



Institute of Chinese Studies - Ananta Centre, Delhi

In collaboration with

Symbiosis School of International Studies (SSIS), Pune

Whither China? Politics, Economy, Society and Education

Symposium Proceedings

Session I: China: Economy and Politics

Moderator: *Amb. Kishan Rana*, Honorary Fellow at Institute of Chinese Studies

Presenters: *Professor Alka Acharya*, Director and Senior Fellow at Institute of Chinese Studies, *Mr. Sridhar Venkiteshwaran*, Executive Director, Avalon Consulting and OC&C Strategy Consultants, *Professor Wenjuan Zhang*, Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean for International Collaborations of Jindal Global Law School

- **China in World Politics**

Professor Alka Acharya, Director and Senior Fellow at Institute of Chinese Studies

The presentation focussed on the need to examine the questions that abound with regard to China's meteoric rise, its growing global dominance and, what some believe, its impending collapse. At the global level, the question that comes up frequently is whether China will be a reactionary power or a responsible one? It is also widely believed that China would adopt a revisionist policy based on its enormous political, military and economic capability. These questions and the assumptions on which most of these arguments are based, must be carefully examined in a broader context to arrive at an accurate assessment. Whether China is going to be a rational actor or a realist power is up for debate.

The interconnectedness and interdependence of countries at the global level, limit or restrict the ability any country to adopt an entirely aggressive stance. China's preparedness for leadership and its acceptance by the international community are also major topics of discussion and conjecture. Significant concerns are also being generated over China's rise with regard to climate change and security-related issues. However, China demonstrates both assertive power and capability to be an agenda setter – both at the regional and global level.

While China's resurgence would raise many issues of concern in India-China relations, the huge trade deficit between them could potentially cause an imbalance in the relations between the two countries. It is therefore extremely important to revive and broaden the economic and commercial dimensions which could be a source of dynamism in the bilateral ties. The ongoing tensions between the two countries, fostered by a sense of distrust, does not augur well for their overall relationship. China's role in South Asia is on the rise and this could be a matter of concern for India. We should focus on the opportunities, even as we remain alert to the challenges if we want to gain from this relationship.

- **The Chinese Economy**

Mr. Sridhar Venkiteshwaran, Executive Director, Avalon Consulting and OC&C Strategy Consultants

China is a 11-trillion dollar economy, which is five times the size of India. Every year, China adds 700 billion dollars to its economy, which is twice that of the United States of

America and seven times that of India. Until 2007, exports and investment led the Chinese growth-story. However, after the 2008 global economic crisis, China lost 20 million jobs, which prompted the Chinese Government to announce a stimulus package as an attempt to minimize the impact of the global financial crisis. China has, since, overtaken Germany as the largest exporter in the world and is the largest trade partner of 75 countries. This data is important especially when China is compared to India; it shows the gap that exists between the two countries. It is to be noted that the nature of exports from China has effected a transition to high-value products.

Today, China faces the challenge that Japan faced - a period of stagnation and lower growth rates. To combat this, China hopes to rebalance from an export-led economy to a consumption-based one. However China is facing some serious concerns. Its key strength, its large forex reserves, has witnessed a sharp fall in recent years from 4 trillion dollars to 3.2 trillion dollars. The other major concern is that China's outbound investment is greater than its inbound investment. Over the next couple of years it is expected that borrowings of provincial governments for infrastructure development might decrease thus increasing outbound investment. China's yuan is a reserved currency and hence, ease of doing business might increase considerably. There is an expectation that China will see a significant rise in high value markets and is could become the highest value market for robots. Overall, a growth rate of 5.5-6% is expected.

India faces a huge trade deficit with respect to China which it needs to address to achieve some form of trade balance. India is on the cusp of a big economic leap and has an opportunity to develop its manufacturing sector with the help of Chinese capital.

