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Abstract

The Silk Roads Ethos (SRE; Ling, 2014) animates the idea that India and China must draw from the legacy of historical exchanges for future cooperation. Mainstream scholarship on the subject employs and relies predominantly on a state-centric rivalry-oriented framework to study the issue, in which a standard focus on demographic comparisons, growth rates, GDP, FDI, energy-security complex, and cognate connotations of “hypermasculine war games” demarcate India-China relations in mutually distinct and discrete “boxed” categories (Banerjee and Ling, 2010). It also does not engage with the growing body of historically attuned, critical scholarship that focuses on the nuances of exchange, collaboration, and conflict between India and China. If scholars working on China-India are serious about offering a counter-hegemonic alternative to the current work-manuals, then our research approaches in understanding one another must also employ a counter-hegemonic epistemology. Drawing on insights from two recent collaborative projects, one on hydro-power projects in India and China, and a second, larger project on India-China relations, this article outlines the specific ways in which the wisdom of the SRE carries with it unequivocal empirical and pedagogical possibilities.

Keywords

China, India, India China relations, river dams, Silk Roads

Introduction: A race within a chase

A review of mainstream academic publications and popular press titles in English on India and China in general, or India-China relations in particular, from the late-1990s onwards reveals that

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the study of India-China relations has been approached predominantly through yardsticks involving all manner of comparisons and deficit tallies (for examples, see Frankel and Harding, 2004; Friedman and Gilley, 2005; Garver, 2001, 2002; Gruber, 2014; Mani, 2005; Meredith, 2007; Palit, 2010, 2012; Sharma, 2009). Here, China-India relations are generally approached, studied, and analyzed from a “trust deficit” premise, which then orients focus toward collating examples of these nations’ mutual scrutiny in geopolitics and surveillance of one another’s socioeconomic progress, that in turn loop back to concentrate on intense competition and rivalry for diplomatic ties, natural resources, and global markets. The discourses surrounding Doklam during the summer of 2017 is a recent instantiation of this combat-chorus narrative style: “China and India are gearing up for what could be a global showdown to test each other’s strength as the leading power in Asia,” asserts Sharma (2017). In spite of alternative perspectives,¹ the framework, representations, and analysis of current India and China relations, both in the West and (replicated unimaginatively) elsewhere, have been predominantly state-centric, largely realist, and characterized by: (a) an uncritical use of political and socioeconomic dichotomies in explaining contemporary trends—for instance, the rigid focus on a *democracy v. dictatorship* contrast used to indicate, respectively, a free but stubbornly chaotic India in comparison to a highly efficient but repressive China; and relatedly, (b) an overreliance on geoeconomic indicators, such as GDP, growth-rate, foreign investment, technology-enabled commerce, industrial production, military capabilities, or even the growing roster of dollar-billionaires in appraising the nations’ progress.² Even in instances in which references to China and India are laudatory, their respective strengths get calibrated on the basis of their performance against a narrow scale of economic achievements and geopolitical competitiveness; and not in terms of any substantial development or political alternatives that their long, shared histories and present exchanges might generate (see Bhattacharya, 2014). To be sure, the *competition-rivalry-race* between China and India is a race within a chase, given that embedded within the rhetoric of “emerging markets” is the idea that they are both in the process of *catching-up* with the West, which, by the way, is neither racing nor chasing anything. As fully self-actualized, the West is just carrying on being itself. Unfortunately, many academics in/from India and China have also adopted this point of view as revealed by their projects’ emphasis on comparing the two countries’ global competition for resources, political and economic influence, accomplishments in the realms of fiscal policies and growth patterns, and finally the seemingly interminable border dispute (see, for example, Chenoy and Chenoy, 2007; Goyal and Jha, 2004; Guruswamy et al., 2003; Mehta, 1998; Nagaraj, 2005; Sharma, 2017; Sidhu and Yuan, 2003; Sidhu et al., 2013; Srinivasan, 2006).

