Historical Evolution and Geostrategic Analysis of the Boundary of the Yadong Region in Tibet (Postprint)

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Date: 2017-09-20T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

The Yadong region constitutes a 'wedge-shaped' junction between China' s Tibet Autonomous Region on the southern slopes of the Himalayas and neighboring countries including India and Bhutan, and has historically served as a critical frontier defense post and trading port. Against the backdrop of India' s provocation of disputes in the Donglang area, clarifying the historical evolution of the Yadong region' s boundaries and analyzing its geostrategic status based on the 'geographical constraints' principle can provide valuable decision-making support for China's advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the safeguarding of border security. This study comprehensively employs textual historical sources, historical maps, and GIS methods to analyze the boundary evolution and geostrategic dimensions of the Yadong region. The findings indicate: (1) The Yadong region' s boundaries have undergone four distinct stages of transformation, closely correlated with the surrounding geopolitical configuration; the Donglang area has consistently constituted Chinese territory de jure, and India should fully respect the relevant stipulations in the Eight Articles of the Sino-British Convention on Tibet and India; (2) Geographical constraints represent a significant factor contributing to frequent boundary issues in the Yadong region, and enhancing infrastructure construction can mitigate pressures from boundary disputes; (3) Overcoming 'geographical constraints' and augmenting the geopolitical influence of the Yadong region constitutes a crucial strategic option for containing buffer states along the China-India border, constraining the Siliguri Corridor, and counterbalancing security challenges to Indian Ocean sea lanes.

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Special Topic: Progress of Comprehensive Scientific Research on the Tibetan Plateau

ChinaXiv Partner Journal

Historical Evolution and Geostrategic Analysis of the Yadong Region' s Boundaries in Tibet, China

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Abstract

The Yadong region forms a "wedge-shaped" junction on the southern slopes of the Himalayas where China' s Tibet Autonomous Region meets India and Bhutan, and has served as a crucial frontier defense post and trading port since ancient times. Against the backdrop of India' s provocations in the Donglang area, clarifying the historical evolution of Yadong' s boundaries and analyzing its geostrategic position based on the principle of "geographic constraints" can provide valuable decision-making support for advancing China' s Belt and Road Initiative and safeguarding border security. This study comprehensively employs historical documents, historical maps, and GIS techniques to analyze the boundary evolution and geostrategy of the Yadong region. The findings indicate: (1) Yadong's boundaries underwent four distinct stages of change, closely related to the surrounding geopolitical landscape. The Donglang area has always been Chinese territory under international law, and India should fully respect the relevant provisions of the *Sino-British Convention Relating to Sikkim and Tibet* (1890). (2) Geographic constraints constitute a significant factor contributing to frequent boundary issues in the Yadong region, and strengthening infrastructure development can alleviate pressures from border disputes. (3) Breaking through "geographic constraints" and enhancing Yadong' s geopolitical influence represents an important strategic choice for restraining Sino-Indian border buffer states, leveraging the Siliguri Corridor, and counterbalancing security challenges to Indian Ocean sea lanes.

Keywords: boundary, historical evolution, geopolitics, Yadong area
DOI: 10.16418/j.issn.1000-3045.2017.09.009

Yadong County, administered under Shigatse City in the Tibet Autonomous Region, is located at the tri-junction of China, India (Sikkim), and Bhutan, and has historically served as an important border trading post on the ancient southwestern trade routes. Today it remains a national first-class port for economic and trade exchanges between China and South Asian countries. In the current multipolar, multilevel geopolitical landscape shaped by globalization,

Yadong can be described as a significant geostrategic area as defined by American geographer Saul Cohen [1]. However, boundary disputes between China and India, as well as between China and Bhutan, have persisted. Over the past half-century, India has repeatedly ignored historical traditions and treaty obligations, using alleged Chinese incursions into foreign territory as pretexts [2,3] to provoke border incidents including the 1967 Nathu La and Cho La clashes and the 2017 Donglang standoff.

