The Role of Ideas in the China-India Water Dispute[1]

Both the Chinese and Indian governments have desecuritized their water dispute.[2] This contrasts with the securitization of most of the disputes between the two countries. Their border dispute, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama are painted as existential threats and accepted as such by both sides. The water dispute, mainly over the Yarlung Tsango/Brahmaputra River, lends itself to securitization as the "triggers for securitization"[3] are present in the river basin. Both China and India are water-scarce, and the Brahmaputra River is prone to floods and droughts. Moreover, the water dispute is intertwined with their border dispute – the Yarlung Tsangpo crosses the border into Arunachal Pradesh, which is claimed by the Chinese and known as South Tibet in China. An asymmetrical relationship also exists between China and India, with China being the upstream riparian with a stronger economy and military, while India is the middle riparian and downstream to China. Under these asymmetrical conditions, incentives exist for both sides to securitize their dispute – for China to use water as leverage against India in border negotiations, and for India, as the weaker party, to use securitization as a tactic to gain attention and offset China's greater aggregate power.[4] Yet, the Chinese and Indian governments have made strenuous efforts to desecuritize water as an issue between them. Why is this the case? The puzzle deepens when one considers that water disputes around the world are mostly securitized – "perhaps the most obvious resource that is prone to securitization is transboundary water."[5]

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[1] This is a latest revised manuscript. For the final and citable version of the article, please refer to Ho, Selina, Qian Neng, and Yan Yifei. "The Role of Ideas in the China–India Water Dispute." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12, no. 2 (2019): 263-294, Available at: https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article-abstract/12/2/263/5506588

[2] Biba

[3] See triggers for securitization in Itay Fischhendler, "The securitization of water discourse: theoretical foundations, research gaps and objectives of the special issue," International Environment Agreement 15 (2015): 245-255: 249-250.

[4] Ibid., 247; and Daniel Nathan and Itay Fischhendler, "Triggers for securitization: a discursive examination fo Israeli-Palestinian water negotiations," Water Policy 18 (2016): 19-38: 34.

[5] Fischhendler, "Securitization of water discourse," 246.

China-India relations have traditionally been analyzed in terms of power and material capabilities. Material conditions are seen as drivers of their relationship as both countries are rising powers and hence, assumed to be competitors for resources and influence.[6] The basic premise of such arguments is that national interest is defined strictly in material terms. However, such a definition of national interest is too broad to be useful.[7] China is said to desecuritize water disputes with its neighbors in order to lower tensions along its periphery so as to focus on economic growth and development.[8] Specifically in the water dispute with India, China's desecuritization moves are attributed to its desire to stabilize its southern periphery, expand bilateral trade and investment opportunities with India, and reduce India's alignment with the United States.[9] However, these motivations are so general that they are also applicable to China's broader relations with India and yet, the border dispute, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama issue remain securitized.

Moreover, why would the Indian government desecuritize its water dispute with China when it has securitized its water disputes with its neighbors in South Asia? An explanation based on power differentials would suggest that India desecuritizes its water dispute with China so as not to provoke China, the more powerful state which dealt it a humiliating defeat in 1962. Such an explanation contradicts the fact that India has on occasion taken actions that are deemed provocative by the Chinese, such as refusing to support the Belt and Road Initiative and sending troops to stop Chinese infrastructure construction in Doklam, Bhutan.[10]

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[7] Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests," European Journal of International Relations, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (1996), p. 279.

[8] Sebastian Biba, …, p.32 ; Li Zhifei, "Water Resource Diplomacy: A New Topic in Constructing China's Peripheral Security" (Shui ziyuan waijiao: Zhongguo zhoubian anquan goujian xin yiti) Academic Exploration (Xueshu Tansuo) 4 (2013): 28-33.

[9] Ibid.

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The conditions for desecuritization of the water dispute needs to be better explained. Solely focusing on the material and power differential aspects of upstream-downstream relations misses out a critical element of how interest is constructed – the role of ideas.[11] We argue that ideas, beliefs, and perceptions shape interest and state behavior. To our knowledge, the paper is the first systematic enquiry into the ideas held by Chinese and Indian experts at both central and local levels and across public, private and non-governmental sectors. Using the Q methodology which is increasingly widely used as a quantitative measure of perceptions and beliefs, not only is it able to uncover in detail various aspects of ideas, such as central/ local government priorities, perceptions on India-China relations and collaboration and so on, but the Q method also allows different aspects of ideas to be presented in relation to one another in terms of both the degree and the significance of (dis)agreement. As such, the result presents a systematic overview that is also highly nuanced.

The perceptions and ideas that emerge from our Q survey focused on three main issues: collaboration, development, and threat perceptions. The results of the Q survey are corroborated with the views presented in scholarly articles on the water dispute. Together, they reveal the debates surrounding a set of ideas and views among policy/expert communities in China and India on how the two countries should manage their dispute.

These debates help account for the desecuritization narrative in the China-India water dispute. Among Chinese respondents, there was a prominent view that displayed significant sensitivity to Indian concerns and which emphasized the need to reduce Indian threat perception. They underscored the importance of building trust on both sides. This view helps account for the desecuritization narrative on the part of the Chinese. It contradicts the assumption in asymmetrical relations that the more powerful state tend to pay less attention to

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[11] Jutta Weldes.

the weaker side. [12] On the Indian side, the Q survey revealed that the Indian central government could be motivated to desecuritize because they themselves are also the targets of the securitization narrative of local politicians and activists in the Indian northeast.

The findings of the Q survey also contribute to the debate on the implications of desecuritization on cooperation. The conventional view is that securitization is negative for cooperation "as it leads to the taking of extreme, competitive measures or the hardening of stances."[13] Conversely, desecuritization is seen as leading to greater cooperation. However, as more recent scholarship suggests desecuritization is not necessarily a normative good as it could lead to issues being ignored or depoliticized.[14] This is because when an issue is desecuritized, high-level attention is taken away, genuine discussion of the issue leading to resolution is undermined, and affected communities are marginalized. While there may be cooperation when an issue is desecuritized, it could be merely tactical, with root causes of the conflict ignored and the asymmetrical advantages of the more powerful actor cemented at the expense of the weaker.[15]

The latter view seems to bear out in the China-India water dispute. Even though the dispute has been desecuritized, cooperation remains at the technical level, and is limited to an expert-level mechanism and a number of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) for hydrological data-sharing. There is no genuine discussion of the core issues, namely, the environmental impact of building dams and other infrastructure projects, and the fact that the water issue is inextricably linked to the border dispute between the two countries. Without addressing these issues, resolution of the water dispute is difficult. The findings of the Q survey provide some preliminary answers as to why desecuritization does not necessarily lead to genuine cooperation. From the views captured in the survey, desecuritization may not

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[13] Buzan et al., p.29; Nathan and Fischhenlder, "Triggers for securitization," 22.

[14] Floyd, Hansen, women in conflict, Aggestam.

[15] Zeitoun and Mirumachi.

necessarily lead to a reduction in threat perceptions and an increase in trust levels, conditions which are essential for strengthening cooperation.

This paper proceeds in the following manner. First, we demonstrate how the Chinese and Indian governments have desecuritized their water dispute. Then, we show how desecuritizing the water dispute is contrary to the predictions of the securitization literature, and how material explanations do not provide an adequate explanation for China's and India's behavior at the river basin level. Next, we lay out the research design and explain the Q methodology, followed by presenting the findings of the Q survey. We then discuss the ideas that surfaced in the Q survey, how how they led to the desecuritization narrative, and examine the implications for cooperation.

Desecuritization of the China-India Water Dispute

Desecuritization is defined as "a moving of issues off the 'security agenda' and back into the realm of public political discourse and 'normal' political dispute and accommodation."[16] Rhetoric, discourses, and narratives are used to neutralize or reduce the security implications of an issue, and turning the issue into normal politics. When a government engages in desecuritization, the aim is to lower tensions with another country and prevent an issue from escalating out of control. For instance, during the spring 2010 Mekong crisis when water levels in the lower Mekong shrunk dramatically, groups within the lower Mekong states put the blame on Chinese dams in the upper Mekong. In response, the Chinese government engaged in several desecuritization moves and increased cooperation with the lower Mekong states.[17]

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[16] Michael C. Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2003), p. 523.

[17] See Sebastian Biba, "From securitization moves to positive outcomes: The case of the spring 2010 Mekong crisis," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 47, No. 5 (2016), pp. 432-434.

India primarily has three concerns with respect to Chinese actions in the upper Brahmaputra – floods, dam-building, and purported plans to divert the water for the Yarlung Tsangpo for the western route of the South-North Water Diversion Project (SNWDP). Indian newspapers and pundits have expressed worries that China's planned construction of a series of dams in Tibet might be capable of diverting water and silt, and thus making these resources unavailable to downstream users. There are concerns over the environmental impact of Chinese upstream activities. On the strategic level, there are fears that China will leverage on its upstream position to gain concessions from India in territorial negotiations.

