

**July 17, 1961**

**Memorandum of Conversation between Director  
Zhang Wenji and Indian Ambassador Parthasarathy  
(1)**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Parthasarathy and Zhang Wenji hold an unofficial and informal discussion on the causes for the deterioration of relations between India and China in the last few years (before 1961). Both sides express a desire to improve relations, but also give reasons for grievances, mainly concerning public criticisms made in the press of one country toward the other, and specific disagreements regarding Sino-Indian border issues.

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Memorandum of Conversation (1): Director Zhang Wenji and Indian Ambassador Parthasarathy

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Zhang [Wenji]: Yesterday the Premier suggested to the foreign secretary that the two of us continue talks. Even though [this], as an informal, candid conversation between friends, cannot resolve issues, it too has advantages and is helpful in seeking solutions. The ambassador has been in China for three years; [he] is conscientious about [his] work, and a person of integrity. During these three years, there have unfortunately been setbacks in the two countries' relations; this is not [due to] personal factors. Before long the ambassador will return to his country, and by coincidence the foreign secretary has come to China and the two sides have held talks. Now there are still a few days left; the ambassador can have contact with the Foreign Ministry side, and exchange views and seek solutions. When the next ambassador comes, we hope we can also have more contact [with him]. Although things did not go as hoped during the ambassador's term, [he] has still made contributions toward cooperation between the two sides [China and India]. Based on yesterday's conversation, [our] initial impression is that, although there are frank and intense disagreements, there are several points on which [we] completely agree or are close to agreement, and these are:

(1) Both countries have expressed the need for friendly [relations], and from a long—term point of view, friendship between the two countries will still prevail.

(2) The situation over the last few years has been unsatisfactory, and both sides have differing views as to the cause, but both think we should adopt a positive attitude and improve relations with constructive steps, and at the very least not add to the difficulties or make the situation get worse.

(3) In order to seek solutions and advance understanding together, the two sides both hope that each can feel and understand the other's predicament; at the same time, each also needs to put themselves in the other's shoes and make allowances for them.

In today's informal, friendly conversation, if the ambassador has views he wishes to be conveyed to my countries' leaders, [I] will be certain to report them faithfully and make [sure] that both sides have a correct understanding.

[Gopalaswami] Parthasarathy: [I] welcome Director Zhang's opening remarks. I am in almost total agreement with your assessment. The foreign secretary and I both consider the two sides' free, candid talks to be the most beneficial ones. Although the disagreements have been somewhat intense, it is still better to speak what is on our minds. This is a vital matter involving the friendship of one billion people. We have a responsibility to promote the restoration of relations, [and] it is no good to not speak what is in our hearts. We have divided the issues into two aspects. One aspect is specific, predominant issues; [these] can be boiled down to border issues. Another aspect is other factors that have caused the two countries' relations to worsen these two years. We feel that the Chinese leaders' sentiments toward India lack understanding in some aspects. For example, on such issues as Bhutan, Sikkim, Pakistan, and criticism in the newspapers, the difference of opinions between the two sides has widened. China's leaders gave a fairly lengthy explanation on the issue of criticism in the newspapers, making mention of their views and the reasons for criticism. What worries me are not the criticisms themselves, but whether they signify

a change in [China's] assessment of India. We two countries have different social and political systems, but [their] goal is still the same; it is only that the methods [we] use to attain that goal differ, that's all. The reports in Chinese newspapers cause people to feel that there have been major changes in India's domestic and foreign policies, as if India has become reactionary, no longer progressive. This is a lack of respect for India. It is very difficult to bring the two countries' relations back to normal.

There are major differences of opinion on border issues, and it will require some time to be able to get agreement. Until then [we] should try to keep [our] differences of opinion on other fronts from widening. [We] must be in contact more, cooperate more, eliminate misunderstandings, and create a favorable atmosphere. Yesterday's conversation was somewhat sharp, but that's not at all to say that [the sides] did not consider the other side. [I will] now raise two or three points:

(1) Bhutan and Sikkim issues. Premier Zhou said that the Sino-Sikkimese borders were stipulated in a treaty in 1890, it is not a problem. But the Chinese side has not recognized India's right to represent Bhutan and Sikkim.

