



Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Beyond the Zhong Sheng
Pseudonym: Deconstructing
China's Homophonic Pen
Names*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:
Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury

30 July 2025

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Speaker: Mr. Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury, David Rockefeller Fellow, Trilateral Commission, Paris.

Chair: Dr. Hemant Adlakha, Associate Professor, Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Vice-Chairperson and Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Date: 30 July 2025

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined how the Communist Party of China (CPC) uses homophonic pen names as a deliberate propaganda strategy, with a focus on the *Zhong Sheng* (中国之声; Voice of China) commentaries. The speaker deconstructed internal political dynamics, policy formulations, and diplomatic positions to analyse how these commentaries serve both as diplomatic tools and warning signals. This duality enables China to reach out to multiple audiences simultaneously, while maintaining strategic ambiguity.
- The Chair, Dr. Hemant Adlakha began with an outline of the *Zhong Sheng* articles, and explained their significance in representing the Party's foreign policy stance. He highlighted the contrast in tone – soft and calibrated in these editorials as against the assertive messaging found in official Party documents. He also noted the dearth of academic focus on these forms of editorial commentary, pointing to a significant research gap in understanding Chinese propaganda mechanisms.
- Mr. Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury presented a historical overview of the CPC's media architecture, tracing its evolution from the ideological battles of the 1960s to the sophisticated digital narrative strategies currently. He emphasised the tactical use of pen names that mimic individual authorship, rather than explicitly representing Party organs, as a way to subtly influence public opinion.
- The speaker explored the etymological complexity of *Zhong Sheng*, noting its dual interpretation as “Voice of China” and “Sounding the alarm bell” (警世钟声). This linguistic

ambiguity, he argued, allows the CPC to partake in diplomatic outreach while simultaneously conveying a warning.

- By highlighting four specific geopolitical events – the 2008 EU-China Summit postponement, the 2012 Senkaku Islands dispute, the 2013 US business obstruction, and the 2016 South China Sea arbitration – the speaker demonstrated how these commentaries function as diplomatic instruments. These instances further exemplify the CPC’s use of editorial platforms to frame international disputes, signal policy intent, and assert sovereignty claims without resorting to official declarations.
- The 2025 *Zhong Sheng* commentaries were portrayed as indicative of an increasingly confident and strategically adept Party-state media apparatus. The speaker observed a notable rhetorical shift from passive, defensive language in early 2025 to proactive framing by mid-year, signalling China’s readiness to challenge US hegemony and negotiate from a perceived position of equality rather than submission.
- In addressing US-China tariff negotiations, the speaker identified two consistent rhetorical pillars – “win-win cooperation” and “equal footing”. These principles underscored China’s insistence on equitable engagement and rejection of coercive diplomacy. Simultaneously, the articles appealed to the Global South by framing China as a defender of multilateralism and economic stability, and casting the US as a disruptive global actor.
- The seminar concluded with reflections on the strategic value of decoding such editorial commentaries. The speaker urged scholars and analysts to treat *Zhong Sheng* as an “open secret” that offers insights into China’s policy shifts, political priorities, and audience-specific messaging. Both the chair and the audience raised compelling questions around authorship authenticity, internal hierarchies of content production, and geopolitical omissions.

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