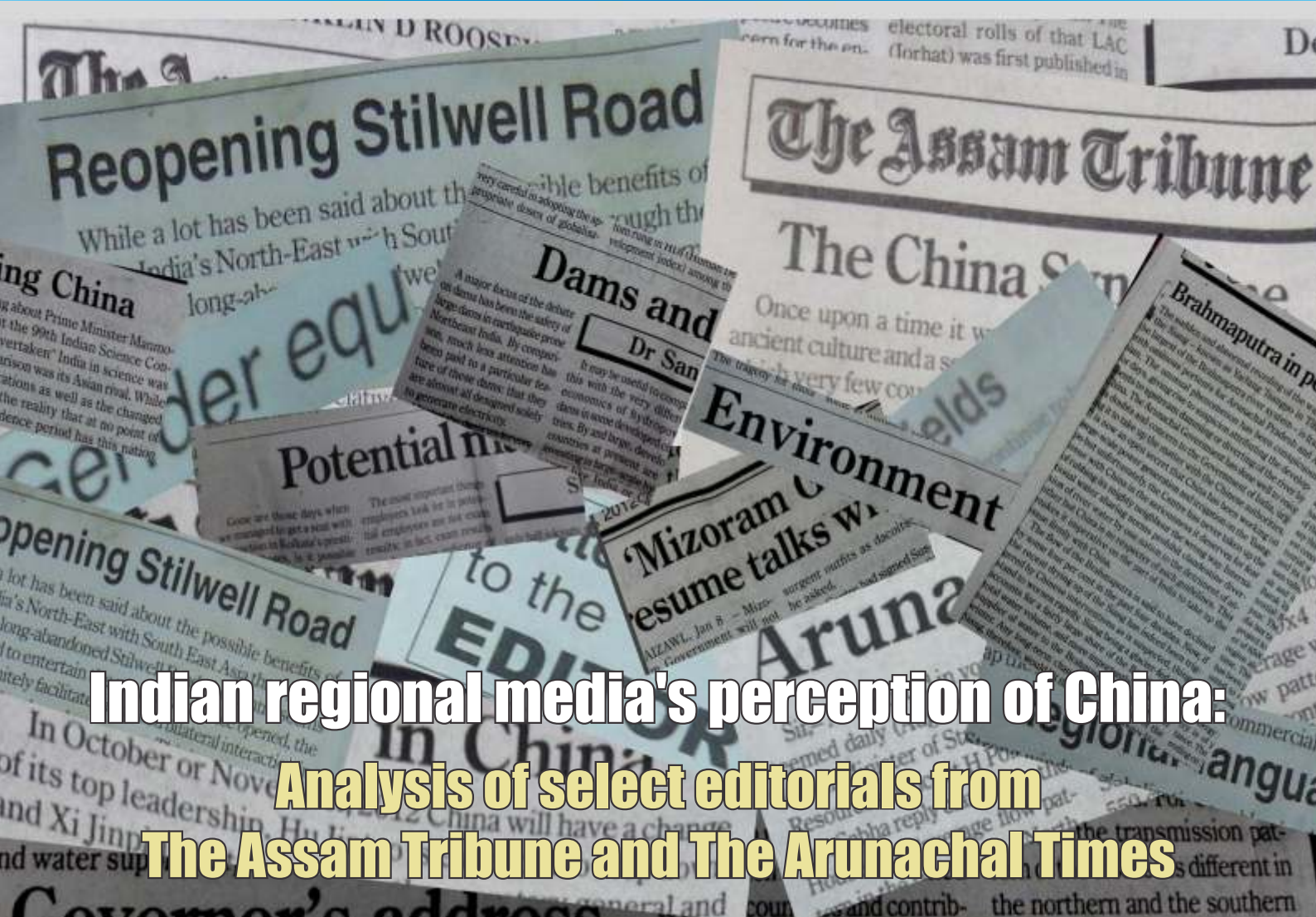


UNDERSTANDING CHINA

PART 2



Indian regional media's perception of China: Analysis of select editorials from The Assam Tribune and The Arunachal Times

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Research and Data Management:

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Building Partnerships for a Global India

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About the Authors

Rakhahari Chatterji, Ph.D (Chicago) is an Adviser at the Kolkata Chapter of the Foundation. Professor in Political Science, Calcutta University (Retired 2008). Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Calcutta University; Visiting Fellow in Political Science and Associate, Committee on South Asian Studies, University of Chicago; Visiting Fellow in Political Science at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and University of Virginia (Charlottesville); Emeritus Fellow, UGC. Has authored 8 books and edited 3 books apart from contributing 92 papers and review articles to books, journals and newspapers. His expertise lies in International Relations, Comparative Politics, Indian Politics and South Asia. His recent publication is "Para-Diplomacy: Concept and Context", (co-authored), *India Quarterly*, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, Vol. 73, Issue 4, 2017, pp.375-394.

Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Ph.D is a Fellow at the ORF, Kolkata under its Neighbourhood Regional Studies Initiative. She is the coordinator of research programmes "Proximity to Connectivity" and "Understanding Public Perception". Her recent publications include *India's connectivity with its Himalayan Neighbours: Possibilities and Challenges* (ORF: New Delhi, 2016, co-authored); *Indian Media's Perception of China: Analysis of Editorials* (ORF: New Delhi, 2017, co-authored); *State of being Stateless: An Account on South Asia* (Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2015, co-editor); *India-Myanmar Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges* (ORF: New Delhi, 2015, co-editor), *India-Bangladesh Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges* (ORF, New Delhi, 2015, co-author); *Women in Indian Borderlands* (Sage, New Delhi, 2011, co-editor). *SAARC at Crossroads: The Fate of Regional Cooperation in South Asia* (Sanskriti, New Delhi, 2006). Her areas of interest include regionalism in South Asia; borders, migration and displacement; energy security; and women in South Asia.

Mayuri Banerjee is a Research Assistant with ORF Kolkata's China Regional Studies Initiative. She is working on the project "Understanding Public Perception: India and China". She is a team member of *South Asia Weekly*. Her research areas include India's foreign policy, conflict, peace and security studies. She is currently pursuing her M.Phil. in International Relations, Jadavpur University.



Foreword

Since its inception in 2013, ORF Kolkata has taken a special interest in China studies and has been focusing on activities towards a better understanding of India's neighbor and rival. Indeed, more than half of the deliberations and discourses that ORF Kolkata has since organised have been on issues related to China. For instance, it has organised seminars and conferences on 'Issues in Sino-Indian Relations and the New leadership in China'; 'Sixty Years after Panchsheel'; 'India-China Connectivity: Past and Present'; 'Conversations on Kunming'; 'Role of State-Province in India-China Relations'; 'China's Rural Development and Possible Reference for India'; 'Economic Reforms in China'; 'De-Mystifying China: Round table on India China mutual understanding'. It has also hosted scholars, diplomats, journalists, business executives, and politicians at its headquarters, including C. Raja Mohan, Manoj Joshi, Sobhanlal Dutta Gupta, Geremie Barme, Tansen Sen, Wang Rong, Arun Shourie, Cao Jin Qing, Jairam Ramesh, Dinesh Trivedi, Ravi Bhoothalingam, Krishnan Srinivasan, ReshmaPatil, Harsh Poddar, Huang Yuqin, Sunanda Datta Ray, Yang Faxiang, Xu Yongxiang, Ye Hailin and Ma Zhanwu. ORF Kolkata has also hosted scholars and researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing.