Therefore, from the perspective of geopolitical environmental systems, clarifying the historical evolution of Yadong' s boundaries and elucidating the importance of its geopolitical environment can provide legal and decision-making support for accelerating China' s Belt and Road construction and ensuring national defense security.

Historical Evolution of Yadong' s Boundaries

Pre-1791 Administrative Status and Boundaries

Historical records indicate that prior to 1791, the Yadong region consistently fell under Chinese jurisdiction. In 729 CE, after Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo unified Tibet, the entire region was divided into five "Rus" (major administrative districts) and 61 "Gyedongs" (minor administrative districts). According to records and research on the five Rus jurisdictions [17,18], parts of Yadong fell under the "Rulak" Rus. From the second half of the 8th century, Yadong remained for centuries the fief of Tibet' s "Gye" clan.

Following the 1247 Mongol-Tibetan "Liangzhou Alliance,"Tibet successively submitted to the Mongol Empire and Yuan Dynasty, and Yadong, as part of Tibet, consequently became a Chinese administrative region at the grassroots level. In the late 13th century, Pagpa Bäsangbo, chieftain of Gyantse, constructed Paru Namgyal Castle at Paru Rinchengang (present-day Yadong County' s lower Yadong area), and his brother Pagpa Rinchen was appointed the first Dzongpon of Paru Dzong [17]. In 1372, the Ming government established the U-Tsang Regional Military Commission to administer Tibet. Thereafter, the Ming largely inherited the Yuan system, implementing a policy of multiple enfeoffments and numerous establishments to govern Tibet [19]. After the Qing government was established, it granted titles to the Dalai Lama and in 1726 established the position of Amban to jointly administer Tibetan affairs with local leaders. Thus, since at least the second half of the 13th century, the Yadong region has consistently been under Chinese administrative jurisdiction.

18th Century Boundaries and Geopolitical Landscape

Numerous historical maps and documents from China and abroad demonstrate that in the early 18th century, the jurisdiction of Yadong (Paru Dzong) exceeded its present scope. Comparing the *Comprehensive Overview Map of the Imperial Territory: Yarlung Tsangpo River Map* completed in 1721 with present-day maps of Yadong County (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]) reveals

that Paru Dzong' s southern border at that time extended roughly to the area south of the Jiepu La Pass (labeled as Jimuladabahan on Figure 1a) down to the Teesta River. Songyun, Amban in Tibet from 1784–1788, wrote in his *Poetic Record of Western Travels* that "the Gorkhas dare not advance," noting that "the Tsang River (i.e., Teesta River) serves as both protection for Sikkim and a barrier for Paru." His other work, *Illustrated Brief Account of the Western March*, also stated: "Beyond Tibet' s borders lie the territories of Gorkha (present-day Nepal), Sikkim, and Bhu-tan (present-day Bhutan); beyond these, one reaches East India—namely A-zha-la (present-day India' s Assam) and Ga-li-ga-da (present-day India' s Kolkata)—where India meets." Therefore, in the 18th century, Yadong' s southern boundary should be the Teesta River. Regarding Yadong' s eastern border with Bhutan, although Tibetan local authorities reached boundary agreements with Bhutan' s government during its civil war from 1715–1725 [20], no specific provisions were made for this section, nor was an actual boundary demarcation conducted.

The geopolitical landscape of Yadong's periphery during the 16th–17th centuries featured the following characteristics: (1) Various Tibetan border tribes gradually became independent while remaining vassals of Tibet' s local government; (2) Under the Qing policy of non-intervention and "using vassals to control vassals," conflicts among Yadong' s neighboring states and tribes persisted, providing the East India Company with an excellent opportunity to intervene in the Himalayas; (3) After conquering Bengal in 1764, the East India Company began exploring the region' s geography under the guise of trade, while the Qing government remained insufficiently vigilant of its strategic intentions; (4) The Tibetan local government' s unauthorized granting of land and tax privileges to outer vassals objectively encouraged Sikkim' s repeated 19th-century demands for territory, subjects, and official positions, planting seeds for future boundary disputes.

