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HINDUS PILGRIMAGE TO TIBET AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

In the era of globalization, religion undoubtedly plays a special role in relations between nations. Cross-border pilgrimages, as the important practice of religious believers, are also an instrument for promoting bilateral ties. The continuous expansion of cross-border pilgrimages has an effect that cannot be ignored in bilateral exchanges. Based on this, this paper starts from the four phrases of the pilgrimage of Hindus to China's Tibet from the perspective of international relations, analyzes the influence of cross-border pilgrimages on Sino-Indian relations from multiple angles, and dissects the mutual constraints between state relations and religious pilgrimages on border area with the example of Doklam incident. In practice, on condition that China and India actively stimulate the positive effect of cross-border pilgrimages and increase the consensus and mutual trusts between the governments and the peoples while managing border conflicts, the relations between the two countries will grow harmoniously to a certain extent.

Key words: Hindus, Tibet Autonomous Region, Cross-border Pilgrimage, Sino-Indian Relations, Border Conflicts

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Индустардың Тибетке тауап етуі және оның Қытай-Үндістан қатынастарына әсері

Жаһандану дәуірінде ұлттар арасындағы қарым-қатынасы тұрғысында діннің алатын орны айтапаса да ерекше. Шекарааралық діни тауап ету рәсімі дінге тұтынушыларының маңызды тәжірибесі ретінде екіжақты байланыстарды ігерілету құралы болып табылады. Шекарааралық аумақта діни тауап ету рәсімінің үздіксіз кеңеюі екіжақты басқа да өзара алмасуларда назардан тыс қалмайтын әсерге ие. Осыған сүйене отырып, бұл мақала халықаралық қатынастар тұрғысынан индустардың Қытай жеріндегі Тибет аумағына тауап жасау рәсіміне барушылар сапарының төрт фразасынан басталып, шекарааралық аумақта тауап ету рәсімінің Қытай-Үндістан елдері арасындағы қарым-қатынастарына ықпалын көптеген қырынан зерделеумен шектеліп қана қоймай, сондай-ақ, мемлекеттер арасындағы шектеулерді де жан-жақты талдайды. Шекаралас аймақтағы бұл қарым-қатынастар мен діни тауап жасау салтындағы өзара шектеулер Доклам оқиғасының мысалы негізінде жасалды. Іс жүзінде Қытай мен Үндістан екеуара шекарааралық аумақтардағы діни тауап ету рәсімінде оң әсерін белсенді түрде ынталандырса және шекаралық қақтығыстарды реттеуде екі жақты үкімет пен халықтар арасындағы өзара келісім мен сенімділікті арттыруда күш салса екі ел арасындағы өзара қарым-қатынас белгілі бір дәрежеде үйлесімді дамиды.

Түйін сөздер: үндістер, Тибет автономиялық ауданы, шекарааралық тауап ету рәсімі, Қытай-Үнді қатынастары, шекаралық қақтығыстар.

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Паломничество индусов в Тибет и его влияние на китайско-индийские отношения

В эпоху глобализации религия, несомненно, играет особую роль в отношениях между народами. Трансграничные паломничества, как важная практика верующих, также являются инструментом развития двусторонних связей и способствует обогащению религиозного опыта паломников. Непрерывное расширение трансграничных паломничеств имеет эффект, который нельзя игнорировать в двусторонних отношениях и будет способствовать дальнейшему развитию и других видов сотрудничества, взаимобмена между двумя этими странами, решению различных приграничных проблем при их возникновении. Исходя из этого, в данной статье анализируется

паломничество индусов в китайский Тибет с точки зрения международных отношений, рассматривается влияние трансграничных паломничеств на китайско-индийские отношения с разных точек зрения и взаимные ограничения между государственными отношениями, так же анализируется религиозные паломничества на приграничье конкретно на примере инцидента Доклам. На основе данного анализа делается вывод, что при условии активного стимулирования Китаем и Индией положительного эффекта трансграничных паломничеств и повышения консенсуса и взаимного доверия между правительствами и народами при урегулировании пограничных конфликтов, отношения между двумя странами будут развиваться в определенной степени гармонично.

Ключевые слова: Индусы, Тибетский автономный район, Трансграничное паломничество, Китайско-Индийские отношения, Пограничные конфликты

Introduction

In Tibet Autonomous Region of China, Mount Kangrinboqe (Mount Kailash) and Lake Mapam Yumco (Lake Manasarovar) are the destinations of pilgrimages for Hindus. Mount Kangrinboqe is the main peak of the Gangdise Mountains, which is located in Burang County, Ngari Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, China. It is known as “the holy mountain”. Kangrinboqe in Tibetan language means “the mountain of gods”, “treasure of snow” or “snow saint”. Lake Mapam Yumco is in the south of Mount Kangrinboqe. It means “undefeated jasper lake” in Tibetan. The religious sacredness of Mount Kangrinboqe and Lake Mapam Yumco are world-recognized, they are honored with the title of “sacred mountain and holy lake” as well as “centers of the world” by Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, Bon and ancient Jainism. India is the world’s largest Hindu populated country with about 94% global Hindu population being concentrated there (“The Changing Global Religious Landscape”, 2017: 8-10.). In the core beliefs of Hinduism, the sacred status of Mount Kangrinboqe and Lake Mapam Yumco is unshakable. Kangrinboqe is regarded as the site dedicated to spiritual practice of Lord Shiva, one of the three main deities of Hinduism, while Mapam Yumco is the bathing place of Shiva and his wife Goddess Woma. The “Kailash Manasarovar Yatra” is a momentous religious practice for all devout Hindus, because it is an important activity for believers to practice Hindu doctrine, to connect to religious feelings and to make changes in life. The significance of pilgrimages and the large numbers of believers determine that Hindus pilgrimages to Tibet will be a long-lasting religious cause, pilgrimage cooperation therefore naturally becomes a great resource for China and India to build and expand bilateral relations. Although there are contradictions and potential conflicts in the development of Sino-Indian exchanges, the pilgrimage, to a certain extent, has created a platform for communication and coopera-

tion between the two governments and increasingly become a special and important factor that stimulates the growth of bilateral relations.

Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives

The purpose of this article is to examine the cross-border pilgrimage in India and China. In this regard, the objectives of this article are to consider the importance pilgrimage among the believers that expanding continuously in the modern period. It should be noted that field research opens up new aspects for the study. The choice of the problem is also due to the possibilities of applying the institutional approach, which allows us to understand the role and place of religious pilgrimage, to study the history of state-state and state-religious relations of China and India in the context of analyzing the system of building relationships between the imperial state and national outskirts.

Scientific research methodology

The methodology of this article is based on the analysis of the current religious situation and state-state, state-religious relation, the established spiritual tradition. Also, including descriptive, historical, hermeneutics and comparative research methods.

Main part

Issues of Hindus Pilgrimage to Tibet from the Perspective of Sacred Sites and International Relations

The return from “exile” of religion in international relations is an indisputable fact (Petito, Hatzopoulos, eds., 2003). Religious sacred sites are the combination of virtualness and reality. As a belief system and a civilization system, religion has its own intangible characteristic. In this sense,

it is a powerful but not tangible force in modern international relations. Religious sites are often the most tangible carriers of religion, but their scale is too minute and their influence on international relations is relatively limited. Religious sacred sites can present the intangible and tangible characteristics of religion at the same time. Specifically, they play both virtual and real roles in international relations. From the perspective of the virtual role, religious sacred sites mainly constitute the physical coordinates of the invisible global belief system. From the real role point of view, religious sacred sites have a deep symbolic meaning (Turner, 1970.). The holy cities and holy relics (including religious places of worship and sacred natural landscapes) contained in religious holy sites are the iconic representation of religion itself. Moreover, the sovereignty and controversy of religious sacred sites also constitute the special content of disputes over territory and ownership, which are the core elements of international relations. The intractability of dealing with religious sacred sites is much higher than that of ordinary land. When it comes to international relations, the function of religion includes two contradictory aspects. It can be the source of turmoil or the messenger of peace (Xu, 2010: 46). Religious sacred sites have the same function.

The Hindus pilgrimage of holy places in China's Tibet is a classic case study of religious sacred sites and international relations. In the first place, from the perspective of religious ownership of sacred sites, it is mainly divided into unshared sites and shared sites. Shared sacred sites, formed in history, are actively shared among religions with a higher degree of harmony. Mount Kangrinboqe and Lake Mapam Yumco in Tibet, China, are considered by Hinduism, Buddhism, Tibet's native religion Bon and ancient Jainism as sacred mountain and holy lake, believers of all religions are welcomed to go on a pilgrimage there. In the next place, in regard to the internal and external border control of a country with sacred sites, there are religious believers who have the right to enter the sites and those who are forbidden to enter for a period of time. Due to the ownership of sacred sites, a country has sovereign border control rights over the access of religious believers from home and abroad to its territory, or it has actual border control rights in the context of sovereignty disputes. In terms of the phased prohibition of entering, it is mainly those countries with ownership or control rights over the sites that actively or passively keep the followers of specific religions or sects out. This prohibition has a phased effect due to the improvement of political situation

or diplomatic relations. When conflicts reach a new level of intensity, China closes the Nathula Pass as a countermeasure, this pass is often the necessary way for Hindus to go to Tibet for pilgrimage.

The Background and Current Situation of Hindus Pilgrimage to Tibet

Since ancient times, China and India had maintained relatively close religious and cultural exchanges. Due to the restrictions of traffic conditions, Buddhists accounted for the majority in the small-scale human interactions. In 1947, after gained independence from British colonization, the Indian government demanded to maintain the privileges Britain once enjoyed in Tibet unconditionally and immediately. In 1952, the Indian Ambassador to China, K.M. Panikkar informed the government of China that India "was ready to discuss the regularization of relations with Tibet" (Gupta, 1978: 696-702). The Indian government insisted that before the establishment of diplomatic ties between the PRC and India, India had already enjoyed interests and privileges produced from conventions and agreements in China's Tibet, such as "maintaining India's mission in Lhasa" and "the right to make a pilgrimage in Tibet" (Wang, 1998: 84.). Starting from the establishment of diplomatic relations between PRC and India, the influence of Hindu pilgrimage to Tibet on the development of Sino-Indian relations has roughly gone through the following four stages:

(1) The start-up stage (1950-1961)

The two countries generally showed a positive willingness to resolve the issue of cross-border pilgrimages. The numbers and scale of official Indian pilgrim groups to Tibet were increasing, pilgrimage affairs were valued and supported by the governments of both sides. In 1950, the PRC and India established diplomatic ties. In order to promote its bilateral relations with the PRC, India proposed in 1953 to negotiate on the relations of India and China in China's Tibet, the Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet was one of the topics. In 1954, aiming at advancing trade and cultural communications between China's Tibet region and India and facilitating mutual pilgrimages and exchanges between the two peoples ("The Agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India", 1954), the governments formally signed the Agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India (hereinafter referred to as the Agreement),

