THE ROLE OF CULTURE AS A CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURE BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA

Greeshma Johnson[1]

[1]Assistant Professor (on contract), Fatima Mata National College (Autonomous) Kollam, India.

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ABSTRACT

India and China have long historical and cultural ties. And such a long history of exchanges among people has guided the building of the present multilevel bilateral ties between the two countries.

Being neighbouring nations, many bilateral issues and border disputes have hindered building a friendly relationship between both countries. The bilateral relations have gone through many ups and downs. However, many diplomatic initiatives have already been taken up in order to smooth and strengthen bilateral ties, and many more are in the pipeline. One of the stumbling blocks to developing smooth bilateral cooperation is the lack of confidence between the two countries. In order to enhance trust, measures should be initiated to directly link people across borders. Many historical documents reveal that cultural connections among people have existed since the earliest eras. Hence, considering the culture a smooth diplomatic tool, it has the potential not only to directly connect the people but also to enrich deep bilateral ties. This paper is a brief description of how culture stands as a diplomatic tool between India and China in order to enhance confidence in bilateral relations. Moreover, it also focuses on India's recent confidence-building measures with China in line with cultural ties.

Key Words-India, China, Diplomacy, Culture, Confidence Building Measures

1. INTRODUCTION

The bond of civilization between India and China has been long-established. Since the ancient epochs, ties have been developed and established in various fields between both nations. Culture was one of the primordial elements that connected the peoples of both nations. Many ancient texts, annals, scholars, and travellers have expounded that the disseminated cultural nature between both nations was not a barrier to developing cordial neighbouring relations. Many ancient kingdoms in India and China have maintained comity, friendliness, and mutual cultural exchanges with each other. Buddhism was another area of cultural connection during the ancient era. Buddhism originated in India and had transferred and flourished in China through the ancient silk route.

Since the post-Independence periods, the relationship between both nations has gone through many friendly and strained phases. The first premier of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, called India-China relations 'Bhai-Bhai' which implies that Indians and Chinese are brothers. This amiable ideal was intended to connect the peoples of both nations, both psychologically and civilizationally. Since then, both nations have made enormous efforts to rebuild ancient civilizational links, especially in terms of cultural relations. Presently, India's diplomatic strategy considers culture as one of the vital components of Indian soft power. Ian Hall argues that India tries to be on good diplomatic terms with China through all its soft power tools (Hall, 2019). The novel foreign policy ideal of India,'Panchamrit', is an alternative and restructuring ideal of 'Panchasheel'. 'Sanskriti Evam Sabhayata' is one of the important five themes of Panchamrit, which connotes the civilizational and cultural linkage of India with other countries in the world. Moreover, the foreign policies are in terms of upholding the ancient civilizational glory of India before the world.

However, evidence of this relationship was available after Buddhism reached China. Herbert Passin observed in his article, 'Sino Indian Cultural Relations' that, after the 1950s, one of the recent examples of cultural relations could be the commemoration ceremony of classical poet Kalidasa in Peking, China. It took place in Peking in 1956. More than a mere ceremony, the Chinese Youth Art Theatre had produced Kalidasa's magnum opus Shakuntala (Passin, 1961). The Indian poet Harindranath Chattopadhyaya got good recognition in China. Later, the India-China Friendship Association was established. Tagore's Vishwabharati University taught Chinese studies. Both countries focused on the exchange of specialists. The student exchanges focused mainly on this (Passin, 1961). Ian Hall, in his book 'Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy', explains the different recent approaches through which India exerts its influence abroad. Religion is one of the novel aspects of India's foreign policy. He gives more importance to soft power, especially culture and religion. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, applies religious and cultural diplomacy to China. Modi gifted Chinese President Xi Jinping a Bhagavad-Gita. He visited a Buddhist temple in China and agreed to the construction of an Indian-style Buddhist temple in Luoyang.

2. CULTURE AS A CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURE

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies defines 'Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) as broadly defined as measures that address, prevent, or resolve uncertainties among states. Designed to prevent wanted and especially unwanted escalations of hostilities and build mutual trust, CBMs can be formal or informal, unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, military or political, and can be state-to-state or non-governmental' (CSIS). CBMs aim to reduce and limit fear among the people and parties involved in the conflict. These measures help create an environment of security and build confidence. It limits escalation and promotes the peacebuilding process. These measures help in establishing new institutional mechanisms or arrangements that lead to peaceful relationships. CBMs were mostly adopted in the military field and concentrated more on hard power. CBMs are tools for easy and direct communication methods for connecting with governments in other countries. CBMs are mainly military and diplomatic.

