

**Second Annual K. Subrahmanyam Memorial Lecture
China in the Twenty-First Century: What India Needs to Know
About China's World View**

India International Centre, August 29, 2012.

Shyam Saran

Respected Ambassador Rasgotra, respected Shrimati Subrahmanayam, Chairman, Global India Foundation, Vice-Admiral Jacob, Vice-Chairman, Ambassador Salman Haider, Member Secretary, Shri O.P. Mishra, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Ambassador Rasgotra for chairing this memorial lecture. I am honoured by the presence of one of my most respected peers.

I consider it a privilege to have been invited to deliver the Second Annual K. Subrahmanyam Memorial Lecture, which gives me an opportunity to pay homage to the memory of a distinguished public servant, a meticulous scholar and one of India's great strategic thinkers. I thank Global India Foundation and its President, Shri O.P. Mishra, for according me this privilege. My own engagement with Shri Subrahmanyam goes back to 1979 when I met him on the eve of my travel to Geneva as a

UN Disarmament Fellow, on the advice of another very distinguished diplomat, the late M.A. Vellodi. I recall Secretary Vellodi telling me that there was no better informed and knowledgeable person in India who could acquaint me with the intricacies of disarmament and international security and India's own positioning in this domain. This began a process of education at the feet of an extraordinary individual, off and on, over the next three decades. There are scores of people like me who have imbibed a sense of India's geopolitical role, its strategic compulsions and opportunities and, above all, the need to undertake dispassionate and rigorous analysis of issues, though I am not certain how many of us would measure up to his high standards. Nevertheless, I feel emboldened today to offer you some ideas on a subject that he was convinced, would remain a major preoccupation for India in the decades to come, the challenge of an ascendant China. Much of what I will say is drawn from my own experience of China, an abiding fascination with its unique civilization and a deep respect for its philosophical and cultural heritage. My justification for indulging in this rather broad sweep analysis is that managing the China challenge requires a much deeper understanding of the nature of

Chinese civilization, its cultural particularities and the worldview of its people, formed layer upon layer, over five thousand years of unbroken though sometimes tumultuous history. China is undergoing a dramatic transformation and its traditional culture and ways of thinking can no longer be sourced only to persistent templates derived from the past. One has to only look at how modern, digital culture has pervaded Chinese society, in particular, its youth, to be cautious in making judgments about the country's view of itself. Nevertheless, there are certain deeply rooted elements that shape China's psyche and its world view that are worth careful reflection, including where India fits into that broad consciousness. At various points, I will also try and contrast Chinese and Indian cultural and philosophical traits, so that one is better prepared in adjusting one's own template in judging Chinese behaviour.

If there is one singular and unique feature of Chinese civilization that distinguishes it from other major civilizations, it is the use of Chinese ideograms and characters, that survive with few changes to this day, since they first appeared on oracle bones, some three thousand five hundred years or more ago, during the ancient Shang dynasty. Chinese language

has no alphabet. Each character is a word in itself and a decent vocabulary requires memorizing at least three thousand characters. A scholar may aspire to a vocabulary of five thousand. “Classical Chinese”, in the words of one scholar, Peter Hessler, the author of Oracle Bones, “connected people over space and time”. “It provided a powerful element of unity to an empire that, from another perspective, was a mish-mash of ethnic groups and languages”. After I had learnt Mandarin in Hong Kong in the early 1970s, I would often communicate with the local Cantonese using my new found knowledge of Chinese characters, because my Mandarin was as unintelligible to them as their Cantonese dialect was to me.

What is to be appreciated in this context is the importance of the written word in Chinese culture and the transformation of Chinese ideograms into an essential element in Chinese aesthetics. Calligraphy is a much admired accomplishment and characters appear as an integral component in paintings as well as Chinese pottery.

Contrast this with Indian culture, where the spoken word is pre-eminent. The ancient Vedas were heard as “Srutis” and were then remembered as “Smritis”. The written word came much later. Mantras get

energized only when they are recited in the correct rhythm and tone. Beauty is imparted and sought through arrangements of sound; imagery is not of the same order . To an Indian, Chinese music sounds stilted and archaic, while Indian classical music is a breathtaking mastery of seven notes and several microtones in between, forever reinventing itself. It is for this reason that I consider Chinese to be a predominantly visual culture, a legacy of the ancient ideogram, while India's is a predominantly aural culture, where spoken word, the musical note, the sacred mantra, were to become the defining characteristics of the culture. This difference in civilizational trajectory has its impact on how our two cultures perceive the world around us and interact with one another. The emphasis on the written word led to an immense treasury of historical documentation in China. The Chinese pilgrims, Fa Xian and Xuan Zhuang left elaborate records of their journeys to India and its great universities of Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramshila. In contrast, while it is estimated that the beginning of the 6th century A.D., the number of Indian Buddhist monks and teachers in China were upwards of three thousand, no accounts of China, as they perceived their adopted country, have surfaced so far. Only