In summary, during the early and mid-Qing period, boundaries between Tibet and Sikkim, as well as between Tibet and Bhutan, were demarcated based on geography and tradition. Although such suzerain-vassal boundaries did not legally constitute international borders, they faced transformation crises as Britain gradually intervened in Yadong' s surrounding geopolitics.

1792: Formal Demarcation of Boundaries

Following the promulgation of the *Twenty-Nine-Article Ordinance for the More Effective Governing of Tibet* in 1792, administrative management in Tibet gradually became "tight internally, loose externally": on one hand, all foreign affairs powers were centralized under the Amban, with strict regulations formulated for entry into Tibet from abroad [8]; on the other hand, the Qing no longer intervened in disputes among "outer vassals," refusing all requests for rewards or military assistance and remaining indifferent to whether they made war or peace .

From 1788–1792, Gorkha successively invaded various Tibetan vassal regions, and after disputes with the Tibetan local government over taxation, launched a large-scale invasion of Tibet. Under the counterattack led by Fuk' anggan, Gorkha was forced to surrender and beg for peace from the Qing court. Following the Qianlong Emperor' s orders, Fuk' anggan and Amban Helin established over ten boundary markers in southwestern Tibet, making "all southwestern outer vassals of Tibet—Bhu-tan, Sikkim, and Gorkha—clearly demarcated" .

According to the *Comprehensive Gazetteer of Tibet*, Volume 2, "Territorial Boundaries," the newly demarcated boundaries were detailed as follows: "From Ganba to Luona Mountain Peak, Zhangjie Mountain Peak, and Yana Mountain Peak, boundary cairns (E' bo) are established; within lies Tibetan territory, beyond lies Sikkimese territory. Also from Pakeli to Zhimu Mountain Peak, Zangmenggu Mountain Peak, and Rina Dzong fortress, boundary cairns are established; within lies Tibetan territory, beyond lies the territory of both Sikkim and Bhu-tan." According to a 1794 report from the Tibetan local government on boundary cairns , the three locations of Luona Mountain Peak, Zhangjie Mountain Peak, and Najin Mountain Peak were situated at the border between Ganba Dzong' s jurisdiction and Sikkim on the northwest side of Paru Dzong, while Yana Mountain Peak, Zangmenggu, areas north of Rina Dzong fortress, and the area along the small river below Zhimu Mountain Peak constituted the border between Paru Dzong's jurisdiction and Sikkim. After 1792, the boundary contours among Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan remained largely unchanged for a considerable period, as illustrated in the *Map of India and Regions to its North* compiled by Britain in 1895 (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]) [21].

In summary, the traditional suzerain-vassal boundaries among Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan were formally established through field surveys in 1792. However, half a century later, these boundaries were transformed into international borders as Britain gradually gained control over the entire Himalayan region.

1890: The Sino-British Convention and Its Aftermath

After the Guangxu Emperor ascended the throne, Westerners were strictly prohibited from entering areas other than Parri, while movement in and out of Rina Dzong was unrestricted [4]. Consequently, Britain argued that this area did not fall under Paru Dzong' s jurisdiction, provoking the Lungthur War with Tibet' s local government. Following Tibet' s defeat, Qing Amban Sheng Tai was forced to sign the *Sino-British Convention Relating to Sikkim and Tibet* in 1890 under British duress of "sign first, withdraw troops later."

This convention stipulated that the boundary between Tibet and Sikkim "shall follow the watershed from the Jelep La at the Bhutan tri-junction to the Nepal boundary, dividing the Teesta and its southern tributaries belonging to Sikkim from the Mochu and its northern tributaries belonging to Tibet." This directly resulted in the loss of Chinese territory formerly under Rina Dzong. It should be noted that this convention had no Tibetan text version, provided no map

illustrating the stipulated boundary, and did not indicate the names of former boundary mountains. Moreover, due to strong opposition from the Tibetan local government, the boundary was never demarcated. These issues created hidden dangers for future border disputes. However, according to remarks by Younghusband, leader of the British forces that invaded Tibet again in 1904, "to ignore Tibetan demands would not only be poor policy but also unjust" [22], Britain initially agreed to respect the traditional boundary between northern Sikkim and Tibet's Ganba Dzong along "Luona Mountain Peak–Najin Mountain Peak–Jiagang–Zhangjie Mountain Peak–Dongjie Pass." Because Britain later reneged, launching a second war of aggression against Tibet from 1902–1904, territories such as Jiagang were ceded to Britain through the *Lhasa Convention*.

