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The Advocacy of Democratic Governance by India and China: (2004-2014) A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This research paper examines how India and China advocate democratisation at the global and national levels. question through a framework, promotion of democratic governance by India and China through an analysis of 10 years of foreign affairs speeches, remarks, interviews and statements of political elites of both countries. The article argues global governance, the contradictions between the clear and consistent push for democracy and equity at the global level and the highly contingent commitment to democracy at the national level remain highly salient. India's struggle to trans-late its domestic democratic credibility into more equitable representation at the global institutional level and into a stellar economic model at the domestic level exposes it to criticism in relationship to China. The article concludes that India has some comparative advantages over China precisely because it can play a xonsistent two-level game in terms of the promotion of democracy both at global and National levels.

Keywords

India, China, democracy promotion, India and Chinese characteristic, India and Chinese model, democracy fund

Introduction

India is the world's largest democracy with the highest number of people living in verty; yet, it prefers to pursue economic growth without compromising democratic principles. China has an extremely impressive recent record of economic performance, alleviating almost 600 million out of poverty, but is one of the longest surviving one-party states. These two countries advocate democratisation of global governance and the promotion of democracy at the state level. In the first section of this article, we examine how the political elites of both countries articulate their countries' position with regard to democracy. We examine foreign affairs speeches, remarks and statements of the Indian and Chinese political elites from 2004 to 2013 by using qualitative content analysis. Our comparative analysis, on the one hand, contributes to a broader understanding of emerging powers' declaratory practice in constructing social reality about them in international relations.

Therefore, content analysis of foreign affairs speeches of the Indian and Chinese political elites can provide constructive references to their ideological and institutional positions about their countries' policy on democracy promotion.

In the final sections, we elaborate on the trajectory and implications of both countries' two-level games on democracy, with a focus on the approaches taken by the India and China in terms of the democratisation of global institutions and the promotion of national or state-based models of democracy in declaratory statements and operational practice.

Promoting Democratic Governance India versus China

The Conceptual stance of India and China on the promotion of democratic governance converges on global institutional level. However, a differentiated ideological approach underpins their position on state-level promotion of democratic governance. Adhering to their historical, stronger stance on the sanctity of sovereignty and non-intervention, both countries emphasise every state's 'equality' on its right to self-determinism in international relations. Nonetheless, their ideological solution to global institution's 'democracy deficit' is not equality per se, rather what is 'equitable'. One the one hand, although the rhetorical currency of promoting democratic governance is founded on fair representation of the South in global institutions, often mobilised under the converging interests of the South-South solidarity, both India and China will be the chief beneficiaries from instiutional reform on global level given their disproportionate weight based on the size of economy compared to their Southern partners. Thus, India and China converge on the conceptual democracy based on equity on global institutional level. On the other hand, both countries take a differentiated conceptual stance about democratic governance on state level. India's conception or democracy in practice corresponds to Dahlian[1] procedural democracy (given its track record of electoral continuity) or to Marshall's[2] citizenship democracy (given its inclusive constitution, affirmative action and welfare pro-gramme on food security). In contrast, China co-opted the term 'democracy' Into its Chinese character-istics and has not shied away from taking a strong rhetorical stance defending it. Nevertheless, there is a deep division on the conceptual clarity of democracy with Chinese characteristies among Chinese scholars, which we elaborate later in our analysis.

In both the Indian and Chinese cases, the democracy references are grounded in the utilisation of a two-level campaign of democratic governance, centred on; (a). global governance; and (b). national or state level. With reference to the first level, India and China call for democratic governance in global institutions, insisting for a more equitable, just and inclusive international order. Significantly, both countries' strategic interest converges in this campaign because they have been vying for a greater role in the decision-making process in global governance, which underscores their ascendant economic power.

At the state-centric second level, India's and China's position on institutional democracy is grounded on functional interest, albeit the ideological or institutional foundations for this side of the campaign diverge markedly. India uses democracy for its public diplomacy campaign in demonstrating its success of embedding democratic values while achieving impressive economic growth. Negating the debate whether democracy is good for a developmental state, India plays a consistent

two-level game, calling for democratic governance at the global level and among other developing countries. China's emphasis on state-level democracy with respect to its political elites' speeches, though, is more nuanced, with a focus on defence of 'democracy with Chinese features'. Framing the argument in terms of the privileging of state-sovereignty, China contends that while democracy is a universal norm, the national distinctions in its procedural form must be accommodated.

