

Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Constructing Economic
Policy Paradigms in
China: Bureaucratic
Politics and the Many
“China Models”*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:

Yingyao Wang

14 May 2025

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Speaker: Dr. Yingyao Wang, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Chair: Prof. Biswajit Dhar, Distinguished Professor, Council for Social Development; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Date: 14 May 2025

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined how China's economic policy paradigms are not the result of a single ideology or top-down vision, but rather emerge from bureaucratic negotiations and institutional processes. Dr. Yingyao Wang argued that these paradigms are constructed within the state apparatus by professional bureaucrats who interact with both domestic and global forces.
- Dr. Wang highlighted a significant transition in China's reform period — from localised, experimental governance to more centralised economic policy-making. This shift was characterised by a transfer of authority and influence from provincial and local governments to central ministries and planning agencies.
- The emergence of economic policy paradigms in China, Dr. Wang noted, stems from three intersecting forces: evolving economic conditions that demand strategic responses, the influx and adaptation of global economic ideas, and the organisational interests within the Chinese bureaucracy.
- A core theme of the seminar was the increasingly prominent role of economic bureaucrats in shaping China's policy paradigms. Dr. Wang emphasised that analysing their trajectories is crucial to understanding how economic strategies are chosen, legitimised, and implemented in China's unique bureaucratic environment.
- To illustrate her arguments, Dr. Wang discussed key case studies including the reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and the development of China's industrial policy. She described two competing paradigms in SOE reform: the "National Champion" model, which promotes large, globally competitive enterprises, and the "Shareholding" model, which encourages commercialisation and efficiency through corporatisation.

- Dr. Wang concluded that policy paradigms in China often emerge from modest, bureaucratically driven beginnings. Over time, they solidify through new career patterns and institutional innovations. The weakening of traditional economic elites has allowed economic bureaucrats to become the central drivers of policy formulation. Bureaucracy therefore, is not just a vehicle for policy implementation, but also a dynamic space where new economic visions are born.

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