However, there are also CBMs based on cultural and political aspects. CBMs can alter a state's perception of other state and reduce misunderstandings. There will also be an information exchange mechanism between countries, which lead to increased transparency. When greater understanding takes place between countries, it leads to a gradual reduction in tension through de-escalation process and conciliatory measures. Cultural CBMs along with political CBMs help in establishing stability and instilling confidence in the elected governments. This can avoid interstate rivalries and the cold war. Cultural CBMs give more importance to local cultures of a country. Besides, the countries will show respect to the traditional centres of power. This includes states will not indulge in making laws that go against certain traditional centres of power and don't indulge in activities that go against the other countries religions or language. The states' also show respect for other parties' by demonstrating it (Maiese, 2003). This area of the study is to highlight how culture acts as a mechanism for building trust between both nations. The Economic Times reported about Shashi Tharoor's view on Indian culture, which was expressed in a gathering in Washington: 'Indian culture has a high potential, which helps in making a country an influential leader in the present century' (The Economic Times, 2017). India is a place of many religions. Hence, it is able to accept major languages and has democratic values. Indian civilization can be termed a cradle of civilizations. Since the dawn of civilization itself, it has been able to assimilate different cultures around the world. Different religions, languages, dance forms, art, and literature flourished in India. Therefore, through these aspects of soft power, Indian influence can reach other corners of the world. Indian luminaries like Tagore and then spiritual figures such as Buddha are known to every part of the world, especially in China, where India shares its border and cultural linkages.

3. INDIA'S VARIOUS METHODS OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

Indian foreign policy has always had a religious element to it. India applies so-called religious diplomacy, or 'Buddhist diplomacy' towards Asian neighbours, especially towards China (Chauhan, 2015). This is because it projects itself as a large country with abundant Buddhist heritage. India also wants to connect with China in all terms. The Modi government's adherence to Buddhism is called a mixing of faith-based and cultural diplomacy (Chauhan, 2015). From the dawn of independence onwards, India adopted friendly and cordial relations with China. In Nehru's period, the relationship was termed 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' days, indicating a fellowship between nations. By 1954, Panchsheel had signed, and Nehru himself made India's stand clear by highlighting Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. One of the five principles of peaceful coexistence was mutual non-interference in each other's internal matters. This principle even acts as a confidence-building mechanism between India and China. However, in 1962, India and China indulged in a border war. It took many years to normalise the relationship. Therefore, some sort of confidence-building mechanism was necessary. In the 1990s, India-China relations entered a new track. Both countries indulged in track one diplomacy, where heads of state meet, engage in bilateral talks, and finally come to an agreement (Nan, 2003). For instance, in 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China and met Chinese counterpart Premier Li Keqiang, which resulted in the signing of 24 agreements between both nations (The Economic Times, 2015). Later, it gave way to two diplomacies. Track two consists of non-officials such as journalists, analysts, and academics who engage in talk and result in cooperation between two countries. For instance, the visit of Indian Bollywood actor Amir Kahn to the Chinese Film Forum acted as a good example of track-two diplomacy (Wu Lin, Sanjana Gogna, 2019). Even though the government supports it, it is held in an informal and unofficial setting. It helps in developing interpersonal relationships between the non-official representatives of rival states. This kind of meeting acts as a confidence-building mechanism between the countries. The think tanks also play a role in facilitating these dialogues. Track two between India and China started back in 2005, when the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA) and the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) signed a memorandum for engaging in bilateral dialogue. In 2014, the Ministry of External Affairs of India and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences also signed Memorandum of Understanding focused on think tank dialogue. Before the Wuhan summit, an agreement was signed

