

HIMALAYAN FRONTIERS

DOROTHY WOODMAN

*A Political Review
of British,
Chinese, Indian
and Russian Rivalries*

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The Himalayas, once peaceful and remote, are today one of the world's most dangerously smouldering areas with strategic roads now reaching up to the high passes where for centuries yaks were almost the only form of transport.

Until the British conquest of India, the frontier regions played an insignificant role in relations between Russia, India and China. Then, in the 19th century, expanding empires came in contact and, although later conventions and demarcations such as the McMahon Line were intended to remove fear of future conflict, new factors have arisen.

Indo-Pakistani hostility, Sino-Soviet rivalry and Sino-Pakistani rapprochement are all discussed in *Himalayan Frontiers*, and the author demonstrates how important it is for India's progress that she no longer live in a state of suspended hostility with her neighbours, especially since the emergence of China as an atomic power. To conceive of the Himalayas as a vast radar screen is to endanger the future, not only of India, but of more than half the people of the world who live in Asia.

32 maps . appendices . bibliography

DOROTHY WOODMAN

Prof. J. C. C.

HIMALAYAN FRONTIERS

A POLITICAL REVIEW OF
BRITISH, CHINESE, INDIAN
AND RUSSIAN RIVALRIES



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Preface

In a hundred ages of the Gods,
I could not tell you of all the
Glories of the Himalaya

So wrote an old Sanskrit poet. I have often shared his feelings while wandering along the frontiers of Bhutan, Burma, China, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sikkim. But I am a political writer. *Himalayan Frontiers* is a political book which reviews the influence of the Himalayas on the Indian sub-continent, where they symbolized the abode of those gods and the centre of the universe. No other country has had this affinity with the Himalayas. It continues to this day, though the people who haunt them are ordinary humans, and peaceful ranges are smouldering volcanoes.

For years merchants crossed these high mountains looking for trade while religious men travelled to and from India and China seeking enlightenment on the Buddhist scriptures. Centuries later the frontier idea was introduced when the East India Company's expansion up to, and then beyond the Himalayas precipitated rivalries between Britain, China and Russia. In this book I follow the chain of events from the days when little piles of stones were enough to tell the traveller where he might be asked to pay a small tax on silk or shawl wool until the present day when unimaginative strategists see the Himalayas as a vast radar screen.

The Himalayas have dominated the Asian policy of Britain, China and Russia. And since geographical factors remain to a large extent constant, they still determine the shape of policy adopted by China, India, Pakistan and the Soviet Union as well as that of the smaller states which are on the Himalayan periphery. In the age of the nuclear bomb, America joins the Himalayan complex.

This is a controversial book. In the political tangles of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth,

allegiances changed as nations reached the limits of strategically safe expansion. Thus China was treated as an ally of Britain when British rulers were impressed by Russia's threat to India. But China became a rival when her troops threatened the plains of Assam, and by that time Russia and Britain had agreed to observe their respective spheres of influence in Tibet, Persia and Afghanistan.

The victory of communism, first in the Soviet Union, and then in China, and the withdrawal of Britain from the Indian sub-continent revolutionised the political outlook of the main participants in this story of Himalayan rivalry. It did not change the basic facts of their geography. Until the Sino-Soviet dispute developed, first in the secret sessions of the communist hierarchy, and then in communist parties everywhere, their common ideology was interpreted as the basis of a formidable threat to the western world. Today, the monolith of communism is shattered and the role of China, unhappily still outside the United Nations, is uncertain. America and Russia collaborate in, and dominate the Himalayan scene. They encourage India and Pakistan to adopt a more realistic policy towards one another in Kashmir.

Nationalism, contrary to the normal thinking of my generation, has proved more emotive, more provocative and more menacing to world stability than ideology. The area of maximum danger might now shift to the long frontier between communist China and communist Russia.

But I have not attempted prophecy. I have tried to draw the outlines of that struggle for the Himalayas which has not yet ended, selecting those facts which seemed essential for any evaluation of big power rivalry. This has involved studying the geographical background and the recapitulation of a wide area of historical data, some of it already covered by more distinguished writers, some of it by Indian and Chinese officials to establish their respective cases. I have also intimately followed the contemporary scene, not only from the outpost of London, once the centre that dictated it, but from frequent visits to Asian countries since 1948. I have also had the very great privilege of personal talks with many of the leading participants, above all with Pandit Nehru. He and the Labour Government's greatly underestimated Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, laid solid foundations for Britain's honourable relinquishment of her Asian empire. Regrettably no comparable discussions with their Chinese counterparts were practicable.

No book written during times of such fluctuations and disarray can

claim to be up-to-date. Official records are still only available till 1938. Access to Chinese records is ruled out, not only by language but by the breakdown of cultural bridges. Books and autobiographies proliferate, especially in India.

Himalayan Frontiers could not have been written without access to the Indian Office Library. I am indebted to Mr Stanley C. Sutton, Librarian and Keeper of the Records, who has so imaginatively transferred its wealth of documentation from the sedate precincts of Whitehall to the pedestrian hub-hub of Blackfriars Road. *A Guide to Lists and Catalogues of the India Office Records* by his Assistant Keeper of the Records, Miss Joan C. Lancaster, now eliminates many hours of difficult search. I owe a special debt to Mr Martin Moir and to Dr Richard Bingle, Research Assistants, who have given immeasurable and friendly help for many years. Miss K. Thompson has long given the Library an intimacy which is widely appreciated. The five Library Assistants, Ernest Brewster, Charles Flaskett, Alfred Pike, Walter Williams and George Martin, continue to produce books and records with efficiency, speed and a valued good humour. I am also indebted to the London Library, the Senate Library, the Library of the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (especially to its unrivalled Press Cuttings Library), and to the National Archives in New Delhi.