Local politicians and local ethnic groups in the northeast, the Indian media, and some pundits have accused China of being responsible for disasters that strike in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Their language follows the grammar of security. In India's northeast, the constant flooding in the north bank of the Brahmaputra is referred to by the people living there as "China floods," which lay the blame on Chinese upstream activities.[18] Local groups have also accused China of weaponizing the Yarlung Tsangpo and painted Chinese activities as threats to the survival of the Indian northeast – for instance, the Secretary-General of a group of elders from the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh said in September 2018 that "China is using the Siang as a *weapon* to *destroy* and *devastate* these regions of Siang and Brahmaputra basin… (italics added)."[19] Chinese activities, particularly the building of dams, are seen by the media as threatening the Indian northeast. The *Assam Tribune* wrote –

> The Brahmaputra being the lifeline of Assam, any development indicating any aberration in the river system, especially in matters of water flow, is fraught with disturbing implications…It is a fact that China has been working on several big dams in the upper reaches of the Siang and there could be a link between the abnormalities seen in the river and the intervention made there…The damming of

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[18] Author's interview with locals living on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, Assam, April 1, 2016.
[19] "Adi elders blame China for deluge," The Telegraph, September 17, 2018.

the Brahmaputra in Tibet by China for large-scale power generation and irrigation

has to be regarded as a big worry for India in view of its adverse implications for

the Northeast."[20]

These speech acts represent attempts by local groups and media to securitize Chinese activities by painting them as particularly threatening to the Indian northeast.

In response to these securitization attempts, China has simultaneously engaged in the three strategies Ole Weaver has identified as desecuritization moves, namely, to pre-emptively avoid speaking about certain issues in security terms, to manage securitized issues in ways that do not spawn security dilemmas, and to transform issues back into the realm of normal politics.[21]

On the floods, China has sought to address Indian concerns by agreeing to share hydrological data on the Brahmaputra River and Sutlej River during the flood season. It also warns the Indian government ahead of time if a flood is expected. For instance, in October 2018, a landslide in a village in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo River, not far from Arunachal Pradesh resulted in a fear of flash floods in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. China's Ministry of Water Resources immediately took the initiative to inform New Delhi of the seriousness of the situation. A spokesman for the Chinese embassy in Delhi said,

"After the incident, the Ministry of Water Resources of China informed the

Indian side immediately and activated the emergency information sharing

mechanism…The Hydrological Bureau of Tibet Autonomous Region has begun

sharing with the Indian side hydrological information every hour, such as the

[20] "Siang in spate," The Assam Tribune, September 6, 2018.
[21] Ole Weaver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in Ronnie Lipschutz, ed., On Security (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46-87.

water level and flow rate…China is keeping close communication with India….”[22]

As for Chinese dam-building activities, the first major dam, the Zangmu Dam, was operationalized in 2014. Three more Chinese dams are planned on the Yarlung Tsangpo. Chinese rhetoric has focused on assuaging Indian concerns by repeatedly stating that the dams are “run-of-the-river,” meaning that they are not capable of storing or diverting large bodies of water. The Chinese have declared that the dams would not “impact flood control or disaster reduction efforts, as well as the ecological environment on the lower reaches.”[23] China has also put forward a positive spin on dams by saying that dams may help increase the amount of water during the dry season and control floods during the rainy season.

The assuaging rhetoric is most obvious during the spring of 2010, following an official Chinese announcement that the Zangmu Dam was being built after months of denial.[24] When news broke in 2010 that China was constructing the Zangmu Dam, the China Huaneng Group, a state-owned company in charge of the Zangmu Dam, stated that first, “the river will not be stopped during construction,” and second, “after it (the dam) comes into operation, the river water will flow downstream through water turbines and sluices. So the water volume downstream will not be reduced.”[25] During a China-India strategic dialogue around the same time, Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun assured the Indian delegation that the project “was not a project designed to divert water” and would not affect

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[22] “Landslide in China blocks Brahmaputra, forms lake,” The Times of India, October 21, 2018. Italics added by authors.

[23] “China communicating with India on cross-border river issue: spokeswoman”, February 5, 2013.

[24] Sebastian Biba, “Desecuritization in China's Behavior towards its Transboundary Rivers: The Mekong River, the Brahmaputra River, and the Irtysh and Ili Rivers,” Journal of Contemporary China, Vol. 23, No. 85 (2014), p. 38.

[25] Biba, “Desecuritization,” p. 30.

"the welfare and availability of water of the population in the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra."[26]

On the purported plans to divert the Brahmaputra for the SNDWP, Chinese officials in meetings with Indian officials have repeatedly given reassurances that they have no such plans. These reassurances are repeated in the Chinese official media. A *People's Liberation Army Daily* article, for instance, denies any diversion plans, and claims that China took Indian interests into account when it chose not to include the Brahmaputra in the SNWDP.[27]

The Chinese applied desecuritizing rhetoric even when they were using water as leverage against the Indians during the Doklam standoff. On August 18, 2017, two months into the Doklam standoff, India's Ministry of External Affairs revealed that China had failed to provide hydrological data as required under the various MOUs. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not acknowledge the data cutoff until mid-September, almost a month after India raised it. In its response, the Chinese government avoided linking the data disruption to the Doklam standoff and offered a technical explanation for the disruption. It merely said that the disruption was due to the upgrading and renovating of monitoring stations. Even though there is no official confirmation that the failure to provide data on the Brahmaputra was in retaliation to the Doklam standoff, both Chinese and Indian observers have linked the two. A *Global Times* article, for instance, reported the views of academics that China will not agree to all-round cooperation with India unless it withdraws from Doklam – "Although China is a responsible country, we can't fulfill our obligations to India when it shows no respect to our sovereignty."[28] Moreover, the Bangladeshi government, which receives the data from the same monitoring stations in China, had confirmed that Bangladesh continued to receive hydrological data from China. That the data cutoff was deliberate is further confirmed by the

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Cited in Wuthnow, "Water Power," p. 25.
[28] Zhao Yusha, "China has to halt river data sharing as India infringes on sovereignty: expert," Global Times, August 20, 2017.

timing of the announcement to resume the data flow, which was in late March 2018, just before the Wuhan summit between Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi to "reset" bilateral ties.[29] A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said, "On the basis of humanitarian spirit and our shared will to develop bilateral ties we will continue with the cooperation on hydrological information cooperation."[30] Even during this period of high tension between China and India, China had refrained from securitizing the water dispute, and linking the Doklam standoff with the water issue.

The Indian government has engaged in similar desecuritization rhetoric. As the downstream riparian, it has also not behaved like Pakistan as the weaker party in its relations with China; it does not use asymmetrical strategies and coercive bargaining against China. Instead, it has avoided inflammatory language, sought to calm the incendiary remarks from some Indian politicians and media, and downplayed the threat posed by Chinese upstream activities. During a meeting between former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Xi Jinping in 2013, Singh said that "as of now, our assessment is that whatever activity that is taking place on the Brahmaputra region in Tibet, it is essentially run-of-the river project and therefore there is no cause of worry on our part."[31] When news of the Zangmu Dam broke, the Minister of External Affairs said in a statement, "We have ascertained from our own sources that this is a run of the river hydro-electric project, which does not store water and will not adversely impact the downstream areas in India. Therefore, I believe there is no

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[29] The last expert-level mechanism met in April 2016, and there were no meetings in 2017.

[30] "China to resume sharing hydrological data with India on Brahmaputra," The Times of India, March 29, 2018. Available from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/china-to-resume-sharing-hydrological-data-with-india-on-brahmaputra/articleshow/63524153.cms (accessed on January 21, 2019).

[31] Press Trust of India, "'China seeks joint mechanism with India," says Prime Minister Manmohan Singh," *NDTV*, March 29, 2013, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/china-seeks-joint-mechanism-with-india-says-prime-minister-manmohan-singh-517541.

cause for alarm. I would like to share with you the fact that a large proportion of the catchment of the Brahmaputra is within Indian territory."[32]

On speculation that China intends to divert the waters of the Brahmaputra, a former Army Chief, General Shankar Roy Chowdhury, said that the alleged diversion of the waters of the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River by the Chinese does not pose any threat to India – "even if China diverts water of the river, India does not need to worry" as the Brahmaputra has enough tributaries with adequate rainfall in catchment areas. [33] The Central Water Commission, India's river water monitoring agency, said that there had been no evidence of China diverting water of the Yarlung Tsangpo.[34] There are also constant reassurances to activist groups and local politicians in the northeast that the Indian government has highlighted Indian concerns about China's upstream activities during meetings with its Chinese counterpart.

The desecuritization of the water dispute is puzzling when one considers that the majority of the disputes between the two countries have been securitized. For instance, when the Dalai Lama visited Arunachal Pradesh in April 2017, China strongly protested the visit, accused the Indians of reneging on its commitment to Tibet, and warned that China will take strong measures to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and legitimate interests.[35] And more recently, in February 2019, during Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh to lay the foundation of a new airport, he said – "Arunachal Pradesh is India's pride…it is India's gateway…And I assure you all that we will not just ensure its safety and security, but also put it on a fast track to development."[36] In response, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman reiterated that China

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[32] Cited in Satu Limaye, "The Middle Riparian Quandaries: India and the Brahmaputra River Basin," in Samaranayake et al., *Water Resource Competition*, p. 44.

[33] "India need not worry about diversion of Tsangpo: Ex-Army chief," Political Business Daily, February 4, 2018.

[34] Prabin Kalita, "No evidence of China diverting water of Siang: CWC," The Times of India, December 16, 2017.

[35] "China to lodge representations to India over Dalai Lama's visit," Xinhuanet, April 5, 2017. Available at http://www.xinhuanet.com//english/2017-04/05/c_136184934.htm (accessed February 9, 2019).

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had never recognized the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh" and warned India to refrain from "any action that may lead to an escalation of disputes or complicate the border issue."[37]

Realpolitik dominates China-India relations. The two sides were at the brink of war during the summer of 2017 when military troops from both sides confront each other at Doklam, Bhutan. Relations have been rocky in the run-up to the incident. India views China's blocking of its entry into the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and refusal to name the leader of a Pakistan-based group as a terrorist in the United Nations as attempts to contain it. From the Chinese perspective, the "Indo-Pacific" strategy and India's closer relations with the United States point to a more aggressive Indian policy towards itself. Such mutual suspicion and distrust are typical of the relationship between China and India. The historical baggage between them, unresolved territorial dispute, the 1962 border war, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama issue have led to a security dilemma that makes the two countries view each other's actions as offensive and hostile.

