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**Китайско-индийские социально-
политические отношения на
современном этапе**

**Sino-Indian socio-political relations at the
modern stage**

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Аннотация. Современные китайско-индийские отношения характеризуются с одной стороны схожестью во взглядах по многим ключевым проблемам мировой политики и взаимным настроем на сотрудничество, с другой стороны, по ряду направлений присутствует элемент конкуренции и разногласий. В целом, геополитическая расстановка сил в Южной и Юго-Восточной Азии отличается нестабильностью и во многом определяется состоянием отношений между ведущими странами региона, в первую очередь, Индией и Китаем. Определенную озабоченность вызывает тот факт, что в современных условиях Индия, отказавшись от многолетней политики нейтралитета, взяла курс на наращивание военной мощи, поскольку Китай в своей внешней политике в ее отношении в ряде случаев, используя силовой ресурс, установил контроль над некоторыми спорными пограничными территориями Индии. В статье анализируются стратегические планы и конкретные шаги, как Индии, так и Китая по построению китаецентричной, либо индоцентричной Азии и приводятся аргументы в пользу китаецентричных тенденций как в геополитической, так и в геоэкономической областях.

Ключевые слова: Индия, Китай, БРИКС, пограничные конфликты, азиатский регион

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Abstract. Modern Sino-Indian relations are characterized on the one hand by similarity in views on many key issues of world politics and mutual attitude to cooperation, on the other hand, there is an element of competition and disagreement in a number of areas. In general, the geopolitical balance of power in South and Southeast Asia is unstable and largely depends on the relations between such powers as India and China. A certain concern is caused by the fact that in modern conditions, India, having abandoned the long-standing policy of neutrality, has taken a course to build up military power, since China in its foreign policy towards it in some cases, using a military resource, has established control over some disputed border territories of India.

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The article analyzes the strategic plans and concrete steps of both India and China to build either

China-centric or Indo-centric Asia and provides arguments in favor of China-centric trends in both geopolitical and geo-economic areas.

Keywords: India, China, BRICS, border conflicts, Asian region

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Introduction. The length of the state border between China and India is 3380 km. Sino-Indian relations have a long history and, being the two oldest civilizations, the states have maintained a relationship for over 2,000 years. The level of Sino-Indian ties, reflecting the current global balance of power, varies from friendly to conflicting. The last fifty years have been no exception. The latest cooling in relations followed a series of unrest in Tibet caused by the establishment of Chinese rule over part of Tibet in 1951 and the forced emigration of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. The culmination of the confrontation was the armed conflict of 1962, as a result of which India ceded part of its territory to China [22, 43].

The period from 1962 to the early 1980s was characterized by the freezing of relations up to the recall of ambassadors and the downgrading of diplomatic relations to chargés d'affaires, as well as a complete curtailment of economic cooperation. Since 1988, relations began to improve again, facilitated by the holding of high-level negotiations in Beijing for the first time in 30 years. As a result of the negotiations, the parties reached an agreement to resume a full-fledged interstate dialogue. The parties also agreed that the remaining unresolved border issue and other problem areas should not slow down the process of establishing good neighborly relations [31]. The results of the negotiations gave grounds to interpret the visit of Indian Prime Minister R. Gandhi as a starting point in the development of formal normalization of bilateral relations. However, complete normalization has not occurred, and the current stage of relations between China and India is not cloudless and is characterized by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, China and India show mutual readiness to build mutually beneficial economic and political cooperation, but at the same time, elements of competition and rivalry that have long roots appear between the two countries. The balance of these trends determines the current state of relations between China and India.

Materials and research methods. The thematic field of research contributed to the use of general scientific methods of theoretical knowledge, such as the scientific description of the object of knowledge, the axiomatization method, the hypothetico-deductive method, the formalization method, etc. Among the specific scientific research methods, the authors turned to the method of theoretical pluralism.

Research results and their discussion. The main problem in Sino-Indian relations is the unresolved territorial disputes regarding a number of border areas. The first area is Aksai Chin, which is located in the western sector of the border between China and India. We are talking about a virtually uninhabitable area with a total area of about 38 thousand km², located at an altitude of 5 thousand m above sea level, and representing a chain of glaciers surrounded by a deserted salt desert [19, 63].

