SINO-INDIAN DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS IN THE GLOBAL COLD WAR CONTEXT, 1947–1950

1. *Introduction*

In international law, diplomatic *recognition* refers to the political and legal act by which an existing state confirms, through specific means, the emergence of a new state or a new government, and demonstrates its readiness to establish diplomatic relations with it[1]. Under traditional European international law, recognition politics operated through a hierarchical discourse of "civilized versus uncivilized," which constrained newly decolonized states within unequal legal, political, and economic structures. During the early Cold War, recognition was further conditioned by ideological alignment as well as geopolitical contestation. Whether decolonized states gained recognition from the international community depended on their ideological orientation, their choice of social and developmental path, and their relations with the two blocs led by the United States and the Soviet Union[2]. In 1947, India cast off its status as a colony of the British Empire and declared independence. On 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded, and on 30 December 1949, India formally recognized the new Chinese government. Following diplomatic negotiations, China and India officially established diplomatic relations on 1 April 1950. What were the political considerations behind the mutual recognition and establishment of diplomatic

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[1] Joseph Gabriel Starke, *An Introduction to International Law*, Eleven Edition, London, Butterworths, 1977, pp. 140–145.

[2] Matthew Craven, Sundhya Pahuja and Gerry Simpson, ed., *International Law and The Cold War, International Law and the Cold War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020; Mikulas Fabry, *Recognizing States International Society and the Establishment of New States Since 1776*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

relations between China and India in the early Cold War? How did the two ancient civilized nations interact concretely? How did such interaction underpinned by strategic autonomy break through the ideological criteria in the Cold War politics of recognition?

As the starting point of modern Sino-Indian relations, India's recognition of the People's Republic of China and the subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations have been interpreted in various ways by earlier scholarship. Indian scholar Anita Inder Singh argues that India's attitude toward recognizing the PRC influenced Britain's own decision on the matter[3]. Scholars such as Francine Frankel of the University of Pennsylvania, drawing on Indian archives, have revived old claims that Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs Jawaharlal Nehru was misled by his diplomatic advisers and deceived by China into establishing relations—an interpretation shaped by prejudices and hostile thinking that emerged after the 1962 border war[4]. Tansen Sen, a professor at NYU Shanghai, makes extensive use of newly released Indian documents to reconstruct the details of India's decision-making process. He contends that India's recognition of the PRC resulted from a long period of consultation and debate, during which Nehru consistently advocated acknowledging the new reality of the PRC and viewed the establishment of diplomatic relations as the appropriate framework through which bilateral disputes and problems could be resolved[5]. Tsinghua University scholar Cao Yin, after examining the Nehru Papers, argues that India sought to use the politics of recognition to demonstrate the independence and autonomy of its foreign policy and to enhance its international influence[6]. Chinese scholars Pan Jingguo and Gao Guowei, drawing on portions of newly declassified Chinese archives, have examined the PRC's decision-making in the establishment of diplomatic relations with India. They argue that the Sino-Indian negotiations created a model for China's future diplomatic practice with capitalist countries—negotiating first, establishing relations afterward—and opened a

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[3] Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship, 1947–1956*, London, Pinter Publishers, 1993.

[4] Francine Frankel, *When Nehru Looked East: Origins of India-US Suspicion and China-India Rivalry*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2020.

[5] Tansen Sen, "India's Recognition of the People's Republic of China," *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies*, 3, 2021, 2, pp. 186–201.

[6] Yin Cao, "India, Burma, and the Politics of Recognizing the New China," *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies*, 14, 2023, 1, pp. 363–363.

new stage in the PRC's diplomacy toward neighboring states under the guiding principle of "leaning to one side."[7]

Existing scholarship, however, provides insufficient analysis of the British bureaucratic frontier officials and imperial frontier traditions, as well as India's great-power diplomatic coordination with the United States, the United Kingdom during the diplomatic recognition and establishment of relations with China. Current research has not yet analyzed China's recognition of India and diplomatic ties establishment against the multilateral backdrop of its simultaneous negotiations with Britain, Burma, and other emerging non-socialist states. Nor has it noted that the preconditions for recognizing India and the detailed negotiation process embodied the PRC's strategic intent to balance and transcend the ideological bounds of the "leaning to one side" policy and pursue relations with all non-socialist states. Moreover, it offers limited examination of the concrete diplomatic interactions, negotiation processes, and bargaining strategies employed by both sides. The domestic contexts, internal decision-making logics, and multilateral diplomatic interactions on both sides demonstrate that Sino-Indian relations were, from the outset, shaped by a complex interplay of factors: the Cold War international order, territorial and economic interests, geopolitical competition, and significant differences in ideology and cultural traditions.

The article advances scholarship in two principal respects. First, at the level of Sino-Indian bilateral relations, the article highlights that the process of diplomatic recognition and the establishment of relations between China and India remained contingent, open-ended, and historically indeterminate—in line with Buzan and Lawson's configurational approach—rather than following a predetermined trajectory toward conflict because of the Tibet issue and border disputes. Drawing on newly available archival materials, the article demonstrates that India's deliberations over recognizing the People's Republic of China were shaped not only by geopolitical considerations, but also by domestic bureaucratic politics, postcolonial state-building concerns, and India's aspiration to enhance its international influence through coordination among major powers. At the same time, the article shows that the PRC leadership

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[7] Pan Jingguo, "The Establishment of Sino-Indian Diplomatic Relations and the PRC's Foreign Policy Choices," *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu* (*Contemporary China History Studies*), 15, 2008, 1, pp. 97–128; Gao Guowei and Gao Guangjing, "A Historical Examination of the Establishment of Sino-Indian Diplomatic Relations," *Dangshi yanjiu yu jiaoxue* (*Party History Research and Teaching*), 2011, 3, pp. 39–45.

strategically moved beyond the ideological principle of "leaning to one side" and viewed negotiations with India as a potential model for relations with non-socialist and newly independent states more broadly. Second, this article contributes to a broader rethinking of Euro-American-centered narratives of Cold War diplomacy. It highlights how Sino-Indian interactions helped challenge Western-dominated structures of international recognition and set an important precedent for other decolonizing states striving for a more autonomous position in the international community. This offers a more empirically grounded account of how newly independent Asian states such as China and India exercised agency in redefining diplomatic legitimacy, political recognition, and postcolonial international participation, which indirectly reshaped the Cold War's evolution from simplistic "bloc confrontation" toward a far more complex multipolar trajectory.

This article draws on extensive primary sources—including the Nehru Papers housed in the Manuscripts Division of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, records from the National Archives of India, and supplementary archival materials from China, Britain, the United States, and other countries—to situate Sino-Indian diplomatic recognition and the establishment of relations within a multilayered analytical framework of Cold War dynamics, South Asian geopolitics, and bilateral interaction. Drawing on Buzan and Lawson's configurational approach, this article analyzes the complexity of the two countries' strategic decision-making during the process of diplomatic recognition and the establishment of Sino-Indian relations, as well as the contingency, open-endedness, and historical indeterminacy underlying their interactions. The article examines the specific policy considerations and adjustments in perception that shaped India's recognition of the PRC and the bilateral negotiations that followed, revealing the complex calculations underlying India's early post-independent China policy and the strategic thinking of New China in breaking through the "leaning to one side" principle during its negotiation for diplomatic relations with India. In doing so, it challenges both the hostile narrative advanced by some scholars that China and India were antagonistic from the outset over the Tibet and boundary issues, and the narrative of inherent Sino-Indian friendship. This study also argues that Sino-Indian diplomatic practice, constituted a significant departure from these norms. Through mutual recognition and negotiated diplomatic establishment, China and India—both ancient civilizations and newly decolonized states—implicitly challenged Western-defined standards of civilization and legitimacy. Their emphasis on reciprocity, negotiation, and strategic autonomy disrupted both the unilateral logic of traditional recognition practices and the ideological criteria of Cold War bloc politics. In doing so, they articulated a more horizontal and

interactive model of recognition politics, which offered a potential pathway for other Global South states navigating the dual pressures of decolonization and bipolar rivalry.

