Another Perspective of Modernization – Gutpa’s Analysis on China from the 1960s to the 1990s

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ABSTRACT

With the intention to ask what the modernization is and how its relation with development is, this paper examines the Indian author K. P. Gupta’s works on China. Whereas there is no country being wholly modern or wholly traditional, how does “modernity” being a worldwide-accepted value when developing a country? We may separate the idea of modernity into two parts: its meaning in time and in value. Through Gupta’s de-dichotomy approach, the meaning of these terms and their evolution are clarified. In short, with another perspective to re-examine the interaction in historical progress, we can see different aspects of development.

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Introduction

What is modernization? Can we just simply understand all efforts and programs in developing countries as the way to modernity? Moreover, this paper intends to ask what “Chinese Modernization” means in the Indian perspective at the same time as Indian development.

“China Report”, an important China-related periodical in India is a good source to find the answer. Krishna Prakash Gupta, an author writing about sociological and philosophical Chinese Studies, showed a unique perspective in this period, in the period between the 1960s to the 1990s. It was time of change; both China and India confronted a totally different condition with their long history, and tried to learn from the west. “The west” was so wealthy and strong that their ideas of historical progress/development are widely accepted. We can see some common elements in the Indian’s Chinese Studies in its long time evolution from Gupta’s work: cultural and historical concentration; and his unique answer to modernity and his denial of a East-West dichotomy.

While knowing what these countries are now, the Indian’s cognition about China during that time is an important part in understanding China and India modernization. Intensive reading the text at that time has shown us how interesting it is to know the history behind the numbers of growing economy.
Impact of the West, and the early 20th century Indian’s idea of the “East”

During the 19th and the 20th century, reformists in India played an important role in the progress of modernization, including religious reform and social reform and so on. Their motivation to reform is basically a reaction to the western impact; therefore, the transformation of tradition and the import of modern values are important to some Indian scholars.

But meanwhile, Indian scholars tried not only to make internal reforms, but to seek for their traditional or cultural ties with its non-imperial neighbors. China was perceived in the sense. China, as a large neighbor with its traditional trade and religion linkage to India, had similar destiny as India. Both should respond to the western challenge and impact with their historical ancient past, and to confront the colonial or semi-colonial conditions.

In the early 20th century, Indian scholars and public opinion showed a positive attitude towards China, and so did Chinese intellectuals. We could see it clearly through the official appeal against the Japanese invading China, and the substantial support from the Indians during the Japanese invasion.

Let us concern on two giants in this period, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Javaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). Those who want to trace the Chinese Studies back to the 20th century must unavoidably discuss them.

R. Tagore, instead of a philosopher, he would like to call himself a poet, is influential amongst the Indians’ perspective and worldview even now. According to Amartya Sen, though Tagore is not an enthusiastic nationalist, he is undoubted an anti-imperialist and an anti-colonialist. Wei-Lin Huang has pointed out that Tagore divided the western modernization into two parts, one was westernization, and the other was modernization, so to accept modern standards and advantage was compatible with the rejection to its oppression. Basically, Tagore’s idea of “the East” is a concept resistant to the imperial-West, and substitutes for India; and his view on international relationship was
a symbol of ideal and cultural ties instead of western nation-states’ international relationship. (Huang, 2010) Sen views this concept as deriving from Indian tradition – pluralistic Hinduism. (Sen, 2005)

It is his visiting to China in 1924 that marked a watershed in Sino-India relations. With a spiritual East and Material West dichotomy and singing praise of the former, Tagore’s visiting caused much debate in China. Before this debate, grave issues had arisen following upon the Qin dynasty’s repeated defeats at the hands of other countries. The Chinese intellectuals argued why the Chinese were humiliated so and then they found the answer: the Manchu’s corruption and unwilling to change. They suggested to “catch up with developed countries”, and thought the western model to be an ideal type or necessity to take as it was a worldwide tendency. It was the strength and wealth that the western countries symbolized made it a standard to learn from. “Modernizing Chinese Nation State” became a goal to survive the Chinese.

But how to transform was another issue. They recommended several ways to save China; some of them suggested to completely westernize, while some insisted on keeping tradition as a foundation of China, and to learn from the western/modern material advantages. However, in the late Qin, the way that Chinese intellectuals’ divided “tradition” and “westernized modernity” into two totally different concepts had made them incompatible. Hence, to modernize or to accept the material west as a developmental model meant to destroy tradition partly or as a whole.

