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THE ARCHITECTURE OF DISTRUST: A MULTI-SECTORAL STUDY OF INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS (2020-2026)

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Abstract

This study uses a multi-sectoral examination of diplomacy, media, nationalism, digital governance, and strategic communication to look at how India-China ties changed between 2020 and 2026. It contends that the June 2020 conflict in the Galwan Valley signaled a significant break in the post-Cold War system of "managed competition," which had previously allowed both governments to strike a balance between strategic rivalry and economic collaboration. According to the study, this break represents the shift from the hopeful "Wuhan Spirit" of leader-driven diplomacy to the hostile "Galwan Reality," which is marked by increasing structural mistrust, militarized coexistence, and ideological conflict. Using a qualitative and interdisciplinary research methodology, the study draws upon media discourse analysis, strategic studies literature, diplomatic developments, and digital communication frameworks to examine the evolving architecture of distrust between the two states.

The study illustrates how the conflict spread beyond the Line of Actual Control (LAC) into the domains of digital media, information ecosystems, and public consciousness by drawing on viewpoints from international relations, media studies, political communication, and strategic studies. In order to explain how geopolitical competition has increasingly emerged through narratives, algorithms, visual symbolism, and online emotional mobilization, it presents the idea of the "Digital Border." The paper also makes a distinction between "visual warfare" and "information warfare," demonstrating how open-source intelligence, satellite photos, viral videos, and broadcast nationalism changed the politics of perception both during and after the Galwan incident.

The study also examines how journalism contributes to the development of conflicting nationalist narratives in China and India. China's controlled propaganda architecture and the economically motivated "Newsroom Nationalism" of Indian media are analyzed as opposing but similar systems of patriotic mobilization. Chinese state-controlled media fostered disciplined "defensive nationalism" focused on sacrifice, unity, and party legitimacy, while India's pluralistic media environment promoted performative nationalism through sensationalist programming and social media activism. In both situations, there was less room for diplomatic restraint and independent examination as journalism became intricately linked to strategic official goals.

The study contends that the post-Galwan era marks the beginning of an extended "Cold Peace" in Asia by placing the rivalry between China and India within the larger framework of hybrid conflict and communication power. Although economic interdependence still exists, military readiness, digital securitization, strategic balance, and conflicting civilizational narratives are taking center stage. In the end, the study argues that in an era where narratives themselves serve as strategic weapons, the future of India-

China relations will depend not only on border talks or military deterrence but also on both societies' capacity to handle the politics of perception, nationalism, and information warfare.

index Terms — *India-China Relations, Galwan Valley, Media Discourse, Digital Border, Information Warfare, Nationalistic Mobilization.*

I. Introduction: From the “Wuhan Spirit” to the “Galwan Reality”

One of the biggest geopolitical shifts in Asia in the twenty-first century has been the development of relations between China and India. Both nations tried to preserve a precarious balance between economic engagement and strategic rivalry for almost twenty years. In order to maintain more diplomatic and economic cooperation, border conflicts, trade disputes, and regional rivalries were segregated under this structure, which was frequently referred to as "managed competition." but this strategic thinking was drastically changed by the violent conflict in the Galwan Valley in June 2020, which ushered in a new era characterized by ideological confrontation, militarism, and mutual hostility rather than cautious engagement. Prior to Galwan, a number of agreements pertaining to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that were signed in 1993, 1996, 2005, and 2013 served as the foundation for the dominant diplomatic framework. These agreements placed a strong emphasis on peaceful discussion, mutual troop restraint, and the non-use of guns. In spite of repeated standoffs at Depsang (2013), Chumar (2014), and Doklam (2017), both governments persisted in presenting themselves as developed civilizational powers capable of handling conflicts in a responsible manner.

This diplomatic optimism was embodied in the Wuhan informal meeting in 2018. The Doklam conflict gave rise to the so-called "Wuhan Spirit," which highlighted strategic communication between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It aimed to use leader-driven diplomacy to ease military tensions. The basic premise was that even in cases when institutional systems failed, political trust at the highest level could maintain bilateral ties.