1.1 Diplomatic Strategies and Mutual Perceptions of China and India

In the late 1940s, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified, and the international order became increasingly polarized into two rival blocs. Against the backdrop of a shifting global landscape and concerns about the security of a revolutionary regime, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formulated a series of foreign-policy principles on the eve of the founding of the PRC. Aimed at safeguarding the new regime and maintaining regional stability, these principles—"set up a new kitchen" (*lingqi luzao*), "clean the house before inviting guests" (*dasao ganjing wuzi zai qingke*), and "leaning to one side" (*yibiandao*)—counseled against rushing to establish diplomatic ties with imperialist countries and their satellites, while advocating alliance with the Soviet Union and other socialist states. At the CCP's Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee in March 1949, Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the CCP declared that the new regime would "not recognize the legitimacy of any foreign diplomatic missions or diplomatic personnel from the Guomindang (GMD) era, nor the continued validity of any unequal treaties concluded during that time." He further stressed that "the question of recognition by imperialist countries should not be hurriedly addressed now, and even for a considerable period after nationwide victory. There will be no need to resolve it urgently."[8] On 30 June 1949, Mao reiterated, in his essay "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" that, drawing on forty years of historical experience, "China must lean either to the side of imperialism or to the side of socialism; there is no third option."[9] These statements demonstrate that, in the period surrounding the establishment of the PRC, the CCP's foremost diplomatic concern was the management of relations with the two superpowers. However, regarding how to handle relations with other capitalist countries—particularly neighboring states such as India—Chinese policymakers had not yet developed a clear or coherent policy.

The CCP had only limited knowledge of India at the time, and its perceptions of the Nehru government were largely shaped by its own revolutionary

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[8] *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected Works of Mao Zedong), Beijing, Renmin Chubanshe, 1991, 4 Vols., IV, pp. 1434–1435.

[9] *Mao Zedong xuanji, op. cit.*, p. 1473.

experience and by a class-based, party-centered analytical framework. First, the CCP viewed the Indian National Congress (INC) with suspicion. Because the INC had come to power through a peaceful transfer of power from the British colonial administration, the CCP questioned the nature of the Indian regime and criticized it accordingly. Chinese Communist publications argued that India had obtained only a form of self-government rather than full, substantive independence; they condemned the Indian bourgeoisie as puppets of imperialism and portrayed Jawaharlal Nehru as a "traitor to the national independence movement," a "villain sabotaging the people's liberation struggle," and a "faithful servant of imperialism."[10] Second, the CCP denounced the Nehru government's suppression of the Indian Communist Party (ICP) and labor movements, labeling the Indian state a "reactionary government" that employed "certain fascist-style emergency military measures" domestically[11]. After the founding of the PRC, the Chairman of the Central People's Government Mao Zedong continued to hold a generally negative view of Nehru and his party. On 19 November 1949, in a telegram to B. T. Ranadive, the ICP General Secretary, Mao characterized the Nehru government as a "collaborator" of imperialism[12]. At this stage, the CCP remained focused on cultivating inter-party relations with the ICP rather than developing state-to-state relations with the Indian government. Its understanding of India was therefore highly limited and one-sided.

In addition, the newly founded PRC remained highly vigilant regarding India's inheritance of British imperial privileges in Tibet, its illegal border-related interests, and its perceived interference in Tibetan issues after independence. During the 1947 "Drive Out the Han" incident, the CCP criticized India for playing a significant role and argued that the episode had been orchestrated by Anglo-American imperialism and its follower, the Nehru government[13]. In December 1949, the Tibetan upper-class authorities dispatched a "mission" to the United States, Britain, and India in an effort to secure external support for the separatist ambitions of the Tibetan elite. Given Tibet's sensitive international position, the CCP leadership paid particular attention to India, as well as on the possibility that the United States and other Western powers might use India as a vehicle to interfere in Tibetan matters. It therefore instructed the People's

[10] in *Shijie zhishi* (World Knowledge), no. 14, 16 September, 1949, p. 12.
[11] in *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 15 March, 1949, p. 3.
[12] in *Renmin ribao*, 20 November, 1949, p. 1.
[13] in *Renmin ribao*, 3 September 1949, p. 1.

Liberation Army to accelerate its advance into Tibet[14]. Consequently, one of the major motivations behind the PRC's desire to establish diplomatic relations with India was to prepare for the domestic agenda of liberating Tibet—namely, to prevent the United States and the West from leveraging India to intervene in Tibetan matters and to ensure the security of China's southwestern frontier.

During the period when Jawaharlal Nehru was formulating the foreign policy of India's Interim Government, he had already perceived with great clarity that the postwar international landscape was dividing into two opposing blocs: a Western bloc led by the United States and an Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union. Drawing on India's painful experience of nearly two centuries of British colonial rule, Nehru concluded that India should distance itself from Cold War power politics and refrain from joining any bloc against another[15]. Nehru believed that aligning with either side would drag India into unnecessary conflicts, constrain its diplomatic flexibility, and reduce the country to a pawn in great-power rivalries[16]. Moreover, from the standpoint of domestic economic development, he did not want India's foreign policy to be subordinated to Cold War ideological confrontation. Through non-alignment, he hoped to obtain economic and technological assistance from both the Eastern and Western blocs. Having just shaken off British colonial domination, India was highly sensitive to any form of dependence or external control and sought to safeguard its newly won sovereignty. It was on this basis that Nehru articulated and practiced the strategy of non-alignment in India's diplomacy with both superpowers[17]. However, once Nehru publicly declared India's adoption of a non-aligned foreign policy, it immediately provoked suspicion and criticism from both sides of the Cold War divide. U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles condemned India's neutralism as immoral; Britain accused India of fence-sitting and evasiveness; the Soviet Union charged that India's

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[14] Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi, ed., *Mao Zedong Xizang gongzuo wenxuan* (Selected Works on Mao Zedong on Tibetan Affairs), Beijing, Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001, p. 6.

[15] "Free India's Role in World Affairs", First broadcast over All India Radio as Vice-President of the Interim Government, 7 September 1946, Gopal, S. ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984, Series 2, 73 Vols., I, p. 405.

[16] Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: A Strategic History of the Nehru Years*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 20; Dixit, J.N. *Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–2003*, New Delhi, Picus Books, 2003, p. 18.

[17] Nanda, B.R. ed., *Indian Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years*, Honolulu, University Press of Hawaii, 1976, pp. 170–171.

neutrality was hypocritical and that the country remained a British pawn[18]. Nonetheless, both the United States and the Soviet Union continued efforts to draw India into their respective blocs. Given China's status as a major Asian power and its growing importance in the emerging bipolar order, the decision of a non-socialist country to recognize the PRC quickly became an issue of intense international scrutiny—one easily labeled as "pro-Communist." Yet Nehru skillfully used the politics of recognizing the PRC to demonstrate India's independently formulated non-aligned policy and to construct India's image as a leading power in Asia.

Although India and China had a long history of civilizational contact, India's official perception of China after independence largely began with Nehru's own understanding of the country. At the time, the United States vigorously promoted the "China threat" narrative, arguing that once the CCP established its regime, it would export revolution throughout Asia, inspire Communist and left-wing parties to launch uprisings against democratic governments, destabilize societies, and ultimately bring all of Asia under Communist control[19]. Nehru, however, approached the postwar international order with his insight. He regarded China as a major power capable of influencing the global balance of power and viewed China's role from the standpoint of maintaining peace in Asia—a matter closely tied to India's own security and that of the broader South Asian region. He asserted, "It is not possible to solve any question in the Far East without cooperation of China."[20] Unlike many Western leaders, Nehru did not view the Chinese Revolution through a rigid ideological lens. He believed that the Chinese Communist Party was not subordinate to the Soviet Union and maintained a degree of independence. Nehru therefore advocated a policy of "cautious friendship" toward the CCP, stating, "It should be made manifest1y a friendly approach, and there should be no support of the enemies of China or forma1ation of any bloc which could be regarded as anti-Chinese or anti-communist."[21] For this reason, he explicitly rejected Burmese Prime

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[18] "Note for Asaf Ali the Ambassadors in U.S.A and K.P.S. Menon the Ambassadors in Nan King", 22 January 1947, Gopal, S. ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series 2, 73 Vols., I, p. 575; Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship, 1947–1956*, *op. cit*., p. 47.

[19] Ovendale, R. "Britain, the United States, and the Recognition of Communist China." *The Historical Journal*, 26, 1983, 1, pp. 139–158.

[20] Gopal, S. ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series 2, 73 Vols., XV, part II, p. 408.

[21] Gopal, S. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, 1947–1956*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979, 3 Vols., II, p. 65.

Minister U Nu's proposal for a defense pact among India, Burma, Ceylon, and Pakistan, as well as the U.S. initiative to extend the Truman Doctrine to Southeast Asia. Nehru's assessments of China consistently reflected flexibility and pragmatism rather than rigid ideological hostility. From the perspective of anti-colonialism and Afro-Asian solidarity, he also viewed the founding of the People's Republic of China as a landmark event symbolizing the liberation and revival of Asian peoples from foreign domination. In his view, the two largest Asian nations—both newly freed from semi-colonial conditions—ought to cooperate closely. Although doubts existed within the Indian government regarding the CCP's policy toward Tibet and uncertainty persisted about whether the new Chinese government would accept India's border claims, the Nehru government nevertheless moved swiftly to recognize the PRC and sought to resolve bilateral problems through diplomatic engagement.