Hindus could go to Mount Kangrinboqe and Lake Mapam Yumco for pilgrimages in accordance with common practice. The Chinese government took corresponding measures to improve convenience for Hindu pilgrims, such as building post stations along the way, providing affordable transportation (“Documents of the Agreement between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India”, 1954: 13-15.), and avoiding cumbersome inspection procedures at border checkpoints by registering and issuing pilgrimage permits. It was immediately after the establishment of diplomatic relations that the Agreement initiated the Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet at the national level, which laid a foundation for official pilgrimage cooperation between the two governments. However, after 1959, affected by the border conflicts, Sino-Indian relations broke into tense confrontation. In December 1961, March 1962 and May 1962, the Chinese government proposed three times that a new agreement should be concluded to replace the 1954 Agreement which was about to expire in June 1962 (Lin, Ye and Han, 2001: 75-76.). However, the Indian government rejected China’s proposal, thus bringing hidden troubles to subsequent Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet.

(2) The frustrated stage (1962-1979)

Cross-border pilgrimages of Hindus were affected by the deterioration of Sino-Indian relations. After the Agreement expired in June 1962, the Indian government withdrew its commercial agencies in Yadong, Getak and Gyangze of the Tibet Autonomous Region. In October 1962, a conflict broke out in the border area, original customs agencies and customs clearance ports were closed successively. The relationship between the two countries had immediately entered a period of stagnation for more than ten years. At the end of 1962, India completely blockaded the routes from India to Tibet. During 1965 to 1967, Indian troops had carried out provocative acts several times in Yadong and Nathula Pass. In September 1967, a small-scale armed conflict between China and India occurred at the Nathula Pass when Indian soldiers tried to cross the pass and invade China’s territory. The Chinese government closed the Nathula port at once. Nathula was the key pass of China to South Asia. It was not only directly connected Sikkim, now a state of India, with Yadong County, but also constituted the shortest pilgrimage distance for Hindus from India to Tibet.

(3) The recovering and fully developed stage (1980-2017)

China-India pilgrimage cooperation had been valued and promoted again by the governments

of the two countries. In February 1979, Indian Foreign Minister Bihari Vajpayee visited China, marking the transformation from confrontation to reconciliation of Sino-Indian relations. In June 1981, Chinese Vice Premier Huang Hua was invited to visit India, there he promised to the Indian government that China would accept the first batch of Indian pilgrims to visit Mount Kangrinboqe and Lake Mapam Yumco (“Chinese and Indian Foreign Ministers Concluded Talks”, People’s Daily, June 29, 1981). It was 1990 when China and India agreed that China’s Tibet would receive 16 batches of official Indian pilgrims each year, with 40 to 50 people in each patch, the entry time centralized in the months of June to September (Qiu, 2019: 12.). In December 1991 and July 1992, China and India successively signed the “Memorandum between the Government of China and Government of India on the Resumption of Border Trade” and the “Protocol on Entry and Exit Procedures for Border Trade”. Then the Lipulekh Pass, which closed after the China-India conflict in 1962, was reopened for trades and personnel exchanges. At this point, China resumed accepting official Indian pilgrims, pilgrimages were not only the personal practice of pilgrims, but also the activities jointly hosted and organized by the governments of China and India. During the summer when traffic conditions were preferable, the tourism departments and foreign affairs agencies of China and India would provide entry and exit services for Indian pilgrims to passing through the Lipulekh Pass. The convenience and efficiency of this pilgrimage route were greatly improved. Concerning the harsh natural environment and sensitive border issues, the Chinese government adopted the method of batch control, each batch accepted 250 Indian pilgrims. After the believers of one batch completed the pilgrimage route in Kangrinboqe and Mapam Yumco, they would be sent back to the Lipulekh Pass and be turned over to the Indian side.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the growth of Sino-Indian relations had boosted bilateral religious exchanges and cooperation, the affairs of Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet had been comprehensively developed. In June 2003, China and India signed ten cooperation documents, among which the “Memorandum between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Expanding Border Trade” mentioned that “The two sides agree to use Nathula as the pass for entry and exit of persons, means of transport and commodities engaged in border trade” (Documents Signed between India

and China during Prime Minister Vajpayee's Visit to China, 2003). After 44 years of closure, China and India resumed border trade via Nathula Pass in July 2006. At that time, Nathula was only for trade and business, individual visitor visas would not be issued. The Hindus therefore entered China's Tibet mainly through the Lipulekh and Zhangmu ports. In September 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced during his visit to India that in order to facilitate the travel of Indian pilgrims to Tibet, China decided to open the Nathula Pass (Chaudhury, 2018). In June 2015, China officially opened the Nathula Pass to Indian pilgrims. The Nathula route obtained policy supports by the Chinese government, its traffic conditions were far less difficult than other routes. The opening of the Nathula Pass continuously increased the numbers of pilgrims to Tibet. In 2012, over 13,000 overseas pilgrims including Indian Hindus entered Ngari Prefecture, more than double the number of previous years (Zhang, 2013); In 2014, Tibet received 489 batches of Indian pilgrims, a total of 17,386 people (Indian Pilgrimages to Tibet Successfully Achieved, 2015). In 2015 and 2016, China's Tibet welcomed more than 1,000 official and 10,000 private Indian pilgrims (Spokesperson for Chinese Embassy in India Made a Speech on Indian Pilgrims, 2017).