Through such interactions, ORF Kolkata has realised that much of the Indian people's knowledge and understanding of China are based on literature coming from western scholars. There is a gap in research from an Indian perspective, and ORF Kolkata aims to fill such void. We begin by seeking to know how India sees China; in other words, what is India's perception of China? The first part of the project on Indian national media's perception of China has already been published. The second part of the project deals with regional media from the eastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the India-China border region.

We are honoured to present this extensive report on regional media and its perception of China.

Ashok Dhar

Director, ORF Kolkata

February 2018



Preface

While the idea of this research is as old as the Kolkata Chapter of ORF, the research began only in 2014. We felt, and many reputed scholars agreed with us, that understanding a nation required an examination of our own perceptions of it. Therefore, we started with the work of understanding India's public perception of China. But perception by itself is an abstract concept and in order to capture it, we needed to “objectify” it even though such exercise may miss certain aspects. To delimit our research content, we decided to define the concept in terms of media perception and public perception. For media perception we decided to look at the web and print versions of select national and regional newspapers; for public perception we conducted an opinion survey of a sampled population in three states in the India-China border region in the eastern sector. This report is a part of this larger project.

Sunjoy Joshi and Ashok Dhar have encouraged and stood by us throughout. Needless to say, for the shortcomings of this report, the authors alone are responsible.

Rakhahari Chatterji

Adviser, ORF Kolkata

February 2018



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1

A Quantitative Analysis

The report examines regional reporting of issues relevant to India-China ties and analyses the trends and content in such reporting. The authors focus on two newspapers from two of India's northeastern states located in the India-China border region, namely, *The Arunachal Times* and *The Assam Tribune*. These newspapers were chosen because of their wide readership. The timeframe of this study is from 2012 to 2014, which is the same as that of the first in this series of reports that covered national newspapers. The purpose of this exercise is two-fold: one, to explore Indian regional media's perception of China in states from the bordering region, insofar as the select regional newspapers exhibit such perception through their editorials; second, to offer observations comparing Indian regional media's perceptions with those of the national newspapers. Like in the earlier report, the authors look at the issues both from a quantitative and a qualitative view. A caveat at this point is in order: the source for *The Arunachal Times* is its web version, while hard copies were used for *The Assam Tribune*, which does not have an online presence. A total of 89 China-related editorial pieces have been studied (*The Arunachal Times*– 31; *The Assam Tribune*- 58). *The Arunachal Times* had the highest number of China-related editorials in 2014 while *The Assam Tribune* published the most number of such editorials in 2013. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Editorials by Newspaper by Year

Year	Newspaper		Total
	The Arunachal Times	The Assam Tribune	
2012	2	9	11
2013	11	27	38
2014	18	22	40
Total	31	58	89

Editorial Attention

To come to a better understanding of the newspapers' concern with China-related matters, the authors constructed an “attention score” while studying the national media. It would be useful to apply the same measure to examine the degree of attention paid to China by these two regional dailies.



The attention score for each newspaper is computed by taking the number of editorials it has published every 365 days for these three years, multiplied by 100, to get a standardised score. According to this scale, a newspaper scoring 100 would have published at least one editorial piece on China every day of each year and a score of zero would mean it did not carry any editorial at all in the same period.

This attention score does not tell whether a newspaper gives more or less attention to China compared to other countries or issues. What it says instead is the degree of interest in China a particular newspaper has shown in comparison with the other newspaper(s) under study. (See Table 2.)

Table 2: Attention Score

Newspaper	2012	2013	2014	Aggregated Score	Mean Score
The Arunachal Times	0.54	3.01	4.93	8.49	2.83
The Assam Tribune	2.46	7.39	6.02	15.89	5.29

Table 2 shows that both the aggregate score and mean score of *The Assam Tribune* is higher than *The Arunachal Times*. Looking at the attention scores separately, it will be noted that over the period of three years, *The Arunachal Times* has consistently increased its attention over China-related issues, with the highest score in 2014. However, the attention score for *The Assam Tribune*—while increasing from 2012 to 2013—it registered a slight fall in 2014 but still remained higher than *The Arunachal Times*. Apart from *The Assam Tribune's* jump in attention between 2012 and 2013, both the newspapers show consistent interest in China-related matters.

Editorial Themes

The authors wanted to know if the two newspapers, through the content of their editorials, sought to capture readers' attention by highlighting certain aspects of China or India-China relations. To do this, the authors categorised the editorials according to the main thrust of their content (or 'themes'). The time frame remains the same as the study of the national media: 2012 to 2014. Six distinct themes came out, namely: China as arising power; India-China border; Ecology/Rivers; Economy; Connectivity; and China's domestic issues. Table 3 summarises the distribution of the editorials of *The Assam Tribune* and *The Arunachal Times* according to these themes.

**Table 3: Editorials by Themes by Newspaper**

Newspaper	Themes						Total
	China as a rising power	India-China Border	Ecology/River	Economy	Connectivity	China Domestic	
The Arunachal Times	2 (6.45%)	22 (70.96%)	3 (9.67%)	3 (9.67%)	1(3.22%)	0	31 (100)
The Assam Tribune	33 (56.89%)	9 (15.51%)	7 (12.06%)	4 (6.89%)	1 (1.72%)	4(6.89%)	58 (100)
Total	35 (39.32%)	31 (37.34%)	10 (11.23%)	7 (7.86%)	2 (2.24%)	4 (4.49%)	89 (100)

Table 3 reveals some interesting aspects. For one, it shows that *The Assam Tribune's* overwhelming concern about China during 2012-14 has been its status as a rising power, distantly followed by its concern for the border and ecology/river. Thus nearly 57 percent of all the editorials concerning China published by this newspaper have been on the country's muscle-flexing in India's neighbourhood. That the next highest number of editorials by *The Assam Tribune* (15.5 percent) is on India-China border issues reiterates that the newspaper is attuned to issues about the border that was breached by Chinese forces in 1962. It is noteworthy that *The Arunachal Times* has written less number of editorials on China during the same period, being published as it is out of a state with disputed borders with China; still, the newspaper showed adequate concern about the border issue during the period of study, with nearly 71 percent of its editorials being of the theme of border. This is followed by its editorials on ecology, economy, and China as a rising power—on which there were few editorials over the three years (see Figure 1).