I have been extremely fortunate to have had discussions with Dr S. Gopal, who, as the then Head of the Historical Division of the Ministry of External Affairs in India, was primarily responsible for the most able documentation of the Indian section of the *Officials' Report*; with Dr Alastair Lamb, whose scholarly books on Himalayan frontiers and frontier problems are indispensable for anyone who wishes to make a careful study of this arena; with Sir Olaf Caroe, who, as ex-Deputy Secretary in the Government of India, played a vital part in the history of the McMahon Line; and with Neville Maxwell, who was *The Times* correspondent in India from 1959–1967. His forthcoming book on the Sino-Indian dispute, based on first-hand accounts will certainly add to our knowledge of this controversy.

Not one of these experts is wholly in agreement with what I have written, and none of them may be held responsible for my conclusions.

I want to thank Christopher MacLehose who, as Editor, has smoothed out many jagged edges and given so generously of his time in the transformation of a troublesome manuscript into the present book.

Finally, I can never adequately express my gratitude to Kingsley Martin whose encouragement and assistance have meant so much in the writing of this, as of my other, books. And no more would he endorse all that I have written and he is in no way responsible for it.

[He was never to see *Himalayan Frontiers* as a finished book. On February 16 his heart stopped. We were on Indian territory – at the home of Apa Pant, the Indian Ambassador, and his wife Dr. Nalini Pant, on the banks of the Nile in Cairo.]

D.W.
April, 1969

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MAPS

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DOCUMENTS

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India and China in Asia

CENTURIES OF UNEVENTFUL CO-EXISTENCE;
THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND SOLIDARITY WITH CHINA;
THE BONDS GROW STRONGER

On August 25, 1959, a cloud fell over the Himalayas which has not yet lifted. On that morning, Chinese and Indian troops exchanged fire on the border south of Migytun. The Himalayas, peaceful and remote, became an area of controversy and menace.

China and India were assumed to be models of co-existence, their good relations almost ostentatiously demonstrated to the world. A belief that the cold war halted at the Himalayan ranges had not before been challenged.

When the first White Paper was laid on the table of the Lok Sabha in September 1959, many unsuspected items were brought to light. They proved that while national leaders were chanting the Panch Shila, controversial Notes were passing between the Foreign Office of Delhi and Peking. Acid Indian protests against Chinese maps met with evasive replies from Peking. While Indian and Chinese crowds were shouting 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai' (India and China are friends) Indian complaints and Chinese non-committal replies were being exchanged on the intrusions of aircraft over Indian territory, on the condition of Tibetan emigrés in Kalimpong and on disturbances in Tibet. These subjects were new to the Indian masses, and, more surprisingly, to most journalists.

Chinese propaganda now called India a hostile neighbour, and Nehru grew the horns of a fascist monster. India's first reaction, one of sorrow rather than anger, was soon expressed in the harsh tones of a betrayed

friend. Bewilderment followed on bewilderment. Men who had been Gandhi's closest associates talked in terms of national honour and sovereign rights. The 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai' slogan lapsed. Charges of Chinese aggression appeared in all but the Communist press, and that omission arose not so much from sympathy with China as from a division among Indian Communists. Nehru was extravagantly criticised by Right and Left for glossing over China's behaviour and for failing to meet its challenge. In terms unthinkable a year or two earlier, he told the Lok Sabha (on September 12, 1959): 'What we have to face today is a great and powerful nation which is aggressive. It might be aggressive minus Communism or plus Communism. Either way it might be there. That is a fact that you have to face.'

Thus the course of Indian history was violently changed in 1959.

CENTURIES OF UNEVENTFUL CO-EXISTENCE

The great arc of the Himalayas had shut off, or enclosed within its folds, the countries of Asia. The word Himalayas has a Sanskrit origin: *Hima* snow and *alaya* home. This home of snow does not only mean the mountains which feed the great rivers of the Ganges, Jumna, Gogra, Gandaki and Kosi; it is a primary source of Indian mythology, of Hindu and Buddhist ideas and has had a profound influence on poetry and art. 'All Indian poetry and mythology,' E. B. Havell, the orientalist, wrote, 'point to the Himalayas as the centre of the world, and as the throne of the great gods. . . . The Hindu regards the Himalayas, not from the point of view of the mountaineering sportsman or of the scientist, but as the Muhammadan thinks of Mecca and the Christian of Jerusalem'.¹