(4) The difficult stage (from 2017 to date)

Hindus Pilgrimage to Tibet have entered a difficult stage of development. Cross-border pilgrimages are greatly affected but not be completely terminated by the deterioration of Sino-Indian relations. In June 2017, Indian border troops crossed the boundary in the Sikkim sector and trespassed into China's Doklam region, causing tension and armed conflict in this area. For the sake of the safety of official Indian pilgrims, the Chinese side suspended the arrangements at the Nathula Pass. The route selections of Indian pilgrims were once again hindered, they could only enter China's Tibet through the Lipulekh Pass. In February 2018, the Indian government proactively contacted the Chinese government, hoping that China could reopen the Nathula pilgrimage route and resume the official arrangements for pilgrimage groups ("China Agrees to Let Mansarovar Yatra via Nathu La Pass", 2018). With the negotiation between the two governments, in June 2018, the Nathula Pass welcomed the first batch of 38 Indian official pilgrims, and in June 2019, the Burang and Yadong ports welcomed the first group of 89 official Indian pilgrims (Zhao, 2019). The official pilgrimage cooperation of China and India was thus able to continue.

The Impact of Hindus Pilgrimage to Tibet on Sino-Indian Relations

The pilgrimage cooperation between China and India in Tibet Autonomous Region is not a cooperation simply involving cross-border religious exchanges between two states, but a cooperation that is simultaneously affected by complex political, social, and border factors. At present, along with the inadequacy of strategic mutual trusts, the development trend of China and India relations is the coexistence of conflict and reconciliation, competition and cooperation. In this context, although the pilgrimage cooperation experiences ups and downs, it also maintains a forward momentum in general and has increasingly become a new driving force for the growth of Sino-Indian relations. Especially when bilateral exchanges are heading towards divergence or sporadic conflicts, the promoting effect of pilgrimage cooperation is prominently manifested in bringing the ties back on the peaceful and stable track. Throughout the history since the establishment of diplomatic ties, influences of the Hindus pilgrimages to Tibet on Sino-Indian relations are mostly showed in the following aspects.

(1) Promoting Bilateral Exchanges between China and India

In the 1950s, in the international political environment of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and strengthening the unity of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Sino-Indian friendships and cooperation were growing with a more robust momentum. However, their friendly relations had not been maintained for a long time and stayed at a low ebb from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s. "It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that the developmental trajectory of bilateral ties stated to form a relatively stable upward curve" (Ye, 2020: 38). For a long period of time, China and India are both fast-growing developing countries. China has shown its tremendous momentum that far surpasses India in terms of comprehensive strength. India holds that China's rise has affected the regional Indian interests. India's perception of the "threat" of China's power is mainly derived from several issues: the Sino-Indian border conflict, the increased military capabilities of China in putting pressure on India in the border areas, and China's influence on India's dominant position in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (Srikanth, 2013: 23-53). In other words, the ups and downs in the development of Sino-Indian relations are mainly attributed to border issues. However, these issues are not merely issues of territorial sovereignty, but also issues of pilgrimages to other countries' territory. The tension between the

governments of the two countries cause by Sino-Indian border conflict may affect the arrangement and development of cross-border pilgrimage-related matters, but it will not turn off the religious needs of Hindus for making a pilgrimage to China. The needs for transnational religious practice of Hindus and China's national identity of sacred sites ownership work together to promote the orderly development of bilateral relations. Non-governmental religious diplomacy revolving around cross-border pilgrimages stimulates official exchanges between China and India. In 2002 and 2012, the Chinese government took the initiative to invite the Indian ambassador to China to visit the Tibet Autonomous region on the theme of pilgrimage (Liu, Ge, 2012). This invitation helped Indian officials conduct on-site investigations of the pilgrimage environment of Hindus, as well as strengthened the official relations between China and India. Taking pilgrims as the main body, the strengthening of official relations further improves the interactive environment for non-governmental exchanges. For example, the Chinese government plans to renovate and upgrade an airport in Tibet to facilitate Indian pilgrims ("China Plans International Airport in Tibet; to Facilitate Mansarovar Visit", 2019), which shows the high degree of attention paid to people-to-people exchanges by the Chinese government. To a certain extent, cross-board pilgrimages supplement the endogenous driving force and enhance the stability of their bilateral relations effectively.

"For pilgrimages are liminal phenomena – and here we shall be concerned with the spatial aspects of their liminality" (Turner, 1973: 191), that is to say, Hindus pilgrimages to Tibet are spontaneous religious behavior which will lead to cross-border population mobility from India to China. Spatial flows of population is a crucial driving force for non-governmental exchanges between different countries and different ethnic groups, meanwhile, cultural communication is the important connotation of long-term non-governmental exchanges. Culture-driven communication once launched, "it has proved unstoppable" (Stephen Greenbaltt, Ines Zupanov, etc., 2010: 6). Therefore, even when official communication between China and India is facing difficulties, non-governmental relation will still play a bridging role and serve as the platform for exchanging. This is a positive manifestation of the important function of non-governmental religious communication in continuously expanding the forms and content of Sino-Indian exchanges and in promoting the development of bilateral relations on the spatial dimension. Also, pilgrimage processes

