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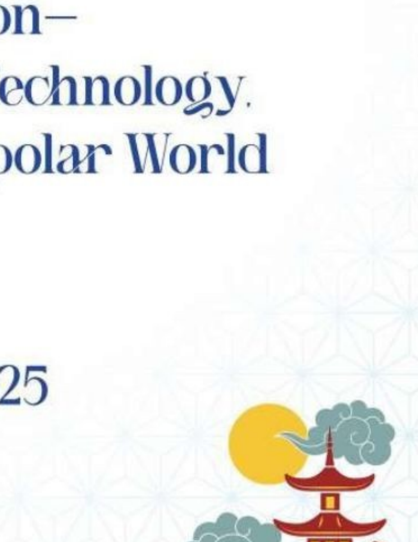
Indian Council of Social Science Research

The 18th All India Conference of China Studies

Theme:
Rewiring Globalization— The China Factor in Trade, Technology, and Sustainability in a Multipolar World

REPORT

October 24-26, 2025



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About the AICCS

The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) has been organising the All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS) as a flagship event since 2006. Convened annually, usually in November-December, in partnership with an institution where research and teaching in China Studies is being carried out, it is meant to generate interest in and strengthen research on China Studies in India.

In addition to a special theme each year, the conference also showcases a survey of recent scholarship in different aspects of China Studies, globally as well as in India. As a pan-Indian outreach initiative, the previous editions of AICCS have been held in Delhi (2006 & 2009), Jadavpur University (2010), Central University of Hyderabad (2011), Visva- Bharati University (2012 & 2021), IIM Kozhikode (2013), Banaras Hindu University (2014), Sikkim University (2015), University of Mumbai (2016), Goa University (2017), CHRIST University (2018), O.P. Jindal Global University (2019), IIT Madras (2021), IIT Guwahati (2022), and Central University of Hyderabad (2023).

Each year, the best paper presented by a young and emerging scholar is selected for the **Mira Sinha-Bhattacharjea Award**, instituted in the memory of one of the most eminent scholars of China Studies in India. The Award carries a prize of 25,000 INR and the selected paper is published by the ICS. The selection is made by a committee comprising senior China scholars, on the basis of originality of the topic, methodology, argument and presentation.

Concept Note

The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), New Delhi, in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, is organising the 18th All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS) from October 24-26, 2025. The AICCS has been a flagship event of the ICS since 2006. This year's special theme is 'Rewiring Globalization: The China Factor in Trade, Technology, and Sustainability in a Multipolar World'.

The AICCS embodies contemporary, emergent scholarship from universities and research institutions on Chinese studies. Convened annually in partnership with an institution engaged in research and teaching in China Studies, this premier conference continues to generate interest in and strengthen research on China Studies in India.

The conference focuses on the opportunities and challenges arising from the evolving dynamics of trade, technology, and sustainability in the global landscape. It also aims to explore how these shifts impact India's strategic and economic interests, particularly in the context of changing global power structures and interdependencies.

Over the past decade, China's integration into the global economy has influenced international trade, technology, and supply chains. Its 'Beijing Consensus' model—rooted in state-led economic strategies, targeted industrial policies, and region-specific growth—has played a key role in its rise across sectors like emerging technologies, renewable energy, and manufacturing. Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have extended China's economic influence, reshaping supply chains and economic diplomacy. Further, China's 14th Five-Year Plan focuses on significant investments in climate change and the digital economy.

However, these developments have raised concerns globally, with issues such as trade tensions, supply chain vulnerabilities, and technological dependencies coming to the forefront. China's dominance in renewable energy has also sparked debates on sustainability and the risks of market concentration, affecting global climate goals and multilateral cooperation.

For India, these shifts present both challenges and strategic opportunities. As India charts its growth trajectory, it must address questions of economic security, technological resilience, and sustainable development amid rising global competition.

The AICCS provides a platform for scholars, policymakers, and industry leaders to assess these dynamics, offering fresh perspectives on how India can strengthen its position in the global order, build resilient supply chains, and promote sustainable growth.

The sub-themes include, but are not limited to, the following: China's Foreign Policy and Diplomacy (China and Indo-Pacific, China and South-East Asia, China and South Asia, China's Economic Diplomacy); Geopolitics of Technology: The China Factor; Power Contestations in a Multipolar World: India, China and the West; Culture, Society, and Religion in China; China's Domestic Politics; Future of India-China Economic Engagement; Renewable Energy and Global Supply Chains: The China Factor in the Future of Climate Change.

Report

Day I

Inaugural Session

The Inaugural Session of the 18th All India Conference of China Studies featured a panel of eminent scholars. **Dr. Himanshu Rai**, Director, Indian Institute of Management Indore, delivered the **Inaugural Address**. Followed by this, **Prof. Aka Acharya**, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi delivered the **Welcome Remarks**. **Prof. G. Venkat Raman**, Convenor, 18th AICCS; Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Indore; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi formally welcomed the audience. The **Keynote Address** was delivered by **Mr. Ashok K. Kantha**, former Ambassador of India to China; Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi; and Distinguished Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi. Finally, the **Vote of Thanks** was delivered by **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, Co-convenor, 18th AICCS; Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Dr. Himanshu Rai opened the 18th AICCS by emphasising the profound significance of India-China relations, quoting the Indian Prime Minister's belief that "stable, predictable, constructive ties" are crucial for regional and global peace and prosperity. He connected this modern vision to India's deep cultural heritage, citing the Sanskrit *Shloka Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah* (May all be happy) as the guiding spirit for an international approach rooted in cooperation and the well-being of all nations. He highlighted IIM Indore's commitment to hosting the event, noting that the institution views education as a transformative force that shapes society and informs policy, perfectly aligning with the conference's goal of going beyond geographical, intellectual, and cultural boundaries. Collaborations and policy-focused forums established by IIM Indore underscore the growing recognition that understanding China is essential for engaging with the evolving global order.

He also talked about the deep civilisational links between India and China, two of the world's most ancient civilisations, which have shared and influenced philosophy, art, and knowledge for millennia. Both nations emphasise harmony between society and nature, reflected in principles like

Dharma and *Karma* as well as Confucianism, providing a shared moral foundation of resilience and ethical responsibility. Historically, the Silk Road and Maritime trade routes facilitated vast exchanges of goods, ideas, and technologies, establishing a legacy of mutual learning. In the modern era, both India and China are central to global conversations on trade, technology, and sustainability, drawing on their history of innovation and robust governance traditions. He stressed that understanding China is no longer optional for India. It is essential to approach this understanding through research-informed debate rather than simplistic narratives.

The main theme of the conference, "Rewiring Globalisation: The China Factor – Trade, Technology, and Sustainability," was introduced as a timely response to profound global shifts. The speaker pointed out that the world is grappling with fractured supply chains, technological competition replacing unification, and the imperative of climate change forcing a collective rethinking of growth models. China, through its unprecedented economic integration, manufacturing dominance, and leadership in areas like 5G and AI, is fundamentally reshaping the contours of globalisation. At the same time, India, with its demographic dividend, technological ecosystem, and democratic traditions, is also an active shaper of these new pathways. He posed important questions to the scholars and attendees, such as how to balance the benefits of interdependence with the risks of vulnerability, how to keep technological ecosystems collaborative amidst strategic competition, and how to rewire globalisation for equity and sustainability, not just growth.

Concluding his address, he asserted that India and China, as major global actors, have the potential to collectively create a new global order that is more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient, rather than merely adapting to external rules. Research and scholarly debate play a crucial role in helping India navigate challenges, spot opportunities, and align national interests with global stability. He encouraged participants to engage actively, challenge assumptions, and generate fresh insights, embodying the IIM Indore spirit of openness and curiosity. He closed with a quote from the *Isha Upanishad* about the power of knowledge, stressing that the ideas exchanged and collaborations formed at the conference will empower and sustain both communities and nations.

Prof. Alka Acharya began her address by expressing immense gratitude and confidence in IIM Indore for taking charge of the 18th AICCS, an important initiative promoting China studies in the country since its inception in 2006. She expressed pride in the fact that AICCS had reached its 18th edition.

She articulated the biggest challenge facing India today is not just China itself, but the difficulty in understanding China and how we approach that understanding. Even after over three decades in the field, scholars have “not even begun to scratch the surface” of truly understanding the neighbouring nation. The AICCS was conceived precisely to address this enormous challenge.

Moreover, AICCS is unique in itself. Its first unique selling point (USP) is that it travels across the country, fostering a broad, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary conversation that brings together scholars, researchers, policymakers, thought leaders, and public intellectuals. The second crucial USP is the conference's deliberate effort to integrate younger, emerging scholars into the field, providing them with invaluable opportunities to engage with and learn from senior intellectuals and policymakers. AICCS rejects the view of scholarly research and policy imagination as a binary, seeing them instead as two parts of a necessary intellectual interaction where robust scholarly research forms the foundational base for effective policy.

To sustain this work, she stressed the importance of institutional collaboration. Over 18 years, AICCS has partnered with public and private universities, IITs, and IIMs, and is actively seeking to expand collaborations to include business and commercial sectors. She firmly stated that conducting serious, meaningful China studies requires substantial, long-term resource commitment from both the state, often via the Ministry of External Affairs, and business leaders. Unlike other fields, China studies demand a basic, durable period of immersion, often requiring at least a decade of rigorous language and field study.

She expressed deep thanks to IIM Indore for its belief and resources, which provided a comfortable and impressive setting for the 18th chapter. She concluded by encouraging all participants to engage actively, challenge assumptions, and generate arguments, as contestation is vital for intellectual growth. She also encouraged everyone to utilise the opportunity to network and expand the community of China scholars across the country.

Prof. G. Venkat Raman began by referencing the 1990s, when China first announced itself on the global stage with a narrative focused on the Peaceful Rise of China. Through its policy of *He Ping Fa Zhan* (Peaceful Development), China aimed to assuage Western concerns about its growing power, assuring the world it harboured no threatening ambitions. However, China’s rise is evident today and it is no longer concerned with Western apprehensions. While the rise of China is undeniable, its nature is definitely not peaceful, leading to a new era of great power competition.

China's rise is characterised by great power competition, with China openly seeking to be a rule-maker rather than a rule-taker in globalisation and aggressively seeking to rewire globalisation itself. The current tumultuous era is marked by discussions about the future of globalisation, slobalisation, economic nationalism, or the end of globalisation as led by the US. The key question is whether the end of US-inspired globalisation will be replaced by a China-led globalisation or one led by new powers like China and India.

If India is to reclaim its rightful place in the 21st century, its greatest challenge is to understand and deal with the monster called China, which has erupted onto the world stage with tremendous speed and scale. He cited the recent example of a Xiaomi electric vehicle, manufactured in 2024, achieving the third-fastest time in the history of the Green Hill race. Regarding scale, he pointed to the energy sector, noting that China now accounts for more than half of the world's installed solar and wind capacity combined, and is driving three-quarters of all renewable energy projects globally. This rapid expansion, however, comes with significant internal costs, including overproduction capacities, economic involution, massive debt levels fuelled by the real estate crisis and COVID-19, and rule changes dictated by the current leadership. He noted that China has successfully disrupted the post-World War II global order, necessitating a reassessment of the new era of great competition.

