

CENTRAL ASIA, THE NEW “GREAT GAME”
BETWEEN THE EMERGING POWERS OF CHINA AND INDIA

Concept Note

14 & 15 October 2009
New Delhi

A comparative study of the two great demographic powers of the world – China and India – has become an established theme in research in this area. Their mutual relations as well as their global geopolitical vision are relatively better-known, while their attitude towards Central Asia remains for long unexplored. However, Central Asia, bordering onto China and separated from India by Afghanistan, is now becoming as important to New Delhi as it has been to Beijing. The analysis of this triangle China-India-Central Asia helps us better understand the grounds for a new ‘world order’ where these two emerging non-European powers – India and China – have come to disturb the traditional Russo-American ‘Great Game’ in the heart of the old continent.

While a study of Sino-Indian relations from the perspective of their stakes in Central Asia is a rare practice among European and American scholars, Indian, Chinese and Central-Asian Scholars have started to publish on this theme in their native languages. The objective of this conference is, therefore, to bring French and native scholars closer for a fruitful exchange of opinions and perspectives on national strategies related to the future of foreign policy in these three zones. A second objective is also to disseminate as far as possible the theoretical advances of French scholarship in social sciences related to the issues of international influence in all its dimensions.

In their attempt to avoid the Russo-Occidental polarization in their territory, the five states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) are calling forth neighboring regional powers to operate in the region in order to facilitate its opening up. Central

Asia is, therefore, one of the new arenas of competition between China and India and we propose to study it from three broad perspectives:

- The geopolitical and geostrategic field: global geopolitical perceptions that attract New Delhi as much as Beijing to redirect themselves towards Central Asia – a zone that shares a fragile boundary with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and is at the same time a part of the Russian sphere of influence. We shall analyze the global visions of China and India and its impact on their foreign policy; their relations with the Russo-Soviet world; as well as their dispositions toward Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and how it influences their perception of Central Asia and its potential as a “sphere of game” in the respective spheres of influence of the two Asian giants.
- The economic field: mastery over the Central Asian market, particularly in the field of energy and defense as well as other commercial goods. We shall study the growing importance of Central Asian hydrocarbon, for which the stakes of both China and India are very high. Simultaneously, we shall look at the economic presence of Beijing and New Delhi in Central Asia while examining the emergence of a Sino-Indian competition, and the issue of defense (selling of arms and professional training by China and India).
- The cultural field: the new growing factors of influence, such as migration; and the capacity of the two powers to produce knowledge (cartography) and transform the old Sinophobic and Indophile perceptions of Central Asia.

This conference also seeks to analyze questions related to the process of globalization: it takes into account issues like identity, security, and the new world order influenced by the emergence of non-occidental powers. Since one of the objectives of the conference is to make native scholars familiar with the vitality of French academic output on the three zones (India, China, Central Asia), with the help of this interaction, we hope to create a network of specialists who would continue to engage in this international collaboration over a period of time. The research institutes involved in the organization of the conference also hope to be able to establish closer links with the research centres situated in the immediate environs of the seat of decision-making, so that the latter can further the French influence in the three zones of study.