

Book review – Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century by Jeff Smith

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Raj Verma finds that Jeff Smith's "Cold Peace" offers a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of Sino-Indian relations.

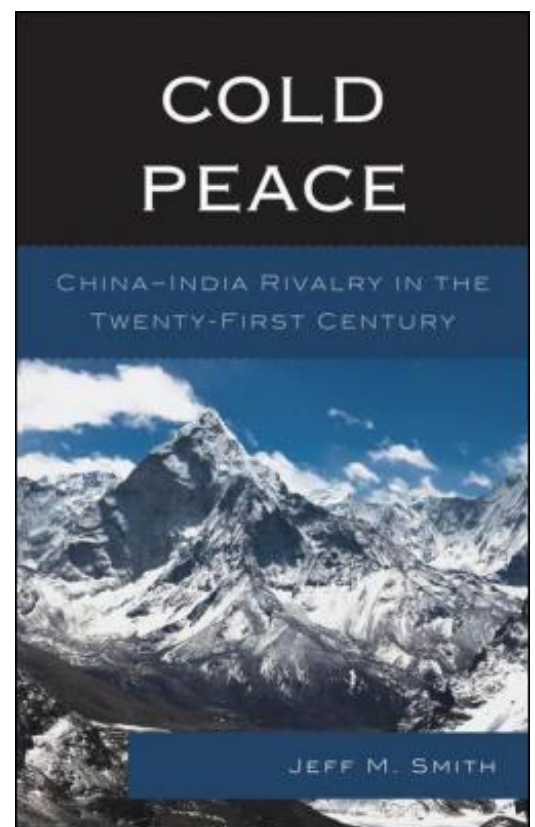
India and China share a long and respected history of early civilisations and independence from colonial rule at around the same time: India in 1947 and China in 1949. India and China with their phenomenal growth rates are also surging ahead as world economic powers—there is a wide consensus that both will surpass the United States by 2050, China much sooner than India.

Tomes of literature and scholarly work are thus attributed to India-China relations. There are myriad books, journal articles, opinion pieces in newspapers and reports from think tanks on the relationship and rivalry between the two rising Asian powers. "Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century" by Jeff M. Smith explores the rivalry between the two countries through a security studies prism. The author has conducted more than one hundred interviews with renowned analysts from think-tanks and academia, serving and retired government officials, policymakers and military personnel from India, China and the United States, which articulate different viewpoints and help substantiate the argument.

In Part One of the book, Smith briefly discusses the relations between the two countries since independence and quantifies and qualifies India and China's threat perceptions of each other. The chapter highlights the general perception in China that India is the yellow sick man of Asia and that Indians are racially inferior, and explains how this construct has important bearings on the relationship between the two countries.

Smith then provides a comprehensive analysis of the border dispute between India and China. This is a useful reference guide for those who seek to enhance their understanding of the border dispute. However, Smith excels in Part Three – 'Tawang and Tibet' – which provides a brilliant analysis of the complexities of India-China relations due to historical anomalies. This section encapsulates the realpolitik and Machiavellian strategies of India and China relating to Tibet, the Dalai Lama and his succession, and the historical town of Tawang. The author concurs with Indian and Chinese analysts that it is extremely difficult (nearly impossible) to resolve the border dispute in the short to medium term.

Smith then shifts his analysis to the role of Pakistan and the United States in Sino-Indian relations. Using international relations theory, especially realist paradigms like balance of power, balance of threat and balance of interest, Smith provides a good account of structural factors that further challenge the relationship between India and China and the complications introduced in Sino-Indian relations by Indo-US and Sino-Pak relations. For example, Smith points out that the United States wants to forge strong economic, political and military relations with India to balance or contain a rising China in East Asia. Similarly, China wants to establish strong diplomatic, military, economic and political ties with Pakistan to enmesh India in South Asia and hinder Delhi from pursuing its goal of



sitting at the high table in global affairs.

Smith also extends his analysis to explore the maritime relationship and security threats faced by India and China in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and the Western Pacific Ocean. He discusses China's securitisation of energy, especially through the Strait of Malacca between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. China is concerned that a US and allied blockade of the straits through which approximately 80 per cent of oil comes to China might stymie China's growth process.

Part Five of the book also discusses India's 'Look East' policy of expanding and strengthening relations with Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and other ASEAN countries. A novel feature of the book is the chapter titled, 'Securing India's Oceans: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI)'. The chapter discusses the importance of the ANI in enhancing India's security and mitigating the threat from China in the Indian Ocean. Here Smith also provides different scenarios for India, critically assesses these and highlights the best option for India to exacerbate China's ever-increasing concerns regarding the supply of energy through the Malacca Straits. The author also cautions India against aggressive posturing in and around the ANI, especially the Malacca Straits, which could lead to punitive measures by China on the disputed border where it enjoys a distinct military advantage vis-à-vis India.

"Cold Peace" also focuses on the economic relationship between India and China. Smith examines the volume, composition and terms of trade and the friction due to lack of market accessibility or difficulties in accessing markets in the two countries due to regulatory and security concerns. According to Smith, India's trade deficit with China has increased since 2006, exacerbating political tensions. The chapter concludes that the IR paradigm of realism marked by mistrust and security issues triumphs the liberal paradigm of increased economic interdependence.

This is further demonstrated by Smith's overview of India and China's mini-disputes at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and their disputes relating to water security. In 2009, China used its influence to block ADB-funded projects in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as its own territory. At the NSG, China not only prevented India in the wake of the 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal from acquiring nuclear fuel from countries which constitute the group, but also bypassed the NSG and constructed two nuclear plants in Pakistan in 2010 and 2011. On the issue of water, Smith opines that Indian concerns regarding water insecurity due to construction of dams by China on the Brahmaputra River are overblown. Overall, his analysis of the Sino-Indian economic relationship is that bilateral ties will continue to be marred by rivalry, mistrust, insecurity, estrangement, containment and 'coopetition', i.e. economic cooperation and political competition.

On the whole, Smith provides an objective and nuanced analysis of Sino-Indian relations. The book is empirically strong and fulfils its goal of providing an up-to-date analysis of the relations between the two Asian powers through a security studies paradigm. There are, however, some gaps. For example, Smith does not include interviews from experts in Pakistan, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and other countries whose perspectives could provide a more comprehensive analysis of the Sino-Indian equation, and especially India's 'Look East' policy. Moreover, Smith's analysis of this policy focuses on Japan and Vietnam at the expense of other ASEAN countries. Similarly, discussion of how the positions of Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka impact Sino-Indian relations is not included in the book. The inclusion of these would provide a holistic picture of Sino-India rivalry in South and East Asia.

One additional observation: Table 9.1, which illustrates China's arms sales to Pakistan, is outdated. The International Institute of Strategic Studies' 'Military Balance' and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's 'Military Expenditure Database' provide the most recent data on Chinese arms sales and transfers to Pakistan. These details aside, "Cold Peace" is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on Sino-Indian relations.

About the Author

Dr Raj Verma is writing a book on India-China relations. He was the Bagri Fellow at LSE's Asia Research Centre and a Visiting Associate Professor at Nankai University, China.