The timing of the conference is therefore critical, as Indian leadership has recently engaged with China at the highest level to explore the possibilities of "competitive collaboration. He highlighted the conclusions of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee, which had just concluded. This Pleanry session unveiled China's ambitions for socialist modernisation and proposed the outline for its 15th Five-Year Plan. Key objectives revealed include achieving significant progress in high-quality productive forces, substantial improvement in science and technology self-reliance, strengthening national security, and seizing the commanding heights of science and technology, referred to as *qiang guo fa zhan ke ji*. These ambitions make understanding China's future trajectory and its impact on trade, technology, and sustainability absolutely necessary for the world.

Delivering the keynote address at the Inaugural Session of the 18th All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS) at IIM Indore, **Mr. Ashok K. Kantha** highlighted the need for developing a distinct Indian perspective on China, grounded in India's geopolitical realities and policy interests rather than Western analytical frameworks. Amb. Kantha situated his remarks within the current global environment of fractured supply chains, technological rivalries, and sustainability challenges, noting that these disruptions are significantly influenced by China's rise and the erratic policies of dominant powers like the United States. He stated that India-China relations are at a critical point, one that will shape not only bilateral dynamics but also the future of the liberal international order.

Talking about the earlier phases of the bilateral relationship, Amb. Kantha recalled his own engagements with China in 2013-2015, a period marked by optimism and high-level exchanges, including Prime Minister Modi's 2015 visit to Xi Jinping's hometown, known as "hometown diplomacy". However, he said that border challenges and strategic distrust led to the Galwan Valley clash of 2020, which destroyed any remaining trust between the countries. Despite limited recent interactions between the two leaders in 2025, he stated that the relationship remains "far from normalcy".

A central theme of the address was the need to understand China through independent, India-centred analysis. Amb. Kantha warned against "borrowed lenses" that often dominate Western academic and policy narratives. Instead, he highlighted the resilience and adaptability of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which has shown a strong capacity to reform and adapt its governance model in response to internal and external pressures.

Mr. Kantha also examined China's innovation-driven development strategy, describing it as a key pillar of the state's vision for national rejuvenation. Despite economic slowdowns, low domestic consumption, and over-reliance on exports, China continues to register significant advances in new technologies. Citing recent reports, he states that China currently leads in over 50 of 67 frontier technology sectors, which is attributed to its unique model of development. He stated that an alignment of private market forces and national objectives has allowed China to excel in technological self-sufficiency and strategic leverage in global supply chains.

He also stated that China's overcapacity in manufacturing and excessive state subsidies have generated global distortions, often referred to as "China Shock 2.0". These dynamics, when looked at in addition to Beijing's expanding export control regime and dominance over critical materials like rare earths and lithium, enable the state to weaponise economic dependence. This has led to significant strategic challenges for India.

In conclusion, Mr. Kantha advocated for advancing a policy approach of “eyes-open engagement” with China, which involves cooperation where mutually beneficial, while simultaneously taking up strong defensive measures to maintain India’s national interests. Thus, he encourages Indian academics and policymakers to invest in homegrown research, innovation, and R&D ecosystems as well as learning from but not by imitating China’s model. Drawing attention to India’s growing significance in the global digital economy, he put forth a thought-provoking question: *“*What do we want to be?”. Referring to a recent article from The Economist that notes that international AI firms view India primarily as a “fire-hose” of data, he cautioned against allowing India to become merely a source of raw inputs, echoing the colonial-era warning about being “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” While concluding, he called for analysing whether India is truly using its human capital and vast digital potential, or simply exporting innovation abroad while neglecting the vast potential that it is capable of.

Dr. Aravind Yelery expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Himanshu Rai for his leadership and collaboration, as well as to Prof Alka Acharya for her guidance and encouragement at every stage. He was grateful to Prof. Sreemati Chakrabarti for gracing everyone with her presence and lauded her selfless dedication. He acknowledged the significant contribution of the PP&R Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, especially the Hon’ble Joint Secretary of the PP&R Division, for encouraging research and scholarship on the crucial topic. He also noted the invaluable guidance and contribution of Ms. Shivani Jhirwal, Under Secretary, PP&R Division. He extended his gratitude to the Indian Council for Social Science Research for providing crucial conference funding. He especially thanked Prof. G. Venkat Raman for leading the charge from conceptualisation and meticulous planning to smooth execution. He appreciated the untiring efforts of every department of IIM Indore, which went the extra mile to make this event inclusive, well-coordinated and truly successful.

Special Panel I

Current Discourses in Chinese Studies

The Special Panel titled "Current Discourse in Chinese Studies" was chaired by **Prof. Alka Acharya**, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker of the session was **Dr. Bhim B. Subba**, Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Telangana, and his paper was titled "State of the Field: Party's Internal as Political Governance". The second speaker was **Ms. Anushka Saxena**, Staff Research Analyst, Indo-Pacific Studies Programme, The Takshashila Institution; and Doctoral Scholar, Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, Manipal Academy of Higher Education. Her paper was titled "China's Technological and Innovation Ecosystem". The third speaker was **Dr. Atul Kumar**, Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi, and his presentation was on the topic "Assertive and Adaptive: Surveying Recent Scholarship on Chinese Foreign Policy". The fourth speaker was **Dr. Anand P. Krishnan**, Fellow, Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. His paper was titled "Surveying the Chinese Political Economy in Last Five Years: Research, Scholarship, Publications". The final speaker was **Dr. Usha Chandran**, Assistant Professor, Centre for Chinese and South East Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. Her paper was titled "Popular Culture in Contemporary Chinese Society: Twenty-First Century Avatar of Confucianism".

The Chair opened the session by noting that it forms an integral part of the All-India Conference of China Studies, intended to review and assess the current state of the field. The panel, she explained, aims to highlight emerging research directions, evolving scholarly discourses, and new thematic areas within China studies. She emphasised the importance of depth in academic research, advising that doctoral studies should be "a mile deep and an inch broad," underscoring the value of focused inquiry over breadth. Each panelist, she noted, brings over a decade of experience in their respective areas, ensuring a comprehensive and informed overview of ongoing developments.

Ms. Anushka Saxena examined the evolution of China's technological and innovation ecosystem through three interrelated dimensions: the economy driving innovation, the strategic logic behind it, and its broader implications for global geopolitics. From a political economy perspective, China's innovation drive is shaped less by domestic policy and more by a competitive international environment. The concept of "creative insecurity", articulated by Mark Zachary Taylor, explains how external rivalry compels states to innovate. This framework captures the current US–China dynamic, where both powers' technological races are mutually reinforcing. Perceptions of China's rapid rise ashighlighted in the ASPI tracker, places China ahead in 37 of 44 advanced technology sectors thatfuel anxiety in Washington, driving reciprocal competition and policy escalation.

At the strategic level, China functions as an "engineering state" — marked by large-scale investment, hyperscale infrastructure, and accelerated industrial innovation. Yet this progress is constrained by "control neurosis", described by Angela Zhang (2024) as the Chinese Communist Party's excessive administrative control over innovation. Regulatory crackdowns on technology sectors reveal an internal paradox: promoting creativity while enforcing rigid political discipline. This results in an oscillation between innovation and repression, a defining feature of China's political economy.

In the military and institutional domains, similar contradictions persist. Organisational reforms in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) aim to enhance efficiency and integrate new technologies. However, frequent structural shifts and anti-corruption campaigns often erode trust within the ranks, generating uncertainty and reducing institutional stability.

The presentation concluded that China's capacity for innovation is undeniable, yet the fundamental challenge lies in its ability to sustain innovation organically rather than administratively. The Chinese model illustrates how creative insecurity can propel technological progress, but sustaining global leadership demands an innovation ecosystem that thrives on openness, institutional flexibility, and reduced state intervention.

Dr. Atul Kumar's presentation provided an overview of recent scholarship on Chinese foreign policy, focusing on its evolving nature from cautious engagement to adaptive assertiveness. In the early 2000s Chinese diplomacy was typically cautious, characterised by restraint. This shifted around 2008–2010 with the rise of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy, known for its aggressive and vocal posture. However, by 2022, a recalibration has been observed, leading to a current approach that is better described as adaptive assertiveness. The book *China's Rising Foreign Ministry: Practices and Representations of Assertive Diplomacy* by Dylan M.H. Loh explains how the Chinese Foreign Ministry (MFA) has gained influence in policy guidance and implementation. The MFA actively uses social media and spokesperson briefings to visually explain policies and control narratives, emphasising a focus on internal and external messaging. There's a clear correlation between the promotion of diplomats who are aggressive, vocal, and effective at countering negative narratives, suggesting an institutional shift in favour of assertive behaviour. However, there's a variation where the vocal assertiveness often acts as theatrical performance. While spokespersons are direct and aggressive on issues like Taiwan, the South China Sea, or human rights, actual policy implementation remains cautiously balanced. For example, despite the public" no-limits friendship" with Russia, Chinese companies have shown caution in adhering to sanctions when dealing with US–Russia tensions, indicating a pragmatic approach that adapts to critical circumstances.

The speaker discussed some emerging viewpoints to China's global ambition. In her book The World According to China, Elizabeth Economy suggests China is no longer content merely integrating into the existing international order; it actively seeks to shape the world order in line with its own interests, values, and governance models. She famously argues that China is neither a revolutionary nor a passive reformer, but a technological and economic disruptor. Technology, particularly EVs, 5G, AI, and green energy, is the future driver of China's economy. The push for high-tech growth is seen as a deliberate strategy for a new growth model. Another viewpoint that Chinese foreign policy is driven by the desire for China to be central, whether it is geographically, economically, politically or ideologically. Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and Dual Circulation are seen as mechanisms to push China to the central stage. Finally, a strategic view suggests China achieved its rise by skilfully exploiting gaps in the existing international system and innovating its own institutions, all while carefully avoiding a decisive confrontation or provoking organised, unified competition from other major powers. In conclusion, the scholarly consensus points to a Chinese foreign policy that is deeply ambitious, technologically driven, and utilises a dual strategy of vocal assertiveness in rhetoric alongside a pragmatic, adaptive approach in critical policy decisions.

Dr. Anand P. Krishnan, examined the Chinese political economy over the last five years, focusing on two interrelated areas — industrialisation and labour. His analysis drew primarily from official documents and recent party communiqués, underscoring the value of engaging with primary sources for understanding policy direction in contemporary China.

He began by discussing the Fourth Plenum of the Communist Party of China, which adopted the framework for the 15th Five-Year Plan. The plan emphasises maintaining a strong manufacturing base and advancing high-quality development under the guidance of the CPC. Xi Jinping's call for "*Chinese-style modernisation*" links development, reform, and innovation as central to addressing the "principal contradiction" between unbalanced development and people's growing needs.

The speaker noted that this development model builds on *Made in China 2025*, stressing advanced manufacturing, technological self-reliance, and industrial upgrading. The emerging concept of **"***new quality productive forces***"** reflects a shift from labour-intensive production to innovation-driven sectors such as robotics, aerospace, AI, EVs, and semiconductors. In response to global trade uncertainties, the dual circulation strategy seeks to balance domestic consumption with export competitiveness.

He emphasised that industrialisation under Xi Jinping is both economic and ideological**,** marked by increased CPC centralisation and the creation of new oversight bodies such as the Central Science and Technology Commission and the Central Finance and Economic Affairs Commission. The boundaries between state and party institutions have blurred, and party committees are being integrated into enterprises, ensuring ideological alignment across sectors. Policy is now simultaneously developmental and disciplinary, reflecting greater central supervision and reduced local flexibility.