Yet, the events of June 15, 2020, destroyed this fragile architecture. The Galwan clash was unprecedented because it caused the first combat fatalities between Indian and Chinese troops in forty-five years. The brutality of hand-to-hand combat with improvised weapons shocked both societies and transformed public perception permanently. In India, Galwan was interpreted not merely as a border incident but as a betrayal of diplomatic trust. The belief that economic cooperation could continue independently of border tensions collapsed almost overnight.

The significance of Galwan extends beyond military confrontation; it represented the breakdown of the “Asian Century” narrative that envisioned India and China as cooperative engines of global growth. Instead, Galwan accelerated the emergence of a bipolar Asian rivalry. However, this delicate building was destroyed by the events of June 15, 2020. Because it resulted in the first combat deaths between Chinese and Indian troops in 45 years, the Galwan conflict was unprecedented. The savagery of hand-to-hand fighting with homemade weapons stunned both communities and forever altered public opinion. Galwan was seen in India as a betrayal of diplomatic trust rather than just a border incident. Almost immediately, the idea that border tensions could not affect economic cooperation was disproved. Beyond only being a military conflict, Galwan was significant because it symbolized the collapse of the "Asian Century" paradigm, which saw China and India working together to propel world development. Rather, Galwan hastened the development of an Asian rivalry that was bipolar. The border became not only a territorial dispute but also a symbolic battleground over sovereignty, prestige, and regional leadership from the standpoint of international relations, the conflict signaled India's shift from "engagement balancing" to "hard balancing." Before 2020, India favored strategic ambiguity, keeping ties with the US while taking part in Chinese-led organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. Following Galwan, New Delhi took a far more forceful stance marked by the expansion of strategic infrastructure, military modernization, digital retribution, and increased security cooperation with the QUAD.

The clash also altered domestic political discourse in both countries. In India, nationalism became closely tied to resistance against Chinese expansionism. Boycott campaigns against Chinese products, scrutiny of Chinese investments, and demands for technological self-reliance gained political legitimacy. In China, state-controlled media portrayed India as a destabilizing actor manipulated by Western powers. Thus, Galwan transformed bilateral rivalry into a deeply emotional and ideological confrontation rooted in nationalism.

Another crucial dimension is the transformation of public consciousness. Earlier border incidents were largely confined to diplomatic circles and military analysts. Galwan, however, unfolded in the age of social media. Videos, satellite images, and viral commentary brought the conflict directly into the digital lives of ordinary citizens. The border dispute ceased to be a remote Himalayan issue and became part of mass political discourse. Therefore, the **“Galwan Reality”** represents more than a military incident; it marks the collapse of a diplomatic paradigm. The relationship has shifted from cooperation-competition to coexistence-containment.

The two Asian behemoths now pursue strategic containment against one another while selectively cooperating when needed, especially in international forums and economic institutions. This study's main contention is that Galwan sparked a structural change in India-China ties. The conflict changed media narratives, economic policy, digital governance, security ideologies, and diplomacy. Between 2020 and 2026, a "Cold Peace" emerged marked by competing nationalist narratives, economic interdependence tinged with strategic mistrust, and armed coexistence. A multifaceted examination incorporating media, international relations, law, economics, and strategic studies is necessary to comprehend this shift.

II. The Media & Journalism Dimension: Information Warfare and the “Digital Border”

The Galwan battle showed that stories, algorithms, and digital pictures are used in contemporary wars in addition to soldiers and weaponry. The media has evolved into a weapon of strategic warfare in the information ecosystem of the twenty-first century. The conflict between China and India beyond 2020 serves as an example of how state propaganda, social media, and journalism may influence diplomatic actions, create popular support for protracted animosity, and change national consciousness. In the past, controlled diplomatic briefings, postponed newspaper coverage, and government press releases were used to mediate border disputes. Galwan completely altered this paradigm. Information spread quickly, frequently without verification, thanks to the development of smartphones, satellite imaging, and social media sites like X and Weibo. Millions of people watched the border in real time as a digital spectacle.