exhibit in their social relations "the quality of *communitas*", and "this quality in long-established pilgrimages becomes articulated in some measure with the enviroing social structure through their social organization" (Turner, 1973: 192). Through full integration of social resources, the short-term spontaneous pilgrimages of religious believers will gradually transform into well-organized group actions. "The quality of *communitas*" applies to cross-border pilgrimages as well. In order to realize the religious demands of foreign pilgrimage groups and ensure their personal safety in the destination country, China and India are jointly committed to create a reasonable operating mechanism. Gradually, the Indian spontaneous pilgrimage communities will be upgraded into normative pilgrimage communities that enjoy the convenience of government policies. This transformation process prompts the governments of the two countries to carry out close coordination. It can be seen that the spatiality nature of cross-border pilgrimages first promotes non-governmental exchanges between China and India with religious factors as the core; the community characteristic then strengthens the relations between the two governments. Frequent cross-border religious flows enhance the breadth and level of Sino-Indian exchanges, bonds of non-governmental religious communication will adjust and optimize the relationships between the Chinese government, Indian government and the Indian cross-border pilgrims. Under the joint effect of spatiality and community, the combined relationship that formed through cross-border pilgrimages and supported by a strong religious background will simultaneously enhance the civil and official exchanges between the two sides.

2. Urging the Indian Government to Take on "Phased Rationality" in its Relations with China

In 1947, Britain withdrew from the South Asian subcontinent, India inherited British treaty privileges in Tibet, including setting up stations in Tibet, deploying Indian troops in Yadong and Ganzi, and trying to redefine the Sino-Indian border in accordance with the so called "McMahon Line". Since then, the Tibet issue and border issue have become the core contradictions between China and India, both of them act as catalysts that make the Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet demonstrate more complex features than other religious affairs. It is reflected in the fact that in the long-term development Sino-Indian pilgrimage cooperation has failed to escape from the negative influence of fluctuations in bilateral ties, especially the border conflicts. Cross-border pilgrimages are essentially related to the

religious interests of Hindus and the border stability and sovereign interests of China. India deliberately triggers border tensions with China at the expense of the religious interests of Hindus. When necessary, India will adopt compromising strategies to improve its relations with China by using the Sino-Indian pilgrimage cooperation mechanism. Overall, the trends of Sino-Indian relations often cause volatility in Hindu pilgrimages to Tibet with interruption and recovery. Correspondingly, Hindu pilgrimage to Tibet prompts India to take on “phased rationality” when dealing with China.

Firstly, the development of pilgrimage affairs enables India to negotiate with China and to show its demands through a reasonable platform. While pursuing the realization of its own religious interests, India can even take into account its concerns on Sino-Indian border areas. In 1953, China and India launched a four-month long series of negotiations over the relevant content of the “Agreement between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India”. In order to ensure the freedom and safety of cross-border pilgrimages for Hindu pilgrims, India proposed their requirements, for example, opening up Lhasa for free pilgrimages, allowing Indian merchants and pilgrims to carry weapons in Tibet; regarding the sovereignty issue of pilgrimage passes, India objected to China’s original statement of “China opens up six passes and route” on account of avoiding directly or indirectly recognizing China’s sovereignty over these places. Under the insistence of India, China finally made the amendment of “traders and pilgrims of both countries may travel by the following passes and route” (Wang, 1998: 93-94). This Agreement related to Sino-Indian trade and pilgrimage cooperation was described by the Prime Minister Nehru as “a new starting-point of our relations with China and Tibet”, he also unilaterally interpreted it as an agreement that affirmed the northern frontier of the two countries (Mankekar, 2003: 138). Although during the negotiation process, some of India’s pilgrimage privileges were rejected by the Chinese government for violating China’s national sovereign interests in principle, China gave appropriate concessions to promote bilateral cooperation. Not only had India’s cross-border pilgrimage interests been positively taken care of in actual operations, but its non-religious interests been realized to a certain extent.

Secondly, pilgrimage cooperation is a breakthrough in easing Sino-Indian relations. Especially after the border issues triggered tensions

repeatedly and even caused armed confrontation, calling actively for resumption of pilgrimages has become a tactical adjustment for India to improve the security dilemma. Because of that, India does not always stay rational in handling bilateral relations, its rationality shows transitional features. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the pilgrimage routes of Hindus have been blocked several times because of India’s unilateral acts in the Sino-Indian border area. Common Indian irrational behaviors include shutting down institutions in Tibet, not negotiating with the Chinese government, and challenging China’s sovereignty on important pilgrimage routes, etc. Even though the Indian government has not fully taken into account the development of cross-border religion practice in its policy towards China, if India is at a disadvantage in border standoffs and needs to take measures to alleviate the tensions, its high-level officials will take the initiative to send positive signals for strengthening communications with China. In 1962, the Sino-Indian border conflict broke out, small-scale disputes continued in the following years. The deterioration of bilateral relations blocked the development of official pilgrimage affairs. In 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made flexible adjustments to India’s border strategies and said at a press conference that the Indian government was prepared to “try and find a way out of solving the dispute with China” (Sail, 1998: 102). This laid the foundation for the easing of Sino-Indian relations. But in 2017, the Doklam confrontation broke out, Sino-Indian relations fell into a freezing point again. The Chinese government shut down the Nathula Pass and denied entry to Indian official pilgrims. In order to resume the cross-border pilgrimages of Hindus, the Indian government once again sent friendly messages to China. Since then, high-level interactions between the two countries have increased significantly. With the efforts of the two governments, the Nathula route was reopened. Cooperation on pilgrimage has created possibilities of easing the tension between China and India.

