



2nd All India Conference of East Asian Studies

organised by the

Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi

in collaboration with

Centre for East Asian Studies

Department of International Studies, Political Science & History

CHRIST (Deemed to be) University, Bengaluru

Mode: Hybrid

Venue: ZOOM (Online) & Council Room, Ground Floor, CHRIST (Deemed to be) University, Central Campus, Bengaluru (In-Person)

Convenor's Report

Prof. Vyjayanti Raghavan

The Institute of Chinese Studies organised the **2nd All India Conference of East Asian Studies** in collaboration with the Centre for East Asian Studies, CHRIST (Deemed to be) University, Bengaluru, on 5-6 April 2024 in virtual mode. The conference successfully facilitated one and a half days of productive dialogues and interactions, wherein a broad range of topics were explored, and novel perspectives were presented. Undoubtedly, the interactions sparked new ideas, and generated both enthusiasm and interest among the scholars studying and researching on this region. The primary objective of the conference, i.e., to provide a platform for such intellectual exchange was undoubtedly achieved. The chairs and discussants provided incisive and insightful feedback and pointers, which greatly benefitted the presenters. The Keynote Address, titled “**The Turbulent Indo-Pacific**”, delivered by Prof. S.D. Muni, set the tone for the conference and the thematic panels synchronised well with the aspects of turbulence that he had highlighted.

While the diversity of the papers that were finally shortlisted was greatly appreciated, it was a difficult exercise to slot them all neatly into the structure prepared by the Conference Organising Committee. Many of the topics transcended the boundaries of a single discipline. For instance, the question of identity and human rights was discussed in different sessions, viz, ‘Refugees and Migration’, ‘Democratisation’ as well as under ‘Interregional and Intraregional Issues’. These papers looked at both, ethnic and non-ethnic issues of identity of various groups — Rohingyas, immigrants in Taiwan who have come not only from the Mainland, but also from Hong Kong and Macau. There was also a paper on the identity and status of the North Korean immigrants in China’s northeastern Yanbian region. The latter, though a minority group, unlike many other immigrants elsewhere, are treated better than the refugees from the same country (North Korea) who infiltrate into China. That is because the settlers here contribute to the economic growth and development of this region of

Northeast China. So, while in some countries, the thwarting of democratic rights of refugees is studied, some papers see the rights of immigrants through the prism of the economic interest of nations. An interesting aspect of identities was also studied through the lens of political cartoons — the perceived identities of politicians in Taiwan and the so called “enemies”, both within and outside Taiwan. These were indeed fresh perspectives.

Another interesting broad theme was the social transformation taking place within countries in the post-pandemic period, and a great deal of focus was given to the recognition of women’s rights seen through the prism of the “Me Too Movement”, both in South Korea and Taiwan, and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in Taiwan. These movements were seen as the burgeoning of democracy. In the context of the concerns raised by Prof. S.D. Muni in his keynote address — the sustainability of democracy — is a hugely complex matter. The papers attempted to explore the connections between the denial and/or suppression of human rights of refugees and immigrants. These have had an adverse impact on democracy, which has further been thwarted by this denial. On the other hand, in places where women’s rights or rights of other minority groups are recognised, it seems to be flourishing. Therefore, the answer would depend on which aspect we are looking at.

Similarly, the papers in the ‘Multilateral’, and ‘Intra and Interregional’ sections focused on varied security concerns — some examined purely economic security aspects affecting nations in the post-pandemic period, while some looked at both economic and broader security issues. The focus of these was largely on the ASEAN countries and their dilemma over BRI involvement. There were papers that also looked at the dilemma of countries like South Korea and Japan trying to square their economic security issue in the circular strategic-security peg. The paper on Japan addressing its military security concerns through non-military means — like joining the QUAD or amending its pacifist constitution — also added an interesting aspect. There was also a paper that looked at cyber security in these times of digital economy.

As to how countries work out their national interest without compromising the interest of the larger regional group to which they belong, like that of ASEAN or the Trilateral Alliance (the US, Japan and South Korea) remains to be seen.

Mongolia is certainly a country with which India hopes to improve its relations, and both countries would stand to gain from it. There were two papers that looked at the India-Mongolia relations. However, what emerged was that it would have been possible to strengthen relations with greater ease, if only Mongolia had not been so far and landlocked between China and Russia.

There were a couple of papers that studied the East-West divide, whether in the form of arguments about the imposition of Western constructs on Eastern values or questioning the very concept of the rationality of the East-West dichotomy that is imposed by some western scholars in the course of their research. These are interesting dimensions, on which more research needs to be carried forward.

Two stand-alone papers in many ways, focused on the education system of Japan in the pre-Covid and post-Covid period, and on Buddhist temple practices in Japan and the changes they had undergone. While the former reminded the listeners of the changes that educationists in India too had to adopt, be it in the online teaching methodology or in the evaluation system during this period. Similarly, the Buddhist temple traditions of Japan trying to balance tradition and modernity and yet trying to remain relevant to the youth of today appeared similar to the problem being faced by the 'Pandits' of the temples in India.

The Roundtable Discussion conceived by the partner institution proved useful for the budding scholars. The participants of the panel provided their insights and elaborated on the scholarships, academic pathways, and professional prospects within the realm of Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Indo-Pacific Studies. A large number of questions arose from the young participants which were addressed by the panellists in the Roundtable.

The Valedictory Address, delivered by Amb. Eric Gonsalves, was extremely thought-provoking, bringing in his vast experiences in dealing with the region, taking stock of the tremendous changes and how they should be contextualised and understood. Questioning the political machinery and the leadership prevalent in many countries today, is an emerging area of concern for many. Amb. Gonsalves also pointed out how most of the papers had argued that regional organisations seem to be shaping the future, and it was therefore vital for neighbouring countries to strengthen their relations. This seems to be the future shape of multilateralism.