

Bond University  
Research Repository



**China and India**  
**New mandalas of power in 21st century geopolitics**

Dellios, Rosita

*Published in:*  
Essays on development issues

Published: 01/01/2003

*Document Version:*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Bond University research repository.](#)

*Recommended citation(APA):*  
Dellios, R. (2003). China and India: New mandalas of power in 21st century geopolitics. In R. N. Gnosh, M. A. Siddique, & R. Gabbay (Eds.), *Essays on development issues: India and the Indian Ocean region* (pp. 93-113). Atlantic.

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

For more information, or if you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact the Bond University research repository coordinator.

January 2003

# China and India: New Mandalas of Power in 21st Century Geopolitics

Rosita Dellios

*Bond University*, [rosita\\_dellios@bond.edu.au](mailto:rosita_dellios@bond.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss\\_pubs](http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs)

---

## Recommended Citation

Dellios, Rosita, "China and India: New Mandalas of Power in 21st Century Geopolitics" (2003). *Humanities & Social Sciences papers*. Paper 103.

[http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss\\_pubs/103](http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/103)

This Book Chapter is brought to you by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at [ePublications@bond](mailto:epublications@bond). It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanities & Social Sciences papers by an authorized administrator of [ePublications@bond](mailto:epublications@bond). For more information, please contact [Bond University's Repository Coordinator](#).

# **China and India: New *Mandalas* of Power in 21st Century Geopolitics**

**by**

**Rosita Dellios**

**Bond University**

***SMALL AND MID-GREAT POWERS IN SOUTHERN  
HEMISPHERE AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH NORTHERN  
NEIGHBOURS***

**Conference  
University of Western Australia, Perth  
20-21 November 2000**

## **CHINA AND INDIA: NEW MANDALAS OF POWER IN 21ST CENTURY GEOPOLITICS**

Rosita Dellios  
Bond University  
Gold Coast, Queensland 4229, Australia  
Telephone +61 7-55-952514  
Fax +61 7-55-952672  
e-mail [rosita\\_dellios@bond.edu.au](mailto:rosita_dellios@bond.edu.au)

### **ABSTRACT**

China and India - Asia's two great civilisational states - are also the world's most populous, accounting between them for a third of humanity. Both nations are nuclear armed and developing blue water navies. In view of their widespread material poverty, however, neither can be considered a truly great power, not even China whose permanent membership of the UN Security Council confers international influence beyond its economic and strategic reach. Nonetheless, China holds advantages over India in the global perception of power, and it is this perception which contributes to the exercise of power.

Chinese military ambition (as distinct from capability), the strength of Chinese culture, and the much touted market of a billion people, have captivated the global imagination. Even China's critics are at their harshest when discussing human rights issues, Tibet and Taiwan. India, by comparison, has not commanded international influence by virtue of being the world's biggest democracy or having a strong computer software industry. Acquisition of nuclear weapons has yet to be translated into genuine power, but rather is seen as evidence of 'gung-ho' behaviour.

In short, where China is perhaps unreasonably feared, given its lack of capability or even sufficiently demonstrated intent, India is not feared enough. And while that famed European Renaissance strategist, Nicholi Machiavelli, thought it better to be both loved and feared, he recognised both do not always coincide, and that human experience has taught that it is safer to be feared in an unsafe world. Neither China nor India are sufficiently appreciated for their inherent capacities. China's are exaggerated in the wrong direction; in China, whatever the appearance, power no longer grows out of the barrel of a gun. Indeed, the military is among the least of China's assets - *unless* it is deployed to extramilitary ends - and can be among its worst enemies if it is not. As for India's capacities, they are underestimated in terms of their diversionary power; it is a case of watch what India says, not what it does. What is India saying it is doing? Interpreting India, and hence its potentialities, is perhaps

even more important than interpreting China which is, ironically for a relatively secretive polity, more revealing of itself.

This paper engages in an exploration of the possibilities of new *mandalas* - or schemas - of power in 21st century geopolitics. The title draws from Indian political tradition (the *raj-mandala* of Kautilya) as well as Chinese *mandala* formations during the Middle Kingdom's height of power. The return of the *mandala* to statecraft in the 21st century is a fitting tribute to the power of Asian states in transforming, albeit by largely indirect means, the political landscape. The use of *mandala* in this paper is not directly Kautilyan, but a significantly modified concept to account for 21st century geostrategic conditions. The new *mandalas* of power are pertinent explorations of the conference theme in its concern for regional relations across the hemisphere: 'Small and mid-great powers in southern hemisphere and their relations with northern neighbours'. A *mandala* with a southern sector viewpoint permits a more dispassionate appraisal of northern sector activity. It is easier to delineate the effects of China and India, on each other and on others, when one is not China and India. It is enough, as the Thais would traditionally say, to be near.

