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**Reflection of India-China Relations in Indian Media:  
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**Abstract.** China and India interactions are dominated by strategic and business concerns. Despite the massive growth of bilateral trade between China and India, tensions over territorial and political issues have also grown, particularly in the last years. These effects are mediated and often inflamed by media depictions and perceptions of these tensions. India and China are both aware that peace and cooperation are essential. But it seems some media are more intent on fanning the flames than focusing on the ties that bind the two ancient civilizations. The media can play a constructive role in promoting mutual understanding. This paper deals with different areas of bilateral competition and convergence covered by the media as well as discusses the key differences between the Indian media's coverage of China and the Chinese media's reporting on India of the last years and especially in 2020. The article proposes to discover the problems and perspectives of the Indian media in India-China relations today.

**Keywords:** India-China relations, Indian media, Chinese media, journalism, criticism, transparency

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## Отражение индийско-китайских отношений в индийских медиа: проблемы и перспективы

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**Аннотация.** Во взаимодействии Китая и Индии преобладают стратегические и деловые интересы. Несмотря на массовый рост двусторонней торговли между странами, напряженность по территориальным и политическим вопросам возросла, особенно в последние годы. Эти эффекты опосредованы и часто усугубляются изображением противоречий в СМИ. Индия и Китай осознают важность мира и сотрудничества, но похоже, что некоторые медиа больше сосредоточены на конфликтах, чем на узах, связывающих эти древние цивилизации. СМИ могут играть конструктивную роль в продвижении взаимопонимания. В статье отражены различные области двусторонней конкуренции и конвергенции, освещаемые в СМИ этих стран. Обсуждаются ключевые различия между освещением китайской темы в индийских СМИ и сообщениями китайских СМИ об Индии в последние годы, и особенно в 2020 году. Обозначены проблемы и перспективы индийских СМИ в сегодняшних индийско-китайских отношениях.

**Ключевые слова:** индийско-китайские отношения, индийские СМИ, китайские СМИ, журналистика, критика, прозрачность

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### Introduction

China and India have been cooperating on many fronts and many factors matter in their relationship. With a combined population of around 2.6 billion, India and China account for over one third of humanity and one fifth of the global GDP as the world's largest populations and important emerging economies, ties run deep. China is one of India's largest trading partners. Both are members of the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation organization, and leaders from both countries have been stewarding ties by and large masterfully.

India and China are both aware that peace and cooperation are essential. The last years India-China relations have gotten worse. It seems some media are

more intent on fanning the flames than focusing on the ties that bind the two ancient civilizations. According to the experts, this subject assumed importance following an escalation of mutual “demonisation” in media of the two countries [1].

### **Indian media on India-China relations**

In the case of India, the escalation was more pronounced in the electronic and online media than in the print media. In China, the escalation was more marked in the print and online media than in the electronic media. China has not yet seen the kind of explosive growth in 24 hour private news channels that India has and it has no privately-run indigenous news channels. In India, the problem of uncontrolled demonisation of China was seen largely in the 24 hour TV news channels, which merrily lapped up anything critical of China said or written by anybody and organized discussions which tended to be over dramatic and occasionally even hysterical [1].

In India, what appeared to be unbridled criticism of China was largely in the regional language media. English media, which has less readership and viewership than the regional language media, did not show the same interest in China and was not as negative about China as was the regional language media.

In China, the criticism was largely seen in the Chinese language print media and in the thousands of blogs which have come up in the country following the phenomenal growth of the Internet. Most of the blog content was in the Chinese language. Since there are very few Chinese language experts in India, the majority of the negative articles and postings about India did not get translated and circulated. Only some were. If more of them had been translated and disseminated to Indian readers, the alarm caused in India would have been more.

Fortunately, the two governments had a better understanding of the state of affairs and put a stop to this self-feeding rhetoric. But there is still a lot of criticism of each other, which is more due to the low level of trust between the civil societies of the two countries due to historical reasons than due to any malign reasons [2].

The analysis of media reflection in the two countries tended to get distorted due to the following reasons. The lack of transparency about the Chinese media and the widespread perception in India that the Chinese media is still largely owned and/or controlled by the Chinese Government and the Communist Party of China. As a result, anything critical of India appearing in the Chinese media was viewed by large sections of the Indian public as representing the views of the Chinese Government and party. Also there is a lack of adequate knowledge in China about the free press that India has and vice versa. E. g. barring some radio stations and TV channels run by the government, there is hardly any government owned or controlled media in India. Large sections of the Chinese public opinion tend to think that the entire Indian media is owned and/or controlled by the government and the political party in power as is the case in China. They assumed that the negative coverage of China in the Indian media was at the instance of the government, which was not a fact [3–7].

Recently in 2020 pandemic year, when the whole world is facing a crisis, during this worst period China-India border tensions erupted in June along the line of actual control, an unforgiving patch of land in the Himalayas that divides the two nations. The two countries are no strangers to skirmishes in Galwan Valley, but the clash on June, 15 ended in bloodshed for the first time in more than four decades [6].