Promotion of Democratic Governance in International

As rehearsed earlier, the main thrust of the Indian political elites' call for democratic governance in global governance is directed towards the reform of international institutions, which, according to India, suffer from a severe 'democracy deficit'. Denoting democracy as the assurance for equal representation in global institutions, India's strategy is to lever this argument for instrumental advantage with respect to its political agenda of securing an enhanced role for itself vis-a-vis other global powers. India's campaign of democracy promotion at international level has thus been reinforced by its emergence as a global economic powerhouse in recent decades. Indian elites contend that the current global institutions reflect an outdated world. At his 2006 speech at the University of Cambridge, the Indian EX PM, Manmohan Singh, said:

As democracies we must also stand together in making goverance across the world more democratic . . . . The governace processes of global institutions of today-be they Bretton Woods institutions or the UN Security Council-reflect the realities of the world as it was more than half a century ago.[3]

The main game for India remains gaining permanent membership at the UNSC. While the G8 evolved into G20 amid the global financial crisis, India's campaign for permanent membership in the UNSC has stalled. The connection of democracy to the goal of equal representation with respect to India's instrumental aspiration in the UNSC is made explicit among the Indian leaders' declaratory statements, as PM Singh (GoI 2004) noted, 'The United Nations and its specialised agencies are the only instruments available for responding effectively to the challenges we face collectively. But what is missing, is our sustained commitment to democratising the functioning the functioning of the United Nations.' He further remarked:

It is common knowledge that the UN is often unable to exert an effective influence on global economic and political issues of critical importance. This is due to what may be called as 'democracy deficit', which prevents effective multilateralism, a multilateralism that is based on a democratically evolved global consensus. Therefore, reform and restructuring of the United Nations system can alone provide a crucial link in an expanding chain of efforts to refashion international structures . . . .[4]

At the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly, PM Singh directly linked India's claim for enhanced status to the UN's democracy deficit. He argued, 'It [reform of the UN] must include the expansion of the United Nations Security Council in both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership.

Unfortunately, the United Nations suffers from a democracy deficit.'[5]

India's campaign to promote democracy in terms of the international institutional architecture converges to a considerable degree with the approach taken by China. Despite China being a one-party state, it also has repeatedly called for democratic govenance at the global level. Indeed. China's steadfast demand for the animation of the principles of equality, democracy and inclusiveness in international relations is made explicit in numerous speeches of the Chinese leaders. China consistently upholds the ideal of equality irrespective of a country's size, wealth and strength, an argument that it makes consistently to its Western as well as Southern partners. President Xi Jinping noted during his speech in Moscow, Russia, 'We stand for the sharing of dignity by all countries and peoples in the world. All countries, irrespective of size, strength and wealth, are equal'.[6] Li Keqiang, during his vice presidency, also reiterated the same message to the African audience, 'China believes that all countries, big or small, are equal members of the international community'.[7]

Building on these themes, the Chinese leaders acknowledge the durability and universal nature of democracy in international relations. During the 2010 Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa or BRICS Summit, President Hu stated that the principles of democracy and fairness cannot change in the global context however complex and profound the ongoing 'adjustments' are in the international landscape.[8] China acknowledges that democracy and multilateralism have earned increasing popularity in international relations as the world embraces multipolarity and economic globalisation.[9] China also identifies cooperation, consultation and dialogue as the prime means to promote democracy in international relations.[10]

Other innovative have been initiated by India and China through innovations in economic agency via new forms of cooperation and coordination under the 'Sout-South' framework, as illustrated, above all, by the formalisation of BRICS to advance their common goals, while avoiding strategic pitfalls from their competitive interests.[11] As part of BRICS's action plans, cooperation entailed new initiatives such as the New Development Bank emergency reserve of $100 billion and coordination in health and agricultural issues[12] Besides BRICS, India formed IBSA with Brazil and South Africa, banking on the brand of the three largest democracies from three different continents. These initiatives demonstrate India and China's active interest to devise new alternatives in the absence of a sweeping democratic reform in global institution.

Taking into account these mixed results of reform in global institutions, the promotion of democratic governance on global level will remain an ongoing theme for both China and India. Given that China is projected to surpass the US as the largest economy in the future, by 2017, though these forecasts have been subject to constant revision given the recent slowdown of economic growth) and India is forecasted to overtake Japan as the third-largest economy, both countries have incentive and logic for promoting democracy in internationl relations. As in the past, nonetheless, the focus of this activity will diverge, with India pushing for

transformative reform of the UNSC as well as the IMF.