# China and India: New *Mandalas* of Power in 21st Century Geopolitics

by  
Rosita Dellios

## I INTRODUCTION: 21ST CENTURY MANDALAS OF POWER

A *mandala* - meaning circle in Sanskrit - is a mystic diagram representing the cosmos. Composed of circles, squares and sometimes other geometrical shapes, it looks like a palace floorplan with gates from the outer to the inner chamber where the monarch is enthroned. In Buddhism and Hinduism it is used as a meditational aid to reach a higher state of consciousness. One needs to progress through such human causes of suffering as selfishness, greed, ignorance and intolerance, before entering higher states of being as one centres. Besides its spiritual meaning, the *mandala* is also a geopolitical expression to describe the conduct of relationships of power among ancient kingdoms in India and later in Hinduised Southeast Asia (see, for example, Dellios, 1997a, 1997b, 1999). These two meanings are not necessarily mutually exclusive, particularly in the present age when moral and material power are pursued simultaneously.

The present world *mandala* is largely American-inspired but two emerging regional *mandalas* are those of China and India. Both have sizable continental and maritime dimensions, generally unchallenged except where they meet in the trans-Himalayan and Ganges-Mekong sectors. The mountain sector is less volatile than the water domain further south, where each comes face to face with the other's traditional spheres of influence and vulnerability to invasion. If India expands its influence into the South China Sea via Indochina,<sup>1</sup> and likewise China does so into the Indian Ocean via Burma,<sup>2</sup> instability is likely to arise if this is perceived as a negation of the values of the retreating power, and hence loss of its 'charismatic' attraction.<sup>3</sup>

In the 21st century, both China and India represent great cultural nations that are endeavouring to become great political powers. They must do this within the prevailing conditions of global connectivity and competitiveness in the

---

<sup>1</sup> In November 2000, India formed a formal grouping with five Southeast Asian countries for cooperation in culture, education, human resources and other areas, called the Ganges-Mekong Cooperation Organisation.

<sup>2</sup> Burma is widely viewed as a client state of China. See, for example, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2000a.

<sup>3</sup> Traditional geopolitical *mandalas* were based on the politics of a charismatic centre, with its attraction of "deference and obligations" from other power centres through a demonstrated "ability to win allies and overtake enemies" (Higham, 1989:240).

knowledge industry, and not only by traditional means of a strong armed force and economy. While respecting the sovereign equality of states, they are not likely to settle for 'middle power' status, except in terms of a temporary hardship. India is already distinguished as "a high-tech leader, with the second largest computer software industry, the largest being in the US" (Sheridan, 2000). China, in having succeeded in joining the WTO in 2001, can better access global markets while profiting from the benefits of competition in its own market. With progress in these and other related areas already underway, it is well within the realms of speculation to anticipate new *mandalas* - or schemas - of power in 21st century geopolitics, based on the Chinese and Indian power centres. The language and signification of *mandala*, drawn from Indian political tradition (the *raj-mandala* of Kautilya) as well as Chinese *mandala* formations during the Middle Kingdom's height of power in dynastic times, is a fitting device for providing a culturally regional perspective. The use of *mandala* here is not directly Kautilyan, but a significantly modified concept to account for 21st century geostrategic conditions.

## II THE NARRATIVE OF POWER AS IT TRAVELS EAST FROM WESTERN GATEWAYS

China and the India - Asia's two great civilisational states - are also the world's most populous nations. Their combined populations of 2.3 billion represent a third of humankind. They are among the poorest of people with per capita GNP, for many, at below US\$200. In view of their widespread material poverty, neither country can be considered a truly great power, not even China whose permanent membership of the UN Security Council confers international influence beyond its economic and strategic reach. As Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's respected senior minister, once remarked: "At present [1997], when people refer to China as a great power, it is more diplomatic courtesy than reality" (Richardson, 1997).

### *Perception of power and the power of perception*

More pointed has been the appraisal of the late Gerald Segal, acerbic analyst of Chinese power and former director of studies at London's influential International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1999, under the telling title of 'Does China Matter?', he found that the Middle Kingdom was really only a middle power (Segal, 1999). Applauding China for its theatrical performance in convincing the world of its illusionary power, Segal concluded that the statistics of power - both economic and military - did not support the perception of China as great. "Beijing is a seriously overrated power," he claimed. "China made up a mere 3 percent of total world trade in 1997, about the same as South Korea and less than the Netherlands" (p. 26). He also singled out Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into China as another myth which did not withstand statistical scrutiny, in that China accounted for only

about 10 percent of global FDI (p. 28). As to China's military credentials, these he dismissed as "second-rate":

. . . China is a second-rate military power - not first-rate, because it is far from capable of taking on America, but not as third-rate as most of its Asian neighbours. China accounts for only 4.5 percent of global defense spending (the United States makes up 33.9 percent) and 25.8 percent of defense spending in East Asia and Australasia. (p. 29)

While Segal's statistically-backed arguments are plausible, so are those in support of China's greatness. Illustrative is a speech to Beijing University in the same year cited above, 1997, by the then director-general of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Renato Ruggiero. He spoke of "the reality that China is already a leading power in an ever more interdependent global economy", and went on to provide supporting evidence:

This reality is emphasized by the sheer force of China's rise in the world. During the last decade, output has been expanding by an average of 10 per cent a year, while merchandise export volume has been growing even faster, at about 15 per cent. In two decades, the value of China's merchandise exports has expanded more than twenty-fold, reaching US\$151 billion last year. China is already the world's fifth largest trading power, and the second largest recipient of foreign investment. Today the Chinese economy represents between 5 to 10 per cent of global output, depending on the method used to calculate national production. (Ruggiero, 1997)