- **How China Sees the World**

Professor Wenjuan Zhang, Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean for International Collaborations of Jindal Global Law School

Contemporary China could be understood through the following three prisms.

The development of staunch nationalism in China could be explained using the historical prism. China has undergone violence and upheavals since the Opium Wars (1839-1860), which have had a long-lasting effect on Chinese psychology. As a nation and people, the Chinese are always in a state of preparedness and have resolved to never be a victim of any aggression again. This explains the defensive psychology of the Chinese which often translates into how China perceives the world and its own policies.

Who drives China? The Communist Party, its government or its businesses? This question could be answered using the cultural prism. The primary mover of China is the Communist Party which follows a pragmatic approach and focuses primarily on policy-making. The Party look at everything and every action in terms of policy. The fact that China's outbound investment is greater than its inbound investment shows that globalisation has had a great influence in China and therefore, it is only appropriate to view the country in its entirety, within a multidimensional framework and not through the Party alone.

The third prism through which any country should be understood is, in my personal experience, through the lens of Chinese scholars rather than only through the writings of western scholars or the media. Without China's own perspective, any view on China will remain incomplete.

Session II: China: Society and Education

Moderator: *Dr. John Kurien*, Director Emeritus, Centre for Learning Resources, Pune

Presenters: *Mr. Ravi Bhoothalingam*, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies and Founder and Chairman of Manas Advisory, *Mr. Abhimanyu Singh*, International consultant to UNESCO and former Director of UNESCO's Beijing office and *Professor Wenjuan Zhang*, Associate Professor and Assistant Dean for International Collaborations, Jindal Global Law School and Executive Director, Centre for India-China Studies, Jindal Global Law School

- **Change and Stability in Chinese Society**

Mr. Ravi Bhoothalingam, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies and Founder and Chairman of Manas Advisory

Chinese society is passing through a phase of rapid transition. A person returning to the country after gap of merely two years may witness a totally different kind of China. The Chinese are concerned that some changes could go out of hand. However, the fine balance between change and stability is a salient feature of modern Chinese society. The following four pegs would be useful in getting an overview:

Women: Mao Zedong is a pioneer of women's empowerment movement in China. Since 1949, Chinese women had access to basic education and healthcare facilities. Even in the 1980s China had a sizable number of working class of women. Against this backdrop, questions were always raised about the negligible participation of Chinese women in the decision-making process. Today, there are no women in the top echelons of Chinese politics. The 'One Child Policy' (even though now it has been relaxed) coupled with a preference for the male child has adversely impacted China and sex ratio has declined at an alarming rate (117 boys to every 100 girl).

Religion: China is perceived to be a non-religious society and officially the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is atheist. Of late, the government feels that religion will make Chinese society more stable and is therefore welcoming religion albeit, secretly. It fears Vatican and Islamist interventions in its affairs (China has around 100 million Christians and a sizeable minority Muslim population of about 25 million) and the Dalai Lama too continues to be a factor that worries them.

Ethnicity: The majority of China's population (93 per cent) is Han; minorities are diverse and dispersed across the country. China was once ruled by Mongols and Manchus who have now been ethnically assimilated. Modern Chinese society has a very good diaspora connect and the Chinese are emotionally close even if they are physically afar.

Media: China is one of the largest if not the largest social media markets in the world both in terms of content generation and consumption. Applications such as WeChat, Weibo and RenRen dominate the social media space. Companies like Facebook and Google have a lot to learn from their Chinese counterparts.

- **Education in China**

Mr. Abhimanyu Singh, International consultant to UNESCO and former Director of UNESCO's Beijing office

China had less than 20 per cent adult literacy in 1949 but has since made rapid advances in education and today, has a literacy rate of about 95 per cent. In China, education is centralised, compulsory (nine years of education is compulsory – six years of primary education and three years of secondary education) and constitutionally guaranteed. This is the cornerstone of the modern development strategy of China. It is rightly argued that the reason for the Chinese economic miracle is the strong focus on Education for All. Over 500 million people have been alleviated from abject poverty. Thus it can be said that education and human resource development are key factors in the policy for poverty alleviation. Education for All has led to the emancipation of workers, peasants and labourers. 70 per cent of Chinese women work outside their home (compared to 25 per cent in India). With respect to education and literacy, there is only a small disparity between different provinces. Chinese education is also inclusive – 80 per cent of disabled children are in mainstream schools and special attention is given to education for the blind children.