some legends survive in temples associated with the more famous among them, such as the Shaolin temple linked with the Zen master, Bodhidharma and the Fei Lai Feng temple, or the Peak that Flew Over, located in Hangzhou, associated with the Buddhist monk, known only by his Chinese name, Huili. Huili came from Rajgir and chose the location of his temple at the foot of a peak that resembled Gridhkuta in his native town. Hence the Peak that Flew Over.

The great value attached to the written word, bound as it has been with Chinese aesthetics and the thought process of a complex culture, has combined with an enormous and detailed historical record to provide a contemporary reference point and multi-faceted prism through which the world is perceived. Even to this day much of Chinese discourse is conducted through historical analogies, some of which are explicit and well known. Some are artfully coded and the language lends itself easily to innuendo and ambiguity. The contrast with India will be apparent where history is often a distraction.

In Chinese diplomatic behavior, this cultural particularity poses unusual challenges to any interlocutor or negotiator.

The Chinese will insistently demand and sometimes obtain explicit formulations from friend and adversary alike on issues of importance to their interests, but will rarely concede clarity and finality in formulations reflecting the other side's interests. Thus, there is the recurring demand that India reaffirm, time and again, its recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. In 2003, during PM Vajpayee's visit, China conceded Sikkim as a part of India but this was not explicitly recorded in a written formulation. In 2005, during Wen Jiabao's visit to India, China went a step further and handed over maps of China, showing Sikkim as part of India. Recently, some Chinese scholars have pointed out that the absence of an official statement recognizing Indian sovereignty leaves the door open to subsequent shifts if necessary.

I also recall seeing the record of conversation between R.K. Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou en-lai in 1962, some months before the border war erupted in October that year. R.K. Nehru drew attention to reports that China was leaning towards the Pakistani position that Jammu and Kashmir was disputed territory. He recalled to Zhou an earlier conversation, where when asked whether China accepted Indian

sovereignty over J&K, he had said, rhetorically- Has China ever said that it does not accept Indian sovereignty over J&K, or words to that effect. At this latest encounter, Zhou turned the same formulation on its head, to ask, Has China ever said that India has sovereignty over J&K? Much of the misunderstanding and lack of communication that has characterized India-China relations may be sourced to the failure on India's part to be conversant with Chinese thought processes. It is easy to accuse the Chinese of betrayal, as Nehru did after the 1962 war, but a clear awareness that deception is, after all, an integral element of Chinese strategic culture, may have spared us much angst in the past. Such awareness should certainly be part of our confronting the China challenge in the future.

Deception, let me add, is not unique to Chinese strategic thinking. The Mahabharata has examples of its efficacy and Chanakya is an ardent enthusiast. But in China it is accorded a value much more significant than in other cultures. I think many in this well-informed audience may be familiar with the Chinese classic, The Romance of the three Kingdoms, and the oft-quoted "Ruse of the Empty City", depicted

therein, which is a favourite part of Chinese lore. This was resorted to by the famous Shu Kingdom general Zhuge Liang. The general was in danger of being besieged and over-run at the fortress city of Xicheng by the Wei army, while his main forces were located a long distance away. Zhuge Liang ordered all the city gates to be opened and asked his soldiers to don the clothes of ordinary householders, going about their normal activities, while he parked himself on top of one of the city gates, calmly playing the Chinese string instrument, the Qin. The Wei general, Sima Yi, confronted with this strange spectacle, suspected that he would run into an ambush as soon as he entered the city gates and withdrew. And the day was saved for Shu. Zhuge Liang is credited with the observation that to win a war, it was necessary to steal into the mind of one's enemy, observe his thought processes, and then fashion the appropriate strategy. There is no moral or ethical dimension attached to deception and the Chinese would find it odd being accused of "betrayal", in particular, if the strategy of deception had worked. What is required from our strategists and diplomats is to understand this important instrument in the Chinese strategic tool-box and learn to deal with it effectively. Perhaps we should take to heart Zhuge

Liang's advice and enter the mind of our Chinese interlocutor to judge his mental and psychological construct.