While there is some disparity in the statistics cited by an academic of international repute and an equally reputable trade organisation director, for a range of reasons,<sup>4</sup> there is no doubt that each of these influential commentators

---

<sup>4</sup> These reasons may include methodology of calculation, the inclusion or exclusion of Hong Kong, the reliability of China's state-issued statistics, or even the authenticity of FDI data. With regard to the first, a better known alternative method of calculation is 'purchasing power parity' (PPP). Its acceptance is reflected in its inclusion in the World Bank's 'World Development Indicators'. Thus PPP GNP is defined as "gross national product converted to international dollars using purchasing power parity rates. An international dollar has the same purchasing power over GNP as a U.S. dollar has in the United States" (World Bank, 2000). Or, as the East Asia Analytical Unit (1996:111) elaborates, PPP "refers to a method of comparing the size of economies using international price comparisons to reflect the relative domestic purchasing powers of currencies. Traditional ways . . . simply convert national figures on the size of a given economy, expressed in the local currency, to foreign exchange (usually US dollars) at the prevailing official exchange rate. This method has well-known shortcomings, including the fact that prices of services and other non-traded goods tend to be much lower in developing economies. As a result, PPP measures of developing economies are frequently higher than estimates based on exchange-rate calculations." With regard to the second reason for statistical sources of difference, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the PRC functions as a separate Customs territory and hence does not automatically come under PRC trade figures. Complicating the matter further, however, is the conduct of a proportion of Chinese trade through Hong Kong. Under careful analysis, this can be discerned through *China's Customs Statistics* (see EAAU, 1996:145). As to reliability of China's statistical data, the fourth reason noted above, even the central government might be misled by enterprises seeking to exaggerate their productivity to avoid being targeted for reform. Finally, the questionable authenticity of FDI data derives from Chinese mainland investments sometimes being disguised



was more concerned with perception of power. Each had an argument to make, and it mattered not whether a country which was responsible for (only) three percent of world trade was the equivalent of the world's fifth largest trading power. What did matter was the light in which economic and military statistics were seen, and hence the perception which was being created or reinforced.

Given the importance of generating impressions of power, it is with some interest that Segal should conclude his essay on 'Does China Matter?', with the following observation: ". . . until China is cut down to size in Western imaginations and treated more like a Brazil or an India, the West stands little chance of sustaining a coherent and long-term policy toward it" (p. 36, emphasis added).

In choosing India as an example of a lesser power with which China should compare, a great deal is revealed about perceptions of India. While both China and India, as large but poor nations, could legitimately be painted as middle powers, they could equally be considered in the category of great powers - particularly from a Southern hemisphere and equatorial point of view. In the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, greatness resides in Japan, China and India. Yet India, in terms of dominant Western (Northern hemisphere) perception, surely suffers from the opposite condition of China. Rather than being an inflated power, it is in all probability a decidedly deflated power. Why might this be so? As I have written elsewhere:

. . . India is not well understood by the rest of the world. Its preoccupations are not the world's preoccupations. Neither rivalry with Pakistan in foreign relations nor the complexity of Indian socio-political affairs internally are international staples.

. . . China is also not generally well understood, but the world is acutely aware of it. Indeed China itself ranks as a global preoccupation. (Dellios, 1999:5)

### ***'Is it better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both?'***

India appears to be underestimated as a potential great power, largely because *it fails to inspire fear, awe or avariciousness* in the world beyond. (These are typical testing grounds in the outer frames of a *mandala*.) China, by comparison, has succeeded. Chinese military ambition (as distinct from capability), the strength of Chinese culture, and the much touted market of a billion people, have captivated the global imagination. Even China's critics are at their harshest when discussing human rights issues, Tibet and Taiwan. India, by comparison, is not feared for being the world's biggest democracy or having a strong computer software industry. Its nuclear weapons status as of 1998 has not primarily inspired fear, but condemnation or ridicule for perceived 'gung-ho' behaviour. In short, where China is perhaps unreasonably feared, given its lack

---

as FDI when entering via Hong Kong. The purpose of this ploy is to qualify for tax concessions (see Segal, 1999: 28).

of capability or even sufficiently demonstrated intent, India is not feared enough. And while that famed Florentine strategist, Nicholi Machiavelli (1469-1527), thought it was better to be both loved and feared, he recognised both do not always coincide, and that human experience has taught that it is safer to be feared if a prince (in current times, a state) is to be influential. Hence the following words of caution have been proffered:

. . . it is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both. . . . The bond of love is one which men, wretched creatures that they are, break when it is to their advantage to do so; but fear is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective.

. . . The prince must nonetheless make himself feared in such a way that, if he is not loved, at least he escapes being hated. For fear is quite compatible with the absence of hatred; . . . [and with the presence of respect].

. . . So, on this question of being loved or feared, I conclude that since some men love as they please but fear when the prince pleases, a wise prince would rely on what he controls, not on what he cannot control. (Machiavelli, *The Prince*: XVII).