Overall, the PRC and the Indian government held markedly different perceptions of the emerging Cold War order and adopted sharply divergent strategic choices. Although the CCP remained critical of the Nehru government, China's geographic proximity to India and their long-standing historical and cultural ties compelled the CCP to consider how, under the strategy of "leaning to one side", it should manage relations with capitalist states such as India—particularly neighboring ones. For India, the question of recognizing the PRC touched not only upon its strategic positioning between the U.S. and Soviet blocs, and the related issue of securing aid from Britain and the United States, but also upon India's desire to safeguard the privileges and border interests it had inherited in Tibet from the British Empire. Despite the differences between the two sides, the Nehru government, from the outset, sought to project an image of diplomatic independence and great-power status in Asia. Given China's pivotal role in the postwar international landscape, the Nehru government used the recognition of the PRC to demonstrate India's autonomous foreign policy, while also aiming to cooperate with the New China to reshape regional security in Asia, support anti-colonial liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and advocate for the PRC's legitimate seat at the United Nations as part of stabilizing the international system. Thus, the issue of diplomatic recognition and the establishment of relations became the starting point from which both China and India reconsidered their external strategies and their bilateral relationship.

1.2 India's Recognition of the PRC Amid Multilateral Strategic Pressures

As the balance of power in the Chinese Civil War shifted and the CCP gradually emerged victorious, debates within the Nehru government over

recognizing the new Chinese regime unfolded in three stages: whether to recognize, how to recognize, and when to recognize. In the first stage—whether to recognize—Indian discussions centered on evaluating the nature of the regime that the CCP was establishing, and on assessing how recognition of the PRC might affect India's domestic Communist movement, India–Burma relations, and the broader Asian regional situation. These debates also involved disputes with Britain, the United States, and other Western powers that were hostile to recognizing the new Chinese government. The second stage—how to recognize—focused on whether India should attach conditions to recognition. Different domestic interest groups debated whether India should insist on reaffirming its inherited privileges in Tibet and its claims concerning the boundary as preconditions for establishing diplomatic relations with the new Chinese government. The third stage—when to recognize—involved determining the optimal timing for recognition. Here, India weighed its own national interests while giving particular consideration to its relationships with major powers such as Britain and the United States, as well as with neighboring countries like Burma. The timing of recognition thus became a calculated decision shaped by India's domestic priorities and its broader diplomatic environment.

The first issue India debated internally was whether to recognize the People's Republic of China. After the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War, India closely monitored developments on the battlefield. In April 1948, K. M. Panikkar was appointed India's ambassador to China, and he regularly reported the progress of the Chinese Civil War to Foreign Secretary K. P. S. Menon. Nehru, for the most part, adopted a pragmatic rather than ideological approach toward China. He firmly believed that the CCP enjoyed broad support within China and that its victory was inevitable; for this reason, India should ultimately recognize the new government. However, some high-ranking Indian officials, influenced by Western ideological views and inheriting the British Empire's long-standing frontier anxieties, held a very different assessment. Figures such as Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel argued that the triumph of Chinese communism would lead the CCP to export revolution abroad. In this view, the "Chinese threat" had arrived at India's doorstep. They feared that the CCP might incite rebellion among Indian Communists, undermine the democratically elected government, and infiltrate border regions adjacent to Tibet[22]. Regarding the

[22] Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945–1950*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1974, 10 Vols., X, p. 345; Peter John Brobst, *The Future of the Great Game, Sir Olaf Caroe, India's Independence, and the Defense of Asia*, Akron, The University of Akron Press, 2005, p. 69.

nature of the Chinese Communist revolution, Nehru judged the CCP to be fundamentally nationalist rather than expansionist. He believed China would not export Communist revolution on a large scale and even expressed admiration for its broad popular base[23]. On the issue of the CCP's potential impact after seizing power, the United States warned that once the CCP established control, it would foment instability in Southeast Asia by mobilizing overseas Chinese communities and local Communist groups. Washington therefore exerted strong pressure on India not to recognize the new Chinese government[24]. Nehru, however, believed that recognizing the PRC would not "push the New China entirely into the Soviet camp," and that admitting the PRC into the United Nations would place its actions within a legitimate institutional framework capable of constraining any potential expansion or infiltration.

In early September 1948, the CCP launched the Liaoshen Campaign, decisively shifting the momentum of the Chinese Civil War. The Communist military advances temporarily quieted debates within the Nehru government over whether to recognize the New China. Nehru instructed the Ministry of External Affairs to adjust its earlier policy of neutrality and non-intervention, instead to actively seek contact with the CCP in preparation for recognizing the new regime. On 5 October, Ismail, Counselor at the Indian Embassy in Nanjing, inquired through Qiao Guanhua, then head of the Xinhua News Agency's Hong Kong bureau, whether the Indian side might visit CCP-controlled areas—an exploratory step aimed at laying the groundwork for future diplomatic relations with the CCP liberated areas[25]. In December 1948, Nehru rejected the Nationalist government's renewed call for mediation, choosing instead a policy of neutrality and "wait-and-see," while closely monitoring developments for an appropriate opportunity to act. As Nationalist forces retreated and ordered foreign embassies to evacuate Nanjing, Nehru instructed that "the Embassy as a whole should remain in Nanking and face the new situation." He reasoned that once the CCP occupied Nanjing, "We shall not,

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[23] "Prime Minister Note to K.P.S. Menon, the Foreign Secretary", 5 December, 1948, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, New Delhi, Geetika Publishers, 2018, 5 Vols., I, pp. 87–89.

[24] "Telegram from Foreign Office to Panikkar, India Embassy in Nan King", 3 June, 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study, op. cit.*, p. 108.

[25] "Concerning the Request by Ismail, Former Counsellor of the Indian Embassy in Nanjing, to Visit the Communist Liberated Areas," 8 October 1948, Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter CFMA), No. 105-00007-01(1).

of course immediately recognise it. But at the same time, we cannot ignore it. We may have to have some dealings with it."[26] For India, keeping the embassy in Nanjing would allow informal contact with the CCP, facilitate intelligence gathering, and help lay the foundation for a constructive relationship with the emerging Chinese government[27]. Nehru believed that India must "proceed cautiously" and observe how other major powers acted: "We need not necessarily fall in step with other powers. But we should also not break with them on this issue." At the same time, he emphasized that "we cannot afford to be hostile in any way to the New China."[28]

Consequently, Nehru handled the Nationalists' request to relocate the embassy with great skill—signaling goodwill toward the CCP while maintaining coordination with Britain, the United States, and others. He monitored their reactions but tried to ensure that such coordination did not provoke suspicion or hostility from the future Chinese government. After the CCP's Yangtze River Crossing Campaign in June 1949, Nehru concluded, "With the Kuomintang (Guomindang) in flight and now split, the Communist Government is the real Government of China. It is to our interest to seek every opening to establish whatever relations are possible with that Government."[29] In August 1949, during discussions on recognizing the New China, Foreign Secretary Menon argued, "To display a hostile attitude towards the new Government in China, or to delay recognition unduly after that Government has announced itself as the legal Government of China will be merely to throw the Chinese Government into the hands of Russia and to destroy whatever slender hope there may be of the emergence of what may be called a Nationalist-Communist Government in China."[30] With the CCP's victory in the Civil War and the founding

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[26] "Note from Prime Minister to K.P.S. Menon, the Foreign Secretary", 5 December 1948, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 87.

[27] "Note from Prime Minister to K.P.S. Menon Foreign Secretary", 14 December 1948, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 84.

[28] "Note from Prime Minister to K.P.S. Menon Foreign Secretary", 14 December 1948, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 84.

[29] "Telegram from Foreign Office to Panikkar, India Embassy in Nan King", June 3, 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 108.

[30] "Note by K.P.S. Menon on H.M.G.'s Latest views on the situation on China", 5 August 1949, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), File No. 710/2/CJK/49.

of the People's Republic of China in October, the Nehru government reached a consensus and agreed unanimously to recognize the new Chinese government.

The central issue in India's internal deliberations was how to recognize the New China—and specifically, whether India should make its inherited British-era privileges in Tibet and its border claims a precondition for recognition. Within the Ministry of External Affairs, two main positions emerged regarding the relationship between the "Tibet question" and the recognition of the PRC. The first was represented by officials who had inherited the British imperial system of political officers stationed in Tibet, notably H. E. Richardson, head of the Indian Mission in Lhasa, and H. Dayal, the Political Officer in Sikkim. Through a steady stream of reports from Lhasa and Gangtok, Richardson and Dayal repeatedly invoked the "China threat," arguing, Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the occupation or the domination of Tibet by a potentially hostile and possibly aggressive Communist power would be a threat to the security of India[31]. Dayal later moderated some of his language, noting "I have already suggested that, when the time comes to recognize the Communist Government, it should be stated in general terms that such recognition is without prejudice to the existing rights and commitments of the Government of India."[32] The second viewpoint was held primarily by India's post-1947 diplomatic personnel in China, especially Ambassador Panikkar and members of the embassy in Nanjing. They argued for the necessity of recognizing the new Chinese government and establishing diplomatic relations as soon as possible. On the Tibetan question, they maintained, "I therefore suggest that the wisest policy we could follow is to be vigilant for the time, giving such assistance and help as we can to the Tibetan Govt., and when the situation develops to remain strictly neutral on the ground that it is an internal affair. The establishment of normal diplomatic relations with China is in my own view the only way we can influence the course of events at that stage."[33]

Within the Nehru government, it was well understood that India could not make its position on Tibet a condition for recognizing the PRC. As

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[31] "Telegram from H. Dayal, the Political Officer in Sikkim to Foreign Office", 20 October 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 158.