For the boundary contours around Yadong in the early 20th century, Britain' s 1900 *Map of Tibet and Adjacent Regions* (Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]) [23] provides a good illustration. For over three decades thereafter, the Yadong section of the boundary showed no major differences from the present day. The Donglang area, where Chinese and Indian troops confronted each other from June–August 2017, is clearly located within Chinese territory.

In summary, after 1890, China' s Tibetan local government not only legally lost the territory of former Rina Dzong but also retreated its border in Gamba County (Ganba Dzong) northward to "Luona Mountain Peak–Najin Mountain Peak–Jiagang–Zhangjie Mountain Peak–Dongjie Pass." While the Republican central government had no capacity to attend to Himalayan affairs, India gradually assumed Britain' s privileges in the region.

Post-1949 Boundaries and Sino-Indian Relations

After the founding of the People' s Republic of China, India initially showed no intention of abandoning the British privileges it had inherited in Yadong. Confronted with the Chinese government' s firm stance on abolishing these illegal privileges, Indian troops were compelled to withdraw from Yadong town in 1954. Following the 1959 Tibetan rebellion, the Chinese government gradually restored traditional grazing and border management in areas within national boundaries including Donglang, Chamapu, and Langmapu, thus forming the contemporary status of Yadong' s surrounding borders (Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]).

Driven by nationalism and great-power aspirations, Indian policymakers have increasingly emphasized comprehensive threats from the northwest, north, and northeast, attempting to control the Himalayan watershed both militarily and diplomatically. After dispatching troops to take over Sikkim' s government in 1949 and annexing Sikkim, India also frequently clashed with China, ultimately leading to the 1962 Sino-Indian border self-defense counterattack and the 1967 Sino-Sikkimese border skirmishes. Only after significant improvements in China-U.S. and China-Soviet relations did India, seeking to expand its options, gradually thaw its relationship with China.

Following Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi' s 1988 visit to China, high-level exchanges between the two sides resumed and economic relations developed rapidly. In 2003, Nathu La Pass reopened after being closed for nearly 30 years, marking a new stage in bilateral Sino-Indian relations.

In summary, we maintain that the contemporary boundary status generally aligns with the *Sino-British Convention Relating to Sikkim and Tibet* (1890). Based on principles of geography, tradition, and treaty, the Donglang area has always been Chinese territory. As the inheritor of British interests, India should fully respect the relevant provisions of this convention.

Geostrategic Analysis of the Yadong Region

Understanding the "Geographic Constraints" Principle

Definition, Connotation, and Characteristics "Geographic Constraints" (Environmental Constraints) initially emerged as an environmental perspective among historians interpreting the causes of ancient civilization origins, positing that higher degrees of constraint exerted greater influence on civilization formation processes and accelerated the pace of civilization emergence [25]. This concept was later introduced into geopolitics and sustainable development research in the 20th century. However, to date, despite numerous illustrative examples, no universally accepted definition has been established. Generally, we understand it as: during a given period, based on contemporary technological conditions, a geographic entity that humans cannot cognitively access or utilize for resource development, and cannot cross to expand living space externally, constitutes a geographic constraint. This understanding rests on two preconditions: first, human self-perception; second, existing technological conditions. Therefore, "geographic constraints" should be considered a humanistic concept that changes with human perception and technological conditions.