Machiavelli's thinking was formulated within the competitive political climate of Renaissance Italy, but the power politics which he studied are of universal import. Forms of political realism, or *realpolitik*, may be recognised from European antiquity (Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War) through to diverse cultural settings, including Chinese legalist and Indian Kautilyan traditions.<sup>5</sup> 'Realism' is a political currency with which the world is long acquainted and which in many respects still holds sway unto the current era.

### *The power of attraction*

That which is feared often inspires awe, and not only in its power of punishment but also in its cultural identity. American culture may be said to be as powerful and awesome as its fighter jets; oftentimes it is just as feared. China has long used culture as a defining feature of civilisation and state strength. In Reischauer and Fairbank's (1970) apt summation, the "Chinese state was regarded as coterminous with Chinese culture" (p. 293). The Middle Kingdom's traditional tributary system of international relations was based on the notion of cultural superiority. Lesser nations would pay tribute to the Chinese emperor in an atmosphere of elaborate ritual. That 'barbarians' represented

---

<sup>5</sup> Greek historian Thucydides (460-c. 400 BC) is famed for his history of the Peloponnesian War, which he attributed to threat perception and power politics. Chinese legalism refers to a school of classical thought which, when put into practice, brought about the unification of China in 221 BC. It supported standardisation, centralisation, severe punishments, and the effectiveness of military power. In China, the first dynasty's legalist rule was thought to be so severe as to sow the seeds of its own downfall. In India, during the Mauryan era, the renowned strategist Kautilya (4th century BC), through the *Arthashastra* (*Book of the State*), developed a complex system of international relations based on relationships of power.

China's uncivilised 'other' is testimony to the important place accorded to culture in Chinese constructions of power.

Culture - and with it, religion - may be seen as the positive face of power. It is the 'carrot' to attract love and respect, as distinct from the 'stick', or negative face of power, which is used to compel or deter through coercion. The 'stick', while inducing fear, can also lead to hatred. Hatred, as Machiavelli warned, is a condition the astute ruler must avoid when deploying the power of fear. Organised hatred of the government may lead to rebellion within, and justify intervention from without. History, including that of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, has furnished abundant examples of this. Thus there are pragmatic and not only moral reasons for the avoidance of tyranny. The *Arthashastra* or *Book of the State* from India's Mauryan empire concurred when it stated: "a king of unrighteous character and of vicious habits will, though he is an emperor, fall prey either to the fury of his own subjects or to that of his enemies" (Kautilya, 1:259). Chinese political philosophy is a ready source of warnings against tyranny as, for example, found in the *Mencius*:

Confucius said: 'There are but two ways to follow, that of humanity and that of inhumanity.' A ruler who oppresses his people to the extreme will himself be slain and his kingdom will perish. If he oppresses not to the extreme, even then his life will be in danger and his kingdom will be weakened. (*Mencius*, 4A:2 in Chan, 1963:73)

Not only was humane government to be practised within the state, but 'the power of attraction' was held in high esteem in traditional Chinese foreign policy. To quote China's pre-eminent Master, Confucius, when asked about government: "Ensure those who are near are pleased and those who are far away are attracted" (*Analects*, XIII:16). Irrespective of the ethical reasons for humane government (and these figured prominently in Confucianism), Chinese deployment of culture was of strategic import. Through the principle of *laihua*, which means 'come and be transformed', China's *modus operandi* as a state was to attract the world rather than conquer it. This meant that the 'barbarian' tribute bearers to the Chinese capital were represented as being drawn to civilisation (the *mandala* centre), not cowed into submission. While there is little to link Machiavelli to Confucius philosophically, it is worth mentioning Machiavelli's viewpoint on this matter, and perhaps in doing so linking ethics to pragmatism, like *yin* to *yang*, *dharma* to *artha* (soft and hard power, ethical and material power). Machiavelli regarded propaganda as one of "two principal instruments at the disposal of the prince" (Jones 1969:29), the other being force. He considered religion to be a prime propaganda technique. "Whoever reads Roman history attentively," Machiavelli wrote in the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* (Vol. II, Bk. I), "will see in how great a degree religion served in the command of the armies, in uniting the people and keeping them well conducted, and in covering the wicked with shame" (Jones, 1969:31). The propaganda power of religion was also used effectively against the Romans, as evidenced by the rebellious Christians.

Present-day secular India is well aware of the political potency of religion. 'Partition' and 'demolition' are politically-charged terms in Indian discourse.<sup>6</sup> 'Partition' - the division of British India into a secular state with a Hindu majority (India) and an Islamic state with a Muslim majority (Pakistan) - was accompanied by much bloodshed (at least 500,000 perished) and bitterness as the opposing religious groups fought during the mass exodus to their respective states. 'Demolition' was also accompanied by inter-communal violence - though not on the scale of partition - when Hindu fanatics tore down a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya in 1992. The fanatics believed that the mosque, called the Babri Masjid, had been built by the founder of the Moghul dynasty on the birthsite of Lord Ram. China, too, is no stranger to the pitfalls of religiously-based movements. Its banning of, and police action against, the Falun Gong sect provides only the latest example of the Chinese state versus religious cult politics - the most famous being the 'Boxer Rebellion' during the Qing dynasty.