Turning to the labour sector, the speaker discussed how the rise of digital platforms has transformed employment relations. Drawing on Li Qiyu's *From Click to Boom*, he explained that e-commerce platforms now perform roles once held by the state, such as contract enforcement and dispute resolution, creating a new form of institutional outsourcing. During the pandemic, the CPC recognised the essential role of gig and platform workers, amending trade union laws to include them as new forms of employment.

Xi Jinping's concept of a "service-oriented model" redefines trade unions as homes for workers, emphasizing top-down service provision and symbolic engagement rather than traditional collective bargaining. This represents a reimagining of China's historic work-unit networks. The party is also extending its organisational reach into informal and flexible labor sectors, using symbolic incentives and selective mobilisation to incorporate gig workers into party-building activities.

The speaker concluded that China's current development trajectory reflects a dual process—industrial centralisation under party control and adaptive labor incorporation into the socialist framework. Both dimensions illustrate how innovation, discipline, and ideology now operate in tandem within China's political economy.

Dr. Usha Chandran's paper examined the complex relationship between popular culture, traditional Confucian philosophy, and the policies of the Chinese state, particularly concerning national identity and social order. While popular culture is generally understood as common among the majority, social science views it as representing beliefs, customs, and language explored ethnographically. Although often associated with industrialisation and mass media, the speaker stressed that popular culture existed long before the industrial era, only gaining a mass reach through modern channels.

Historically, Confucian teachings were critical to daily life in China, connecting people's material and psychological well-being. Over time, Confucianism extensively absorbed elements from Daoism and Buddhism. While it became a common tradition of the majority Han population, it also established a hierarchical binary, particularly concerning gender. The cultural unification of China, prominently practiced through writing was often intertwined with or superimposed upon existing folk culture. This dominance created tension with ethnic minorities, who were often geographically pushed inward or treated as culturally inferior, despite official recognition as ethnic groups. Even though the founding of the PRC was ostensibly against racism, cultural diversity became an obstacle to the state's fundamental efforts toward political centralism and integration. While some minority cultural elements are preserved for tourism, there is a constant anxiety and friction between the dominant culture and resistant minority voices.

The entry of Western culture in the 19th century created challenges for China, leading to a need to forge a new national identity. The spread of Marxism challenged traditional Confucian culture, paving the way for the Communist revolution. Even after 1949, the CPC continued a culture of revolution, rejecting Confucian values and promoting a mass culture based on collective goals, uniform practices and community principles. This reached its extreme during the Cultural Revolution, which aimed to destroy the Four Olds.

However, the subsequent periods of reform, opening up, and globalisation reintroduced Western cultural influences, prompting the need to revive and preserve Chinese culture. The government, while wary of fully reviving conservative traditional ideology, began subtly reversing its stance. For instance, the idea of a Harmonious Society was introduced in 2003 to address inequality, and the Chinese Dream highlighted the centrality of Confucian thought. The CPC's mission became the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, aligning culture with a framework of being Chinese.

The state-market nexus has facilitated the popularisation of traditional Chinese culture, presenting it as mainstream rather than just elite. This revival emphasises the five Confucian constant virtues. Studies show that many Chinese people still maintain Confucian beliefs regarding marriage and family life, although young women show the highest difference of opinion from traditional ideas on raising children. The popular revival of Confucian principles, such as *Guanxi* (social networking/relationships), continues to serve the guiding principles of maintaining social harmony and peace.

Historically, Confucianism has thus been idealised, dismissed, and more recently, rehabilitated by the state. The speaker concluded by highlighting a paradox: The CPC, which fought against conservatism based on Confucianism during its revolutionary period, is now actively promoting it to maintain social order and create an image of a harmonious, functioning society. Some scholars view this as an alternative ideological tool reflecting the declining influence of Marxism, leading to the idea of Confucian Marxism. This revival, however, risks undermining the century-long efforts for liberation, especially concerning entrenched issues like hierarchy and gender inequality.

Dr. Bhim B. Subba's presentation analysed recent shifts in the CPC institutional practices, focusing primarily on the Organisation Department and the United Front Work Department (UFWD), and their alignment with Xi Jinping's emphasis on Party control and traditional culture. A major transformation is seen in the CPC Organisation Department's recruitment. Historically focused on law or liberal arts graduates, the department is now prioritising STEM and management backgrounds for provincial leadership. This shift is interpreted as part of Xi Jinping's strategy to cement the Party-State's control over innovation and the legal regime, ensuring that the "rule of law" operates as "rule under the Party-State."

The speaker also highlighted the Party's increasing reliance on Confucian virtues in governance and discipline. The Central Discipline Inspection Commission is incorporating traditional cultural concepts, such as emphasising "truth" and other virtues, into rules and regulations. This effort to integrate traditional culture is seen as necessary, though perhaps insufficient, to bolster the Party's ideological framework. Furthermore, there are changes in the recruitment for the Foreign Ministry. Many new diplomats are trained in the UFWD or have been appointed after serving long tenures in minority regions like Xinjiang or Tibet. This practice is crucial for the Foreign Ministry because, as the speaker suggested, the Party often utilises Western concepts to articulate itself globally, making it essential to understand how the Party establishes its distinction from the people of China. Finally, the presentation touched on the Party's use of anti-corruption as a political tool. Annual CDIC reports detail surprisingly large numbers of cases, for instance, 90,000 disciplinary cases in a recent year. Anti-corruption is increasingly being weaponised to negotiate power and sideline both non-performing and non-compliant leaders, ensuring Party loyalty and control

Referring to earlier discussions in the conference, she linked these concepts to the notion of China as both a disruptive and status-quo power, questioning why similar labels are not applied to other major powers such as the United States. She concluded by emphasizing that the presentation offered thought-provoking perspectives on how China's innovation model combines state control with competitive dynamism, and how these frameworks could also invite comparative reflection for India's own innovation strategies.

The Chair commended Dr. Krishnan's presentation for drawing attention to the importance of primary-source analysis in China studies. She emphasised that policy documents, speeches, and party papers require careful textual reading to uncover their deeper meanings and implications, rather than being dismissed as mere propaganda. The discussion, she noted, highlighted how the party-state seeks to expand control, restructure innovation, and extend ideological influence into new socio-economic domains, including labor and technology.

Thematic Panel I

State-Business Relations and Emerging Technologies

Thematic Panel I titled “State-Business Relations and Emerging Technologies” was chaired by **Prof. Ajit Phadnis**, Associate Professor, Humanities and Social Sciences Area at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Indore. The first speaker was **Ms. Nimisha Kashyap**, Doctoral Scholar, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and her paper was titled “State-Business Relations in the Age of Emerging Technologies: The Case of Fintech Sector in China”. The second speaker was **Dr. Ankit Surana**, Faculty, Indian Institute of Management Indore, and his paper was titled “Success and Failure of Indian Digital Platform Firm in China”. The third speaker was **Dr. Tanmoy Kundu**, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management Indore, and he presented on the topic “Beyond the Belt and Road: Emerging Corridors and the New Global Trade Order”. The fourth speaker was **Dr. Nishit Kumar**, Research Fellow, Centre for Contemporary China Studies, New Delhi, and his paper was titled “China’s Techno-Nationalism: Strategic Policies and Technological Innovation”.

The Chair introduced the session's core theme as the interaction between "markets and government," focusing on a central paradox is that "innovation may not thrive in authoritarian regimes," yet this theory doesn't apply in the case of China. He positioned the panel as an opportunity to explore how innovation can thrive in a different type of a state-market setup and hoped the presentations would provide answers. He then briefly previewed the four papers, noting there focus on "technology, business, and the state" while one covers "state and trade", all using varied methodologies.

Ms. Nimisha Kashyap began with an introduction to fintech as a fusion of finance and technology aimed at simplifying financial products and services to broaden access for all. Ms. Kashyap emphasised the pivotal role fintech has played in China’s financial inclusion, particularly among populations with limited access to traditional banking. She detailed China's rapid rise as a global fintech powerhouse, highlighting key players such as Alibaba, Baidu, and Tencent, which spearhead platforms like Alipay and WeChat Pay. According to the Ernst & Young Fintech Adoption Index 2019, China's fintech adoption rate stands at 87%, with digital payments adoption at an impressive

95%. By 2024, the fintech market in China was valued at approximately 459 trillion dollars, reflecting its exponential growth.
The speaker also outlined China's fintech evolution through three distinct stages: computerisation of finance (1984–2003), internetisation of finance (2004–2014), and intelligentisation of finance (2015 to the present). The initial stage was characterised by a top-down regulatory approach where traditional financial institutions laid foundational infrastructure. The intermediate stage saw a bottom-up market-driven expansion fuelled by internet, mobile technologies, and cloud computing, with the government adopting a cautious "wait-and-watch" regulatory stance that allowed fintech firms to flourish largely unregulated until 2016.

During this phase, Ms. Kashyap noted the role of digital infrastructure initiatives such as "Internet Plus" and "Made in China 2025" and the increasing smartphone penetration, which surged from 62% in 2014 to 72% in 2022, alongside the jump in internet penetration from 47% to 78%. These factors collectively created a favourable environment for fintech growth, enabling platforms that integrated e-commerce, messaging, and financial services to emerge and underpin China's transition toward a cashless economy.

The intelligentisation stage, from 2015 onwards, saw the development of fintech through advanced technologies like big data, artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, and internet of things. This period was marked by a hybrid model that blended market innovation with active state involvement. Ms. Kashyap emphasised how regulatory responses evolved from encouragement to stringent oversight, especially following instances of financial fraud, misuse of customer data, and collapse in peer-to-peer lending platforms between 2017 and 2018. The government intervened decisively to restore order, exemplified by the central bank digital currency initiative, enhanced anti-fraud measures, and regulatory consolidation under the People's Bank of China (PBOC).

In her analysis, Ms. Kashyap pointed out the dual forces driving China's fintech sector: state-led development emphasizing regulation and financial stability, and market-driven innovation promoting rapid expansion and inclusion. This interaction has shaped a distinctive fintech landscape, posing questions about the replicability of China's state-led development model in other contexts, particularly given China's unique political and economic governance.

In conclusion, Ms. Kashyap summarised that China’s fintech sector growth can be understood through its innovation patterns, regulatory evolution, and state-market interactions. The Chinese model has successfully fostered fintech development and expanded financial inclusion but faces ongoing challenges related to data protection, fraud prevention, and sustainable regulation. Her lecture provided valuable insights into how emerging technologies interact with governance and market dynamics in shaping financial innovation.

Dr. Ankit Surana began by noting that while traditional internationalisation studies focused on Western firms moving to Asia, this narrative has shifted, first with Japanese firms and then significantly with Chinese firms (like Haier, Tencent, Alibaba) becoming global leaders. The core of his research addresses a key phenomenon: the widespread failure of major Western digital firms (such as Amazon and Uber) in China, despite their global success. These failures are often attributed to fierce local competition and state-related factors. He then introduced his case study of OYO Rooms. OYO's case is particularly compelling because it was an Indian firm that entered the Chinese market in 2017, after most Western firms had already failed.

Dr. Surana explained that OYO, unlike many Western firms before it, initially found remarkable success in China. It achieved this through a savvy, multi-dimensional strategy. The company expanded at a breakneck pace, covering over 300 cities and 180,000 rooms within just a year. This growth was not random, it strategically targeted the standardisation of budget hotels in Tier 2, 3, and 4 cities, which perfectly mirrored the Chinese government's policy of promoting domestic tourism. Also, OYO clearly learned from the failures of predecessors like Amazon and Uber. It emphasised deep localisation by acquiring local hotel chains, integrating with local travel partners, and forging crucial alliances with major platforms such as Meituan-Dianping.

