

# Introduction

## About the topic

My choice of the Sino-Indian border dispute as the topic for my master's dissertation responds to different reasons. First of all, I already had investigated in the past about this region through my end-of degree's dissertation, but specifically about the decolonization process, boundary and identity issues, nationality laws of the United Kingdom and the Indian diaspora in this country. I wanted to widen my knowledge about India's reality, as well as China's, due to my interest in Asian studies and the Eurocentric education that I had received during my academic years, that did not focus on these types of topics.

At the same time, the Sino-Indian boundary issue have developed great relevance due to the increasingly competitiveness between China and India that not only covers a regional spectre, but also a global scope, as well as the constant incidents and movements in both sides of the border. Its relevance in the international agenda at the moment makes this topic very interesting to research; but the most attractive aspect from my point of view is that this conflict has been present for seventy years without being resolved and has very deep roots down in history.

Both India and China were the two main regional actors and more relevant territories in Asia during the colonial years, but they were already the two main Asian powers in terms of power and influence for centuries, and even millennia. That is why when they gained independence as states by their own in its modern dimension, they did not see themselves as new countries inside the global or Asian contexts, but more as the representatives of ancient and rich cultures and traditions.

China was the "kingdom or empire of the centre", a territory that stood out culturally, politically, and economically since thousands of years throughout all its empires and dynasties. In the meantime, India, even that it was not as relevant as China in terms of its economy or politics, it certainly has exercised an enormous influence in the Asian panorama, with an "Indianization" and spread of Hinduism or Buddhism to other territories, being the great part of the Asia-Pacific region.

Taking into account all these facts, we have to consider that these civilizations shaped profoundly the rest of the region due to its relevance, and their rivalry came from several centuries ago. In fact, China was not only India's neighbour, but it was the only power that was able to compete with India, and vice versa. This idea will help to perfectly frame the border dispute. Another key element is that in China and India there was a constant struggle between unity and strong minorities or regional identities, both ethnic and religious. This lack of a Chinese or Indian monolithic civilization and identity crisis will finally set off, among other consequences, in the Great partition in the case of India and territorial dispute with China afterwards. With the expansion of their territories and the new delimitation of borders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this conflict between the conception of the state of a monolithic identity and diversity, and the integration of territories with different identities, such as Kashmir for India or Tibet for China, increased enormously the territorial tensions.

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe could not compete against Asia, especially against the Chinese economy. The turning point for this Asian predominance was the First Industrial Revolution, that took place in Europe, and whose centre was the United Kingdom. The technological superiority of the Europeans allowed them to have an economic and military predominance and to be able to take advantage of the resources of the region. This fact, linked to the internal crisis that both civilizations were living at that moment, contributed to the instauration of European colonies in most countries in Asia and the end of their independence.

In the specific case of the British, these used the internal crisis and turned them around with the purpose of gaining control of these territories, starting with India through unequal treaties imposed after revolts, with the final result of the instauration of the British Raj. This same process was used in China, with the repartition of the territory in different areas of influence, although in this case a direct control was not possible. These years of colonial dominance are considered by both civilizations as a very dark and shaming period.

It will not be until India's independence in 1947 and the declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949 when these countries will gain their autonomy back and therefore the way towards the industrialisation and capitalisation of their economies. This new beginning started to bring their power back and was the turning point for the predominance of Asia in the global context, especially in the case of China, growingly competing with the West's relevance politically and economically. This also means that they will compete against each other for being the major regional power in Asia, and this fight will be exemplified better than anything in the borders dispute.

Therefore, apart from an interest on the region and the current importance of this matter in the international agenda, another reason for the decision of focusing on this topic is the own history and relevance of these two countries, in a global sense. These two giants are the only countries in the Asian context that are able to oppose each other, as well as to position themselves as the leading power in this sphere of influence. The boundary conflict would be the best exemplification of this struggle, as well as a great mirror of the geopolitical strategies and priorities of both countries, hence its importance.

## Structure

In order to successfully address this master's dissertation, we will start with a first chapter covering as an introduction the history and causes of the boundary issue, in relation with the decolonization process and creation of new states at the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, continuing with the Cold War Years and the change of century. The history of the conflict has such relevance because both powers have been justifying for years their actions and movements based on their own history and cultural relations with the territory. This fact initiates a never-ending cycle where both countries feel entitled to carry out actions and seeking their best interests. Also, we have to consider a broader scope where the global context of the moment was very relevant in order to explain the evolution of the conflict. For example, the climate in the region after the colonial occupation and WWII, the game of interests and alliances during the Cold War, or even the change after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the aims of a new beginning that finally were not successful.

