

The role of 'prestige' in creating intractable interstate border disputes: the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute.

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The Sino-Indian border dispute has proven notoriously difficult to resolve and has been the cause of several military skirmishes and diplomatic standoffs in the past. Yet curiously there have been no theoretical examination as to why it remains unresolved, with only a handful of studies investigating what causes interstate border dispute (IBD) intractability more generally. In this article, I argue that the three existing explanations behind IBD behaviour only sheds light onto part of the problem of intractability. Instead, I posit that the key to understanding why the Sino-Indian border dispute specifically and IBDs generally become intractable and enduring lies in a state's 'sense of national prestige'. Prestige is effectively the 'invisible hand' which motivates actors in international affairs and is pivotal in establishing an unofficial hierarchy within the international system. Hence, all state officials covet and cherish their state's prestige and actively avoid 'losing face'. When a state involved in an IBD believes that making concessions towards the rival claimant would lead to a serious loss of prestige, its officials obstinately maintain their maximum claim or an otherwise incompatible stance. As state leaders and officials in both China and India have repeatedly indicated that national prestige is a strong concern when devising policies, I argue that prestige is a key factor behind their negotiations becoming deadlocked and intractable.

Key words: Prestige, interstate border disputes, Sino-Indian relations, diplomacy

Introduction

The Sino-Indian border dispute has been the major source of tension between the two countries since relations first broke down over the issue in 1959. Tensions exacerbated, eventually leading to a brief war in 1962 in which People's Republic of China decisively defeated the Republic of India (simplified to China and India respectively from hereon). Though relations were normalised between China and India in 1976, the border dispute has remained a consistent spoiler in their bilateral relationship. Indeed, negotiations to resolve the Sino-Indian dispute are frequently deadlocked, diplomatic relations are often chilled by frequent incidents along the border and bilateral economic and political connections remaining relatively stunted. This immediately begs the question: what has caused the Sino-Indian border dispute to become intractable? Curiously, despite China and India's growing role in international affairs, there has been no systematic exploration into this question. Instead, the majority of existing studies of the Sino-Indian border dispute are either historical accounts of the dispute's emergence or commentaries and assessments of specific or recent events (see Fang 2002; Hoffmann 1990; Kalha 2014; Ma 2014; Maxwell 2013; Mehra 2007; Smith 2014). This is all the more concerning in light of the sheer size of the territory that the Sino-Indian border dispute covers and the fact that India and China are both clearly situated to play a leading role in international politics in the twenty-first century.

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Equally as curious is that no explanation for the Sino-Indian border dispute's intractability is readily available within the wider body of literature dedicated to discussing interstate border disputes (IBDs). Most studies on IBDs to date have either focused on why and how international border disputes emerge in the first place (Diehl and Goertz 1988; Goertz and Diehl 1992; Hensel 1999; Huth 1996; Prescott 1987), or tried to identify the circumstances under which contested interstate borders lead to inter-state war or resolution (Fravel 2008; Guo 2012; Kocs 1995; Levy and Vakili 1992; Vasquez 1995, 2009). While these previous works have provided valuable contributions to the understanding of IBDs, they all fall short of explaining why most of these disputes become intractable and fester for decades. There have been some efforts, in Blanchard's words, to shift from "pattern identification to theory construction and testing" (2005, 689), but to date only a handful of these studies have attempted to explore why IBD's become and remain intractable (see Chung 2004; Wiegand 2011; Zacher 2001).

This paper is an attempt to address this oversight and provide a theoretical explanation as to why the Sino-Indian border dispute has become intractable. Currently, there are three basic causal factors identified by scholars as motivating state behaviour towards IBDs: the tangible or symbolic value of the territory; the compulsions of domestic politics; and the geopolitical environment that the state operates with. My central hypothesis is that these explanations fail to provide a satisfactory explanation for causing the Sino-Indian border dispute to become intractable and that a fourth factor, concern over national prestige, is responsible for establishing the gridlock. In essence, I argue that when a state's borders become linked with their deeply valued sense of national prestige, the fear of 'losing face' prevents state officials from making the concessions required to break the deadlocked negotiations. Since neither side is willing to alter its position, interstate border disputes become intractable as the negotiations become deadlocked and the situation typically degenerates into a prolonged conflict.

My argument is unpacked in four sections throughout this paper. The first section outlines the logic of the three existing causal factors often identified by scholars as determining state behaviour towards interstate border disputes. In the second section, I apply these to the Sino-Indian border dispute case to illustrate their flaws in explaining why the dispute has become intractable. In the third section, I outline how prestige typically manifests in international affairs and towards IBDs in order to address a gap in the literature in which national prestige remains an under theorised and nebulous concept. The final section illustrates, using the Sino-Indian border dispute as a case study, how the impact of prestige has compelled state officials in both countries to adopt obstinate and irreconcilable positions, thus ensuring intractability of their IBD.