Despite this impressive start, OYO's dominance crumbled, leading to a significant wind-down of its operations by 2021-22. Dr. Surana's research identified several critical factors in this failure. The core issue was a flawed business model; the minimum income guarantee promised to hoteliers proved to be a massive, unsustainable financial burden. This vulnerability was further exposed by the unfortunate event of the COVID-19 pandemic, which collapsed the domestic travel market. As financial stress mounted, hotels could no longer maintain OYO's quality standards, leading to a surge in customer complaints and friction with hotel owners. Simultaneously, local giants like the

Huazhu Group and Trip.com began aggressively targeting the same smaller cities, while, as Dr. Surana noted, institutional factors shifted, with the government actively pushing these local rivals.

Dr. Surana concluded by framing OYO's spectacular rise and fall through three theoretical lenses. He suggested that Platform Ecosystem Theory explains OYO's initial success, as it was good at managing its complex network of hoteliers, customers, and partners. However, its failure is highlighted by Platform Governance Theory; the minimum income guarantee was a central governance mechanism that proved financially unsound and unable to withstand shocks. Finally, he used Institutional Theory to explain the broader context. While OYO was initially clever in building legitimacy by aligning with formal government policies, it was ultimately overwhelmed by institutional pressuresboth market and political—that strongly favoured the incumbent local firms.

Dr. Tanmoy Kundu began by establishing the historical context. He revisited the inception of China's Belt and Road Initiative launched in 2013. He outlined the BRI’s foundational ambition to revive ancient trade routes through two primary corridors: the maritime and rail corridors. The rail corridor, known as the China Railway Express, connects cities in China to Europe and London, aiming to reduce dependence on maritime routes fraught with geopolitical and traffic challenges. Despite initial rapid expansion, issues including debt traps for participating countries and geopolitical tensions emerged, prompting a re-evaluation of global trade connectivity.

Dr. Kundu highlighted the shift from a unipolar trade system dominated by the BRI to a multipolar one characterised by emerging alternative corridors. Notable among these are the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), the European Union’s Global Gateway, and the QUAD Infrastructure Partnership involving the US, Australia, and Japan. These corridors reflect competitive yet fragmented trade landscapes with limited regulatory coherence and cooperation, intensifying geopolitical rivalries and regionalisation trends in supply chains.

In addressing these complexities, Dr. Kundu introduced the 4C Corridor Assessment Framework, designed to capture the multi-dimensional nature of contemporary trade corridors beyond mere scale or investment metrics. The 4C framework incorporates four core dimensions: Connectivity, Credibility, Compatibility, and Control, enriched by cross-cutting factors such as risk and technology.

Connectivity primarily concerns physical infrastructure like ports, railways, and multi-modal transport integration and digital connectivity through interoperable platforms. Credibility pertains to governance, financial transparency, sustainability, and institutional accountability within corridor projects. Compatibility focuses on the interoperability of digital and regulatory standards across involved nations, vital for seamless operational integration. Control reflects geopolitical influence, ownership structures, and power distribution within corridor governance.
Dr. Kundu elucidated a two-by-two typology amalgamating performance (what corridors achieve) and governance (how corridors are managed), distinguishing internal stakeholders and assets from boundary interactions with external entities. He underscored the salience of integrating risk categories: environmental, operational, geopolitical, financial, and cybersecurity, to contextualise corridor resilience. Technology, similarly, was stressed as transformative in shaping logistics dynamics.

The operationalisation of this framework involved indicators aligned with each dimension, for example, loan grants and tariff alignment under Credibility, free trade agreement coverage under Compatibility, and power asymmetry under Control. This empirical approach anticipates the development of a composite 4C index to quantitatively assess and compare corridors, facilitating informed policymaking and strategic planning.

Comparative analysis using the framework revealed that while BRI remains prominent, its credibility suffers due to opaque financing and debt risks. Conversely, IMEC shows significant promise, especially if it leverages India’s cultural and political strengths in building multi-stakeholder credibility. The discussion also touched on lessons such as the importance of the host country’s legal and regulatory environment, which significantly affects project success or failure, exemplified by various BRI outcomes.

In conclusion, the lecture delivered a timely and nuanced framework for assessing global trade corridors amidst shifting geopolitical realities. Dr. Kundu’s 4C framework offers a valuable lens for policymakers, multilateral institutions, and industry stakeholders to navigate the complexities of infrastructure-led connectivity in a digitally integrated multipolar world. The session reflected a balanced, well-researched perspective on future directions for international logistics and trade policy development.

Dr. Nishit Kumar began by explaining how Chinese techno-nationalism, defined as an ideological integration of technology, policy, and power has become central to its national rejuvenation strategy. Nishit identified the core ideological root as *Zili Ziqiang* (self-reliance and self-strengthening). This principle, originating from Confucian philosophy and re-emerging in the Mao era, has been redefined under Xi Jinping to signify strategic autonomy. He highlighted President Xi's statement that "crucial core technology can only be mastered in our own hands" as a guiding plan.
The paper focused on four key pillars of this techno-nationalism, starting with what it called the institutional backbone of the strategy- the “Made in China 2025” plan. Launched in 2015, this policy was described as the blueprint for shifting China from a manufacturing giant to a true innovation powerhouse, backed by significant state financing like the "Big Fund" for its domestic chip industry. Along with this manufacturing goal, the paper highlighted the New Generation AI Development Plan from 2017. This ambitious program aims to establish China as the undisputed global leader in artificial intelligence by 2030. It's not just a top-down mandate, the strategy effectively covers state guidance with corporate brilliance, smearing National AI Champions like Baidu for autonomous driving, Alibaba for smart cities, and Tencent for medical imaging.

Dr. Kumar noted that this policy has since evolved into the AI+ Initiative. The analysis also explored the Military-Civil Fusion policy, which was formalised in 2017. This initiative is designed to tear down the traditional walls separating the civilian tech sector from the defence-industrial complex. The main goal is to ensure that breakthroughs in areas like AI, quantum computing, and 5G serve both commercial and military masters, effectively blurring the lines between private enterprises and the People's Liberation Army. Finally, the paper examined the Digital Silk Road (DSR) as the external dimension of this entire strategy. He used compelling examples, such as Huawei constructing 70% of Africa's 4G infrastructure, to argue that the DSR is far more than an infrastructure project. Instead, it was presented as a strategic tool for influence designed to export China's complete technological ecosystem, including its technical standards, software platforms, and state-centric norms for data governance, across the globe.

Dr. Kumar discussed the state-corporate symbiosis involving firms like Huawei and Alibaba, and noted that the US-China tech decoupling is creating parallel digital ecosystems. This presents a strategic dilemma for emerging economies like India, which must navigate infrastructure dependence and the contest between state-controlled sovereignty and an open internet. The speaker concluded that China's techno-nationalism is a strong combination of ideology, policy, and power, and that China is actively exporting its digital order. Dr. Kumar ended with the question: "Who sets the rules of tomorrow's digital world?".

During the interactive session, Ms. Kashyap addressed concerns about consumer protection, data privacy, and the challenges of balancing innovation with regulation. She acknowledged the discrepancies in consumer protection within China's fintech sector and the limited replicability of its model elsewhere due to China's authoritarian political framework and strict capital controls. She cautioned against directly transplanting regulatory models from one jurisdiction to another without considering underlying political, social, and economic contexts.

One participant suggested to Dr. Surana that China's "aspirational" consumption model and the "liability of country of origin" were key factors. For Chinese consumers, India does not have a high-end brand perception. OYO was in the difficult position of being a *foreign* brand in a *low-cost* segment, whereas Western brands that survived (even premiumised) during COVID were in the high-end segment. He also mentioned that even the local Huazhu Group has struggled to "premiumise," suggesting the high-end market is reserved for very specific international brands.
Another participant expanded on this, noting a clear "fascination" in China for US and European brands, followed by Japanese, Singaporean, and Korean. He also emphasised the severity of COVID-19 lockdowns as a critical financial factor for OYO. Dr. Surana agreed with these observations, especially the "liability of country of origin," and stated that a key research question is to determine how much of OYO's failure was due to the uncertain event of COVID-19 versus the underlying state backing of local competitors.

Dr. Kundu addressed queries on aggregating the four dimensions into a single risk score, ongoing efforts to develop quantitative modeling and simulations to gauge corridor resilience under geopolitical and trade shocks, and the applicability of geographic-specific factors like host country governance. He acknowledged challenges in data availability but affirmed progress in system dynamics modeling for supply chain robustness. Critiques included caution against direct comparisons of BRI and IMEC due to differing maturity stages and strategic scopes, to which Professor Kundu responded by highlighting the potential for IMEC's expansion and corridor development akin to BRI's regional networks.

A question was directed to Dr. Kumar regarding the interplay between the Digital Silk Road (DSR), globalisation, and cybersecurity. He responded by clarifying that techno-nationalism and globalisation often have an inverse relationship. He stated that the DSR, cybersecurity, and globalisation will "play out together," but their interaction is shaped by differing political structures. He contrasted China's "Great Firewall" model, which restricts information from flowing out, with the open approach of democratic nations. He pointed out that while China bans Western apps (like Facebook), those same democratic countries and their companies are not structured to impose similar bans, highlighting a core difference in political and digital philosophy. He concluded that viewing the digital ecosystem from a Chinese (authoritarian) perspective is a "different ballgame" than viewing it from a democratic one. Prof. Phadnis, then, formally brought an end to the first thematic panel.

Thematic Panel II

Society and Culture

The second thematic panel was titled “Society and Culture”, and was chaired by **Dr. Usha Chandran**, Assistant Professor, Centre for Chinese and South East Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker was **Dr. Shivender Rahul**, Faculty, Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur, and he presented on “Cultural Transformation and Religious Revival in Contemporary China: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity”. The second speaker was **Ms. Aleena Tennise**, Doctoral Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai, and her paper was titled “Convict Routes to the Nilgiris: An Examination of the Global History of Penal Transportation in the 19^{th} Century”. The third speaker was **Dr. Snigdha Konar**, Research Associate, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and she presented on “Folding Beijing: A Future Innovation or a Dystopian Warning?”. The final speaker was **Ms. Mallika Bora**, Doctoral Scholar, University of Delhi, and her paper was titled “The Revival and Transition of Folk Beliefs in Post-Reform China: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis”.

The Chair remarked that understanding countries requires learning and enquiring about their society and culture, how people think, and what their mindset is. She also warned against the “othering” of Chinese society. She stated that we need to look at Chinese society using an inward gaze rather than looking at it as an ‘other’, and that the present discussion is a step towards the “unothering” of Chinese thought and culture through deep engagement and drawing parallels with our own.

Dr. Shivender Rahul opened by reflecting on the unbreakable relationship between culture and religion, he argued that any meaningful understanding of society and culture must consider the religious dimensions shaping people’s lives. He drew an initial comparison with India, where religion is intertwined with all aspects of social and political life, and he posed the question of how religion functions within China’s rapidly modernising and state-controlled environment.

He provided an overview of his research, which examines the resurgence of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and folk religions in China amid processes of modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, and political regulation. The study employs a mixed-methods ethnographic approach, incorporating fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, participant observation in temples, and the monitoring of digital religious activities on platforms such as WeChat between 2022 and 2024. His work also includes an analysis of government policies and local religious regulations to understand how the Communist Party of China (CPC) promotes certain religious expressions while restricting others.