Tagore’s praise of the spiritual east and the blame he put on the abused and arrogant material power seemed to be out of date at the same time when the Chinese intellectuals conducted “modernization” as a necessity to save China. When Tagore lectured in China in 1924 and encountered obstacles, he responded with friendly wishes.

Even though sharing with the same idea of “spiritual east”, Tagore’s perspective on modernity was still different from the Chinese; he thought the true spirit of modernity lay with the eastern ideal entity, but the Chinese
critics made the spirit of modernity western. With such difference, the reason of Tagore’s obstacle in his visiting China is clear.

But let us keep on Nehru, who inherited Tagore’s experience and shared the same Indian perspective, but more realistic. Before independence, J. Nehru played an important role in anti-colonialism and the nation building movement. In 1947, Nehru, as the first prime minister of India, delivered a speech showing his expectation to India as a “rising star of freedom in the East”, and thought it to be a fateful moment for the Indians, “for all Asia and for the world”\(^1\). Or as Mira Sinha pointed out that Nehru “created an entire structure of foreign policy in which vision, policy and practice were closely linked, providing it with inner coherence.”\(^2\) Then how did Nehru view China while he thought of India, as a new star in the East, in a symbolic but realistic way? It would become clear to see in his letter to K.M. Panikkar in 1950, “I attach great importance to India and China being friends. I think the future of Asia and to some extent of the world depends upon this.”(qtd. In M. Kohli, 1985)

As M. Kohli described, Nehru was “partly realistic and partly romantic and visionary”\(^3\). In practice, he made a Bhai-Bhai strategy towards China through his anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist standpoint, and his fate in socialism and communism. Although he thought China as “a mighty country with a might[y] past”, but after the Chinese communist party (CCP) took over the Chinese governance in 1949, he made Sino-India relation his basic foreign policy, and regarded the future of Asia and the world as somehow depending on these two countries.

Nehru’s view of China had transformed with the changing Sino-India relationship. Before CCP’s governance in 1949, as a young socialist, he divided

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\(^2\) Mira Sinha : China Making and Unmaking of Nehru’s Foreign Policy, China Report No. 6, 1970. p.52. pp. 51-64.

\(^3\) Manorama Kohli : Nehru’s World View and China Policy, China Report, No21, 1985, pp. 497-502
the world into the imperial nations and the oppressed nations. This indicated an “united oppressed Asia” against the “imperial west”. Nehru not only treated China as a continuous civilization but also as “shedding the lethargy and weakness of ages” (qtd. In K. P. Gupta, 1972), so it was not difficult to admit a different party as the sovereign over China under this perspective. After CCP’s victory, its practice in international relations and hostility towards India wrecked Nehru’s belief in the Asia unity, but he still justified China’s behavior as its reaction to the misery in its past.

In the 1950s, Nehru’s idea of Asia had turned into the “co-existence” model between nations, but it became a “Hostile Coexistence” with their border issues and disputes over the “liberation” of Tibet. Because of the Tibetan Rebellion and the Dalai Lama’s flight to India in 1959, Nehru was faced with a dilemma to the sympathy of Tibetan in Indian public and the hatred of the Chinese. Nehru now raised a legally and specifically border debate with China. But after the Border war broke out in 1962, he called China as expansionist, and the Indian government started to hold a negative image of China.

**Chinese Studies in Indian before and after the war and China Report:**

**A Quick Review**

According to Brij Tankha, the first Chinese related study in India was the Chinese language course established in 1918, Calcutta University. But in 1937, it was the founding of “Cheena Bhavan” in Shantiniketan that symbolized the beginning of Chinese studies in India. Before the 1962 Border war, Chinese Studies in India mostly concerned the Chinese language, culture,

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literature, and religion (Buddhism). Research was on traditional China and was seeking for the Sino-India ancient linkage.