The puzzle deepens as we consider that the tendency is for countries to securitize water disputes. As the availability of water is essential to survival, water-scarce countries are likely to present water as a security threat if it shares water resources with other countries. For instance, up until the 1990s, Egypt securitized the Nile River water as imperative for its survival and cemented its dominance in the Nile vis-à-vis the other riparian states through water agreements backed by the use of force.[38] In the Middle East, in particular, water scarcity is often considered an issue of national security, such that resource management policies are securitized.[39]

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[37] "China voices strong opposition to Modi's visit to region on east section of its border with India," Xinhuanet, February 9, 2019. Available from http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/09/c_137809165.htm (accessed Feburary 9, 2019).

[38] See Stephan Stetter, Eva Herschinger, Thomas Teichler, and Mathias Albert, "Conflicts about water: Securitizations in a global context," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2011), pp. 441-459.

[39] See for example Eirka Weinthal, Neda Zawahri, Jeannie Sowers, "Securitizing Water, Climate, and Migration in Israel, Jordan, and Syria," *International Environmental Agreements*, Vol. 15 (2015), pp. 293-307; Daniel

Such moves to securitize water is not only a practice in the water-scarce and conflict-ridden Middle East. In Asia, the water dispute between Malaysia and Singapore are securitized, with Malaysia threatening to "cut off" the supply of water from Johor state to Singapore whenever relations take a downturn, and Singapore making it clear that such an action is *casus belli*.[40] India also securitizes water issues with its South Asian neighbors. The India-Pakistan dispute over the Indus River is painted as an existential security threat for both countries. It is also linked to Jammu and Kashmir, disputed territories between India and Pakistan – Jawaharlal Nehru had hoped that the Indus Water Treaty would eventually pave the way for resolving the Kashmir dispute.[41] India has taken advantage of its upstream position from Pakistan to threaten Pakistan on the Indus, the latest being Modi's suspension of talks on the treaty in retaliation for the Uri attack in Jammu and Kashmir in 2016 – Modi said "blood and water cannot flow simultaneously."[42] Apart from Pakistan, India has also securitized its water disputes with other neighboring states. For instance, it securitized the construction of the Tanakpur Barrage on the Mahakali River shared with Nepal in order to pressure Nepal and gain its support for the construction of the barrage.[43] In the process, India secured favorable terms for itself, including a transfer of land from Nepal to construct part of the barrage in 1991.

The China-India water dispute also bucks against the conventional view that desecuritization is a normative good and likely to lead to cooperation.[44] Desecuritization is seen as a move to open an issue into the ordinary public space so that as transparency

Nathan and Itay Fischhendler, "Triggers for Securitization: a discursive examination of Israeli-Palestinian water negotiations," *Water Policy*, Vol. 18, Issue 1 (2016), pp. 19-38.

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[41] Raja Nazakat Ali, Faiz-ur-Rehman, and Mahmood-ur-RehmanWani, "Indus Water Treaty between Pakistan and India: From Conciliation to Confrontation," *The Dialogue*, Vol. X, No. 2 (2015), http://www.qurtuba.edu.pk/thedialogue/The%20Dialogue/10_2/Dialogue_April_June2015_166-181.pdf.

[42] Indrani Bagchi and Vishwa Mohan, "'Blood and water can't flow together': PM Narendra Modi gets tough on Indus treaty," *The Times of India*, September 27, 2016, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Blood-and-water-cant-flow-together-PM-Narendra-Modi-gets-tough-on-Indus-treaty/articleshow/54534135.cms.

[43] Mirumachi, "Securitizing shared waters."

[44] Buzan et al., Security, p. 29.

increases in the decision-making process, issues can be openly debated in order to allow more stakeholders to participate in the resolution of core problems.[45] The assumption therefore is that states desecuritize in order to increase cooperation leading to the equitable resolution of an issue.

However, China and India clearly did not desecuritize in order to increase cooperation as desecuritization has not led to higher levels of cooperation. The two countries are far from coming up with an equitable resolution of their water dispute. There is no substantive discussion of the root of the conflict – which is intertwined with the dispute over Arunachal Pradesh. Both sides are wary of discussing the territorial dispute together with the water dispute as it will likely worsen the already difficult and fraught border negotiations.

At present, cooperation consists of a few low hanging fruits. An expert-level mechanism to manage the water dispute first started in 2006 and is chaired by representatives from the ministries of water resources of each side. By the end of 2014, the expert-level group has met eight times.[46] Water is also discussed as part of the regular bilateral meetings between the two sides. The first MOU between the two countries on hydrological data-sharing on the Brahmaputra during the flood season, ranging from May/June to October every year, was signed in 2002, and is renewed every five years. The catalyst for the MOU was a major flood in the early 2000s that killed 30 Indians and left 50,000 homeless when a natural dam broke due to a landslide on a tributary of the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet. At that time, many in India asserted that China withheld hydrological information that could have prevented the landslide.[47] Under the MOU, India has to pay China for the cost of data collection. China also agreed to share data on the Sutlej beginning from 2005. Another MOU was signed in 2013 to strengthen transboundary river cooperation in terms of discussing

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[45] Nathan and Fischhendler, "Triggers for Securitization," p. 22.
[46] Liu Peng, "National Interests and Interdependence: China, India and the Case of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra River", *South Asian Studies*, 4 (2013), pp. 33-45.
[47] Wuthnow, "Water Power," p. 25.

technical issues of hydrological information sharing, monitoring and information sharing, and constructing hydrology models. In substantive terms, this MOU expanded data-sharing to twice a day and extended the data-sharing period from June 1 to May 15.[48] The aim is to help the Indian government prepare for flood and droughts in the northeast. There are criticisms however that data-sharing should be continuous and not confined to only the flood season.[49]

Existing Arguments

There are few explanations as to why China and India have desecuritized their water dispute. Scholars who tried to do so have focused on the material positions of the two countries. For instance, according to Sebastian Biba, China desecuritizes the river basins it shares with the Mekong states, Kazakhstan, and India in order to maintain a stable periphery for economic growth as China's growing domestic water crisis has the potential to adversely affect relations with these countries.[50] In the case of the Yarlung Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River, China could not afford to completely ignore India's concerns, given its three key objectives to stabilize its southern periphery, expand bilateral trade and investment with India, and reduce India's alignment with the United States.[51] These objectives are general and broadly apply to all aspects of China's relations with India, and as such, does not offer an adequate explanation of why the water dispute is desecuritized while the other disputes between the two countries are not.

There are also scant explanations as to why India would desecuritize the water dispute. A general explanation is that India will avoid antagonizing China because of the power

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[48] Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation (India) (2016). India-China Co-operation. Available at: http://wrmin.nic.in/forms/list.aspx?lid=349 (accessed 5 September 2016).
[49] Anamika Barua, Sumit Vij and Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, "Powering or sharing water in the Brahmaputra River basin," International Journal of Water Resources Development, Vol. 35, No. 5 (2018), p. 837.
[50] Biba, p. 30.
[51] Ibid., p. 32.

differential between them, which was clearly demonstrated during their 1962 border war.[52] However, India has not hesitated to undertake provocative actions against the Chinese, such as allowing the Dalai Lama to visit Arunachal Pradesh, and sending military troops into Doklam to stop Chinese road construction. Material explanations of desecuritization are lacking as they are only provide broad strokes of how China and India define their national interest. They do not tell us of the specific interests that China and India have with respect to their water dispute and how these interests are interpreted – "Determining what the particular situation faced by a state is, what if any threat a state faces, and what the 'correct' national interest with respect to that situation or threat is, always requires interpretation."[53]

Likewise, securitization theory comes up short in explaining why China and India have desecuritized their water dispute. The theory argues that security is socially constructed.[54] Threats are inter-subjective and discursively constructed by speech acts – it is the development of "a plot that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out."[55] The conditions that facilitate securitization are: (1) the speech act must carry the grammar of security; (2) the position of authority of the securitizing actor; and (3) features of the alleged threats that can facilitate securitization.[56] These three conditions are present in the China-India water dispute and should (although not necessarily) lead to the securitization of the water conflict.

The securitizing actors of the dispute include local politicians in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, journalists, public intellectuals, and anti-dam activists. The rhetoric they used fits the speech patterns of securitization – words such as using water as a "weapon," "water wars," "to destroy and devastate" are commonly used to describe Chinese actions on the Yarlung Tsangpo. This discourse portrays the water dispute as a zero-sum game. The

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53 Weldes, p.279.

54 Buzan et al

55 Ibid., pp. 32-33.

56 Ibid., p. 33.

target audience of such rhetoric would be the Indian people, the Union government, and the Chinese government. The aim of these securitizing actors is to pressure the Union government to undertake stronger measures against China, protect India's national interest, and the livelihoods and water-use rights of the people in the northeast, and for the Chinese government to cease their upstream dam-building activities and come to an agreement with India on water usage. Although the securitizing actors are not the Indian and Chinese central governments, the securitizing actors are in a position to securitize the dispute. India is a vibrant democracy with strong local governments which have at times acted as stumbling blocks to Delhi's initiatives. Moreover, water under the Indian Constitution is a state subject. Local politicians have been able to exert significant pressure on the Union government in this area. For instance, opposition from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banarjee has stalled the signing of the Teesta River Treaty with Bangladesh.[57] While these securitizing actors may have the tools to securitize the water dispute with the Indian government, it is harder for them to impose the securitizing rhetoric on the Chinese government; however, the Chinese are also vulnerable to the securitizing rhetoric as their international and regional image may be tarnished if they were to act in ways that result in harming the communities living along the Brahmaputra.[58]

In addition, the features of the China-India water dispute make securitization highly likely. The intertwining of the water dispute with the territorial dispute, water scarcity in both countries, Indian dependence on the Brahmaputra's runoff for water, Chinese plans to develop the Yarlung Tsangpo for hydroelectricity and for Tibet's economic growth, and Tibet being a national security concern for China facilitate securitization of the water dispute.