Dr. Rahul noted that religion in China is adapting rather than disappearing under modernisation. He described how religious practices have increasingly moved online, with devotees attending virtual ceremonies, offering prayers digitally, and joining online faith communities. WeChat, a popular digital platform in China, has become a central space for this adaptive growth. The speaker highlighted how digital religion allows devotees to maintain their faith at a distance, while making it easier for the government to surveil religious activities through livestreamed rituals. His findings also show a generational divide in contemporary Chinese religiosity. Younger generations in urban areas are developing pragmatic and hybrid belief systems, mixing multiple religious traditions with modern life. He stated that this change shows a broader trend toward personalised spirituality and flexible interpretations of faith. On the other hand, rural communities usually preserve folk traditions and ancestral festivals.

He stated that the role of the state and community in China’s religious revival is shaped by an ongoing negotiation between government control, market forces, and local communities, which together influence how religious practices evolve and the degree of tolerance they receive. Addressing the state's role, the speaker explained that the government officially recognises five religions, which are Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism, and requires their institutions to register with state authorities. The CCP promotes "civilised" and "Sinicised" forms of religion that align with socialist values and Chinese cultural heritage, and censors practices seen as providing alternate ideologies.

The speaker concluded by emphasising that religious revival in China is not a return to tradition but a reconfiguration of faith in line with modern realities. He described digital religion as both a tool of community for believers and a way of control for the state. The speaker asked the audience to understand the duality of how technology sustains cultural continuity while reinforcing surveillance and regulation. His talk ended with a comparative note on India, suggesting that digital mediation of religion, evident in both countries, is an important way to understand the evolving nature of religion in modern societies.

Ms. Aleena Tennise discussed the global history of penal transportation in the 19th century. Beginning with looking transportation as a punitive measure, the presentation looked as use of convict transportation as a system of labour and punishment and lays a network of global convict flows in the making of colonial economies. She aimed to define transportation, locate it in carceral history, and build a global narrative on coerced mobility in the development of colonial economies. Historically, penal transportation was practiced by European empires, including Spain, France, Britain, and Portugal, serving to meet labour demands, manage "troublesome individuals," and aid colonial expansion. Convictism was seen as a labour system that provided a relatively inexpensive and long-term method of social control. Denise argued that transportation was not a British invention but part of a much older trans imperial practice of exile and coerced mobility. This viewpoint challenges the traditional, Eurocentric narrative of carceral modernity by illustrating a continuum where mobility and confinement functioned as technologies of control. For example, the Portuguese used condemned criminals as "emergency manpower" and cultural intermediaries during their expansion due to a modest national population.

Focusing on British Asia between 1789 and 1939, the British transported over 100,000 Indian, Burmese, Malay, and Chinese convicts across the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean to penal settlements in places like Penang, Singapore, Mauritius, and Burma. In these colonies, convicts often lived and worked outside log spaces, interacting with local communities.

A core argument of the presentation was that the movement of convicts, soldiers, and officers was a multifaceted manifestation of globalisation. Convict transportation created one of the earliest state-organised systems of global mobility and played a significant role in knowledge transfer and skill circulation. Convicts carried technical knowledge, artisan skills, and agricultural practices, contributing to the construction of imperial infrastructure such as roads, prisons, harbours, and plantations. This circulation linked economies, laying the foundations for economic globalisation. Convicts also fostered hybrid communities and syncretic cultures through sustained contact with indigenous peoples and other transported groups. Moreover, penal colonies functioned as sites of imperial experimentation and knowledge production, where ideas regarding surveillance and labour management were tested before circulating globally.

Then the speaker dedicated specific attention to the connection between China and the Nilgiris (in Southern India). A group of skilled Chinese prisoners of war (from the Second Anglo-Chinese War, 1865–69) were transported to the Nilgiris to serve sentences and engage in civil works. They were involved in constructing the Lawrence School and, critically, setting up tea plantations, including the first commercial estate named *Thea Shola* (a combination of Chinese and Tamil words for tea and forest). Some of these individuals stayed and integrated into the local community by marrying locals. This demonstrated how remote areas like the Nilgiris became critical nodes of global transformation through circulatory processes.

The presentation noted gaps in scholarship, particularly the need for a transnational approach to fully capture the complexity of transportation, especially in Asian and African contexts. Ultimately, penal labour was framed as being both punitive and productive for the empire.

Dr. Snigdha Konar presented on Hao Jingfang's award-winning science fiction novella *Folding Beijing*, analysing whether it represents a vision of future innovation or a dystopian warning about contemporary Chinese society. The speaker began by introducing the author, Hao Jingfang, who holds a background in astrophysics and a doctorate in economics and management from Tsinghua University. Dr. Konar highlighted how Hao's scientific and economic knowledge actively influences her book. Her background allows her to blend both social and technological ideologies and create an imaginative setting for the story.

The presentation first summarised the plot of *Folding Beijing*, which is set in a futuristic city physically divided into three planes or "spaces," each occupied by distinct social classes. The 'First Space,' inhabited by 5 million people, occupies the city for 24 hours, followed by the 'Second Space,' with 25 million members of the middle class, and finally the 'Third Space,' which has 50 million workers for only eight hours a day. When one space is awake, the others sleep, which means that these different populations are invisible to one another. The story follows Lao Dao, a waste worker from the Third Space, whose journey across the other spaces reveals the deep divisions festering in this unequal system.

Dr. Konar then analysed the novel through a dystopian lens. She explained that while *utopia* refers to an idealised society, a dystopia usually represents a utopia that has gone wrong. This utopia follows a system that benefits a privileged few and marginalises the majority. She thereby argues that *Folding Beijing* is not only a science fiction story but a critique of real social stratification and class in modern China. Hao Jingfang's portrayal of the city's physical separation indirectly represents the spatial and temporal disconnect among different classes in Beijing today.

The speaker also stated that technological innovation in the novel further strengthens class division rather than eradicating it. In this manner, the folding mechanism itself becomes a system of exploitation. She drew a parallel between this fictional structure and China's real-life hukou system, which restricts rural migrants from settling in urban areas. Thus, *Folding Beijing* is both an intriguing story and a sharp commentary on the socioeconomic barriers faced by the Chinese society. She also discussed how Hao's use of science fiction allowed the author to critique government systems indirectly, since direct criticism of the state is still censored.

In her presentation, the speaker praised how the novel was able to provide a detailed description of social hierarchy and showed how cleanliness and light are unequally distributed across spaces. The First Space represents the cleanliness enjoyed by the rich few, while the Third Space is described in terms of decay and a booming population. The speaker also cited critics such as Melissa Arul and

Carl Freedman while noting how *Folding Beijing* presents both despair and faint hope for change. She stated that this hope is present because some characters, like Lao Dao, continue to selflessly fight for a better future even though they will not get any immediate rewards for their efforts.

In conclusion, Dr. Konar described *Folding Beijing* as a speculative but deeply political narrative that is an accurate representation of China's inequalities under rapid modernisation and censorship. Beneath its futuristic surface, the story questions who "gets to live the future" and "who is folded away." For Dr. Konar, Hao Jingfang's novel can be viewed as a landmark in Chinese science fiction and an important cultural text for understanding the socio-political realities of a rapidly transforming China.

The final speaker, **Ms. Mallika Bora**, analysed the historical transformations and revival of folk beliefs in post-reform China, noting their crucial significance in that they constitute the largest form of religious practice in the country, often exceeding official counts. At first, she clarified the distinction between two key terms: *folk beliefs* and *folk religions*. Folk beliefs lack formal organisation and are rooted in the everyday spiritual lives of individuals, families, and clans. Folk religions are those folk beliefs that have been absorbed and assimilated into the broader framework of officially recognised institutionalised religions. Drawing on sociologist CK Young, the speaker noted that Chinese society is largely shaped by "diffused religions" — beliefs embedded in everyday life activities without formal requirements — with data suggesting that 70% of the population follows folk religion. Furthermore, a conceptualisation of the differential mode of association highlights that these rituals sustain and regulate social relationships (family, kinship, clans), thus maintaining moral order and social stability.

Historically, folk beliefs were targeted for suppression. They were sidelined during the May Fourth Movement and actively suppressed during the Cultural Revolution's campaign to destroy the four olds. However, following China's economic opening in the 1980s, these beliefs were welcomed back and reintegrated. This cultural revival is heavily intertwined with economic reforms: local festivals and temple fairs have become powerful tourist attractions, transforming spirituality into a form of "cultural economy". The resurgence is also linked to the psychological insecurities and alienation experienced by individuals due to market relations in the neoliberal capitalist economy, prompting people to seek solace and spiritual grounding in folk beliefs and rituals.

The paper identified three main paths through which folk beliefs are seeking legitimacy in contemporary China, including “folklorisation” (treating them as part of everyday culture); “religionisation” (emphasising their spiritual dimensions, often leading to their absorption into institutionalised religions like Buddhism and Daoism. This pathway includes the push for a linguistic shift from "folk beliefs" to "folk religion); and, “cultural heritisation” (preserving temples and rituals as heritage sites, often tied to China’s intangible cultural heritage movement with UNESCO).

A central analytical challenge discussed was reconciling the inherent vast diversity of folk practices (which vary across ethnic and regional contexts, such as the difference between communal worship in the north and image-related worship in the south) with the state’s promotion of a singular, homogeneous Chinese national identity. The speaker suggested that only a fraction of beliefs that transition into practices — and are absorbed by institutionalised practices — are eventually incorporated as "folk religion".

In conclusion, the study found that folk beliefs operate in a triadic relationship: they act as a subtle resistance against alienation, are undergoing transition reflecting sociopolitical conditions, and have become a commodified product in tourism. They provide agency, act as a collective force in times of uncertainty, and help maintain kinship systems. The state's stance remains ambivalent, shaped by evolving party politics and the global economy.

During the interactive session, Dr. Shivendra Rahul was asked questions on the practical challenges of his field study in China, particularly the language barrier. He admitted that the "soul gets lost" in translation and that he was "slightly scared" when interacting with locals. To overcome this, he relied heavily on machine translation, AI translation, translators, and focused on observing body language, asserting that it "speaks more than thousand words". When asked about his sample size and whether he studied minority religions, he confirmed he primarily visited monasteries and temples, and did not visit any mosques. The Chair highlighted his observation of digital religious practices as "distance praying" or "censorship praying," reflecting the state’s ability to monitor groups through live streaming.

In the discussion on folk beliefs and national identity, Ms. Mallika Bora was pressed on how she, as a scholar, could analytically reconcile the vast regional diversity of folk practices with the state's promotion of a singular, homogeneous Chinese national identity. She responded that only a select few beliefs that eventually transition into institutionalised practices are incorporated as "folk religion," often through absorption by institutionalised religions like Buddhism and Daoism. This absorption process, she noted, largely represents the Han culture. Bora also explored folk religion as a subtle form of resistance, suggesting that prayers for climate disasters resist the development process, and cited the textile weaving practices, including praying to the silk goddess, as a diverse cultural act that resists capitalist textile production forces. Later, a participant intervened to clarify a foundational point, emphasizing that the five officially recognised religions in China are Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam, and that Confucianism is a philosophy or "way of life," not a religion.