The emergence of "visual warfare" was a defining feature of media coverage following Galwan. Grainy recordings of soldiers engaged in combat, satellite images of military camps, and drone footage of infrastructure development all became powerful symbolic instruments. These pictures had a strong emotional effect since they avoided using formal diplomatic language. Instead of depending solely on government statements, the public now witnessed glimpses of the battle through internet media. Nationalism grew stronger as a result of this change. Social media campaigns and television debates in India portrayed the fight as proof of Chinese treachery. "Dragon's Betrayal" emerged as a key term in media discourse. The Indian Army was depicted by news outlets as protectors of national honor from an aggressive force. Primetime journalism increasingly resembled military theater. Anchors used digital maps, simulated battle scenarios, and aggressive rhetoric to cultivate emotional mobilization.

"Newsroom Nationalism" is one term used to describe this phenomenon. Competition for TRPs encouraged sensationalism and restricted space for in-depth research. To satisfy the needs of a 24-hour news cycle, there was constant pressure to exaggerate the battle. To make complicated geopolitical circumstances easier to understand, appeasement and patriotism were contrasted. Journalistic objectivity was often subordinated to nationalist performance. Indian media also linked the war to broader themes about civilization. Commentators used ideas like "Vishwa Guru" to present India as a moral and democratic alternative to authoritarian expansionism. China was viewed as both a geopolitical foe and an ideological threat to democracy and sovereignty. In contrast, Chinese media took a very centralized approach to communication.

At first, coverage of the conflict was minimized by state-run media like Xinhua and Global Times. For months, the number of casualties was kept under wraps to avoid internal unrest. When Beijing finally accepted deaths, heroism and sacrifice played a major role in the narrative. Soldiers were portrayed as valiant sons protecting their homeland from Indian aggression.

The logic of "defensive nationalism" was represented in the Chinese strategy. Chinese journalism served as an extension of state power, in contrast to India's cacophonous and dispersed media landscape. To preserve social cohesiveness and strengthen faith in the Communist Party, information was carefully chosen. Cinematic movies, patriotic anthems, and poignant narrative both humanized PLA soldiers and undermined India's claims. Thus, disparate accounts of the same incident were created by two drastically different media systems. While China's unified propaganda system produced disciplined patriotic unity, India's pluralistic yet sensationalist media used competitive nationalism to amplify outrage. Social media further complicated this landscape. Hashtags calling for boycotts of Chinese products trended widely in India. Nationalist influencers and digital creators became important actors in shaping public perception. Memes, short videos, and emotional appeals transformed geopolitical rivalry into everyday digital culture. In China, censorship ensured tighter narrative control, but nationalist online communities still amplified anti-India sentiment.

The role of false and misleading information is another crucial aspect. False military claims, unconfirmed death tolls, and inaccurate satellite readings were widely disseminated on both sides. The line between propaganda and journalism was blurred by information warfare. The goal was narrative supremacy rather than necessarily factual correctness.

During this time, the idea of the "Digital Border" came into being. Beyond the Himalayas, the conflict spread to social media, information networks, and cyberspace. Narrative control became just as crucial as territorial control.

This explains the strategic and symbolic significance of India's subsequent ban on Chinese apps, which was an attempt to protect informational sovereignty in addition to economic reprisal. The Galwan era revealed significant conflicts between professional obligation and patriotism from the standpoint of journalism ethics. During security emergencies, should journalists put the country's interests first or keep a critical distance? Many critics in India claimed that hyper-nationalistic coverage increased animosity and decreased public comprehension. The lack of independent journalism in China made it impossible to examine state narratives in any way. Ultimately, the media dimension of the India-China rivalry demonstrates that contemporary geopolitics is inseparable from communication power. Wars today are fought simultaneously on mountains, television screens, and social media feeds. The battle for territory is also a battle for perception, legitimacy, and emotional mobilization. The Galwan clash revealed that in the digital age, narratives themselves have become strategic weapons.