Current theories on intractable interstate border disputes

As IBDs can potentially refer to several different phenomena in international relations, for clarity I define an intractable IBD to be: *the existence of a known overlap between two or more states' claimed boundaries where the rival claimants refuse to compromise or are otherwise unable to reach a settlement over the location of the border.* These disputes may be actively contested or effectively ignored by the claimants and range in size from minor positional issues, such as which side of a river or mountain the border lies, to contests over uninhabited islands to significant tracts of territory (Fravel 2008, 10; Guo 2012, 1–3; Wiegand 2011, 2–8). I have deliberately avoided specifying a minimum time duration for an IBD to be considered intractable as I consider any attempt to do so inherently arbitrary and detracting from the salient point that a resolution is currently unreachable by the disputing states. Nonetheless, it is important to note that intractable IBDs tend to last at least decades and have been known to continue for well over a century (Wiegand 2011, 86–89). Although much of the current literature on IBDs does not focus on why these disputes become intractable, there are three plausible explanations identifiable within the literature: the value of the territory, the domestic situation within the states and the international or geopolitical context that the IBD is taking place within (Huth 1996, 33–67; Guo 2012, 73–74).

The value of the disputed territory is the most obvious and frequently cited factor behind a state's desire to dispute the territory in question, in part because it is easy to quantify and investigate (Guo 2012, 38–39; Newman 1999, 3; Toft 2014, 187–89; Wiegand 2011, 22). As David Newman (1999, 4–5) articulates, territory can be considered valuable due to concrete or symbolic reasons, although each disputant will often draw upon both in order to strengthen their claim. The concrete or intrinsic importance of the disputed territory can be found primarily in its military/strategic or economic value and therefore, is easy to identify. Examples of concrete value include the amount of exploitable minerals or arable land, the defensive or offensive utility of the terrain and geographic location, whether this be its proximity to important trade/transportation routes or a sensitive area for the state such as a city or a key military facility (Goertz and Diehl 1992, 14–20; Huth 1996, 74; Hensel and Mitchell 2005, 275–77; Newman 1999, 4–9; Wiegand 2011, 23–24). Thus, in theory, the concrete value of a territory ensures that statesmen and negotiators would be unwilling to surrender or compromise over their claim lest their state lose access to a useful strategic or material resource.

In contrast, the symbolic value of a territory identifies the land in and of itself which is valued by states above all else. The strong psychological link to certain territory, which often underpins national identity, makes international border disputes much harder to successfully negotiate (Hensel 1999, 117–18; Huth 1996, 78–79, 110; Wiegand 2011, 26–27). There are two prominent types of

symbolic value identified within the literature on border disputes. The first is that the disputed land is occupied by people of a particular ethnicity with which the challenging state identifies. The second is the identification of certain territory as part of the state's homeland, usually by claiming that the territory was part of a historical polity that the state's claims as its precursor (Goertz and Diehl 1992, 19–20; Newman 1999, 12–16; Wiegand 2011, 24–26). These symbolic claims are typically hard to empirically prove as they are often based more upon national myths or a selective reading of history. Nonetheless, symbolic value claims are typically highly emotive and salient issues with the state and are potentially a key glue used to keep the regime in power. Therefore, territorial claims involving symbolic territory are notoriously difficult for officials to negotiate over, let alone relinquish (Hensel and Mitchell 2005, 277; Newman 1999, 13–14).

Another widely cited explanation behind the existence of interstate border disputes is the influence of domestic politics. In essence, the basic argument here is that it is a central concern for both democratic and authoritarian political leaders to maintain their position of power. This requires political leaders to address the key needs and demands of the general population and elite interest groups, such as the military, who have the power to remove them whether by election, coup or some other means. Thus, the degree to which a government can negotiate over an IBD is dependent on the degree of salience it has within their state or at least powerful interest groups within it. Without some greater incentive to change their negotiating calculus, state leaders are often reluctant to negotiate a resolution of even moderately salient IBDs for fear of the domestic repercussions for their government (Chung 2004, 16–22; Huth 1996, 41–46; Levy and Vakili 1992, 122). Another way domestic political pressures can produce intractable border disputes is when statesmen strategically manipulate the situation as a form of domestic mobilisation. The textbook example of this phenomenon is the Argentinean junta's efforts to forcefully annex the Falklands in 1982 in order to rally support and counter the significant domestic unrest it was facing (Hensel 1999, 118–19; Levy and Vakili 1992; Wiegand 2011, 35–38). Hence, statesmen could conceivably be incentivised to keep the border dispute unresolved so as to capitalise upon it when needed to assist with regime security.

The international context has also been identified as a cause of interstate border dispute intractability in three notable ways. The first is the link between interstate rivalries and territorial disputes. In essence, states engaged in a strategic rivalry are loath to yield any potential geopolitical advantage to their enemy, prompting them to adopt inflexible and irreconcilable positions towards any border dispute between the feuding states (Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2007, 240–45; Huth 1999, 57–63). A second cause is a norm that arose in the international community during the latter half of the twentieth century that has seen the delegitimising of the use of force to annex or otherwise

alter interstate boundaries. While the 'border fixity' norm has not prevented the use of force towards an IBD, it has ensured that any territory captured by a state remains contentious. This is because defeated states are unwilling to legitimise the victor's *de facto* control over the disputed territory and the conqueror is equally unwilling to relinquish their control over it (Atzili 2012, 16–30; Zacher 2001). The final cause is identified by Krista Wiegand (2011) in one of the few studies that focuses specifically on intractable IBDs. In essence, Wiegand argues that a key cause of intractable IBDs is that the challenging state has linked the resolution of the dispute with another goal or issue that it has. Hence, the challenging state will continue to maintain its claim to use either as a bargaining chip or as leverage until the linked issue has either been resolved or becomes irrelevant (Wiegand 2011, 55–68).

