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India looks East and China looks everywhere

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Abstract
Extract:
Asia's two great civilisations, India and China, have been the subject of contemporary scrutiny in the Australian conference scene. Together, India and China account for more than one-third of the world's population. Peace and cooperation between these two neighbours makes eminent sense if the Pacific Century is to live up to its name.

Keywords
conference, Confucian, Australian National University, India, China

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CONFERENCE REPORT

India Looks East and China Looks Everywhere

*A Conference Report by **Rosita Dellios***

Asia's two great civilisations, India and China, have been the subject of contemporary scrutiny in the Australian conference scene. The first, called *India Looks East*, held in December 1994, was a 'workshop' organised by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre of the Australian National University and the Australian Institute of International Affairs. Its title comes from India's greater freedom of engagement with capitalistic, fast-growing, East Asia in the post-Cold War world. During the Cold War, by comparison, anti-Soviet sentiment in East Asia tended to weaken links with a non-aligned, Soviet-friendly India. Now with average annual growth rates of 6-7 percent, India is joining the East Asian 'tigers' and 'dragons' in development, and it is also on much better political terms with the rest of Asia. Among the high points was restoration of diplomatic relations with that other Asian giant, China.

Together, India and China account for more than one-third of the world's population. Peace and cooperation between these two neighbours makes eminent sense if the Pacific Century is to live up to its name. Given that the two countries had experienced enmity in the past, the high point of which was their border war of 1962, it was perhaps not surprising to find some enthusiasm in depicting China as a malevolent power bent on oppressive regional practices. This mischievous attitude was not shared by those who live next door to China.

Among those resisting such threat perceptions was the Director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis in New Delhi, Air Commodore Jusjit Singh, who expressed his distaste for the 'cold warrior' mentality. He spoke of India's primary strategic goal not in the traditional language of strategic studies - that is, the language of power politics and military defence - but, refreshingly, focused more responsibly on 'the socio-economic growth and betterment of the quality of life of its 900 million people'.

The primacy of this goal derives from recognition of what he terms 'the revolution of rising expectations' as the defining characteristic of our time. Rising expectations of a better material life, participatory politics and recognition of differences such as ethnic identity, are the more obvious symptoms of this new revolution. The challenge for countries addressing the 'rapidly widening gap between expectations and fulfillment' is how to strike the right balance - 'how to maintain competitiveness for efficiency and selectivity while maintaining cooperation for social and distributive justice'.

In contrast to the smaller and more focused 'workshop' on India at ANU, a wide-ranging interdisciplinary conference on China was held at Macquarie University in Sydney on 5-7 July 1995. Organised by the Chinese Studies Association of Australia, this fourth biennial conference covered subjects from classical poetry and the traditions of imperial China to economic issues, moral education, and contemporary politics. My own paper on Chinese foreign policy is published in this issue of the *The Culture Mandala*. It was the only foreign policy paper at the conference, apart from one from Yur-bok Lee, of North Dakota State University, on 'The Confucian rejectionists in the opening of Korea'. This, however, dealt with historic international relations. If disciplinary isolation, and possibly boredom, is a risk one runs in attending interdisciplinary conferences - a criticism one could not have levelled at the India workshop for all its bias shown in some quarters - indulgence in academic diversions is clearly the reward.

As a 'China specialist' one feels one can never know enough about China and things Chinese. China is always too big and too broad; perhaps too deep; one's own particular area so dependent on the wider holistic picture. So it was with some joy that I could indulge myself in topics like the clash between colonial medicine and traditional Chinese medicine (as expressed during the bubonic plague outbreak in Hong Kong in 1894), by Carney Fisher of the University of Adelaide; and on how parents teach their children morality in contemporary China, the subject of a paper by Andy Fung, of the University of Hong Kong. It is interesting to note that with regard to the latter, one of the books on family education is a 1995 bestseller, having sold 40 million copies by May of this year. *Xin Sanzhi Jin* is produced by an impressive editorial board comprising the Guangdong Province Party Committee and Education Committee, Zhongshan University. The book's central theme is morality, a fitting message in this economic reform period with its side-effects of 'money-worship'. More specifically, the pampered single child syndrome is also proving a worry for parents who look for guidance (or for an easy way to teach children right from wrong).

The type of morality taught in the literature now available for home education differs from traditional Confucian morality in a number of ways. Equality between the sexes is taught, not the traditional notions of male superiortity. Fathers are instructed to be kind rather than stern, the latter trait being typically Confucian. To the question of who is responsible for the child's good behaviour, the traditional answer of 'father' or 'teacher' is replaced by the child himself or herself. Even more fundamental in breaking from the past is the question of whether human nature is inherently good or bad. The old answer of 'good' has been replaced by a new answer of 'neutral'.

A number of other presentations proved equally intriguing, including one which examined developments in the southern Chinese autonomous region of Guangxi, which borders Vietnam. It is not without interest to international relations people like myself to learn that of Guangxi's three ports, one

(Fangchenggang) is being re-constructed into a size large enough to handle international trade.[1] The paper, 'Guangxi: towards Southwest China and Southeast Asia', was presented by Hans Hendrischke of Macquarie University.

[1] This fits in well with the idea of economic growth circles in the Indochina area, as discussed in 'Trading Ideas on the Mekong', in the previous issue of *The Culture Mandala*.