But to return to the awe-generating potential of culture, and China's refinement of the art, there is yet another power element to which it is related. In addition to tribute relations equating with a symbolic submission to civilisation (China), this form of traditional foreign policy which China practised also entailed attractive rewards, both in terms of trade opportunities and the conditions of peace in which they could be pursued. Here the 'barbarian's' avariciousness comes into play.

### ***The power of greed***

Gerald Segal, in his abovementioned essay questioning China's credentials as a great power, speculated that "China is better understood as a theoretical power - a country that has promised to deliver for much of the last 150 years but has consistently disappointed" (p. 24). It is true that the vast Chinese market has not fully materialised, largely because it has not been fully developed. Poverty prevented a large proportion of the Chinese population from becoming consumers - except for opium, owing to 19th century British commercial avarice and political expedience. There were also restrictive Chinese government policies on trade when it was demanded by the 'foreign devils' as a right, rather than conferred as a consequence of proper tributary relations. Indeed it was an imbalance of trade, in China's favour, that led the British to resort to the sale of opium, grown in India, to open the China market. When they could not succeed by subversive means, because of a concerted clampdown on the illegal opium trade, the British imperialists openly employed force. This became known as 'gunboat diplomacy' during the Opium Wars of 1842 and 1860.

China's subjugation to British trade interests demonstrates the power of greed when it is turned against you. Beijing has learnt this lesson well and opened up,

---

<sup>6</sup> As evident in the diversely-sourced essays found in Silvers and Epstein, 2000, for example.

on its own terms, the same treaty ports - as well as many other areas - more than a century after the Opium Wars. Long prized for its luxury consumer products that included silk, tea, and porcelain, China is now courted once again by business interests the world over. Because of the much celebrated China market, Beijing is exempt from the more censorious extremes of American and allied foreign policy. Even for the USA, the celebrated 'land of the free', ideology is not the sole - nor always the primary - 'criterion of truth'. The United States and India, the world's two largest democracies, have seen little of each other during the Cold War when strategic alignment held higher value as an indicator of worth than constitutional, freely elected, government. Like China, the United States well understands the language of power - markets, military might and global diplomatic impact.

Given the weight of American business and stability-promoting interests, neither democratic Taiwan nor Tibet as an international *cause celebre* can sway Washington into taking punitive action against China. NATO's use of force in Kosovo in 1999 is unlikely to be replicated in the Strait of Taiwan or in the Himalayan plateau, let alone across the less publicised region of Xinjiang from which calls for an independent 'East Turkistan' issue. Beijing acts like a beacon to international investors, particularly with its recent admission to WTO. It controls a credible and constantly modernising nuclear arsenal, as well as the world's largest armed force. While Beijing reserves its smiles for investors, it readily displays a belligerent attitude as the occasion demands, particularly on issues of sovereignty.

### *China's flexibility of forces*

In a world which has become far more interdependent (the integrating function of *mandala*) but no less wedded to power as an *exclusive value* - that is, "Since one's own power is relative to others' lack of it, the pursuit of power for oneself implies the denial of power to others" (Jones, 1969:26) - finding one's preferred place in the hierarchy involves skills relevant to both conditions (becoming more integrated as one travels to the centre in the *mandala* but also manipulating the demons of human appetites). Power as a *common value* - "in the sense it could be shared without loss" (*ibid*) - refers here to the (productive) economic and cultural power of attraction (*laihua*). It also includes China's much publicised 'strategic partnerships' with various countries, including the USA and Russia. These are fluid partnerships of power rather than entrenched struggles for power that characterised 19th century diplomacy and 20th century Cold War politics. 'Strategic partnerships' may prove to represent a shrewd diplomatic device for defusing a competitor's exclusive pursuit of power. Power as a *common value* accords with global interdependence. However, the quest for a preponderance of power characterises the power-maximising activities of nations wishing to reduce their vulnerabilities and maintain a credible capacity to enforce claims or threaten punishment when interests are compromised.

In the light of the above, China may be said to have performed its fear-inducing and awe-inspiring - not to mention, greed-invoking - role rather better than India. Western 'realism' may well be misreading both centralised, 'Communist' China (which is popularised as a potential threat to the established order), and democratic, 'chaotic' India (which is not). In turn, Beijing and New Delhi may also have only themselves to congratulate or blame, as the case may be, for misleading the West and possibly themselves. In a word, neither China nor India is sufficiently appreciated for its inherent capacities. Their current *mandalas* are not fully formed. In China, whatever the appearance, power no longer grows out of 'the barrel of a gun'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the military is among the least of China's assets - *unless* it is deployed to extramilitary ends - and can be among its worst enemies if it is not.

By this is meant that Chinese military power should not be used or threatened to be used in any situation which could advance the image of China as a brutal power,<sup>8</sup> as in case of Taiwan's reunification or in an internal security role, lest China's campaign of economic and cultural attraction (a contemporary version of *laihua*) turns to repulsion. This, of course, occurred most vividly in response to the use of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) against students in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. Military power is best used when held in abeyance as a deterrent to aggression or as psychological ballast for advancing its diplomacy - in other words, being able to negotiate from a position of strength. If we are to understand that, in Henry Kissinger's words, "the United States is the only superpower in only one field of activity, and that is the military" (Kissinger, 1998:2), then China has a great deal of room to maneuver. With its portfolio of forces, including economic attraction and partnership diplomacy (especially in US President Bush's 'war against terrorism'<sup>9</sup>), it can set out to modify US behaviour, and not only compete in kind - that is, militarily.

