Security perception is a state actor's strategic culture or ideas about security. It basically involves three aspects, i.e., threat perception, types of security, and approaches to security. Threat perception is the appraisal and judgment of the status or condition of security. Types of security are the sectors or dimensions of security classified by the character of threats. When nations categorise their own security, they generally establish an order of priority at the same time. Approaches to security are the methods or ways taken by a state in dealing with its security issues to accomplish or preserve its national security. Based on Wendt's Constructivism, which postulates that ideas matter more than interest and power in terms of their effects on international politics, the objective of this thesis has been to examine the kind of role played by security perception in the transformation of China-India relations since the end of the Cold War.

According to Wendt, state actors and the international system are mutually constituted. The evolution of international strategic culture thereby has an effect on the respective security perceptions of China and India, and vice versa. Since the end of the Cold War, the international strategic culture has been undergoing a major change, namely, from the Cold War mindset to the post-Cold War new security perspective. The first aspect of change pertains to the source of threat. The Cold War mindset postulates that capability outweighs intention in the construction of threat. Therefore, the major threat to a nation's security is derived from the military superiority of its opponent. The new security perspective assumes that intention is far more important than capability. States are not born aggressive. Peace among the
major powers since the end of the Cold War has demonstrated that it is primarily
with the intention that a nation’s military capability constitutes a threat to others. The
second aspect lies in the categorisation and prioritisation of security. The Cold War
mindset takes the military and political characters of security for granted. It believes
that military threats are always at the core of nations’ security consideration. The
threat facing a nation will be greater if its opponent enjoys a divergent ideology. The
new security perspective extends the dimension of security from military and
political to economic and other non-traditional aspects. In the post-Cold War era,
many countries are convinced that military capability should be underpinned by
economic strength. Therefore, they see economic security as important as military
security. Thirdly, nations with the Cold War mindset rely on self-help security and
alliance security to preserve their national security. However, the new security
perspective advocates common security, cooperative security and comprehensive
security, which ensure a nation’s security by growing mutual trust and common
interests through cooperation.

In a period when the transformation of the international strategic culture is still in
transition, each country’s security perception is influenced by both the Cold War
mindset and the new security perspective, though to a different extent. As a result,
some countries incline to the new security perspective, some continue to cling to the
Cold War mindset, while others stay in between. As far as China and India are
concerned, the post-Cold War era has witnessed major changes in their respective
security perceptions.

On the part of China, there has been a shift from the Cold War mindset to the new
security perspective. First of all, since the end of the Cold War, China has adjusted
the parameter by which it defined threat. During Mao’s era, China considered that
the imbalance of military power and ideological confrontation among nations were
major sources of threat. As a newly liberated and weak country, the China of this period had been staying in a shadow of an imminent Third World War as well as a possible military invasion by the superpowers, i.e., the United States in 1950s, both United States and the Soviet Union in 1960s, and the Soviet Union in 1970s. Although in the early 1980s Deng started to downplay the role of the imbalance of military power in constructing threat, he had to keep an eye on the political and ideological pressures on China by the Western countries at that time. He warned against the threat of “a third world war without gunsmoke” launched by the Western countries to promote “peaceful evolution” in the socialist countries. In light of the fact that the post-Cold War competition among nations is characterised by comprehensive national strength rather than military power alone, China attributes its sense of insecurity mainly to its backward economy. Economic security thereby made a formal appearance in China’s national security consideration after the Cold War.

Secondly, China in the Cold War took the military and political characters of security for granted. It was also convinced that military security preceded political security in importance all the time. After the Cold War, however, China started to seek comprehensive national security, including economic security, military security, political security and non-traditional security which involves issues like terrorism, transnational crimes, environmental degradation, drug trafficking and epidemics. In the first decade of the post-Cold War era, when China set economic development as the central task of the whole country and required all other work, including national defence, to be subordinated to and serve this strategic objective, it accorded priority to economic security. When the urgency of defending China’s territorial integrity has mounted due to the rising risk of “Taiwan Independence” since the beginning of the new century, China has upgraded military security to the same level as economic security.
Thirdly, China has replaced alliance security with common security in defending its security interests. During Mao’s era, China adopted alliance security along with self-help security as the major approaches to security. On the one hand, China gave the army the priority in access to the limited resources China had at that time in order to build a strong army including the establishment of its own nuclear arsenal. On the other hand, China forged alliances with the two superpowers at different periods, as well as exploring a moral alignment with the Third World countries. In 1982, Deng Xiaoping started to drop alliance security and tried to safeguard its national security through economic cooperation and international security dialogue. Since the end of the Cold War, in spite of China’s insistence on “active defense” to basically safeguard its territorial security, this trend has been reinforced particularly in the emphasis that the PRC gives to common security. Believing that common interests and good political relationships can play a more effective role in addressing its security problems, China has developed strategic partnerships with all major powers and good-neighbourly relations with surrounding countries.