The patterns of ongoing research scrutiny of the social, political, and economic anatomy of India-China have produced a powerful matrix against which the two countries’ mutual and global relevance continue to be gauged. The epistemology at work here—characterized by dissection, comparative analysis, appraisal, and prognosis of India-China’s contemporary socioeconomic and cultural dimensions—bears an ongoing and troubling historical relationship with highly racialized, gendered, and orientalist perspectives of non-white people that is, unfortunately, pervasive across both academic disciplines as well as everyday discourses. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, western “scientists” carried out innumerable pseudo-scientific biological experiments that dissected, weighed, measured, color-coded, and compared the anatomy—from bones and muscles to skin and hair—of Black, Asian, indigenous, and Jewish people. In the “objective” views upheld in this expansive body of pseudo-science, non-white people were seen as being not merely afflicted with suboptimal bodily conditions and deficiencies (at once too small, too thick, not subtle, too weak), but it was also established that these very flawed attributes—stamped onto their biology—

defined these peoples' fundamental inferiority: low mental acumen, unsound ethical sensibilities, sexual degeneration, characteristic proclivity to deviate from the rule of law, or the absence of a noble temperament needed for proper political leadership arising from any number of social, historical, or bodily degenerative problems (for a historical overview of this racist epistemology and its prolonged implications for the political economy of development and world politics, see, for example, Hobson, 2012; Mohanty, 1991; Rist, 1997; Said, 1979; Sheppard et al., 2009; Smith, 2012). Knowledge acquired through a pursuit of racial pseudo-biology not only bolstered foregone conclusions regarding the corporeal and intellectual/cultural superiority of white people, but it was also central to the formulation of the wide spectrum of racial projects ranging from eugenics to anti-Asian and anti-Black immigration policies, from Euro-American imperialism to the deadly laws of the Nazi regime. Although the emergent notion of development in the post-1950s era had managed to dilute some of the most outrageous racist phraseology, its epistemology and discourse, nevertheless, retained, utilized, and expanded the familiar colonial worldview and racial idioms in making the Third World knowable against a long list of social, economic, and political deficiencies (Escobar, 1995). Specifically, the previous century's acutely racialized and gendered hierarchical judgments (emanating from the West) about non-white people's demonstrable anatomical and sociocultural backwardness infused the idea of development. Accordingly, tutelage and prescriptions for suitable improvements, i.e. development, were supplied on the basis of the West's exemplary progress curve. Calibrated against units measuring deficiencies and gaps of all manner, the postcolonial world's anatomy, both corporeal (malnutrition, high fertility, low life-expectancy) and social (the economy, government, resources, culture, people, and everyday lives), became data, rendering their people open and visible to the disciplinary gaze of a legion of western development experts and their policy interventions (Escobar, 1995).

Indeed, much has altered in China and India since the 1950s: rising economic growth rates, the emergence of sprawling urban centers, export-oriented manufacturing and technology hubs, growing service sectors, increased life expectancy and literacy rates, along with poverty reduction measures have featured prominently over the last two decades in commentators' observations regarding the two countries. And yet, despite the passage of time since the post-1950s' heyday of development discourse, as well as the ever-lengthening catalogue of growth variables that are routinely highlighted, the West's orientalist perceptions concerning the non-western racial others' near-permanent vestigial backwardness and deficiencies have nonetheless remained painfully stable. This remains true of the characterization of India and China—both in academic and media discourses overall (see Hobson, 2012; Liss, 2003; Mitra, 2016; Ramasubramanian, 2005; Turner, 2014). In the specific cases of these two countries, former racial perceptions of non-white peoples' suboptimal physical anatomy have mutated and spilled over into perspectives about their 21st-century body politic at home and in geopolitics worldwide. This is particularly so in the common use of orientalist and racialized references to India as the proverbial "Elephant" and China as the "Dragon" (Elliot, 2006). These articulations perform the work of reducing the two countries/cultures to caricatures of mythical or unwieldy animals, while accentuating the West's status as the enduring seat of (sublime) *human* civilization from which emanates unendingly its legitimate role as the ultimate adjudicator of the India-China race, frequently couched in the language of the "BRICS' prospects" (see De Jong et al., 2012). Although the two countries' rising economic growth rates and prosperity have been attributed to economic policy reforms and globalization, i.e. secular and modern vectors, these countries' representation overall in the media draw from old, orientalist tropes that continue to underscore shades of backwardness. China has been portrayed as an "aggressive, brutal, and dangerous place" in prominent US newspapers as recently as in the