Avoidance of outright military competition will save China money and 'face', in that its inadequacies will not be under constant scrutiny. If China attempted to match the US, the cost would be prohibitive. Avoidance of even the appearance of an arms race will also save it from continued suspicion of its intentions. Meanwhile, the psychological ballast of credible defence capability must be maintained - especially in the conventional weapons sector. Undue reliance on the nuclear threat is fraught with the risk of (a) *use* in the event that deterrence fails and conventional forces are inadequate; (b) *non-use* and hence capitulation (like the Cuban missile crisis when the Soviet Union backed down in the face of US nuclear threats); and (c) *provoking or providing a pretext* for US

---

<sup>7</sup> A famous Mao dictum, which was included in the *Little Red Book*, was that 'political power grows out of the barrel of the gun'. Its historical context was that the Chinese Communist Party needed its army to win the revolutionary war; but the army was expected to obey the party and not vice-versa.

<sup>8</sup> For example, former British Ambassador to China, Sir Percy Craddock, is quoted in MacFarquhar (2000:165) as describing the Chinese as 'thugs'.

<sup>9</sup> This theme is developed in Dellios and Field (2002).

deployment of missile defence systems. This would considerably diminish China's nuclear credibility (see the International Institute for Strategic Studies 1999a, 1999b).

China's geostrategic advantage is that it is the largest and always has been the largest polity in East Asia, much of which came under its suzerainty for two millennia. This, coupled with the China's attractiveness to futurists and optimists who invest in emerging world orders, provide the People's Republic with sufficient flexibility to arrange its power portfolio as circumstances demand. When Mao Zedong addressed the question of how does a weak army fight a strong one, his answer then has not lost any of its salience. The answer was to gain psychological ascendancy over the opponent so as to minimise his comparative advantage in material power. At the time, Mao's strategy was called People's War and involved guerilla tactics - "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue" (Mao, 1966). As I have written elsewhere: "Such guerilla tactics naturally favour fluid rather than fixed battle lines. The purpose is to avoid engaging the enemy force on its own self-serving terms - an example of the wider principle of denying the adversary its concepts of warfare" (Dellios, 1989:13).

China has a rich and robust history of strategic endeavour. Mao, like Confucius, was a creative transmitter of tradition, mining China's cultural resources for answers to contemporary predicaments. It is said that nothing is wasted in China. Its use of history and culture attests to this. In questions of war and peace, Mao revived such classical strategists as Sunzi, just as Confucius addressed the militarism of his times by invoking the humane way of the sages. China has a flexible and diverse range of power factors at its disposal. Because these are often 'value added' by circumstance or convergence with one another, they are not readily measured. However, it would be unwise to underestimate this form of power while overestimating the significance of arms acquisition programs and forays into the South China Sea.

### *India's Diversionary Power*

India's greatness lies in its wide-ranging talents for losing itself in the world and finding its presence in almost any philosophy, religion and social condition, while retaining the recognisable *rasa* or flavour of 'Indian' civilisation.

All the convergent influences of the world run through this society: Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular; Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind. (Historian E. P. Thompson quoted in Sen, 2000: 101)

India's capacities are underestimated in terms of their diversionary power; it is therefore a case of watch what India says, not what it does. What is India saying in what it is doing? Interpreting India, and hence its potentialities, is

perhaps even more important than interpreting China which is, ironically for a relatively secretive polity, more revealing of itself. China's concerns are highly focused: domestic economic reform; vigilance against American containment; and defence of Westphalian sovereignty to prevent interference in the upkeep and pursuit of Chinese state unity.<sup>10</sup> China's preoccupations read like a career path to great power status.

India, by comparison, is more evocative in its approach to the conduct of state affairs. For example, the otherwise fear- and awe-inducing act of nuclearisation is verbally juxtaposed with smiling Buddhist serenity. India's civilisational greatness, the birthplace of Buddhism and home of Hinduism, was brought home to the modern world with a 'bang rather than a whimper', to borrow from T. S. Elliot's suitably titled poem, *The Wasteland*. Upon the testing of India's nuclear device in 1974, its success was conveyed to Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister, with the code term: 'Buddha is smiling'. That test was conducted on Buddha Poornima Day (or *Wesak*, Buddha's birthday). On the 24th anniversary of the first test came another. It was codenamed, 'Buddha smiles again'. One scientist, on witnessing the underground explosion of three nuclear devices was reported in *India Today* (May 1998) as saying: "I can now believe stories of Lord Krishna lifting a hill" (in Roy, 2000:xvii). The 1974 test had been described as a peaceful explosion. Its sequel in 1998 came with a government assurance that India continued to be "committed to the global elimination of nuclear weapons" (*Deccan Herald*, 1998). In this regard, it is ironic that among the official reasons given for the test was 'exposing Western hypocrisy'.

