

The Cold War in the Himalayas: Multinational Perspectives on the Sino-Indian border conflict, 1950–1970

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Reed Chervin has produced an insightful work of international history examining how major states – not only China and India – approached the disputed Sino-Indian border between 1950 and 1970. The key contribution is to take our understanding of this conflict beyond the 1962 border war itself to consider the post-war reverberations both within China and India and internationally.

Chapter one looks at the war in the two main theatres of Ladakh and the North-East Frontier Agency. It then burrows into the domestic impact in both India and China. We learn about the Indian state's suppression of Indian communists, the political debates over where blame lay and the anti-Chinese backlash that led to internment and deportation of many. Reaction within China is shown to have included criticism of the government for being weak on India or even for being distracted from development priorities. Chervin analyses Chinese media to show that Beijing was content with the course of the war but tried to limit the diplomatic fall-out. Chapter two examines immediate international reactions to the war. India appealed to the West for military assistance and the US saw advantage in responding positively. The UK was more ambivalent. While London wanted to support India, it believed China's case on the border had some merits, wanted to preserve ties with Beijing and avoid antagonizing Pakistan. Australia, New Zealand and Canada also had varying reactions. Beijing's diplomacy tried to preserve its international reputation. Particularly useful is the analysis of responses in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where a balance was struck between Chinese nationalism and anti-communism. The chapter also considers the difficulty Moscow had in balancing its relations with India and the PRC. Section two considers China, India and the West's approaches to the Sino-Indian border before 1962, detailing attitudes towards Tibet, the "Himalayan Kingdoms" (meaning Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal) and Burma. China's straightforward desire to eradicate Indian positions and influence in Tibet through the 1950s is underlined. India tried to manage the frontier with China through its military, state-building and diplomacy in peripheral and border regions. Chapter five considers mainly the UK and the US. The final section considers developments after 1962. Beijing tried to limit its isolation and also to buttress the autonomy of Indian neighbours like Bhutan and Burma. India took a firmer approach and invested more on its military, providing more aid to its small neighbours also. Chapter eight reviews Western policies in South and Southeast Asia also and tags on discussion of Pakistan's reaction to that.

Excellent research underpins this book, and Chervin deserves great credit for the many archives used – not only the Chinese Foreign Ministry, but also the Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Guangdong and Yunnan archives, as well as *Academia Sinica* and the National Archives in Taiwan. Furthermore, the *neibu cankao* collections (accessible at the Chinese University of Hong Kong) brilliantly illuminate Chinese public opinion. Use of archives in India and Burma is also notable and underlines how those researching Chinese history must look beyond that country for primary sources.

Chervin uses these sources to make many useful contributions. For instance, British policy towards the region is shown to be highly involved and nuanced. Historians often struggle to centre



the voices of ordinary individuals in Mao's China, but Chervin has managed to at least alert us to some popular responses to the border conflict. Similarly, the oppression experienced by many in India as a result of the war is also well presented. A particularly interesting aspect of the wider story is how Beijing's most intimate enemies on Taiwan responded to the border conflict, intervened to take advantage and undermine Beijing and tried to cosy up to India.

Nonetheless, the book has some shortfalls, unsurprisingly given the scope of its subject. The structure – with the war and domestic fall-out coming before analysis of the pre-war developments and then followed by post-war shifts – is confusing. A straightforward chronological arrangement might have made more sense given that the subject was not the war, its causes and consequences but rather the border itself. Despite the title, there is little discussion of the 1950s: pre-war sections often have a rather brief mention of the early 1950s, then the author leaps to 1959. More context might have helped readers better grasp the developments from 1959 onwards. For instance, discussions on Chinese and Indian views of the borders in 1950s might have considered the 1954 Tibet treaty more carefully. Also, Chinese and Indian border policy was often a dialogue, so might be better analysed together rather than in separate chapters. It was said that China–India relations declined following the 1950 takeover of Tibet. But this is not entirely true, and in other places the author talks about the friendship symbolized by the song *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai*. More careful analysis of the ups and downs in relations in the 1950s would be useful.

More profoundly, there was no obvious big argument here. The reader is left rather wondering how much all this mattered. The book's title is *Cold War in the Himalayas* but there is no sense of the ideological stakes that title might imply. How was this conflict part of the global Cold War? Nehru was famous for insisting on non-alignment in the Cold War, a daring experiment in post-colonial diplomacy: what impact did the war with China and his desperate appeal for US aid have on this stance? And on the Chinese side, we often think of Mao's China as defined by its radical ideology above all else. But in 1962 China fought a border war over territory, an eminently national endeavour: what was the balance between nationalism and other ideologies in Chinese foreign policy?

One absence in this analysis is the role of the USSR. There is much talk of India's turn to the West during the 1962 war and after, but the real development is in India–USSR security relations through the 1960s, which built on their warming ties in the 1950s. This relationship had its vicissitudes to be sure, but lasted for decades; and, in the form of India–Russia relations, today confounds many observers in the West. The uncertain grasp of the Soviet factor here is reflected in repeated reference to the “Sino-Soviet split of 1960.” Many prefer talking of the split as a process rather than a single event or moment. After all, in 1962 the Sino-Indian War, and the almost simultaneous Cuban Missile Crisis brought Moscow and Beijing back together publicly, even if briefly.

However, Chervin's book has provided a significant contribution to the history of the Sino-Indian border conflict, an issue that remains live in international politics today, and the book will be of great help to students of international history and international relations.

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