Promotion of Democratic Governance on national level

India is commonly showcased as a model for other developing countries due to its embedded democratic institutions. In his 2004 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, PM Singh highlighted India as an example of a developing country that upholds democracy and still effectively addresses its developmental challenges. He stated: 'The United States is keen to support the promotion of democratic values around the world. India is a living example of how democratic intuitions can flourish in developing countries and in a manner which achieves developmental objectives'.[13]

Singh said, 'Poverty, illiteracy or socio-economic backwardness do not hinder the exercise of democracy. Quite the contrary, our experience of more than 50 years of democratic rule demonstrates how democracy is a most powerful tool to successfully overcome the challenge of development.'[14] Others such as Sinha demonstrate how economic liberalisation and democracy in India have reinforced each other.[15]

Significantly, PM Singh's response during a 2005 Lok Sobha debate on India's foreign policy demonstrates a much more robust approach to the success of India's democracy. He noted how the principles of liberal and pluralistic democracy of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multilingual and multicultural India is a fait accompli for all nations of the world in the long run.[16] Such aspirational support for the spread of democracy in South Asia is evident as well from one of the annual reports of the Ministry of External Affairs which noted, 'India would like the whole of South Asia to emerge as a community of flourishing democracies. India believes that democracy would provide a more enduring and broad-based foundation for an edifice of peace and cooperation in sub-continent.

In comparison to India, the Chinese elites also have a strong stance on the Chinese character of democracy in their declaratory practice. Yang has argued, 'Today, China's leaders are clearly in dialogue with the West on issues of democratization and human rights, and have repeatedly talked about the importance of political reforms'.[17] It is, however, somewhat still sensitive in the context where multi-party electoral politics is non-existent in China, and yet the Chinese leaders claim to have carried out political reform enhancing democratic governance and empowering Chinese people to become the 'master of the Country'.[18] In more fashion, the Chinese leaders often stress the promotion of democratic governance as part of their structural reform. To the audience of the Royal Society of London in 2011, Premier Wen said:

Much progress has been made in making government decision-making sound and democratic and enhancing public oversight of the government. For example, we have made government affairs and budgets more transparent and introduced such practices as e-

government, public hearing and expert consulting.[19]

Nonetheless, political reform in China is an ongoing agenda according to its leaders, who often indicate that they would continue to pursue reform to enhance democracy.[20] During his vice presidency, Xi presented two major goals of China's reform programme for the first half of the twenty-first century at the China-US Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum in 2012. According to him, one goal was to transform China into a moderately prosperous country by 2020 and the second goal was to build a modern democratic country, albeit socialist in nature.[21] Xi calls it the 'Chinese features' of its democratic system, which expands people's political participation in the development of China.[22] According to Premier Wen, democracy flourished in struggle against feudal autocracy; however, different societies achieved democracy in different forms. The Chinese distinction of democracy is its embracing element of socialism. He explained, 'People's democracy is the soul of socialism. Without democracy, there is no socialism. Without freedom, there is no real democracy. Without guarantee of economic and political rights, there is no real freedom. Concerning the problems of corruption, disparity in income distribution and 'ills' that harm people's right, he further asserted, The best way to resolve these problems is to firmly advance the political structural reform and build socialist democracy under the rule of law'.[23] Explained by the Premier Wen. We will increase the forms of democracy and enhance self-governance at the village level...Some localities are summarizing experience and preparing the ground for elevating election at the village level to the township level on a trial basis. And on expanding democracy. We may first start first start within the Party and gradually introduce it to beyond the Party.[24]

India and China diverge when it comes to putting their rhetoric of state-level promotion of democratic governance into practice.

India promotes democracy through bilateral and multilateral means. Its minimal involvement in bilateral capacity building through training for electoral process demonstrates that it takes utmost care not to project itself as an overbearing regional power. India's direct bilateral promotion for procedural democracy includes gifting Maldives and Nepal electronic voting machines and providing almost $1.4 billion to Afghanistan for the construction of their parliament building. The Election Commisssion of India (ECI) funded bilateral training programme for Bhutan's election officials. India also promotes procedural democracy with bilateral reciprocation but under multilateral initiatives. India jointly launched the India International Jnstitute of Democracy and Election Managemant (IIDEM) with support from funders such as the UN and the Commonwealth. The IIDEM is an advanced resource centre promoting components of participatory democracy and election management. India undertakes bilateral exchanges and training programme centred at the IIDEM with 18 countries, which also includes its neighbours under the multilateral arrangement of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Election Study and Observation programme.