After the Border War, many Chinese Studies institutions were set up by the Indian government to research China—mainly military and strategy analyses, for example, IDSA, a think tank concerning defense studies and analyses, and CCS (Center of Chinese Studies) in Delhi University. Alongside, the journal *China Report* held by what was to be called an informal Chinese studies group constituted of Chinese experts from multiple fields. According to the interview of Tang Chung, they even met weekly to discuss China events. In 1969, the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) was founded by that Group, and helped with sustaining China Report. After 1978, China Report was relocated at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and became the journal of the Group. In 1990, the Group was founded as the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) for the further development of Chinese Studies. *China Report,* even now, is the only journal specifically China-related in India or even in south-eastern Asia. Indian's Chinese Studies in this period tended to concentrate on diplomatic and strategic studies. But political analyses and various other studies did appear in China Report, however, even in the face of India's contemporaneous hatred of China.

**What was China? A De-dichotomy Study**

In the 1970s and the 1980s, *China Report* called for certain kinds of papers. Two of these called for papers to rethink the Indian perspective on China: “an Indian approach to modern China” in 1971 and "Chinese Studies in India" in 1986, introducing the development and evolution of Chinese studies in India. K. P. Gupta wrote both of these. K. P. Gupta, who got his PhD in Harvard as one of the first people to receive the scholarship form the Ford Foundation, used to be a member of the informal Chinese group mentioned above, an editor in China Report, and a professor in DU. During 2003, he left for various financial reasons.
K. P. Gupta’s first article was published in 1969, and the last one in 1995. Most of his articles analyzed and interpreted Chinese events with what he called as a Social-Historical Approach, using this to avoid an ahistorical theoretical construction. Through reviewing theories explaining contemporary international events or theorists’ suggestions on developing a country, Gupta found that not only American scholars but also the Indians would easily accept the norms from western schools without knowing these countries’ historical or cultural roots. For example, when scholars examined the Indian and Chinese modes of governance, they advised increasing the activity of civil society in China and the expansion of central governmental power of India to ensure their democracies ran normally. But Gupta traced back the tradition of democracy in the western context, and pointed out that the tradition of democracy lays on the European cultural and historical background. Though scholars tried to evaluate Chinese and Indian governments with the western standard and gave them advice sincerely, their presupposition of the necessity of historical progress was in a prejudicial norm that prevented them from objectivity. It could be seen that such a presumption must be substituted. (Gupta, 1971; 1995) But this did not mean the denial of westernization and modernization as a whole. It was a suggestion to the scholars to remind themselves to know their standpoint and perspectives they were bringing from their own cultures.

All of his articles concerned China related issues. To him, India, China and the west had their own complex contents. In his 1971 article, he summarized the contemporary history of Sino-India relations through pointing out the influential persons and ideas concerned. He noticed that Indians like Vivekananda, R. Tagore, and J. Nehru thought about China in an overly positive and an idealized way. But in Nehru’s late years, with the Chinese political reality, he reversed his view of a positive Chinese image into negative. Scholars tried to find out the reason of the split cognition between above, and Gupta summarized their findings into three reasons, but again he denied all of them: (1) Ignorance, it was the ignorance of the Chinese political reality that the Indians view China as the reflection of India. (2) Reflection, the Indian
scholars made China a reflection of India. (3) Sympathy, with the Indian’s own suffering, they saw China suffering from the similar situation as well. Whereas Nehru truly sympathized with the Chinese and knew about the political reality in China while he was the first prime minister of India, he still failed to know the Chinese’s intention towards her neighbors. In his other articles, we can find out more about his proposed second reason. There were two ways of reflection, one was the spiritual Asian unity, and the other was the cooperation/co-existence of the anti-imperialist or the oppressed. The former referred to the idea that Tagore first brought to the Indians. His followers inherited both Tagore’s idea of a spiritual East, as well as his substitution which switched the idea of “India” into the idea of “the East”. The latter meant to treat China as an actor or as a nation state as well as Indian; to view China with her ancient past and her anti-imperial struggle, and with the distinct worldview in India of “co-existence”.