Zhang: I very much appreciated the way you put it; there are disagreements, but [we] must consider things as a whole. As long as we [do so] for the sake of honesty, there is nothing to fear in talks being somewhat sharp. This is much better than mutual criticisms in official letter exchanges and in public opinion. [We] must not create public tension; the governments both feel pressured, [and it] runs counter to both sides' desire for improvement. [As for] criticism in the newspapers, India's criticisms far outnumber [China's]; we don't attach much importance to it. Our newspapers have also carried some news about India that is entirely of a reporting nature, [with] almost no comment. The Ambassador said that China has changed its assessment of India and holds that India has become reactionary. Yesterday the foreign secretary said India's foreign policy has not essentially changed for the past 15 years. We welcome this promise. If one is to speak of any changes in both sides' estimation of the other, one must first say that it is India that feels there has been a great change in China's domestic and foreign policy. China's national leaders have not voiced any objections whatsoever to India's domestic and foreign policy. The Indian side says it does not know what changes there have been to Indian foreign policy. But judging from actual behavior, one cannot help but feel that there has been a change. When Sino-Indian relations were good, India held that China was interested in peace. But since last year, India's leaders have repeatedly implied that China is keen on [having a] cold war. An Indian leader even said he did not know of any country that loved peace as much as a certain country does, nor did he know of any country that loves peace less than China does. As for China's domestic policy, the deputy head of India's Foreign Ministry, Mrs. [Lakshmi] Menon, once said that China is a concentration camp, a Hitler-style totalitarian regime. China's leaders do not want to make direct criticisms of India. Yesterday, Vice-Premier Chen Yi raised the point that both sides should [try to] lessen the differences of opinion and do their best to find common points, reducing differences and preventing them from surfacing. The ambassador says that the main focus should be on border issues; when Premier Zhou visited Delhi last year, it was in the very hopes that it would lead to a resolution of border issues. Over the past two years we have negotiated about borders with Burma and Nepal, and achieved resolution through friendly consultation. There has been development in relations with both [these] parties, as the ambassador also knows.

Parthasarathy: I still do not have a precise understanding of some of the issues discussed yesterday. India has a right and a responsibility to represent Bhutan and Sikkim in handling foreign affairs; what is China's attitude toward this?

Zhang: Yesterday, the foreign secretary raised this question under the subject of border issues. There are no problems between China and Sikkim in terms of borders. There are already stipulations [regarding them] in a late nineteenth-century agreement. With the exception of a small area south of the McMahon Line, there is

not much disagreement on the Sino-Bhutanese border, either. I will say it again: [China] does not cross the McMahon Line—the problem is in fact nonexistent. The ambassador raised the [subject] of India's right to represent Bhutan and Sikkim in diplomatic negotiations; this went beyond the scope of border issues. The foreign secretary says India has a special relationship with Bhutan and Sikkim; [I] don't know what this refers to.

Parthasarathy: This was stipulated on the basis of a treaty. Based on two-way treaties, Bhutan and Sikkim agreed to accept India's guidance on foreign relations and to have India handle foreign affairs. What are the implications in China's saying it respects "proper" Indian relations with Bhutan and Sikkim?

Zhang: This is a general expression, and it is also not limited to this issue; it is common in international affairs. I personally do not quite understand why India wants to treat Sikkim as a protectorate; this kind of practice is rare in Asian and African countries. We have no ambitions regarding the territory of any country, and we do not carry out subversive activities [against foreign regimes]. In an official letter, the Indian side made a reference to Chinese leaders in Tibet stating that Bhutan, Sikkim, and Ladakh are parts of China, [and we] want to recover them. This does not merit a response. China's leaders have never said this kind of thing. India has a general consulate and other agencies in Tibet; they can find out that there is no such talk or activities. India is just basing itself on reports from Western news agencies; it is not worth taking seriously. That we did not reply does not mean we affirming this.