Skill based education – 52 per cent students are into vocational streams and China has 24/7 online education platforms which are easily accessible. Investment in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines is increasingly seen in China as a means to boost innovation, particularly in manufacturing. More than 60 per cent university students are in STEM fields. Majority of the political and social elite of China (including most of the political class) are STEM graduates. The Chinese also have a large number of students abroad (over 300,000); most of them in the United States of America and Europe. China is also increasingly welcoming foreign students. The Chinese also have an avid interest in learning the English language. There is also a rush for digitalization of all educational media.

International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) also play a crucial role in education policy making in China. The country actively works with IGOs like UNESCO and the World Bank and takes into account their policy recommendations during policy

formulation. It can be said that the “pecking order” that China follows with regard to education policy recommendations is –

1. OECD policies
2. World Bank recommendations
3. UNESCO recommendations

This international policy approach has helped China to a very great extent. New Delhi has a lot to learn from Beijing. China now wants to transform its education system from the largest in the world to the best in the world. Thus, there is a sense of nationalism attached to education in China and it can be said that China, in a way, defines its nationalism in terms of educational excellence.

- **The Party in Chinese Life**

Professor Wenjuan Zhang, Associate Professor and Assistant Dean for International Collaborations, Jindal Global Law School and Executive Director, Centre for India-China Studies, Jindal Global Law School

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plays an important role in Chinese life. The political systems in India and China have 3 major differences. Unlike India which is multi-party republic, China is a single-party centralised state. China is a consultative democracy, a system which is said to have its roots in the Confucian notion of *minben* (Democracy). China also does not have any separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary and the power is constitutionally vested in the National People’s Congress.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has substantial influence on Chinese daily life. The Great Chinese Famine (1958-60) and the the Cultural Revolution were watershed events in modern People’s Republic of China (PRC) history. These events coupled with sweeping policy measures to alleviate poverty and bring in education for all have brought positive changes for millions. In the 80s, the CCP exponentially increased its expenditure on education and this was critical in ushering in what is now known as the Chinese economic miracle. I was myself a beneficiary of this and in spite of being born in a poor family in rural China, had relatively easy access to world class education. Even though the Cultural Revolution had many terrible consequences, it acted as a great equalizer for Chinese society. This is what paved way for the economic miracle and social development of the 1980s.

The legitimacy of the CCP and its governance model have sometimes come under criticism in the face of modern developments such as the rise of China’s new middle class and the advent of social media. As the author of the book *Smoke and Mirrors: An Experience of China* states that if she was born in a middle-class family she would prefer to live in India but if she were to be born in poor family she would prefer to live in China.

Presently, China's burgeoning middle class is increasingly demanding participation in the political process and increased civil rights. The ubiquity of smartphones coupled with easy access to fast internet will be an important factor in determining the relationship between the Chinese people and the CCP, a relationship that is seen to be in a state of flux. The push from a consultative democracy to a more participatory one is what will go on to define this relationship in the future.

Students from Symbiosis, faculty and representatives from Civil Society attended the event in large numbers.

The presentations were followed by intensive discussions – there were numerous queries from the young students – who were clearly eager to learn more – and time proved to be a constraining factor. The Director of the Symbiosis School of International Studies, Dr Shivali Lalvale in her vote of thanks to the organisers – the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi and the Ananta Centre - expressed the collective wish of all present to conduct more such outreach events at the Symbiosis, on more specific issues.