The second disputed area is Arunachal Pradesh, located in the eastern part of the border area. There is no demarcated border between the countries here, but the region has the status of an Indian state with an area of about 84 thousand km² with a population of 1.4 million people, crossed by the Himalaya mountain system [3, 173]. The western zone of the region is de facto controlled by China, which classifies it as a single Tibetan cultural and ethnographic area. At the same time, the Indian authorities react quite negatively to the presence of China in these areas, declaring that Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh are part of Indian territory [16, 93].

Despite attempts to resolve existing territorial disputes through negotiations initiated in the period 1990-2000, military clashes on the border of the actual demarcation of forces did not stop. A serious incident in 2013 prompted the countries to sign the Border Security Cooperation Agreement. The result of the signing of the document was the facilitation of methods and means

of cross-border cooperation in the defense sector, strengthening contacts and mutual understanding between border troops. The agreement marked the beginning of a new stage in the resolution of border conflicts: from that moment on, the top military leadership, and not the political administration of the border regions of both states, became responsible for their stabilization.

In general, Aksai Chin is not of economic interest, while India and China are aware of the important military-strategic importance of the region. For China, the fact that there is a highway connecting the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region with Tibet is important. As for the territory of Arunachal Pradesh, the region is known for the presence of significant deposits of natural resources: limestone, coal, marble, oil and gas. The fertile soils of Tawang, a region in Arunachal Pradesh, which is capable of providing raw materials for a third of the entire economy of Tibet, are also of great importance [20, 113]. This circumstance explains that this territory has also become the subject of great economic interest for Beijing, which is guided by considerations of economic benefit, coupled with military-strategic plans to station its armed forces in these territories.

In 1963, India issued a note of protest because Pakistan signed a border treaty with China, according to which a section of Kashmir territory, including the Ladakh region, was transferred to Beijing [24]. Islamabad not only ceded part of Kashmir to Beijing, the entire territory of which Delhi claims, but also officially recognized the legal presence of the Chinese military in the territory they conquered from India in 1962. And this despite the fact that these territories have never been under the control of Pakistan [24]. These steps by Pakistan improved relations with China and linked the resolution of the border issue between China and India with the settlement of the Kashmir problem. By transferring Aksai Chin, which is less significant for India, to China, the Pakistani leadership believed that India would automatically recognize Islamabad's right to govern part of Kashmir. However, according to V. Shikin, an expert on East and South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, "No matter how pragmatic the Indian government is, it will never make such a decision" [8]. Delhi's adamant decision not to allow territory to be ceded to Beijing is confirmed by the border incident in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which occurred at the end of 2022, after which Pentagon press secretary Patrick Ryder was forced to state that "the PRC continues to accumulate forces and create military infrastructure in the border areas." areas with India" [12]. The cause of the incident, as reported by the Hindu newspaper, was a violation of the Indian border by Chinese troops. According to the Indian side, they crossed the line of control and invaded the territory of a neighboring state. However, the Chinese side certainly denied the fact of border violation [12].

The fact that both states have nuclear weapons and the increased tension between Beijing and New Delhi over territorial disputes cannot but worry the world community. Due to the threat posed by China's official status as a nuclear power (according to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, India is not granted such a right [7]), India has become a systematic violator of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and at the same time has an advantage in the field of conventional weapons. It is also necessary to emphasize that Delhi's nuclear program is being modernized not from the standpoint of increasing the volume of its nuclear arsenal, but from the standpoint of improving the methods of its delivery. In 2014, testing of the first Indian nuclear submarine Arihant began [20]. In 2018, India successfully launched the Agni-V intercontinental missile, which, in terms of its combat range, is capable of hitting any targets on Chinese territory [26]. In June 2022, the Indian Armed Forces successfully launched the Prithvi II short-range ballistic missile, and in November 2022, they successfully test-fired the Agni-III medium-range ballistic missile, which can carry a nuclear warhead [9]. In order to contain Pakistan, India only needs to use short-range missiles and tactical bombers, but in the case of Agni-III, we are talking about medium-range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads. The above gives strong grounds to believe that there is an arms race in the region, caused by India's response to China's attempts to establish its control over part of Indian territory. Thus, the development of the Indian military nuclear program is more a reaction to the threat from China than from Pakistan.