The 1998 test was presided over by a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Hindu nationalist prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was politically embattled at the time - just as Indira Gandhi had been in 1974. As Pankaj Mishra (2000:228) observed: "India's first nuclear test in 1974 came in handy for Indira Gandhi when she was facing a crippling railway strike (the first of the political challenges that eventually led her to suspend civil rights in 1975)." The second demonstration of nuclear power gave a new lease of political life to Vajpayee, just as the first had done so for Mrs Gandhi: "The tests removed a feeling of 'national weakness' among Indians, a BJP spokesman said. This is why criticism of the Prime Minister virtually ceased for a while after the tests: he was now praised, even by his recent opponents, for being courageous and decisive . . ." (Mishra, 2000:231). Indian public acclaim for heroic deeds on the part of its leaders links into god-king and mother-goddess attributes. Indeed, Pankaj Mishra (2000:238) relates how after India's defeat of Pakistan in 1971, Indira Gandhi was hailed as the Hindu goddess Durga, consort of Shiva. The tale of a BJP leader, L. K. Advani, dressing up like Lord Rama and being driven in a

---

<sup>10</sup> Thus, for example, in 1992, China passed legislation declaring sovereignty over the disputed Spratly, Paracel and Diaoytai (or Senkaku) island groups and also reserved the right - as it did with Taiwan - to use military force to assert its claims.



Toyota disguised as a chariot, is another instance of the power of mythic metaphor in Indian politics.

Former Indian prime minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, in his book, *The Insider* (1998), argues that Indian politics are essentially feudal. "Neither the democratic nor the federal principle had taken root to supplant the feudal ethos . . . [of] past centuries; the concept of kingship . . . was ingrained in the collective consciousness. . . . Democracy in action at best consisted of the question: Who should reign?" (quoted in Mishra, 2000:240).

If - to take this metaphor further - emperors and mandarins, albeit Communist, still rule in China, and divine monarchs rein in India through elections, what of the lands they govern? China is still called *Zhongguo* (the Middle Kingdom) in Chinese. The idea of a middle kingdom pertained not only to the centre of civilisation, surrounded by 'barbarians', but also to the country of equilibrium. As for India, its psycho-strategic dispositions are well revealed by the American specialist on South Asia, Stephen Cohen. Referring to the partition of post-independence India, he observed that it "broke up the strategic unity of the subcontinent that - albeit intermittently - goes back 2000 years to the first Mauryan Empire" (Cohen, 1993). A united India would mean a geographic reach from the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia and a diplomatic gravity to rival China's (*ibid.*). Add to continental unity, a maritime power projection across the Indian Ocean, and India could have been much greater than it is in the hierarchy of nations - perhaps second or third after the United States. K. M. Panikkar's seminal work, *India and the Indian Ocean*, first published in 1945, presents the case for control of the seas as follows:

During its five thousand years of history, India like China has been conquered many time by invasions from the land side. But in the case of both, such conquests, though they led to temporary convulsions, only ended in the assimilation of the conqueror in the general pattern of the local civilisation.

Control from the side of the sea is different. It operates as a stranglehold especially when, as in the case of India, as a result of geographical factors, the country's prosperity is dependent almost exclusively on sea trade. . . .

. . . For sea trade no country is so centrally situated. . . . While to other countries, the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas, to India it is the vital sea. Her life lines are concentrated in that area. (Panikkar, 1962: 84-5)

With the 21st century underway, India as a great sea power has not come to pass. While not without progress, India's new naval doctrine which calls for 'blue water' capability by 2010, is judged overly ambitious to fund within such a short timeframe (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2000b). Similarly, India's August 1999 Draft Nuclear Doctrine would require, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (*ibid.*), "about \$500 million annually over the next decade for even a minimal version" of the envisaged strategic force. India's ambitions, it seems, are out of reach of its capabilities.

But ambition harnessed to a China-like determination to accomplish serious reform tasks, taps India's diversionary power. Shiva's dance does not have to lead to destruction - unless it is the destruction of petty political vanities. If China seeks its equilibrium between Heaven and Earth, *yin* and *yang*, *dharma* and *artha*; India is precariously balanced between the gods and the void. High-tech exit strategies from poverty present themselves on the one hand, the forces of 'partition' and 'demolition' menace on the other.

Chinese premier, Zhu Rongji, understood the condition well when he famously adhered to the view that China must crash or crash-through in implementing its reforms. 'Crash' could entail national fragmentation. This is no idle speculation for either China or India in view of the ease nowadays with which nations fall, fragment or force their entrenched leaderships from office. The weight of restive publics with heightened expectations needs to be borne through ever more enterprising and transmodern means. In other words it is a question of how to globalise in relation to the 'centre'.