Geographically, numerous factors can cause spatial separation and isolation, including encirclement by mountains, oceans, deserts, or major rivers; blockage by dense forests or vast swamps; or constraints imposed by harsh resource conditions. These geographic constraints represent a double-edged sword: they may bring isolation and backwardness to a country or region, while simultaneously providing natural barriers for national or regional security, offering favorable defensive conditions to deter foreign invasion. Historically, enclosed geographic environments in countries like Egypt and France have played positive roles in protecting national security. From the perspective of human social evolution, geography played a decisive role in historical development during early human civilization; after entering civilized society, geography continued to influence social development; with scientific and technological advancement, geography' s impact on human society has gradually weakened, and many resource bottlenecks have been overcome, yet to this day, humanity still cannot completely avoid geographic constraints.

However, such geographic barriers are not absolute but relative. Different peo-

ples, spatial-temporal scales, historical periods, and geographic locations and resource conditions produce different outcomes. For China, the ocean to the east, vast deserts to the northwest, and the world' s highest Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to the southwest formed insurmountable geographic constraints for agricultural peoples. Yet due to its vast territory and large internal maneuvering space, China nurtured a pluralistic yet integrated Chinese nation within a relatively secure geographic space. When the Industrial Revolution arrived, however, China' s peaceful geographic advantages were quietly lost as Western scientific and technological development enabled control of "sea power" to break through China' s natural maritime barriers, achieving their goal of controlling China' s survival and development rights.

From a geopolitical influence perspective, geographic constraints exhibit three main characteristics: (1) multidimensionality, derived from the multidimensionality of geographic space such as mountains, oceans, atmosphere, and space; (2) hierarchy, derived from the hierarchical nature of geopolitical analysis ranging from peripheral to regional to global scales; and (3) holism, derived from the integrity of the world political map, requiring all political forces to view the complex world with strategic vision.

Breakthrough and Significance Generally speaking, breaking through "geographic constraints" of border mountains can be achieved through three approaches: (1) new technological means. With social development and technological advancement, previously impossible changes become achievable with economic strength and technical support, such as large-scale road and bridge construction, cable laying, and water conservancy projects in high mountain areas. (2) circumvention and substitution. This involves avoiding nodes and routes that could cause major losses due to "geographic constraints" and finding alternative paths to achieve reasonable goals indirectly. (3) war and assimilation. This involves using war to resolve 归属 issues between different peoples on both sides of "geographic constraint" entities, thereby eliminating psychological barriers caused by national factors.

The circumvention or breakthrough of geographic constraints holds important strategic significance for a nation's geopolitical landscape. Specifically regarding the breakthrough of "geographic constraints" on the Sino-Indian border, three main implications emerge:

(1) Through investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Sri Lanka' s Hambantota Port, Pakistan' s Gwadar Port, and Bangladesh' s Chittagong Economic Industrial Park, circumventing and breaking through the Himalayan geographic constraints not only deepens economic and trade ties between China and South Asian nations but also enhances China' s geopolitical influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, providing safeguards for implementing the Belt and Road vision and action plan.

(2) By leveraging geopolitical advantages and the radiating effects of economic corridors, strengthening the hub status of China' s Tibet region in international multimodal transport corridors can further improve accessibility to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and economic, trade, and cultural exchanges with China' s interior, holding important practical significance for improving living standards in Tibetan areas.

(3) Through jointly developing border trade ports at Nathu La Pass in the Yadong region, eliminating "geographic barriers" and tense geopolitical situations in Yadong, and resolving mutual trust issues between China and India arising from border problems and the Tibet issue, holds profound historical significance for building close economic and trade cooperation between China and India and alleviating Indian concerns about Yadong' s strategic counterbalancing position.

Geographic Constraints and Breakthrough in Yadong

Geographic Environmental Characteristics Yadong County is situated in southern Shigatse City, Tibet Autonomous Region, between 88°52' -89°30' E and 27°23' -28°18' N, covering a land area of 4,240 km². The county' s outline is wide in the north and narrow in the south, with a maximum east-west width of 45 km, north-south length of 123 km, and average elevation of 3,500 m. Influenced by the Himalayas, the terrain features low-north, high-middle, and low-south characteristics. The northern region has a cold, arid climate with 410 mm annual precipitation, while the southern region has a subtropical semi-humid monsoon climate with 873 mm average annual precipitation (Table 1). Yadong enjoys abundant sunlight, water, mineral, biological, and agricultural resources, with annual sunshine reaching 2,722 hours. The region' s largest river, the Yadong River, has an abundant water volume with an average annual runoff of 1.71 billion m³. The area hosts rare plants such as yew, larch, and spruce, and wildlife including Bengal tigers and red pandas. The region contains 11,800 mu of cultivated land, over 10 million mu of grassland, and over 550,000 mu of forest, with forest coverage of approximately 3.8%. The registered population is 12,950, yielding a population density of about 3.0 persons/km². However, based on resource endowments and basic conditions, Yadong could support a much larger population, yet remains sparsely populated due to geographic constraints.