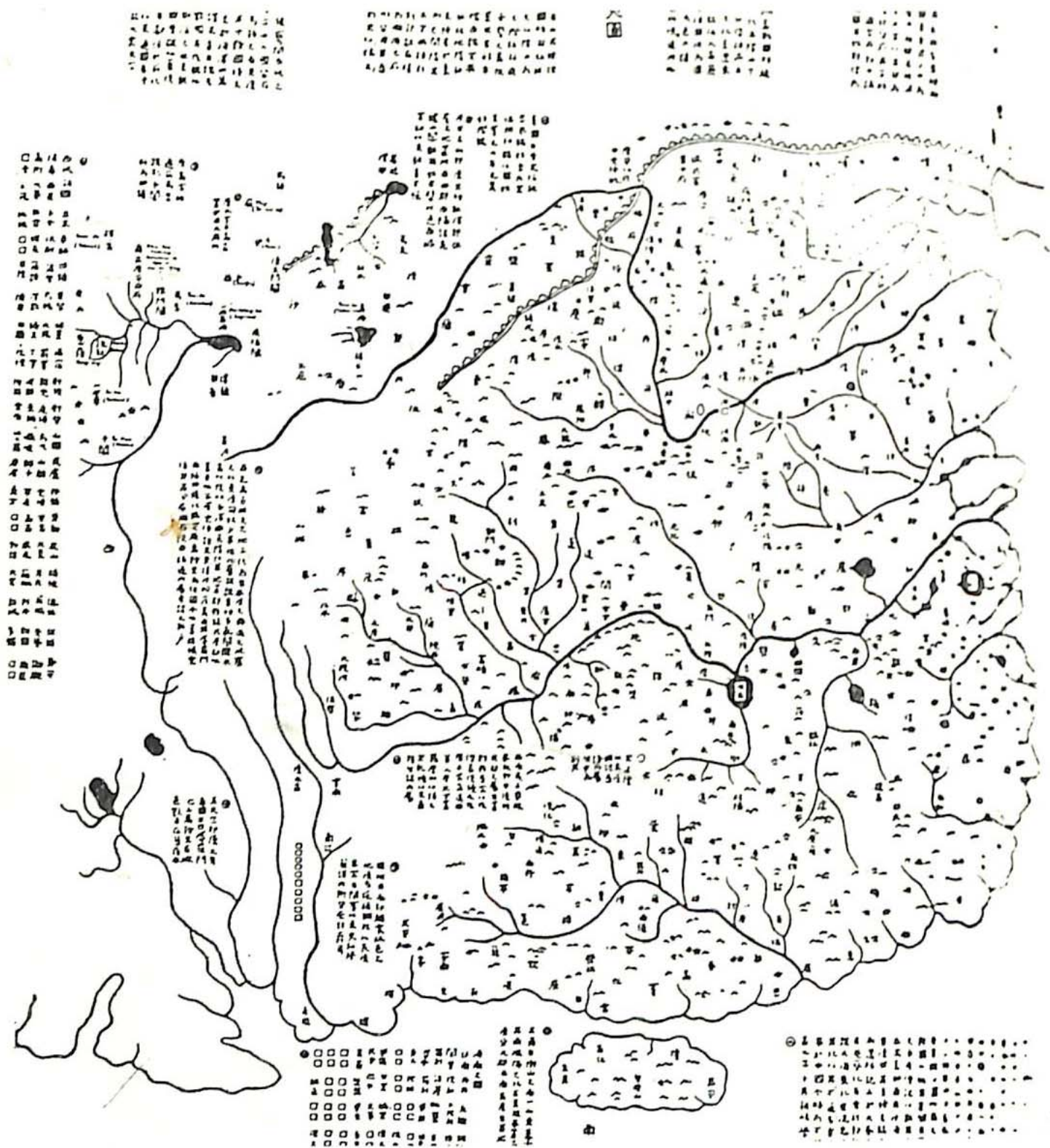
The Himalayas have dominated the life, the culture and the religion of India. The *Vishnu Purana*, an early Sanskrit text, suggests that they were always the shield of India. The country south of the Himalayas and north of the Ocean is called *Bharat*, and all people who are born in this land are called Bharatiyas or Indians. The *Rig Veda*, two centuries before Christ, and the *Upanishads*, some centuries later, were composed by men who felt themselves part of the Himalayas. The Hindu gods were the mountains and the symbol. The heroes and heroines of *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* came from the world of the Himalayas, the abode of the gods. In the 5th Century A.D., Kalidasa's popular dance drama, *Kumarasambhava*, which is still frequently performed in India,

begins with an invocation to the Himalayas, describing them as 'a measuring-rod spanning the wide land from the east to the western sea'.