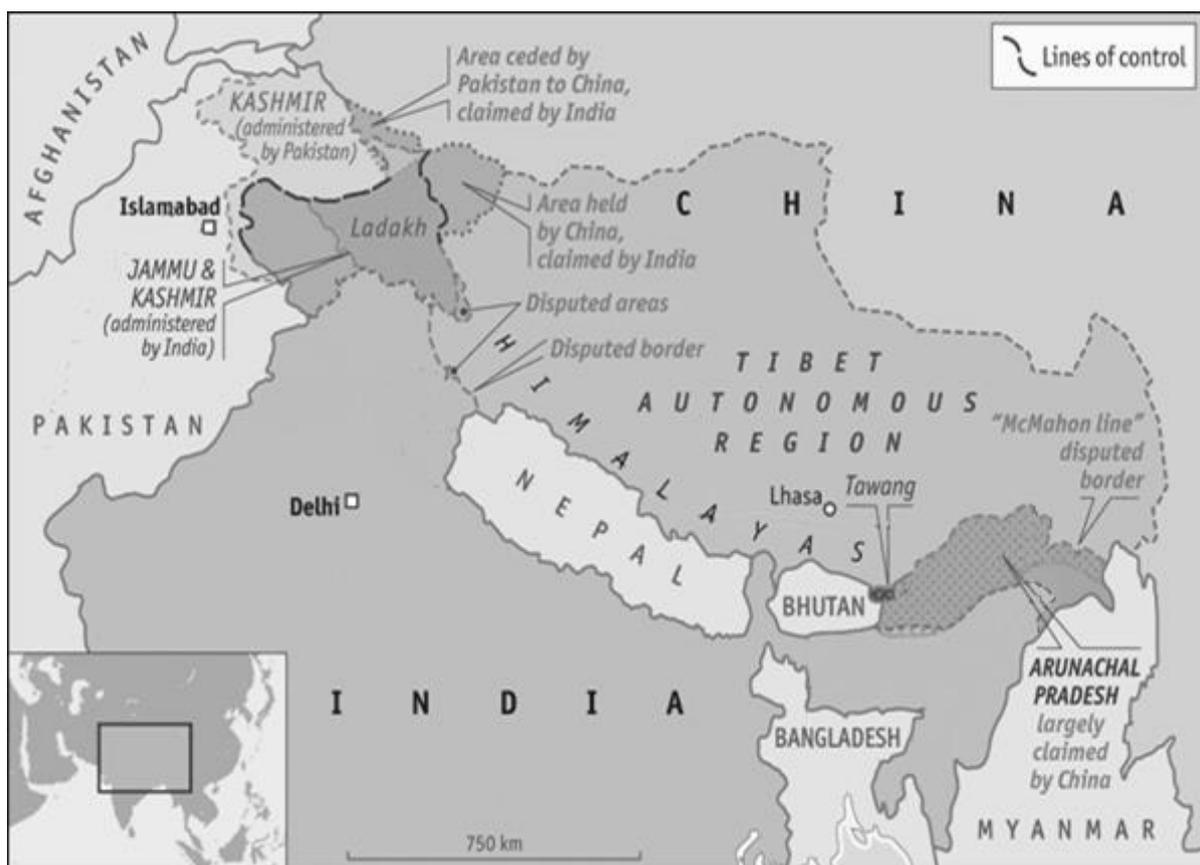
The Sino-Indian border dispute and the existing theories

All of the above factors conceivably play some role in prolonging IBDs generally and do provide good explanations for Chinese and Indian behaviour during certain periods of their dispute. However, none of these, either individually or in a combination, can be considered sufficient causal explanations behind the Sino-Indian border dispute's lasting intractability. To begin with the concrete value of the disputed territory in the Sino-Indian border dispute undoubtedly played a pivotal role in the initial years of the dispute but appears to have had little impact since. Whilst much of the terrain that China and India dispute is relatively barren and devoid of mineral wealth, it does cover strategic routes onto the Tibetan Plateau, most notably across the Aksai Chin from China's side. During the 1950s and 1960s the all-weather road through the Aksai Chin was one of China's primary means of injecting troops into a restive Tibet. However, much of this strategic utility has become irrelevant over time as China has developed numerous other means onto the plateau including the Qinghai-Tibet railroad and numerous airfields (Garver 2001, 82–88; Rehman 2017, 108–9). In addition, several scholars have demonstrated that states involved in IBDs have been willing to part with materially valuable territory but expend significant resources maintaining a claim over relatively worthless territory (Huth 1996; Walter 2003, 137–38). Indeed, China has settled on reasonably generous terms several disputes over strategically or materially valuable territory with neighbours such as Mongolia and Russia whilst vigorously contesting the comparatively barren and uninhabited territory with India (Fravel 2008; Maxwell 2014).