Questions directed at Dr. Snigdha Konar focused on the critical role of the dystopian novella *Folding Beijing*. When asked where the novel fits within the literature of resistance, Dr. Bard placed it among dissident authors who stay in China and criticise the system indirectly — often through science fiction — allowing their works to sometimes "pass the sensor codes". Regarding solutions to the extreme inequality depicted, drawing on the author’s economics background, argued that the problem is deeply rooted inequality stemming from short-sighted investments and insufficient commitment to basic science. She stressed that the solution must be people-oriented, specifically addressing the resource allocation manifested in the differential distribution of space and time. She also confirmed that the state promotes and commercialises science fiction like *Folding Beijing* because it is set in fiction, not reality, despite its anti-status quo critique.

A general query was also raised about whether the state facilitates the rise of religious tourism and folk religion to gain further legitimacy and manage potential middle-class resistance, though a comprehensive answer to this systemic question was not provided in the responses recorded. Finally, Aleena Tennise’s presentation on penal transportation was followed by a question concerning the influence of coloniser brutalities on the large-scale movement of transported populations.

The Chair ended the session by calling the presentations insightful and emphasising how the papers provided a deep dive into Chinese society. She thanked both the panellists and the audience for their engagement, noting the thoughtful questions and attentive participation. The Chair also remarked on Confucianism, reiterating that it is classified as a philosophy and way of life rather than a religion.

Special Panel II

Doing Business in/with China: Voices from Indian Business Leaders

The second special panel titled "Doing Business in/with China: Voices from Indian Business Leaders" was chaired by **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, Co-convenor, 18th AICCS; and, Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker was **Mr. C.R. Raguramachandran**, CEO, AceMicromatic International, the export division of AMG; Legal Representative, Micromatic Machine Tools Shanghai Co., Ltd., the WOFE of Ace Micromatic Group in China, and his paper was titled "ChiBhara (Zebra)- Contrast between China and Bharath Manufacturing Landscape". The second speaker was **Mr. Ravi Shankar Bos**e, Co-Founder and Director, Fugumobile, and he presented on "Navigating Intersection of Digital Innovation and India-China Collaboration". The third speaker was **Mr. Divay Pranav**, Head, Mobility Domain (Last Mile Mobility — E3W and E4W — Microcar), Hyundai Motor India Ltd, and his paper was titled "Gears of Growth: Comparing China and India's Automotive Journey". The final speaker was **Mr. Phani Kiran Immanen**i, former Chief Executive and Country Head, ICICI, China, and he presented on "Towards Atma Nirbhar Bharat: Building on China's Manufacturing Blueprint".

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Yelery provided an overview of the session's theme, emphasising its relevance in understanding the evolving dynamics of India-China economic engagement, particularly in the context of trade, technology, and business collaboration. He noted that the discussion aimed to bring forward experiential insights from Indian professionals and entrepreneurs who have successfully navigated the Chinese market. Dr. Yelery began by introducing the distinguished panel of four speakers, each representing a unique perspective on business operations, innovation, and strategic engagement with China. Dr. Yelery's introduction set a thoughtful and engaging tone for the session, framing the discussions around the shared learnings, challenges, and strategic opportunities encountered by Indian business leaders in China.

Mr. C.R. Raguramachandran began his presentation by highlighting the company's significant role in India's machine tool industry, where it commands nearly one-third of the domestic market. He noted that any automobile manufactured in India has at least three to four components produced using an ACE Micromatic machine.

He recounted the company's foray into China in 2005, driven by both opportunity and curiosity. At that time, India's domestic market had limited growth potential, and there was a strong perception within the industry that "China is coming." The decision to enter China was strategic, an effort to understand and engage with the world's fastest-growing manufacturing ecosystem.

Mr. Raguramachandran outlined the stark contrast between the Indian and Chinese automotive and machine tool markets. The global automotive market stands at around 100 million units, with China accounting for 30% and India for 5-6 million units. India's automotive consumption translates to roughly $4 billion in machine tool demand, one-third of which is supplied by ACE Micromatic. China, by comparison, consumes about $27 billion worth of machine tools annually. Interestingly, both India and China import approximately $2 billion worth of machine tools, though their domestic manufacturing capacities differ vastly.

Reflecting on China's transformation, he identified two pivotal policy shifts in 2008-09- tax rationalisation and rapid urbanisation as catalysts for manufacturing growth. These reforms propelled China's automotive sector from 10 million units annually to its current scale. He emphasised China's unmatched speed and scale, driven by infrastructure development and strong state involvement in manufacturing, logistics, and urban planning.

He illustrated the impact of infrastructure investment with the example of high-speed rail networks, which reshaped industrial geography. When ACE Micromatic considered opening an office in Nanjing, the introduction of high-speed trains reduced travel time from four hours to one and a half, making operations more efficient and cost-effective.

Mr. Raguramachandran contrasted China's flexible and adaptive manufacturing ecosystem with India's more sector-specific usage. In China, a precision machine initially used for producing premium mobile handset components can be retooled for manufacturing belt buckles or other goods- a reflection of the workforce's technical versatility. He noted that such agility would take India at least a decade to achieve.

While acknowledging China's reputation for being "cheap and copy-oriented," he emphasised that the process of reverse engineering luxury products such as watches still demands high technical proficiency, design capability, and production discipline. This capacity has led global manufacturers to collaborate with Chinese firms rather than compete with them directly.

In India, he pointed to the two-wheeler industry as a model of ecosystem success. India's dominance in this sector is not based on low prices but on trust, reliability, and a strong network of suppliers, such that a disruption in Indian exports would create global shortages.

Mr. Raguramachandran noted that while China contributes 28% of global manufacturing output and India only 3%, both nations began from similar agrarian starting points in the late 1940s. India's machine tool consumption is rising (from $1 billion to $4 billion) while China's has declined from $40 billion to $27 billion.

In conclusion, he urged India to focus on innovation and export competitiveness through stronger collaboration between academia, industry, and government. China's manufacturing dominance, he argued, is not merely due to low costs but to talent-driven competitiveness. India must emulate this by investing in skills, research, and industrial coordination while ensuring that its growth remains sustainable and democratic, aligning competitiveness with inclusivity.

Mr. Ravi Shankar Bose, drawing upon his extensive professional experience — including his association with China SoftBank in 2000 and the founding of Fugumobile in 2006 — presented a comprehensive view of technological transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), and the policy environment shaping digital ecosystems in Asia. Mr. Bose began by sharing the origins of Fugumobile, a Shanghai-based digital marketing agency established by two Indian expatriate entrepreneurs, which has since become an example of successful cross-border entrepreneurship. His work has been featured as a case study at reputed institutions such as the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Indore. Building on this background, he emphasised how digital transformation today is being driven by three interconnected pillars-connectivity, cloud infrastructure, and large user ecosystems. Together, these elements form the canvas on which both India and China are redefining their technological and economic futures.

Discussing the impact of artificial intelligence, Mr. Bose noted that its influence extends beyond specific models such as DeepSeek and represents a global phenomenon shaped increasingly by open-source innovation. He compared India's and China's approaches to digital public infrastructure, observing that while India emphasises inclusivity and accessibility, China focuses on innovation at scale, leveraging its massive user base to accelerate experimentation and adoption.

Highlighting recent policy directions, Mr. Bose referred to the Fourth Plenum of the Communist Party of China, where the discourse shifted from mere GDP growth to the *quality of growth*, emphasizing AI and technological innovation as strategic priorities. He underscored that China's AI strategy centers on developing independent and controllable AI systems-independent from Western technological dependencies and controllable in terms of governmental oversight of data and algorithms.

On the investment front, Mr. Bose pointed out that approximately USD 125 billion has been invested globally in AI, with a significant portion coming from the private sector. This investment surge reflects growing confidence in AI's transformative potential and the urgency to establish global standards for governance and digital sovereignty.

Focusing on India's opportunities, Mr. Bose advocated for India to assume a leadership role in AI development. He argued that India's large and diverse digital market, vast talent pool, and rich data resources position it uniquely to create domain-specific AI models in critical sectors such as health, agriculture, education, and governance. To realise this potential, he emphasised the need for strong deliverability capabilities, institutional collaboration, and regulatory guardrails that ensure ethical and secure use of technology.

In conclusion, Mr. Bose stressed that while there is considerable scope for India-China cooperation in digital innovation, such collaboration should be selective, robust, and strategically guided. Establishing mutual guardrails and frameworks for responsible engagement will be essential for advancing shared technological progress while safeguarding national interests. The session provided valuable insights into the dynamics of AI-driven digital transformation and offered pragmatic perspectives on fostering sustainable collaboration between two of Asia's leading technology ecosystems.

Mr. Divay Pranav delivered an engaging and interactive presentation that focused on the rapid evolution of the global automotive industry, comparing the trajectories of India, China, and the United States. His central theme was the accelerating pace of innovation in China, particularly in the electric vehicle (EV) and software-defined vehicle (SDV) segments, which are reshaping the global automotive landscape.

Mr. Pranav began by noting that while global attention has largely been on electric vehicles, the true disruption lies in the integration of software and hardware, a transition that only a few countries, notably China, have mastered. He cited audience observations about the challenges posed by dependence on rare earth materials and hydrogen, acknowledging them as real constraints but emphasizing that China's strength lies not merely in material supply chains but in its capacity for continuous innovation.

Drawing from industry comparisons, Mr. Pranav highlighted that in traditional automotive manufacturing, bringing a new car from concept to production typically takes four years. By contrast, Chinese companies now achieve this within two years, effectively halving the cycle time. This agility, he argued, allows Chinese manufacturers to maintain market relevance, as rapid innovation keeps pace with changing consumer preferences. China's government-backed investment ($27 billion in the EV sector alone)has catalysed this transformation, creating conditions where manufacturers are able to produce vehicles that consumers genuinely want to buy.

A major part of his talk centered on the shift toward Software-Defined Vehicles (SDVs), where the vehicle's hardware is deeply integrated with software systems that control nearly all driving functions. Citing HarmonyOS, China's indigenous operating system, Mr. Pranav noted that it has become a benchmark in the automotive sector for seamless integration between vehicles, devices, and digital ecosystems. Unlike the mechanically dominated automotive engineering of the past 50-60 years, the SDV era demands strong software capabilities, an area where China currently leads.

He illustrated how EVs and SDVs are redefining the driving experience. In electric vehicles, functions such as the clutch and brakes are increasingly automated, with software assuming control. As automation advances, even speed regulation will eventually become fully autonomous. This evolution, he noted, is paving the way for vehicles that prioritise user experience, creating "me time" during travel, where the car becomes a digital environment that can receive updates, upgrades, and new features, much like a smartphone.

Mr. Pranav pointed to the entry of non-traditional players such as Xiaomi into the car manufacturing space as evidence of this shift. These companies bring expertise in both hardware and software integration, a combination that traditional automakers are now racing to match. The rise of Multipurpose Vehicles (MPVs), designed for versatility and space optimisation, is another reflection of changing consumer demands that the Chinese industry has rapidly adapted to.

He also spotlighted India's emerging strengths, citing Mahindra's world-class designs at competitive prices, Ather Energy's innovation in locally developed EV components (founded by IIT Madras alumni), and TVS Motors' long-standing collaboration with BMW, notably the production of the TVS Apache. These examples demonstrate that Indian firms are capable of achieving excellence and localisation, though the industry must accelerate its pace of integration between software and mechanical systems to remain globally competitive.

In closing, Mr. Pranav emphasised that China's automotive transformation is not solely about electric mobility but about the digital redefinition of vehicles themselves. For India to keep pace, it must invest in software capabilities, faster design-to-market cycles, and integrated innovation ecosystems. The future of mobility, he concluded, belongs to nations that can seamlessly blend mechanical engineering with digital intelligence.