The Assam Tribune shows some degree of sensitivity on the ecology/river theme compared to both *The Arunachal Times* and its own attention to the other themes of economy, connectivity, and China's domestic issues. In recent years the Brahmaputra river has emerged as another area of contention between India and China. Indian media reports allege that China is attempting to build dams over the 1,625-km stretch of Brahmaputra or Yarlung Tsangpo (as it is called in China) that flows through China and is trying to divert water to the dry mountain lands of Tibet—this would result in less water flow downstream. The river originates from the Chemayungdung glacier in South Western Tibet, flows across China and makes a U-turn to flow south into India and then Bangladesh before merging with the Bay of Bengal. Expert opinion in India appears to be divided, with one section suggesting that even if the claims were true, Chinese attempts are unlikely to succeed as the



major catchment area of the river is within India. The other section argues that such damming activities will negatively impact the ecological health of the river in the lower riparian states (India and Bangladesh) and thus India should take up this issue urgently with China. Since the river is the lifeline of Assam and change in its course or flow can affect the livelihood of millions of Assamese as well as its overall ecology, it is expected that opinion in Assam would show much concern. *The Assam Tribune's* relatively larger number of editorials on this theme is a reflection of this concern. To the *The Assam Tribune*, this issue is nearly as important as the border issue. Although, as shown in Table 4, the newspaper's concern is not sustained through these three years under study, for while most editorials on it were published in 2013, a year of relatively high tension in India-China relations in recent years, the number of editorials in the other two years is negligible.

Figure 1: Editorials by Theme by Newspaper

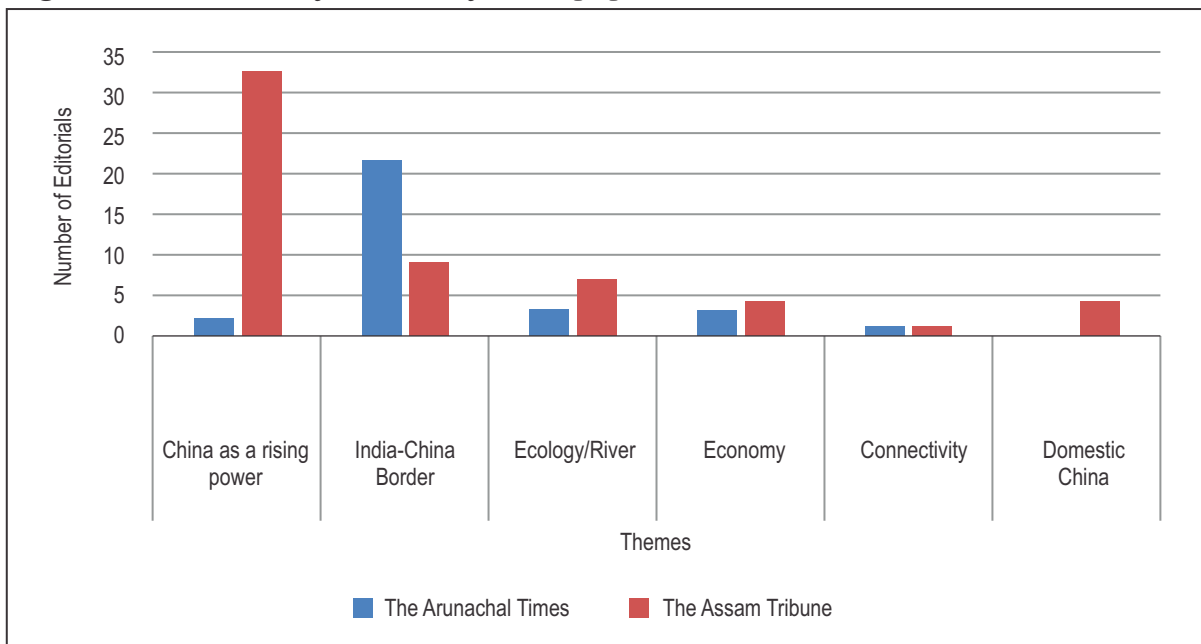


Table 4 presents the frequencies and percentages for the same themes for the two dailies for each year. The table reveals that while in 2012 neither of these two dailies wrote a single editorial on the border, in the next two years the picture changed. *The Arunachal Times* wrote seven out of 11, and 15 out of 18 editorials on the border in 2013 and 2014, respectively; *The Assam Tribune* contributed 5 out of 27 and 4 out of 22 editorials on the same theme during these latter years. These authors' earlier study of national newspapers found that 2013 and 2014 witnessed many alleged incursions by China particularly on the Eastern and Western sector of the border, making those newspapers more sensitive to the border issue in those years. The same pattern is visible for the regional dailies of the border states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The qualitative analysis will more elaborately show whether these regional dailies were writing about the alleged border incursions in general or they were reflecting worries about their parts of the border in the wake of the activities in the two sectors. Here it needs to be pointed out that the issue of stapled visa issued to Arunachal



athletes in 2013 raised the temperature in India-China relations and with Arunachal being particularly involved in the issue, it is understandable that *The Arunachal Times* showed heightened concern on the border question at this time.

Table 4 Themes by Newspaper by Year (2012-2014)

Year: (The Arunachal Times)	China as a rising power	India-China Border	Ecology/ River	Economy	Connectivity	China Domestic	Total
2012	0	0	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0	0	2(100)
2013	1 (9.09%)	7 (63.63%)	2 (18.18%)	1 (9.09%)	0	0	11 (100)
2014	1 (5.55%)	15(83.33%)	0	1 (5.55%)	1 (5.55%)	0	18 (100)
Total	2	22	3	3	1	0	31
The Assam Tribune)							
2012	7(77.77%)	0	1(11.11%)	0	0	1 (11.11%)	9 (100)
2013	13 (48.14%)	5(18.51%)	5(18.51%)	2(7.40%)	1(3.70%)	1 (3.70%)	27(100)
2014	13(59.09%)	4(18.18%)	1 (4.54%)	2 (9.09%)	0	2 (9.09%)	22(100)
Total	33	9	7	4	1	4	58

It is only natural that perceived threats on the border would also sensitise the dailies about China's rise as a power in the neighbourhood. Thus, *The Assam Tribune* wrote at least 50 percent of its editorials on China as a rising power in 2013 and 2014 (13 out of 27 and 13 out of 22, respectively). For its part, *The Arunachal Times* wrote at least one editorial on the same theme in both these years compared to none at all in 2012.

What is quite surprising is that despite controversies over the Brahmaputra, the newspapers do not show much concern about the ecology/river theme. *The Arunachal Times* has written only three out of 31 editorials over this three-year period on the subject, while *The Assam Tribune* showed a little more sensitiveness with seven out of 58 editorials (the proportions remain nearly the same).

Editorial Perception

The central theme of this project is to decipher the perception of China as projected by the two newspapers under study. A newspaper writing an editorial on an issue or a country tries to make a point through which it wants to influence readers' opinion as much as to have an impact on public policy. The point it makes about the issue or the country may project it negatively or positively; accordingly, negative or positive perception is likely to be encouraged. Thus, in reading Indian newspapers' editorials on China, it has been necessary for the authors to see whether they encourage negative or positive perception and to classify them accordingly. In transforming such subjective impressions about editorial



contents as negative or positive into quantities there are risks involved. To minimise such risks, the authors have taken methodological care, which will be discussed in the conclusion of this section.