As far as India is concerned, much like the development with regard to China since the end of the Cold War, India’s security perception has also undergone a great change. First of all, India has broadened the definition of threat. During the Cold War, the successive Indian leaders looked at the threats facing India through a narrow prism of purely military and political contexts. India attributed its sense of insecurity to its inferiority in national power, especially in military strength. Though it did not see any prospect of direct military invasion by the superpowers, India had been haunted by a sense of being encircled for decades, especially since 1962. It believed that the two-front threat was enhanced by the Sino-Pak collaboration since the mid-1960s; the Sino-US alliance in the 1970s and 1980s had a strategic bearing on the India-China disputes while the smaller regional states tried to counterbalance...
India by developing military cooperation with the major powers. After the Cold War, the economic crisis made India realise the implications of economic strength for its national security. In the mid-1990s, it also started to pay attention to other non-traditional problems like drug-trafficking, terrorism and organised crime.

Secondly, India has reorganised its security structure. Like China and many other countries in the world, India in the Cold War assumed that national security had only military and political dimensions. While Nehru and Rajiv Gandhi attached equal importance to military and political security, Indira Gandhi obviously accorded greater importance to military security. After the Cold War, India gradually accepted that national security should be viewed as a comprehensive issue encompassing military, political, economic and other non-traditional elements. Unlike China, India has never downgraded the significance of military and political security, but emphasised that more attention should be paid to economic security in the contemporary world.

Thirdly, some changes have occurred in terms of India’s approaches to security. During the greater part of the Cold War, India, just like Mao’s China, was heavily dependent on alliance security and self-help security to safeguard its national security. While attaching great importance to its own military build-up including the explosion of a nuclear device in 1974, India viewed its quasi-military alliance with the Soviet Union since the early 1970s as a major provider of security. After the Cold War, however, India started to adopt comprehensive approaches to security. Alliance security has been replaced with new partnership, security dialogue and cooperation, and economic diplomacy, which could be attributed to common security, cooperative security or comprehensive security. By emphasising military and technological self-reliance, India still regards self-help security as a significant approach to security for India in the post-Cold War era. This has been especially manifested by
India’s decision to go nuclear in defiance of the strong international opposition.

The mutual perceptions of China and India have been the consequence of their respective security perceptions. These perceptions have determined their respective policies toward each other, and have consequently shaped their overall relationship.

As history has witnessed, for most part of the Cold War era, China and India saw and dealt with each other through the prism of the Cold War mindset; and hence underwent a three-decade-long "cold" relationship. The China-India "honeymoon" around the mid-1950s emerged at a time when they attempted to keep aloof from the then prevalent international strategic culture. Obviously, it was the determination of Nehru and Mao to befriend each other that had led the bilateral relationship to such a height as "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai". As China and India got further involved into the Cold War to different extents, however, the mutual distrust inherent in their respective security perceptions gained momentum with the passage of time. Since both Nehru’s India and Mao’s China took each other’s expansive nature for granted, they were very sensitive to any change of their power relations. China’s gain in Bandung and military action in Tibet appeared to be alarms for Nehru; Nehru’s sympathy for the Tibet rebellion, claim to the British legacy of the Sino-Indian border and intimacy with Khrushev were in turn a series of warnings for Mao. The mutual distrust led to mutual misperceptions, culminating in the armed conflict of 1962.

From 1962 onwards, China and India formally dubbed each other as threats or adversaries. For China, the real threats derived from India’s quasi-military alliance with the Soviet Union, China’s major enemy at that time, as well as the ideological difference between China and India. For India, which was haunted by the humiliation of its defeat in the 1962 war, China’s proximity to Pakistan, its later
alliance with the United States, and its pursuit of nuclear weapons and missile capacities, were all interpreted as India-directed. In fact, the hostility between China and India was formally fixed in the structure of Cold War confrontation since 1970s, with the US-China-Pak strategic collaboration on one side and the Soviet-Indian alliance on the other.

