korean 'rimland' in Northeast Asia (Prabhakar 2009), that together form the larger mandalic theatre.

8.1 Indian Ocean

India does not regard China as a legitimate player in the Indian Ocean. It sees its gigantic neighbour to the east as a competitor attempting to encircle the subcontinent and extend its influence westward. A case in point is the Chinese-built Gwadar deep water port on Pakistan's Balochistan coast near the Persian Gulf. Located 400 kilometres east of the Straits of Hormuz and 72 kilometres from the Iranian border, Gwadar holds strategic value for both military and development purposes. It is thought to serve as a surveillance facility at present and may provide China with a naval base in the future (see Kaplan 2009:22). Moreover, should the Malacca Strait be closed to China in the event of, say, US support for Taiwan in a Chinese military campaign to capture it, a port at the mouth of the Persian Gulf would prove invaluable. In terms of development, Gwadar is well located to serve as an Indian Ocean–Central Asian transport and pipeline hub. It would act as a terminal for China's oil imports from both Iran and Africa. China maintains that its investment in Gwadar is to enhance the economic development of its comparatively poorer western regions, as Gwadar's location is much closer than the Chinese eastern seaboard. Proximity, however, comes at a cost. Gwadar lies at the terminus of a vast region of political instability. Both western China and Pakistan's Balochistan province are home to pro-independence movements among the Uyghurs and the Baloch, respectively. Pipelines that travel through Baloch territory could be prone to sabotage, if there is intensified internal conflict.

8.1 Pacific Ocean

As to the Pacific sector of this maritime mandala, even a cursory glance at a Western map compared to a Chinese one reveals that the international boundary for the PRC is not the same. China's claims extend over much of the South China Sea, including 5,400 islands in what it views to be Chinese territorial waters. Not all of these – notably Taiwan and the majority of the Spratly Islands (known as the Nansha to the Chinese) – are under Beijing's control. Moreover, claims over a group of barren islands in the East China Sea, known as Daoyutai to the Chinese and Senkaku to the Japanese, pit China in a sovereignty dispute against its historical foe and East Asia's economic heavyweight, Japan. If India fears encirclement by China in the Indian Ocean, then reciprocally China is concerned that it is vulnerable to encirclement and containment within the perimeter of a US-friendly island chain that stretches from Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines – what is often referred to as the 'first island chain' – and is vulnerable to outside control of the Malacca Strait that channels tanker traffic between the Indian Ocean and the South China and East China Seas.

9. Conclusion: Quadrants of Cooperation

To create new mandalas of cooperative power, perceptions of mutual encirclement need to be replaced by ambitions of mutual enrichment at a bilateral and multilateral level. Such enrichment cannot be sustainable if it is only economic, but needs to address security issues too. Security today needs to be understood as a thought system with both indigenous and

international inputs. Security itself is, first and foremost, a philosophical undertaking that delves into the very notion of a multi-layered identity, with non-traditional security becoming more important in a global system of transnational threats. Nuclear proliferation, terrorism, environmental degradation and climate change, pandemics, financial crises and other ‘problems without passports’ go beyond the controls of any one nation. They can even become ‘threat multipliers’ for countries that are already vulnerable. Climate change in the Himalayas is a ready example. The governance structure that deals with these problems would do well to open itself to not only multilateral but intercultural approaches to security. Here China’s and India’s strategic cultures have fresh perspectives to offer.

The mandala is a peculiarly Indian concept but of universal import. It is based on nature but is also a simplification, a cosmogram, a construct with a particular goal and with designated sectors. Harmony is also universally recognised as a social value, but for the Chinese, harmony has been taken as a core doctrine in Chinese culture generally and Confucian thought in particular, as found in early Chinese art, literature, historical texts and philosophy. The joining of mandalic integration with Chinese applications of harmonious diplomacy would assist in the construction of a less volatile neighbourhood.

In championing the practice of cooperative regionalism, there is much scope in existing organisations, especially the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Plus Three,⁵ the Indian Ocean economic regional bodies, in which China is not a full member but should become one, and the SCO of which India should also become a full member. Likewise, cooperation across the Indo-Pacific oceanic zone has already begun on issues such as piracy, disaster relief, security of sea lines-of-communication and energy transport. Here emerging organisations such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, IONS – a ‘colloquium’ of naval chiefs – might include China as an observer, allowing a positive, contextualised dialogue on naval issues between rising powers (Paul 2010). Stronger institutional links regionally need to be matched at the global level. The G20⁶ has become the celebrated start to a more multipolar and representative world, but the Security Council of the UN also needs to be updated with India as a permanent member.

To conclude, this article posits that India and China as the rising powers of the 21st century will occupy the status of ‘soft superpowers’ in that their strategic cultures will drive their outlook, while the logic of globalisation will privilege soft power patterns of influence. However, to achieve a balance of hard and soft power modalities, the two countries will need to work at their own relations through the pooling of their cultural resources. The benefits will not only be for India and China but hold global implications in creating a more inclusive world.

⁵ The ‘Plus Three’ are China, Japan, and South Korea.

⁶ In 1999, the Group of Twenty (G20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors formed as a response largely to the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 and the emergence of large developing nations that needed representation in global economic governance institutions.

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