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Book Review

The Long Game- China's Limited Interaction to Active Engagement in South Asia Pamir Gautam

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Mr. Pamir Gautam's Book, *The Long Game- China's Limited Interaction to Active Engagement in South Asia* is a fascinating book that tends to discuss the rise of China as one of the global leading power in world's economy. The striking thing about the Chinese economy is that it surged immensely in the past two decades. In 2020, China's GDP reached approximately \$14.7 trillion, making it about 70% the size of the U.S. economy, whilst back in 2000, China's economy was only one-tenth the size of that of the United States. Obviously there has remained various speculation regarding the Chinese economic progress, many of the scholars and experts, have construed this rapid stride in Chinese economy as one of the top global developments of the present time and also been found quoting, "never before in a history has a country risen as rapidly as China".

The author of this book has rigorously tried to link this global economic shift from west to east with the China's peripheral diplomacy. This book offers an in-depth analysis on how the adoption of China's improvement of its peripheral diplomacy have helped on its global rise making it the world's second largest economy. A nation that now holds the status of largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), largest manufacturer and merchandise trader and largest foreign reserve exchange holder. This book has provided a sheer picture of China's peripheral diplomacy which has evolved to become increasingly ambitious, wide-reaching, and proactive.

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The whole book has been divided into six chapters. Overall the chapters of this book have provided a thorough contexts, properly maintained a good flow, made simpler and easy to understand and grasp the context. Chapter 1 commences with the reflection on the economic progression of China, featuring on its some of the tangible economic indicators of the nation. As China shares around 5000 km of volatile land border with other countries, the chapter talks about the realization of the China on its peripheral diplomacy which takes back to time when president Xi took the office, he has made the priority to improve its ties with South Asian countries. Admittedly, America's rising interest upon the South Asian region has been evident and the world's largest democracy India also lies in the Southern territory, with whom China have experienced conflictual relationship. Two of these factors have been an impetus upon the realization of extensive peripheral relationship. Chapter 2 delves into the various academic debates surrounding improved peripheral diplomacy, particularly in the context of major powers like China. The debates are particularly focused on whether such strategies represent genuine efforts at regional integration or are primarily driven by strategic and security considerations. The author has put forward an interesting question regarding the China's extensive foreign policy intention. As China continues to expand its influence, recent academic discussions have increasingly centered on whether the country should be viewed as a revisionist and assertive rising power aiming for global dominance, or as a status quo-oriented and cooperative participant within the existing international order. Various school of thoughts have interestingly presented their own perspectives and such kind of debates are always enthralling in nature.

Chapter 3 examines China's South Asia policy up to the end of the 20th century, analyzing its strategic priorities, diplomatic engagements, and evolving relationships with key regional countries. The chapter reflects on how China's approach was shaped by historical legacies, border disputes, ideological alignments, and geopolitical considerations, particularly during the Cold War. China's foreign policies under the leadership of Mao were limited. It talks about the various historical events relating to geo-political interventions and Cold-war policy suggesting on how the relation deflates over the time with the various external influences. Mao unimpressed by the western hegemony in those times, China was once suspicious of the liberal foreign policy. This made China to adopt "lean to one side" foreign policy. This chapter have reflected on the bonhomie relationships that existed between India and China. Due to this Sino-Indian bonhomie relation it was believed that China carefully developed its relationship with other smaller states like Nepal. Chinese relations were pragmatic, as possible not going

for the direct confrontation. However, there remained the influence of USA. Tibet havoc, cold war policy, US-Pakistan military bedlam, nuclear test caused the fall out between these two super powers. It further depicts on how small South Asian territories like Nepal had to readjust the foreign policy due to the strife between these two big neighbors, even they maintained neutrality to the conflict. And how the India also had to adopt its appeasement foreign policy towards Nepal with the objective of limiting the Chinese influence.

Chapter 4 highlights a major shift in China's foreign policy starting from 2001. Since the dawn of the new millennium, the South Asian region has gained growing importance in China's strategic outlook. The chapter explores China's economic interests in the region, focusing on market access, investment opportunities, and improved connectivity, all of which align with its broader "Go Global" strategy. It also provides comparative data illustrating the steady rise in China's trade with South Asian countries over time. China has become the region's leading exporter, successfully penetrating these markets through an export-driven growth approach. This chapter also resembles the different facets of Chinese diplomacy which involves the realms of tourism, culture and education and humanitarian with other nations. Likewise, chapter 5 offers insights into China's multilateral engagement with South Asia, emphasizing how multilateralism serves as a pragmatic tool for China to combat against U.S. influence on the Southern periphery. US has been continuously attempting to limit China's dream of national rejuvenation through geo-political confrontations. The chapter also explores key initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multidimensional Connectivity Network, highlighting their role in strengthening regional ties and advancing China's strategic interests. For example, China's relationship with Malacca, a key city in Malaysia, holds significant strategic importance due to the Strait of Malacca, which serves as the shortest maritime route connecting the Middle East and East Asia. This vital waterway greatly reduces transportation time and costs between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, making it a crucial corridor for the movement of hydrocarbons, container goods, and bulk cargo. Given its strategic value, the US could have influence over such geo-strategic location, thereby it becomes very crucial for China to place high importance on maintaining strong ties with Malaysia. And lastly Chapter 6, discuss about the China's South Asian voyage, a long journey that a China now has to travel as it have vowed to become a global leading power. Cooperative engagement and insightful diplomacy are the only way out. Even though China have forged for improved relationship,

there are various issues pertaining to the situation. Suspicious India, external influences in Asia, political instability, rising trade deficits are some of the issues and challenges for China.

Overall, the author has put forward an argument that China active engagement in South Asia is mostly integrationist approach. It is predictable that when a nation like China undergo major diplomatic shift, numerous scholars and experts would try to decipher the intention behind their policy shift. Amidst this debate, the author firmly believes that the answer to this puzzle lies on a point that no countries have felt threatened despite the rise of China that have aimed to ensure its growth through stable and peaceful Sino-South Asian environment.

China already have travelled far on its modernization journey. In today's interconnected world, the interdependence among states has made international partnerships essential, sparking a growing interest in cooperation. When nations recognize that collaboration can bring mutual benefits, they often establish formal and informal institutions to address shared challenges and coordinate actions. Advocating for global cooperation, encouraging multilateral frameworks, and offering reassurance to other countries allow emerging powers to form new alliances that support their rise and serve their national interests. To foster a stable and peaceful regional environment, efforts to strengthen diplomatic ties can contribute significantly to a nation's sustained development. Major powers like China should embrace multilateralism as a practical strategy for economic growth. Meanwhile, countries like Nepal, with pressing needs for infrastructure, resources, and financial aid, can greatly benefit from partnerships with powerful nations like China.

The book was so captivating. A very well-researched book from the author that gives the knowledge on geo-politics. This book will make the readers understand how geo-politics works, and how geo-strategy are a crucial part to a nation's economy and development. Nepal should also work on its geo-political strategy, and understand the peripheral diplomacy. We lie between China and India, Nepal should focus on the balanced tri-lateral relationship. The grants should be properly used and the country must go under political stability to grasp the benefits of sharing periphery with two such powerful forces. The print and the cover of the book has not failed to impress either. The book is written in an accessible style so that it will be helpful for even the unrelated person to this field to gain a better understanding of China's relationship with South Asian states in particular. This book is highly recommended for the undergraduate scholars pursuing international relation or diplomacy course. As the author has mentioned, it's really a long game, China has engaged with South Asian countries with the view of becoming a global power.