Table 5: Editorial Perception by Intensity by Newspaper (2012-2014)

Newspaper	Intensity	Perception		Total
		Positive	Negative	
The Arunachal Times				
	Strong	0	11 (50%)	11 (35.48%)
	Moderate	3 (33.33%)	8 (36.36%)	11 (35.48%)
	Weak	6 (66.66%)	3 (13.63%)	9 (29.03%)
	Total	9 (100)	22 (100)	31 (100)
The Assam Tribune	Strong	2 (13.33%)	14 (32.55%)	16 (27.58%)
	Moderate	7 (46.66%)	18 (41.86%)	25 (43.10%)
	Weak	6 (40%)	11 (25.58%)	17 (29.31%)
	Total	15 (100)	43 (100)	58 (100)

Table 5 shows that both newspapers have published overwhelmingly negative editorials on China: *The Arunachal Times* has written only 9 out of 31 editorials (29.03 percent) with a positive projection of China as against 22 (70.96 percent) editorials that are negative. *The Assam Tribune* has been even less charitable: its positive editorials constituted only 25.86 percent (15 out of 58) as against 74.13 percent (43 out of 58) editorials with a negative tone. In contrast, the authors' report on the editorials of the five national newspapers found the gap between negative and positive projections of China to be much narrower. Although except for *The Hindu*, negative editorials outnumbered the positive ones, yet the aggregated gap between the two was only of 25 percentage points. The largest gap between the negative and positive perceptions was found in the case of *The Indian Express* which was of 39 percentage points (Table 8 of *Understanding China Part I*, 20), that is, much lower than in the case of the regional dailies under scrutiny.

To elaborate the point, the authors have examined the finer gradations within positive and negative projections like in the study of the national newspapers. Thus the positive and negative editorials have been classified into 'strong', 'moderate' and 'weak' categories to see how the editorials' positive and negative projections vary in terms of intensity of their expression.

All of the positive editorials in *The Arunachal Times* were written with weak or moderate intensity (more weak than moderate) while 19 out of 22 negative editorials were strong and moderate (more strong than moderate). That is to say, when *The Arunachal Times* is writing negative editorials it is doing so with a lot of assertion than when it is making a positive point about China. *The Assam Tribune's* position is somewhat different: 86 percent of its positive



editorials are moderate or weak, nearly evenly balanced, in contrast to 73 percent of its negative editorials which are strong or moderate. That is, its editorials, whether positive or negative, tend to be moderate and not extreme. This slight but noticeable difference between the two newspapers from these two Northeast Indian states could well be because of the threat posed by China to Arunachal Pradesh through official de-recognition of its belongingness to India. *The Assam Tribune's* negativity is mostly because of historical reasons rather than due to any contemporary threat perception from China; thus, the intensity of its negative and positive editorials are relatively more evenly balanced. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Editorial by Perception by Intensity



Table 6 presents the frequencies on negative/positive perception of the regional newspapers by year. In 2012 both newspapers have been most positive towards China: *The Arunachal Times* had only two editorials concerning China in this year to begin with, but they were evenly split between negative and positive projections of China; although *The Assam Tribune*, in contrast, published eight negative editorials in 2012, it is far outweighed by the negative editorials it has written in the following two years. It is interesting that in 2013, the year in which there were a number of border issues between India and China in the western and the eastern sectors of the border, *The Arunachal Times* wrote more positive editorials, albeit only marginally.



Table 6: Editorial Perception by Year (2012-2014)

Newspaper	YEAR	PERCEPTION		TOTAL
		Positive	Negative	
The Arunachal Times	2012	1	1	2
	2013	6	5	11
	2014	2	16	18
	Total	9	22	31
The Assam Tribune	2012	1	8	9
	2013	9	18	27
	2014	5	17	22
	Total	15	43	58

For *The Assam Tribune*, the gap between positive and negative projections of China during these three years has always been quite considerable, the latter always outnumbering the former. But the year 2014 has been the worst for China so far as these two newspapers are concerned. In this year both newspapers wrote enormously more negative editorials on China: the gap being 14 in the case of *The Arunachal Times* and 12 for *The Assam Tribune*. This is quite in contrast with the editorials in the national newspapers that were examined in the earlier study. They have projected China most negatively only in 2013, the year of many serious alleged border incursions, while the gap considerably narrowed down in 2014, coming even closer than it was in 2012 (*Understanding China, Part I, Figure 8, 22*).

Figure 2: Editorial by Perception by Intensity

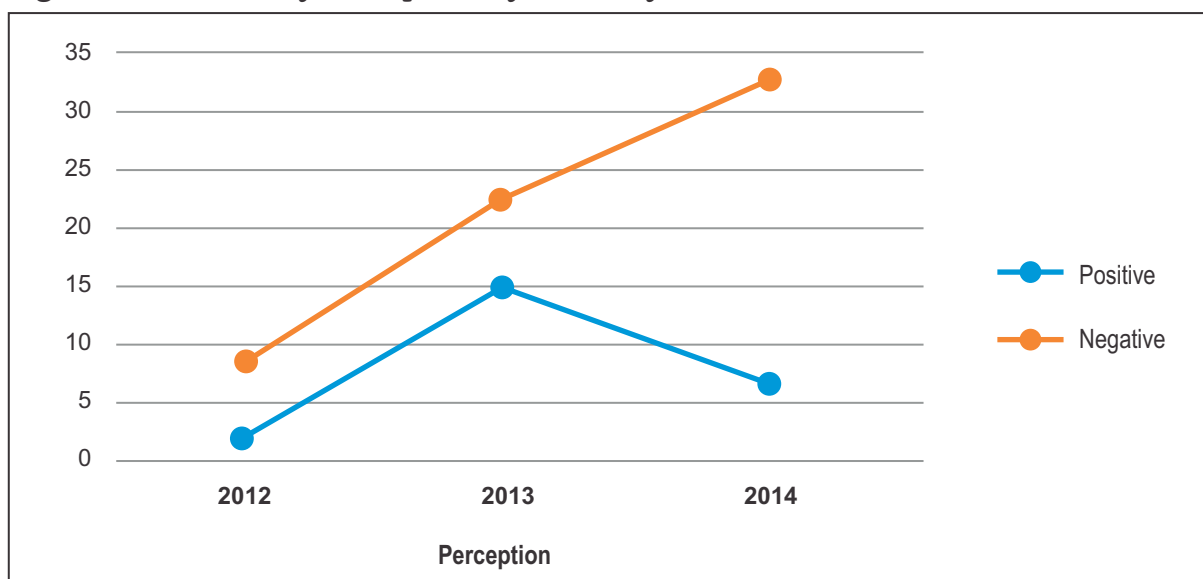


Table 7 presents the positive and negative perceptions of these regional newspapers across the themes. For *The Assam Tribune*, most negative projections have been on China as a



rising power theme, distantly followed by India-China border and ecology/river themes. For *The Arunachal Times*, the border issue has invited most negative projection than any of the other themes. As mentioned earlier, because of the dispute on Arunachal Pradesh which China claims to be southern part of Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh has become particularly sensitive about the border. This probably elicits negative reaction whenever anything relating to India-China border is discussed. In contrast, *The Assam Tribune* has been more sensitive towards China's overwhelmingly powerful presence in India's neighbourhood.