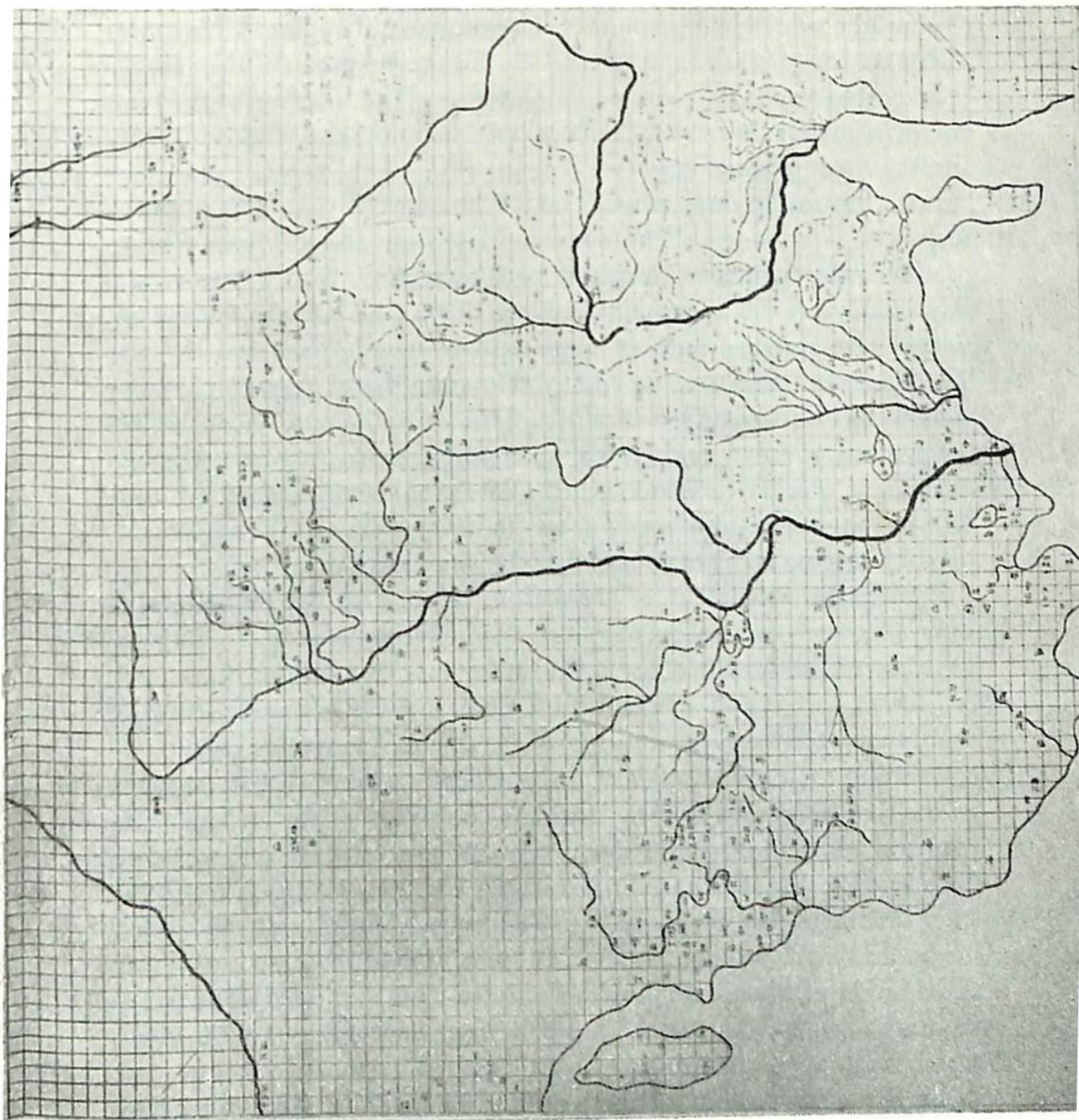
Whereas the Himalayas were the Olympus of Hindu and Buddhist culture, they played no part in the early civilisation of China. They are not even a feature in any of the early Chinese maps, as Maps I and II demonstrate. They form a natural barrier between these two great Asian civilisations, so divergent in almost every aspect.

There is no more dramatic illustration of this early divergence than a comparison of Asoka's Edicts carved on stone pillars over an area including Afghanistan and Baluchistan with the rock inscriptions of Shih-huang, who unified China for the first time, made at just about the same time, in the 3rd Century B.C. Asoka, after exhausting his enthusiasm for conquest, became a Buddhist and his inscriptions were mainly moral exhortations. The Tai-chang pillar characteristically described Shih-huang ti: 'For the first time he has united the world,' and another claimed: 'The Sovereign Emperor has pacified in turn the four ends of the earth.' In the first naturalistic geographical survey made by Yu-Kung, the cosmology of the world was classified as royal domains, princes' domains, pacification zone, allied barbarism and cultureless savagery.

The attitude of China towards her western neighbours was dictated then, as it is now, by geography. Dr Joseph Needham in the first volume of his monumental *Science and Civilisation in China* quotes an influential high official as advising his prime minister that 'friendly intercourse with barbarian nations is advisable only where communications are reasonably easy'.² Less materialistic considerations inspired the early exchange of ideas. From about the middle of the 4th Century A.D. Indian scholar monks visited China to preach Buddhism and many more Chinese scholar monks made pilgrimages to India to study Buddhist scriptures. Prominent among the latter was Hiuan Tsang, one of the most endearing travellers of all times. In spite of official disapproval he left China secretly in 629, and according to his own moving Memorial written to the Tang Emperor on his return in 645 'traversed over vast plains of shifting sand, scaled precipitous mountain crags clad with snow, found my way through the scarped passes of the iron gates, passed along by the tumultuous waves of the hot sea'. He described the Himalayan borderlands of Assam, Nepal and Kashmir as being ruled by Hindu kings, and his description of sixteen years travel in India



MAP I. *The Hua I Thu* (Map of China and the Barbarian Countries), one of the two most important monuments of medieval Chinese cartography, carved in stone in +1137 but probably dating from about +1040 (from Chavannes). The size of the original (which bears a fuller explanatory text), which is now in the Pei Lin Museum at Sian, is about 3 ft square. The name of the geographer is not known.



MAP 2. *The Yü Chi Thu* (Map of the Tracks of Yü the Great), the most remarkable cartographic work of its age in any culture, carved in stone in +1137 but probably dating from before +1100 (from Chavannes). The scale of the grid is 100 *li* to the division. The coastal outline is relatively firm and the precision of the network of river systems extraordinary. The size of the original, which is now in the Pei Lin Museum at Sian, is about 3 ft square. The name of the geographer is not known.

remains the most vivid account of the country of that period. He made many Indian friends and wrote to his co-religionist, the monk Jnanaprabha in 654: 'I returned ten years ago. The frontiers of the two countries are far away from each other. I had no news from you. My anxiety went on increasing.'³

In Delhi, in the days when 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai' was a popular slogan, I saw an excellent documentary film about Hiuan Tsang produced by the Indian Ministry of Information. The theme was a thousand years of friendship between India and China. It was an imaginative political gambit, applauded by intellectuals and masses. The documentation was inevitably thin since the close personal contacts in the 7th Century were not to find a parallel until India was an independent country and China was under Communist rule. Hiuang Tsang was quickly forgotten when Chinese soldiers marched through Himalayan passes, and presumably today the dust of some official pigeonhole covers this discarded exercise in goodwill.