Breakthrough of Geographic Constraints Geographically, Yadong is not easily accessible, with most of its land situated in high mountain terrain units. The Himalayas traverse central Yadong with an average elevation exceeding 6,000 m, and its highest peak, Mount Chomolhari, reaches 7,326 m. Constrained by such geographic conditions, infrastructure remains underdeveloped, the transportation system is extremely inadequate, and road grades are low. Particularly in southern Yadong, social and economic development has been slow due to mountain barriers, land transportation remains relatively isolated, and the basic requirement of connecting every village by road has not yet been

achieved. Nathu La Pass, located north of Donglang, is currently the only passage from this region to India' s Sikkim State, with an elevation of 4,730 m. It serves as both an important land border trade port between China and India and the main entry point for Sikkimese Buddhist pilgrims traveling to Tibet. Constrained by such geographic conditions, Yadong' s geopolitical influence as a border county in southern Tibet has not been fully realized. In recent years, with China' s enhanced comprehensive national strength and technological development, China possesses both the capability and will to improve residents' living environment, increase infrastructure investment in the Yadong region, break through the geographic constraints and resource bottlenecks spanning central Yadong, and thereby demonstrate Yadong' s geopolitical influence.

Yadong' s Special Geostrategic Position

Restraint on Border Buffer States China borders India along the Himalayas in its southwestern region. Constrained by high mountain barriers, land transportation connections are not smooth, resulting in numerous boundary disputes that constitute an important factor affecting Sino-Indian relations. The 1962 Sino-Indian border self-defense counterattack and the Indian government' s attitude toward the Tibet issue have, to some extent, exacerbated the complexity of Sino-Indian boundary problems.

Geographically, no Sino-Indian border existed earlier in the middle Himalayas, where Nepal, Sikkim (annexed by India in 1975), and Bhutan were distributed, forming an important buffer zone for Sino-Indian border conflicts. However, since Sikkim' s annexation as an Indian state in 1975, it ceased to be a buffer between China and India, and the original contiguous buffer zone was broken, transforming the China-Sikkim boundary issue into a China-India boundary problem.

From a geopolitical perspective, Nepal and Bhutan do not share a border, with India' s Sikkim State and China' s Yadong County distributed between them. Yadong, as China' s inherent territory, borders Nepal across Sikkim to the west and Bhutan to the east, becoming an important strongpoint for China to restrain the Sino-Indian border buffer zone and impacting India' s sphere of influence in northern South Asia. Presently, to enhance its dominance over northern South Asian countries, India has not hesitated to create friction by breaking existing boundary demarcations and entering China' s Yadong region, attempting to weaken China' s restraining role in the border buffer zone. Simultaneously, India recognizes that China' s southward-protruding Yadong region not only deepens China' s influence in neighboring South Asian countries (such as Nepal and Bhutan) but also alleviates tension in the traditional three-segment border pattern, playing a positive role in Sino-Indian boundary negotiations.

Leverage over India' s Siliguri Corridor India is a major South Asian power with a land area of over 2.97 million km² and a population of 1.31 billion [8], second only to China. India' s territory extends from the Himalayas

southward into the Indian Ocean, with mountainous regions in the north, the Indus-Ganges Plain in the center, and the Deccan Plateau in the south. Constrained by geographic conditions, India' s Northeast region is geographically isolated from the mainland, and connections are not very close.