The modern period of Sino-Indian relations is characterized by a number of other serious disagreements in various areas. Thus, in 2017, India boycotted the International Forum “One Belt, One Road,” which was initiated by China to expand the potential of its transcontinental transit project. India has repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with China's active efforts to build the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of the One Belt, One Road initiative. China, for its part, does not recognize India's concerns regarding CPEC and is ready to consider India as an investor. The Indian leadership is concerned that the implementation of such a transit project “could contribute to an increase in cross-border terrorist activity” [28]. At the same time, China is making attempts to attract neighboring states to the corridor project by providing investments and loans, which further worries the Indian side. Since India does not have the same financial resources as China, it is seeking a counterbalance to Beijing by moving closer to the US, Japan and Australia. Moreover, transport routes are laid through the disputed territories of Kashmir, which are controlled by Pakistan, which is regarded in Delhi as Beijing's non-recognition of Indian sovereignty over this territory.

The Pakistani port of Gwadar is of serious concern to the Indian leadership. This port occupies a strategically advantageous position between the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf and allows China to use the shortest route to access markets in the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Delhi has repeatedly expressed concern about the continued presence of the Chinese Navy in Gwadar. The port is a convenient observation point for the movement of merchant ships, oil tankers and maneuvers of the navies of neighboring states.

Another problem in the relationship between India and China has become the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Since 2018, the Chinese have been renting the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota and have now thoroughly modernized it, investing more than \$1 billion [18]. Although the leadership of Sri Lanka declares that the deal with the Chinese side is purely civilian-oriented, experts note that “In Sri Lanka, as in some other strategically important places in the world, China's investments are immediately followed by the deployment of the Chinese Navy. In some cases, military contingents of the People's Liberation Army of China are stationed in civilian ports on a long-term basis” [6]. Such steps aggravate the contradictions in Sino-Indian relations. The active penetration of the Chinese into countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, along with participation in the negotiation process in Afghanistan, makes many Indian politicians and experts confident in the establishment of a gradual blockade of India by China, its main geopolitical rival.

The central place of “clash of interests” between China and India is most often Asia. The reason for this (in addition to the unconditional geopolitical factor), according to some researchers, including Indian ones, is “China's desire to see the Asian space as “Sino-centric,” while the PRC “is seeking to form a multipolar world, but a unipolar Asia” [27, 26]. The basis for such assessments, to some extent, can be Chinese analytical studies, according to which a five-pole international order will be formed in Asia, where Russia, the USA, Japan, India and ASEAN will occupy places at the edges, while China claims to be central, dominant position.

It should be noted that today China has achieved some success in building a Sino-centric Asia. Thus, on May 18-19, 2023, the “China – Central Asia” Summit was held, which laid the foundation for the creation of the “China + 5” geopolitical structure, which means expanding the framework of cooperation between the PRC and the Central Asian five, which included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In a speech at the Summit, Chinese leader Xi Jinping noted that “We need to firmly resist attempts by external interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the region, attempts to organize new “color revolutions” ... and “no one has the right to sow discord and provoke confrontation in the Central Asian region for achieving their political goals” [13]. The creation of the China+5 grouping and the speech of the Chinese leader was not only China's response to the West, which, in the words of Xi Jinping, “is trying to turn Central Asia into a springboard for containing China and Russia,” but also to India [13].