It was Deng Xiaoping who brought some light at the end of the China-India relations tunnel. In 1982, when he was determined to keep aloof from the Cold War and put China’s focus on its economic development, Deng Xiaoping suggested that the two countries should treat each other not as threats but close neighbours and friends, and that they could normalise their relations without predicking the process on the resolution of their boundary dispute. India accepted this proposal only by late 1988 when Rajiv Gandhi made some adjustments in India’s security consideration according to the changes in the international situation. Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to Beijing in December 1988 broke the impasse of the process of normalisation between the two countries and led China-India relations into a new page of increasingly positive interaction.

As their respective security perceptions have transformed in general since the end of the Cold War, China and India have looked at each other more and more through the new security perspective. China, guided by the “new security concept” which lays stress on comprehensive national power and common security, believed that a new-type partnership with India is in its fundamental interests. With the good-neighbourly policy becoming an important approach to security, even the Indian 1998 nuclear tests did not change this perspective. Although China started to accord equal priority to economic security and military security in 2002, the rising threat in the east has consolidated its determination to strengthen peace and stability in the other directions including the west. Therefore, in recent years, China has
started to seek a strategic partnership with India.

In the early 1990s, India, on its part was convinced that an “inward looking” China did not have an intention to threaten India. A good working relationship with China would serve the interests of the similarly “inward looking” India at that time. As it started to take a more comprehensive security perception in the mid-1990s, India perceived more opportunities than challenges in its relations with China. It visualised a constructive cooperation with China, both at the bilateral level and on the multilateral fora. Although some Indian top leaders continued to warn against the “China threat” in 1998, it was not a manifestation of a return to the negative China perspective of the Cold War period. Rather, it was more of a tactical attempt to justify India’s nuclear tests. As history has witnessed, shortly after the Pokhran II, the Vajpayee government once again reiterated India’s commitment to the development of friendly, cooperative, good neighbourly and mutually beneficial relationship with China. Entering the 21st century, India regards China as a partner rather than an adversary. Although there are still some old security concerns regarding China, like China’s military buildup and its military relations with Pakistan, India is adopting approaches beyond military confrontation to solving these outstanding differences with China.

Treating each other as new partners rather than adversaries and acknowledging the need for comprehensive approaches to national security, both China and India have accordingly adjusted their respective policies toward each other since the end of the Cold War. Irrespective of their specific expectations from this relationship, both countries converged on the understanding that a stable and cooperative relationship between them would best serve their respective national interests in the post-Cold War era. This meant that they would maximise their own interests only within the framework of friendship, and that on occasion, they would even accommodate their
requirements to the concerns of the other. China’s attitude toward the Indo-Pak tensions and India’s stance on the Tibetan issue can be cited as such examples.

Not everybody is satisfied with the pace of the development of China-India relations, but no one can deny that this relationship has experienced an impressive transformation, from normalization to partnership, since 1991. The last decade of the 20th century witnessed the two countries emerging from their three-decade cold relationship and replacing it with a normal one. In spite of the brief hiatus after Pokhran II, the inability of the Indian nuclear tests to derail the China-India relations has demonstrated the degree of maturity this relationship had reached on the one hand. On the other, it also represents a strong affirmation of this research’s major hypothesis that perceptions construct relations. If there were no perception changes in China or India, there would be no change of their relationship, and vice versa. Walking out of the shadow of India’s nuclear tests, China-India relations entered a new stage of comprehensive cooperation and marched ahead along the track of “constructive and cooperative partnership”. This trend has been consolidated by the new boom in high-level visits (including Vajpayee’s 2003 visit to China, Wen Jiabao’s 2005 visit and Hu Jintao’s 2006 visit to India), new consensus on the orientation of this relationship, new progress in border talks (including the creation of the Special Representatives mechanism and the 2005 Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question), new efforts in terms of trust building, and new achievements in the field of economic cooperation which have raised the bilateral trade volume to US$ 24.9 billion in 2006.

Since perceptions construct relations, the future of China-India relations will basically depend on the evolution of their respective security perceptions and their mutual perceptions thereby. Wendt points out, there is an interaction between state
actors and international system. Since the international system$^\text{6}$ is still in a transition period, the respective security perceptions of China and India will be continually affected by the evolution of international strategic culture. Meanwhile, as the two most important nations in the world of the 21st century, both China and India can play a significant role in the construction of the new international system. Obviously, an international system characterised by cooperation and win-win games will better serve the interests of China and India which are rising simultaneously.

$^6$ It needs to be emphasised here that, for constructivists, the structure of the international system is a "distribution of ideas" rather than a "distribution of power".