[32] "Telegram from H. Dayal, the Political Officer in Sikkim to Foreign Office", 20 October 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 158.

[33] "Note by K.M. Panikkar on Tibet Policy", 4 November, 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, p. 166.

Menon put it: "If, while extending recognition to the new regime, we simultaneously made any suggestion regarding Tibet, I anticipated that there would be an adverse reaction from Peking. On the other hand, if we recognised the new regime unconditionally and took up the case of Tibet subsequently, the chances were that our representations would be put into the waste paper basket, although we might wish to help the present Tibetan Government."[34] For this reason, contemporary Indian scholarly criticism of Nehru—that he failed to settle the border issue or clarify Tibet's status before recognizing the PRC, thereby contributing to later misunderstandings and conflict—reflects hindsight and neglects the historical context in which decisions were made[35]. In practice, Nehru adopted the second approach: recognizing the PRC at an early stage and establishing diplomatic relations so that, when China moved to "liberate" Tibet, India could use diplomacy to safeguard the legal status of its mission in Lhasa and its trade agencies, and thereby preserve its interests in Tibet[36].

Regarding India's border interests, H. Dayal, the Political Officer in Sikkim, repeatedly invoked the "China threat." He argued, "Apart from the opportunity that such proximity would afford of Communist infiltration into India, it would encourage the Chinese Communists to press their country's long-standing claim to a large portion of the Assam Tribal Areas and also perhaps to revive pretensions to suzerainty over Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal."[37] Panikkar, however, took a different view. He maintained that China had never accepted the provisions of the 1914 Simla Convention. India's discussion of the Convention, he noted, "would depend largely upon the state of relations between the new Chinese regime and India." He also cautioned that in such discussions India should not allow itself to be seen as "merely a tool of Britain and the United States." Dayal countered that immediately after independence, India had already communicated to the Nationalist government its position on the 1914 Convention and its commitment to territorial integrity,

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[34] "Note by K.P.S. Menon, Foreign Secretary", 1 December, 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

[35] Tansen Sen, "India's Recognition of the People's Republic of China," *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies*, 3, 2021, 2, pp. 186–201.

[36] Richardson, H. E. *Tibet and Its History*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 180.

[37] "Telegram from H. Dayal, the Political Officer in Sikkim to Foreign Office", 20 October 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

and therefore India must adhere to this established policy[38]. In the end, Nehru adopted the latter view but reframed it in strategic rather than ideological terms. He affirmed that "it must be made clear to all concerned that any threat to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Ladakh or the McMahon Line areas will be resisted with all our force."[39] Thus, contrary to later criticisms by some Indian scholars—that Nehru naïvely accepted the advice of the supposedly "pro-Communist" Panikkar and was overly conciliatory toward the PRC—Nehru's guiding concern in deliberations over recognizing the New China was consistently the protection of India's border security and national interests[40]. Through internal debates over Tibet and the boundary question, Nehru secured consensus within the government to recognize the PRC unconditionally—while deliberately avoiding any linkage between recognition, the establishment of diplomatic relations, and issues related to Tibet or the border.

The final issue—the timing of recognition and its implications for India's interests—provoked the most intense debate within India. On 10 November 1949, India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, argued that India should be the first to extend recognition, calling such a move "politic and wise." Early recognition, he maintained, would merely acknowledge an obvious reality and symbolize four thousand years of Sino-Indian friendship. If India recognized the PRC only after Britain or other Western powers, the gesture would lose all significance. Moreover, the Kremlin would interpret India's early recognition as proof of its independence and neutrality[41]. However, prominent leaders—including Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel, Secretary General of the Ministry of External Affairs G. S. Bajpai, and many conservative civil servants—favored delaying recognition[42]. On 6 December, Patel wrote to

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[38] "Telegram from Political Official in Sikkim to Foreign Office", 14 November 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 180.

[39] "Note on the meeting held by the Prime Minister with Foreign Secretary (K.P.S Menon), K.M. Panikkar and Political Officer (H. Dayal) to discuss 'Policy on Tibet'", 30 December 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 218.

[40] Karunakar Gupta, *Sino-Indian relations, 1948–52: Role of K.M. Panikkar*, Calcutta, Minerva Asociates, 1987, pp. 87–99.

[41] "Letter form embassy of India, Moscow to Foreign Office", 10 November 1949, NAI, File No. 710/2/CJK/49.

[42] Panikkar, K.M. *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of A Diploma*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1955, p. 67.

Nehru arguing that India would gain no substantial advantage by acting first. Although India would eventually have to recognize the New China, "there would be no harm," he suggested, if India recognized it somewhat later than others. Nehru disagreed, insisting, "Our advisers are of opinion that it would be definitely harmful to recognise them after the Commonwealth countries have done so. It would mean that we have no policy of our own, but follow the dictates of other countries."[43] Bajpai also counseled delay. Since the Nationalist representative still occupied China's seat at the United Nations and the Kashmir issue was on the Security Council's agenda for deliberation, he argued that India needed to consider the sensitivities of the Nationalist government and therefore should postpone recognizing the PRC[44].

To secure broad political support, Nehru convened a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs on 17 December to discuss the issue. He briefed cabinet members and parliamentarians on both the rationale and the proposed timing of recognition. The Committee ultimately concluded that India should recognize the PRC before the Colombo Conference in January 1950, and Nehru lobbied members to forge consensus in support of the government's decision[45]. Faced with deep divisions over timing, Nehru adopted a two-track approach: on the one hand, he regularly wrote letters to provincial governors and chief ministers, and on the other, he used parliamentary debate to strengthen coordination among domestic stakeholders and build national consensus.

In determining the timing of its recognition of the PRC, India sought to strengthen coordination with major powers—particularly Britain and the United States—in order to secure their understanding. India first intensified communication with Britain and other Commonwealth members, hoping that a collective position might offset American pressure while minimizing resentment within the Commonwealth and preserving the possibility of future financial assistance from both Britain and the United States[46]. In October 1949,

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[43] "Letter from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Vallabhbhai Patel", 6 December 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 196.

[44] "Letter from G.S. Bajpai to B.N. Rau, the Indian Delegation at the UN", 3 November 1949, NAI, File No. 710/2/CJK/49.

[45] "Extract from the Proceedings of the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Legislature for the Ministry of External Affairs", 17 December 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 198.

[46] "Recognition of Communist Government of China", 22 November 1949, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), U.K. Foreign Office, FCO 371/75822.

the United States pressed India with four conditions for recognizing the New China: "1) Chi Commie regime has established effective control over China. 2)It has shown by actions it respects international obligations and intends honor them. 3)It has demonstrated satisfactorily it will conduct its international relations in conformity established concepts of diplomatic community. 4) Convincing evidence obtained this recognition would result in marked improvement GOI ability protect its interests."[47] Facing this pressure, Nehru personally traveled to the United States to explain India's position and seek American understanding so as to avoid alienating Washington. In his conversations with Secretary of State Dean Acheson and President Harry Truman, Nehru justified early recognition on the grounds of "our deep interest and concern for the welfare of the Chinese People" and "India's Proximity to China." This rhetoric—framed in terms of humanitarian concern and geographic necessity—helped soften U.S. hostility toward India and enabled Nehru to win a degree of American accommodation[48].

Some Chinese scholars have argued that the failure of Nehru's U.S. visit was the key factor prompting consensus within the Indian government on recognizing the PRC, but this claim is debatable[49]. In fact, Nehru's objective in visiting the United States was primarily to obtain American understanding, not to secure support. With regard to Washington's condition that China must first demonstrate its willingness to abide by international treaty obligations before receiving recognition, the Indian government maintained, "We have repeatedly told U.K. and USA Representatives in Delhi that delay in recognition of new Government of making recognition dependent upon fulfilment of conditions which new regime could legitimately represent as hard or humiliating would only strengthen those who wish Chinese foreign policy to follow Moscow's."[50]

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[47] "Telegram from the Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in India (Donovan)", 7 October 1949, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), 1949, The Far East: China, Vol., IX, Document 121.