(3) Encouraging the Chinese Government to Adopt More Pragmatic Defensive Strategies when Dealing with Crises and Changes in Sino-Indian Exchanges

Owning the shared religious sites of multiple religious groups, Tibet is an important place for religious exchanges and interactions between China and neighboring countries. Meanwhile, it is extremely crucial for safeguarding China’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity. In essence, the geostrategic significance of Tibet and

the international nature of cross-border pilgrimages determine that the Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet is certain to be closely related to the relations between China and India. For China, as Sino-Indian geopolitical mutual suspicion and border conflicts continue to intensify, the dual character of cross-border pilgrimages of Hindus has become more and more prominent.

On the positive side, as the destination country of cross-border pilgrimages, China has more initiative and flexibility in its policies of Hindu cross-border pilgrimages. Strengthening official cooperation mechanism between China and India and responding to India's religious demands can not only satisfy the needs of exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations, but also speed up the development of friendly cooperation and optimize Sino-Indian neighbor relations. After the establishment of diplomatic ties, official or semi-official cultural exchanges have generally been highly valued by the two governments, but the scale and scope of nongovernmental contacts still need to be further improved. The opening up of Tibet pilgrimage routes to Hindus conveys goodwill of the Chinese government to the Indian people, it provides a new direction for nongovernmental exchanges between China and India as well. The disadvantage of cross-border pilgrimages is also obvious. It is not the foreign force but the foreign ideology that poses main threat to the stability of a traditional society (Huntington, 1968: 154). In China's view, under the banner of religion, foreign hostile forces use various opportunities to carry out anti-Communist Party and anti-Socialism propaganda in some ethnic minority areas of China, their purpose is to manipulate national sentiment, foster separatism, and ultimately "disrupt" China (Tan, 2020: 69). The sacred mountain and holy lake in Tibet are the destinations of cross-border pilgrimages, therefore, it is inevitable of Tibet to be disturbed by foreign religious thoughts and ideologies. Generally speaking, cross-border pilgrimages are highly secretive and deceptive. Such actions are often tightly organized, making it difficult for the Chinese government to identify and supervise. In addition, the rationality of the religious demands of pilgrimages and the goodwill that showed in China's religious exchange policies have endorsed the long-term existence of cross-border pilgrimages. All of these will make the social stability of China's Tibet and the religious governance capacity of the Chinese government face the challenge of cross-border religious movements for a long time.

Due to the lack of political mutual trusts over

a long period of time, cooperation between China and India in the field of religion is still based on a trust deficit. Therefore, in order to prevent China's sovereign security from being affected by cross-border movements, China has strengthened defensiveness in its policy towards India. The specific performances are as follows—first of all, highlighting China's sovereignty over the pilgrimage routes. In 1997, when China and India were negotiating the resumption of the traditional trade through Sikkim, there were two possible routes for border trade, one was the Nathula Pass and the other was the Jelep Pass (Raman, 2003). China finally decided to open the Jelep Pass, which not only increased the numbers of pilgrimage routes to Tibet, but also helped to further ensure China's sovereignty and security in this region. The next, it is emphasized that the cross-border pilgrimages of Hindus should be consistent with the political and social environment in Tibet. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, the Indian government made requests to China for the Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet. Some of the requests related to China's sovereign interests. In consequence, China rejected unreasonable requests while responding to the reasonable ones. Lastly, valuing the coexistence of government-organized official pilgrimages and spontaneous private pilgrimages among Hindu believers. People-to-people exchanges are a driving force for promoting relations between countries. Improving the ties between the governments is as important as the ties between the peoples. For China, one of the keys for the sustained development of friendly relations between the two countries is to build closer "people-to-people bonds". Even though official pilgrimages have been interrupted several times due to the deterioration of Sino-Indian political relations, the Chinese government has never blocked all pilgrimage channels without provocation, and private pilgrimages of Hindus to Tibet have never stopped.

Results and discussion

Mutual Restrictions between the Doklam Standoff and the Hindus Pilgrimage to Tibet

On June 18, 2017, Indian troops armed with weapons and bulldozers crossed the Sikkim border into Doklam to stop China from road construction, which triggered a 71-day military standoff between the two countries. During this period, the relationship between China and India deteriorated rapidly with the outbreak of small-scale conflicts. China then closed the Nathula Pass and suspended arrangements

for the Indian official pilgrimage groups to go across the Sino-Indian border through Nathula.

The 2017 Doklam standoff is not the first border tension between India and China in the Doklam area. As early as in September 1967, India crossed the Nathula Pass in the north of Doklam and launched cross-border provocative attacks against China. While maintaining restraints, China issued the Indian military a warning about its illegal invasion and finally took a self-defense counterattack. After the conflict in 1967, China closed the pilgrimage route through Nathula and only reopened it in 2015. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and India, the governments of both countries inherited the “Convention between Great Britain and China Relating to Sikkim and Tibet” that signed in 1890. This Convention delimits the Sino-Indian boundary in the Sikkim sector, and points out that the actual boundary on the ground follows the watershed. Indian Prime Minister Nehru wrote a letter to Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in September 1959, it said “This Convention of 1890 also defined the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet; and the boundary was later, in 1895, demarcated. There is thus no dispute regarding the boundary of Sikkim with the Tibet region” (Yang, 2017). In the same year, the Chinese government recognized formally the boundary division of the 1890 Convention, China said that the border between Sikkim and Tibet had been officially defined and there was no divergence or disputes in the map drawing as well as in practice (The China-India Border (2), 1960: 36). The Doklam incident occurred in the Sikkim section where boundary there is clearly delimited and have been recognized and abided by for a long time. However, even with a clear boundary line, the Doklam confrontation still appeared more than once. It reflects that India’s unilateral actions will cause Sino-Indian pilgrimage cooperation to be attached with a higher degree of sensitivity and vulnerability.