Gupta suggested the idea of "knowing China in Chinese terms", and we can see this clearly in Nehru’s case. Gupta thought that it was Nehru’s Indian worldview being different from the Chinese worldview is what led him to a misinterpretation. But such cognition caused Nehru’s attitude to reverse from positive to negative. Gupta believed that the Chinese had a worldview of the world all of their own. Under this context, what used to be thought contradictory was compatible and consistent. In Chinese, the word for “China” meant literally to “the Middle kingdom”, and this partly represented their worldview. Gupta said the Chinese distinguished in-group and out-group, and it also a distinction between the civilized and the barbarian. Gupta said, to the Chinese, through contacting with the Middle kingdom, the out-group would gradually be civilized. The central (i.e. the civilized) had its moral obligation to the barbarian, through giving immense material or moral benefits in order to radiate civilizing influences. In its modern version, the Chinese traditional worldview transferred into socialist terms. With the idea of worldwide liberation and united front, CCP supported the communism movement—communism that CCP recognized. We can see similar analyses in Lucian Pye
and Richard Madsen’s work\textsuperscript{7}. Recently Shih\textsuperscript{8} has published several books talking about CCP’s theory and practice with their moral superiority.

Gupta’s “knowing China in Chinese terms” was also a rejection of the dichotomy of tradition and modernity. To Gupta, China, or the Chinese, were identical but not homogenous, and so was Indian. In the international relationships, they were actors that achieve the western standard of being a nation state. Both had its long history while confronting many social changes but still consisted of a changeable but contiguous culture. If one simply divided the development progress into tradition and modernity, they should be very careful not to confuse “modernity” with “contemporary”.\textsuperscript{9} Now we tend to keep the idea of development models to estimate and improve human living condition instead of historical progress.

It was a myth to identify China as a fixed idea or to suppose there was a certain substance called the Chinese characteristic. In Gupta’s concept, China was a nation both in a modern and in a traditional sense, an actor in international relationship, a flexible but continual tradition, and a culture with other cultural elements. But it still inherits from the concept of China from

\textsuperscript{7} Lucian W. Pye in his work \textit{The Spirit of Chinese Politics: A Psycho-cultural Study of Authority Crisis in Political Development} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M. I. T. Press) pointed out the communist leaders were making policies in a Confucian manner; and the result was governance with emphasis on morality. Richard Madsen in several books mentioned a similar phenomenon. For example, in \textit{Morality and Power in a Chinese Village}, (London, California Press, 1984) he investigated the small, Chinese, Chen Village from the 1960s to the 1980s. He found in Chen Village that the “Communist gentry” played an important role in local governance. In Chinese villages, there was intensive networking of people as a community, and the gentry were those who fulfilled the expectation to manage public works. The Communist gentry who linked the ideological demands of the central government with the local view of government tended to achieve traditional morality, but they do this with communist terms.

\textsuperscript{8} Similar result was seen in Shih Chin-Yu analyses; he analized CCP with different aspects, strategic and diplomatic included. For example, \textit{China's Just World: The Morality of Chinese Foreign Policy} (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1993). or \textit{The Spirit of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Psycho-cultural View} (London: Macmillan 1990) in English and \textit{《中共外交的理論與實踐》} (Taipei: SanMin, 1994) in Chinese. Mostly concerned the CCP's emphasized on its supremacy of morality.

\textsuperscript{9} Since Gupta thought that modernity was a term with valuation but contemporary was about time, he regarding that some arguments of historical progress fading away these days as noticing the confused usage.
Tagore and Nehru. In Gupta’s article, we find a dual aspect of China, one was the effect of her cultural roots, and the other was the reaction to the western impact. But these two aspects were located in the noun, China. While the Chinese acted as a modern country in an international level, their motivation and action were still traditional. Actually, we never saw a country that was modern without tradition elements; countries in the world now were always both modern but also traditional. So, evaluating countries with modernity but ignoring its own tradition like some scholars unconsciously did was hardly to be called as a proper way to its development. The statistic data surveying China revealed little without interpretation; furthermore, when scholars examine the China’s intention and practice in international levels without taking its tradition into consideration, there would be a problem of reaching a universal standard de-historically and some kind of dichotomy. Through the Indian’s research on China, we can find a way to rediscover the continuity and divergence in a “tradition” out of the dominant perspective.

**Conclusion: Another Perspective of Modernization**

When scholars speak of Sino-Indian relations, they will most likely start with ancient linkages between China and India. Unlike the security issue or merely temporary events, this is a unique approach in international relationships because it does not make the result a-historical or rootless from their traditions. But Gupta uses this method in discussing Sino-Indian relations as well as in Chinese events. Through analysing these events in such a social-historical approach, Gupta traces back not only Sino-India or East-West interaction but also their historical contexts as a whole.