However, India' s Northeast region holds important strategic significance in geopolitics, situated at the juncture connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia. This region includes six states—Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, and Manipur—plus India' s illegally occupied Chinese territory in South Tibet, covering approximately 255,000 km² (8% of India' s total area) with a population of 37.41 million (3% of India' s total population). The region is also the main settlement area for Indian tribal groups, representing a special community within India. Since the Northeast region' s overall development level lags behind other parts of India, and its ethnic development process is relatively slow with cultural independence, while bordering Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and China, it has become a haven for cross-border criminal activities and a major source of domestic instability in India [26].

Although Yadong covers only slightly over 4,000 km² with an average elevation above 3,500 m and less-than-ideal geographic conditions, it protrudes like a wedge between India' s Sikkim State and Bhutan, overlooking the Brahmaputra alluvial plain to its south and the so-called "chicken' s neck" of India—the Siliguri Corridor. This corridor serves as the vital passage connecting India' s mainland to its northeastern states, bordering Bhutan to the north and Bangladesh to the south, with a narrowest width of only 21 km. The Donglang area of Yadong is only several dozen kilometers from the Siliguri Corridor, providing leverage in Sino-Indian border disputes and holding special strategic importance in the South Asian geopolitical landscape.

Counterbalance to Indian Ocean Sea Lane Security South Asia refers to the vast region south of the central and western Himalayas and the Indian Ocean. Bordered by the Bay of Bengal to the east and the Arabian Sea to the west, and separated from the Asian mainland by the towering Himalayan range to the north, South Asia forms a relatively independent geographic unit. South Asia comprises seven countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan on the subcontinent, plus the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. As a dominant power in South Asia, India holds a strong leading position in regional geopolitics. Consequently, India has long regarded South Asia as its backyard and positioned itself as its "manager."

In the 1980s, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proposed India' s version of the "Monroe Doctrine"—the "Indira Doctrine"—in handling relations with other South Asian countries, explicitly stating that India would only interfere in South Asian internal affairs when requested, and would not permit extraregional powers to do so. If other South Asian countries needed help resolving internal crises, they should first seek assistance from within South Asia [27]. This demanded not only that external powers refrain from involvement in South Asia but also

that other South Asian countries could only turn to India for crisis resolution assistance.

China, as a major Asian power neighboring the South Asian subcontinent, has long maintained traditionally close relations with South Asian countries and enjoys broad cooperation prospects in economy and trade. Especially in recent years, with the advancement of China's Belt and Road Initiative, South Asia and the Indian Ocean region have become important components of this "Vision and Action Plan," receiving positive responses from most South Asian and Indian Ocean littoral states. China' s investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Sri Lanka' s Hambantota Port, Pakistan' s Gwadar Port, and the upcoming development of Bangladesh' s Chittagong Economic Industrial Park have not only deepened economic and trade relations with South Asian nations but also expanded China' s influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, causing anxiety in India and increasing its wariness toward China' s Belt and Road Initiative.

In response to China' s Belt and Road Initiative, India has proposed the "Trans-Indian Ocean Maritime Route and Cultural Landscape" plan, hoping through this initiative to expand India' s maritime, cultural, strategic, and psychological presence in the Indian Ocean, reminding people why this ocean is called the "Indian Ocean" [28]. Due to this lack of trust, geopolitical collisions between China and India in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region have become increasingly prominent, seriously hindering Sino-Indian economic cooperation and affecting China' s ability to secure its energy and trade channel interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region [29].

Regarding China's overseas energy transportation, approximately 80% of China' s oil imports currently arrive via Indian Ocean sea lanes, a proportion projected to exceed 85% by 2020. Therefore, ensuring channel security in the Indian Ocean region is vital to China' s economic lifeline [9]. India is well aware of these stakes and continuously strengthens its control over the Indian Ocean region. Although China actively seeks diversification in oil imports and transportation, it cannot avoid this international waterway. To guarantee the security of this "maritime lifeline," strengthening the geopolitical position of Yadong region, which adjoins the northern part of the South Asian subcontinent, will become one of China' s strategic choices for counterbalancing security challenges from South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.