early 2000s (Liss, 2003: 310; see also Turner, 2014). Likewise, India has been portrayed as a dangerous and ruthless place on western film, TV, and digital media (Mitra, 2016); and specifically as backward, rural, dirty, and poor in English language films from the US and UK between the 1930s to 2000 (Ramasubramanian, 2005). Western commentators' summations of progress and growing economic strengths are often juxtaposed in terms of the cunning of "reverse engineering" in China and "low-end," repetitive back-office work undertaken in the Indian Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector.³ Development in these countries is thus seen as super-imposed, uneven, and associated with illiberal forces that leave much to be desired to the extent that it does not match up to the norms of globalization's modernity: for instance, we are told of state authoritarianisms that can squash any impediments at all, or of narrow specializations in laborious, derivative "copy-paste" jobs that lack any internally-driven or autonomous creativity (see Abrami et al., 2014). This method of juxtaposing variables of progress with a cornucopia of contrasting anachronisms is designed to imply that unlike the West's fundamentally liberal, all-encompassing, authentic, and civilizational progress, the global South's development is, in the end, incomplete, erratic, and superficial; indeed, the entire region is undeserving of the development it has indubitably acquired. Thus, stock references to their economic progress notwithstanding, the ongoing reproduction and repetition of the *deficit-competition-overcompensation* circuitry vis-a-vis India-China have reaffirmed and revitalized for the contemporary world a familiar, reassuring Euro-American idiom in which the West is able to retain its position as a stable, higher authority that observes and dispenses judgment about the India-China race.

Silk Roads Ethos and the wisdom of the road for methodology

The *compare-contrast* and *deficit-competition* hall of mirrors notwithstanding, a growing body of work is shifting the contours of India-China scholarship. To begin with, this scholarship illustrates how the history of research along this trajectory—on China and India in general and on their relations in particular—is longer and more substantive than commonly recognized (see Banerjee and Ling, 2010; Deshpande, 2001; Duara, 1995, 2010b; Farooqui, 2006; Ling, 2013; Rahman, 2002; Tan, 1998, 1999). And, despite the many episodes of diplomatic strains over several decades following 1962, scholars in India have managed to sustain a deep interest in understanding China's development, culture, politics, and literature (see Acharya 2008, 2009; Acharya and Deshpande 2003; Agarwal, 2007; Banerjee, 2016; Banerjee and Ling, 2010; Duara, 1988; Ghosh, 1995; Tan, 1999, 2002; Thakur, 1996).⁴ More significantly, this work conveys an emphasis on understanding the historical links, interactions, and even conflicts to gain nuanced insights on how India and China related to each other both in the postcolonial context and in the pre-Westphalian world order before the hegemony of modern, colonizing categories of political analysis made an appearance (see Banerjee and Ling, 2010; Lal, 2009; Tan, 1998). The interpretation of the 1962 border war as a residuum of colonial rule, biopolitics, and cartography, that subsequently got incorporated into Cold War politics, for example, indicates an assertion not commonplace in mainstream analyses of the war's much longer pre-independence geo-political context (Banerjee, 2007). This body of work thus represents a marked departure from the conventional growth and security models adopted in framing contemporary India-China relations (Banerjee, 2016; Ling, 2013, 2016).

This line of inquiry has found an articulation among a growing number of Indian and Chinese scholars who suggest that India and China ought not to see themselves as mere nation-states caught-up in the narrow balance of politics and power, but also as "civilizational twins" (Tan, 2002: 162; Ling, 2014), endowed with a rich history of mutuality, who bear an undeniable

relevance for one another in the contemporary world (see Acharya, 2008, 2009; Lal, 2009; Mohanty, 2005). This point of view, emerging from the knowledge and appreciation of shared history and civilization, makes it imperative to listen to what many scholars like Lal have articulated as a set of “different and varying idioms” not easily legible in colonialist and orientalist knowledge systems (Lal, 2009: 44):

Long before either China or India had any substantive relations with the west, they had encountered each other in various domains of thought, art, and culture. A few fragments from that rich history should suffice to suggest that it is not merely that stories of trade along the Silk Route have now been supplanted by the present narrative of political and economic rivalry, but rather that the stories of previous times were told in different and varying idioms.

It becomes imperative for us, then, to try to develop a literacy or capacity to discern and understand these *idioms* and work out their relevance to shape the kinds of scholarship that this century needs.

