

Review of

Paul, T.V. Ed. 2019. *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalisation Era.*

Orient BlackSwan Private Limited. Hyderabad, India. Rupees 1195.00, Hb, 351pp, ISBN 978-93-5287-520-7 by Amitrajeet A. Batabyal¹

Several observers have pointed out that the rise of China and to a lesser extent India, has shifted attention about economic and political affairs from North America and Western Europe to Asia. Even though a lot has now been written about what this means for both world economics and politics, much less has been written about the non-trivial rivalry between China and India in this era of globalization. Given this state of affairs, the purpose of this edited book is to shed light on various aspects of the China-India rivalry and to point out that “a limited or managed rivalry persists, but it has remained less intense than the India-Pakistan rivalry due to several mitigating variables, ranging from economic to diplomatic factors” (p. 5). In what follows, rather than provide a tedious chapter by chapter review, I shall sample selectively from the book’s contents. This ought to provide the reader with an adequate flavor for the intellectual contributions of the book.

T.V. Paul begins the proceedings by explaining that if one is to truly comprehend the China-India conflict, then it is necessary to explore the evolution of this conflict in different areas and to recognize the differences between this conflict and the ongoing India-Pakistan conflict. He then helpfully notes that it makes sense to conceptualize the China-India rivalry in terms of three clusters. These clusters relate to territory and resources, status and conception of order, and strategic culture and deterrence strategies. This discussion is clear but the same cannot be said about Mr. Paul’s discussion of the reasons for India being taken seriously by the international community. He claims that this has occurred primarily because of India’s “deeper insertion

into the global economy” (p. 10) and because of its “economic progress” (p. 10). It is not obvious that India’s insertion was deeper relative to China’s and, for that matter, how deepness is being measured. In addition, China’s economic progress during the time period under consideration equaled or exceeded that of India. Hence other factors---such as democracy versus one-party state---were probably as important or more important in raising India’s global stature.

Xiaoyu Pu begins his analysis by noting that relative to the India-Pakistan conflict, the China-India conflict is a lot “more peaceful and stable” (p. 68). He then poses two questions. First, despite the increasing economic interdependence between China and India, why is the relationship between these two nations not more cooperative? Second, how do concerns about status influence the rivalry between China and India? With regard to the second question, Mr. Pu argues that even though India would like to be treated as a great power, “there is a gap between India’s aspiration of great-power status and the extent to which more established powers (including China) are willing to accommodate India” (p. 76). This notwithstanding, we learn that more often than not, “contestations between India and China are related to a club good status rather than a positional good status” (p. 83).

Zhen Han and Jean-Francois Belanger first question whether the rivalry between China and India is intense and then they adopt a historical perspective to explain “what causes the ups and downs in the China-India rivalry” (p. 116). The adoption of this viewpoint helps the authors explain how the need for “external-balancing strategies” (p. 127) has led to the rise of an

enduring rivalry between China and India. Even so, a key point---made with insufficient detail---is that the rivalry between these two nations needs to be viewed not as a boxing match in which the two fighters have a straightforward objective but instead as a soccer match in which “many players [are] competing on different fronts with the goal to win, but not [to] necessarily incapacitate their opponents” (p. 134).

Selina Ho focuses on a particular dimension of the China-India conflict and that is their dispute over water, particularly water from the Brahmaputra river. She rightly notes that China in general is a more powerful nation than India. She then explains that this power asymmetry results in “systemic misperceptions, which prevent the establishment of robust cooperative mechanisms between China and India for managing their shared waters” (pp. 169-170). Therefore, we now have a situation in which India views all Chinese actions involving the Brahmaputra river with suspicion. For its part, China has shown little interest in cooperating with India because it “sees little economic and financial benefit from [such cooperation]...on the Brahmaputra...” (p. 181). Note that China could cooperate with India on, for instance, hydroelectric projects but it does not because its dam building skills are superior to that of India’s and because it has greater financial heft.

How does the fact that both China and India possess nuclear weapons affect their rivalry? Does it increase the likelihood of a future conflict between them? What nuclear developments are these two nations likely to pursue in the future? Finally, will these developments enhance or reduce regional stability?

These questions are ably addressed in the fine chapter by Vipin Narang. Mr. Narang begins his analysis by reminding the reader about a salient asymmetry between China and India and that asymmetry is this: “While India still has some way to go in order to achieve a reliable assured retaliation capability against China,...China is long past that point with India” (p. 229). As such, China is little concerned about the threat posed by India’s nuclear weapons and it is more focused on how to effectively deter the United States which it sees as its primary contemporary adversary. Current political considerations being what they are, Mr. Naranag plausibly contends that although naval competition between China and India is likely to escalate in the future, the same is unlikely to happen with nuclear weapons because both nations adhere, at least nominally, to no-first-use policies.

There is no gainsaying the fact that both China and India are seeking to play a greater role in international affairs. How does this fact influence competition and cooperation between them in multilateral institutions? Feng Liu provides thoughtful commentary on this question. He explains that with regard to India becoming a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the two nations have divergent interests and hence this situation leads to increased rivalry and competition. Mr. Liu contends that not much can be done to alter this insalubrious state of affairs. That said, he does not provide a detailed enough justification to substantiate his claim that in the context of multilateral institutions, the “best option for [China and India] is not acting individually,

but cooperatively” (p. 300).

Let me conclude this review with three observations. First, as I have noted above, this book suffers from a small number of errors of commission and omission. Second, even though there is some variability in the quality of the individual chapters, the average quality of the chapters is high and the variance is low. Finally, I unequivocally recommend this book to all readers who wish to learn more about the asymmetrical and yet complex rivalry between China and India that has salient ramifications for all regions in the world.