



Harmony and Stability in Contemporary Chinese Strategic Discourse: Constructing 'New' Peace?

Speakers: Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary

Chair: M. V. Rappai

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ICS Seminar Room

Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary began the session by introducing the agenda of her talk, the idea of harmony and stability in the Chinese discourse in terms of its historical arrival. She asserted that China is projecting a New Peace through its harmony discourse and the newness in this peace is worthy of further investigation. She established that her research looks at this New Peace through the concept of reification, or providing a concrete form to an abstraction.

Speaking about the relationship between peace and harmony, Dr. Tiwary highlighted that the concept of peace has been promoted by the Chinese leaders since the 1950s and more recently since the 2000s, and it posits harmony as peace. This discourse helps maintain what the Chinese leadership thinks is important. Peace was never projected as a pre-cursor to harmony, but was always implied and implicit in harmony. This emphasis on harmony was reflected in the documents released by the Chinese government as well as the bilateral and multilateral relations that the government engaged in. The focus on harmony was revived in 2005 with President Hu Jintao's speech, which had contradictory ideas since he discussed Confucius' concept of harmony as well as those of his critic. This was when the world began to pay attention to China's interlinking of harmony and peace. Dr. Tiwary clarified that an investigation of the strategic discourse on harmony would involve an examination of official government documents as well as the articles on harmony from other sources.

Dr. Tiwary introduced the various terms that harmony has been interlinked with. It is clear that the idea of peace cannot be separated from other such ideas that derive from traditional Chinese thought. Although these terms are ambiguous, it is important to see how they have come together to form the abstract concept of harmony and the ramifications of this

interlinking. An analysis of the ways in which harmony has been portrayed in official government documents and other sources brings to the fore two major approaches. First, the legalistic notion of harmony is prevalent in many sources, in that they try to capture the actuality of relations today by looking at the current institutions, their roles, and the end goals or telos of engaging in such relations. The second prominent approach to harmony extrapolates from Confucian teachings and differs from the legalistic notion in terms of the pre-eminence given to human nature. While there are differing opinions on how the final goal can be reached, and these answers often do not coincide with traditional Confucian thought, they all speak about the same objective of attaining order by focusing on harmony. This approach establishes that harmony prevails when everyone is aware of their predisposition to do what they need to do. In this regard, China has been criticized for its contradiction between the importance given to harmony and its actions in the South China Sea and other conflict regions which suggest that it is trying to bring about a readjustment in world order.

Dr. Tiwary underlined that there is a conceptual contradiction and overlap between terms like harmony and hegemony, and order and power. She brought to the fore the debate on harmony and order which revolves around three main themes: the degree of reliance on world institutions, the extent to which leadership is crucial, and the nature of the roles and relationships that should structure our society. In this regard, the debate centres on whether the current position of China is justified. It is clear that the constitution of behavior depends on what is perceived as the end goal or telos, and therefore a teleological study of China's behavior could yield interesting results.

Dr. Tiwary stressed that most of these international debates on China's behavior and the subsequent responses have domestic roots, and so it is essential to understand these concepts as they understand them. The idea of an evolutionary form of history is dominant in China, which becomes the basis for the differences in its notion of harmony with respect to others. Therefore, assigning a static value to harmony does not seem logical. China can deploy the harmony discourse to validate almost all its actions, including the newly adopted Social Credit System. Dr. Tiwary concluded her presentation with the remark that the only condition that the harmony discourse fails to justify is the rising income inequality in China.

The Chair commented that the Chinese Communist Party maintains that communism is still in its early stages, and this argument can probably be used by them to explain why income inequality still persists. One of the members of the audience asked whether harmony fits as

the means or the end in the Chinese development trajectory, and if harmony is merely of ornamental value for external consumption in an authoritarian system. Dr. Tiwary responded that examining the nature of the means and end is a crucial aspect of the harmony-stability discourse, and the end is justified if the means are justified. She stated that harmony is the means to reach an end, which for China is to be the world leader. Dr. Tiwary emphasized that harmony is one of the ways in which the state interacts with the rest of the world as well as its own people, and it is imperative to look at the deployment of harmony in its domestic policy and not just its foreign policy. To a clarification sought by a member of the audience on how reification fits into this analysis, Dr. Tiwary established that reification is a Marxian concept which means that a concrete form is given to an abstract concept. Dr. Tiwary posited that the concept of harmony did not actually exist but was given a form by Hu Jintao in his speech wherein he discussed aspects that conveniently seemed to fit and not how harmony actually exists in philosophical debates.

In response to Dr. Tiwary's earlier statement, a member of the audience suggested that the harmony discourse and not merely the concept of harmony is the means to achieving the end goal. He also brought to the fore the relative decline of the harmony discourse in the Xi Jinping era, emphasizing that it has been subordinated by the Chinese dream discourse and the New Era discourse. Further, he mentioned that the emergence of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity in China problematized the Confucian idea of harmony and made the discussion richer. Another scholar highlighted that harmony is always presented as a socio-political category leading up to stability. To another query as to whether income inequality is the only contradiction or if it is the low hanging fruit to take focus away from the other decisions which are at odds, Dr. Tiwary agreed that it is important to look at how the debate progresses in the power circles and what kind of contradictions the Chinese government is willing to recognize. Finally, Dr. Tiwary stated that there is a tension between harmony and stability and the state as the interlocutor is using this tension to its advantages. The unexpected ramification of this is that people within and outside China have started talking about it.

About the Speaker

Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary is an Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, and University of Delhi. She is the Assistant Editor of *China Report: A Journal of East Asian Studies* (Institute of Chinese Studies) since 2016. She has a

PhD from Chinese Studies Division, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. She was a recipient of Junior and Senior Research Fellowship by the University Grant Commission of India (2009-2014) and Indian Council of Social Sciences Research International Grant (2014). She received the Young Sinologist Award by the Ministry of Culture, Peoples' Republic of China in 2017 and held International Visitor's Leadership Program Fellowship given by the Department of State, USA in 2016. She has held Visiting Fellowships at the Politics and International Studies Department at the University of Cambridge (2013), Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences at Shanghai, China (2012), Centre for Policy Analysis, Delhi (2011-12) and German Institute of Global and Area Studies at Hamburg, Germany (2009). She has a keen interest in the foreign policy discourse and international relations in East Asia. Her areas of research include Regionalism in East Asia and foreign policies of India and China. Her doctoral work China and East Asian Regionalism: Origins and Dimensions of an Emerging Leadership, 1997-2009 and a monograph A Comparative Study of Power and Leadership Discourse in South Asia and East Asia are forthcoming. She regularly writes for media publications on foreign policy issues. Some of her latest contributions on Indian Politics & Foreign Policy of China can be found in: Political Processes and Institutions in India (Orient BlackSwan, 2018) and Contemporary Indian Politics (Sage, 2018), Politics: Essays in Tribute to Randhir Singh, (Aakar Books: New Delhi, 2018) China's Foreign Policy: Global Perspectives, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, People's Republic of China, 2018).

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