



Local Environmental Governance and Industrial Development in China

Speaker- Ms. Saheli Chattaraj

Chair- TG Suresh

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ICS Seminar room

Saheli Chattaraj is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for China Studies at Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi. Her talk was based partly on her Doctoral thesis and is focused on the case study of the Zhejiang, an eastern province in China. According to the speaker the reasons why she chose Zhejiang as her case study are: firstly, it was relatively an industrialized province with its per capita GDP in the top five provinces in China. Secondly, Zhejiang was one of the first provinces that lead the industrial development after the reform period and was successful in reaching a stable industrial development in a very short period of time.

China witnessed rapid economic development since the economic reform but it was also during this period that China became the largest energy consumer and carbon dioxide emitter which caused serious environmental problems. Given the priority to rapid economic growth from 1989 till 2015, she argued that China compromised its environment but is looking to formulating valid pollution governance measures that don't affect industrial development. In fact, she argued that due to continuous governance measures, China has been able to avoid further deterioration in its environmental standards at several levels. This is because of several bodies that played active role in the environmental governance and conservation. The state was one of the leading bodies that gave more importance to environmental protection over the years with laws and institutions. One major step taken by the state was to decentralize environmental policy making and implementation.

Her talk commenced tracing the development of institutions that are responsible for the environment protection and governance in China, such as Environment Protection Leading Group – that was set up in 1974 as an agency - and the Environment Protection Agency,

which became a ministry of its own in 1998. With this she argued that in recent years, China is giving more importance to environment protection.

She listed two types of governmental agencies that are concerned about the environmental protection, agencies that are under central government and the local level government. Her focus was on the local level government agencies such as the *Environmental Protection Bureaus* and *Environmental Protection Officers*. These agencies sign a direct contract with the central government along with the officials of factories that fall under their jurisdiction to be responsible and take the task of monitoring the environmental regulatory framework. She argued that the contract signing is the result of the conflict of environmental governance between the central government environmental protection agencies and the local agencies and also due to the problem in the implementation of the environmental protection law.

Zhejiang followed many different measures of environmental protection and governance measures, some of the measures that the speaker highlighted are; the fragmentation of environmental governance; shift in the importance to the tertiary and secondary sectors from the primary sector - that has dominated Zhejiang's industry composition since the communist gained power in China; encouragement of technology sharing; and also the classification of the industries into heavy pollutant and non or little pollutant and taking measures accordingly. Ms. Saheli argued that with these environmental and governance measures, Zhejiang made a fast and steady progress in its environmental protection and became a model for other provinces in environmental protection and governance.

Wenzhou, a prefecture level city in Zhejiang, Ms. Saheli said didn't have even ten percent of drinkable water and that the rivers were so polluted they had turned black. The central government intervened to protect the rivers through an introduction of a river protection model in Zhejiang, where all the eight rivers were appointed with an official – they are also called river god - responsible to take care of the river and directly answerable to the central government and provincial government. Generally, it was the mayor of the city that was appointed as the river god. The river god further fragment the responsibilities into other officials who were made responsible for particular part of a river like the lower, middle and upper stream. With this along with other measures like river harnessing, rehabilitation of river and shifting heavy industries outside of the river basin, and technology sharing mechanism, Ms. Saheli argued that rivers are not black anymore and that the water is clean.

She concluded her talk claiming that due to fragmentation of state and the implementation of the environmental protection laws, the province that is known for having black rivers is now focusing on green technology and green development. This led to many high level summits being held in Zhejiang, an incentive that is given due to its success in the environment protection. Zhejiang also became the model for many other provinces regarding environmental protection.

The talk was followed by question and answer session. During which it was discussed whether the technological fix - use of green and high technology – played a more important role than the creation of awareness of the environmental protectionism in Zhejiang's success. It was also discussed how environmental activism was seen as a threat to the state and how it is no more perceived as a threat. The growth in importance given to environmental protection in China is highlighted with the curriculums on environment protection being introduced in the schools.

Overall, her talk presented how China and its various agencies, basing on her case study of Zhejiang province, is adopting various environmental policies and governmental measures for environmental protection or at least to avoid further deterioration, without effecting their progress and industrial development.

About the Speaker

Saheli Chattaraj is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for China Studies at the Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Her basic training has been in Chinese Language and Literature and is a fluent speaker of Mandarin. She holds a Bachelors and Masters degree in Chinese Language, Literature and Cultural Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University. She holds an M.Phil Degree in Chinese Studies from the School of International Studies, JNU. Her research interest includes contemporary India-China relations, politics and state and society relations in China. She had been awarded a fellowship by the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the China-India Cultural Exchange program 2010-2011 to undertake advanced studies in Chinese. She has also been awarded the Taiwan Fellowship by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan to conduct research on India and Taiwan. She was affiliated with the National Chung Hsing University. She has also been associated with the India-China bilateral project of the Encyclopedia of India-China Cultural

Contacts, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. On several academic assignments she has travelled to China, Taiwan and Hong-Kong. Her recent publications include BRICS and the new Global Order (Third Concept, ISSN 0970-7247, January, 2013); Chattaraj, Saheli (2017), “The One Belt One Road as a Chinese Vision of Regional Economic Order”, in M.S. Prathibha ed., *China’s Rising Strategic Ambitions in Asia*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press (Upcoming); Chattaraj, Saheli (2017), “New Southbound Policy in India and South Asia”, *Prospect Journal*, *Prospect Foundation*, Taiwan (Upcoming, October, 2017).

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