Gupta’s strategy is to introduce China as a modern nation. Gupta supposes that Chinese made themselves a nation in order to respond to the westernized world; otherwise he introduces Chinese as a modern nation. Also he describes the Chinese leaders regard to Confucian decision-making. But Gupta ignores these descriptions as the results of the Chinese debate on modernization. He regards all of the debate as a certain kind of response. In fact, there are always
more than two opinions in a transitional community, the fundamentalist and the reformist. The interaction amongst ideological debate and their interpretation of modernization transforms the modern form of the country; such debate often comes out with the revaluation of their inherent virtues. The transformation of the virtue system that sets modernity a value, along with the transitional political regime makes policies with blended virtues. In the Chinese debate, while scholars tend to accept those westernized standards as universal, the term “modernity” becomes ambiguous and in their view a mixture of both time and value.

Though Tagore and Nehru shared the same goal with the Chinese to fight against the imperialist and the colonialist, they still met obstacles in China. We might say it was an ideological conflict. We now know more about the source of ideological conflicts Centuries after the western impact. Samuel Huntington regards such conflicts as “The Clash of Civilizations”, but practically more concerned the religious aspect. Whereas broadly speaking such conflict is between civilizations with various ethical systems, most scholars agree that these conflicts arise from having a different worldview and priority of value. Gupta suggests a culture-free approach to avoid the problem of making conclusions with this bias. Through this approach, Gupta finds the reason why there are conflicts between China and India is that they have different aims in diplomacy and in their worldview. The former refers to China’s aim in her international relations to recover her dignity following her defeat during the late Qin and to try to be a great nation in the international field once again, but the Indians seek for the world peace and peaceful co-existence of all people. And the latter is that their view of nations, countries and even the world order is derived from their worldview.


11 There are also scholars get their explanation to the countries’ leadership in deep. For instance, in Pye’s opinion towards China, the Chinese loathed of the west was just because of their defeated and their belief in authority and its supremacy with morality and ability in a Confucian sense. Moreover, he thought the Chinese elites desired only Western technology but not the Western values.(Pye, 1968; 1988)
Gupta’s articles in China Report mostly concern the Chinese issues. By introducing the background of Chinese issues and the evolution of relevant ideas until now, Gupta makes contemporary China continuous with its past. Doing this, he makes China a noun with a changeable continuity. But one thing to examine is his ignoring the divergence inside China. Though Gupta denies a fixed “Chinese characteristic”, when Gupta finds out some common elements in the Chinese reforms, he observed that while some factors were innate, others were not. Nevertheless it is interesting to reexamine the debate inside a country and compare to the other country’s debate on similar topics. This is not mean task as a comparison would have to be made across the language gap.

Through Gupta’s Indian perspective and his analysis of China, we can see that there is more to find out through other perspectives. With Gupta’s denial of the tradition-modernity dichotomy, the meanings of these terms are clarified. We can see it as a terminological problem as we understand that the words “tradition” and “modern” are both used in the sense of time and value. Now let us come back to the question posed in introduction: can we just simply understand all efforts and programs in developing countries as the way to modernity? With another perspective with which to examine our ambiguous usage of modernity today, we can separate the question into two parts. One is the westernized category, and the other is the local category. It is historical reasoning to make the westernized universal, while transforming the local into the westernized. But this is not a logical necessity, only a political choice. But if we are limited from a certain standpoint to seeing the complex descendent problems, we will barely make out something from the numbers. With the historical interaction between the oppressors and the oppressed, the

12 There is an interesting example that Gupta summarized the reformation of some Chinese reformers such as certain Zhang Zhidong, Kang Youwei, SunYat-se and Deng Xiaoping. Gupta then makes a denial of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” without a fixed “Chinese characteristic” idea but suggests it is the reformers choose their ways to improve China to be a powerful country that is a tradition.(Gupta, 1991) But there are still other factors to explain why they made such choice or theory, and his analyses on their identical and difference are too rough to specialize on such scholars.
intellectuals have been discussing how to make lives better for hundreds years. If this is the meaning of development, then it will be a continuous progression.
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