Sacred sites play an important role in building the hard power of a country’s religious influence abroad, and religious policy is an important part of its soft power (Xu, 2018: 4-10). As a substantial “religious power”, China’s Tibet is a religious holy land that widely shared by multiple religions. This shapes China’s unique advantage in its diplomacy towards India. Confronted with the rapidly deteriorating bilateral relations and the tensions between China and India in the Doklam region, the Chinese government reacted to the issue of pilgrimages and immediately took emergency measures. The Nathula Pass was closed again, and official arrangements for the entry of Hindus pilgrims were suspended with advance

notice to the Indian government. When the bilateral crisis escalated, China chose to close important pilgrimage route in the region. The main effects were threefold: 1) to ensure the personal safety of believers and avoid mounting chaos in the relevant areas with the flows of cross-border population; 2) to convey the intention of “religious harmony” spurs on “border harmony” to India; 3) to resist threats with peaceful but reinforced means when national security and interests are damaged. “Pilgrims’ entry into Tibet needs necessary atmosphere and conditions”, and “the reopening of the Nathula Pass which allows Indian officially-organized pilgrims’ entry into Tibet depends on whether the Indian side could correct mistakes in time” (Mu, 2017). Taking the cross-border pilgrimage as the starting point, China put pressure on India and set a negotiation direction for the easing of Sino-Indian relations. Since China is the destination country of cross-border pilgrimages and claims sovereignty over important pilgrimage routes, from China’s standpoint, Sino-Indian relations and cross-border pilgrimages increasingly show a trend of mutual influence. China does not directly link the border issues with religious issues. The Chinese government suspended the Nathula pilgrimage route, but other passages for Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet have not been affected. Pilgrims can still choose other routes to the sacred mountain and holy lake in Tibet. In addition, the duration from closing to reopening of the Nathula Pass in 2017 was much shorter than before, showing Chinese government’s sincerity in improving Sino-Indian relations. Although Nathula route is often in an alternating cycle of opening and closing, and the two sides carry out strict reviews of pilgrimage affairs in their respective territories, the Hindus pilgrimage to Tibet have never been completely blocked. The Chinese government clearly stated that China’s suspension of specific pilgrimage route was to ensure the safety of official Hindu pilgrims, not for political purposes.

After China stopped arranging for the official Indian pilgrim groups to enter Tibet via the Nathula Pass, India accused China of closing the passage for retaliating against India. China’s rejection of official pilgrims and closing of pilgrimage route were described as an indication of “increased tempers” (Eye on China, India Pushes More Troops in Doka La in Longest Impasse Since 1962, 2017). In India’s view, China deliberately politicized the issues of pilgrimage to prevent Hindus from fulfilling their cross-border religious obligations and to force Indian government to make concessions on the Doklam standoff. In fact, judging from the Doklam

standoff and India's attitude towards the suspended official pilgrimages, India failed to reconcile its political and religious interests. After Modi came to power in 2014, there was an accelerating rise of nationalism in India. During the standoff, a wave of protests called for "boycotting Chinese products" and "punishing China" erupted in India, which strongly supported the Indian government's hardline stance on the Doklam incident. However, religion is an important source of India's national identity. Religion can have a profound impact on the concepts of diplomacy, its inherent foundation is that religion constitutes a deep structure of a country's cultural traditions and values, and religious values reach deep into the value foundations and value judgments of a country's foreign policies (Liu, 2017: 80). Indian nationalism is essentially Hindu nationalism. Maintaining people's devout belief in Hinduism will be absolutely critical if the Indian government wants to better exert its ability to organize and mobilize in international affairs. The Indian government cannot persist in pressing strategies after China takes countermeasures. Therefore, in the final confrontation stage, India showed a return from tough to rational, and tended to resolve the crisis through diplomatic means. In early August 2017, Modi pointed out in a speech that "dialogue is the only way to cut through deep-rooted religious stereotypes and prejudices" (PTI, 2017), which was regarded as the first indirect response of the Modi government to the conflict in Doklam. At the end of August, India withdrew troops from the region of Doklam and ended the Doklam standoff. Sino-Indian relations began to improve. Due to huge differences, it is difficult for the two countries to completely resolve the border issues, but the easing of bilateral relations still provides opportunities for both sides to transcend local frictions and to restore and deepen cooperation in various specific areas. India is the demand side of cross-border pilgrimages, while China is the supply side. If India wants to better coordinate domestic political and religious interests, it must handle its relations with China more rationally.