Another important feature of Chinese thinking is what I would call, "Contextualizing". Significant decisions and actions must always be located in a broad assessment of political, economic, social and even psychological factors that constitute the stage setting for the proposed activity. This lends an inherent prudence to Chinese strategic thinking, but once events have brewed to the right mix and the timing is right, action must be swift and decisive. The Chinese strategist may wish to avoid war, if such a war carries inordinate risk. However, the use of force is an essential and accepted part of pursuing national interests and war is not necessarily an unmitigated evil. The Indian attitude towards the use of force and the dangers of war is more ambiguous. The use of force is often seen as a failure of diplomacy not an extension of it. And this is an important difference between the two countries. The conversations between Nehru and Mao in 1956 on the nature of war reflects this clearly.

Let me try and illustrate this by examining some of the events leading up to the 1962 border war. In January 2005, Chinese TV broadcast a documentary entitled "The Secret History of the China-India War". This

documentary is important for two reasons. It painstakingly spells out the domestic, regional and international context within which the decision to launch the attack against Indian border forces was taken. It refers to the hesitation within certain sections of the party leadership to “make an enemy out of India”, at a time when China was still recovering from the ravages of famine and the disastrous consequences of the 1958-61 Great Leap Forward. The international situation was also not judged to be favourable. The ideological conflict with the Soviet Union, the commentary says, had now become a state to state conflict as well. The United States continued with its hostile policies towards China and the Chiang regime in Taiwan was becoming more aggressive. This is an example of the “contextualizing” approach. This probably corresponded to the assessment of Chinese posture on the Indian side; briefly, that while border skirmishes would continue, China was unlikely to engage in a full-scale war.

However, from summer of 1962, the “context” had begun to change and the clues to this change were missed by the Indian side. After having retreated to the “second line of leadership” in the wake of the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Mao plotted his return to absolute leadership, using the PLA with the new Defence Minister Lin Biao, who had replaced Marshal Peng

Tehuai, as an ally. The TV documentary points to differences of opinion within the Party leadership on the border issue. This, it said, was settled by the denunciation of those who counseled restraint, as “right opportunists”. While having temporarily ceded the administration of the Party and the Government to other veteran leaders like Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen, Mao appears to have taken charge of issuing directives to the PLA personally, on handling border tensions with India. It was he who decided in August 1962, to engage in a full scale military assault on Indian forces, and to “liquidate the invading Indian army”. But this was done only after his commanders had reported that the Indian side simply had neither the numbers nor the equipment to withstand a Chinese attack, particularly if the attack was of an unexpected scale . On the international front, too, there was a window of opportunity, mitigating some of the constraints cited earlier. In June, 1962, the Chinese ambassador, Wang Bingnan had enquired from his U.S. counterpart in Warsaw whether the U.S. would take advantage of India-China border tensions, to encourage a Taiwanese attack on the mainland. He obtained a categorical assurance which he claims, in his memoirs, played a big role in the decision to go to war with India. Thanks to the impending Cuban missile crisis, the then Soviet Union sought Chinese

support by conveying its intention to side with China in the border conflict with India. China may not have known about the looming US-Soviet crisis, but it certainly profited from the Soviet change of heart, temporary though this proved to be. Perhaps it is too much to expect that Indian decision makers would have connected these dots together, but that is precisely what is necessary in dealing with China.

The other example of the importance of contextualizing may be seen through a contrary example. In 1971, during the Bangladesh war, US and China were allies supporting Pakistan. Kissinger tried to persuade the Chinese to attack India along the Sino-Indian border as a means of relieving pressure on their common ally, Pakistan. In the papers of Alexander Haig, who was White House Chief of Staff at the time, it is reported that he did receive a formal reply from the Chinese side, conveying that China had decided not to move troops to the Sino-Indian border. One can confidently surmise that the constraining 'context' in this regard was the Indo-Soviet treaty of 1971.