Table 7: Editorial Themes by Perception (2012-2014)

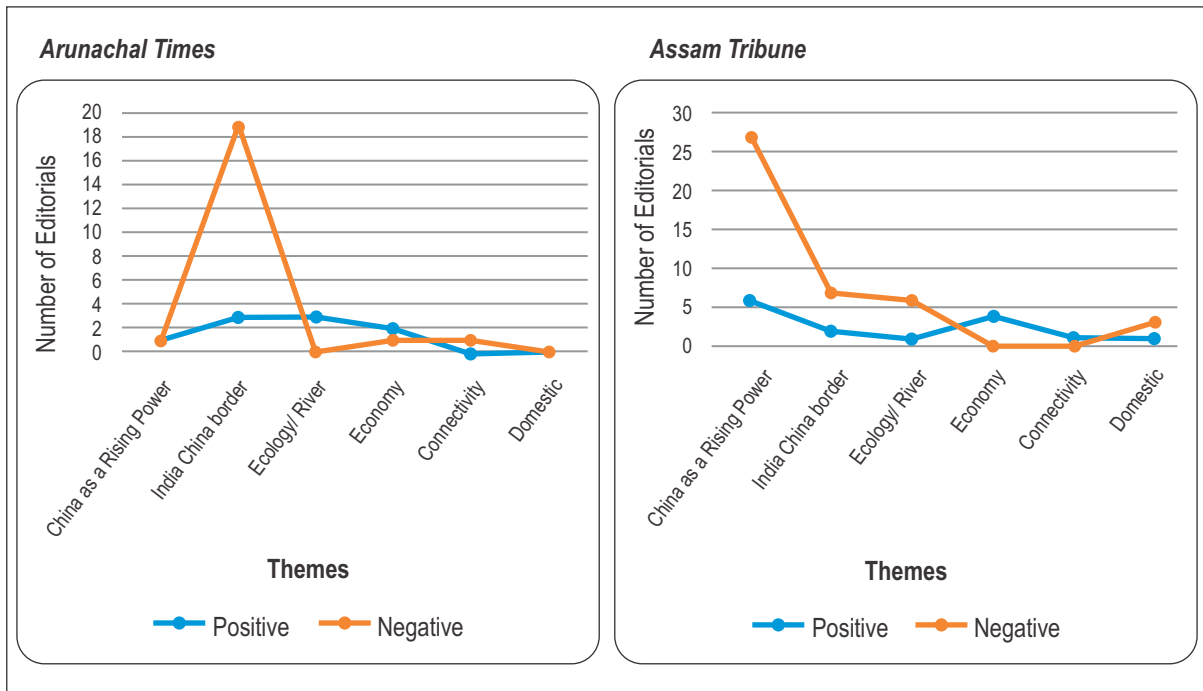
Themes	Perception					Total
	Positive		Negative			
	The Arunachal Times	The Assam Tribune	The Arunachal Times	The Assam Tribune	The Arunachal Times	The Assam Tribune
China as a Rising Power	1(10%)	6 (40%)	1 (4.76%)	27 (62.79%)	2(6.45%)	33 (56.89%)
India-China Border	3 (30%)	2 (13.33%)	19(85.71%)	7(16.27%)	22 (70.96%)	9 (15.51%)
Ecology/River	3 (30%)	1 (6.66%)	0	6 (13.95%)	3 (9.67%)	7 (12.06%)
Economy	2 (20%)	4 (26.66%)	1(4.76%)	0	3(9.67%)	4 (6.89%)
Connectivity	0	1 (6.66%)	1 (4.76%)	0	1 (3.22%)	1(1.72%)
Domestic	0	1 (6.66%)	0	3(6.97%)	0	4(6.89%)
Total	9	15	22	43	31	58

The Assam Tribune has displayed minimal interest in the domestic issues of China. It has written four out of 58 editorials on the theme, but three of these four are negative: these focus on China's problems such as its huge population, poor rank on human rights index, its autocratic party and political system, and increasing corruption.

Figure 4 depicts Table 7 graphically: the red line (negative projection) dominates left end of the graph for both the newspapers. On less politicized themes like ecology, economy or connectivity, towards the right end redline comes to converge with the blue line (positive projection), sometimes even going below the blue line. This trend is broadly congruent with the editorials in the national press: the Indian media believes in the greater possibility of a negotiated future in India-China relations over these issues than with regard to border, for instance.



Figure 4: Editorial Themes by Perception (2012-2014)



While discussing the data quantitatively, the authors have attempted to explore some important dimensions of the editorials on China and China-related themes found in two regional newspapers from two states in India's northeast bordering China. Since the above is a quantitative representation wherein we had to convert the information in the textual format into quantities, caution was taken to avoid or reduce subjectivity. The authors coded the textual material separately as well as jointly with the objective of attaining as much inter-subjectivity as possible. Additionally, as in the team's earlier study of the national newspapers, the qualitative analysis of the data was done independent of the quantitative work.

2

Qualitative Analysis

The following section evaluates the contents of the same 89 editorial pieces to understand dominant trends in the regional dailies of the Northeast, *The Assam Tribune* and *The Arunachal Times*. It will also identify transformations (if any) in the nature of the editorials between 2012 and 2014. The categories/themes—China as Rising Power, India-China Border, Ecology, Economy, Domestic and Connectivity—will remain constant throughout the study of the editorials; however, the sub-themes underlying the dominant theme often vary and overlap in content, where strict categorisation could not be made. It is worth mentioning here that due to limited data the authors have not applied the 'framework' structure (competitive, conflicting, emulative and co-operative) in the same way as was done in the study of national media. However, the same nuances are observable in the course of the analysis.

A. Emerging trends of Analytical Framework: *The Assam Tribune*

China as a rising power: The most dominant theme

China as a Rising Power' is the dominant theme in *The Assam Tribune*. Out of 58 editorials *The Assam Tribune* published 33 editorials on this theme with highest number of editorials published in 2013 and 2014 (See Table 3). This is similar to the trend observed in the study of national media, where 73 out of 167 editorials were published on the same. China's rising power is palpable by usage of phrases like “unquestioned trouble shooter of the region” or “increased influence around the globe” or “incredible economic and international stature”. An editorial ('The China Syndrome', 11 November 2012) claimed that no country can ignore China's emergence as a nation with incredible economic and political clout. However, China's 'increasing dominance' in the region has made her neighbours wary, indicating how China's growing power is perceived as threat by other countries in the region. Another editorial, ('Sabre Rattling', 12 March 2013) expressed concern whether China has 'lost hold' over North Korea.'

There were two important sub-themes that merit discussion: India-China geostrategic competition and China's expanding influence in India's neighbourhood.

- **India-China geostrategic competition**

The editorials under this sub-theme perceived China to be an important geo-political contender both in the region and outside. China is also perceived as an expansionist and aggressive power that is bent on increasing its strategic space through tactics like 'bullying',



'political maneuver' or 'outright muscle flexing'. The editorials therefore constantly urged India to play a more pro-active role to challenge China's aggressive tendencies. India-China strategic competition is manifested in use of phrases like 'jockeying for predominance in Asia', 'China has scored points over India in terms of global influence' or 'unfortunately what is India's loss is China's gain' ('Myanmar Beckons', 15 Nov 2012; 'Political Decision' 12 Nov 2013). Similar sentiment could be found in the editorials published in 2014, for instance one editorial ('Achieving Self Reliance', 16 June 2014) urged 'Indian navy to play a more pro-active role' and 'challenge Chinese aggressive intentions in Asian hotspots'.