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[58] Lan Jianxue, "Water Security Cooperation and China-India Interactions" (Shui ziyuan anquan hezuo yu ZhongYIn guanxi de hudong), 2010. Lan argues that China's international reputation would benefit if China took a leading role in proposing basin-wide cooperation. (cited in Wuthnow, p. 36).

Of the rivers that China and India share, the Brahmaputra River is the most significant. From the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, the river enters into Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang River before entering Assam as the Brahmaputra, and eventually merges into the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna River and into Bangladesh. It is the second largest of the world's rivers in terms of drainage and home to approximately 40 percent of the South Asian population.[59] It thus has substantial portions of people dependent on it for their livelihood. Ecological sustainability of the Brahmaputra is an important concern. The river also has deep cultural and religious value.

For China, because the river originates from Tibet, it naturally becomes a national security concern; stability and development in the region are key priorities for the Chinese government. Development of the hydrological potential of Tibet is seen as a major boost to the Tibetan economy and Chinese economy in general. From the perspective of the middle riparian, India, China's upstream position gives it substantial political and strategic leverage over India. This geographical advantage is further enhanced by the fact that China is ahead of India both militarily and economically. The building of Chinese dams in the upper reaches and speculations that China intends to divert the waters of the Brahmaputra further fuel these fears. There are also implications for India's domestic stability in the northeast, an area that is politically and ethnically fragile. There have been high levels of public disapprobation of China's planned cascade of dams in recent years, particularly in the Indian northeast.[60] These criticisms are not just leveled against China but also against the Indian government for not doing enough to stand up to China.

The water dispute between them is also conflated with their territorial dispute, as the Brahmaputra enters India through Arunachal Pradesh, a disputed territory that China claims.

[59] Naho Mirumachi, "Securitising shared waters: an analysis of the hydropolitical context of the Tanakpur Barrage project between Nepal and India," *The Geographic Journal*, Vol. 179, No. 4 (2013), p. 312.
[60] Pichamon Yeophantong, "River activism, entrepreneurship and transboundary water disputes in Asia," *Water International*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2017), p.176.

Despite being the upstream riparian, there also genuine fears within China that India's dam-building activities downstream would further strengthen India's "actual control" over Arunachal Pradesh, which could complicate border negotiations and reduce China's ability to regain the disputed territory.[61] For this reason, in 2009, it opposed an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan to India to develop the watershed in Arunachal Pradesh.[62] These fears are clearly spelt out when a Chinese scholar with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), a prominent government think tank, wrote that the Indians have sought to firm up its control over Arunachal Pradesh by increasing its military presence, migration of its citizens into the area, and development of river resources, and area building dams in that area to gain an advantage in border negotiations with China.[63] Another Chinese scholar wrote,

> Since South Tibet is still under the actual control of India, therefore from the
> perspective of China's core interests, no matter it is by China or India, any form
> of development and utilization of the Yarlung Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River must
> not threaten China's sovereignty over South Tibet nor can it increase the
> difficulty of China in regaining South Tibet. Hence any action of India that seeks
> to enforce its control of South Tibet through the development of the Yarlung
> Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River must be opposed by China.[64]

As for India, it suspects that China lay claims to Arunachal Pradesh in order to gain control over Arunachal Pradesh's vast water resources, estimated to be almost two hundred

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[61] Nilanthi Samaranayake, Satu Limaye, and Joel Wuthnow, Water Resource Competition in the Brahmaputra River Basin: China, India, and Bangladesh (Washington DC, 2016), pp. iii-iv.
[62] Lan Jianxue, "Shui zi yuan an quan he zuo yu zhong yin guan xi de hu dong" ("Security Cooperation on Water Resources and the Interaction of China-India Relationship"), *International Studies*, 6 (2009), pp. 37-43.
[63] Li Zhifei, "Water Security Issues in Sino-Indian Territorial Disputes," (Zhongyin lingtu zhengduan Zhong de shui ziyuan andquan wenti), South Asian Studies Quarterly (Nanya Yanjiu Jikan) 4 (2013): 29-34.
[64] Liu Peng, "National Interests and Interdependence: China, India and the Case of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra River", *South Asian Studies*, 4 (2013), pp. 33-45.

million cusecs.[65] These suspicions were fueled by China's move to block the ADB loan for watershed development in Arunachal Pradesh. India is also fearful that China will leverage its upstream position in negotiations over their disputed border. The conflation of the territorial dispute with the water dispute has made the water dispute one of the most intractable problems in China-India relations.[66] From the Chinese perspective, "the resolution of either is the pre-requisite for the resolution of the other."[67]

The lack of cooperation between China and India in managing their water dispute despite desecuritization seems to suggest that scholars who analyze riparian relations in material and power differential terms are correct.[68] Miriam Lowi predicts that cooperation is least likely when the upstream riparian is also the hegemon, as the upstream hegemon will have little incentive to cooperate given the constraints it will face in utilizing shared water resources.[69] When applied to the China-India water dispute, it would appear that China is responsible for the limited amount of cooperation since it is both the upstream state and the more powerful between the two countries. China certainly behaves as a realist power in the Brahmaputra River Basin, constructing dams and other infrastructure projects without consulting downstream states. It does not keep India informed of its plans to construct dams – despite months into construction, it had denied that it was building the Zangmu Dam. Moreover, the Indians have complained that the Chinese are not always consistent in providing data.

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[65] IDSA Task Force Report, *Water Security for India: The External Dynamics (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses* (IDSA), 2010), p. 44.

[66] Liu Peng, "National Interests and Interdependence: China, India and the Case of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra River", *South Asian Studies*, 4 (2013), pp. 33-45.

[67] Liu Peng, "National Interests and Interdependence: China, India and the Case of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra River", *South Asian Studies*, 4 (2013), pp. 33-45.

[68] See for example Zeitoun and Warner.

[69] Lowi focuses on the institutions that are being built. Even though there are debates about the benefits of cooperation for lower riparians and whether institutions entrench the dominance of the upstream state, the focus here is on institutions for cooperation.

Yet, there are flaws in the argument that cooperation is least likely when the upstream state is also the hegemon. China has desecuritized its water disputes with its neighbors in the Mekong, the Ili, and Irytsh rivers, and instituted cooperation with them at a relatively high level, for instance, cooperation with Kazakhstan over the Ili and Irtysh stops short of a water treaty.[70] It has taken a limited sovereignty view with respect to the water dispute with Kazakhstan as there are ongoing discussions for a water allocation plan.[71] Hence, set against the background that China cooperates to varying degrees with its riparian neighbors, there needs to be a better explanation for why cooperation is low in the China-India water dispute. The argument that cooperation is least likely when the upstream riparian is also the hegemon is narrowly focused on power asymmetries at the river basin level, without taking into account the context of the upstream hegemon's relations with its riparian neighbors, and how ideas and perceptions matter in shaping interest and behavior.

Why Ideas Matter in the China-India Water Dispute?

Why are ideas relevant and why do they matter to the China-India water dispute? First, ideas, defined as causal beliefs, are a primary source of political behavior.[72] They are not merely "hooks" used by policymakers to propagate and justify their policies.[73] Ideas are important because actors are normatively oriented – "Their desires, preferences, and motivations are not a contextually given fact – a reflection of material or even social circumstance – but are irredeemably ideational, reflecting a normative orientation toward the context in which they will have to be realized."[74] Ideas are road maps and focal points for

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[70] See Selina Ho, …..

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[72] Beland and Cox, "Introduction," p. 3.

[73] Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.4.

[74] Colin Hay, "Ideas and the Construction of Interests," in in Daniel Beland and Robert Henry Cox, eds, Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 67.

coordination.[75] They give rise to interest and thus shape state behavior. Interest is subject to interpretation and we agree with the view that interest is not always clear and stable but instead there could be a myriad of ideas on what constitutes interest on a particular issue.[76] This myriad of ideas among experts of the China-India water dispute on what constitutes interests and the best course of action to pursue these interests are captured in the results of the Q survey discussed below, and they help explain why China and India desecuritize their water dispute and why desecuritization did not lead to enhanced collaboration.