How might this question be approached in *mandala* terms? Hall and Ames (1995) provide some guiding insights in their discussion of Chinese aesthetics:

Among the Chinese, circles and squares have been dominated not by their peripheries but by their centres. It is not the bounded circle or the square one is apt to meet in Chinese art, literature, or philosophy, but the "radial" circle and the "nested" square which extend themselves ever outward from their centres. The Chinese claim that the world is but "the ten thousand things" bears little suggestion that it is a bounded or a boundable whole. Such a world is a set of foci from which relatedness to what at the moment is deemed "centre" may be negotiated. (Hall and Ames, 1995:xxii)

China and India are great powers insofar as they concentrate on their civilisational centres - their historic regard for how to become human and thus enlightened - rather than their peripheries which can entrap them into narrow concerns for boundaries and borders. In any case, these are being outgrown. Happily, the 'borderless world' has become a cliché of our present digital age. New geopolitical *mandalas* of power are positioned to extend outwards into this borderless world from ancient centres of power. Rather than committing cultural suicide in order to survive the demands of globalisation and middle class/middle power values, these ancient centres of civilisation understand how to be great in the developed human sense. Their confidence should assist both their own people and the rest of the world to integrate the 21st century's diverse globalisation.

## REFERENCES

- Chan, Wing-tsit (trans. and comp.) (1963), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Cohen, Stephen (1993), 'The Regional Impact of a reforming India', in International Institute of Strategic Studies, *Adelphi Paper 276*, Brassey's, London.
- Confucius (1988), *The Analects*, D. C. Lau (trans.), Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Dellios, Rosita (1989), *Modern Chinese Defence Strategy: Present Developments, Future Directions*, Macmillan, London.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1997a) "'How May the World be at Peace?": Idealism as Realism in Chinese Strategic Culture', in Valerie M. Hudson (ed.) *Culture and Foreign Policy*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, Colorado, pp. 201-230.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1997b) 'Reconceptualising Development as a Culture Mandala', conference paper, *4th International Conference on Development*, Institute for Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and the International Institute for Development Studies (IIDS), Calcutta, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1999), 'China-United States Relations: The New Superpower Politics', *The Culture Mandala*, Vol. 3, No. 2, August, pp. 1-20, <http://www.international-relations.com>
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2000), 'Globalisation and the Mandala: Software for the Millennium', *The Culture Mandala*, Millennium Issue, Vol. 4, No. 1, December-January, pp. 1-10, <http://www.international-relations.com>
- Dellios, Rosita and Heather Field (2002), 'China and the European Union: Potential Beneficiaries of Bush's Global Coalition'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 1, April, pp. 83-98.
- East Asia Analytical Unit (1996), *Asia's Global Powers: China-Japan Relations in the 21st Century*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Hall, David L. and Roger T. Ames (1995), *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Higham, Charles (1989), *The Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- International Institute of Strategic Studies (1999a), 'US Missile Defence: Strategy, Technology and Politics', *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 5, No. 3, April.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1999b), 'Sino-American Tensions: Bombs, Spies and Trade', *Strategic Comments*, 5(5), June.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2000a), 'China's Ambitions in Myanmar: India Steps Up Countermoves', *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 6, No. 6, July.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2000b), 'India's Military Spending', *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 6, No. 6, July.
- Kissinger, Henry (1998), 'High-Minded Goals Require Realism', *Transitions* 5(11), Special Supplement, Nov. 1998, pp. 2-3.
- Jones, W. T. (1968, 2nd edn), *A History of Western Philosophy: Hobbes to Hume*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York.
- Kautilya (1967), *Arthashastra*, R. Shamasastri (trans.), Mysore Printing and Publishing House, Mysore.
- Mabbett, I. W. (1978), 'Kingship at Angkor', *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 66, No. 2, pp. 1-58.

- MacFarquhar, Roderick (2000), 'India: The Impact of Empire', in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds), *India: A Mosaic*, NYREV Inc., New York, pp. 149-178.
- Machiavelli, Niccolo (1981, 3rd edn), *The Prince*, George Bull (trans.), Penguin, London.
- Mao, Zedong (1966), *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing.
- Mishra, Panjak (2000), 'A New, Nuclear, India?', in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds), *India: A Mosaic*, NYREV Inc., New York, pp.227-273.
- Richardson, Michael (1997), 'Diplomacy Defuses Fear of Beijing', *The Australian*, 11 January, p. 7.
- Roy, Arundhati (2000), 'Introduction', in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds), *India: A Mosaic*, NYREV Inc., New York, pp. xvii-xxxiv.
- Ruggiero, Renato (1997), 'China and the World Trading System', *WTO News: 1995-1999 Speeches - Renato Ruggiero, Former DG*, World Trade Organisation, Geneva, <http://www.wto.org/>
- Segal, Gerald (1999), 'Does China Matter?', *Foreign Affairs*, 78(5), September/October, pp. 24-36.
- Sen, Amartya (2000), 'Tagore and His India', in Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein (eds), *India: A Mosaic*, NYREV Inc., New York, pp.55-106.
- Sheridan, Greg (24 March 2000), 'Reluctant Passage to India', *The Australian*, p. 11.
- Silvers, Robert B. and Barbara Epstein (eds) (2000), *India: A Mosaic*, NYREV Inc., New York.
- Taiwan Security Research (13 November 2000), 'Weekly Report', <http://www.taiwansecurity.org/>
- World Bank, 'Size of the Economy', *2000 World Development Indicators*, <http://www.worldbank.org/>