

Institute of Chinese Studies

SPECIAL PANEL DISCUSSION

*Celebrating 10 Years of ICS-
HYI Multi-Year Doctoral
Fellowship in China Studies*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speakers :

Veda Vaidyanathan

Pawan Amin

Shubhda Gurung

Nishant Sharma

Cherry Hitkari

22 January 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speakers:

Dr. Veda Vaidyanathan, Associate Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress, New Delhi

Mr. Pawan Amin, ICS-HYI Fellow, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Cambridge

Ms. Shubhda Gurung, ICS-HYI Fellow, Harvard-Yenching Institute, Cambridge

Mr. Nishant Sharma, Senior Advanced Student, Fudan University, Shanghai

Ms. Cherry Hitkari, ICS-HYI Fellow, East China Normal University, Shanghai

Introductory Remarks: Prof. Alka Acharya, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies; Chairperson & Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Moderator: Mr. Ravi Bhoothalingam, Emeritus Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi; Fellow, Royal Geographical Society, London

Closing Remarks: Dr. Madhavi Thampi, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies; Former Editor, China Report; Former Associate Professor, Department of East Asian Studies, Delhi University, New Delhi

Date: 22 January 2025

Venue: Zoom

- The Special Panel Discussion commemorated the 10-year anniversary of the Institute of Chinese Studies-Harvard Yenching Institute (ICS-HYI) Multi-Year Doctoral Fellowship in China Studies. Prof. Alka Acharya outlined the history of the ICS-HYI Fellowship, and explained how it provides an opportunity for young doctoral scholars focusing on China to study and undertake research at premier universities and institutions in China,

followed by a stint at the Harvard-Yenching Institute. She highlighted the Fellowship's strong institutional backing, the commitment and efforts to provide the most feasible solutions to the academic needs of scholars, as well as providing mentorship, and access to resources not available in India.

- Mr Bhoothalingam moderated the following discussion by outlining the framework for this Panel Discussion and specifying the themes and issues that were to be addressed by the panellists.
- Ms. Cherry Hitkari highlighted the role of the Fellowship in aiding her research. She noted the importance of attaining language proficiency, and pointed to various resources that she has been able to access in China over the last several months.
- Outlining his experiences in China, Mr. Nishant Sharma emphasised his interactions with people and the impact of the same in shaping his perceptions. He also highlighted the manner in which navigating the Internet in China has aided him in his research.
- Ms. Shubdha Gurung, who received the Fellowship during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the flexible nature of the Fellowship. She appreciated how the ICS and the HYI both took into active consideration the prevailing circumstances and allowed her to avail the Fellowship as soon as travel restrictions were lifted. Ms. Gurung also mentioned how the ICS and the HYI enabled her to foster connections with universities and people whose research aligns greatly with her own. Furthermore, she also noted the availability of resources through various channels which greatly supported her work.
- Mr. Pawan Amin focused on how the Fellowship enables young scholars to become good Sinologists. Outlining his experience, Mr. Amin emphasised the importance of networking and opportunities for the same made available through the Fellowship. Speaking about language proficiency, a core element of the Fellowship, Mr. Amin noted how it aided him in referring to Chinese sources in research, and discovering new perspectives.

- Dr. Veda Vaidyanathan highlighted that the Fellowship allows young researchers to develop and refine their perspective, and provides a platform for scholars to engage, learn, and develop their skills. She also mentioned various opportunities that open up for scholars after the end of the Fellowship. She also stressed the relevance and value of networking, and engaging with peers in order to grow as researchers.
- Dr. Madhavi Thampi highlighted six aspects – language, access to research materials, direct experience, excellent mentorship, networking and a good stipend – that the ICS-HYI Fellowship provides to its recipients, which make for a unique blend of learning and valuable experiences facilitating development in both personal and professional fields.
- In her remarks, Prof. Acharya highlighted the Fellowship committee’s criteria for selecting fellows, which includes clarity and coherence of ideas, the scholar’s depth of knowledge, their engagement with relevant readings and arguments. She also highlighted the importance of being aware of dominant thinkers in the field of research. Furthermore, the committee also values the determination, potential and, enthusiasm towards research.
- In conclusion, Dr. Thampi highlighted that the aim of the Fellowship is to train the next generation of China scholars in India, who shall, through rigorous research and initiatives, highlight the importance of China Studies as a field.

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