Although sentiments have been running high since the clash, both China and India have been taking steps to de-escalate the situation via diplomatic and military channels, with the latest being talks between the two militaries on June, 22.

But many media reports in both countries on the topic seem to be stoking tensions between the neighbors or presenting a lopsided version of the events. For example, news reports were first published by Top Indian Media News Line and later bigger media outlets including ABP News and Times Now, quickly joined in to spread fake news. On June, 21 it was published an article with the headline: “Xi plays tough, but can China afford to make an enemy of India?” adding that “the brutal ambush in the Himalayas is the latest aggressive move from Beijing by a nation battling crises on several fronts” [8]. The first two paragraphs paint a grisly picture of Chinese troops laying in wait, setting a medieval trap for unwitting Indian soldiers. It claims the Chinese soldiers unblocked a dam, letting the water hit Indian soldiers before the Chinese side swept down, brandishing sticks encrusted with nails. It isn't until the end of the second paragraph you see that this colorful rendition just so happens to be from Indian media. Starting off with the Indian perspective without saying so or acknowledging it upfront is misleading. Besides, most other media would include a line saying something like, “we can't independently verify this version of the story” [9].

The Times of India newspaper considers it conceivable that “Chinese aggression” could be a warning to India against joining the “absolutely legitimate” international demand for an independent investigation into the origins of the coronavirus outbreak: “If Beijing succeeds in getting India to kowtow to China's diplomatic positions, this would also be a strong signal to the other neighboring countries about who is to decide what in Asia. Therefore, India should do exactly what China does not want it to do, and react with diplomatic countermeasures.” In this context, the author recommends sharp criticism of the “end” of Hong Kong's economy, China's human rights violations in Tibet and Xinjiang, and improving relations with Taipei. “We should also pay China back in kind and use trade as a weapon by imposing sanctions on Chinese imports. Beijing can't kill our soldiers on the Line of Actual Control while benefiting from our huge market” [9].

The Indian express wrote, that “The brutal killing of 20 Indian soldiers by the Chinese army has the potential to undermine the military detente agreed upon only a few days ago between senior officers on both sides.” The writer also referred to the mutual accusation, that the other side had violated the consensus that they had both reached. “Without a doubt, much is lost in the process of translation. At the same time, Chinese adventurism violates the agreement reached at several meetings between Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi. New Delhi should activate all political and military communication channels with Beijing to make this point clear.” The paper also claimed that many politicians in New Delhi have been

lulled into a false sense of security by earlier diplomatic successes in border disputes with China between 2013 and 2017. The Indian government can no longer ignore the “fundamental change in China's world view, according to which Beijing can take on anyone. India can no longer afford its political illusions about China” [9].

The Wall Street Journal on June, 21 published the story later copied by top Indian media news channel and print media this article, “After China Border Fight, India Likely Weighs Closer U.S. Military Ties: South Asian countries also are expected to work with Japan, Australia and others to check its neighbor” [10].

As we like to say, great claims require great evidence. But with words such as “likely” and “expected to” paired with no shred of evidence, except comments from analysts, we're just not buying it. A deeper dive into the article doesn't deliver any convincing evidence either, just a list of ways the U.S. and India have been cooperating over the years. But the more critical issue is that the article appears to be stoking tensions between China and India by throwing the U.S. into the mix. Yes, U.S. President Donald Trump did offer to step in and “mediate” the conflict. But China and India can resolve their own issues via autonomous diplomacy [10].

The headline in Indian media is also missing part of the broader China-India relations picture, which is about cooperation. When you say the “South Asian country also is expected to work with Japan, Australia and others to check its neighbor,” it gives the impression that's all that India is thinking about, does not it?

### **Conclusion**

Despite the border tensions, both Beijing and New Delhi have managed to keep relations at government levels at an even keel and there is constant official exchange of views between the two sides over the last years even setting up a hot-line between the two prime ministers is under discussion. This being so, there may be some justification if a question is asked as to why pay attention to unofficial blogs and fake stories running by private news channels and print media as well.

The aim of this study is not to create panic and cause misgivings in respect of Sino-Indian ties. But at the same time, it may not be wrong to say that analysts in India have a responsibility to take notice and analyze implications if any, of tall claims being made in the Chinese media and blogs in conflict situations like with Arunachal in the 2011–2015 period or Ladakh [11; 12].

The core of India-China relations should be mutual development and to be sensitive toward each-other's sensitivities and core interests. We personally believe the understanding may be opposite to Indian Media that China will respect its interest in the neighborhood has been rather undermined. This could be discerned from China's pivot to South Asia where China's focus is not on consolidating its ties with India but more with the smaller countries in the vicinity. This is reflected in China's investment and diplomatic engagement in the region [13].

It is a good sign that military and diplomatic channels are active. Both have agreed to disengage and deescalate the situation, but this needs to be reflected on the ground – and in media.

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