Second, as material definitions of interest and power differential analysis of the water dispute between China and India do not offer adequate explanations for the desecuritization of the water dispute, we should uncover the ideas and beliefs underlying desecuritization. Threats are inter-subjective and discursively constructed – "Even if one wanted to take a more objectivist approach, it is unclear how this could be done except in cases in which the threat is unambiguous and immediate."[77] As demonstrated in the above sections, threats in the China-India water dispute are ambiguous and subject to debate. There is a significant amount of speculation, rumors, and lack of information and knowledge on dam-building activities and river diversion projects. Under such circumstances, when threats are unclear and the immediacy of the threat is uncertain, and where information is incomplete, ideas are particularly critical for shaping state behavior.[78]

Third, as Manjari Chatterjee-Miller has demonstrated, ideas are also particularly important to China and India as rising powers.[79] Ideas and beliefs are particularly relevant to rising powers as they need ideas to chart the course of their rise to great power status and

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[76] Daniel Beland and Robert Henry Cox, "Introduction: Ideas and Politics," in Daniel Beland and Robert Henry Cox, eds, Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3.
[77] Ibid., p.30.
[78] Blyth
[79] Manjari Miller – Role of Beliefs and how ideas constrain Modi.

would need to know what is the appropriate behavior for great powers.[80] Hegemons care about their image.[81] For China, in particular, the decision to desecuritize water disputes with its neighbors is very much tied to concerns about how countries around it perceive it, which impacts on its international and regional reputation. Apart from being an environmental security issue, water is essential for human survival and hence, is also about human security. On moral and humanitarian grounds, China could not be seen as completely ignoring the plight of those living in downstream countries. The emphasis in Chinese official statements that China is acting on humanitarian grounds for sharing information with India during the flood season shows that it recognizes that the water dispute is not solely a security dispute, but also an ideational and normative issue that could affect China's trajectory as a rising power.

Research Design: The Q Methodology

We contend that "interests are ideas, and ideas constitute interests, so all interests are subjective."[82] The Q methodology is thus well-suited for this study because the Q is the study of human subjectivity, defined as communication of a personal viewpoint.[83] It is useful for uncovering and representing stakeholder positions and their interrelations through discourse. [84] It measures the perceptions of respondents and hence, is relevant to understanding cognitive structures, that is, how individuals think about the topic of interest.

The Q methodology is widely used in the fields of psychology, sociology, social psychology, political psychology, and political science, and captures qualitative responses

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[80] Miller, "Role of Beliefs," p. 218.

[81] Take from Kazakhstan article – winning goodwill and friends. David A. Lake

[82] Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism," p. 317.

[83] Bruce McKeown and Dan B. Thomas, *Q Methodology*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013), p. 2.

[84] See Dan Durning, "The transition from traditional to postpositivist policy analysis: A role for Q-methodology," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 18, Issue 3 (1999), pp. 389-410; Laurence E. Lynn Jr, "A place at the table: Policy analysis, its postpositive critics, and future of practice," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 18, Issue 3 (1999), pp. 411-425; and David Pelletier, Vivica Kraak, Christine McCullum, Ulla Uusitalo, and Robert Rich, "The shaping of collective values through deliberative democracy: An empirical study from New York's North Country," *Policy Science*, Vol. 32 (1999), pp. 103-131.

quantitatively.[85] It goes beyond the usual quantitative tool bag as it brings qualitative research into the quantitative realm. It uses factor analysis to reveal groups of people and the views they hold. In narrative analysis, this shows the number of viewpoints that could exist in any situation – that is, the unique stories that different groups of people tell themselves. This is an important difference from ordinary regressions which focuses on the correlation of traits (or disembodied characteristics), with factors showing clusters of these traits.

In the Q, the variables are no longer traits, but the various persons who take part in the study.[86] Instead of traits, the factors denote clusters of people - that is to say, each factor is a particular interpretive community of shared beliefs. Also, a Q represents a typology of perceptions, rather than a prevalence of traits. In other words, unlike normal regressions, "Q-analysis does not yield statistically generalizable results. Instead the results produce an in-depth portrait of the typologies of perspectives that prevail in a given situation."[87] This is useful for investigating the specific coalitions within the members of the public, experts and government officials. The correlations in Q reflect the degree of similarity in the way that statements have been sorted and the factor analysis of the correlations identifies groups of like-minded individuals.

The methodology typically employs a small sample of respondents, about 30 to 60. It is useful for studies that operates on a small budget but which do not wish to compromise the rigor of methods used. It consists of step-by-step procedures for examining subjectivity, perceptions, and the ideas/beliefs that people have. The main steps comprise the following:[88]

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[85] Durning, "The transition," and McKeown and Thomas, *Q Methodology*.
[86] Simon Watts and Paul Stenner, "Doing Q methodology: theory, method and interpretation," *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2005), p. 72.
[87] Toddi a. Steelman and Lynn A. Maguire, "Understanding participant perspectives: Q-methodology in national forest management," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 18, Issue 3 (1999), p. 363.
[88] Durning, "The transition," pp. 403-404.

1. Creation of a Q-Sample, which is a set of statements that are broadly representative of the discourse or the opinion domain on the topic of study. This requires the researcher to be familiar with the narratives and literature on the subject.

2. Administration of the Q-sort to respondents whose perspectives on the topic are of interest to the researcher. Each respondent sorts the statements in a quasi-normal distribution, placing each statement relative to other statements on a spectrum ranging from those they most with agree with and those that they most disagree with. The selection of respondents is based on including people whose opinions are either of practical or theoretical interest.

3. Each respondent's sorting of the Q-statements is called a "Q-sort" and factor analysis is applied to the sorts. In Q-methodology, the individual sorts are the variables and the Q statements are the observations. Correlation and the factor analysis of the correlation matrix is aimed at identifying clusters or groups of people who sorted their statements similarly, that is, they share similar view points.

4. A few significant factors are identified from the weighted average sorts of different groups of participants, to characterize their attitudes, as well as the consensus and/or disagreement among them. Major "social perspectives" of the topic of interest are thus synthesized at this final stage.

In our study, as a first step, we combed through newspapers, both national and local in both countries, to identify the narratives and discourse that surrounds the Brahmaputra River. We focused on materials not only in English, but also local languages, including Chinese and local dialects in India. The ideas and views found in existing narratives touch on the existing policy priorities, central-local coordination, China-India collaboration, threat perceptions, and the effects of developing the Brahmaputra. From this initial list, we then draw up a list of statements that is most representative of the variety of views on the Brahmaputra. These fall

neatly into the three kinds of ideas that scholars have worked with: policy solutions; problem definitions, which is a way for understanding a complex issue; and public philosophies (zeitgeist), which is an idea of how to understand the role of government.[89] These three sets of ideas are captured by the statements in the Q survey (see appendix 1).

In the second stage, we purposefully and carefully selected a list of participants, known as the P sample, and we invited them to express their degree of agreement with the Q statements. The P sample in this study consisted of 33 respondents from India and China, 17 in India and 16 in China, who were experts on the Brahmaputra River, including retired government officials, academics from renowned research institutions, practitioners, and NGOs. While we do not intend to claim that the views of this selected number of experts represent the entirety of the Chinese or Indian population, we chose to target our survey to experts because while the citizen opinions are also important, expert opinions may be more comprehensive in the sense that not only do reflect government views or the views of non-state actors alone, but the views of both on the subject. Experts may also be more knowledgeable about the government policies, strategies and overall issues regarding the Brahmaputra in these two countries that arise from their expertise.[90] Given the overall difficulties in accessing politicians and bureaucrats, experts in this field thus became the important and even the only source from which insightful perspectives can be generated. Having said so, experts surveyed here did not The participants were drawn from both the central and local areas, namely, Beijing, Yunnan and Shanghai in China, and Delhi, Guwahati and Assam in India. Nor do the findings of the survey suggest that there are no debates among policymakers and experts on how to best manage the water dispute. In fact, the findings (which are presented in the next section) reveal some contradictory ideas among the

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[89] Jal Mehta, "The Varied Role of Ideas in Politics: From 'Whether' to 'How'", in Beland and Cox, eds., Ideas and Politics, p. 27.

[90] In our sample, Chinese experts have on average nearly five years of working on the Brahmaputra-related issue. The number for Indian experts is over 12 years.

experts surveyed. These findings are corroborated with journal articles written by Chinese and Indian scholars.

In the third stage, the statements were administered to the invited participants, using an online survey tool Q-sorTouch.[91] The respondents were asked to order the statements of the Q sample into a quasi-normal distribution in the shape of a grid, which is an inverted pyramid of slots arranged along a scale ranging from a sentence that the participant disagrees with most, -3, to a sentence that the participant agrees with most, +3. The ranking is thus relative, forcing participants to rank the order in which they agree with the sentences, and not just merely expressing the extent to which they agree with them or not. The order set this procedure yields is known as a Q sort. The meaning of each ranking is only established through reference to the rankings of the other statements. We also included a few questions to learn more about the background of the respondents.

The fourth and final stage was to analyse through a by-person factor analysis to reveal correlated groups of statement preferences. We analysed the data from Indian and Chinese respondents separately, and then compared them. Analysis was conducted by Ken-Q Analysis software, a web-based application for Q methodology data.[92] For both data sets, eight principal component factors were initially extracted; among the factors with Eigenvalues higher than 1, three factors were kept using the varimax rotation, which cumulatively explained 70% of the variance for the Indian sample and 56% for the China sample. The significance of the factors is ranked in descending order, with Factor 1 representing the majority view of the respondents.[93]

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[91] https://www.qsortouch.com/#/.

[92] https://shawnbanasick.github.io/ken-q-analysis/

[93] In Q methodology, this means the largest number of Chinese participants expressed very close views and was statistically most significant to explain the most variance of the views by the whole sample. These sorts were then synthesized to Factor One. However, this does not mean that other participants don't agree any of the statements in Factor One at all. In fact, others may also share some of the similar views, but less significant. Again, we are not seeking to generalize the view of 6 experts to represent the 1.7 billion Chinese people;

The factors that result from the analysis can be understood as groups of views and ideas on how China and India can manage their dispute over the Brahmaputra River. The identification of factors is based on interpretation of respondents' reactions to the various statements, and hence in that sense, even though Q methodology is a quantitative method, it is subordinate to the broader analytical and interpretive task.