Parthasarathy: We were not basing ourselves on Western reports, but on our own intelligence. It is said that you broadcast this news. We consider this to be a serious matter, [so] we brought it up with you. Now you say this didn't happen, but it is also possible that irresponsible people did say such things; you can also investigate. We would not criticize you based solely on Western reports. As for [your] saying, "protectorate," this is not a very accurate term (a loose term). This is, in fact, a historical relationship; based on the stipulations in the treaty, they ask us to offer guidance in foreign diplomacy. China's saying that it respects a "proper" relationship has made people doubtful as to whether you respect the India-Bhutan and India-Sikkim treaties, or whether you recognize India's right to represent Bhutan and Sikkim in foreign diplomacy.

Zhang: You say India's criticism is based on Tibetan broadcasts, but you have never supplied specific information. Your letter was very vague, [and] you have long since made general statements that there was no such thing [happening].

Regarding [India's] traditional relationships with Bhutan and Sikkim. India says that based on the treaty, only India has the right to handle their foreign relations. But Bhutan and Sikkim are also in communication with Tibet. For the moment [we] won't speak of the historical relationships; in recent years, there have also been communications. For example, they have representatives stationed in Tibet. Their representatives have remained there following the India-Bhutan and India-Sikkim treaties; this is a fact. It is very clear what we mean by saying we respect India's relations with Bhutan and Sikkim; we are very cautious, and unwilling to damage China's relations with Bhutan or Sikkim. We also do not [want to] damage China's relations with India. The two countries have not, in official meetings discussed Sino-Bhutanese or Sino-Sikkimese border issues, because at the time the two countries' premiers were only authorized to discuss Sino-Indian border issues; nor did India in any way believe Bhutan or Sikkim to be part of India. As regards the Indo-Bhutanese treaty, India and Bhutan's explanations are mutually contradictory; Bhutan believes they have the right to handle foreign affairs. In any case, we do not have any diplomatic contacts with them.

Generally speaking, the tension in [our] two countries' relations over the past two

years has concerned Sino-Indian border issues. [China] has made great efforts to alleviate [tensions] and seek ways of resolution. You say that India is doing this, too. That's good, but now India tends to sideline Sino-Indian border issues and instead focus discussions on the issues of Bhutan, Sikkim and Pakistan, etc; this will not serve to narrow [our] differences of opinion—rather, it will broaden [our] differences of opinion. This does nothing to help resolve the issues. Our chief consideration should be Sino-Indian border issues; there is definite danger with this aspect, and none at all with the other issues. Yesterday the foreign secretary said that the borders ought to be considered as a whole, starting with Kashmir and ending with Burma. Here one should not overlook the fact that there also exist third-party nations, such as Nepal. We respect India's relations with Bhutan and Sikkim and have done nothing to damage [them]. We recognize the Sino-Sikkimese border and do not see any necessity for further mention of this issue. If [India] has ulterior motives [in raising this issue], then at the very least they lack understanding. We cannot confuse primary [issues] with secondary ones.

Parthasarathy: I am personally surprised that the issue is getting bigger. It was our hope that the issue could be limited to the scope of Sino-Indian border issues. But the difficulty lies with your use of this term "proper relations." During Sino-Indian official meetings, you also refused to discuss the Sino-Bhutanese and Sino-Sikkimese borders. We should first discuss issues of substance. [We] would like to ask whether the Chinese side would agree to talk if Bhutan entrusted India with discussing Sino-Bhutanese border issues. This is the crux of the issue. As for the Kashmir issue, India is very sensitive about it. You are discussing border issues with a country that has no right to negotiate; it is impossible not to consider this hostile. Yesterday Premier Zhou raised some practical issues, but from a legal standpoint, two countries cannot discuss the territory of a third country; [they] ought to be mindful of popular opinion.

Zhang: India believes China has a hidden agenda concerning Bhutan and Sikkim and is expanding the issue; this idea is strange and hard to understand. China has done nothing in this aspect over the past two or three years. Our relations with Bhutan and Sikkim have not increased—they have decreased. The main disagreement over the Sino-Bhutanese border map is [the area] south of the McMahon Line. Currently the two sides are at an impasse on the McMahon Line. India's submission of a letter demanding discussion of the Sino-Bhutanese border, and also touching on the McMahon Line, only expanded the quarrel—[it was for this reason] we did not reply.