In 2012 phrases like 'Chinese communist government's devious game', 'aspirations of becoming a leading player in Asia' or 'overbearing tactics' were used to describe Chinese conduct with Japan and other smaller neighbours over territorial conflict and South China sea dispute. There was also mention of Chinese 'big-brotherly' attitude towards Myanmar and N. Korea ('Troubled Waters', 17 September 2012; 'Significant visit', 8 September 2012; 'Myanmar beckons', 15 November 2012).

In 2013, some editorials used phrases like 'Chinese stick', or 'absolute control' and 'expansionist tactics' or 'Chinese annexation of Tibet' to indicate Chinese military bullying in the region and its policy of resource denial towards India ('Chinese Accusation', 10 October 2013). One editorial, 'Reforging Bonds', (31 May 2013) outlined the importance of India's relations with Japan, a country which had recently been a 'victim' of China's aggressive and expansionist tactics.

Similar usage of words was continued in 2014 and phrases like 'growing influence of China in the global stage' or 'carving out a strategic niche for itself' were used to describe Chinese geo-political advance in the region ('Going it Alone not relevant', 31 October 2014). Another editorial on 'Aggressive intentions' (13 May 2014) referred to Vietnam's lonely attempts of resisting "China's muscle flexing" in South China Sea.

As can be noticed from the above discussion, from 2012-2014 the use of words remained similar and the content repeatedly emphasised China's aggressive foreign policy which is inclined more towards showing power than cooperation. In this light the perception regarding China remained negative (see Table 7) and cautionary, inducing India to forge alliance with other countries who have also been victims of Chinese aggression.

- **China's expanding influence in India's neighbourhood.**

An important component of these editorials under this sub-theme is suspicion regarding China's intentions in India's immediate neighbourhood. The editorials used phrases like 'China has had more influence on Sri Lanka than India' or 'China-Pakistan nexus' or 'loss of real influence by India' over Nepal, Sri Lanka. For instance, the editorial entitled 'Security Provider' (28 May 2013) contended that 'aggressive Chinese foreign policy and political and diplomatic goof ups on India's part has ensured that countries upon which India has had real influence...are estranged today'. In 2014 similar statements were made by using phrases like China has 'slowly but surely exerted her influence over India's neighbourhood' or another editorial on 'Significant Visit' (14 November 2014) argued that Modi's recent visit to Nepal



has helped 'neutralizing the gains made by China in Nepal and retrieving the lost ground'. In this sub-theme as well, we see the perception to be negative which remained constant from 2012-2014.

It is worth-noting that the perception of 'aggressive' Chinese foreign policy remained the same in both the sub-themes. However, in the context of Chinese activities in the international arena the tone is cautionary which shifts to suspicion of Chinese intention in India's neighbourhood. The editorials under the theme 'China as a rising power' strike a particularly competitive tone since the editorials from both the sub-themes envisioned two countries to be involved in a zero-sum game for strategic and economic influence in the immediate neighborhood and in the international arena.

The above theme, 'China as a Rising Power', has more geopolitical connotation to it and the next theme, 'India-China Border', addresses one of the core issues of India-China relations.

India-China Border

Closely followed by the above theme, 'India-China Border' was projected as the second dominant theme. Out of 58 editorials, 9 editorials were published on India-China border issues. Publication on India-China border started from 2013 (See Table 4) when incursions at Ladakh sector were being reported.

In 2013 a persistent theme in the editorials is Chinese aggression denoted by phrases like 'Chinese intrusions into India's border' or 'aggressive Chinese expansionist tactics' and 'India's weak response to Chinese aggressive agenda' reflected in underdeveloped Arunachal and tremendous infrastructural expansion on Chinese side ('Unwarranted Delays', 18 November 2013; 'Frontier Face-Off", 25 April 2013). In 2013, while editorials described Chinese nature of attack, in 2014 the focus shifted to Chinese and Indian attitude towards the border. In 2014 editorials were published using phrases like 'China's grumbling habit' and 'India's feeble rumbling' ('Pleasant Surprise', 20 October 2014). One editorial on 'Look North East' (17 September 2014) reminded India of the 'thrashing' it received in the hands of Chinese army in 1962 and warned that this incident should not be repeated. The editorials also contended that Chinese attitude remains contradictory and ambiguous, which has prevented any meaningful dialogue between the two. For instance, an editorial published in 2014 described China's behaviour along the border to be 'mercurial' in nature. ('Confidence Building', 20 September 2014)

The extent of persistent suspicion about Chinese intention along the border is also worth discussing, because a number of editorials mentioned 1962 war, as a reminder of China's aggressive and unilateral intentions. Although in 2012 no editorials were published exclusively on India-China border but the reflections of 1962 border conflict were found in some editorials. For instance, some editorials ('Significant visit', 8 Sept 2012; 'Troubled waters', 17 September 2012) referred to the Chinese 'thrashing' of Indian army in 1962 and 'Chinese inexplicable assault on India' in 1962 as old evidence of its current aggressive



behaviour. In 2013, the editorial entitled 'Enhanced Defense', (21 Nov 2013) argued that India should immediately modernise its border forces 'if the humiliation of 1962 is not to be repeated'.

Therefore, the theme 'India-China border' primarily demonstrates a conflicting tone and during 2013-14, media's perception of China over border issues remained negative with highest number of negative editorials published in 2013 (See Table 6). However, the editorials in both 2013 and 2014 chose to talk about incursions at Daulet Beg Oldi in western sector and there was no mention of border incursion at Chaglagam, Aruanchal Pradesh. On the contrary few editorials mention the need of upgrading infrastructure in the North East region of India.

If the above theme had a military/political component in its content, the next theme concerning 'India-China bilateral trade' is more politico-economic in its approach and has editorials from sub-theme like connectivity. It is noteworthy that the editorials under this segment also described China as a 'Rising Power'.

Economy

Out of 58 editorials, four were published under the theme 'Economy' and the publication started with two editorials in 2013 remaining constant through 2014 (See Table 4)

This theme emphasised a peaceful and cooperative approach towards China, promulgating 'maturity of bi-lateral ties', 'amicable settlement of disputes' and 'the need to maintain peace and foster economic development' ('Change in China', 11 March 2012; 'Five Petals', 3 April 2012); 'Chinese Puzzle', 9 June 2012)

In 2013, issues of close economic cooperation, confidence building measures, and diplomatic dialogue gained prominence. The editorials urged 'symbiotic relationship', 'greater internal economic development', and 'Re-opening of Stilwell Road for improved road links between India and China'. ('Business Trip', 22 May 2013; 'Looking East', 6 June 2013; 'Re-Opening Stilwell Road', 12 November 2013). One editorial on 'Indo-China trade' (27 May 2013) argued that the sooner the Stilwell Road is re-opened, the better it will be for not only India and China but also South East Asian countries. In 2014, suggestions for re-opening Stilwell Road gained prominence. Three editorials ('Re-Opening Stilwell Road', 16 March 2014; 'Silk Road Initiative', 12 April 2014; 'Indo-China Trade Link', 7 August 2014) called for opening of the border trade route for better people-to-people ties.