It is important to note that the limitation of the Q methodology is that it is primarily an exploratory technique. It cannot prove or disprove hypotheses. It can however bring a sense of coherence to research questions that have many potentially complex and socially contested answers.[94] The Q methodology is thus useful for exploring the complexity of China-India relations, and specifically, their water dispute.

Findings

We identified three factors on each side that are most representative of the views we have collected. The ranking of ideas represented by each factor tells us how interests are conceived by the Chinese and Indian participants with regards to the water dispute – the most significant factor, defined as the view of the largest number of respondents, is factor 1, followed by 2, and then 3. There were remarkable similarities in the ideas and views on both sides, although there were differences in the specifics. The group represented by Factor 1 on both the Chinese and Indian side believed that collaboration should be enhanced and that China should do more to assuage Indian concerns. Factor 2 on both sides focused on development, but they viewed the role of their respective central governments in developing Tibet in China, and Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India as having different levels of efficacy. Factor 3 represented the group that viewed the Brahmaputra from a security perspective, with the Indian side seeing the threat as mostly emanating from China, while the

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instead, we look to identify similar thoughts among participant over the set of statements, and summarize from there.

[94] Watts and Stenner, "Doing Q methodology," p. 75.

Chinese saw the threat as emanating internally from within Tibet. Appendix 2 summarizes these views, the most significant statements, as well as the degree of agreement and z-score, which is a standardized measure of how salient the statement is to the factor.[95]

Factor 1: Collaboration

The idea of enhancing collaboration figured prominently in the survey. On the Indian side, the group represented by Factor 1 strongly advocated strengthening China-India collaboration in terms of water-resource management, scientific research on climate change, and ecological and environmental protection, particularly at the national levels (statements 21, 23, 25). They saw current policies, at the national and local levels as well as between China and India, as insufficient for protecting the environment and ecology of the Brahmaputra region (statements 29, 27, 1, 16). This view prioritized ecology protection above the construction of dams and other forms of infrastructure and economic development. The Indian respondents saw both the Union and local governments as placing too much emphasis on economic growth and development, and harnessing river resources for energy development. They felt that the benefits of growth and development did not outweigh the harm to the ecology of the Brahmaputra – they disagreed with "the benefits of building bridges, railways and other infrastructures along the Brahmaputra outweigh its harm on local environment and ecology" (statement 28) and "the benefits of building dams and hydropower stations along the Brahmaputra on local socioeconomic development outweigh its harm on local environment and ecology" (statement 27). This group also appeared to have greater trust in Chinese intentions when they disagreed with "dams constructed on the Chinese side will divert the flow of Brahmaputra and disrupt India's water supply in the Brahmaputra region"

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[95] "The z-score is a weighted average of the values that the Q-sorts most closely related to the factor give to a statement, and it is continuous. Factor scores are integer values based on z-scores and they are used to reconstruct the Q-sort of a factor, which is then interpreted." Aiora Zabala and Unai Pascual, "Bootstrapping Q Methodology to Improve the Understanding of Human Perspectives," *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2016).

(statement 31) and "containing and constraining lower riparian countries is also considered in China's policymaking regarding the Brahmaputra" (statement 12).

The Chinese respondents in Factor 1 also emphasized the importance of enhancing cooperation. They disagreed that current levels of cooperation in terms of hydrological data-sharing was satisfactory (statement 16). The Chinese respondents in this group strongly agreed that collaboration particularly on water resource management should be strengthened at the national level (statement 21), and also accorded priority to enhancing cooperation on climate change research and environmental protection (statements 25 and 23). They strongly agreed that assuaging Indian concerns that China would behave responsibly was very important for bilateral relations (statement 17). This group underscored the importance of collaboration and demonstrated sensitivity to Indian concerns when they strongly disagreed with "containing and constraining India on Brahmaputra is more important than collaborating with India" (statement 18), "building dams and hydropower stations along the Brahmaputra will not negatively impact lower riparian countries" (statement 29), and "it is not necessary to regularly update lower riparian countries about infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra due to national security and/or business concerns" (statement 33). There was consensus with the Indian experts on statements 29 and 33. The Chinese respondents also agreed that "regularly updating lower riparian countries and infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra is important for maintaining transparency in cross-boundary communication" (statement 32) and that the territorial and water dispute should be delinked so as not to impede China-India collaboration on the Brahmaputra (statement 20).

On the development of the Brahmaputra river basin, the Chinese side in this group held a neutral position on the benefits of building dams, bridges, railways and other infrastructure on the Brahmaputra while the Indian side disagreed that the benefits from development outweighed the environmental costs.

Factor 2: Development

Like the view represented by Factor 1, the Indian respondents represented by Factor 2 were also supportive of greater collaboration between China and India in terms of scientific research on climate change (statement 25) and environmental protection (statement 23), and thinks that reassuring India that China will behave responsibly on the Brahmaputra is very important (statement 17). However, they also differed significantly from those in Factor 1 on the benefits of development. They agreed that "the benefits of building dams and hydropower stations along the Brahmaputra on local socioeconomic development outweigh its harm on local environment and ecology" (statement 27) and "the benefits of building bridges, railways and other infrastructures along the Brahmaputra outweigh its harm on local environment and ecology" (statement 28). This group thus believed that development in the northeastern states was essential. They believed the Union government was not carrying out policies that were beneficial for and meeting the needs of the northeastern states (statement 13) and was instead, interfering with local autonomy (statement 14). The Union government was also seen as not doing enough to mitigate floods and other natural disasters, protecting local ecology, and water resource management – they disagreed with "Union government institutions have contributed to water resource management, disaster relief, and socio-economic development of the Brahmaputra region" (statement 15) and "managing and mitigating floods and other natural disasters is the top policy priority for the Union government in the Brahmaputra region" (statement 3).

Factor 2 on the Chinese side also held a "pro-development" view of the Brahmaputra. This group agreed that the benefits of infrastructure construction, including building dams, bridges, and railways, outweighed the harm on local environment and ecology (statements 30, 28, 27), and that "boosting economic growth and socio-economic development is the top

policy priority for the Tibet government in the Brahmaputra region" (statement 8). Unlike the Indian respondents, they saw central government's policies as being aligned with local developmental needs – they strongly agreed with "policies of the central government have so far reflected and addressed local needs (socioeconomic/sustainable development; flood and disaster mitigation) in the Brahmaputra region" (statement 13) and "cadres to support/aid Tibet from other provinces have contributed to the socio-economic development of the Brahmaputra region" (statement 14).

Compared to those in Factor 1, the Chinese respondents in Factor 2 tended to be less sensitive to India's threat perception and needs – respondents strongly disagreed with "regularly updating lower riparian countries about infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra is important in maintaining transparency in cross-boundary communication" (statement 32) and agreed with "it is not necessary to regularly update lower riparian countries about infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra due to national security and/or business interest concerns" (statement 33). While this view would like to see greater cooperation between China and India in scientific research on climate change (statement 25), they saw development of the Tibetan region, promoting ethnic harmony, and ensuring the stability of Tibet as more important (statements 5, 6, and 8) than collaboration with India. They clearly prioritized business interest and national security when they agreed that "it is not necessary to regularly update lower riparian countries about infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra due to national security and/or business concerns" (statement 33). The respondents in Factor 1 strongly disagreed with this view. The Chinese in Factor 2 also agreed with the statement that China's "upstream position on the Brahmaputra is an important leverage for China in territorial negotiations" (statement 19), which those in Factor 1 disagreed with. But this group also disagreed that "containing and

constraining India on Brahmaputra is more important than collaborating with India on the same" (statement 18).

Respondents in Factor 2 thus reflected the view that development in Tibet and the northeastern states of India was vital for these regions. The Chinese side in this view tended to be less sensitive to Indian concerns than those in Factor 1. Their focus was on the internal development of Tibet and placed less priority on collaboration. With the exception of collaboration in climate change, they maintained a neutral or negative position on water resource management and ecological protection. They saw the benefits of development as outweighing the ecological costs.

Factor 3: Threat Perceptions

On the Indian side, Factor 3 was a "China threat" view. They strongly agreed with the statement that China's policies showed that "containing and constraining India is more important than collaborating with India on the Brahmaputra" (statement 18). This view also saw a close linkage between China's upstream position and the territorial dispute between China and India – they strongly agreed with "China's upstream position on the Brahmaputra is an important leverage for China in territorial negotiations" (statement 19). They saw China's dam-building and construction of other infrastructures as having a negative impact on lower riparians (statement 29) and believed that the Chinese did not take into account the interests of the lower riparians (statements 17, 30 and 34). For instance, they strongly disagreed with "not harming the interest of lower riparian countries is also considered in China's policy-making regarding the Brahmaputra" (statement 11). They felt that China should be more transparent in its policies and information-sharing with India – they disagreed with "it is not necessary to regularly update lower riparian countries about infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra due to national security and/or business interest"

(statement 33), and strongly agreed with "regularly updating lower riparian countries about infrastructural construction activities along the Brahmaputra is important in maintaining transparency in cross-boundary communication" (statement 32). They were also concerned about the internal stability of the northeast – they agreed that "maintaining regional stability and promoting inter-racial, -caste or –tribal harmony is the top policy priority for the central/Union government in the Brahmaputra region" (statement 5) and prioritized the management of floods and other natural disasters (statements 3 and 4).

On development, they weakly agreed that the benefits of building dams and other infrastructure outweighed the ecological costs (statements 27 and 28) and maintained a neutral position on boosting economic growth in the northeast. They maintained a neutral position on collaboration on climate change research while disagreeing with the need to collaborate on ecological and environmental protection. As for water resource management, they weakly agreed that collaboration should be strengthened at the national level while strongly disagreeing that it should be strengthened at the local level.