A. Visual Warfare vs. Information Warfare: The Emergence of the "Digital Border"

Conventional military strategy is not the only way to understand the India-China rivalry following the Galwan battle. By proving that conflicts in the digital age are waged concurrently through visuals, algorithms, narratives, and emotional mobilization, the 2020–2026 period significantly changed the character of global combat. Control over perception became just as crucial as control over territory as the border issue developed into what could be called "hybrid information warfare." The Line of Actual Control (LAC) was no longer merely a geographical frontier; it became a "digital border" mediated through smartphones, satellite imagery, social media platforms, and televised nationalism. Traditionally, conflicts between states were communicated through carefully managed diplomatic channels. Governments relied on official press releases, delayed newspaper reports, and structured military briefings to shape public understanding. This allowed political leadership space for negotiation and de-escalation.

The battle of Galwan totally upended this strategy. War pieces were able to swiftly reach millions of people because of mobile devices, commercial satellite photos, and real-time social media distribution, often before governments had a chance to formulate an official narrative. One of the most significant developments during this period was the democratization of battlefield imagery. Grainy videos showing soldiers fighting with rods, stones, and makeshift weapons immediately became viral on websites like X, YouTube, Telegram, and Weibo. Satellite imagery of military camps, bridge building, and troop movement was used as a tool for strategic interpretation by journalists, experts, and everyday locals.

The Galwan period saw the decline of governmental monopoly on battle photography, in contrast to previous conflicts where governments controlled visual information. This resulted in what communication theorists refer to as a "emotional feedback loop." Policymakers were under tremendous pressure due to the public outcry sparked by viral content. Leaders in Beijing and New Delhi were forced to react to fast escalating public sentiment on the internet in addition to military events. Any perceived compromise ran the risk of being seen domestically as a sign of weakness or surrender, which limited diplomatic flexibility. Social media therefore actively influenced state behavior rather than just reporting disputes.

The distinction between "visual warfare" and "information warfare" is particularly important. Visual warfare refers to the strategic use of imagery to evoke emotional responses. Information warfare, by contrast, involves the manipulation, control, or dissemination of narratives to influence public perception and strategic outcomes. During the India-China confrontation, these two dimensions became deeply interconnected. Images acquired political meaning only when embedded within broader nationalist narratives. For instance, photographs of Indian soldiers stationed in freezing Himalayan terrain were framed within narratives of sacrifice, patriotism, and resistance against aggression. Similarly, Chinese state media utilized carefully curated visuals of PLA troops engaged in disciplined exercises to project strength, unity, and legitimacy. In both countries, imagery functioned as a psychological instrument designed to cultivate resilience and national solidarity.

The conflict was further altered by the rise of open-source intelligence (OSINT) communities. Independent analysts started following military construction around the LAC openly using satellite imagery from firms like Maxar and Planet Labs. Troop deployments were often discovered by civilian social media researchers more quickly than by traditional media outlets. This made it difficult to distinguish between citizen journalism and professional intelligence gathering. The battlefield opened up in previously unheard-of ways.

However, this transparency also generated severe risks. Unverified claims, manipulated footage, and misleading interpretations spread rapidly. Competing nationalist communities amplified misinformation in order to claim symbolic victories. Casualty figures were exaggerated, infrastructure projects misrepresented, and military capabilities distorted. The objective was often not factual accuracy but narrative dominance. In this environment, truth itself became contested terrain.

The personalization of geopolitical rivalry was another crucial outcome. Tensions between China and India were mostly discussed in high-level diplomatic and strategic circles until Galwan. The dispute permeated everyday digital culture beyond 2020. Geopolitical antagonism was transformed into mass participation nationalism through memes, nationalist anthems, boycott campaigns, short films, and popular hashtags. Through likes, shares, comments, and online activism, citizens took an active role in information warfare.