Editorials under this theme were seen to be positive in their perception of China in the interest of economic cooperation. Here diplomatic and political links were stressed upon for better economic relations. Thus, these editorials demonstrate a visibly more cooperative approach. Indeed, suggestions for close economic cooperation with China were made in 2013 even during heights of border tensions. This trend continued in 2014 as well. Thus, attempts were made to balance the negativity in perception with positive hopes of economic cooperation in both 2013 and 2014.



Ecology

Out of 58 editorials, 7 were published under the theme ecology with highest number of editorials published in 2013 (3). (See Table 4)

Brahmaputra water sharing emerged as the most important sub-theme with four editorials addressing this sub-theme. It is also interesting to note that the highest number of publication under this segment was made in 2013 and the editorials addressing this sub-theme appeared to be highly apprehensive regarding Chinese intentions.

- **Brahmaputra water sharing dispute:**

It is important to mention that some editorials under the theme of ecology directly referred to the Brahmaputra water sharing dispute. The research team also found editorials outside this theme referring to the water sharing dispute—these are included in the analysis of this sub-theme.

The editorials under this sub-theme identified Brahmaputra river water sharing dispute as a “nagging problem” between India and China. Throughout the three-year period, the editorials repeatedly urged the Government of India to take up the issue of construction of dams in the upper stream with the Chinese government. The editorials warned that China's construction of dams in the upper stream of Brahmaputra will negatively impact the flow of water downstream. ('Change in China', 11 March 2012; 'Chinese Accusation', 10 October 2013; 'Coerced Cordiality', 10 June 2014). The editorials perceived China to be hostile regarding the water sharing dispute, which is apparent in the use of phrases like “overbearing tactics”, or “China is no respecter of guideline”. Some editorials pointed towards China's exploitative mindset by using phrases like “China's clandestine diversion of water” or “exploit the river as they wish” and argued China to be a powerful neighbour that India is reluctant to “rub in a wrong way”. ('Brahmaputra Peril', 3 March 2012; 'China's Refusal', 19 April 2013; 'Dams in Tibet', 27 November 2014).

The editorials under the theme 'Ecology' projected a clash of interest between India and China. Therefore, these editorials were negatively poised towards China, arguing that it China is likely to leverage its powerful position in negotiations over Brahmaputra waters.

Apart from these themes, the other issues discussed in the editorials related to China's domestic concerns. These editorials appreciated China's “technological infrastructure and the country's leadership in maintaining its international stand”. ('Trailing China', 5 January, 2012; 'Respect in Shame'; 30 May 2013). Both these editorials implied that the Indian state can emulate Chinese strategies of national and technological progress.

In 2014 there were two editorials addressing Chinese domestic issues which drew attention to alarming proportions of corruption level in China and its continued suppression of the civil rights movement in Hong Kong ('Confronting reality', 16 July 2014; 'Not the end', 16 Dec 2014)



It is interesting to note that no editorials that suggested India to emulate China were published in 2014, pertaining to intense border tensions in 2013. A positive picture of China in domestic issues was not projected and any suggestions for cooperation emerged only in 2014, with regard to the economic sector.

B. Emerging trends in analytical framework: *The Arunachal Times*

India-China Border: The most dominant theme

As shown in Table 3, *The Arunachal Times* had the highest number of editorials published on the India-China border issues. Out of 31 editorials, 22 were on India-China border, with the highest number in 2014 (See Table 4). This can be gleaned as a repercussion of the 2013 incursions into the Arunachal sector, and the continuing incursions into the Ladakh sector in 2014. In contrast, in *The Assam Tribune*, the theme 'China as a Rising Power' dominated the editorials in both 2013 and 2014. Further, in contrast to *The Assam Tribune* that talks about general India-China bilateral trade, Arunachal Times is more focused on border trade.

- **Border incursions**

Most of the editorials under this sub-theme perceived China to be the aggressor in border issues. However, few editorials used the word “aggression” or “hostility” and instead described China's conduct by using words like “incursion” or “China's expansionist mindset”, ('Things to Change', 18 November 2014; 'India sends strong message', 10 September 2014). These editorials also called for strong action against regular Chinese incursions.

Publications on India-China border incursions started from 2013 (See Table 4). A consistent component in the editorials had been the threat perception vis-à-vis China. Editorials used phrases like “shaken the nerve of New Delhi” or “sends chilling warning” to New Delhi or “incursion inside Arunachal territory by Chinese army had given heartache to many citizens”. ('Chinese incursion in Chaglagam is a wakeup call', 2 August 2013; 'Indo-China relations get better', 26 October 2013; 'Beijing's Old Ploy', 2 November 2013). Some editorials also opined that the lack of border infrastructure can turn into a security threat in the long run. ('Chinese incursion in Chaglagam is a wakeup call', 22 August 2013; 'Don't Play with Fire', 24 December 2013).

In 2014 too, China continued to be portrayed as an aggressor. However, that year, the editorials emphasised China's double standard and adopted a more confrontational attitude. One editorial cited the issue of stapled visas, arguing that despite China's claims of cooperating with India, it continues to issue stapled visas to Arunachal citizens. Another editorial accused China of engaging in “psychological war against India” ('Bizzare Justification', 11 June 2014; 'China does it again', 16 September 2014). Some editorials also applauded the current leadership for making “strong statements” against China, contrasting it with the “lackadaisical attitude” of the previous UPA government. ('Stapled visa Row a



forgotten issue', 20 January 2014; 'Modi trying to send a strong message', 3 September 2014; 'Things to Change', 18 November 2014). Three editorials also emphasised developing border infrastructure ('Is China spreading wing in NE states', 14 February 2014; 'Focus on McMahon Line', 12 June 2014; 'Things to Change', 18 November 2014). As can be understood from the use of these words, the editorials had a conflictual tone and were negative in their perception of China.

- **Border Trade**

The editorials sounded hopeful regarding improvement in relations between the two neighbours. An important feature in many of the editorials was the recommendation of border trade through Arunachal Pradesh. These editorials contended that there are opportunities of significant amount of border trade through Arunachal Pradesh, observing that this border trade will not only boost Arunachal economy by providing employment but has the potential to serve as a confidence-building measure. The editorial, 'International Border cannot be redrawn' (9 November 2013) opined that “places like Kibitho and Anjaw district and Bumla pass at Tawang can become major hub for business activity”.

Similar sentiments for border trade were found in 2014 as well ('Open Arunachal Border for Trade purposes', 2 September 2014; 'Relation with neighbours should be improved', 1 April 2014). One editorial argued that the two neighbours should never allow the border dispute to spiral out of hand: “Both India and China need to exhibit some maturity to solve boundary dispute amicably. The two nuclear armed neighbours should avoid having tense standoff” ('Resolve Issue Peacefully' 22 April 2014).