On the Chinese side, Factor 3 represented a "national security" view of the Brahmaputra region. Because the Brahmaputra has its headwaters in Tibet, this view tended to see threats as emanating from within Tibet, and linked security and stability in Tibet to the management of the Brahmaputra. This group strongly agreed with "maintaining regional stability and promoting ethnic harmony is the top policy priority for Tibet government in the Brahmaputra region" (statement 6) and "mitigating flood and other natural disasters is the top policy priority for Tibet government in the Brahmaputra region" (statement 4). The emphasis on both disaster mitigation and maintaining ethnic harmony indicates that stability in the Tibetan region was the priority for this group. Lower priority was accorded to development, contrasting with the "pro-development" view of Factor 2. This group disagreed that boosting economic growth and socio-economic development was the top policy priority for both the

central and Tibetan governments (statements 7 and 8) and "the benefits of building dams and hydropower stations along the Brahmaputra on local socioeconomic development outweigh its harm on local environment and ecology" (statement 27), and expressed neutrality on the benefits of building bridges, railways and other infrastructure (statement 30). This view also expressed some support for enhanced collaboration between China and India – they strongly agreed with "in terms of scientific research on climate change, current India-China collaboration on Brahmaputra should be strengthened further at national platforms" (statement 25) and also agreed with enhancing collaboration in ecology and environment protection (statement 23) but less so in water resource management (statement 21). They agreed that existing territorial disputes should not impede collaboration (statement 20) and regularly updating lower riparians on infrastructure construction projects was positive for communication between China and India (statement 32). Nevertheless, these pro-collaboration views were not as strong as the view presented in Factor 1. In contrast to Factor 1, they strongly disagreed that "assuaging India that China will behave responsibly on the Brahmaputra is very important for bilateral relations" (statement 17). They seemed somewhat satisfied with the current level of India-China collaboration on sharing hydrological information and dealing with emergencies (statement 16). Clearly, safeguarding national security in the Brahmaputra region trumped collaboration with India in this view.

Analysis: Ideas in the China-India Water Dispute

A set of ideas and debates have emerged from the Q survey that focuses on collaboration, development, and threat perceptions. The combination of ideas and views across Factors 1, 2, and 3 provides a plausible explanation as to why the Chinese and Indian governments have desecuritized their water dispute, and why despite desecuritization, cooperation between them in managing their water dispute is low. The myriad of ideas

presented here suggest that there was a salient view among Chinese respondents that were sensitive to Indian concerns and prioritized the need to reduce Indian threat perceptions. The need to build trust was also emphasized. These provide possible motivations for the Chinese side to desecuritize the water dispute. On the Indian side, the findings suggest that the Indian government is incentivized to desecuritize because the Union government in addition to the Chinese government are the targets of the securitization rhetoric of local politicians and activists in the Indian northeast. Cooperation is low despite desecuritization because desecuritization does not necessarily lead to a reduction in threat perception and contribute to greater trust. Thus the traditional view that desecuritization is a normative good and could lead to more genuine cooperation does not bear out. Only when desecuritization succeeds in lowering the perception of threat and resulting in greater trust can genuine cooperation ensue and root causes of a conflict dealt with. In addition, disagreements between those who favor development and those who prioritize ecological protection among the policy/expert community in both countries also impede cooperation.

Ideas and desecuritizaton

Factor 3 represented the group of respondents who viewed the China-India water dispute as a security threat. While the Chinese side saw the threat as emanating from within as the emphasis was on both disaster management and maintaining ethnic harmony, the Indian side saw the threat as mainly external resulting from China's position upstream which could be used as leverage in territorial negotiations. This group thus saw a linkage between the water dispute and the territorial dispute. The view was that China is using the Brahmaputra to constrain India and that China does not take into account whether its upstream activities, such as the construction of dams, will impact downstream countries. The Indians in this group also viewed the internal stability of the Indian northeast as a key priority.

These threat perceptions make it easy for a securitization narrative to take place. India, in particular, may find it useful to securitize the water dispute as a bargaining chip against China. In fact, a report from a task force of the Institute of Defense and Strategic Analysis (IDSA) warned that

> It is important for India to create global awareness about the water resources in Tibet and build regional pressure. Tibet's water is for humanity, not for China alone. Almost 2 billion people in South and Southeast Asia depend on the water resource of Tibet. Tibetans need to be also sensitised to the water resources and extensive ecological damage that China's water diversion plans can cause…With Pakistan and China, water issues will be far more political and strategic. Water as an instrument and tool of bargain and trade-off will assume predominance because the political stakes are high. Water issues between Pakistan and China have the potential to become catalysts for conflict. [96]

At the minimum, there are some sectors within the Indian government itself that favor securitization. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the features of the water dispute facilitate securitization. Why then has the Union government, like the Chinese government, made strenuous efforts to keep the water dispute from being securitized?

Analyzing the other two factors may offer some insights to why desecuritization was chosen instead. Critically, the perception of threat is much lower in the first two factors. In Factor 1, the Indian respondents displayed a higher level of trust towards Chinese intentions when they disagreed that Chinese dams would divert the flow of the Brahmaputra and disrupt India's water supply and that China aimed to contain and constrain lower riparian countries by using the Brahmaputra. Indian respondents in Factors 1 and 2 did not seem as deeply concerned about China's upstream position as those in Factor 3. For factor 2, respondents

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[96] Institute of Defense and Strategic Analysis (IDSA), *IDSA Task Force Report: Water Security for India: The External Dynamics* (New Delhi, 2010), p. 10.

only mildly agreed that China's upstream position is an important leverage in territorial negotiations while those in Factor 1 expressed a neutral position on this statement.

Views expressed by Chinese respondents in Factor 1 showed a level of sensitivity to Indian concerns that is at odds with the expected behaviour of the stronger party in an asymmetrical dyad. This sensitivity to Indian concerns provides a plausible motivation for why China desecuritizes the water conflict. There was strong consensus between the Chinese and Indian respondents in this group that building dams could negatively impact downstream countries, and national security and/or business interests should not prevent China from updating downstream countries on infrastructure activities along the upper Brahmaputra. The Chinese side emphasized the need to have greater transparency and information-sharing, and to reassure the Indians that China would behave responsibly. The Chinese respondents here were concerned with reducing India's threat perceptions, which is in line with the desecuritization narrative. This sensitivity is clearly demonstrated when the CASS scholar wrote –

> The processes of negotiation and cooperation between China and India over water resources have shown that the characteristic of cross-boundary basins makes it impossible to view the water resource issues of international rivers from an angle of pure domestic sovereignty, but it must also consider the reasonable concerns of the lower course countries. Only then could the mutual trust and common development between the nations in the basin be enhanced, and their confrontation and doubts towards each other reduced… As for the negotiations between China and India, China needs to take a balance between the principle of absolute territorial sovereignty and the principle of fair use and limited

sovereignty if China is to consider from the overall diplomatic deployment and general national interest. [97]

In addition, except for Factor 2 on the Chinese side which mildly agreed (+1) that China's upstream position was an important leverage in territorial negotiations, the Chinese respondents did not seem keen to leverage China's upstream position to gain concessions from India. Even in factor 2, respondents disagreed that containing and constraining India was more important than collaborating with India on the Brahmaputra.

A clue as to why the Indian government favors desecuritization can be found in Factor 2. Indian respondents in Factor 2 expressed a high degree of dissatisfaction with the Union government for the manner with which it had managed the water issues in the Indian northeast. They saw the Union government as interfering in the rights of the Assam's and Arunachal Pradesh's governments on water management and feel that the Union government had not addressed local needs in the Brahmaptura. This disapprobation of the Union government is mainly the result of the activities of non-state actors who sought to mobilize popular opposition against Chinese dams as well as the dams that the Union government wants to build in the northeastern states. For instance, by 2010, the All Assam Students Union and the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, a farmers' right movement, had established a broad-based resistance movement.[98] Local politicians in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are also responsible for whipping up these anti-Delhi sentiments. Besides questioning Delhi's response to Chinese activities, they also criticized the central government's dam-building and other activities. That the Indian Union government is the target of these groups, and not just the Chinese, means that there is incentive for it to play down the significance of the water dispute. Securitizing the dispute with China will put the Union government in a tough spot

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[97] Lan Jianxue, "Shui zi yuan an quan he zhong yin guan xi" ("Water Resource Security and China-India Relationship"), *South Asian Studies*, 2 (2008), pp. 21-6.
[98] Yeophantong, "River Activism," p. 177.

between the Chinese government, and the local politicians and activist groups.[99] The IDSA Task Force report hints at this when it said while the securitization of water increases political attention and public awareness, "there is, however, the risk that the issue can become vulnerable to political vested interests and linkage politics and solutions could be manipulated within the political context."[100]

Ideas and cooperation

The Chinese respondents who saw the need to reduce India's threat perceptions also tended to prioritize collaboration. This linkage was strongest among respondents in Factor 1 who favored assuaging Indian concerns and increasing collaboration in water resource management, ecological protection, and climate change. Such views on cooperation are supported by the views of Chinese scholars expressed in Chinese journals. For instance, the scholar from CASS argues that China's reputation would benefit if it took a leading role in initiating basin-wide cooperation.[101] Another scholar wrote –

> China and India need each other in their cooperation on water resources. To have conflicts on water resource issues is by itself unnatural and no matter who wins, both countries will be adversely affected. Hence China and India should enhance their *cooperation in water resources and environmental conservation, establish reasonable water distribution mechanisms* (italics added), so that there are mutual benefits for both countries and both peoples.[102]

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99 Ibid., pp. 178-179.
100 IDSA, *Water Security for India*, p. 19.
101 Lan Jianxue, "Water Security Cooperation and China-India Interactions" (Shui ziyuan anquan hezuo yu ZhongYin guanxi de hudong), 2010.
102 Liu Shu, "Sino-India Cooperation on Non-Traditional Security Issues -- Water Source Dispute and Cooperation as a Case", *Indian Ocean Economic and Political Review*, 2 (2015), pp. 127-39.