Regional rivalry is prompting India to develop moves to counter these Chinese foreign policy trends. As an alternative to the China-Pakistan alliance, the Indian leadership is actively developing the idea of forming a triangle India-Iran-Afghanistan. Thus, in 2019, the India-Iran-Afghanistan trade corridor was opened through the Iranian port of Chabahar. Thanks to this

corridor, India has access to Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. India's concerns about China's reorientation of sea routes through the Indian Ocean connecting European and Asian markets to the Northern Sea Route are also quite justified, which will entail a weakening of the importance of India, which still plays an important role in organizing traditional cargo transportation routes. For Delhi, the possibility of creating new international maritime routes - routes through the Arctic Ocean - means a fundamental transformation of the geopolitical balance of power in the region in favor of China and the loss of extremely important advantages for India in relations with China. Considering the fact that China is actively introducing the Northern Sea Route into its sphere of influence as an alternative route for cargo transportation, India is losing leverage over Beijing, and India's military strategy, aimed at blocking Chinese cargo transportation through the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca in the context of a possible conflict with China – loses significance [25]. Using the Northern Sea Route provides China with alternative sea routes and, as a result, deprives India of serious leverage over Beijing.

Thus, the development of the Arctic has a systemic essence with components of geopolitics, directly related to one of the three most important directions of Chinese foreign policy “One Belt - One Road” in addition to the “Economic Belt of the Silk Road” and the “Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century”. The “Ice Silk Road” or “blue economic corridor” [15, 49] has become a logical continuation of China's geopolitical activity, whose borders extend to the Arctic. China, which has observer status in the Arctic Council since 2013, has declared itself a “near-Arctic state” [17, 103] and intends to make the Arctic one of the key areas of its interests, as evidenced by the active construction of ice-class vessels at Chinese shipyards and China's plans to have nuclear icebreaker fleet [5]. China's Arctic challenge is an important component of Beijing's 2021-2025 Five-Year Development Plan, which aims to expand its global influence through investment and infrastructure [1].

India is no less interested in realizing its national interests in the Arctic regions, having developed its strategic development plan - the “Arctic Mission of India”, since with the receipt of observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, India also gained access to strategically important levers for managing the Arctic region .

One way or another, the above-mentioned geopolitical competition often manifests itself in political practice. In particular, on the one hand, India resists Beijing's increased activity in the Indian Ocean, and especially in the states neighboring India. On the other hand, Beijing is dissatisfied with India's “eastern course”, aimed at strengthening its positions in East Asian countries, including Japan, on the basis of contacts with which New Delhi plans to “stimulate the balance of regional forces” [23, 43]. The “Tibetan issue” also has a systemic essence with geopolitical components for India and China, although India, realizing that internal separatism could spread to its territory, never insisted on granting sovereignty to Tibet. Beijing is confident that India secretly supports subversive activities on Chinese territory, secretly encouraging and arming Tibetan rebels.

China, in turn, is alarmed by the intensification of the Indian-American dialogue, during which Delhi speaks of plans to “create an optimal balance of regional forces for India” [30]. According to the Indian expert community, this balance relates mainly to India's relations with China. That is, the task is openly formulated “to contain the growing and little predictable northern neighbor” [30].

It is worth emphasizing that in view of the constructive vector of relations officially designated by the leadership of both countries and the progress they have achieved in the political and economic spheres, today the declared commitment to cooperation between India and China prevails over contradictions in the military sphere. After going through a turbulent phase, bilateral relations began to improve from 2018, and it can be believed that at this point a new stage of relations between the two most populous countries in the world began. The informal meeting in Wuhan contributed to the normalization of China-India relations as both countries managed to overcome differences over the Doklam incident in a peaceful manner and pave the way for improved bilateral cooperation. To a large extent, this assessment is supported by the fact that the authorities of both states are determined to maintain bilateral relations in a “positive direction.” The leadership of both countries continues to follow the course according to which Beijing and New Delhi have enough strategic space for parallel and non-contradictory development. This is

confirmed by the results of two informal meetings between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 and 2019. In May 2023, the official representative of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Mao Ning, commenting on the visit of Russian Prime Minister M. Mishustin to China, stated that “Russian-Chinese cooperation is not directed against third countries and is not subject to their influence” [4].