During those centuries of separation, the role of the Himalayas as India's frontier was not in question. An Indian scholar, P. C. Bagchi, Director of Research Studies in Santiniketan, dedicated his book *India and China*, in 1944, 'To Friends in China'. It was a romantic study of more than 1000 years of Sino-Indian friendship. He wrote: 'The roads connecting these two countries had lost themselves in the desert sands or in tropical forests, uncared for; the footprints of the ancient messengers had been effaced by the ravages of time and the old literature had become a sealed book.'⁴ It was the constant claim, not only of Bagchi, but of Nehru, Panikkar, Majumdar, Chakravarti and other historians that the two great civilisations of India and China, spreading as they did over Asia until they met in Indo-China, enjoyed an uneventful co-existence. That there should be boundary lines between them was a purely western notion.

There had never been war between India and China. They were both the victims of western imperial ambitions. The boundary idea was one product of western occupation and western strategy and, more particularly, of the British occupation of India.

Curzon, as a geographer who had explored the Pamirs and the Karakorum, described them as a barrier between India and Czarist Russia. In a memorable phrase he observed: 'Frontiers are indeed the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to nations. . . . The holders of the mountains', he

appreciated, had an 'immense advantage . . . against the occupants of the plains.' He advocated a scientific frontier to counteract that advantage, 'i.e. a Frontier which unites natural and strategical strength, and by placing both the entrance and the exit of the passes in the hands of the defending Power, compels the enemy to conquer the approach before he can use the passage'. He realised that as far as Asia was concerned, the idea of a demarcated frontier was 'an essentially modern conception. . . . It would be true to say that demarcation has never taken place except under European pressure and by the intervention of European agents.' ⁵

At the end of the 19th Century, Sir Thomas Holdich, Surveyor-General of India, described the Himalayas as the natural and accepted frontier. 'It is the finest natural combination of boundary and barrier that exists in the world. It stands alone. For the greater part of its length only the Himalayan eagle can trace it. It lies amidst the eternal silence of vast snowfields and icebound peaks. . . . Could you stand on the summit of one of the lower and outer ranges in Kashmir, or in Garwhal, or Nepal, or at Darjiling, and watch on some clear day the white outline of the distant snowy range, you would realise then that never was there such a God-given boundary set to such a vast, impressive and stupendous frontier.' ⁶

Nothing could have been further from Nehru's mind when sovereignty was transferred to India in 1947. Whatever changes might take place in Asia, and 'the winds of change', as he described them, were blowing over the whole continent, Sino-Indian friendship seemed one of the few stable factors. The drama of a thousand years of contact between the two countries was one of his favourite themes. 'Probably China was more influenced by India than India by China,' he had earlier written in *The Discovery of India*, 'which is a pity, for India could well have received, with profit to herself, some of the sound common sense of the Chinese, and, with its aid, checked her own extravagant fancies. China took much from India, but she was always strong and self-confident enough to take it in her own way and fit it in somewhere in her own texture of life.' ⁷ China and India were cut off from each other for several centuries, and then, as Nehru describes it, they were 'brought by some strange fate under the influence of the British East India Company. India had to endure this for long; in China the contact was brief, but even so it brought opium and war'. He was writing in Ahmadnagar Fort prison camp somewhen between August 9, 1942, and March 28, 1945. ' . . . The wheel of fate has turned full circle and again

India and China look towards each other and past memories crowd in their minds; again pilgrims of a new kind cross or fly over the mountains that separate them, bringing their messages of cheer and goodwill and creating fresh bonds of a friendship that will endure.'⁸

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND SOLIDARITY WITH CHINA

Nehru's admiration for and solidarity with China were more than a personal matter. They were a dominating factor in the foreign policy of the Indian National Congress, for which he was largely responsible from 1927 onwards.

The National Congress was founded in 1885 – the same year that Britain annexed Upper Burma – and although its founders included retired British members of the Indian Civil Service it was an Indian organisation, and as such it could not be indifferent to British annexation of a neighbouring country. It was a Party in a colonial country, but it nevertheless expressed views which implicitly or explicitly criticised the ruling power. At its first session, in December 1885, P. M. Mehta moved a resolution describing annexation as unwise, unjust and immoral. His criticism was based on a fundamental opposition to imperial conquest and on the likelihood that Indian tax-payers would be asked to help pay the bill. Mr Mehta did not refer to China, though the pressure of British business interests to open up the country through the back door of Burma was no secret, least of all in India. But there was a separate resolution deprecating the annexation of Upper Burma. And when the National Congress met in 1891, Dinshaw Wacha accused the Government of trying to expand beyond India's eastern frontiers 'in obedience to the call of pious Manchester for the sale of the products of its spindles and looms'.⁹