LHM Ling (2013, 2014, 2016), a leading postcolonial feminist scholar of transnational politics, has provided certain tangible conceptual examples and methods of analysis that elaborate what it would mean to work with the resources that have grown out of the long arc of civilization exchanges between India and China. Ling reflects on how the Buddhist philosophy of *Interbeing* not only sustains a reappraisal of the history of exchange, but also offers a methodology with which, for instance, India-China relations, past and present, can be conceptualized as codependent and intersubjective.⁵ In this regard, the SRE has concrete and powerful methodological implications. As opposed to an uncritical move to recast an idealized past, SRE-oriented work seeks a scholarly imperative that can engage with the epistemological value of a counter-hegemonic conceptualization of India-China relations. A sustained focus on shared history and oft-ignored cultural resources’ relevance in generating an alternative view of multiple-worlds (Ling, 2014) is thus at the heart of SRE as method. One might ask: in what ways does SRE differ from postcolonial and transnational interventions, in theory and method? The reader will note that, indeed, transnational and post-colonial feminist theorists, in IR and the social sciences overall, have since the early 1980s questioned/decentered the hegemony of West-centric, universalist knowledge claims based on Euro-American empirical standards set up in the context of imperialism and colonial relations of rule (Ling, 2007; Mohanty, 1991; Smith, 2012). This work’s growing momentum has demanded an accountability toward the historical contexts of imperialism and its ongoing afterlife, manifested as a sequence of unequal relationships of power, which shape, mediate, and refract through what are codified as academic research methods: e.g. the research process (indicating social relations of power), data collection (rendering the research subject knowable), and analysis and writing (routinely presenting “results” and “conclusions” about people/cultures) (Smith, 2012). Following intellectual interventions from the various intersecting theoretical strands of feminist postcolonial scholarship and ethnic studies, the idea of an impartial and universal epistemology has been provincialized, to borrow a term from Chakrabarty (2000): *western* epistemology has now been comprehensively reappraised as constructed, situated, specific, and partial, as in both one-sided and incomplete.⁶ Growing emphasis on intersectionality, polyphony, and the multi-sitedness of research contexts and categories has also further altered the view of the field(s).⁷ Some examples from the domain of qualitative social science research would include: Visweswaran’s (1994: 101–102) proposition concerning the presence of the “West” in the “East” and of the “East” in the “West”, and Manalansan’s (2000) articulations of “bifocality”—a research framework that

can capture the multi-local contexts of social experiences of people located in the same place.⁸ Indeed, these perspectives on methodology certainly resonate with the SRE.

However, approaching the concept of SRE through a “compare-contrast” framework—that is, one that proceeds to delineate in realist terms how and why SRE is new—would defeat its core purpose of orienting our understanding of the world through the philosophies of *Interbeing*, which underscores mutual resonances and generativity.⁹ The spirit of the SRE, as I see it, sustains: (a) a focus on understanding the life-pulse of the syncretic worldviews that emerge from historical exchanges; (b) an ability to be able to conceptualize and narrate a more open-ended, collaborative story about what we witness as knowledge-makers—while drawing from the intellectual and philosophical ponderings from the life-worlds produced by travelers and merchants, pilgrims and scholars, chroniclers and cuisine-artists, and so on; and (c), a worldview that is emergent and expansive (but not postmodern; this conflation is to be avoided). In brief, the point is not encapsulated in what SRE *is*, but instead in what kind of a philosophy it has to offer and what it can open up for researchers in terms of theory and empirical work.

China and India: Capillaries of collaboration across the Himalayan bridge

In recent collaborations with my co-author Li Bo, a scholar-activist and journalist whose work has been based in China, we have offered an example of how a nonmainstream framework for comparative and collaborative empirical research might be developed on issues that have shared relevance to China and India (see Banerjee and Li, 2016).¹⁰ As a result of our individual research interests, Li Bo and I had, separately, conducted research on hydroelectric power projects (HEPs) and resistance: my work focused on the HEPs on the Teesta River in Sikkim, a state in North-eastern India, while Bo’s focused on the dams on the Nu River-Upper Salween in Yunnan Province, Southwestern China. Following our preliminary research, we carried out in-depth discussions over multiple sessions in order to listen to each other and understand each other’s research contexts and field observations. This allowed us to review and learn from each other’s work. A second round of dialogue and exchange helped us develop new questions for further study in our respective projects (based on a method of mindful curiosity). In the process, we co-produced a template for comparative analysis that deviated markedly from mainstream approaches that begin with projections concerning the differences between the two countries’ governance systems, experiences of dissent, and the micro-politics of power. Our approach is described as follows:

Instead of being distracted by the different political systems operating in China and India – and reifying binaries between authoritarian China and democratic India – [we have] asked: which experiences and outcomes are similar in both countries and what do these shared experiences compel us to reconsider? What is the common problem? What do common outcomes – primacy of mainstream development approaches, environmental problems, people’s marginalization, and displacement – indicate about power structures? And, how can we achieve greater transparency and accountability, despite differences in political systems? Our analysis and subsequent conversation offer[ed] a concrete way to proceed. It promises hope for the future, we believe, given our method’s grounding in an ancient, capillary understanding of India-China. (Banerjee and Li, 2016: 137)

In contrast to the state-centric China-India *deficit-rivalry* approach, this work seeks to remap the theoretical and methodological points of entry into the India-China scholarship and reflects a

nuanced approach in the treatment of the countries' differences in economic and political imperatives as well as of their shared goals and concerns (see also Acharya, 2008, 2009; Ling, 2013, 2014). Moreover, this model of collaboration between researchers differs significantly from some of the more typical approaches in the social sciences, in which scholars from the North delineate their field's theoretical framework and research agenda and are recognized as the researchers proper, whereas researchers from the global South—whether academics based in universities or otherwise—are seen as mere assistants or junior partners of the primary (western) researchers. Generally delegated the roles of translators, local experts, field contacts, or empiricists who only know their case studies, researchers from the South are seldom conferred the high status reserved for scholars based in/from the North, who are more readily identified as internationally relevant theoreticians with universally applicable knowledge (Chimni, 1998, 2009; Smith, 2012).

India-China: An Ancient Dialectic for Contemporary World Politics constitutes a second illustration of SRE-oriented research. In collaboration between Payal Banerjee and LHM Ling, this project is based on a long-term, dialogic approach to understanding some of the most under-researched aspects of India-China relations, past and present. Since 2005, this project has flourished beyond its modest beginning with the co-teaching of a graduate seminar on India-China relations at The New School (New York), and has gone on to incorporate ongoing discussions, research, and international travel to relevant sites (India, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, Mexico, and Brazil) to gather materials on historical instances of collaboration and cultural exchange. More recently, we have started crystallizing what we have learned through these explorations, while a related conversation in the form of the SRE has emerged (see Silk Road Research Initiative, n.d.), which has provided us with a point of coalescence in our ongoing thinking about China-India as a unit. To place the SRE into concrete methodological terms, we have incorporated into the research agenda mechanisms to include interviews with a broad constituency of Indian and Chinese academics, policy-makers, and public intellectuals currently engaged with India-China issues. Part of this research involves surveying current university curricula on India and China in both countries; interviewing students who are studying Chinese in India (and vice versa); and analyzing films and media coverage of news pertaining to India-China to understand the respective cultural and discursive landscapes of knowledge production about the other. This project also looks into China-India alliances in international arenas, collaborations in trade forums, joint academic research, and other examples of economic and cultural exchanges beyond the state's domains of operation.

Concluding remarks

The governments of India and China have expressed a desire to revive the Panchsheel ethos—the five pillars of peaceful coexistence encoded in the Panchsheel Treaty signed in 1954 by India, China, and Myanmar (Krishnan and Singh, 2014; Mohanty, 2005; Ramachandran and Krishnan, 2014). To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the treaty, India and China jointly produced a two-volume *Encyclopedia of India-China Cultural Contacts*, which seeks to underscore and make accessible the two countries' cultural exchange and interconnected histories over 2000 years.¹¹ Representing the collaboration of a group of eight lead-scholars, four from each country, this work has included over 800 research entries that emphasize themes such as interaction, incorporation, acculturation, and the movement of people, ideas, and objects between India and China. Over the last few years, the countries have also signed a large number of memoranda of understanding for cooperation in a wide array of areas, such as the transportation sector, housing and urban poverty reduction, health and family welfare, land resource management, geological surveys, and banking

systems in the agricultural sector (Acharya, 2008). Other symbolic gestures include proposals to enable greater public access to each other's films and popular culture (Jha, 2013).

