



‘Can Mahatma Gandhi Save China?’: Glimpses of Discussions on Mahatma Gandhi in *The Eastern Miscellany*

Speaker: Prashant Kaushik, M.Phil/Ph.D candidate, JNU

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Prashant Kaushik began by discussing the importance of the magazine *Eastern Miscellany*. He emphasized the significance of this magazine, which was in publication during 1904-1948 from mainland China. It was the leading, comprehensive, longest running and most influential private magazine in the first half of the 20th century in China, published by ‘The Commercial Press’. According to the speaker, one could know the affairs of China and the world by just getting a copy of *The Eastern Miscellany*. Further, at one point of time, its circulation figures reached 60,000 copies, the maximum for any contemporary magazine. Therefore, it was not surprising that it was popularly known as the ‘magazine of magazines’, a heavyweight in the world of magazines and a ‘storehouse of modern Chinese history’. The speaker compared *The Eastern Miscellany*’s popularity to that of the *Economic and Political Weekly*.

The speaker mentioned about the problems he initially faced in accessing *The Eastern Miscellany* archives. Since 2012-2013, the magazine can be accessed online.

Referring to Mahatma Gandhi and his importance in *The Eastern Miscellany*, the speaker listed a number of articles and special issues that were published during the period 1904-1948. The prominent issues included a series of seven special columns titled ‘Gandhi and New India’ (甘地与新印度) (Vol. 19 No. 10, 1922), and a special issue consisting of 13 articles to commemorate his demise (追悼甘地专号) (Vol.44 No.5, 1948). The speaker informed that Gandhi was the only person on whom *The Eastern Miscellany* brought out two special series. Earlier studies have put the number of articles published on Gandhi in *The Eastern Miscellany* at over 65 articles and not less than 60-70.

The speaker then threw light on the issues that were taken up in the various articles. Broadly, the themes covered related to Gandhi's life, leadership, and personality, his contribution towards social reform and the advancement of the untouchables in India. The feasibility and the pros and cons of applying Mahatma Gandhi's ideas and methods of struggle in China were also discussed.

Regarding the use of terminology and the projection of Gandhi in the magazine, the speaker revealed that for a long time there was no general consensus on how to spell Gandhi in Chinese, first it was put as '甘特希' (gān tè xī), then as '甘尼地' (gān ní dì) and finally '甘地' (gān dì) (in 1922 and after) became the standard version. He mentioned how Gandhi's personality and movements were mentioned in the magazine, describing Gandhi as an 'extreme religionist' (極端的宗教家) and an ascetic (禁慾主義者) representing the Eastern culture. About the impact of Gandhi in India, the magazine eulogized Gandhi as the king of India '(在實際上甘地就是現在印度的王), as the one who 'controls the spiritual and material domains of India'. Gandhi was also compared to other personalities like Lenin; it stated that in the beginning of the 20th century, there are only 'two greatest figures in the world', 'Lenin of new Russia' and 'Gandhi of new India'.

The speaker further discussed the magazine's coverage of the various movements led by Mahatma Gandhi based on the virtues of non-violence, *satyagraha* and passive resistance. There was particular focus on the success of the non-cooperation movement against the British rule. There were also divergent voices in the magazine that criticized Gandhi's methods and his inability to control the untrained lower masses leading to violent incidents.

Delving into the main theme of the presentation regarding the question of Gandhi being able to save China, the speaker took up five significant articles from *The Eastern Miscellany* published in 1924 and summarized their relevance one by one.

Hua Lu in his article, 'The Methods and Elements of People's Movements' showed how Gandhi's peaceful revolution was not similar to that of the so-called mass movements in China. Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement had concrete active methods (of resistance). Zhuo Zhang in his article 'Who Can Save China? How to Save China?' found that Gandhi's passive resistance was applicable only in the realm of economy and not in the realm of politics. Fan Zhongyun in 'Is Revolution Avoidable?', discussed two types of revolutionary methods: armed revolution, led by Lenin in Russia and passive revolution, like Gandhi's in India. He further noted that the fruition of revolution also varies according to the method employed and it is very difficult to choose between the two.

The speaker concluded his presentation by underlining the importance of *The Eastern Miscellany* as a rich source of information on how the Chinese scholarly community perceived Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's novel methods of non-violent resistance and *satyagraha* were considered as representative of the eastern civilization.

Discussion

The discussion and comments that followed the presentation were quite interesting and illuminating. An important set of questions pertained to the connections that could be drawn between the non-cooperation movement in India and similar movements/traditions in China. Some sought to locate Chinese interest in Gandhi in the context of China's transition from waging a class struggle to building a harmonious society. An important query related to issue of Japanese imperialism and whether *The Eastern Miscellany* carried out any discussion on Gandhi's views towards imperialism. The speaker responded by stating that so far he has not come across any such article while acknowledging that it may be an interesting aspect to look into if one is able to access the archives published from Taiwan after 1948. In this context, the speaker highlighted the scope for further research on Gandhi's influence in non-English speaking countries such as China and Japan. An insightful comment concerned the comparison between Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi – how Tagore got rejected on the same grounds that Gandhi was accepted. The speaker responded by conjecturing that perhaps the politics of a political figure was more attractive as compared to the politics of a literary figure. Having said that, the speaker informed that Tagore does find mention in *The Eastern Miscellany*, though not as extensively as Gandhi. However, the speaker expressed interest in exploring this topic further and visiting China for the same.

While concluding the presentation, the speaker apprised the audience about how China wanted to have someone like Mahatma Gandhi who can ameliorate the plight of its masses. They lamented Mahatma Gandhi's demise as a loss of the representative of non-cooperation.

Report prepared by Satarupa Mitra, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.

About the Speaker

Prashant Kaushik is an M.Phil/Ph.D candidate at the Centre for Chinese and South East Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He holds BA (H) and MA in History from University of Delhi and MA in Chinese from Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has also studied Chinese language at the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi and Heilongjiang University, Harbin, PRC.

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