In regards to the intangible value of the disputed territory, several statistical studies have indicated that such considerations have a negligible impact upon a state's willingness to resolve an IBD (Huth 1996, 150–52; Toft 2014, 187–88). Although the details of the Sino-Indian border dispute negotiations are not available to the public, it appears from the anecdotal evidence of the several memoirs and statements from retired officials that intangible value concerns have not been a factor

either. Both China and India have justified their claims in terms historical connection or control by the Imperial Qing dynasty and the British Raj respectively (Chang et al. 1960; Mehra 2007). Yet both sides have also indicated at various times that they are willing to relinquish their claim in a mutually agreeable swap. Indeed, it is seemingly now widely accepted amongst commentators and state officials on both sides that the basis for a resolution to the Sino-Indian border dispute will involve at most a tweaking of the *status quo*, illustrated in figure one bellow (Garver 2011, 101; Gonsalves 2015, 289). A more specific example of this willingness to horse-trade over ‘historical’ claims, can be seen in the recent focus around the Tibetan Buddhist monastic town of Tawang in the eastern sector. Although Tawang historically was administered by Tibet, China showed little interest in the town prior the mid-1980s and only begun to insist on Tawang’s ‘return’ as part of a change in negotiation strategy (Garver 2001, 103–5; Singh 2011, 87–88). On India’s part, while publicly adamant that Tawang is part of India’s historic heritage despite only seizing it in 1951, it reportedly has seriously considered ceding the town to China in return for concessions in the western section (Aneja 2017; Krishnan 2017).

Figure One: The Sino-Indian Border dispute



(Adapted from an original map in *The Economist* 2010)

The domestic political factors behind IBDs have also fallen short generally and in the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute specifically. Largely, this is due to domestic politics being too erratic

and malleable to be a causal factor for IBD intractability. Although domestic pressures often do put significant constraints on a state official's room to manoeuvre, internal politics and public opinion is notoriously fluid. The general mood of the public and elites towards an IBD, whether jingoistic or pacific, has been known to change dramatically with no progress being made on the border dispute. Additionally within the government itself there are often numerous different formal or informal coalitions often with different ideas over how to address the IBD competing for influence over policy, with some pro-resolution or more pragmatically inclined (Chung 2004, 20–22; Huth 1996, 171–72). These observations have been reflected in the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Both China's and India's public and elite opinions have oscillated between indifference to nationalist fervour with little tangible impact on the border negotiations. Both countries have also have identifiable resolution and hardliner schools of thought within their respective security and diplomatic services that debate over how hard a stance should be taken towards the border (Malik 2011; Smith 2014).

When it comes to mobilising the population as a factor behind IBD intractability, it appears as though the cases of it occurring are more opportunism than long-term calculated strategy for regime preservation (Fravel 2010; Wiegand 2011, 40). Indeed, both China and India have had several opportunities to utilise the Sino-Indian border dispute, or their other IBDs, to rally support and distract from internal issues and have declined to do so. Influential statesmen are also often able to sway the majority opinion towards adopting their favoured position on the border dispute. Charismatic or stable leaders have also been willing and able to swat aside domestic opposition if they believe that resolving the dispute is right or necessary for the state (Byman and Pollack 2001). This has been particularly visible in both India and China which both have a highly centralised policymaking procedure when dealing with their various IBDs. One recent example of this can be seen in the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to settle the Bangladeshi-Indian border dispute which had seen a negotiated settlement had been stuck at the ratification stage since 2011. Modi, in pushing through the land swap deal with Bangladesh in June 2015, overrode nationalist political opposition including within his own party, insisting that a resolution was in the national interest (Bagchi 2015a, 2015b).

The international system is equally unable to account for intractable interstate border disputes. This is in large part because the international system is also notably dynamic, with fluctuations of the balance of power and the emergence of new regimes with different priorities occurring frequently. Indeed, Paul Huth's rigorous statistical study on IBDs identified the incessantly shifting international situation as being the primary reason behind border dispute settlement, with states forsaking their territorial claims either to gain diplomatic support or avoid wasting resources

(1996, 154–59). Whilst statistics have demonstrated that interstate rivalries are likely to cause an IBD to become intractable, such situations only account a minority of the world's intractable border disputes and shed little light onto non-rival border disputes remain frozen (Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson 2007, 249; Huth 1999, 48–50). Additionally, even should it be conceded that China and India consider each other rivals, both countries have resolved IBDs with other rivals in the past. China began negotiations with the Soviet Union before its collapse and concluded negotiations to resolve its land border with Vietnam, a rival with whom it continues to occasionally spar with in the South China Sea (Fravel 2008, 146–48). Similarly India has resolved sections of its IBD with arch rival Pakistan, most notably in the Rann of Kutch area, despite retaining their bitter rivalry (Wiegand 2011, 40).