[48] "Record talk with President Truman", 13 October 1949, Gopal, S. ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series 2, 73 Vols., XIII, part II, p. 299; "Memorandum of Conversation", by the Secretary of State, FRUS, 1949, The Far East: China, Vol., IX, 893.01/10-1349.

[49] Zhou Qian, "The Process, Motivations, and Significance of India's Recognition of the People's Republic of China," *Hubei Ligong Xueyuan Xuebao (*Journal of Hubei Polytechnic University, Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 41, 2024, 3, p. 85.

[50] "Telegram from Foreign Office to the Indian Delegation at the UN", 25 September 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 152.

Nehru insisted that recognition should not wait until after the meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers; early recognition would highlight India's independent foreign policy and demonstrate that it was not merely a follower of Western powers. At the same time, because the Nationalist regime still held China's seat at the United Nations and possessed voting rights relevant to the Kashmir issue, India decided to set the recognition date after 5 December, when the UN General Assembly had concluded deliberations on resolutions concerning China. India also considered that delaying recognition might adversely affect its future position regarding Kashmir[51].

In addition, the Nehru government intensified consultations with neighboring states such as Burma on the timing of recognition. Its aim was to achieve a collective, synchronized recognition by non-Communist countries, thereby avoiding the stigma of appearing "pro-Communist," while simultaneously projecting India's role as a leading power in Asia. Nehru engaged in close coordination with Burma, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Indonesia. The Burmese Foreign Ministry repeatedly assured India that it would act in concert with New Delhi. However, on 16 December, Burma unexpectedly recognized the PRC without informing India in advance, disrupting India's diplomatic choreography. The Indian ambassador in Rangoon was furious, noting that the Burmese Foreign Minister had coordinated with India as late as the 15th, yet on the 16th recognized the PRC without notifying the Indian embassy. India only learned of the decision through a Reuters report and confirmed it only after making inquiries to the Burmese Foreign Ministry. As the ambassador complained, "All this is very annoying. But it is typically Burmese."[52] This anger indirectly reveals India's desire to use coordinated recognition—especially with its neighbors—to signal its leadership in Asia and, ideally, to be the first non-Communist country to recognize the New China. Burma's unexpected move deprived India of that symbolic advantage. Influenced by public pressure that India should act quickly, Nehru swiftly ended the protracted debate over timing, and the government reached a consensus to recognize the PRC on 30 December 1949[53].

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[51] "Note by the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru", 17 November 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[52] "Letter from India Embassy to Foreign Office", 17 December 1949, NAI, File No. 710/2/CJK/49.

[53] Message from the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the Prime Minister Clement Attlee", 19 December 1949, TNA, U.K. Foreign Office, FO 371/75829.

On 20 November 1949, Nehru sent a formal note to the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Sri Lanka, and Burma explaining India's reasons for recognizing the New China. First, he argued that the PRC was a stable and effectively functioning government that exercised real control over the entire Chinese mainland. Second, recognizing the New China would facilitate the resumption of normal trade relations. He strongly recommended early recognition, warning that delaying recognition could lead to political and economic harm, might push the PRC fully into the Soviet camp, and could even create domestic disorder in Southeast Asian countries, where large overseas Chinese communities identified with the new Chinese government[54]. India's arguments also served as a response to the conditions the United States had earlier proposed regarding recognition. By employing Cold War language and security concerns, Nehru sought to persuade other countries to adopt a similar position. After more than a year of deliberation, assessment, and internal debate, Nehru informed the Indian cabinet on 27 December that the government would recognize the PRC. On 30 December, India sent a letter to the new Chinese government announcing its unconditional recognition of the People's Republic of China. India's final decision to recognize the PRC rested primarily on the following considerations: First, an inescapable reality: The Chinese Communist Party had won a decisive victory in the Civil War and established a unified national government. As a neighboring state, India could not ignore the emergence of this new Asian power and had to find a way to engage with it. Second, Protecting India's interests in Tibet: India had inherited certain privileges and interests in Tibet from British India. Nehru believed that by recognizing the PRC early and establishing formal diplomatic relations, India would be better positioned to negotiate the preservation of its interests—at minimum, to maintain the legal status and normal functioning of its mission in Lhasa and its border-related claims.

In implementing its strategy for recognizing the New China, the Nehru government displayed considerable sophistication. On the one hand, Nehru carefully weighed the advice of key advisers such as Ambassador Panikkar and India's representative to the United Nations B. N. Rau, while also taking into account the views of frontier political officers like Richardson and Dayal, who handled Tibet- and border-related affairs. Through letters to chief ministers and discussions within the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External

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[54] "Circular Telegram to specified Indian Missions regarding question of recognition of China", 20 November 1949, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., pp. 184–185.

Affairs, Nehru encouraged broad domestic debate and gradually built consensus behind the decision to recognize the PRC. On the other hand, Nehru coordinated closely with Britain and other Commonwealth members, as well as with neighboring states such as Burma and Nepal. By doing so, India sought to collectively offset American pressure regarding the recognition of the PRC, while simultaneously asserting the independence of India's foreign policy and projecting the image of India as a leader in Asia. Nehru's coordination with the major Western powers and his interaction with other Commonwealth governments fully reflected his strategic reasoning and demonstrated the decisiveness and sophistication of an experienced statesman. This approach contradicts the claims of political opponents who portrayed Nehru as naïve, overly trusting of Panikkar, or excessively idealistic, as well as later scholarly depictions that reduce Nehru's China policy to simple idealism[55].

The internal struggles within the Nehru government also reflected India's post-independence identity anxiety and strategic pragmatism. On the one hand, India sought to inherit Britain's privileges in Tibet, including military garrisons, postal services, and extraterritorial rights; on the other, it aimed to uphold its image as an anti-colonial leader. The eventual recognition of the new China was a contingent outcome shaped by internal power balancing, the pursuit of an anti-colonial image, and realistic considerations over the Tibet issue, rather than an inevitable expression of goodwill toward China. Moreover, China and India shared a basic understanding of the international and regional situation. As neighboring states, both recognized that regional security was essential to national security. As two newly independent major powers, China and India sought to secure their own national interests by promoting peace and stability in Asia. This shared perception enabled both sides to seek common ground while acknowledging differences, ultimately forming the consensus necessary for the establishment of diplomatic relations. India's move directly undermined the U.S.-led policy of containment, blockade, and non-recognition toward China. It broke through the initial international isolation faced by the People's Republic of China and provided a crucial pivot for China to regain its international space.

1.3 Sino-Indian Negotiations on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations

Although the CCP had already adopted the foreign-policy strategy of "leaning to one side" toward the Soviet-led socialist bloc and of not rushing to

[55] Karunakar Gupta, *Sino-Indian relations, 1948–52: Role of K.M. Panikkar*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.

establish relations with capitalist countries, the question of how to handle diplomatic relations with non-socialist states such as India still required careful consideration—especially with respect to outstanding historical issues such as Tibet and the border. On 30 September 1949, the Common Program stipulated that: "The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China may, on the basis of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, negotiate with and establish diplomatic relations with foreign governments that have severed ties with the reactionary Guomindang and adopt a friendly attitude toward the PRC."[56] This article laid out the conditions, principles, and procedures for the PRC's establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign states, providing a clear legal basis for such negotiations. On 1 October, upon the founding of the PRC, Mao Zedong announced from Tiananmen that: "The Central People's Government is willing to establish diplomatic relations with any foreign government that is prepared to observe the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial sovereignty."[57] Soon thereafter, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist states recognized and established relations with the PRC. On 2 October, Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai sent a formal note to foreign governments expressing China's desire to "establish diplomatic relations on the basis of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial sovereignty."[58] The Indian side, through its embassy in Nanjing, reported China's message to New Delhi. Because the United States and Britain had not yet reached agreement on recognizing the PRC, and the United Nations and its Security Council had likewise not taken a position, India sought to buy time. At the same time, Indian officials understood that delaying recognition and failing to respond might place foreign missions in Nanjing—including India's—at risk once the CCP took over. After consultations with Britain, India adopted much of the language used by the British in their reply, emphasizing historic friendship and a positive consideration of recognition[59]. On 7 October, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs formally replied to Beijing, stating that India had received the communication announcing the establishment of the Central People's Government,

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[56] In *Renmin ribao*, 30 September, 1949, p. 2.

[57] In *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 2 October 1949, p. 1.

[58] "Telegram from Nanking to Foreign Office", 3 October 1949, NAI, File No. 710/2/CJK/49.

[59] "Letter from Archibald Nye to K.P.S. Menon", October 1949, NAI, File. No. 710/2/CJK/49.

that it was assessing developments in China, and that the Indian ambassador in Nanjing had been recalled for consultations. During the interim, India hoped that informal contact could be maintained, believing that the presence of its representative in Nanjing would be mutually beneficial. The note further underscored the enduring, centuries-old friendship between China and India and India's desire to preserve that friendship[60]. During this period, the Indian government continued carefully evaluating the situation in China and weighing the positions and attitudes of other major powers.

