

## **60 Years of Sino-Indian Interactions: Comprehending the Multifarious Dimensions of Inter-relationship**

**Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur, Kerala.**

**12-14 December 2011**

*Report by Jabin T. Jacob, Assistant Director, ICS*

The conference was supported by the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Ministry of External Affairs and the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), and the lead organizer was Dr. **CR Pramod**, formerly of the Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU and now a lecturer at the Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur, which hosted the conference.

The conference was interesting for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the fact that it was being held in a town in Kerala and that the MEA had chosen to support the endeavour, speaks of new thinking in the government. Perhaps, it is also an indictment about the state of China Studies in general as run out of the usual places – New Delhi and Calcutta. Second, the fact that the conference was held in Kerala allowed participation by scholars based locally or scholars from Kerala based elsewhere who have either done some work on China or do so full-time. Third, the conference also provided an opportunity to explore the historical and cultural links between Kerala and China. Equally important and interesting, especially in view of the state's communist heritage, were the couple of presentations by a journalist and a writer about their personal impressions on the influence of China on their lives and work.

While the audience participation left a lot to be desired – the students were mostly shy and diffident – the questions that were asked were interesting all the same. And one hopes that greater exposure to scholars and views from outside Kerala will allow its students to grow more confident in their ability to engage and discuss matters related not just to China but international relations in general. The language barrier was a significant barrier and in this respect, Kerala for all its high literacy rate and number of graduates reflects a state of affairs where the emphasis on quality is very low or limited to a few select institutions.

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The first day's programme saw a keynote speech by Ambassador **Nalin Surie**, former Indian ambassador to China, about the state of affairs in Sino-Indian relations. There were also interesting presentations on the cultural determinants of China's negotiations behaviour (**G. Venkat Raman**, IIM Kozhikode) and on perceptions of China in Kerala. The latter by **MG Radhakrishnan**, Associate Editor, *India Today* was an engaging bilingual account of how the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 and the subsequent split of the Communist Party of India in 1964 affected Radhakrishnan's family, too, dividing the family into two separate camps of the CPI and the CPI (Marxist).

Other presentations on the first day included those on reforms in post-Mao China (**Raju Thaddikaran**, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam), China's energy policy (**Shaji Varkey**, University of Kerala, Trivandrum) and perspectives on Sino-Indian relations (**MS John**, IIT Chennai and **Jabin T. Jacob**, ICS, Delhi).

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The second day saw two comparative perspectives related to cities in China and India. While one (by **TG Suresh**, JNU) looked at the relationship between cities as agents of globalization and the flow of migrant labour to them with reference to Chengdu, Shanghai and Delhi, the other (by **Geeta Kochhar**, JNU) looked at the urbanization process, including the distribution of privileges for residents, in the cities of Delhi and Guangzhou.

The two economics papers both dealt with questions of innovation. While the one by **Sunil Mani** (Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum) contrasted the place of innovation in the economic reforms of China and India, using a variety of indices of comparison including investments and papers produced, the other by **Jayan Jose Thomas** (IIT Delhi) examined the possibilities of China and India succeeding in their quest to move from low-wage and low-skilled employment to high-skilled and innovation-related employment. The presenter was pessimistic about the direction of India's education and social welfare trends in this context.

Another related paper by **Vijayamohan Pillai N.** (Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum) was a comparison of social security in rural India & China, focusing on a panchayat each in Kerala and Orissa and a village each in Jiangsu and Gansu provinces. This was an old multi-year study conducted with support from the Ford Foundation and jointly with some economists at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The methodology seemed extremely dodgy to me at least with several sensitive questions left unasked or unanswered on the Chinese side and on the whole given that the project ended in 2007, it was rather too late to present these here again.

A paper that promised a lot but failed to live up to expectations was one titled, "Institutionalization of Health Care Traditions in the East: The Indian & Chinese Experiences" (**Burton Cleetus**, University of Calicut and **MS Harilal**, French Institute, Pondicherry). Unfortunately, the presenter who was familiar with the Chinese half of the case did not turn up. More comparative perspectives were to be had on the second day with presentations on the Chinese and Indian Diasporas (**PA Mathew**, FISAT, Kochi), on the activities and policies of the two Asian giants in Latin America (**Aparajita Gangopadyaya**, University of Goa) and on the nature of intellectual property enforcement and development in the two countries (**Prabha**, CUSAT, Kochi), the last a rather technical paper that left open the question of which country's legal regime would stand the test of time and be the most useful for that country's economic development.

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The third and final day of the conference was an extended session owing to the fact that several prominent politicians and local luminaries could not turn up for the concluding session. I had the

privilege of chairing this session which saw historical, cultural and business themes being discussed. Beginning with the historical, **C Rajendran** (University of Calicut) together with a Chinese scholar he has been in touch over the years – a scholar it might be added who had studied traditional medicine in India – tried to put together the various connections, including historical place names, records of travels and so on between Kozhikode and China. **Civic Chandran**, a local writer held forth on the place of China in the Malayalam imagination, including its novels and poetry noting that the changes in China were also reflected in the literary output in Kerala. The speech was entirely in Malayalam and a fascinating one at that. **CR Pramod** in his presentation on local views of China made a carefully structured assessment of the various views of China that operate in Kerala and what their driving forces were.

In the business-related part end of the session was yet another comparative perspective – this time on the role of the governments in establishing IT parks in China and India (**N Vasudevan**, Technopark, Trivandrum). The other presentation and the more interesting one, was one businessman's (**Antony Kottaram**, Kerala Chamber of Commerce and Industry) perceptions about doing the hows and whys and do's and dont's of doing business with the Chinese. With over a decade and a half of experience, it was no wonder that he was spot on most of the time and this presentation in fact tied in well with the presentation on the first day about Chinese negotiation practices.

All in all, the conference might have been a bit of stretch being organized over three days but it was well-organized, nonetheless, and ambitious in its scope. Hopefully, the ICS will support more such endeavours elsewhere in the country.