When Wiegand's bargaining leverage theory is applied to the Sino-Indian border dispute, it does potentially explain recent Chinese behaviour along the border dispute (see Garver 2011, 108–11; Menon 2016, 25–26; Smith 2014, 50) but not why both sides displayed significant intransience over the IBD prior. Additionally, both sides appear to have deliberately kept other issues including the situation in Tibet out of negotiations and the dispute has effectively been decoupled from the wider bilateral relationship by the 1993 Agreement of Peace and Tranquillity, leaving little for either side to leverage. The final international explanation of the border fixity norm at explaining IBD intractability generally and towards the Sino-Indian border dispute specifically is of similarly limited utility. Whilst the border fixity norm is still an observable feature in international affairs, its relevance is increasingly being eroded by another increasingly popular norm of international community mediation. Specifically, the successes of the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration at resolving several previously intractable interstate border disputes has seen a notable spike of interest in having IBDs adjudicated (Huth, Croco, and Appel 2011; Simmons 1999). Regardless, in the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute, China and India have effectively ignored both of these norms. Neither side has shown serious interest at having the dispute mediated by outside powers, have both seized sections of the disputed territory by force and have indicated at several times that they are willing to accept their rival's claims over that land.

The lack of consistent explanatory power of any of the above theories behind IBD intractability suggests that there is a deeper causal factor compelling China and India to obstinately maintain their positions. Consequently, from hereon in, I seek to explore the hypothesis that China and India's concern over their national prestige is actually an intrinsic feature of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Yet, as prestige is a relatively unexplored factor in the study of IBDs, let alone their intractability, it is important to first understand how it generally manifests in international relations.

The national prestige factor: its definition and logic

As national prestige is an underexplored concept within the literature, a clear definition and outline of how it influences state behaviour more generally is necessary before the logic behind its impact on IBDs can be revealed. National prestige is defined here as: *the public recognition of, and respect for, a state's importance within the international sphere, as reflected in its achievements, qualities, capacities or character*. Hence, national prestige is closely linked, if not synonymous, to concepts such as eminence, grandeur and status as well as having a strong symbiotic relationship with a state's honour, respect, reputation and pride (Renshon 2015, 662–63; Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 7–17; Markey 1999, 133–36). In other words, national prestige is a complex mental phenomenon that is cultivated in and derived from the state's political relationships with its other states (Freedman 2016, 800; Van Dyke 1969, 160–61; Wood 2013, 388).

Many International Relations (IR) scholars have long sensed that national prestige is an important motivating factor behind state behaviour (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014; Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014). Early political philosophers typically considered prestige alongside security and profit as the three motivating factors behind state behaviour (Markey 1999, 135). However, notwithstanding a brief flourishing of interest in the 1960s and a more recent revival (see Volgy et al. 2014, 58–59), prestige gradually faded into an 'invisible hand' in IR scholarship; typically mentioned in passing to explain certain state actions which cannot be attributed solely to material factors. This general neglect of prestige as a factor within the wider IR literature has occurred for a variety of reasons. Hans Morgenthau attributed this neglect of prestige to many IR scholars' obsession with providing material explanations, being repulsed by the frivolous and absurd actions that prestige concerns can prompt, and the concept's association with antiquated 'aristocratic' politics (Morgenthau 1973, 74). Others have pointed to 'semantic confusion' over what to call the phenomenon (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 374), or argued that the 'paradigm wars' which have dominated the discipline of IR were not conducive to studying prestige (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 4–5). Whilst national prestige has been recognised as a key motivator of state behaviour in some studies, these have typically been exploring niche topics such as global sport (Maguire 2005; Wood 2013, 404–5) or the space race (Van Dyke 1964).

National prestige primarily manifests in the diplomatic arena where it is used to establish an informal hierarchy amongst the states and allow governments to identify their 'peer group', or states that they consider themselves equal to (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 376–79; Morgenthau 1973, 75–81; Van Dyke 1969, 161–63). Yet the actual sources of national prestige are highly varied, ranging from military strength to intellectual achievements to diplomatic or economic acumen ensuring that

any comparison is rudimentary at best. Nonetheless, states attempting to enhance or maintain their prestige will typically seek status symbols or consciously behave in a certain manner they believe will enhance their esteem in the eyes of others. For example, states may acquire major military assets such as aircraft carriers or nuclear weapons that go beyond what is required to meet their security needs, launch space programmes, host major international events, encourage and promote intellectual and cultural/artistic pursuits of its citizens or conduct proactive foreign policies such as foreign aid projects and advocating certain norms (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 20–23; O’Neill 1999, 195; Van Dyke 1969, 161–63). Yet, national prestige still remains based as much upon opinions or perception of other states as it is with a country’s actual capabilities. Thus, prestige still maintains overtones of its etymological origin in the Latin word *praestigium*, which translates as a slight of hand or an illusion, as governments can feign prestigious capabilities or draw upon prestige after its abilities have waned (Kim 2004, 41–42; Wood 2013, 390).