Mr. Phani Kiran Immaneni, drawing on his long professional experience and his tenure as the Country Head of ICICI Bank in China, offered a nuanced analysis of the structural, procedural, and cultural factors that have enabled China's manufacturing dominance, while identifying critical lessons for India's pursuit of self-reliance and industrial competitiveness.

Mr. Immaneni structured his talk around two analytical frameworks—the "4 Is" (Interest, Investment, Infrastructure, and Innovation) and the "4 Ps" (Policy, People, Productivity, and Processes)-each reflecting a key dimension of economic transformation.

Under the first "I," Interest, he emphasised the importance of a *level playing field* and effective capital formation for industrial growth. He pointed out that in India, the cost of capital, land, and loans remains high, which deters large-scale manufacturing investment. In contrast, China operates under a leasehold system, making land and financial access more feasible for enterprises and enabling smoother industrial expansion.

Discussing the second "I," Investment, Mr. Immaneni shared his personal experience of establishing ICICI Bank in China in 2005. He highlighted the remarkable administrative efficiency of Chinese authorities, noting that only two questions were asked before granting approval —"*What is the* *quantum of FDI?*" and "*How many people will be employed?*" This reflects China's pragmatic and time-bound approach to governance. He explained that while China requires nearly 14 types of licenses for manufacturing operations, the system functions efficiently. The authorities even guide companies through the process — often linking recruitment to licensing — and the license validity is based on the date of acknowledgement rather than submission, ensuring clarity and procedural discipline.

On the third "I," Infrastructure, he emphasised that China's manufacturing competitiveness stems from an end-to-end supply chain network and a clear timeline for project delivery. He contrasted this with India's fragmented infrastructure development and stressed the need for predictable execution timelines.

The fourth "I," Innovation, was discussed as a cornerstone of China's internal competitiveness. Mr. Immaneni noted that China's biggest competition is China itself. Intense intra-national competition, widespread capability in reverse engineering, and a continuous drive for technological advancement have collectively ensured that innovation is not just an aspirational goal but a structural feature of China's industrial landscape.

Transitioning to the 4 Ps, Mr. Immaneni began with Policy, emphasising that China's policy environment is highly coherent and consistent from the provincial to the national level. He noted that provincial officials are given explicit targets, creating a competitive governance model that drives economic performance.

Under People, he highlighted China's advantage in employment creation and skilled labour availability, supported by vocational training and local-level capacity building. He mentioned that *multilateral bank-backed* "*plug-and-play*" *models*—where industrial parks and facilities are ready for immediate use—enhance efficiency. In contrast, India faces challenges in skill development and labour market flexibility.

Addressing Productivity, he linked it to earlier points under the "4 Is," stressing that productivity in China is an outcome of synchronised planning, streamlined processes, and infrastructure readiness.

For Processes, Mr. Immaneni drew a comparison between India's parallel processing approach and China's process-productivity integration. He observed that in China, companies may produce 100 similar items but avoid making two entirely different products simultaneously—reflecting a disciplined specialisation approach.

In conclusion, Mr. Immaneni touched upon the environmental dimension, particularly in the electric vehicle (EV) and e-waste sectors. He highlighted that out of approximately 1.7 million tonnes of e-waste produced in India, only about 1% is decomposed, pointing to the urgent need for sustainable waste management within initiatives like *Swachh Bharat* and *Clean India*. Mr. Immaneni concluded by reaffirming that India possesses the capability to become a global manufacturing hub but must adopt disciplined processes, strengthen policy coherence, enhance infrastructure delivery, and foster innovation. His presentation underscored that learning from China's manufacturing evolution can provide a practical roadmap for realising India's *Atma Nirbhar Bharat* vision.

The session concluded with an engaging interactive session, during which the panellists elaborated on key themes such as artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), digital infrastructure, and lessons from China's developmental model. The discussion offered practical insights into how India can strategically position itself in emerging technological and industrial domains.

The first question was directed to Mr. Ravi Shankar Bose, focusing on the key lessons for Indian businesses in AI and semiconductor development. Mr. Bose emphasised that China's technological rise has not been achieved in isolation; rather, it has evolved through observation, adaptation, and collaboration. He advised that India should similarly learn from both the United States and China, tracking technological trends and integrating best practices. He noted that enterprise-level AI is deeply rooted in China, while consumer-facing AI is more prominent in the U.S. Highlighting India's strengths, Mr. Bose pointed to its delivery capabilities and access to large, diverse data pools, which can be leveraged to train AI models. However, he cautioned that India has yet to develop strong foundational AI models, and should instead focus on domain-specific applications in areas such as healthcare, agriculture, and education. He concluded with a forward-looking message-India should adopt the approach of "Build in India, Build for the World" to achieve meaningful global impact.

The next question was addressed to Mr. Divay Pranav, concerning the *importance of developing electric vehicles (EVs)* within India's industrial and environmental strategy. Mr. Pranav responded that the future of mobility lies in smart mobility platforms, where vehicles function not merely as transport tools but as intelligent, connected platforms integrated with digital ecosystems. He noted that India currently lags in this competitive space and must focus on creating value-added, tech-enabled EV systems to ensure sustainable growth in the sector.

A question to Mr. C.R. Raguramachandran focused on the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in strengthening digital and manufacturing infrastructure. He underscored that effective industrial growth in both India and China has relied on strategic collaboration between the government and private enterprises. He emphasised that PPP frameworks are essential for developing robust manufacturing capabilities, modern supply chains, and digital infrastructure that can sustain long-term competitiveness.

Finally, Mr. Phani Kiran Immaneni was asked about the *non-textbook model of China's economic growth* and whether it could serve as an ideal template for India's industrial development. Agreeing with the premise of the question, Mr. Immaneni noted that China's success cannot be attributed to a single policy or institution but rather to a collective ecosystem of responsibility and coordination. He highlighted the importance of localised efficiency, citing the "Shanghai Power Line" and "Shanghai Window" initiatives as examples of how local-level governance and service delivery contribute to national progress. He concluded that India, too, must strengthen local administrative capacity and integrate efficient practices at the grassroots level to replicate such success.

Overall, the interactive session reinforced the central themes of the panel—strategic learning from China's model, fostering innovation through collaboration, building strong digital and manufacturing ecosystems, and enhancing India's global competitiveness through technology-driven self-reliance.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Yelery expressed appreciation for the speakers' diverse experiences, which collectively reflect the multifaceted nature of doing business in China—from manufacturing and finance to digital innovation and mobility. He encouraged an open and constructive dialogue, aiming to generate practical insights for policymakers, industry professionals, and scholars interested in India-China economic relations. Further he commended the panel for sharing rich, experience-based perspectives that effectively bridged theory with practice — highlighting lessons on innovation, manufacturing, financial systems, and emerging technologies such as AI and EVs.

Dr. Yelery described the session as *engaging, informative, and forward-looking*, noting that the dialogue successfully illuminated how India can draw pragmatic insights from China's developmental and industrial experiences while shaping its own pathway. Concluding the proceedings, Dr. Yelery thanked the audience for their active participation and keen interest in the discussion. He then announced that the session would be followed by a tea break, encouraging further informal interaction and networking among participants.

Special Panel III

Tariff Wars and Trade-Offs: Can India and China Find Common Ground?

The third special panel titled "Tariff Wars and Trade-Offs: Can India and China Find Common Ground?**"** was chaired by **Dr. Karthikeya N,** Associate Professor, Economics Area, Indian Institute of Management Indore. The first speaker was **Prof. Murali K.,** Professor, Head of Administration, Centre for WTO Studies, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), New Delhi and he presented on "US Tariffs and Sanctions and Other Growing Challenges: The Challenges for Sustaining Trade". The second speaker was **Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna,** Deputy Head and Senior Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office (UNCTAD), and his paper titled "India-China Economic Cooperation: Reshaping the South-South Trade". The third speaker was **Mr. Santosh Pai**, Partner, Dentons Link Legal; and, Treasurer and Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and his paper was titled "Recalibration of Economic Ties with China: What, Why and How?". The final speaker was **Dr. Aravind Yelery,** Co-convenor, 18th AICCS; Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and he spoke on "Turning Tariffs into Opportunity? India at the Crossroads of Trade and Investment Flows".

Dr. Karthikeya N opened the session by noting the growing significance of India–China economic engagement in an era of global uncertainty, technological change, and evolving trade frameworks. He emphasised that the session aimed to explore the structural dimensions of bilateral trade, focusing on tariff regimes, data transparency, and the broader policy environment shaping these relations. Introducing the panellists, he mentioned that Prof. Murli K. would discuss distortions in tariff and digital trade data, Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratana would analyze structural imbalances in India–China trade composition, and Dr. Aravind Yelery would examine the policy shifts in investment and regulatory engagement since 2020. He encouraged participants to engage critically yet constructively, keeping the discussion analytical and evidence-based.

He ended his remarks by stressing that the objective of the session was to move beyond deficit-focused narratives and instead understand how data quality, industrial structure, and policy coordination can jointly inform a more balanced and pragmatic approach to India–China trade relations.

In his presentation, **Prof. Murli K.** highlighted the growing challenges to global trade arising from increasing US tariffs and sanctions. Using a partial equilibrium model, he illustrated how tariff hikes of 10–20%, and even up to 50%, would disproportionately impact China and India, reducing their market access to the US. Within Asia, India faces the highest trade losses under such conditions. He further observed that India's trade imbalance with China remains a structural concern, with imports increasingly comprising high-value capital goods, while exports to China are largely raw and intermediate materials.

He noted that this composition reflects India's underproduction and limited export capacity compared to China's industrial advancement. Despite political differences, he emphasised the need for India–China cooperation to strengthen the Global South and balance the global economic order dominated by the United States. Economic integration, he argued, could serve as a stabilising factor in managing bilateral tensions, echoing the historical lessons from Europe and ASEAN.

Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna examined the quantitative impact of tariff changes and the structural composition of India–China trade, using model-based simulations to highlight vulnerabilities. Employing a partial-equilibrium model, he evaluated scenarios in which the United States raises tariffs on imports from China by 10 and 20 percentage points. His projections showed that China would face the steepest export losses, but India, being regionally integrated with U.S.-linked supply chains, would also experience notable welfare losses. Going forward, Dr. Ratna compared India's and China's export structures to reveal long-term asymmetries. He observed that India's exports to China remain dominated by raw materials and intermediate goods, approximately 65 percent in

2024,whereas China's exports to India have shifted dramatically toward capital goods and high-value manufactured items, rising from 51 to 61 percent over the same period. This transformation, he argued, has entrenched India's trade deficit, as low-value exports are exchanged for high-value imports. As a consequence, India is cutting its pocket and China is expanding the depth of its pocket by trade surplus in the global value chain.

He illustrated this imbalance through sectoral data, noting that while China now exports machinery, electronics, and capital equipment to India, India continues to supply commodities such as ores, chemicals, and agricultural intermediates. Consequently, even as trade volumes rise, India's terms of trade deteriorate. Dr. Ratna attributed this pattern to limited industrial capacity and technological upgrading in India and called for policies promoting domestic manufacturing and diversification of export baskets. He also recalled how India and China, during the 2008 global recession, played stabilizing roles for Asia through sustained demand and import flows. This, he suggested, demonstrates the potential of both nations to act as twin anchors of growth for the Global South if cooperation replaces competition.

