China and India Online. Information Technology Politics and Diplomacy in the World's Two Largest Nations

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One of the common frustrations of those of us interested, like the staff of the Berglund Center for Internet Studies, in the broader impact of the Internet is the lack of materials which adequately incorporate an understanding of the technological issues within wider political, social, or economic contexts. This lack is particularly clear as one leaves the comfortable boundaries of American virtual space. China and India Online should be welcomed by anyone wishing to know how other nations are responding to the Internet and the host of issues its expansion inevitably raises.

And China and India are not just any nations, but the world’s two largest ones. With an understanding of the significance of the Internet for China and India, and, of course, the United States, one can begin to grasp the totality of the changes facing the world. Marcus Franda has both the experience and the education to approach this daunting topic. He has significant experience in both China and India, and draws upon a wealth of connections with international organizations and important individuals across the world. At present he teaches in Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, which operates one of the world’s largest programs in international education. He is also a Research Associate at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management.

This is an extremely dense and complex work. We begin with the general framework of the analysis, which is what can best be called “international policy regimes.” These are regimes as created by transnational policies, usually created and administered by international organizations,
rather than “regime” as recently popularized by Operation Iraqi Freedom [1]. Globalization is proceeding, Franda notes, through three interrelated types of linkages:

- Trade and investment flows
- Multinational enterprises
- International policy regimes (p. 5)

Franda’s perspective is that there has emerged a shaky but adequate “international policy regime” for governing the development of the Internet. This regime has three spheres:

- Technical operational standards and principles
- Management and governance arrangements
- Commercial and legal frameworks (p. 7-8)

There is, however, a potential problem in this policy regime as it extends from the core area where the Internet itself and the accompanying policy regime developed historically, principally the United States and Europe. Many nations, including most especially India and China, are inclined to see the regime as in some senses a tool for extending American global economic and political influence [2].

India and China both recognize, however, the economic and political importance of information technology. Each aspires to be at least a regional power if not a superpower, and consequently must take the Internet very seriously indeed. This work then, centers on the manner in which both India and China have responded to the three spheres of the Internet Policy Regime listed above.

Each wishes, out of its own concerns, to accept such conditions as it views as positive or at least neutral, while rejecting negative ones. For China, the overwhelming concern is the monopoly of the Communist state over the national and international flow of information. For India, it is fears about a new sort of informational neocolonialism that will not only adversely impact Indian culture, but may shoulder aside domestic industries and companies as well.

Neither one of these countries, however, wants to totally disrupt this regime, though they may want to change it in significant ways and ignore it in others. This book, then, is an analysis of both technical issues and international relations. It could be read profitably by anyone wishing to understand the Internet. The book is probably best utilized in an advanced course if one is an educator looking for a book to update one’s curriculum in International Affairs, though it could be used with caution at an introductory level. Anyone involved in international business or international policy as either affects India or China should read China and India Online.

One of the valuable aspects of this work is an extensive set of notes and bibliography.

Footnotes:

Franda’s understanding of Globalization fits nicely into those earlier analyses. It is my own belief that the recent events in Iraq have totally altered the course of globalization, a topic best suitable for future editorials.

This concern is not easily dismissed. See Jeffrey Barlow, “American Power, Globalism, and the Internet in Interface, March 2002 at: http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2002/03/editorial.php

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