During this period, the top leadership of the CCP was also considering how to develop diplomatic relations with non-socialist countries such as Burma and India. Although the CCP's general pre-founding attitude had been to delay establishing relations with capitalist states—so as to prevent the U.S.-led imperialist bloc from penetrating and undermining the revolutionary camp[61]. The situation changed after Burma recognized the PRC on 16 December. This new circumstance compelled the PRC to reconsider its approach toward relations with capitalist countries. First, the PRC moved to establish procedural conditions for diplomatic recognition. On 19 December, in response to the Burma case, Mao Zedong instructed that: "Capitalist countries wishing to establish diplomatic relations with China must first undergo negotiations." He further detailed the procedures: 1) China should telegraph the government in question to ask whether it is willing to sever relations with the Guomindang; 2) China should request that the government dispatch an authorized representative to Beijing for negotiations; 3) Diplomatic relations would be established only after negotiations have produced satisfactory results. Mao stressed that these procedures were "necessary" and should apply to "all capitalist countries."[62] Second, on 7 January 1950, the PRC—after consulting with the Soviet Union—decided to telegraph the United Nations stating its intention to send its own representatives to replace the GMD delegation. As a result, support for the PRC's representation at the UN, including the expulsion of the GMD representatives, became a precondition in China's negotiations

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[60] "Letter from K.P.S. Menon to Roberts, High Commissioner for the UK, New Delhi", 7 October 1949, NAI, File. No. 710/2/CJK/49.

[61] Shen Zhihua and Ding Ming, trans., "Liu Shaoqi's Report to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and to Stalin (4 July 1949)," *Dangdai Zhongguo Shi Yanjiu* (*Contemporary China History Studies*), 1997, 2, p. 104.

[62] "Capitalist countries must conduct negotiations with China before establishing diplomatic relations," 19 December, 1949, in *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* (Selected Diplomatic Papers of Mao Zedong), Beijing, Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1994, p. 117.

with capitalist states seeking to establish diplomatic ties[63]. Third, once India recognized the PRC, Beijing reassessed the international environment. Amid stalemated Sino-Soviet negotiations, Mao incorporated talks with India and Britain into a broader strategy designed to increase China's leverage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. He accordingly agreed to invite an Indian representative to Beijing for negotiations on diplomatic recognition. Finally, the urgency of peacefully liberating Tibet became an important factor. The CCP leadership believed that establishing diplomatic relations with India would help stabilize the Sino-Indian frontier and reduce the risk of U.S. manipulation, which might otherwise encourage India to interfere in China's liberation of Tibet. Mao stated explicitly in a telegram of 10 January—addressed to the Politburo and forwarded to Liu Bocheng, Deng Xiaoping and He Long of Southwest Bureau, and leaders of Northwest Bureau tasked with advancing into Tibet: "Now that Britain, India, and Pakistan have all recognized us, this is extremely advantageous for our advance into Tibet."[64] Thus, the PRC's decision to pursue diplomatic relations with India resulted from a combination of domestic and international considerations.

In accordance with the CCP leadership's established procedure of "negotiating first, establishing diplomatic relations afterward" with capitalist countries, Zhou Enlai, after internal discussions within the CCP Central Committee, replied to Nehru on 4 January 1950: "The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China is willing, on the basis of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, to establish diplomatic relations between the Governments of China and India, and hopes that your government will dispatch a representative to Beijing to conduct negotiations on this matter."[65] On 6 January, the Indian government sent a letter to Beijing proposing the appointment of A. K. Sen as *Chargé d' affaires ad interim*, stating that "any matters of mutual concern may be discussed through normal channels once diplomatic representatives have been exchanged." India's decision to appoint Sen—then stationed in Nanjing—as chargé d' affaires reflected

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[63] Shen Zhihua, *Mao Zedong, Sidalin yu Chaoxian zhanzheng* (Mao Zedong, Stalin, and the Korean War), Guangzhou, Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2014, p. 136.

[64] *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Formation of the State), Beijing, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987, 20 Vols., I, p. 226.

[65] Lian Zhengbao, Wang Jingtang, and Huang Taopeng, comps., *Jiemi Waijiao Wenxian: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianjiao dang'an, 1949–1955* (Declassified Diplomatic Documents: Archives on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of the People's Republic of China, 1949–1955), Beijing, Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2006, p. 226.

two main considerations: 1) Diplomatic dignity: Indian officials argued, "It would of course have been undignified for us to send a representative from here to Peking." 2) Substantive issues: They believed the Chinese government would be unwilling to negotiate on substantive matters such as Tibet, and thus preferred to avoid negotiations altogether[66]. That same day, the Ministry of External Affairs instructed Sen, "If any matters of substance are raised by the Chinese Government you should refer them to us for instructions."[67] This revealed India's deep concern that the negotiations might involve substantive bilateral issues—particularly Tibet—and its desire to bypass the negotiation stage and proceed directly to the establishment of diplomatic relations through an exchange of notes. On 12 January, the Chinese side responded by inviting Sen to Beijing *only* in the capacity of "India's representative" to conduct formal negotiations on establishing diplomatic relations, explicitly rejecting his appointment as chargé d' affaires and upholding China's principle of "negotiating first, establishing relations afterward."[68]

In response to China's proposal that India send a representative to Beijing for negotiations on establishing diplomatic relations, the Nehru government examined Britain's approach to its own negotiations with the PRC. The British government—seeking to avoid discussions that might touch on sensitive issues such as Hong Kong, British commercial interests on the Chinese mainland, or the question of China's representation at the United Nations—adopted a strategy of exerting pressure on Beijing. In its initial note recognizing the new Chinese government, Britain proposed appointing J. C. Hutchison as Chargé d' Affaires prior to the formal appointment of an ambassador. China, however, agreed only to receive Hutchison as a representative empowered solely to negotiate the question of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In response, London instructed its representative in Nanjing to inform the Chinese government that "in their view the interchanges which have taken place constitute establishment of diplomatic relations and should seek acceptance of this view. If this is NOT accepted, then he should point out that he CANNOT

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[66] "Telegram from K.P.S. Menon to the Indian Delegation at the UN, New York", 9 January 1950, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 230.

[67] "Telegram from K.P.S. Menon to Sen", 9 January 1950, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 229.

[68] Lian Zhengbao, et al., *Jiemi Waijiao Wenxian: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianjiao dang'an, 1949–1955*, *op. cit*., p. 270.

go to Peking except as Charge d' Affaires."[69] On 11 January, while attending the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' Conference in Sri Lanka, Nehru wrote to Foreign Secretary Menon, noting that China's attitude toward Britain was broadly similar to its attitude toward India. Therefore, India should likewise resolve the issue of establishing diplomatic relations before taking any further steps.[70] On 13 January, Menon sought Nehru's instructions on how to respond to Beijing's latest communication. Menon believed that Zhou Enlai intended only to discuss with A. K. Sen the procedural details of establishing embassies in Beijing and New Delhi, and recommended that any substantive issues be raised only after diplomatic representatives were exchanged.[71] Ultimately, Nehru chose to synchronize India's negotiating strategy with that of the British. On 17 January, he telegraphed Zhou Enlai, stating that "the exchange of correspondence that has taken place between us constitutes agreement to establish diplomatic relations between the Government of India and the Central People's Government of the Chinese People's Republic." Adopting Menon's advice, Nehru further specified that "Mr. Sen will be in a position to discuss preliminary and procedural matters connected with establishment of missions in Peking and in New Delhi. Any matters of substance will have to be discussed after the appointment of Ambassadors."[72]

India's adoption of the British negotiating formula in its communication with Beijing aroused deep suspicion and dissatisfaction on the Chinese side. On Nehru's 17 January telegram, Liu Shaoqi, Vice Chairman of the Central People's Government, made a clear marginal comment: "This is the British government using India to test us. The British are afraid that we will raise important issues for negotiation; therefore, Hutchison does not dare come, and they want India to come first. Are they asking whether this is acceptable to us? If we accept this, then not only will the Indian representative come, but representatives of Britain and other countries will also follow."[73] From the

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[69] "Telegram from Prime Minister to K.P.S. Menon", 11 January 1950, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit*., p. 235.

[70] ibid.

[71] "Telegram from K.P.S. Menon to Prime Minister", 13 January 1950, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study, *op. cit*., p. 236.

[72] "Telegram from Jawaharlal Nehru to K. P. S. Menon", 16 January 1950, Avtar Singh Bhasin, p. 238; "Nehru's Reply to Zhou Enlai (Translation)", 17 January, 1950, in Lian Zhengbao, et al., *Jiemi Waijiao Wenxian*, *op. cit*., p. 271.

[73] *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao* (Liu Shaoqi's Manuscripts since the Formation of the State), (Beijing, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987, 5 Vols., I, p. 354.