The use of algorithms increased the intensity of this process. Social media platforms promote emotionally charged content because outrage increases engagement. Consequently, it was hard for moderate or nuanced points of view to compete with dramatic narratives. Thus, the algorithmic structure of digital platforms has an indirect impact on polarization and hostility. Information ecosystems that become echo chambers strengthened the nationalist mindset. The "digital border" consequently turned into a parallel battlefield where governments battled for legitimacy, emotional mobilization, and ideological sway. The altercation demonstrated how, in the present era, communication tools are being utilized more and more to mediate disputes.

Territorial conflicts have spread beyond mountains and military installations to include media ecosystems, cyberspace, and public opinion. In the end, the post-Galwan era showed that information has evolved into a strategic weapon in the twenty-first century. Military might is not the only factor that determines victory; other factors include the capacity to influence narratives, arouse feelings, and control perception. The

competition between China and India serves as an example of how nationalist narratives, digital platforms, and visual media may turn minor border conflicts into long-lasting conflicts between civilizations.

B. The Construction of the “Enemy”: Competing Nationalist Narratives in Indian and Chinese Media

The post-Galwan confrontation between India and China was not merely a territorial or military dispute; it was also a struggle over identity, legitimacy, and national imagination. Media systems in both countries played a crucial role in constructing the image of the “enemy.” Through selective framing, emotional storytelling, and ideological messaging, journalism became an instrument for manufacturing national cohesion during a period of heightened strategic tension. However, the methods used by Indian and Chinese media differed significantly due to contrasting political systems, media structures, and ideological priorities.

In India, the dominant media narrative after Galwan may be characterized as the “**Dragon’s Betrayal**” framework. This narrative rested on the belief that China had violated diplomatic trust established through decades of confidence-building agreements and high-level summits. The Galwan clash was portrayed not simply as a border dispute but as evidence of deliberate Chinese deception. The symbolic collapse of the “Wuhan Spirit” reinforced the perception that Beijing had betrayed India’s goodwill and peaceful intentions. Indian television journalism rapidly adopted what may be described as a “High-Powered Military Discourse.” Primetime news programs framed the confrontation through dramatic language emphasizing bravery, retaliation, and national honor. Digital maps, animated battlefield simulations, martial music, and aggressive rhetoric transformed news broadcasts into spectacles of patriotic mobilization.

The Indian Army was consistently portrayed as an elite, morally superior force defending sovereignty against expansionist aggression. This discourse frequently intersected with broader civilizational narratives. Concepts such as “Vishwa Guru” were integrated into media discussions, positioning India as a democratic and ethical power confronting authoritarian expansionism. China was not merely depicted as a strategic rival but as an ideological threat to democratic values, regional stability, and national dignity. Such framing elevated the conflict beyond territorial disagreements and transformed it into a moral struggle between competing political systems.

This emotional intensity was heightened by the decentralization of India's media landscape. In a highly commercialized 24-hour news cycle, several television networks fought for viewers. Nationalism turned into a lucrative media product. Rather than portraying themselves as journalists, anchors often took on militaristic personalities, almost as strategic commanders. By linking criticism of harsh vocabulary with a lack of patriotism, debate panels frequently ignored conciliatory or nuanced viewpoints. These dynamics were further heightened by social media. Through viral content, nationalist commentators, retired military officers, and influencers affected public debate. The hashtags calling for boycotts of Chinese products became very popular. Strong emotional appeals highlighting martyrdom, sacrifice, and patriotism were widely disseminated. The adversary image became intensely individualized and emotionally charged.

In contrast, the Chinese media approach followed an entirely different logic rooted in centralized state control. Outlets such as the *Global Times*, *Xinhua*, and *CCTV* functioned within a tightly regulated propaganda framework aligned with the priorities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Initially, Chinese authorities suppressed detailed reporting about the Galwan clash, including casualty figures. This reflected Beijing’s concern that uncontrolled public outrage could destabilize domestic political narratives or pressure leadership into escalation. When casualty information was eventually released, the Chinese narrative emphasized “defensive nationalism.” PLA soldiers were portrayed as heroic martyrs who sacrificed themselves while defending China’s territorial integrity against Indian provocation.