In contrast to India, China's state-level democracy promotion in practice is largely non-existent. While China effectively constructed 'South-South' cooperation hinged on the political campaign of democratic governance on global level, China's reluctance or inability to promote state-level democracy (of Chinese characteristics) reflects its own sensitivities which is driven by three factors: (a). the idea of democracy with Chinese characters lacks clarity which restricts the ability to create consensus among the Chinese elites; (b). China's difficulty in effectively building grassroots democracy at home that questions the legitimacy of its self-claimed gradual political reform; and (c). limited popularity for the Chinese model beyond China.

As context, there is a lack of consensus among the Chinese political theorists about the constitutive elements of the Chinese model of democracy. The existing debate demonstrates a clear ideological division. Several factors such as the importance of cultural distinction, the Confucius notion of civilisation and the socialist character of democracy remain much-contested elements. The Chinese conservative theorists like Tan Guanghong, Zhao Jianying, Bai Gengsheng, Luo Yanhua and Xu Chongwen support philosophical importance of cultural distinctions over the widely accepted normative democratic values.[24] These conservatives take a critical perspective on the universality of culture as Luo of Peking University contends that the the promotion of liberal democratic values is nothing but the US's hegemonic effort to impose a system of its own. Within the wide spectrum of scholarly debate, Hu Mou oscillates from conservative to moderate stance, whereas Yuan Weishi of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong province argues for a liberal political development of China, in essence dismissing the conservative's stance on cultural exclusivity over universal norm of liberal democracy. As a result, a clear conception of democracy with Chinese features is yet far from a reality. This gap, which is cracy while keeping by slow and uneven efforts over two decades to accommodate grassroots democracy while keeping the superiority of the party, is creating tension between the party cadres at local levels with the self-governing village committees.[25]

In terms of practice, although the Chinese political leaders often mention at the declaratory level the progress of political reform, this is a very slow and difficult process. It has been over three decades since the grassroots democracy spontaneously started at the village level in China in the early 1980s. Despite having crucial support from a few Chinese political leaders like Peng Zhen, Bo Yibo, Premier Zhao Ziyang, Minister Cui Naifu of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Politburo Standing Committee member, Song Ping, who helped China embrace the legal implementaion of democracy at the village level ,[26] vigorous opposition to the 'self-government' in many quarters of the CCP demonstrates the embedded friction among many interest groups in any democratic political reform.[27]

On top of all this, as demonstrated by Ambrosio's work, it is questionable whether other countries are attracted to Chinese model of democracy. His content analysis of news media of the US and non-US sources from 2004 to 2011 demonstrates that the Chinese model suffers from significant lack of popularity in terms of its applicability and legitimacy. In

Ambrosio's own words, despite significant attention in both US and non-US media sources:

negative coverage appears strong enough to balance positive references, and serious doubts about its applicability outside of China persist. In terms of effectiveness and appropriateness, the data present opposite conclusions: the CM/BC is seen as working, but a normative shift in its favour in lacking.[28]

Sceptics like Yao already claimed that the current shortcomings demonstrate the 'end of the Beijing consensus'.[29] moreover, China's ability to actively advocate for its model of democracy to other countries is undercut by its own policy of non-interference. As a result, India enjoys a comparative advantage over China with its consistency in two-level democracy promotion.

Conclusion

The central purpose of this research paper is to provide added value in terms of assessments over the comparative advantages held by China and India concerning models and lessons on global best practices, norms and standards with regards to democracy. While sharing some common characteristics, accentuated by a tendency to see the ascendant roles of China and India as part of a West versus the rest dynamic, it is the differences between the two countries that shape the thematic structure of this research paper. These differences are apparent in the global-level component of the two-level promotion of democratic governance, which India has to play in scrambling for reform in both UNSC and IFIs.

While far from a liberal democracy, China has not shied away from declarations on democracy domestically as well on global governance vis-a-vis international institutions. On the contrary, China has made both a robust and nuanced argument about the advantages of its own model of development.

India's strategy combines, therefore, a high risk and diffuse trajectory on global governance and a cautious and targeted approach at the domestic component of the two-level approach. Consistency of message, however, may well trump an imbalance in intensity. While it is unlikely that India will reap the huge deliverables on the global governance front, its willingness and capacity to make the same 'good' argument at both levels enhances its credibility. At the same time, India's consistency remains in sharp contrast with the inconsistency at the core of China's approach. which is a low-risk approach to global governance while being ambiguous at the domestic level. Swamy notes, for example, that unless China initiate wider democratic reform risking the Party's control in order to sustain its impressive economic growth, India, with a 'second generation' reform, can easily bridge the gap with China. In such a case, India indeed enjoys an advantage of being a consistent, if often messy, democratic country, with democracy acting as a comparative advantageous tool in its favour.

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