Lest any one believes that Chinese strategists always get things right, I would like to recall what happened in 1986 during the Wangdung Incident

in the Eastern sector. In 1985, China began to signal that the so-called “package proposal” for resolving the border issue, essentially legitimizing the post-1962 status quo, was no longer on offer. In official talks, Chinese officials stated explicitly for the first time that since the disputed area in the Eastern sector was much larger than in the Western sector, India would have to make significant concessions in that sector and China would reciprocate with appropriate concessions (unspecified) in the West. It was also conveyed to us that at a minimum, Tawang would have to be transferred to the Chinese side. When we pointed out that just 3 years back in 1982 Deng Xiaoping had himself spelt out the package proposal as we had hitherto understood it, the response was that we may have read too much into his words. The shift could have been related to a greater level of confidence following China’s rapid growth and the fact that a young and as yet untested Prime Minister had taken office in Delhi. This was followed by the discovery in the summer of 1986 that the Chinese had crossed the Thagla Ridge and occupied a feature called Le, built permanent barracks as well as a helipad. In my view this was in some way linked to the hardening of the Chinese position on the border and the new insistence on India making concessions in the Eastern sector. I recall accompanying

Ambassador K.P.S. Menon to lodge a protest with the then Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister and being witness to a most undiplomatic, offensive and vituperative harangue by the latter. He claimed that China was, of course, on its own territory, that it was only “strengthening border management” after the neglect of recent years and that India would be prudent not to over-react . Soon thereafter I was transferred from Beijing to Tokyo, but en route in Delhi I attended a strategy session called to discuss our counter moves. There was, I admit, a reluctance to take any military counter measures. However a couple of weeks later I learnt that the then Army Chief, Sundarji, had airlifted troops and occupied the parallel ridge, known by the peaks Lurongla, Hathungla and Sulunga , overlooking the Sumdorong river. Two forward posts, Jaya and Negi, were set up across the river just below the ridge and only 10 metres from a Chinese forward post. The Chinese were taken completely by surprise as perhaps were our own political leaders. The then External Affairs Minister, Shri N.D. Tiwari was transiting Beijing on his way back from Pyong Yang after attending the Non-Aligned Coordination Bureau meeting that September, to try and assuage Chinese anger. I was accompanying him en route to Tokyo having been deputed to Pyong Yang to assist our delegation. Senior Chinese

Foreign Ministry officials were at hand at the airport to receive our delegation. In the brief exchange that took place at the airport, our Minister's protestations of peace and goodwill were met with the not unreasonable comment that while our leaders were talking peace they were making aggressive military moves on the ground at the same time. China would only be satisfied if Indian troops vacated the ridge they had occupied. China would not be fooled; it would "listen to what is said, but see what action is taken." In later talks we agreed to vacate the heights on our side if the Chinese retreated behind the Thagla ridge, but since they were not ready to do so, we stayed put as well. While we may not have planned it this way, the Chinese judged our actions through their own prism: that we had countered their unexpected move by a well orchestrated counter move of our own. Subsequently, I am told, that the offensive and overbearing tone adopted by Chinese Foreign Ministry officials also changed to being more polite and civilized. The next several years were spent in the two sides discussing disengagement in this sector and finally in 1992, the eyeball to eyeball confrontation was ended and a number of confidence building measures adopted. The lesson to be drawn is not that we should be militarily provocative but that we should have enough

capabilities deployed to convince the other side that aggressive moves would invite counter moves. This is the reason why it is so important for us to speed up the upgradation of our border infrastructure and communication links along all our borders, not just with China.

In dealing with China, therefore, one must constantly analyze the domestic and geopolitical environment as perceived by China, which is the prism through which its strategic calculus is shaped and implemented.

In 2005, India was being courted as an emerging power both by Europe and the U.S., thereby expanding its own room for manoeuvre. The Chinese response to this was to project a more positive and amenable posture towards India. This took the shape of concluding the significant Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for seeking a settlement of the border issue; the depiction of Sikkim as part of India territory in Chinese maps and the declaration of a bilateral Strategic and Cooperative Partnership with India. In private parleys with Indian leaders, their Chinese counterparts conveyed a readiness to accept India's permanent membership of the Security Council, though it was not willing to state this in black and white

in the Joint Statement. Since then, however, as Indian prospects appeared to have diminished and the perceived power gap with China has widened, the Chinese sensitivity to Indian interests has also eroded. It is only in recent months that the tide has turned somewhat, when China has been facing a countervailing backlash to its assertive posture in the South China Sea and the US has declared its intention to “rebalance” its security assets in the Asia-Pacific region. There has been a setback to Chinese hitherto dominating presence in Myanmar and a steady devaluation of Pakistan’s value to China as a proxy power to contain India. At home, there are prospects of slower growth and persistent ethnic unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet. A major leadership transition is underway adding to the overall sense of uncertainty and anxiety. We are, therefore, once again witnessing another renewed though probably temporary phase of greater friendliness towards India, but it’s a pity that we are unable to engage in active and imaginative diplomacy to leverage this opportunity to India’s enduring advantage, given the growing incoherence of our national polity.