Other areas where cooperation could be enhanced include the collective management of rivers and the chartering of international law.[103] Given the strong emphasis on collaboration reflected in Factor 1, which represented the largest group of respondents, why has actual cooperation between China and India remain at a low level?

A holistic analysis taking into account Factors 2 and 3 helps explain the low level of collaboration. Higher threat perceptions appear to impede cooperation. Factor 3 which was a threat perception view tended to emphasize less cooperation. This was true for both the Indian and Chinese respondents in this group although there were differences in level of emphasis. There are three areas of collaboration which respondents were asked to rank their preferences – climate change research, ecological protection, and water resource management. Water resource management would be the most sensitive of these three areas since it involves riparian states accepting a limited sovereignty view of water resources that run through their territory. Ecological protection would be the next most difficult step for collaboration as it would also impinge on sovereignty since it imposes restrictions on how states develop their water resources. Climate change research is least controversial among the three possible areas of collaboration.

Indian respondents in Factor 3 expressed neutrality on climate change research, disagreed with ecological protection while mildly agreeing to enhancing water resource management at the national level. On the Chinese side in Factor 3, respondents seemed to think that current levels of collaboration at hydrological information-sharing was satisfactory. They strongly agreed on climate change research but placed lower priority on ecological protection, while only mildly agreeing that there should be collaboration in water resource management. Such thinking on the Chinese side is in line with the suspicions that the Chinese hold towards India. A key reason why China has been reluctant to step up cooperation, even

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[103] Liu Peng, "National Interests and Interdependence: China, India and the Case of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra River", *South Asian Studies*, 4 (2013), pp. 33-45.

in the area of extending data-sharing throughout the entire year, is due to the Chinese belief that sharing information throughout the year would allow India access to monitoring China's upstream activities all year round, which it deems as "provocative."[104] This contrasts sharply with the Chinese side on Factor 1 which strongly agreed with collaboration on water resource management suggesting that they took a limited sovereignty view of shared water resources. These differences between Factors 1 and 3, as well as the lack of consensus on both the Indian and Chinese side on areas of collaboration help explain the low level of cooperation between them.

In addition, although a development view of the Brahmaputra as captured in Factor 2 appeared to also support collaboration, the level of threat perception among the Indians is higher here than in Factor 1. This indicates a lower level of trust and the Chinese in this group are less sensitive to Indian concerns. A lower level of trust and less sensitivity to other party could impede cooperation – the distrust between China and India has been described as a "key customary institution that affects cooperation."[105] Both Indian and Chinese scholars have expressed that this lack of trust is the chief obstacle to the formation of effective institutional mechanisms between the two sides.[106] While the Indians in this group valued greater collaboration, they also expressed greater suspicion of China than those in Factor 1. They saw China's upstream position as an important leverage for China in territorial negotiations, and placed high priority on China reassuring India that it would behave responsibly.

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[104] Lei Xie, Shaofeng Jia, "Diplomatic Water Cooperation: the case of the Sino-India dispute over Brahmaputra," International Environment Agreements 17 (2017): 677-694, at 690.

[105] Yumiko Yasuda et al., "Multi-track water diplomacy: current and potential future cooperation over the Brahmaputra River Basin," in Selina Ho, ed., Transboundary River Cooperation: Actors, Strategies, and Impact (Part II), *Water International*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (2018), pp. 642-664 at p. 649.

[106] See for example, Barua et al., "Powering or sharing water," and Lei Xie, Muhammad Mizanur Rahaman and Wei Shen, "When do institutions work? A comparison of two water disputes over the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna river basins," Water Policy 20 (2018): 308-322. Lei et al. stated that "building trust, therefore, remains the most important factor related to the outcomes of such cooperative initiatives," p. 319.

Among the Chinese respondents in Factor 2, there was interest in collaborating on climate change research, but less so on ecological protection, and neutrality on water resource management. This group wanted to preserve China's rights to utilize its water resources as it deems fit. It saw linkage between the territorial and water disputes, and agreed that China's upstream position was an important leverage for China in territorial negotiations and that existing territorial disputes would impede cooperation with China on the Brahmaputra. This view is echoed in a journal article written by a Chinese scholar who asserted China's right to develop its water resources and at the same time, advocated adopting a linkage strategy between negotiations on the border dispute and the negotiations on the water dispute.[107] The Chinese respondents in Factor 2 were also less sensitive to Indian concerns when they strongly disagreed that regularly updating lower riparian countries on infrastructure construction is important, and agreed that the benefits of dams, and other forms of infrastructure construction would outweigh ecological costs. The Indian and Chinese respondents in both Factors 1 and 3 disagreed (more so in Factor 1) or express neutrality that the benefits of building dams and other infrastructure outweighed ecological costs.

The development versus ecological protection debate that is captured by the Q survey is part of the overall debate surrounding the water dispute. There are basically two groups with opposing views on how to manage the water resources. One group believes that the benefits foregone of not using water as an engine for economic growth have been very substantial, particularly considering the extensive and abject poverty of riparian countries.[108] The Brahmaputra river system is viewed by this group in both China and India as under-exploited. [109] The other group argues that the current modes of development, such as

[107] Liu Peng, "National Interests and Interdependence: China, India and the Case of the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra River", *South Asian Studies*, 4 (2013), pp. 33-45.
[108] Barua et al., Treaties, p. 1028.
[109] Xie et al., "When do institutions work?," p. 314.

hydropower generation and river linking projects, are risky, unsustainable, and unjust.[110] Such opposing views help explain why cooperation has been low despite the desecuritization narrative. Disagreements between these two opposing groups within the policy/expert community on how shared water resources should be utilized is a stumbling block towards more substantive cooperation.

Conclusion

Material accounts of water disputes tend to paint these disputes in broad strokes, and do not reveal the nuances and complexities of water as an issue between states. The traditional emphasis on power asymmetry when explaining and predicting riparian relations does not adequately explain why states such as China and India have dealt with conflicts arising from disputes over transboundary waters in a variety of ways. This article offers a fresh perspective by arguing that ideas are essential for understanding the China–India water dispute. A set of ideas represented in the Q survey helps explain why, unlike the other disputes between the two countries, desecuritization of the water dispute has taken place, and why desecuritization does not necessarily lead to enhanced collaboration or genuine cooperation.

Desecuritization has taken place, at least in part, because there is a salient view among the Chinese respondents that displayed relative sensitivity to Indian concerns, and which sought to reduce Indian threat perception. Chinese scholars have emphasised the importance of building trust on both sides, and desecuritisation is generally seen as having a positive impact on trust. On the Indian side, the Indian government could be motivated to desecuritise because the securitisation narrative of local politicians and activists in the northeast is also aimed at the central government. By desecuritising the water dispute, therefore, the Indian

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[110] Ibid.

government aims to lessen the significance of the water dispute and reduce pressure on itself. Securitisation is not a viable strategy, because it would put the Indian government in a tight spot between the Chinese government and local groups in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

The analysis also shows that desecuritisation does not necessarily lead to better cooperation because it may not result in greater trust and reduced threat perception, both of which are pre-requisites for higher levels of cooperation. Thus, the traditional view that desecuritisation is a normative good and could lead to more genuine cooperation does not bear out. While securitisation is generally seen as harmful because: 'These alarmist views have hindered regional transboundary water cooperation with their popular "water wars" and "Chinese threat" narratives',[111] desecuritisation also poses dangers if depoliticisation takes place. As Weaver points out, desecuritisation that leads to treating an issue as a technical one may depoliticise it at least as much as securitisation does.[112] This could obstruct the equitable resolution of a dispute, because: 'Desecuritization processes which result in depoliticisation can be particularly troublesome in asymmetric conflicts' since they could entrench the interests of the dominant party at the expense of the weaker.[113] The China–India water dispute is treated as a technical issue by both the Chinese and Indian governments because cooperation has remained at the technical level. The challenge facing the expert communities, therefore, is to keep the dispute politicised and relevant.

The Q methodology has been useful in uncovering the myriad of debates and beliefs surrounding the China–India water dispute. Its value lies in revealing viewpoints and interpretations relative to one another. As a methodology, it can be applied to research wherein ideas and narratives are central to the argument. However, while it is useful as an exploratory technique, it cannot prove or disprove hypotheses, and hence cannot trace the pathways through which these ideas become important. The article makes up for this

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[111] Zhang and Li, 'A Process-based Framework', p. 722.
[112] Ole Weaver, 'Politics, Security, Theory', Security Dialogue, Vol. 42, No. 4/5 (2011), p. 472.
[113] Aggestam, 'Technocratic Turn', p. 335.

limitation in two ways. First, by gathering the views of experts in the think tank communities of both countries, such as CASS, CICIR, IDSA, and top universities involved in research on the water dispute. These institutions are linked to the governments of their respective countries and receive funding from them. As the reports written by these experts are read by policymakers, therefore, they can influence the decision-making process. Secondly, these views are corroborated through the examination of journal articles and reports written by Chinese and Indian scholars. Such endorsement further underlines the importance and relevance of the views captured in the Q survey. Future research could make up for this shortcoming by tracing how and when these ideas become important.