China is promoting the resumption of free trade negotiations with India. To enhance economic cooperation with the Middle Kingdom, India is also seeking to take a more active and open position in the negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) in order to give impetus to the process of integrating regional cooperation. In this regard, India is actively promoting the construction of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor, since the growing diversified influence of the PRC on Bangladesh not only does not contradict, but is in line with Indian interests, and participation in the “BCIM corridor” will expand India's opportunities for economic penetration into Bangladesh. This project will not only benefit investor countries, but will also give impetus to the development of most countries in South, Southeast and East Asia.

At the same time, it cannot be stated unequivocally that the benefits from mutual trade and summit meetings declaring a course for cooperation will create a platform for the complete settlement of all existing contradictions, disagreements and rivalries, since tensions still remain in the relations between countries in resolving such important issues such as China's growing military power in the Indian Ocean, China's growing influence in South Asia, competition for global resources, disputes over India's membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (China opposes India's membership on the grounds that it has not signed Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, although in a similar situation France was included in the Group), Chinese border claims, etc.

Thus, the main source of most of the problems in bilateral relations between India and China is the difference in geopolitical interests, as well as the continuing lack of mutual trust - both at the strategic level and in practical activities. The lack of trust, accordingly, prevents the settlement of existing disagreements.

Today, India, which has one of the youngest populations in the world (average age 28.4 years), is currently experiencing a population surge. Although India's GDP is smaller than China's, among large economies, the Indian economy is growing at the fastest pace in the world. This situation is characterized in most cases by a “catching up” algorithm of actions on Delhi's part, which is due to both a shorter period of positive growth dynamics and less confident starting positions. Thus, the report of the UN Department noted that the Indian economy grew by 6.4% in 2022 (for comparison: the EU economy grew by 2.7%, China - 4.5%, the USA - 2.6%) [21]. Despite the high growth rates of the Indian economy, the accumulated large gap in economic development compared to China will not allow India to get ahead of China in the near and even medium term. However, in this regard, there is a clear desire of Western companies to reduce the risks of dependence on one state - China, which is currently beginning to control an increasingly large part of world business. This strategy is called “China+1”, which means the parallel development of business chains in other countries where India is on the preferred list. China, in turn, is considering options for banning the export of important raw materials to the West - rare earth metals, which are significant for the transformation of the Western energy sector [11].

Conclusion. The existing rivalry between China and India is reflected in various areas: from the possibility of using energy resources and roles in international organizations, to the volume of defense spending and the degree of regional presence.

China's foreign policy has forced Japan and Australia to adjust their strategy and engage in countering Chinese expansionism in the region. By approving plans to double military spending by 2027, Japan has effectively left the pacifist national security policy of the post-war era behind. Australia, for its part, abandoned its previous approaches and created, together with the United States and Great Britain, the AUKUS defense pact [14]. In our opinion, this Asian version of NATO, created as a counterweight to official Beijing, can gain weight and become an important geopolitical player in the region.

The above allows us to state the “unpredictability of the political event field” in relations between China and India [2, 142], since modern Sino-Indian relations cannot be characterized

unambiguously, despite similar views on many key issues of world politics. Despite the fact that at times the mutual spirit of cooperation between China and India prevails over competition and disagreements, the geopolitical situation in the region continues to remain unstable. The next decade will demonstrate the intensification of contradictions between such giants as India and China, since “despite the risk of a full-scale war, India has openly challenged Chinese power in a way that no other world power, including the United States, has done this century” [14]. India, having abandoned its long-standing policy of neutrality and equidistance, has begun to build up its military power, and the reason for this is China, which claims dominance in the region, is exerting active pressure on India and is trying to establish its control over some of India's border territories. The latest example is China's attempt in the spring of 2020 to occupy hundreds of square kilometers of ice-covered land in India's northernmost region of Ladakh, taking advantage of the period of the pandemic and the most severe nationwide quarantine in India.

Both states also realize that a fundamental transformation of the global security architecture is currently taking place, where correctly formed foreign policy priorities and new inter-country coalitions can radically change the regional balance of power. In our opinion, both India and China equally have the potential to build a Sino-centric or Indo-centric Asia. At the same time, today, taking into account modern trends, in our opinion, China's foreign policy course prevails.

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