Chinese perspective, India and Britain were acting in coordination, and India's sudden change in tone was interpreted as being directed by Britain. Beijing believed that India's attempt to bypass the agreed-upon negotiation process was essentially "throwing stones to test the water" on Britain's behalf—probing the PRC's attitude before Britain made its next move. Nehru's 17 January telegram was indeed influenced by the British negotiating strategy, and that India sought to remain in step with Britain in the sequence of establishing diplomatic relations[74]. However, whether India was deliberately "testing the waters" for Britain remains uncertain. Based on presently available archival evidence, the Nehru government's primary concern appears to have been its own interests: specifically, the fear that China might raise substantive issues—such as Tibet—during the negotiations. To avoid such discussions, India adopted the British formula and unilaterally asserted that the exchange of telegrams constituted the establishment of diplomatic relations, thereby seeking to bypass the negotiation stage altogether[75].

After the Chinese side reported the contents of India's 17 January reply to the top CCP leadership, Mao Zedong personally drafted the telegram to India. At 1:00 a.m. on 20 January, Mao telegraphed Liu Shaoqi, agreeing with Liu's assessment and instructing: "Send a telegram to Nehru first, stating in essence that we agree to Mr. A. K. Sen serving as a temporary representative and coming to Beijing to negotiate the preliminary and procedural matters concerning the establishment of diplomatic missions."[76] At 7:00 a.m. the same morning, Mao sent another telegram to Liu: "The wording of the full reply to Nehru must be considered carefully, because this reply will serve as the model for our communications with Britain and all other capitalist countries. Instruct the Foreign Ministry to draft a telegram and send it to us for review. It does not matter if this reply is issued a few days later. For drafting the reply, please have the Foreign Ministry provide the full texts of India's first communication, our first reply, and India's second communication."[77] After further reflection, Mao sent

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[74] "Telegram from Prime Minister to K.P.S. Menon", 11 January 1950, Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed., *India-China Relations, 1947–2000, A Documentary Study*, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

[75] "The Course of the Negotiations on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between China and India," 17 January, 1950, CFMA, No. 105-0007-02.

[76] "Telegram Concerning Approval for the Indian Interim Representative to Come to Beijing to Negotiate the Establishment of Diplomatic Missions," 20 January 1950, in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 20 Vols., I, p. 249.

[77] "Telegram to Liu Shaoqi Regarding the Drafting of the Reply to Nehru," 20 January 1950, in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, 20 Vols., I, p. 250.

a third telegram to Liu that same day: "The purpose of prolonging negotiations on establishing diplomatic relations with Britain, India, and other countries is to pose some difficulties and delay the process, thereby demonstrating that we are not eager to establish relations with these imperialist countries and their dependent states. On the contrary, it makes clear that they are anxious to gain access to us. At the same time, this strategy delays the efforts of the U.S. imperialist bloc to infiltrate China."[78] Thus, Mao concluded that the reply to India should: "Only agree that A. K. Sen come to Beijing to discuss the preliminary and procedural matters concerning the establishment of diplomatic missions, and refrain from mentioning anything else. The scope of Nehru's message can be interpreted in many ways; it is best that we do not engage with it."[79]

After careful deliberation, the Chinese side resolved the issue by having Vice Foreign Minister Li Kenong send a letter to Nehru, stating: "Between China and India, there have been no important matters that require discussion prior to the mutual exchange of ambassadors."[80] This effectively allayed India's concerns and set aside the sharp disagreements between the two sides. India ultimately agreed to send A. K. Sen to Beijing as a negotiating representative, ending the dispute and breaking the nearly month-long stalemate. In reality, during the negotiations, China strictly limited the agenda to two issues: 1) India's relations with the Nationalist government (the termination of ties), and 2) the question of China's representation at the United Nations. China had no intention of addressing historical issues such as Tibet or the border during this round of talks. Mao's multiple telegrams in a single day demonstrate that he personally designed the strategy of "negotiating first, establishing diplomatic relations afterward" with India. In the CCP leadership's view, this approach would also serve as the standard model for the PRC's negotiations on diplomatic recognition with Britain, Burma, and other capitalist states.

On 22 February, 1 March, and 15 March 1950, China and India held three rounds of negotiations on the establishment of diplomatic relations. Discussions focused primarily on: 1) India's termination of relations with the Guomindang government; 2) the disposition of the GMD institutions and property remaining in India; 3) India's position on expelling the GMD delegation from the

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[78] "Mao Zedong's Instruction on the Aim of Delaying the Negotiations with Britain and India," 20 January 1950, CFMA, No. 110-00022-05.

[79] ibid.

[80] Lian Zhengbao, et al., *Jiemi Waijiao Wenxian, op. cit*., p. 272.

United Nations, and 4) India's support for the participation of the government of the People's Republic of China at the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Throughout the negotiations, India adopted a constructive and cooperative attitude and ultimately met China's key conditions. Subsequently, the two sides held four additional rounds of talks regarding the mutual exchange of diplomatic missions. China and India agreed that the two governments would formally establish diplomatic relations on 1 April 1950. India thus became the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC through formal negotiations. During the negotiation process, the Chinese side paid close attention to both India's statements and its concrete actions. After India issued a declaration severing relations with the GMD government, China waited until the Nationalist government in Taiwan fully broke off diplomatic ties with India and withdrew their representatives before officially advancing the final stage of negotiations. Likewise, on the question of China's representation at the UN, the PRC insisted that India clearly state its position in support of the PRC.

An examination of the PRC's agenda-setting and substantive negotiations with India shows that China's principle of "negotiating first, establishing diplomatic relations afterward" required that, prior to formal diplomatic recognition, both sides must exchange representatives for talks; the other party must clarify its position on China's preconditions; and only after demonstrating sincerity in respecting China's sovereignty could negotiations proceed on procedural matters such as the modalities of diplomatic recognition, the timeline, and the exchange of envoys. China's "negotiation-before-recognition" policy toward India rested on three concrete principles: 1) Any state wishing to establish relations with the PRC must sever diplomatic ties with the GMD authorities entrenched in Taiwan, recognize the Central People's Government of the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China, and acknowledge that Taiwan is an integral part of China; 2) The state must adopt a friendly attitude toward the PRC and support the restoration of the PRC's legitimate seat in the United Nations; 3) The state must transfer all Chinese-owned properties and their rights of disposition within its territory to the PRC government. Through its negotiations with India, the PRC established both the guiding principles and the procedural framework for forming diplomatic relations with other capitalist countries. In practice, these negotiations also revised and expanded the meaning of the strategy of "leaning to one side" (*yibian dao*). The strategy of "leaning to one side" did not preclude contacts with capitalist countries; rather, under this guiding principle, China could establish diplomatic relations with them conditionally. As Zhou Enlai later explained: "We must rely on the progressive forces, win over the middle forces, and split the die-hard elements. This

will make our diplomatic work more flexible. It is not a simple matter of two hostile blocs with no room for maneuver. Only in this way can we open new possibilities for our diplomacy."[81]

Through its negotiations with India and careful observation of India's position on the question of China's representation in the United Nations, the PRC leadership developed a deeper understanding of India's foreign policy. Only a few days after the establishment of Sino-Indian diplomatic relations, Zhou Enlai, in explaining the tasks of Chinese diplomacy, stated: "Our mission is to support and promote the development of national liberation movements." Later, in response to arguments that countries such as India were "formally independent yet in essence still colonies or semi-feudal societies," Zhou pointed out: "Although these countries were once colonies, they are now politically independent, with their own parliaments and governments, ruled by their national bourgeoisie. How can we still call them colonies? Only those directly ruled by imperialism are colonies. Southeast Asian countries have contradictions with imperialism on questions of war and peace. We must work actively to win them over and help them maintain peaceful neutrality."[82] Shortly after establishing diplomatic relations with India, China proceeded—through similar negotiation-based processes—to establish relations with Nepal, Burma, and several other neighboring states. These developments significantly expanded the PRC's diplomatic landscape and ultimately inaugurated a new chapter in China's diplomacy in its surrounding region.

2. *Conclusions*

Against the backdrop of the Cold War, China and India held markedly different international strategic perspectives and made divergent strategic choices. In India, debates over recognizing the New China were shaped by parliamentary discussions and media commentary that inherited the frontier anxieties of the British Indian colonial Empire, focusing heavily on protecting the privileges and border interests India had inherited in Tibet. The internal struggles within the Nehru government also reflected India's post-independence identity anxiety and strategic pragmatism. Through multiple rounds of internal consultation and parliamentary debate, Nehru succeeded in forging a domestic

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[81] *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan* (Selected Diplomatic Papers of Zhou Enlai), Beijing, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1990, p. 25.

