

“Mesonic” role of Taiwan among Asia’s Giants

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It was remarkable that Jawaharlal Nehru, at a different era of China and India, where both countries were perhaps in one of their most unfortunate historical moments, could present such a clear and succinct vision. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will agree with me there can be no higher calling to the mission of National Tsing Hua University’s binding effort on behalf of Taiwan to adhere to the immortal words of the profound vision of Jawaharlal Nehru. In can, as Manoj Das said, “...work(s) wonders in the realms of creativity..”

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome. This is indeed an exciting conference. In fact, I think it could be interpreted as a **watershed moment** for Taiwan to understand the fundamental importance of India in the 21st century.

On September 24 of 2007, I was invited to give a talk at the United States National Academy of Sciences conference entitled *The Dragon and the Elephant: Understanding the Development of Innovation Capacity in China and India*. The title of my talk was “India, China and United States: What could/may happen in 21st century?” The main theme was to say that these countries, for the world’s sake, should be more a “trinity” than a “tripartite.” In my summary, I said that,

“It is clear to me that the condition, which took the entire 20th century to mature, is ripe for these three nations to regard themselves as a ‘trinity’ and not a ‘tripartite.’ Due to their individual successes, I believe that these three nations should and need to shoulder a major part of global responsibilities to ensure that the world can be a better place for all humanity in the 21st and beyond centuries.”

I gave that talk just prior to coming to Taiwan. At that time, I had no inkling as to where Taiwan would be placed in this trinity.

In my first three and a half years in National Cheng Kung University, while I climbed a very steep learning curve to understand Taiwan and Mainland China, India was not part of my equation. During those three and a half years, I saw a significant and positive change in the so-called “cross straits” relationship. In fact, the “hostility” between Mainland China and Taiwan has *de facto* vanished in reality, and more important, in the minds of people on both shores.

Remarkably, since coming to National Tsing Hua University 18 months ago, I began to think about Taiwan in the context of India and Mainland China. What led me to this train of thought is the following. First of all, National Tsing Hua University is joined at the hips with Beijing Tsinghua University, which is one of the intellectually and politically most powerful universities in Mainland China. This linkage provided a natural platform for me as NTHU’s Senior Vice President in charge of global strategy to gain a deeper appreciation of the intricate relationship between Taiwan and the Mainland. It also drew for me a roadmap, however blurry at the moment, of the long term relationship of the two shores.

Secondly, little did I know that prior to my arrival, President Lih J. Chen and Vice President for Global Affairs Wei-Chung Wang had already developed a fledgling effort with India. After my arrival, I saw and participated in a number of robust activities. These activities were spiritually led by President Chen and actively developed with relevant Offices, Colleges and Departments throughout campus by the Office of Global Affairs. In fact, in the past 18 months, there were numerous exciting events involving Indian institutions and NTHU. I took the opportunity to

visit my birth place New Delhi and India's silicon-valley Bangalore. Also, NTHU had initiated a number of educational centers in India to bring and transfer the rich and robust Chinese culture to Indian students. In return, our friends in India have started to instruct us the beauty of Indian cultures, the richness of Indian history. We hope that this is the spark that could burn brightly the prairie.

So what role should Taiwan, a nation of “tiny” 23 million, play in the new Asian paradigm?

To this end, I hope you will let me indulge in a few words about physics. I am sure that you know from your basic knowledge of physics that at one level the fundamental building blocks of matter are neutrons and protons. For any two such particles, neutron or proton, the question is what binds them together? Well, the binding is in fact carried out by another particle which possesses totally different physical characteristics. It is called a **meson** (介子).

So, faced with the new Taiwan – China and Taiwan – India paradigms, I began to ask myself what role Taiwan should and can play when it is situated between the two enormous giants, Mainland China with 1.4 billion populations and India with 1.2 billion. India and China, with nearly 40% of the world's population, sit adjacent to one another geographically. Both have deep history and a love for education. They have diametrically different political systems. In the 20th century, China and India shrugged off “Sick Man of East Asia 東亞病夫” image and a “British colony,” respectively and emerged in the 21st century as global economic powerhouses. Yet, it is indeed unfortunate that for these two nations, history has not been kind to their mutual relationship, thus rendering them an awkward disposition in the 21st century. Still, in many ways, India and China are certainly as starkly different as they are strikingly similar. I dare to say that for the tranquility of Asia and the world in the 21st century, India and China should and need to have the best of relations.

With this as my underpinning, I slowly came to the conclusion that Taiwan could play a “**mesonic** role” for India and China.

As you all know, in the past decade, partially because of the economic rise of China, there is in India a noticeable surge of interest in Chinese ways and means. In my recent visits to India, I noticed that such interest is by no means confined to only Chinese languages, although that may have been the initial incentive, but to the cultures, the thinking processes and deep rooted social habits. Indeed, in general, Chinese ways and means. The most obvious rise of this interest is that Indian government is requesting all of its secondary schools, if possible, to offer Chinese as a third language. For a nation of 1.2 billion, such a request would constitute a herculean human engineering effort. It is therefore truly remarkable that Taiwan, whose tiny population of 23 million, who has inherited the thousands of years of rich Chinese culture, could be a source for the vast Indian population to learn it.

On the other hand, India is popping up in Mainland China's radar screen. This is also partially due to India's economic and intellectual rise, especially its transparently obvious information technology (IT) global dominance. Also, due to the fact that English is so prevalent in India, Indians prominence in the world of commerce is as vast as they are in the world of academics. For the same reason, for China to appreciate India, it too should begin to appreciate the vast and complex Indian languages, Indian cultures, and in general Indian ways and means. Therefore, since Taiwan, through the effort of NTHU, and hopefully this effort will spread to all universities on the island, has made serious inroads into understanding this enormously prolific nation, it can serve as a bridge for China.

So, ladies and gentlemen, the mesonic model of Taiwan is as follows. Mainland China and India are the fundamental building blocks of Asia in particular, the world in general. However, for Mainland China and India to truly become global powers in every sense of the word, to be able to assist the world in tackling many of the global challenges, and not to cancel each other out, they need to bind together. This is just like neutrons and protons. For these particles to have power, they need to bind together. And, like the mesons for neutrons and protons, Taiwan, with the new and palpable interest in everything of India, and with its deep and ubiquitous Chinese culture, could bind India and China together in order for these two powerful nations to truly attain its rightful place in the world in the 21st

century! This is why with such a global perspective is the effort of NTHU so important today.

The great Indian scholar and reporter Manoj Das wrote in The Hindu on January 7, 2001 the following”

*“...the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru who said “**If China and India hold together, the future of Asia is assured.**” This holding together needs not be confined to diplomacy; it can, by all means, be a psychological force that can work wonders in the realms of creativity...”*

It was remarkable that Jawaharlal Nehru, at a different era of China and India, where both countries were perhaps in one of their most unfortunate historical moments, could present such a clear and succinct vision. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will agree with me there can be no higher calling to the mission of National Tsing Hua University’s binding effort on behalf of Taiwan to adhere to the immortal words of the profound vision of Jawaharlal Nehru. It can, as Manoj Das said, “...work(s) wonders in the realms of creativity..”

This is clearly a case where the university did not seek greatness. Greatness through serendipity was thrust upon it!

With this calling in mind, I came to the conclusion in my opening comment that this conference is a watershed moment.

Thank you so much for your attention.