



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-560029 (In-person)

Conference Report

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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 the 5th and 6th April 2024 in the 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 synchronized 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 Organizing 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 Hongkong 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. A few papers focused on 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 an advancement of democratic rights. The concern raised by Prof. S.D. Muni in his keynote address on the sustainability

of democracy raises some complex issues. The papers attempted to explore the connections between the denial and/or suppression of human rights of refugees and immigrants. These have an adverse impact on democracy, which is thwarted by this denial. On the other hand, in places where women's rights or rights of minority groups are recognized democracy seems to be flourishing when viewed in this perspective. Therefore, the answer would depend on which aspect we are looking.

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 construct 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.

There were two stand-alone papers. One of them focused on the Education system of Japan in the post Covid period, and the other on the Buddhist temple practices in Japan and the changes they had undergone. The former reminded the listeners of the changes that educationists in India had to adopt, in the online teaching methodology and the evaluation system with the onset of Covid. The latter reminded one of the pandits of the temples in India who faced problems similar to those of the monks of the Japanese Buddhist temples, namely that of balancing tradition and modernity and at the same time remaining relevant to the youth of today.

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 panelists in the Round Table.

The Valedictory Address delivered by Ambassador Eric Gonsalves was very thought-provoking. He brought in his vast experience in dealing with the region. He took stock of the far-reaching changes taking place. He then suggested ways of contextualizing and understanding the transformations.

Questioning the political machinery and the leadership prevalent in many countries today, is an emerging area of concern for many. Ambassador 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.