[82] Li Da'nan, "Zhou Enlai and Sino-Indian Relations," *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao* (CCP Party History Materials), 65, 1998, 1, p. 39.

consensus. Facing pressure from the United States, India intensified its coordination with major Western powers—particularly Britain and other Commonwealth members—to avoid bearing the brunt of American hostility alone. At the same time, Nehru strengthened consultations with neighboring states such as Burma and Nepal in order to project India's image as a regional power and to persuade domestic political forces to support early recognition of the PRC. When Burma unexpectedly recognized the PRC first, Nehru effectively used this development in domestic debates, enabling India to quickly conclude its internal discussions on timing and to reach a consensus in favor of early recognition. On the Chinese side, perceptions and policies toward India evolved from early ideological hostility—derived from Cold War bloc thinking—to a gradual acknowledgment of India's non-aligned diplomacy and foreign-policy autonomy. Over time, China increasingly sought to establish united front with India on the basis of regional security considerations. Nevertheless, Communist ideology and revolutionary diplomacy continued to shape Chinese perceptions of India.

During the negotiations on establishing diplomatic relations, the Nehru government drew heavily on British methods and experience, but it remained autonomous and analytically independent on matters concerning India's own national interests. It neither yielded to American pressure nor simply followed the British precedent. Instead, India maintained an independent decision-making process, built domestic consensus through internal consultation, coordinated with major powers such as the United States and Britain, and engaged in dialogue with neighboring states. Ultimately, India recognized the PRC unconditionally, accepted China's proposal for negotiations prior to formal recognition, and became the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. India's decision reflected a combination of factors: 1) Realist considerations, especially protecting India's inherited interests in Tibet and its border claims; 2) the desire to signal India's non-aligned foreign policy amid the U.S.–Soviet Cold War; and 3) an aspiration to shape a new model of inter-Asian relations among newly independent states. On the Chinese side, although the initial impetus to engage with India stemmed partly from the need to break the stalemate in Sino-Soviet negotiations, the wave of recognition from Burma, Britain, and other capitalist countries led Beijing to attach greater importance to diplomatic engagement with India. The PRC seized this opportunity and began to formulate systematic principles and concrete procedures for establishing diplomatic relations with non-socialist countries. It was in this context that China creatively introduced the practice of "negotiating before

establishing diplomatic relations"—a departure from established international diplomatic convention.

The PRC's practice of "negotiating before establishing diplomatic relations" was, on the one hand, an innovation that departed from conventional international practice. Under normal diplomatic custom, once two governments exchanged notes expressing their intention to recognize one another and establish relations, formal diplomatic relations were considered to have begun. In contrast, the PRC leadership's concept of "negotiating before establishing diplomatic relations" represented a creative integration of the struggle for national independence, equality, and dignity with the principles of international law. It marked an important and pioneering exercise in the PRC's independent foreign policy and drew a clear line between the diplomacy of the New China and the diplomacy of humiliation of the old regime[83]. On the other hand, this approach did not violate international legal principles governing the recognition of governments. According to the fundamental norms of international recognition, recognizing a new government means acknowledging its legitimate authority to represent the state and expressing a willingness to establish or maintain normal relations with it—while severing all official ties with the previous government[84]. From the perspective of the PRC's diplomatic practice, negotiating with non-socialist countries in order to establish diplomatic relations broke with the earlier strategy of "leaning to one side", which prioritized relations solely with the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist states and delayed recognition of capitalist countries. In subsequent years, China used the India model of "negotiating before establishing diplomatic relations" in establishing relations with Burma, Nepal, Indonesia, and other states. This approach facilitated mutual recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations and, in doing so, helped break the Western-led isolation, blockade, and hostility toward the PRC. It also opened a new chapter in China's diplomacy with its neighboring countries.

The process of diplomatic recognition and the establishment of relations between China and India remained contingent, open-ended, and historically indeterminate rather than following a predetermined trajectory toward conflict. Although the Tibet question, border issues, and broader Cold War

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[83] Guo Weiwei, "Zhou Enlai and the PRC's System of Negotiating Diplomatic Recognition," *Mao Zedong sixiang yanjiu* (Mao Zedong Thought Studies), 27, 2010, 1, pp. 85–89.

[84] Lu Yi, et al., *Waijiaoxue gailun* (Introduction to Diplomacy), Beijing, Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2004, p. 74.

pressures created significant tensions, the interactions between the two governments during 1949–1950 remained fluid, negotiable, and subject to multiple possible outcomes. Both sides engaged in a process of continuous exploration, bargaining, and strategic adjustment shaped by changing domestic priorities, international pressures, and perceptions of postcolonial identity. The two countries' strategic autonomy in the process of recognition and diplomatic ties, as well as their initiative in emphasizing mutual recognition and negotiated establishment of relations, have redefined the standards of civilization as defined by Eurocentric narratives if recognition politics. This have also broken the ideological criteria in Cold War recognition politics and transformed the passive status quo—in which newly established states and governments under Western-dominated international law could only be recipients of recognition. It underscored the equal international status of all states, and challenged the bipolar international order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. They have thus provided a model for other Global South countries caught in the intersection of decolonization and Cold War politics, in terms of their mutual recognition and recognition by the international community.

The early Sino-Indian diplomatic interactions cannot be explained through any single causal logic such as ideology, balance of power, national interest, or civilizational identity alone. Rather, the establishment of diplomatic relations emerged from the interaction of multiple historically contingent factors, including domestic political developments, bureaucratic politics, leadership perceptions, decolonization processes, and the evolving structure of the Cold War international order.In this sense, the article suggests that Sino-Indian interactions exemplified the kind of historically contingent and multidimensional processes emphasized by Buzan and Lawson[85]. Their diplomatic interactions and strategic calculations were dynamically adjusted amid contradictory divergences over the Tibet and border issues, as well as cooperation in responding to pressures from the U.S.-Soviet blocs and addressing decolonization agendas. Rather than being dominated by a single issue or strategic logic, these interactions remained pluralistic and open-ended rather than reducible to a single strategic logic or ideological framework. This dual nature of contingency and openness also precludes the binary narrative of hostility versus amity adopted in some scholarship on Sino-Indian relations. It fluctuated among cooperation,

[85] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

tension, bargaining, and limited accommodation under changing domestic and international conditions.

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Abstract

Questo articolo analizza il processo e le motivazioni alla base del riconoscimento diplomatico sino-indiano e dell'instaurazione di relazioni formali tra il 1947 e il 1950, avvalendosi sistematicamente di fonti archivistiche cinesi, indiane, britanniche e statunitensi. Si sostiene che la geopolitica della prima Guerra Fredda abbia profondamente plasmato le percezioni e le decisioni di entrambi i paesi. Il riconoscimento della Repubblica Popolare Cinese da parte dell'India scaturì da un acceso dibattito interno e da consultazioni continue con i partner del Commonwealth, gli Stati vicini e gli Stati Uniti. La decisione finale rifletteva preoccupazioni realiste riguardanti il Tibet e la sicurezza delle frontiere, la volontà di affermare una politica estera non allineata e le aspirazioni di esercitare una leadership regionale. Per la Cina, la politica verso l'India evolvette da un iniziale sospetto ideologico a un riconoscimento pragmatico dell'autonomia indiana e della sua politica di non allineamento. Le negoziazioni con l'India fornirono alla RPC un modello per l'instaurazione di relazioni con paesi non socialisti. L'autonomia strategica dei due paesi, nonché la loro iniziativa nel sottolineare il reciproco riconoscimento e l'instaurazione di relazioni negoziate, superarono sia i criteri ideologici propri della politica di riconoscimento della Guerra Fredda sia la pratica tradizionale del riconoscimento unilaterale.

PAROLE CHIAVE

Relazioni sino-indiane
Guerra fredda
Riconoscimento diplomatico
Decolonizzazione
Stati del Sud globale

Abstract

This article analyzes the process and motivations behind Sino-Indian diplomatic recognition and the establishment of formal relations between 1947 and 1950 through systematic use of Chinese, Indian, British, and American archival sources. It argues that early Cold War geopolitics profoundly shaped both countries' perceptions and decisions. India's recognition of the PRC emerged from intense domestic debate and sustained consultations with Commonwealth partners, neighboring states, and the United States. Its final decision reflected realist concerns over Tibet and border security, the desire to assert a non-aligned foreign policy, and aspirations to exercise regional leadership. For China, policy toward India evolved from early ideological suspicion to a pragmatic acknowledgment of India's autonomy and non-alignment policy. Negotiations with India provided the PRC with a template for establishing relations with non-socialist countries. The two countries' strategic autonomy, as well as their initiative in emphasizing mutual recognition and negotiated establishment of relations, broke through both the ideological criteria in Cold War recognition politics and the traditional practice of unilaterally being recognized.

KEYWORDS

Sino-Indian relations
Cold War
Diplomatic recognition
Decolonization
Global South states