To engage with this mode of enquiry, a team of five Asian-origin international scholars organized the Silk Roads panel at the Jeju Forum in 2016. Their collective work highlighted specifically the notion of travel; not in the narrow sense, but rather as a metaphor for transcultural exploration of multivalent realms such as cuisine, literature, films, art, and languages.¹² The spaces and places linked up with the Silk Roads, and India-China specifically, emplace within the idea of transculture elements of plurality that apply within and beyond the nation-state and across a substantial range of time (Duara, 1995, 2010a; Ghosh, 1992; Lal, 2009; Ling, 2013; Tan, 1998). The idea of India, to begin with and despite various *Hindutva* groups' strenuous efforts, resists any singular definition given Indian society's diversity in terms of languages, religion, spiritual beliefs, castes, and class. A very abridged set of examples that refers to areas of general public awareness and scholarship in this regard would include: the legacy of India's old trade routes and links to China, Southeast Asia, and the Arab world; the role of Persian as an official language for centuries and its enduring legacy in contemporary Hindustani and other Indian languages; Central and East Asian as well as European influences on architecture, art, food, attire, language, and other expressions of everyday culture; and, of course, the significance of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity as bridges to peoples and geographies beyond India. The Mughal emperors' various diplomatic and trade missions, along with the presence of envoys in the Mughal courts from Persia, Balkh, Kashghar, Istanbul, Yemen, Ethiopia, Muscat, Mecca, England, Holland, and Portugal, convey the subcontinent's intensely cosmopolitan political and cultural history. Later, in the 1940s and 1950s, a number of key political commitments and sensibilities in India also revolved around the notion of Third Worldism and Afro-Asian solidarity. This sense of location in relation to and within a landscape of transcultural exchanges, confluences, and even conflict and violence thus marks a good portion of India's intellectual genealogy, as it does for other Asian countries. Working from an SRE approach has become even more of an imperative at this time given the expansion of the *Hindutva* right-wing's attempts in India to establish the hegemony of an exclusionary Hindu majoritarian nationalism and to deny/erase the country's multivalent diversity derived over centuries from an expansive global and historical context. It is important to note a transcultural sensibility has been by no means limited to the elites in India (see Sen, 1998; Tan and Yinzen, 2005). The concept of culture, and by extension transculture, have been treated both in resistance movements and in scholarly research in India as one that is deeply political, hinged upon the historical production of difference, inequality, and hierarchies of power (see, for example, the scholarship in Dalit Studies and Subaltern Studies).

And this brings me to the final point, which is about transformation and the significance of the practice of *Interbeing* therein. The typical yardstick of academic merit is structured around the value and prestige of sole-authorship above collaborations and of making contributions *to* the literature. In this model, where the author is the authoritative and authorial entity, the worth of any scholarly contribution gets diluted as and when the number of co-authors increases, perhaps given the importance of linking the core contribution or intellectual property with an *individual*.¹³ And, despite genuine offerings of gratitude catalogued in a book's "Preface," the knowledge-producer ultimately remains autonomous, independent, and more or less unchanged by the process of knowledge production. In order to be rewarded and respected in this system of academic evaluation, a researcher needs to cultivate the subject position of a primary *actor* whose detached and dispassionate intellectual efforts change—or in most desirable scenarios reconfigure—the literature/field, i.e. the *authorial academic acts upon others'* understanding of, and in, the field. In other

words, the dominant idea of worthwhile scholarship seems to be that of a solitary, independent, authoritative scholar who changes others, while they themselves remain unchanged. Needless to say, the worldview at work here elevates a (western, masculinized, and individualized) set of practices in which the prospect of any meaningful transformation for the scholar through non-hierarchical collaboration is discouraged, and even devalued.