This was abundantly true. The factor which was largely overlooked at the time and underestimated by most historians was China's acquiescence in the annexation of Upper Burma. The Anglo-Chinese Treaty of 1886 amounted to an understanding by which China agreed that 'in all matters whatsoever appertaining to the authority and rule which England is now exercising in Burma, England shall be free to do whatsoever she deems fit and proper'.¹⁰ Britain, in return, countermanded the Trade Mission then in Peking, which was trying to open up relations with Tibet. China aimed at an outpost on the Irrawaddy. It was a major

objective of British policy to prevent Chinese expansion. An official document expressed it: 'To permit the Chinese to cross the mountain ranges which separate the river systems of the Irrawaddy and the Upper Salween, and to occupy the higher basin of the former river, would be inconvenient to the Government of India, and would complicate their action in that part of the country.'¹¹ Britain, with the power of the Indian Army behind her, was strong enough to hold her own in Upper Burma, though China's challenge remained the major factor in her Burmese policy. Throughout this period British imperialism was a subject for continuous criticism by the Indian National Congress; many resolutions referred to British policy on China's eastern seaboard. That China too had an expansionist policy in Tibet and in Burma was scarcely taken into consideration.

British policy on the North-West Frontier was attacked as 'unwise and aggressive', and as aiming at the extension of frontiers under the pretext of defending the Empire. In 1895 and 1897, after the occupation of Chitral, Congress urged the British Government to stop this aggressive policy, and added that if these expeditions were found necessary, then they should be charged to the British Exchequer. Banerjee told the 11th Congress in 1895 that where domestic reforms were involved India was found to be poor, but if a subsidy to some frontier expedition was involved, or entertainment for the Princely families on the frontier, then the Government was 'as rich as the richest Government in the world'.¹²

Although the Indian National Congress seemed to overlook Chinese expansion, it was extremely outspoken against Curzon's policy. Sir Henry Cotton, the President of the 19th meeting in 1903, described it as 'a monstrous thing, an outrage and a blunder through and through'.¹³ At the next meeting H. A. Waidya condemned it in equally strong terms. He maintained that there was no evidence of any fresh provocation by Russia in Tibet or in Central Asia, and that even if there were this was not India's concern.

The First World War and the Russian Revolution had far-reaching results in the policy of Congress. Politically conscious Indians now had no doubts that India would win freedom from British rule. The July 1921 meeting of the All India Congress Committee passed a resolution that neighbouring and other non-Indian states should be informed:

- (i) that the present Government of India in no way represents Indian opinion and that their policy has been

traditionally guided by considerations more of holding India in subjection than of protecting her borders;

(ii) that India as a self-governing country can have nothing to fear from the neighbouring states or any state as her people have no designs upon any of them, and hence no intention of establishing any trade relations hostile to or not desired by the people of such states;

(iii) that the people of India regard most treaties entered into with the Imperial Government by neighbouring states as mainly designed by the latter to perpetuate the exploitation of India by the Imperial power, and would therefore urge the states having no ill-will against the people of India, and having no desire to injure her interests, to refrain from entering into any treaty with the Imperial power. The Committee wishes also to assure the foreign states that when India has attained self-government, her foreign policy will naturally be always guided so as to respect their religious obligations'.¹⁴

Three years later when Indian troops were used in China to put down the national movement, the A.I.C.C. openly condemned British policy and conveyed their sympathy to the Chinese people. The idea of an Asian federation now featured in the writings of Gandhi and in resolutions passed by the 37th, 38th and 41st meetings of the A.I.C.C.

Rabindranath Tagore's visit to China in 1924 produced many expressions of friendship in both countries, as well as in Rangoon, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Hongkong, where the Chinese communities welcomed him as he and his party passed through. Dr Sun Yat Sen sent friends to invite him to visit Canton, but Sun's sudden death prevented a meeting.

'No event in recent years has aroused so much interest in Chinese intellectual circles as the visit of Rabindranath Tagore' the *North China Standard* wrote. 'What is the explanation? It is because Dr Tagore belongs to the East and in honouring him the Chinese intellectuals are honouring the civilisation of the East.' The European attitude was expressed in the *Far Eastern Times*: 'He (Tagore) sees in the mechanics of the West and its destructive influence on the East, the real enemy. Against this enemy he bids Asia and Africa – Africa as well as Asia, for he thinks of the Dark Continent very frequently – gird up their loins,

not in a spirit of hate but in a spirit of race-consciousness of Freedom.' Tagore was demonstrably pleased by the reception he received almost everywhere in China. He was already known as a critic of the opium policy of certain European powers and for a most perceptive appreciation of Chinese life and ideals in his review of Lowes Dickinson's *Letters to John Chinaman*. His *Gitanjali* had been translated into Chinese.

Leonard K. Elmhirst, who acted as Secretary to the Indian delegation in 1924, added an interesting point to the story of the tour. 'Tagore used to say before we left India that it was vitally necessary for Indians to try and discover the aspirations of modern China. He refused to visit ancient buildings not because he was not interested in them, but because time was short and he had brought a team of Indian specialists with him, an artist, a Sanskrit scholar and a historian to study every aspect of China's past. Meanwhile he determined to devote all his energy to trying to meet and fathom the mind and aspirations of modern China, of her students, her professors, her writers, her living painters, singers and musicians.' ¹⁵

One result of Tagore's visit was the establishment of a Chinese Hall and Library in Santiniketan some years later. The moving spirit was Professor Tan Yun-shan, who met Tagore in Singapore and was so much impressed by him that he raised most of the funds himself in China.