While dealing with this sub-theme, it is clear that the perception was different from that projected under the border dispute theme. The perception of China was positive regarding border trade, in the context of potential cooperation.

Therefore, within this theme of India-China border, both streaks of conflictual and cooperative trends could be found. On the issue of border dispute, the editorials took a conflictual stand, arguing China to be a security threat. On the other hand, editorials addressing border trade envisioned China as a potential economic partner. It is worth noting that specific suggestions of strengthening border trade appeared in both 2013 and 2014 in the face of border incursion at two different sectors. This leads the authors to conclude that a positive angle through border trade is always kept to dilute the scepticism over border tensions.

As mentioned at the outset, the nuances of framework will be discussed in the course of this study.

China as a Rising Power:

In *The Arunachal Times*, 'China as a rising power' was the theme of two out of 58 editorials. (See Table 3). These editorial recognised China's rising power by mentioning it as an



important country in other themes like economy and ecology. Therefore, in this analysis, the authors have clubbed the editorials according to the prominent arguments made.

As stated earlier, some editorials directly referred to China's increasing power and there were other editorials from themes like economy or ecology implicitly referring to China's rising power. These editorials pointed towards China's lead in economic growth, resource utilisation efficiency, material consumption, and provision for development aid. However, the newspapers covered in this study remained unfavourable to China's growth due to the economic/strategic competition it poses to India and the impact it has upon environment. In 2012, two editorials pointed out China's lead in rice production and its growing energy consumption, as an indicator of its rising power ('Food Security and Asia', 28 April 2012; 'India's Carbon emission much less than US China', 4 December 2012). In 2013 an editorial on 'Aid for Development' (24 May 2013) described the nature of financial aid given by India to Sri Lanka and compared the aid figures between India and China. The comparison with China was indicative of China's expanding influence in India's immediate neighbourhood, which a posed a strategic threat to India. In 2014, one editorial, 'China in no mood to relent' (1 December 2014) argued that China stands as a major obstacle for foreign investments in Arunachal Pradesh. However, some editorials also voiced their concerns regarding the impact of China's growth on environment. The editorial published in 2012 on 'India's carbon emission much less than US, China' (4 December 2012) claimed China to be major carbon emitter. Another editorial published in 2013 on 'China ahead in material consumption'(9 September 2013) quoted a report by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) that claimed that current rates of consumption in China are likely to cause environmental pressure. It is noteworthy that under this theme, the editorials exhibited a competitive tone towards China and were negative in their orientation of China.

Grey areas with conflictual and cooperative tone overlapping

Apart from the abovementioned themes and their overall tones, there are some editorials dealing with border-related issues have overlapping conflictual and cooperative tones. The editorial, 'PM embarks on China tour' (23 October 2013) expressed doubt whether the Indian PM's visit will have any positive impact on India-China relations in the wake of "recent unsavour incidents" such as issuing of Chinese stapled visas, and border incursions at Chaglagam and Anjaw district. However, the editorial also voiced the demand of Arunachalee citizens for opening border trade with China to let people of the two countries develop business relations.

Two regional dailies: Emphasis on two different issues

It is evident from the above discussion that the two regional newspapers emphasised upon two different issues with regard to China.

- *The Arunachal Times*, in terms of editorial frequency and editorial content, gave overwhelming emphasis upon India-China border and border-related issues. Taken collectively, the editorials enunciated primarily upon three aspects: a) repeated



border incursion by China at Chaglam and Anjaw districts; b) improvement of border infrastructure; and c) initiation of border trade. *The Assam Tribune*, on the other hand, had given relatively less importance to border incursions and chose to dwell on incursions primarily at the Ladakh sector.

- Another important difference that emerged from the researchers' reading was that *The Assam Tribune* had not only engaged more with the aspects related to China's rising power but also emphasised upon its likely consequences on the India-China Brahmaputra water sharing dispute. It is interesting to note that the issue of water-sharing dispute had been completely absent in *The Arunachal Times'* editorials.
- Unlike *The Arunachal Times* that addressed the border issue from three different perspectives, the line of narrative remained constant in *The Assam Tribune*, i.e., Chinese traditional aversion to international norms and a necessity on India's part to press more upon this issue.
- By observing these two different trends of reporting, it can be argued that *The Arunachal Times* being published from a border state and keeping the readership in mind, chose to crown upon border incursions. Likewise, *The Assam Tribune* sought to focus more on the Brahmaputra water-sharing dispute since the river is closely linked to livelihood in Assam.

3

Conclusion

This study follows an earlier report on the editorials in the national media on the same issue. Therefore the research team has had the advantage of comparing the present study with the earlier one.

The first thing that needs to be pointed out is that regional perception, as projected by these two newspapers of the two states from the bordering region in India's Northeast, differs sharply from the national-level perception. Perception from the bordering areas is distinctly more negative and has become increasingly so over the years compared to the perception projected by newspapers published from the national capital region. In terms of themes emphasised, there is also a difference between them. While national newspapers show sensitivity to the need for improving India-China relations through greater connectivity and more collaboration on economic and environmental issues, there was no such echo in the regional newspapers' editorial positions.

Second, it is noteworthy that not only the national and the regional perceptions differ; even this regional perception is internally fragmented: the two northeastern states differ in terms of importance given to the different themes as well as in terms of the intensity with which they project China negatively or positively. Therefore, the specific locale and its problems is related to the perception of China, and Arunachalee and Assamese perceptions as seen through *The Arunachal Times* and *The Assam Tribune* are different.

Third, the editorials in the regional newspapers certainly convey the idea that even though they represent two states from the bordering areas with historical and contemporary problems with China, they are not overwhelmed by the presence of a globally muscle-flexing China. Thus the degree of attention paid to China by *The Assam Tribune* and *The Arunachal Times* is in the neighbourhood of what the national newspapers have done: the former exceeds the degree of attention paid by *The Indian Express* (4.84 being the highest mean score among the national ones) by a small margin while the latter equals the score of *The Hindu*. The regional press does not think that they need to be overly concerned with China even though they happen to be published from the bordering regions.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that broadly, the regional media's views overlap with the national media. Thus, both the national and the regional media think it is appropriate to pay more attention to themes of China as a rising power and the border issue, among all the other themes or issues.



Policy recommendations

- Based on quantitative and qualitative readings of the editorials, this study reveals that regional newspapers are more prone to assess India-China relations through the lens of regional issues going beyond the stereotypical notion of national security. In the selected regional dailies the India-China border is not always portrayed as a zone of conflict but redefined as a zone of opportunity as well. Against this backdrop, it is important to understand the differences of perception from peripheries in terms of future policy direction for India with regard to China.
- It is clear that the regional media looks at border trade with China as an opportunity and a possibility. The central government needs to be more sensitive to this and needs to promote border trade without jeopardising either security or identity.
- Continued years of neglect and isolation in these border areas have created a sense of marginalisation and insecurity in these bordering regions. Therefore, there is an urgent need on the part of Indian government to be more responsive to the needs of the region. Development of infrastructure and improved connectivity with the states in the border regions demand far more attention than has been paid so far.



20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-43520020, 30220020. Fax : +91-11-43520003, 23210773
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org