Conclusion

Cooperation in Sino-Indian pilgrimage mechanism can actively promote mutual learning between different civilizations and guide a healthy development of bilateral relations. But because of the Sino-Indian border conflicts, it has never been able to maximize the growth potential of Sino-Indian ties. Official pilgrimage cooperation

continues intermittently. As far as Sino-Indian relations are concerned, territorial sovereignty is the core interest of both sides, then followed by the religious pilgrimage interests. While the Chinese and Indian governments appropriately respond to the reasonable demands of Hindu pilgrims to the sacred mountain and holy lake in Tibet, they also have to enhance the construction of crisis management mechanisms in the border area and strengthen the sustainable development of Sino-Indian relations at a religious and geopolitical level.

In addition to the pilgrimages of Hindus, other forms of cross-border religious cooperation between China and India also present great potential. In 2015, the "Holy Water Diplomacy" jointly created by China and India successfully expanded the diversity of forms of cross-border cooperation between the two states. The main content of "Holy Water Diplomacy" was to send the "holy water" from Kangrinboqe and Mapam Yumco to converge with the Godavari River, the sacred river in India. The idea behind this event was to enhance mutual understanding and people-to-people exchanges between the two. China-India "Holy Water Diplomacy" represented a three-way confluence: a confluence of the holy waters of Lake Mapam Yumco and River Godavari; a confluence of Hinduism and Buddhism; and a confluence of the spiritual, cultural and civilizational traditions of India and China (Kulkarni, 2019). The "Holy Water Diplomacy" was a successful demonstration of China and India in promoting cross-border religious cooperation. Its practical significance was concentrated in three aspects: Firstly, the "Holy Water Diplomacy" had given full play to the communicative and coordinative abilities of the non-official, semi-official and official institutions of China and India. Above all, the "Holy Water Diplomacy" concept was proposed by the Consulate General of China in Mumbai and the Observer Research Foundation of India, which was the result of interactive communication between the official and semi-official institutions of China and India. The whole event built up the goodwill of both sides to promote the development of diversified and large-scale cooperation. Then, the process of water bringing in the event was not finished by Indian officials or staffs, but by invitees from all walks of life in India. These invitees participated in the whole process from bringing the water from the holy lake in China to merging the water into the River Godavari in India. The "Holy Water Diplomacy" was a prominent determination of China-India official and semi-official institutions to mobilize people's enthusiasm to participate in the

growth of bilateral cooperation and exchanges. At last, the “Holy Water Diplomacy” was also strongly supported by the two governments. Both China and India not only collaborated on all related matters, but also sent government officials to participate in the whole process, which showed that the two sides attached great importance to promoting bilateral relations through the event. Secondly, the “Holy Water Diplomacy” had a stronger propagation effect on friendly relations between China and India. In the theory of Peripheral Communication, news information has absolute value and relative value □ absolute value is related to the benefits of most people, while relative value is to a small minority. The higher the correlation is, the greater the news value will be. Geographical distance is one of the important indicators that affect the degree of correlation (Gao, Peng, Lu, 2019: 14-17). In other words, more and more people would pay attention to news related to the “Holy Water Diplomacy” when the event truly happened in a place that was very close to them. Different from the cross-border pilgrimages that would be totally accomplished in China, the starting location of the “Holy Water Diplomacy” was Lake Mapam Yumco in Tibet, China, but its destination was the Godavari River in India. Therefore, as an momentous diplomatic activity that extending across two countries, it was much easier to attract attention of the Indian people. Moreover, the water bringing delegation was formed by famous figures from all sectors of India society, included medical professional, athlete, social activist, computer scientist, etc. The choosing of highly influential social personalities can increase the exposure of the “Holy Water Diplomacy” in different fields of India. Thirdly, the “Holy Water Diplomacy” filled the religious needs of more Hindus. Kumbh Mela is one of India’s biggest religious gatherings during which hundreds of thousands of Hindus will bathe in a holy river. In July to September of 2015, the Kumbh Mela was held in Nashik, on the banks of River Godavari (“Kumbh Mela ‘Shravan Shudha–

First Snan’: Thousand of Devotees Take Dip on the Banks of Godavari River”, 2015). On the last day of the Kumbh Mela, the famous Hindu temple Trimbakeshwar Shiva in Nasik witnessed the final ceremony of this event, the holy water from the Lake Mapam Yumco eventually flowed down into the Godavari River. The merging ceremony immediately attracted millions of Hindus to bathe and get baptized in the river. Since not the vast majority of Hindus could make a pilgrimage to Tibet, China, the “Holy Water Diplomacy” that brought holy water from China to India would satisfy a larger number of Hindus on a spiritual level, and also increase the Indian people’s support for the development of friendly relations between China and India. The “Holy Water Diplomacy” received unanimous praise and strongly backed up the religious enthusiasm of Indian believers. China’s action was highly recognized by the Indian people. However, it needs to be pointed out that the “Holy Water Diplomacy” strongly depended on the collaboration ability of the two governments, the continuous development of such events is most probably connected to the growing trend of bilateral relations between China and India.

All in all, similar cross-border cooperation with substantial content and positive significance does not account for the majority. The two governments still need to enrich the connotation and expand the number and scale of Sino-Indian religious cooperation. At present, border conflicts are still the main manifestation of the contradictions between China and India. Hindus Pilgrimage to Tibet is fundamentally related to China’s sovereignty and security, because of its transnational nature and the basic regularity of current Sino-Indian relations of growing in friction. Practically, while managing border conflicts, China and India actively play the positive role of cross-border pilgrimages and strive to increase consensus and mutual trusts between the governments and the peoples, the harmonious development of relations between the two countries will be promoted to a certain extent.

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