

Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*'Silk Road Economic
Belt' (2013) to
'Community with a
Shared Future for
Mankind' (2023):
Deciphering Xi Jinping's
World View*

REPORT

Speaker :

Parimal Maya Sudhakar

24 January 2024

REPORT

Speaker: Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar, Associate Professor, MIT School of Government (MIT-SOG), MIT World Peace University, Pune.

Chair: Dr. Jabin T. Jacob, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies, and Director, Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

The seminar examined the underlying principles of Xi Jinping's worldview and their influence on China's foreign policy. Dr. Sudhakar began his presentation by appreciating Xi's approach, stating that it's essential to contextualise it within broader historical trends and geopolitical developments. The transition from Hu Jintao's leadership to Xi's marked a pivotal moment in China's foreign policy evolution. During Hu's tenure, China adhered to Deng's principle of maintaining a low profile, focusing on economic development while avoiding confrontation with major powers. However, growing assertiveness from countries like Japan and the United States' "pivot to Asia" under Barack Obama challenged the effectiveness of this strategy, and laid the groundwork for reassessment under Xi's leadership.

According to Dr Sudhakar, Xi Jinping perceives China as a rising power with a responsibility to assert itself on the world stage actively. His vision goes beyond merely safeguarding China's economic interests; it encompasses a broader ambition of national rejuvenation and global leadership. This perspective has informed his approach to diplomacy, emphasising proactive engagement and the pursuit of strategic objectives that align with China's long-term interests. At the heart of Xi's worldview is the concept of China's national rejuvenation, which entails reclaiming its historical greatness and achieving comprehensive national progress. This aspiration extends beyond economic prosperity to encompass political, cultural, and military dimensions. Xi sees China as a civilisational state with a unique role to play in shaping the future of humanity.

The speaker highlighted that Communist Party of China (CPC) has codified Xi's diplomatic principles under the banner of "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy". These principles emphasize the integration of foreign policy with the overarching goal of national rejuvenation. Chinese diplomats are expected to prioritise the leadership of the CPC and promote China's image as a responsible global stakeholder. Central to this approach is the idea of leveraging China's ancient civilisation and cultural heritage to strengthen its soft power and expand its influence on the world stage.

Dr. Sudhakar further emphasised that Xi's worldview can be analysed at three interrelated levels: China, Asia, and the global balance of power. Domestically, he seeks to consolidate CPC control and maintain social stability while advancing economic modernisation. In Asia, he envisions China as the core player in a multipolar regional order, with initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative aimed at expanding Chinese influence across Eurasia. Globally, Xi perceives China as a rising power challenging the dominance of Western-led institutions, advocating for a more equitable international system.

Dr. Sudhakar also specifically highlighted Xi's most ambitious diplomatic initiatives, the proposal for a global civilisation initiative. This initiative seeks to promote dialogue and cooperation among civilisations, with China playing a leading role in shaping a new world order based on mutual respect and inclusivity. While promoting Chinese civilisation, the initiative also seeks to engage with other cultures and promote shared development, presenting an alternative vision to Western-led globalisation.

Despite Xi's assertive foreign policy stance, several contradictions and challenges persist. Economically, China faces uncertainties stemming from structural imbalances and the efficacy of its growth model, internationally, its assertiveness has not always translated into greater acceptance or influence, particularly in key regions like the United States and Europe. Moreover, while perceptions of the U.S. decline may be advantageous in some respects for China, it also presents risks and uncertainties for China's long-term strategic calculations.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Sudhakar stated that Xi Jinping's worldview and China's foreign policy under his leadership represent a departure from previous approaches, emphasising proactive engagement and the pursuit of strategic objectives tied to China's national rejuvenation. While this approach has generated significant momentum and reshaped global perceptions of China's role, persistent challenges and contradictions underscore the complexities of navigating international relations in an increasingly multipolar world.

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