

Session on "Chinese Leadership in the 21st Century: A Civilisational Approach" with Dr Tu Weiming

New Delhi, 02 January 2008

Instead of using the lens of 'clash of civilisations' in dealing with international relations, we should focus on harmonious relationships and cultural pluralism, said Dr Tu Weiming, Professor at Harvard University and Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, USA, addressing a session on "Chinese Leadership in the 21 st Century: A Civilisational Approach", organized by the Aspen Institute India, in New Delhi. In order to deal with the domestic issues and relationship with foreign countries, China should take civilisational approach and tap cultural resources in the new world order.

Prof. Tu said: "To meet the new challenges in the wake of marketisation, the Chinese leadership should understand the importance of social capital and involve people from different backgrounds in the mainstream of national life." He said though China has emerged as a technological power in the last two decades, it should also lay emphasis on its rich cultural and civilisational heritage. The country can go further on the path of stability and harmony if it uses its cultural competence in a proper and constructive way, he added.

Prof. Tu said, "True harmony is the recognition of differences between various groups of society. This opens the space for public reasoning. In view of the unprecedented turmoil China faced in the past two centuries, it should nurture social capital and pluralism in society and promote its soft power." Highlighting the importance of tradition in the modern world, Prof. Tu said we should reject narrow-minded nationalism and accept harmony, a civilisational concept as propounded by Confucius. In a larger context, Prof Tu felt that intellectuals should come forward and contribute to creating a healthy social order.

Prof. Tu said Confucian philosophy can go a long way in resolving the differences between China and Taiwan. "Being a big power, China should be 'benevolent' to Taiwan and Taiwan as a small state should pay 'respect' to China. This Confucian approach can help in narrowing the differences and finally in resolving the problem of identity."

Prof. Tu said that market forces should not forget the importance of a harmonious society. In quest of growth, companies should not ignore the ecological balance. He warned that the booming automobile industry in China can spell ecological disaster if not dealt with appropriately. Soft power can help China a lot in dealing with the problems of ecological and social issues.

Prof. Tu highlighted the cultural proximity of India and China and urged them to work in close co-operation, particularly in the field of information technology. He said, "Given the shared Buddhist heritage, China should take India as a reference culture."

Welcoming Prof. Tu, Mr Tarun Das, President, The Aspen Institute India, said, "Aspen India has been playing an instrumental role in creating understanding between people from different backgrounds." Introducing Prof. Tu, Mr Ravi Bhoothalingam, Founder Chairman, Manas Advisory, said: "India-China ties should

not be confined to economy only. We are taking a broader look. Prof. Tu has done a commendable job in spreading Confucian values."