Conceptually, states covet and pursue prestige either as a means to an end or as the end goal itself. The latter has strong roots in human psyche and social dynamics, specifically the association with a group and the desire for its success (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 378; Renshon 2015, 672). Although early IR theorists dismissed state officials who sought prestige as an end were vainglorious or foolishly pursuing ephemeral goals (Morgenthau 1973, 82), there is little doubt that many, if not most, of a state’s denizens cherish their state’s prestige. Indeed, as Vernon Van Dyke has articulated, “states have obviously been concerned with prestige, pride, greatness, glory and honour...men do not like to live, when they can help it, in degradation, humiliation, ignominy, shame or dishonour” (Van Dyke 1969, 183). Hence, both the government and general populous of a state typically wish their country to be viewed as, if not an important international power, than a respected one and they will adopt or support policies aimed at achieving this (Wood 2013, 91). Prestige, when sought as an instrumental end, typically acts as a form of soft power and can be utilised for a number of strategic ends. For example, a prestigious state in international affairs is often able to rally others to a cause they support and or can be sought out by other states to bestow legitimacy on their actions or regime (Jervis 1970, 7; Kinne 2014). Prestige is also sought by states to demonstrate to others their power or resolve in situations thus acting as a deterrent against attacks against the state’s interests (Kim 2004, 42–44; Morgenthau 1973, 82–83; Van Dyke 1969, 161). Whilst theoretically a state would be more inclined to sacrifice its instrumental prestige if its other goals could be satisfied, in practice it is difficult to disentangle the two types or ascertain when a state is cultivating prestige for intrinsic or instrumental ends.

How then does national prestige generate intractable IBDs? In essence, when the influence of national prestige becomes a factor in an IBD, the dispute becomes not so much about the territory in question but about how the state is being treated by its rival claimant. As states deeply cherish their national prestige, they not only pursue and seek to enhance it but are also loath to see it damaged. While states rarely seek to actively undermine another's national prestige, all states nonetheless tend to be particularly sensitive to anything that would degrade their country's perception in the international society (O'Neill 1999, 139; Wood 2013, 392). Hence, should a state feel that it is being slighted by its rival's actions or attitude in negotiations, even minor IBDs can become major issues. In these cases, the claimants adopt positions they know to be unacceptable to their rival and can engage in exorbitant efforts to maintain or enforce their claims, thereby spoiling resolution efforts ensuring the IBD becomes intractable.

The degree to which national prestige will become an issue in an IBD, or any other issue for that matter, can be loosely measured in terms of 'face'. In essence face is the public treatment or deference a state can expect based upon its position within the hierarchy of states. A state's face is generally considered to be lost when a state is publicly forced to accede to another's will or is otherwise humiliated, especially by a state that is considered inferior in rank. Face is saved or gained when a state is able to at least publicly appear to have negotiated a good deal for itself or successfully demonstrated resolve when confronted with a threat (O'Neill 1999, 139–40). As concerns over face tend to mostly involve symbolic actions or focal points, scholars disagree as to the extent that a setback or slight will actually damage a state's overall prestige or affect other states decision making. Nonetheless, it is clear that most state decision makers are concerned with saving face, believing that a loss of face will impact on a state's ability to influence international affairs and potentially inviting other tests of its resolve or strength (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 382–85; Morgenthau 1973, 82–86; Renshon 2015). Hence, in IBD negotiations when at least one side's officials believe that accepting a deal will result in an avoidable loss of face, they tend to obstinately insist upon their own incompatible positions, thus ensuring a deadlock.

Paul Hensel and Sara Mitchell (2005) explain the logic behind this phenomenon in interstate negotiations through an apt analogy of a car dealership: a purchaser comes into the store with their spouse looking to buy a car and the dealer wishes to make a sale but is being observed by his co-workers. In bargaining over a car's price, they end up becoming deadlocked over a few hundred dollars, with neither willing to shift from their position for fear that their respective observers will see them as weak. Hence, even though the negotiators themselves are in favour of reaching a deal and might have been able to come to an agreement behind closed doors, concerns over saving face before

their audience prevented them from reaching one (Hensel and Mitchell 2005, 276). Similar considerations occur when states negotiate over a resolution to the IBD which, given that any agreement and its ratification would literally result in changes on the ground, is publicly observable. Concessions are often unpalatable for the state as it does not wish to be perceived as acceding the rival claimant's demands before their domestic constituents and other states in the international system. As neither side is able to relinquish their claims without losing face, yet are typically unwilling or unable to escalate the dispute, maintenance of the deadlocked *status quo* becomes the only feasible option.

This situation is exacerbated should one or more of the states in an IBD believe that there is an imbalance between their self-perceived national prestige and the deference or respect shown by their rival claimant. While many states feel as though there is degree of disparity in this regard, some countries appear to be perennially dissatisfied or overly sensitive with the level of respect that they receive. Such countries, especially if they are rising or waning great powers, typically have a strong sense of entitlement and are often a destabilising influence on international affairs as they seek to address this perceived imbalance (Volgy et al. 2014, 60–64; Wallace 1973). This manifests as the tendency to obstinately stand its ground, believing that compromise will diminish their national prestige in the international system, and to take umbrage at otherwise innocuous behaviour (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 24–25). Hence, when such a state is involved in an IBD, it will likely demand that its own territorial claims be recognised at least in principle and reject even reasonable proposals from the other state or an international mediator if they contradict their position. For the rival claimant such a position is, if not insulting, often unacceptable and encourages it to establish firmer non-negotiable positions of its own in order to avoid losing face (Morgenthau 1973, 76–81; Wallace 1973; Wood 2013, 403–4). Hence, when at least one state in an international border dispute senses that its national prestige is at risk, its behaviour compels both sides entrench their positions ensuring that even minor interstate border disputes become intractable.