to enhance cultural relationships between the two countries. It specifically focused on people-to-people contact. Here, the think tanks are identified as the most important agents in implementing heads-of-state-signed agreements (Gogna, 2019). Track one and track two diplomacy are not enough to establish cultural contacts between India and China. In such a situation, Track 3 diplomacy is gaining much relevance. The track three diplomacy practices in such a way that 'unofficial third parties work with people from all walks of life and sectors of their society to find ways to promote peace in settings of violent conflict' (Chigas, 2003). This kind of diplomacy helps to intervene in the everyday lives of people in conflict-ridden areas. It can help change the attitude of people towards a specific community or towards a state itself. The United States Institute for Peace defines track three diplomacy as "people-to- people diplomacy undertaken by individuals and private groups to encourage interaction and understanding between hostile communities and involving awareness-raising and empowerment within their communities. Normally focused at the grass-roots level, this type of diplomacy often involves organising meetings and conferences, generating media exposure, and political and legal advocacy for marginalised people and communities (USIP, 2011, p. 51). Track three diplomacy can strengthen India-China relations. Track three diplomacy can act as a confidence-building mechanism between India and China as it helps in people-to-people exchanges. This is because most of the Sino-Indo civilizational dialogue took place between ordinary citizens, not between governments. (Yinzeng, 2006). Buddhism dominates this civilizational dialogue. Buddhism acts as a propelling force behind political, economic, and cultural relations. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations is providing scholarships to Chinese students studying in India. (Embassy of India Beijing, China, 2018). Almost 23,000 Indian students are pursuing their studies in China; among them, 21,000 are medical students (Sharma, 2020). This shows India and China have a strong trust-building mechanism through the diaspora.

4. RECENT INDIA- CHINA CULTURAL INITIATIVES

India has initiated many programmes with China in order to tie up cultural cooperation. In bilateral meetings, both countries have signed many Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) to enhance cultural cooperation.

Arts	Buddhist Connectivity	Education	Tourism
• In 2015, Bollywood dance performances conducted in Shanghai as part of Memorandum of Understanding between ICCR and Centre for China Shanghai International Arts Festival (CSIAF) • In 2016, a gala performance conducted as part of Memorandum of Understanding between Indian Council for Cultural Relations and China Federation for Literary and Art Circles • In 2015, the Shanghai Women's Federation (SWF) and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) organised a week-long India-China Women Artists' Residency Programme in Shanghai, • In every month, Swami Vivekananda Culture Centre organises Indian movie screening • Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre organises Indian classical dance classes in various parts of China	• In 2007, Xuanzang memorial established at Nalanda,India • In 2008, stamps released by both nations. Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya depicts on one stamp and White Horse temple at Luoyang depicts on another stamp • In 2010, India constructed a Buddhist temple inside the White Horse Temple complex in Luoyang, China • In 2017, Consulate General of India in Shanghai organised a photo exhibition, named 'Buddhist Heritage of India'	• India and China signed Education Exchange Programme (EEP) in 2006 • In 2015, both nations signed a new Education Exchange Programme (EEP). • Operational Chairs of ICCR in China: Shanghai International Studies University, Shenzhen University and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	• In 2015, the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of India and the National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China signed an agreement on tourism cooperation • Designated 2015 as 'Visit of India Year' • Designated 2016 as 'Visit of China Year' • Since 2015, India is offering E-Visas to Chinese travellers

The following table depicts India's recent cultural cooperation initiatives with China.

Source: (Embassy of India, Beijing, China)

5. INFORMAL SUMMIT AS A CONFIDENCE BUILDING MECHANISM

Informal summits are a kind of confidence-building mechanism because they take place in a historically or culturally important place. Thus, the tradition and culture of that place will physiologically connect the people. For instance, the recent India-China summit took place in Mahabalipuram, traditionally called Mamallapuram. This place was the centre of the Pallava kingdom. It also lies near India's spice route and China's silk route. It had close connections with the Chinese empire. They had sought the help of Pallava king Narasimhavarman II to fight against Tibetans and Arabs (Subramani, 2019). It shows how leaders use cultural linkage and people-to-people connections to enhance trust