Emotional documentaries, patriotic songs, and carefully curated biographies personalized the soldiers as sons, brothers, and loyal patriots devoted to national sovereignty. This personalization strategy served several political functions:

1. It humanized the PLA and strengthened emotional attachment between citizens and the military.
2. It reinforced the legitimacy of the Communist Party by portraying the state as the protector of national dignity.
3. It framed China not as an aggressor but as a victim forced into defensive action.

Unlike India's pluralistic yet chaotic media landscape, Chinese journalism operated as a disciplined extension of state authority. Competing narratives were largely absent due to censorship and centralized editorial control. This enabled Beijing to maintain narrative consistency and prevent public fragmentation. However, it also eliminated the possibility of independent scrutiny or critical debate regarding military actions and diplomatic strategy.

The contrasting media structures produced two distinct forms of nationalism. India's nationalism was decentralized, emotional, and performative, shaped by competitive media markets and democratic political contestation. China's nationalism was centralized, disciplined, and state-managed, designed to reinforce social cohesion and party legitimacy. Despite these differences, both systems shared common characteristics. Each constructed the opposing state as a threat to sovereignty and national identity. Each utilized emotional storytelling to cultivate patriotic unity. Each reduced space for diplomatic moderation by reinforcing adversarial perceptions among domestic audiences.

Thus, the creation of the "enemy" emerged as a key aspect of post-Galwan geopolitics. Strategic rivalry became ingrained in the public perception as a civilizational conflict due to media narratives. The India-China competition was no longer limited to diplomats and military strategists; it had evolved into a fiercely emotional and ideological conflict that was witnessed on a daily basis through screens, news reports, and online exchanges. In the end, the conflicting nationalist narratives of 2020–2026 demonstrate how contemporary journalism participates actively in geopolitical conflict in addition to serving as a medium of information. The emotional architecture of animosity was shaped by media organizations, which increased mistrust and made long-term reconciliation more challenging.

III. Journalistic Ethics and “Newsroom Nationalism”

Significant moral conundrums in modern journalism were revealed by the Galwan confrontation and its aftermath. The years 2020–2026 showed how national security crises can turn media outlets from public information sources into tools for strategic propaganda and emotional mobilization. The lines between reporting, nationalism, and official interest have become increasingly hazy in both China and India. One way to characterize this phenomena is "Newsroom Nationalism," in which media outlets actively contribute to the creation of patriotic narratives instead of upholding their professional objectivity.

According to democratic thought, journalists should serve as the fourth pillar of accountability by examining state authority, promoting critical discourse, and disseminating correct information. However, pressures that undermine these principles are often created during times of global conflict. Patriotism and media performance became closely linked during the India-China border issue, especially in India's fiercely competitive television industry. Following the Galwan conflict, Indian news outlets quickly went into a hyper-nationalistic broadcasting phase. Primetime studios embraced military aesthetics, with anchors reenacting the fighting mood using dramatic sound effects, battlefield simulations, and digital war maps. Some presenters used overtly military terminology or dressed in camouflage. In order to maintain public indignation and emotional involvement, television news began to resemble strategic theater.

Commercial incentives played a role in this shift. Geopolitical crises result in high viewership numbers, and the 24-hour news cycle necessitates continuous content production. Nationalism turned into a product that could be sold. Simplified dichotomies, loud speech, and emotional outrage were more commercially

popular than careful geopolitical study. As a result, journalistic ethics frequently gave way to spectacle. During this time, "performative patriotism" became a prominent phenomena. It was common to accuse journalists of damaging national interest when they questioned official narratives or promoted diplomatic restraint. Journalism was frequently described in public discourse as either patriotic or anti-national. Such divisiveness hindered democratic discussion and reduced the room for independent thinking.