National Prestige and the Sino-Indian Border Dispute

Interestingly, China and India share similar concerns over their national prestige. Both countries since their founding have clearly considered that the prestige attributed to them by the international community has been inferior to what they considered their 'rightful place', especially vis-à-vis the West (Deng 2008, 155; Garver 2001, 343–53). Additionally, both have frequently drawn upon their long cultural history, purported military prowess and comparisons with whom they consider to be their peers to claim entitlement to the more prestigious position of a great power. Indeed, though China is currently recognised as a great power, it has often been frustrated with what they consider

to be their inferior position in international affairs. Such frustrations are largely responsible for China's split with the Soviet Union and subsequent attempt to establish themselves as an alternative leader of the communist world through to China's recent sensitivity over their treatment within multilateral organisations (Deng 2008, 54–68; Freedman 2016). India similarly has long perceived itself to be a great power but, until recently, few outside of South Asia have taken its claims seriously despite its leadership of the Non-aligned Movement and regional dominance (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 43–47; Pardesi 2015, 2; Paul and Shankar 2014, 166).

Both China's and India's sensitivity to the disparity between their self-perceived national prestige and the reality has made them sensitive to their IBDs generally and the Sino-Indian border dispute specifically. The logic behind this mentality was perhaps most eloquently articulated by India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1959 when he responded to a question in the Lok Sabha regarding the Sino-Indian border dispute:

Now, it is a question of fact, whether this village or that village or this little strip of territory is on their side or our side. Normally these are relatively petty disputes...it does seem to me rather absurd for two great countries- or two small countries- to rush at each other's throats to decide whether two miles of territory are on this side or that side, and especially territory in the high mountains where nobody lives. But where national prestige and dignity is involved, it is not the two miles of territory, but the dignity and self-respect of the nation that becomes involved. And therefore this [Sino-Indian border tensions] happens (cited in Maxwell 2013, 123).

Though this is one of the few times that national prestige has been directly equated with an IBD, the language and behaviour surrounding prestige concerns pervade the Sino-Indian border dispute interactions.

As Nehru's quotation indicates, India's has clearly equated its national prestige with the Sino-Indian border dispute early on, making it difficult for it to adopt the flexible and creative stances in negotiations necessary to reach a compromise (Hoffmann 1990, 252–56). India's belief that its prestige is at stake was derived from a number of concerns. During the initial tensions over the Sino-Indian border dispute between 1959 and 1963, India was concerned that negotiating with China would ultimately diminish their prestige whilst enhancing China's, especially within the developing and anti-colonialist countries (Maxwell 2013, 166). Indeed, as Nehru confided in a British diplomat at the time, India believed that by offering concessions would lead the perception that India was weak and encourage further claims from its rivals (Kalha 2014, 133–34). On a more intrinsic level, India came to perceive the Sino-Indian border dispute as a matter of national prestige as it considered China's territorial claims, especially over the Aksai Chin, a deliberate betrayal of India's policy of Sino-Indian

friendship and pan-Asianism (Chung 2004, 107–8). Thus, in order to preserve face, Nehru and his government felt compelled to adopt an obstinate and absolutist position towards the dispute during the April 1960 conference and the subsequent official talks, ultimately leading to their failure (Hoffmann 1990, 87–88; Kalha 2014, 134; Maxwell 2013, 170–72).

This mentality was reinforced following India's quick and decisive defeat in the 1962 Border War which reverberated throughout the Indian national psyche. This humiliating blow to India's identity as a world leader has fostered within India a strong degree of hostility and suspicion towards China that is still tangible in the current official discourse. Indeed, when the Sino-Indian border negotiations finally resumed in 1981, India rejected the *status quo* resolution proposed by China, with the Foreign Minister declaring it as effectively legitimising theft and insufficient to rectify the earlier humiliation (Ganguly 1989, 1127; Garver 2001, 103). Over time, India has mollified this position as much of the animosity and tension in the Sino-Indian relations has been removed following the signing of treaties in the 1990s that has pacified the border and established confidence building exercises (Fravel 2008, 170–71; Menon 2016, 15–23). Yet the compromises necessary to settle the Sino-Indian border dispute remain unpalatable for India, lest it is perceived as losing face by capitulating to an aggressor (Chung 2004, 107–8; Scott 2008, 251). Most recently, India's concern over upholding national prestige has been visible in its efforts to demonstrate their ability to assert their claims and their arrival as a peer of China. This has largely manifested specifically towards the IBD in India's outrage over China's refusal to drop its eastern territorial claims despite the presence of settled populations and its efforts to match China's capabilities along the border to deter 'incursions' (see Kalha 2014, 210–28; Smith 2014, 39–43).