between the countries. Informal summits take place as supplementary summits to the formal ones. It will never be a purpose-specific one. It plays a greater role compared to formal summits (Gill, 2019). The Wuhan summit took place in China after the Doklam issue. The Doklam standoff took place at the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction in 2017. After that, India-China relations went down. Therefore, to normalise the situation, both nations decided to conduct an informal summit. The Wuhan summit has invoked 'Wuhan spirit'. Ten hours of strategic conversation took place between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping. They decided to look at three main themes. The first one is the domestic development of both countries. Secondly, they both looked at international developments. Finally, they concentrated on the India-China bilateral relationship. After the Wuhan summit, there was faster and better communication, which led to a reduction in border skirmishes. Then, bilateral meetings also took place between the two. Both countries do not want the differences to turn into disputes (Dabhade, 2019). The second India-China informal summit took place in Mahabalipuram in October 2019. Like the earlier Wuhan summit, there was no pre-scripted agenda and only long-term personal conversations (Dabhade, 2019). Narendra Modi selected Mahabalipuram because India wants to make sure that China sees their relationship through the prism of cultural relations, which existed during the seventh century (Kandwal, 2019). The results of the second informal summit were an in-depth exchange of views on various strategic issues of regional and global importance. They also discussed how they could both increase India-China bilateral relations. They agreed on an inclusive, rule-based international order and a rule-based multilateral trading system. They identified terrorism as a global threat and decided to make joint efforts to ensure peaceful world order. They also decided to foster cultural understanding. It will help in greater dialogue and understanding between the two. They also agree on a prosperous and stable environment. They decided to celebrate 2020 as the year of 'India-China cultural and people-to-people exchanges'. The year 2020 is the 70th anniversary of the establishment of India-China relations. Therefore, both countries decided to celebrate it through exchanges between political parties, militaries, youth organisations, and legislatures. They celebrate the anniversary by organising 70 activities. It includes a conference on a ship voyage. It will connect the historical links between the two civilizations. They decided to establish sister-state relations between the Fujian province of China and the Tamil Nadu state of India. They also want to set up an academy to study the link between Fujian Province and Tamil Nadu. The establishment of a sister-state relationship will foster cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts. They also decided to establish a high-level economic and trade dialogue mechanism. They also decided to settle the boundary issues based on 'Political Parameters and Building Principles of 2005' and agreed to continue to work together to build additional confidence-building measures. Both leaders praised the informal summit. Finally, Xi invited Modi to visit China for a third informal summit. Modi happily accepted the invitation. Overall, the informal summit acted as a CBM in all senses, and both leaders were able to trust each other (Ministry of External Affairs, 2019). India and China show a different kind of 'constrained cooperation' (Toby Dalton, 2012). Here, economic relations make them forget strategic differences. China considers India-US ties a counteraction against China. Therefore, to reduce tensions between India and China, confidence-building measures are necessary. There are many areas where India and China suffer aberrations. The important ones are territorial claims and border disputes. China even refused to grant visas to the people of Arunachal Pradesh because they consider residents of Arunachal Pradesh to be Chinese citizens. Another issue is Sino-Pak relations. There is a presence of China in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. Then comes the presence of more than 1, 00,000 Tibetan exiles. Nothing is done to formalise the status of Tibetans in India. In such a situation, enhancing relations through CBMs is necessary. Increasing economic interdependence leads to the adoption of confidence-building measures that further lead to a more firm relationship between India and China (Toby Dalton, 2012).

6. CONCLUSION

Trust is the foremost principle in diplomatic relations. India has been engaging with China for several decades. The cooperation has faced many challenges and difficulties. Developing confidence is the primary way to improve the relationship between both nations. The most significant way to improve confidence in bilateral relations is to engage more through unofficial means, which means direct relationships among people. Cultural cooperation has the potential to connect people directly through cross-border exchanges. Nowadays, India has adopted culture as one of the diplomatic strategies to build confidence with other nations. Hence, the new diplomatic strategy of India is giving more importance to culture as a means of building confidence in its bilateral relationship with China. Recently, India has shown more eagerness to improve its cultural cooperation with China. In the last decade, India and China have signed several bilateral MoUs in order to enhance cultural cooperation. And all the significant agreements were centred on the areas of arts, Buddhist connectivity, education, and tourism because these areas can directly connect the people in both countries. Still, both countries can expand their cultural cooperation. Conducting informal meetings and summits at both the top and official levels is also an effective means to improve trust between the two countries. In

similar ways, India and China have also taken that approach, and that was also a milestone in bilateral affairs. Nevertheless, such a move was not very successful because of the border problems between the two countries. There are several long-lasting bilateral issues between both countries that are unsettled. It can be considered a herculean task to settle India-China bilateral problems; rather, it can be managed by bilateral negotiations. By minimising the trust deficit, many bilateral fissures can also be reduced. Hence, the two countries have to increase their diplomatic and strategic measures to enhance confidence.

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