Nehru shared Tagore's interest in China. He was struck by the quality of the Chinese delegation to the League against Imperialism Conference in Belgium in 1927 and wrote in his report to the A.I.C.C.: 'I suppose the Chinese representatives were the natural products of a revolution and I was led regretfully to wish that we in India might also develop some of this energy and driving force, at the expense, if need be, of some of our intellectuality.' He described them as 'very young and full of energy and enthusiasm . . . with a great deal of driving force' and quite unlike the 'traditional notion of the placid and tranquil Chinese'.¹⁶ The Chinese and Indian delegations made a joint declaration which today sounds unhappily ironical:

For more than three thousand years the people of India and China were united by the most intimate cultural ties. From the days of Buddha to the end of the Mughal period and the beginning of British domination in India this friendly intercourse continued uninterrupted.

After the East India Company had, by intrigue and force, secured its firm hold on the greater part of India, the English began looking for new sources of revenue and new markets. They not only introduced poppy cultivation into areas where food had previously been grown, but also thrust Indian opium on the unwilling Chinese people by force of arms. Since that infamous Opium War of 1840–1844 Indian mercenary troops have been sent again and again to China in support of British capitalist brigandage in that country. For 87 years Indian troops have been permanently stationed as policemen in Hongkong, Shanghai, etc. Time and again they have been used to shoot down Chinese workers and have thus created ill will in China against the people of India. Even as we make this declaration Indian troops are again on their way to China in an attempt to crush the Chinese revolution.

With the strengthening of British imperialism, India was cut off more and more from intercourse with China, and in their cultural and intellectual isolation, the Indian people have now become completely ignorant of the condition of China.

It is this extreme ignorance that makes it difficult today to organise effective means of preventing India's money and manpower being used for the enslavement of the Chinese people. We think it urgent and essential that active propaganda should be carried on in India to educate the people regarding China and to arouse them to the necessity of immediate action.

We must now resume the ancient personal, cultural and political relations between the two peoples. British imperialism which in the past has kept us apart and done us so much injury, is now the very force that is uniting us in a common endeavour to overthrow it.

We trust that the leaders of the Indian movement will do all in their power to co-ordinate their struggle with that of the Chinese people so that by simultaneously engaging British imperialism on two of its most vital fronts, China may receive active support in her present struggle and the final victory of both peoples may be secured.¹⁷

Chinese affairs dominated Nehru's own report. He quoted in full the

declaration of the British, Indian and Chinese delegates. It had been drafted by the British delegation – George Lansbury, Fenner Brockway, S. O. Davies, John Becket, Ellen Wilkinson, Harry Pollitt, Reginald Bridgeman, Arthur McManus, Helen Crawford, William Rust and J. Stokes.

Nehru and the Chinese signatory, H. Liau, both felt that as Britain 'was the chief sinner in regard to India and China it would be desirable if they prepared a statement as to what they proposed doing'. Their programme of action was a demand for the immediate withdrawal of all armed forces from Chinese territory and waters; strikes and embargoes to prevent the movement of munitions and troops either to India or China and from India to China; an agreement to vote against war estimates and to recognise the National Government; a demand for the abolition of all unequal treaties and extra-territorial rights. Edo Fimmen, who presided over the Congress, cabled it to the I.N.C. and the National Government of China.

Nehru emphasised the need for closer relations between the Chinese and the I.N.C. 'Nothing would please them more than to have a visit from representatives of the A.I.C.C. to study the Chinese situation on the spot. For students they are prepared to afford every facility, and even now, as is well-known, many of the records of ancient Indian culture can only be found in China.'¹⁸ News of China was derived almost exclusively through English official sources. He felt that it was tainted, and he wanted first-hand information.

Nehru, as President of Congress in 1936, warned his audience: 'In the Far East also war hovers on the horizon and we see an eastern imperialism advancing methodically and pitilessly over ancient China and dreaming of world empire. Imperialism shows its claws wherever it may be, in the West or in the East.'¹⁹

He described 'Japanese imperialism continuing its aggression in North China and Mongolia; British Imperialism piously objecting to other countries misbehaving, yet carrying on in much the same way in India and the Frontier; and behind it all a decaying economic order which intensifies these conflicts'.²⁰

Early in the same year Nehru spoke in London under the auspices of the Indian Conciliation Group. He was asked about Japan's potential threat to India, once China was defeated. He answered: 'One cannot go easily over the Himalayan mountains and the various deserts and other tracts of China. Therefore you must realise that India is not very easily

accessible to Japan if Japan goes through China, so Japan has to come by a fairly intricate route through the Singapore Straits, and any hostile fleet could make it difficult for the Japanese to approach India.' He believed that even if China were conquered it would still be a problem 'and something which will really absorb the energies of Japan, and probably bring about its downfall'. He considered China weak 'because some of her rulers were weak, Chiang Kai-shek and others. . . . In any event, Japan would have a hostile China to deal with whether it was subjugated or not'.²¹

When the Chinese Hall was inaugurated in Sankinoketan in 1937, Nehru, who was prevented by illness from being present, sent this message:

What a long past that has been of friendly contacts and mutual influences, untroubled by political conflict and aggression. We have traded in ideas, in art, in culture, and grown richer in our own inheritance by the other's offering. Political subjection came to both of us in varying forms and stagnation and decay, and at the same time new forces and ideas from the West to wake us out of our torpor. . . . China and India, sister nations from the dawn of history, with their long tradition of culture and peaceful development of ideas, have to play a leading part in this world drama, in which they themselves are so deeply involved.²²