I will speak briefly on Chinese attitudes specific to India and how China sees itself in relation to India. While going through a recent

publication on China in 2020, I came across an observation I consider apt for this exercise. The historian Jacques Barzun is quoted as saying:

“ To see ourselves as others see us is a valuable gift, without doubt. But in international relations what is still rarer and far more useful is to see others as they see themselves.”

It is true that through their long history, India and China have mostly enjoyed a benign relationship. This was mainly due to the forbidding geographical buffers between the two sides, the Taklamalan desert on the Western edges of the Chinese empire, the vast, icy plateau of Tibet to the South and the ocean expanse to its East. Such interaction as did take place was through both the caravan routes across what is now Xinjiang as well as through the sea-borne trade routes across the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, linking Indian ports on both the Eastern and Western seaboard to the East coast of China. India was not located in the traditional Chinese political order consisting of subordinate states, whether such subordination was real or imagined. In civilizational terms, too, India,

as a source of Buddhist religion and philosophy and, at some points in history, the knowledge capital of the region, may have been considered a special case, a parallel centre of power and culture, but comfortably far away. During the age of imperialism and colonialism, India came into Chinese consciousness as a source of the opium that the British insisted on dumping into China. The use of Indian soldiers in the various military assaults on China by the British and the deployment of Indian police forces in the British Concessions, may have also left a negative residue about India and Indians in the Chinese mind. This was balanced by several strong positives, however, in particular the mutual sympathy between the two peoples struggling for political liberation and emancipation throughout the first half of the 20th century. To some extent, these positives continued after Indian independence in 1947 and China's liberation in 1949 and were even reinforced thanks to Pandit Nehru's passionate belief in Asian resurgence and the seminal role that India and China could play in the process. However, such sentiments were soon overlaid by the challenges of national consolidation in both countries and the pressures of heightened Cold War tensions. With Chinese occupation

of Tibet in 1950, India and China became contiguous neighbours for the first time in history. When the 1959 revolt in Tibet erupted and the Dalai Lama and 60,000 Tibetans sought and received shelter in India, the differences between the two sides on the boundary issue, took on a strategic dimension, as has been pointed out most recently by Kissinger in his book “On China”. The 1962 War was not so much about the boundary as it was a Chinese response to a perceived threat to China’s control over Tibet, however misplaced such perception may have been. The comprehensive defeat of Indian forces in the short war and the regional and international humiliation of India that followed, allowed China to conveniently locate India in its traditional inter-state pattern, as a subordinate state, not capable of ever matching the pre-eminence of Chinese power and influence. Since 1962, most Chinese portrayals of India and Indian leaders in conversations with other world leaders or, more lately, in articles by some scholars and commentators, have been starkly negative. An Indian would find it quite infuriating to read some of the exchanges on India and Indian leaders in the Kissinger Transcripts. In recent times, Chinese commentaries take China’s elevated place in Asia and the world as a

given, but Indian aspirations are dismissed as a “dream”. There are repeated references to the big gap between the “comprehensive national power” of the two countries. India’s indigenous capabilities are usually dismissed as having been borrowed from abroad. In an interesting research paper entitled “Chinese Responses to India’s Military Modernization”, Lora Salmaan refers to the “over confidence” phenomenon that characterises Chinese comparisons of their own capabilities vis-à-vis India. She points out that Indian claims of domestic production and innovation are frequently dismissed by Chinese analysts by adding the phrase “so-called” or putting “indigenous” or “domestic” under quotes. She concludes that

“These rhetorical flourishes suggest elements of derision and dismissiveness in Chinese attitudes towards India’s domestic programmes and abilities.”

This dismissiveness also colours Chinese analysis of Indian politics and society. The usual Chinese refrain is that India is chaotic and undisciplined and does not have what it takes to be a great power like China. In an article entitled “Why China is Wary of India”, the

commentator Peter Lee relates an interesting story of what transpired at a Washington Security Conference:

“A Chinese delegate caused an awkward silence among the congenial group at a post-event drinks session when he stated that India was “an undisciplined country where the plague and leprosy still exist. How a big dirty country like that can rise so quickly amazed us”.