As for the Kashmir issue, Premier Zhou has repeatedly discussed, in clear-cut terms, our position and predicament. There is nothing to add. The ambassador recognizes that China can, when necessary, be in temporary contact with the local authorities. This is also a recognition that there are practical problems that must be handled. But this idea of the ambassador's still cannot resolve the practical difficulties. We could not wait until after bloodshed occurs to talk; this would create new tensions and be detrimental to our relations with neighboring countries. This will only cause the imperialist elements intent on destroying China's relations with neighboring countries to clap their hands for joy.

As regards the Sino-Indian border issue, the foreign secretary spoke well; after the Sino-Indian officials' reports were released, none of the three possible methods could be used, [so] we should consider a kind of fourth option—which is, both sides reconsider [the issues]. We set great store by this important statement [when it was] made by an official so sincere as the foreign secretary. We welcome this suggestion, and agree that we should consider issues on this foundation. [We] should talk about facts that should be ascertained—which ones [we] can accept, and which we could consider. I am very interested in how the Indian government views this. If it is believed that the facts supplied by the Indian side are all unassailable, and the facts supplied by the Chinese side are all incorrect and worthless, not only could I personally not agree, any fair-minded person would not agree. The concluding

section of India's report even said the Chinese side's information can prove that India's traditional line is correct. This statement not only disregards the facts, it is also an insult to me personally. I have held in the proper respect, and maintained personal friendship with, Indian representatives such as [Director of the China Division in the Ministry of External Affairs J. S.] Mehta and [Director of the Historical Division in the Ministry of External Affairs S.] Gopal; I know this is not an issue between individuals, but guided by Indian government policy. This statement from the Indian side does not hold water at all. Of course it is difficult for the two sides to have total consensus on the facts, but this is no barrier to seeking resolution on practical problems provided it does not harm the interests of either side. Both sides [can] yield to and forgive the other—this is also the normal way [of doing things]. Officials' reports from both sides deserve regard, but one cannot get tangled up in the details. The relationship between our two countries is too important; we should view it from a greater distance, from an elevated height, considering the big picture, and seek resolution. The two sides will not necessarily agree on specific views, but should understand the overall spirit.

Parthasarathy: This is a difficult problem. For the two sides to have consensus on the facts is difficult. In truth, what the officials presented was not one report, it was two reports. The officials were assigned to examine and double-check the [written] information, determining the points [we] agree on and those we do not, but the result was completely divergent viewpoints. How are the two countries' premiers to consider [the issues] with two piles of completely opposing facts? [My] personal view is, might it be possible to seek a solution starting with ascertaining those points that require further clarification?

Zhang: After India issued the officials' report, Premier Nehru flatly stated that there could be no discussion unless India's requirements were accepted. Under these circumstances, China prefers not to state its stance for the time being, unless we are prepared to squabble. Regarding the officials' reports, I believe that besides the differing points, there are certain portions on which [we] agree or are relatively close. Our side once suggested writing this, but the Indian side refused. As for China's border negotiations with Burma and Nepal, there is some experience that can serve as a reference. Ordinarily speaking, when there is disagreement on the facts, there are two possible methods of resolution: (1) If the two sides both have definite grounds [for their stance], following an earnest, objective comparison, [they] can determine which side has somewhat greater grounds, and consider from a political standpoint which [country] finally getting the [land] would do more for peace and the two countries' relationship. (2) If the two sides' views differ greatly and it is impossible to bring them into line, each can keep to its own position and consider, from a political standpoint, what kind of resolution would be more beneficial. Of course, the differences of opinion between China and India are somewhat greater, but the importance of Sino-Indian friendship is also far greater; both can continue to think about whether there is anything else to consider. The two sides should meet halfway—it is possible to resolve the issues. China and India cannot stay locked in long-term mutual confrontation; there must eventually be peace and friendship. As long as both sides have the desire, the question of method is an easy one to resolve. [I] won't speak of the past; yesterday's talks prove that we are willing to resolve the issues.