The same theme was touched on by Professor Tan Yun-shan, the moving spirit of the Sino-Indian Cultural Society: 'India and China are naturally a pair of sister countries. Their similarities and their associations are great, numerous and intimate. Looking over the geography and history of all the nations of the world, we find there are not any other two nations that can be compared to our two countries. . . . The powers of Europe and America have come to the end of their wits in the labyrinth; it is then urgently necessary for the Easterner, especially Indians and Chinese, to shoulder this duty of human salvation, threatened as it was, he claimed, by the 'misuse of science and materialism'.²³

Japan's attack on China that same year moved Tagore to write to the Japanese poet Noguchi, deploring their militarism and extolling China's resistance. 'Faced by the borrowed science of Japanese

militarism which is crudely western in character, China's stand reveals an inherently superior moral stature.'²⁴

The second stage of Japan's war had already begun when Congress met for the 51st session in 1938. After expressing its 'deepest sympathy' with the Chinese people 'in their great ordeal' and its 'admiration for the heroic struggle they are conducting to maintain their freedom and integrity',²⁵ Congress assured China 'of the solidarity of the Indian people and as a mark of India's sympathy called upon the people of India to refrain from purchasing Japanese goods'. Other practical demonstrations of Congress support were made at meetings; Congress and Chinese flags were unfurled together; Dr M. Atal took out an ambulance unit to China.

THE BONDS GROW STRONGER

When Nehru visited China in 1939 he again showed his deep affection for the people and his faith in Indo-Chinese friendship. 'I chose to go,' he wrote, 'because while I hesitated, loving and comradely hands beckoned to me from China and distant memories of ages past urged me to go. The long perspective of history rose up before me, the agonies and triumphs of India and China, and the troubles of today "folded their tents like the Arabs and as silently stole away". The present will pass and merge into the future, and India will remain and China will remain, and the two will work together for their own good and the good of the world.'²⁶

Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh seemed no less emotional in their response. They praised Dr Atal's work with the Eighth Route Army. 'The great Indian people and the Chinese have a common destiny,' they declared, 'We, the Indian people and the Chinese combined, compose almost half of mankind. We are the two peoples who have been suffering longest imperial oppression and slavery, and we both have the glorious tradition of fighting for liberty and freedom. Our emancipation, the emancipation of the Indian people and the Chinese, will be the signal of the emancipation of all the down-trodden and oppressed.'²⁷

When Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek visited India in 1942, they were given a truly warm welcome, and won a good deal of praise in some circles for their appeal to the British Government to give real political power to the Indian people, and to the people of

India to join with the Big Four (China, Great Britain, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.) in defending the free world. Characteristically, Nehru wrote: 'The bonds that tied Indian and China grew stronger and so did the desire to line up with China and other nations against the common adversary.'²⁸ The Chiang Kai-sheks made generous donations to the Midnapore Relief Fund and to the Santiniketan venture.

Six months later Singapore had fallen and China's position was alarming. Ties between Indian and China were so strong that the 'Quit India' resolution specifically expressed its desire 'not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations'. Gandhi wrote personally to Chiang Kai-shek: 'I look forward to the day when a free India and a free China will co-operate together in friendship and brotherhood for their own good and for the good of Asia and the world.'²⁹ Nehru sent a personal message to the Chinese assuring them that India would keep faith with China. 'Whatever we do now, constrained by circumstances, is aimed at the achievement of India's independence so that we may fight with all our strength and will against the aggressor in India and China.'³⁰ Each country closely observed the vicissitudes of the other. The Chinese Consul-General in Calcutta, Dr J. C. Pao, passed over a handsome contribution for famine relief in Bengal in 1943, and, later, China Aid Committees in various parts of India donated gifts for Madame Chiang Kai-shek's relief fund.

When Dr S. Radhakrishnan visited China in 1944, giving philosophical rather than political lectures, he often referred to Gandhi's assertion that any recommendation he might make would 'be governed by the consideration that it should not injure China or encourage Japanese aggression against India or China'. His visit coincided with fratricidal struggles between Communists and Kuomintang, which he described as 'impeding the force of Chinese resistance'. One observation he made illustrates his a-political shrewdness: 'The Chinese Communists are not strict followers of the Russian creed. Their fatherland is China and not the Soviet Union. They are nationalists first and foremost and are fighting the battles of China against Japan, and not those of the Comintern.'³¹

Although China was at war, Radhakrishnan was greeted with banquets and orations. The Abbot Tai Hsu recalled: 'For centuries Buddhism permeated China. Today Confucian and Hindu thought

interflow.' The Minister of Education, Chen Li-Fu, composed a poem 'to wish the interflow of the cultures of India and China, as long and perpetual as the Ganges and the Yangtse. . . . We have had intercourse for two thousand years, our hearts are one'.³²

The Second World War nominally ended within a few months of Radhakrishnan's visit. The last and most violent stage of civil war began in China. In September 1946, Nehru, then Vice-President of the Interim National Government of India, broadcast: 'China, that mighty country with a mighty past, our neighbour, has been our friend through the ages and that friendship will endure and grow. We earnestly hope that her present troubles will end soon and a united and democratic China will emerge, playing a great part in the furtherance of world peace and progress.'³³ Nehru's most cherished vision of Sino-Indian partnership in an Asia freed from colonialism was not materially affected by the victory of Chinese communism.