China, for its part, has been equally as concerned that its own prestige would suffer should it not be able to secure concessions on the Sino-Indian border dispute. In contrast to India, however, China's prestige concerns have emanated from completely different areas. First and foremost is China's desire to 'restore' China's lost position as a great power after a century and a half of predation by imperialist countries, primarily by reversing the unequal treaties and what regain lost territory it can (Freedman 2016, 809–12). Premier Zhou often stated during his correspondence with Nehru that China considered the McMahon Line delimiting the eastern sector as an illegitimate imperial creation and hence a stain upon its national prestige that should be renegotiated on a more equitable basis (Garver 2001, 107–8; Maxwell 2013, 94–95). Though the Marxist rhetoric has largely faded from China's discourse, this position has only become stronger with the rise of nationalism within China. Indeed, upon closer inspection the rising nationalist sentiment within China, and to a lesser extent

India, considers any exchange of territory as effectively the “dispossession of the national patrimony and the ruination of national dignity” (Chung 2004, 21).

Secondly, China clearly considers India to be of an inferior rank within the international system and frequently shows little concern for India’s potential sensitivities (Chung 2004, 108; Smith 2014, 8–10). Hence, when India adopted obstinate and even provocative positions in 1961-1962, China decided to ‘teach them a lesson’, initiating the 1962 Border War to avoid the humiliation of being outmanoeuvred by an inferior state. Finally, China has been particularly sensitive towards the ‘China threat’ theories that have been emanating from elements within India, considering them effectively slander as they run contrary to its efforts to cultivate an image of its peaceful rise (Deng 2008, 97–108). The most notable instance of this occurred in 1998-1999 when India cited the threat of China as justification of its nuclear breakout. China considered this to be a significant insult, prompting it to cancel the regularly scheduled border resolution negotiations for the first, and so far only, time since their resumption. China was only appeased by Indian Ministers and officials visit to Beijing to request that China “help India untie the knot” (Fang 2002, 167–68).

Interestingly, Chinese negotiators initially showed greater concern for attempting to save the face of both countries regarding the border dispute in the form of their ‘package deal’. In essence, this package deal proposed in 1960, and again during the 1980s, sought to provide a settlement with honour for all parties by China swapping its eastern territorial claims for India’s western one. However, due to India’s uncompromising stance that China finally felt compelled to drop the package deal in 1985 and start pressing more vigorously its claims in the eastern section, especially regarding Tawang (Ganguly 1989, 1129–30; Singh 2011, 87–88). In order to save face by avoiding admitting that India’s position had forced a change in policy, China described the change of policy as simply adding specifics to the original principle (Garver 2001, 103–4). Regardless, securing compromises in the eastern sector has now become a matter of national prestige for China, linked to its desire to restore its position by securing lost territory, in this case Tawang and its hinterland at a minimum (Garver 2011, 109–11; Smith 2014, 59–60). Whilst it is unclear what exact concessions China is willing to make in the western sector to secure such concessions in the east, the trading of any significant territory in Arunachal Pradesh is considered an unacceptable loss for India. Hence the Sino-Indian border dispute has become frozen with the deadlocked negotiations being conducted annually more a result of inertia and diplomatic ritual rather than any hope for a breakthrough.

Concluding remarks

This paper has made the case that the often overlooked factor national prestige has played a significant role in causing the Sino-Indian border dispute to become intractable. In reviewing the

evidence of the discourse and state behaviour regarding the Sino-Indian border dispute, it becomes apparent that concerns over national prestige have been a driving force behind both sides adoption of incompatible and inflexible positions. It is hardly surprising that the connection between prestige and intractable interstate border disputes has not been identified before. With a few exceptions, the focus of the existing literature on IBDs has largely concentrated on how they form, escalate or resolved and used territorial value, domestic politics and the geopolitical environment as causal explanations. Similarly, much of the literature on the Sino-Indian border dispute has been historically focused, looking at specific incidences of the dispute rather than attempting a theoretical explanation for its current intractability. As such, the explanations provided by the existing theories proposed thus far have all proven unable or insufficient to explain why the dispute has become intractable.

The identification of national prestige as a factor behind the Sino-Indian border dispute's intractability has several important ramifications and consequently suggests new avenues for further research. More nuanced understandings of national prestige's role both towards IBDs generally and the Sino-Indian border dispute specifically remain to be elucidated. Whilst a large sample group testing of the impact of national prestige's impact on IBDs was well beyond the scope of this paper, the prominence of prestige in shaping the Sino-Indian border dispute indicates that further studies into its impact will yield interesting results. It is also unclear to what extent statesmen can be convinced or compelled to accept resolution that impacts negatively upon its prestige or how states can extricate and progress stalled border talks without losing face. Overall, whilst it is clear that national prestige plays a significant role in the continuing intractability of the Sino-Indian border dispute, without further investigation the true extent to which this under studied phenomenon's impact will remain unknown.

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At a time when the India-China border dispute is hogging the limelight and causing unease in the Indian establishment, many festering inter-state border disputes in the Northeast that are sowing seeds of discord seem to elude the attention of policymakers at the Centre. The issue of inter-state border disputes came to the fore recently, when tensions erupted along the.Â Dr. Pushpita Das is Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.