Well-suited to those not easily threatened by the prospect of transformation and precisely those who are in search of alternative epistemic models, the SRE opens up a restorative consideration of how the practices of *Interbeing*—interactions and collaborative exchanges both in terms of the research process and the conceptualization of research questions—can offer a tremendous potential for transforming ourselves as scholars and teachers. In the two research examples summarized above, the dialogic, co-dependent, and inter-subjective sensibility between the researchers not only transformed how we approached the research questions on China-India relations or river-dams in China and India, but also produced a deep impact on us as researchers and our own views of China-India. A sustained focus on the two countries' *inter-relationship* and the importance of assigning value to the countries' archive of civilizational continuity in framing contemporary concerns, i.e. their mutual reference and intersections with each other both in the past and present, signals the methodological articulation of the Silk Roads Ethos, as follows:

[This approach] entails transgressing borders of all types: geographical, disciplinary, discursive, and epistemic. First, we reach across the India-China border to look at their common borderlands. Second, we do not abide by a typical comparative approach by listing the similarities and differences that distinguish India and China as states, then ask whether or how each may compete or collaborate with the other. Instead, third, in comparing two cases of the same phenomenon – i.e. local resource management – we talk to each other as researchers and concerned, transnational subjects of India and China, respectively. Together, we understand how a capillarie India-China still circulates within the states of India and China. And in so doing, fourth, we break epistemically from the statist, border-centrism of Westphalia World. Our dialogue . . . exposes the erasures That is, Westphalia World misses the ancient geo-cultural ties between India-China and thereby misses opportunities for regional integration and development. Another layer to “what’s not there” becomes apparent: trans-national action between India-China borderlands. This re-focus is especially pressing given the role and influence of global corporate capitalism operating on national and local development in India and China today. (Banerjee and Li, 2016: 100)

The standard academic research projects on India and China, particularly the ones emerging from an Asian context, will benefit significantly from drawing upon the existing lineage of transdisciplinary and transcultural SRE approaches that privilege the long arc of historical exchanges to better reflect upon what India-China relations might have to offer in the way of a global South-oriented counter-hegemonic alternative for research and mutual understanding, and equally importantly, much-needed healing and rejuvenation (Ling, 2014).

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Notes

1. I discuss some of these alternatives in the next section of this article.
2. I characterize this literature and its research approach as mainstream given their characteristic emphasis on realist, state-centric focus, with a data-driven, presentist orientation. This mainstream approach is echoed further in policy circles as well as in journalistic accounts about India-China relations: see, for example, *India Times* (2013). Overall, this approach does not engage with the body of scholarship discussed in the subsequent portion of this article: i.e. the work on India-China that questions the conventional wisdom of realist approaches, probes deeper into the history of exchange and collaboration between China and India over a long period extent, and is interested in understanding, to some extent on the countries' own terms, the contours of mutuality both within and beyond the formal purview of the state's bureaucracies.
3. For illustrative examples, see Joffe (2017).
4. This general overview reflects the work of authors of Indian origin and material published on the topic at leading academic sites in India.
5. For further elaboration, see relevant articles in this issue, especially Chong and Ling's introduction.
6. For rich examples, see Cohn (1996); Hobson (2004); Ling (2014); Mani (1998); Mitchell (1988).
7. In addition to the literature cited here, also see the work of Diane Bell (1991), James Clifford (1986), and Donna Harraway (1991), as part of ongoing discussions concerning the need to reckon with the social field of power dynamics, the simultaneous and multiple analytic of agency of those being studied, and partial knowledges.
8. For additional commentaries on ethnographies in this vein, see Marcus's (1986, 1998) mapping of three requirements central to developing multi-local methods, especially in the context of a globalizing political economy: a shift from the concept of community studies as in realist ethnography; a shift from modernist Eurocentric history; and, a focus toward "polyphony" or multiplicity of voices. Also see Burawoy's conceptualization of the "extended case method," based on "extending out from micro processes to macro forces" (Burawoy, 2000: 27). In elaborating this further in reference to global imperatives on ethnographic research, Burawoy (2000: 29) notes: "In effect we are problematizing the third dimension of the extended case method, the extension from micro to macro, from local to extralocal, from processes to forces."
9. See Ling and Perrigoue's article in this issue for a discussion on mainstream research methods' insistence on reductive parsimony in the quest for (universal) causality.
10. For an analysis of capillary borderlands, see Ling (2016).
11. For more information, see Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs (2014).
12. For additional details regarding the Jeju Forum's Silk Roads 2016 panel, see Chong and Ling's introduction in this issue.
13. The reader will note that criteria for academic appointments, contract-renewal, tenure, and promotion in the West are more or less based on these principles.

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