Currently, there are two strands in Chinese perceptions about India. There are strong, lingering attitudes that dismiss India’s claim as a credible power and regard its great power aspirations as “arrogance” and as being an unrealistic pretension. The other strand, also visible in scholarly writings and in the series of leadership summits that have taken place at regular intervals, is recognition that India’s economic, military and scientific and technological capabilities are on the rise, even if they do not match China. India is valued as an attractive market for Chinese products at a time when traditional markets in the West are flat. China is also respectful of India’s role in multilateral fora, where on several global issues Indian

interests converge with China. I have personal experience of working closely and most productively with Chinese colleagues in the UN Climate Change negotiations and our trade negotiators have found the Chinese valuable allies in WTO negotiations. In such settings Chinese comfortably defer to Indian leadership. I have also found that on issues of contention, there is reluctance to confront India directly, the effort usually being to encourage other countries to play a proxy role in frustrating Indian diplomacy. This was clearly visible during the Nuclear Suppliers Group meeting in Vienna in 2008, when China did not wish to be the only country to oppose the waiver for India in nuclear trade, as it could have since the Group functions by consensus. China may have refused to engage India in any dialogue on nuclear or missile issues, but that does not mean that Indian capabilities in this regard so unnoticed or their implications for Chinese security are ignored. It is in the maritime sphere that China considers Indian capabilities to possess the most credibility and as affecting Chinese security interests. These two strands reflect an ambivalence about India's emergence - dismissive on the one hand, a wary, watchful and occasionally respectful posture on the other.

Needless to say, it is what trajectory India itself traverses in its economic and social development that will mostly influence Chinese perception about the country.

Additionally, how India manages its relations with other major powers, in particular, the United States, would also be a factor. My own experience has been that the closer India-US relations are seen to be, the more amenable China has proved to be. I do not accept the argument that a closer India-US relationship leads China to adopt a more negative and aggressive posture towards India. The same is true of India's relations with countries like Japan, Indonesia and Australia, who have convergent concerns about Chinese dominance of the East Asian theatre. I also believe that it is a question of time before similar concerns surface in Russia as well. India should be mindful of this in maintaining and consolidating its already friendly, but sometimes, sketchy relations with Russia. The stronger India's links are with these major powers, the more room India would have in its relations with China.

It would be apparent from my presentation that India and China harbour essentially adversarial perceptions of one another. This is determined by geography as well as by the growth trajectories of the two countries. China is the one power which impinges most directly on India's geopolitical space. As the two countries expand their respective economic and military capabilities and their power radiates outwards from their frontiers, they will inevitably intrude into each other's zone of interest, what has been called "over-lapping peripheries". It is not necessary that this adversarial relationship will inevitably generate tensions or, worse, another military conflict, but in order to avoid that India needs to fashion a strategy which is based on a constant familiarity with Chinese strategic calculus, the changes in this calculus as the regional and global landscape changes and which is, above all, informed by a deep understanding of Chinese culture, the psyche of its people and how these, too, are undergoing change in the process of modernization. Equally we should endeavour to shape Chinese perceptions through building on the positives and strengthening collaboration on convergent interests, which are not insignificant. One must always be mindful of the prism through

which China interprets the world around it and India's place in that world. It is only through such a complex and continuing exercise that China's India challenge can be dealt with.

Sometimes a strong sense of history, portions of which may be imagined rather than real, may lead the Chinese to ignore the fact that the contemporary geo-political landscape is very different from that which prevailed during Chinese ascendancy in the past. Merely achieving a higher proportion of the global GDP does not guarantee the restoration of pre-eminence. Ancient China was not a globalized economy. It was a world in itself, mostly self sufficient and shunning the less civilized periphery around it. Today, China's emergence is integrally linked to the global economy. It is a creature of interdependence. Similarly, today the geopolitical terrain is populated by a number of major powers, including in the Asian theatre. A reassertion of Chinese dominance, or an assumption that being at the top of the pile in Asia is part of some natural order, is likely to bump up against painful ground reality, as it has since 2009, opening the door to the US rebalancing. The recent reports of a slowing down of Chinese growth should also be sobering.

On the Indian side, the failure to look at the larger picture often results, by default, in looking at India-China relations inordinately through the military prism. This also inhibits us from locating opportunities in an expanding Chinese market and in promoting a focus on the rich history of cultural interchange and the more contemporary pathways our two cultures have taken in fascinating ways. This covers music, dance, cinema, literature and painting. Chinese successes in development and its focus on infrastructure do have lessons for India which should be embraced. And if China, for its own reasons, is willing to invest in India's own massive infrastructure development plans, why not examine how this could be leveraged while keeping our security concerns at the forefront? There are many areas of grey and it is for dispassionate strategists on both sides to explore and help shape a future for China-India relations that aspires to be as benign as it has been for most of the past.

I thank you for your attention.