At the same time, in a second chapter, we will focus on the specific case of each region in dispute, in relation with how it has directly handled the diverse claims over its territory and confrontations in the past, as well as what is the current situation and prospects of future. This second chapter is necessary, because even though we conceive the boundary issue throughout the master's dissertation as unitary, a single border between India and China, we need to dedicate a space to analyse the situation in every region in conflict with relevant secondary actors involved, and how it has come to this point, to fully understand this topic.

The Kashmir region has suffered an enormous escalation of tensions during the last years, due to several reasons, but specifically to its particularities compared to the other territories in dispute. Kashmir is not only contested by India and China, but also by Pakistan, being a territory with a lot of identity issues. At the same time, the derogation of the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and the latest COVID-19 crisis, made the region an authentic hot pot of conflict at the moment.

Bhutan, a frequently ignored but very relevant actor, exemplifies the perfect case of an independent state immerse in the conflict that has tried over the decades to protect its national identity and culture, and not positioning itself favourable to one side or another. The constant claims over some of its territory, its transition to democracy or its management of the pandemic, are making that neutrality to be difficult to maintain, or at least to be questioned.

The territories of Nepal and Tibet are also some of the more important areas in this boundary dispute. While Nepal reached its autonomy, Tibet has been over the years significant due to its visibility and struggle for autonomy.

Finally, in a third chapter, we will make an analysis on the topic proving the hypothesis and sub-hypothesis, covering counter narratives explaining why the conflict has taken place for so long, as well as the nature of the own conflict, alternative forms of involvement and the real interest behind it. For this purpose, we will discuss if the boundary issue is a real war conflict or not, taking into account the sporadic attacks and length

of the conflict. At the same time, it would be discussed if it can become in the future a global outcome, or it will keep relegated to a regional sphere as a bilateral issue between both countries. In the end, the dissertation will be finished with an analysis of the role of natural resources as a motivation for the conflict; as well as the use of the economy, population and the recent COVID-19 crisis as tactics or strategies for reaching more control over the region.

## Hypothesis

In this master's dissertation we will present the hypothesis that the Sino-Indian boundary issue is not caused by historical reasons or identity issues that appeared mainly after the end of WWII and the decolonisation process. We want to prove that different national identities and conceptions of the new re-established states in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (India and China) came into contradiction and are, the explanation of the border dispute.

We will support that hypothesis on the growing tension in the region for the access to natural resources, due to the enormous population of both countries, as well as the future challenges of climate change. India, which is controlling the headwaters of the main rivers in the western area, in dispute with China and Pakistan, is carrying out a series of public works based on the construction of hydroelectric dams. For its part, China is doing the same in the central-eastern region, not only with hydroelectric projects similar to the ones of its neighbour, but also with largest projects that consist of the deviation of waters from the Himalayas to other parts of the country. This struggle for hydric and electric resources will be translated in the future into more tensions in the border area, in order to dominate the source of all these natural resources, the control of the Himalayas. From this chain grow all main rivers that cross the Asian continent, providing life to millions of people. The need of its control can potentially be translated into a "water war".

As first sub-hypothesis, we have the conception of the conflict as a territorial issue, but not really a war conflict. This is based on the very sporadic attacks and length of the conflict.

The second sub-hypothesis is the potential to the boundary issue of becoming a global conflict, due to its implications and different actors. China, India, and even Pakistan, are nuclear powers; and in relation with the border dispute there is a series of alliances, such as the one of India with the US, that can be very dangerous in case of a major escalation of events.

The last sub-hypothesis will be the use of another strategies in order to gain influence over the areas in dispute, as well as to debilitate the enemy. Examples of these strategies are economic cooperation, with a series of public works and development programmes; the use of population, with purchases of land and the construction of villages in disputed areas; as well as during the last year the fight against the virus.

## Methodology

The methodology used to achieve these objectives consisted of a bibliographical analysis based on different sources.

In the one hand, primary sources were barely used, because our analysis is not based on the legal status of the conflict during the years, being as we mentioned before an analysis of the last engagements and moves that justify the hypothesis of the real motivations of the boundary issue, apart from the official ones, as well as the new strategies used. This few primary sources are for example the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 1997 of the United Nations, for explaining the role of water-resources as a cause of the conflict.

Thus, in this master's dissertation we have used mainly secondary sources, separating these in two groups. The first group consists of academic articles of different authors, especially Chinese and Indian scholars. We must emphasise the importance of Cheong in relation to the Sino-Indian war, or Borreguero in relation with the Kashmir region, as well as Christopher with the Brahmaputra project and water resources. The last secondary sources are news from Chinese and Indian digital newspapers, due to the current relevance of this