



## **A Report on the International Conference titled “India and China in the 20th and 21st centuries: Where do history and international relations meet?” Oxford University, 26-27 March 2013.**

**Speaker: Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty and Prof. Alka Acharya**

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In his presentation Prof. Mohanty started by giving examples of how institutes and universities in Europe and other parts of the world were engaging in collaborative ventures, like the Inter-University Collaboration Programs, to have a better understanding of China. In particular, he pointed out Prof. Rana Mitter's (FOS, Oxford) observation about the linkages that needed to be drawn from a study of modern history and not just economic comparisons that would involve China. Prof. Mitter added that there has to be a dual emphasis on history as well as language to have a fruitful understanding of the various that are involved.

Prof. Mohanty mentioned many papers that were presented in the Seminar in Oxford and in particular mentioned the main arguments of three papers. His own paper which was presented in the seminar there makes a case of distinguishing between the notions of 'rebalance' and 'restructuring' in the context of the contemporary global order. A common question posed with regard to this formulation is whether it is a normative or an empirical argument? He pleads to look at his formulations from the empirical perspective. He went on to explain that it is very crucial to identify 'alternative' processes which can be located at three levels. They are:

- Various processes within the respective countries
- Regional formations like BRICS, BCIM
- Global people's movements (like women's or environmental movements)

He argues that restructuring can be seen as a tendency that involves the repositioning of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies. At this juncture Prof. Alka Acharaya added that in the last ten years, India and China have shown 'maturity and resilience' in the way they have dealt with sensitive issues like the 1962 War. She explains that the perceptions of the War have been more mature with the explicit recognition of various 'fault lines'.

Continuing with his presentation Prof Mohanty talked about three papers which he attended and makes the crucial arguments the respective authors made. In the first paper Prof. Mohanty recalled the presentation made by Prof. Meng Qinglong who argued along four lines with respect to the 1962 War:

- Chinese silence on key matters should not be taken as sign of tacit consent. India has often mis-perceived China's silence.
- There is a very strong communication gap between the countries

- The role of big powers in the context of 1962 war is not fully appreciated by research, especially the role of UK, USSR and USA
- India missed out crucial opportunities on three occasions viz. 1960, 1980 and 1982.

He recalls that in 1954 when Nehru had visited China there was no explicit issue raised with regard to the maps and cartography concerning China and India. This implied silence was wrongly taken to be a sign of consent by India. Also, the position of UK with regard to the crucial issues of sovereignty and suzerainty was not clear during the war.

Prof Mohanty talked about other papers, one by Prof. Rana Mitter, where he looked into the Chiang Kai-Shek Papers that were released by the Taiwan Archives. Mitter mentioned that Chiang's diary was also accessed by him. A third paper presentation was also discussed by Prof. Mohanty which looked at the Chinese statistical system by Chen Hansheng. Chen worked on the regional atlas of Asia and was concerned with rural studies. The author of the paper argued that the methodology employed by Chen in his understanding was faulty.

Prof. Mohanty made a plea of having an India-China conference, not just a comparison on the economic aspects of it, which according to him was the dominant trend, but in a manner that would look at the competing, contested and discursive histories of the two countries. In this sense the conceptualization of history as 'windows' would throw more meaningful insights as far as our understanding of China is concerned.

Few questions were raised pertaining the possibilities of such archival research by Indian scholars. The participants from the audience talked about the issues and problems, to challenges of bearing cost of such an exercise. Prof. Acharya explained that M.V. Rappai was attempting such a study. Prof. Acharya also mentioned that the Institute of Chinese Studies was attempting to build a comprehensive repository of material and translation of texts from Chinese into English and vice-versa. She was of the view the crucial archival documents are not available with regard to China. Although in 1967 the Chinese archives were opened, there was a strict regulation in the sense that these documents were examined carefully prior to their release. She also talked about looking at other sources for archives that involved the Dutch and the Italian archives.

A question was raised with regard to the poverty of archival research concerning China by Indian scholars, either in China or in the UK. There was a view that even when it was done, there was a very strong element of 'self-censorship' in the works of the researcher. Puroshattam Mehta, who has done some archival work, was thought to have applied this idea in the presentation of his research.

### **MAIN POINTS MADE IN THE PRESENTATION**

- Need for strong archival research in the UK as well as in China by Indian scholars.
- Need for a collaborative program among Universities and Institutes in India
- Need for a better understanding of the role of UK, USSR and USA in the context of the 1962 War
- Need to establish comparisons that incorporate the 'histories' into account
- Need to establish a comprehensive repository of reading materials with regard to China
- Need to maturely recognize and examine the 'faultlines' along which further studies and enquiries can be made with regard to India-China.
- Need for the translation to crucial Chinese works into English and vice-versa for a better understanding of views and opinions.

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