Another major ethical concern involved the dissemination of unverified information. Competition for breaking news encouraged premature reporting based on rumors, anonymous sources, or misleading social media content. Casualty figures, troop movements, and satellite imagery were often circulated without proper verification. The speed of digital journalism frequently outweighed commitments to factual accuracy. Social media intensified these pressures. Journalists competed not only with rival networks but also with influencers, independent commentators, and viral content creators. Algorithms rewarded emotionally charged narratives, incentivizing sensationalism over careful reporting. Outrage became structurally embedded within the digital information economy.

In China, the ethical dilemma was distinct but equally important. The Communist Party is in charge of media organizations in China's highly organized journalism system. Sensationalism was not the ethical dilemma in this situation; rather, it was the almost complete lack of independent investigation. Strict state guidelines aimed at maintaining social order and bolstering party legitimacy were followed when reporting on the Galwan conflict. Information about casualties was first hidden for months by Chinese state media. While avoiding public discourse that could lead to instability or criticism, coverage focused on discipline, unity, and patriotic sacrifice. Strategic communication that was in line with the goals of the CCP and the Central Military Commission successfully replaced journalistic independence.

This poses a basic ethical query: is it possible for journalists to function autonomously in an authoritarian information system? In China, the media served more as a tool for national mobilization than as a forum for public inquiry. State-defined views of reality were reinforced via patriotic storytelling, emotional films, and carefully chosen tales. Political control and censorship prevented the presence of critical viewpoints.

Despite their structural differences, both India and China experienced forms of media militarization. In India, commercialization and competitive nationalism undermined objectivity. In China, centralized propaganda eliminated independent journalism altogether. In both cases, the public was exposed primarily to narratives reinforcing national solidarity and hostility toward the opposing state. The ethical implications are profound because journalism plays a crucial role during crises. Responsible reporting can reduce tensions by providing verified information and contextual analysis. Irresponsible reporting, however, can escalate hostility by amplifying fear, anger, and misinformation.

During the post-Galwan period, media ecosystems in both countries often contributed to escalation rather than de-escalation. Another important issue concerns the relationship between nationalism and democratic accountability. Excessive patriotic framing can discourage scrutiny of government decisions, military preparedness, or diplomatic failures. When criticism becomes equated with disloyalty, journalism loses its capacity to function as an independent institution.

The India-China confrontation therefore highlights the transformation of modern journalism under conditions of geopolitical rivalry. Newsrooms increasingly operate within an environment shaped by nationalism, algorithms, commercial incentives, and strategic communication. The ethical ideal of neutral reporting becomes difficult to sustain when audiences demand emotional affirmation and governments prioritize narrative control. Ultimately, the Galwan era revealed that information itself has become a battlefield. Journalists are no longer merely observers of conflict; they are participants within larger struggles over legitimacy, identity, and public consciousness. The rise of "Newsroom Nationalism" demonstrates how the media can simultaneously inform societies and intensify confrontation, making peaceful reconciliation more politically difficult in an age dominated by digital emotion and strategic narratives.

IV. Conclusion: The Perpetuation of the Cold Peace

The shift from the "Wuhan Spirit" to the "Galwan Reality" represents a clear turning point in Asian geopolitical history. The events of 2020–2026 changed the India-China relationship into a complex conflict that goes beyond simple territorial conflicts, as this analysis has shown. Both countries have created a self-reinforcing architecture of mistrust by weaponizing information, militarizing the digital border, and integrating nationalism into journalism ethics.

In this new era of "Cold Peace," the media perpetuates the conflict rather than just reflecting it. The conflict is now ingrained in the collective consciousness of more than two billion people thanks to the creation of the "Enemy" through state-managed martyrdom in China and broadcast spectacles in India. Economic interdependencies still exist, but they are becoming more and more overshadowed by the demands of strategic autonomy and "hard balancing."

The tenacity of this "Digital Border" indicates that conventional diplomacy won't be enough to achieve reconciliation in the future. Whether journalism can regain its position as a conduit for factual information or if it will continue to be a front in the hybrid conflicts of the twenty-first century is the problem for the next ten years. Not only did the Galwan conflict alter a border, but it also altered how two cultures perceived one another, maybe for millennia to come.

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