Mr. Santosh Pai analysed the complex and evolving nature of India–China economic relations. He explained that their engagement extends beyond trade to include investments, public procurement, and the digital sector. However, the relationship has deteriorated since 2020 due to the pandemic, border tensions, and India's new FDI screening framework, which has drastically curtailed Chinese investments. Subsequent bans on Chinese digital applications and restrictions on public procurement have further strained ties.

Mr. Pai argued that while trade remains strong, India's dependence on China for capital goods and technology poses structural risks. He emphasised that despite India's pursuit of multiple Free Trade Agreements with major economies, global supply chains remain deeply tied to China, making recalibration essential. Reducing this dependency without disrupting domestic manufacturing is a pressing challenge. Mr. Pai called for a pragmatic dialogue to define a path for de-escalation and renewed engagement with China, noting that clear priorities and negotiations are crucial to balance strategic autonomy with economic necessity.

Dr. Aravind Yelery's presentation explored the policy evolution of India–China economic engagement, focusing on investment, regulation, and the broader geopolitical context. He began by mapping the multiple layers of bilateral economic ties prior to 2020trade in goods, cross-border investments, digital applications, and public procurement projects together amounting to roughly $10 billion in combined activity. He then traced how these linkages were disrupted by India's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) screening mechanism introduced in 2020, followed soon after by border tensions and the pandemic. The screening, he noted, reduced approval rates for Chinese investments to around 15 percent, effectively functioning as a prohibition. Parallel measures, including bans on several hundred Chinese mobile and internet applications, sharply curtailed digital engagement. He also observed that the cumulative effect of these measures was a near-standstill in new Chinese participation in Indian projects, pushing Indian firms to procure indirectly through third-country intermediaries. He explained that public procurement contracts especially in infrastructure, steel, and mining is now depended on indirect sourcing rather than direct bidding by Chinese firms.

Looking ahead, he argued that India must recalibrate its approach to China in the context of upcoming trade agreements such as the EU FTA and prospective US bilateral arrangements. Many of these partnerships, he explained, rely on supply-chain configurations in which China remains an indispensable component. Therefore, pragmatic engagement, not isolation, would better serve India's strategic interests. He also emphasised the limited awareness of China- related economic dynamics within Indian business schools and industry. Encouraging academic focus on China studies, he said, would create the analytical capacity necessary for informed policymaking and corporate decision-making.

The session followed by the question answer round, participants asked whether the easing of border tensions could reopen investment channels. Dr. Yelery replied that while discussions between leaders have signalled a willingness to move beyond the immediate security concerns, substantial change would depend on institutional trust-building and selective relaxation of regulatory barriers. On a question about digital economy cooperation, he noted that certain joint ventures in technology and manufacturing are being selectively approved, suggesting early signs of cautious normalisation.

Answering to other question during the discussion, participants asked whether India could realistically reduce its deficit through diversification alone. Dr. Ratna responded that enhanced production, sector-specific incentives, and targeted participation in regional value chains are essential. A question on tariff escalation prompted him to clarify that India's nominal tariffs remain moderate by global standards, but its import composition amplifies the deficit impact. The chair and several participants noted that data on India's high-technology exports are still limited, and further study is needed to assess potential complementarities with Chinese industrial demand.

Questions from the audience focused on two aspects: how to operationalise the customs– central-bank data linkage, and whether private data could supplement official statistics. Dr. Murli replied that institutional cooperation, not replacement, is key, and public and private entities should share, not duplicate, efforts. On a query about agricultural tariffs, he reiterated that transparent calculation of non-ad valorem equivalents is essential for fair comparison across countries. Participants also discussed how digital trade might be integrated into WTO frameworks; Dr. Murli suggested that formal recognition of electronic trade records could eventually be adopted through bilateral agreements.

Dr. Karthikey N concluded the session by summarising the key insights from the presentations and discussions. He observed how Prof. Murli underscored the need for greater transparency in tariff structures and digital trade data; Dr. Ratna emphasised the importance of structural reforms and diversification to address India's persistent trade imbalance; and Dr. Yelery situated India–China economic engagement within a rapidly evolving geopolitical and regulatory landscape. Together, these perspectives highlighted the interdependence of reliable data, robust industrial capacity, and coherent policy frameworks in sustaining fair and effective bilateral trade relations.

Dr. Karthikey noted that questions from participants further enriched the dialogue, raising important considerations regarding the feasibility of data coordination, the reopening of investment channels, and potential sectoral complementarities. He concluded by stressing that the session reaffirmed the value of evidence-based policy-making and constructive India–China engagement. He encouraged continued research and sustained dialogue under the AICCS platform to foster informed, balanced, and forward-looking perspectives on bilateral economic relations.

Thematic Panel III

Chinese Diplomacy and Geopolitical Rivalries

The third Thematic Panel was titled, “Chinese Diplomacy & Geopolitical Rivalries”, and was chaired by **Dr. Bhim B. Subba**, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker was **Dr. Dattesh Parulekar**, Assistant Professor, School of International and Area Studies, Goa University,, and his paper was titled “China’s ‘Blue Economy’ Framework for the Global South: The ‘Indo-Pacific’ in Perspective”. The second speaker was **Dr. Khushnam P.N.**, Independent International Relations and Regional Security Analyst, who prensented on “US Gaza Policy and Trump’s Proposals: A Potential Geopolitical Gain for China in West Asia”. The third speaker was **Mr. Sanoop Sajan Koshy**, Doctoral Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, and his paper was titled, “Strategic Gains vs. Legitimacy Challenges in China’s Periphery Diplomacy: Debt Sustainability, Trade, and Influence in South Asia’s BRI Engagement”. The final speaker was **Mr. Mayukh Mukhopadhyay**, Executive Doctoral Scholar, Indian Institute of Management Indore, and he spoke on “Sonic Soft Power: China’s Podcast Diplomacy”.

The Chair has introduced everyone and briefly discussed the topics of each presentation. The professor argued that each topic is currently relevant and that the papers are well-researched.

Dr. Dattesh Parulekar’s presentation examined the evolution and strategic logic behind China’s blue economy and how it functions as an instrument of statecraft and geopolitical influence, especially across the Global South.

Dr. Parulekar began by situating his analysis within the broader context of global geostrategic competition, arguing that contemporary power dynamics unfold across five vectors: critical resources and minerals, trade and supply chains, financial transmission mechanisms, critical and emerging technologies, and human innovation and talent mobility. These vectors, he noted, converge most intensely within the maritime realm, making the oceans the central arena for strategic and economic contestation. The blue economy, therefore, serves as a crucial platform through which major and middle powers alike seek to shape the future of growth and influence.

Tracing the historical evolution of China's engagement with the blue economy, Dr. Parulekar identified three distinct phases. The first phase (2002–2010) coincided with China's entry into the World Trade Organization and its increasing dependence on maritime trade routes, leading to a focus on securing "arterial lifelines" under the concept of an "ocean economy." The second phase (2010–2018) emerged in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, when Beijing sought to pivot its growth model from land-based to maritime-oriented development. The third and current phase, beginning around 2019, marks China's embrace of the "blue economy" as a framework for resilience, security, and national rejuvenation. Notably, the term "blue economy" first appeared in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015), with pilot projects in Guangdong, Shandong, and Zhejiang provinces, aimed initially at contributing to domestic economic development rather than projecting global influence.

Dr. Parulekar highlighted several milestones in this transition. The 2008 State Council directive recognised the maritime economy as an alternative engine for growth beyond land-based sectors. The 2015 Defence White Paper introduced the concept of "comprehensive sea control", encompassing ports, mobile assets, and subsea domains such as critical minerals and undersea cables. This marked a shift from protecting maritime trade routes to controlling and exploiting the entire maritime ecosystem. He also emphasised China's 2020 announcement of the Hainan Free Trade Port and its goal of establishing global technical standards by 2035, suggesting that Beijing seeks not merely technological advancement but control over the regulatory and normative frameworks governing technology.

China's blue-economy strategy, Dr. Parulekar explained, can be understood through four key dimensions—consolidation, capacitation, coercion, and conversion. Consolidation involves integrating coastal and riverine provinces into a unified national maritime framework to strengthen domestic cohesion. Capacitation refers to China's infrastructure-building efforts, both at home and abroad, through ports and logistics hubs that extend its reach. Coercion manifests when economic interdependence in blue-economy sectors is used as leverage, as seen in the 2018 episode when China restricted tourism to the Maldives over debt repayment issues. Conversion signifies China's ability to transform peripheral geographies into strategic nodes, illustrated by the Chancay Port in Peru, which links Latin America's Pacific coast with China's trade networks and even attracts interest from Atlantic economies like Brazil.

The presentation also explored China's efforts to integrate blue-economy projects with broader strategic initiatives. Initially a subset of the Maritime Silk Road, the blue economy is now increasingly aligned with the Global Development Initiative (GDI), a softer and more inclusive narrative compared to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China defines three "blue economy passages": China–Indian Ocean–Africa–Mediterranean, China–Europe via the Arctic, and China–Oceania–South Pacific. The deliberate omission of Southeast Asia from these passages, Dr. Parulekar argued, implies that Beijing views the South China Sea as part of its national maritime space, disregarding the sovereignty of other claimant states.

Concluding his talk, Dr. Parulekar asserted that China's blue-economy strategy has evolved from a means of protecting maritime lifelines to one of transforming those lifelines into productive territory. The maritime domain now represents a launchpad for industrial, technological, and geopolitical expansion. Through this process, China seeks not only centrality but centricity — structuring regional and global interactions around itself. The blue economy, he argued, thus serves as both an economic and political instrument through which China consolidates its domestic growth, extends its influence across the Global South, and positions itself as an exceptional and leading power in world affairs.

Dr. Khushnam P.N. presented a geopolitical analysis arguing that the current instability in the Middle East, particularly the US-Gaza policy under the second Trump presidency, is creating a significant strategic advantage for China. His central thesis is that China is exploiting the US's weakened commitment and strained alliances in the Middle East to assert itself as a dominant factor in the region and advance its goal of a multipolar world order.

Dr. Khushnam began by highlighting the immediate context: the 28-point peace plan in Gaza and the notable presence of half of Donald Trump's cabinet, including figures like J.D. Vance and Jared Kushner, in Israel. He immediately pointed to a major point of tension, the Knesset passing the first reading of a bill to annex the West Bank, an action President Trump had explicitly stated he would not allow. This, Dr. Khushnam suggested, demonstrates the complex and contradictory nature of the US position in the Middle East, signalling an erosion of its influence.

The presentation provided a historical perspective on Israel's strategy of managing global powers. Israel, even during its formation a century ago, meticulously engaged with the dominant powers of the time, the Ottoman, German, and later the British Empires, to secure key concessions like the Balfour Declaration. Following its formation, Israel continued this delicate balancing act, notably managing to maintain ties with both the USSR and the USA during the Cold War. However, Dr. Khushnam posited that the current Gaza crisis has tipped this balance, with Chinese diplomatic voices becoming "very, very disruptive" towards Israel, challenging its traditional leverage.

Dr. Khushnam detailed how the US's long-term geopolitical strategy, which divided the world into three key sectors (European, Middle East, and Indo-Pacific), is being deliberately made complicated. The US plan to shift focus to the Indo-Pacific to "contain China" by outsourcing security in the Middle East was based on three major actors: Israel, the Arab world (led by Saudi Arabia), and Iran, being aligned against Iranian threats. This strategy successfully led to the Abraham Accords and facilitated Israel's shift from EUCOM to CENTCOM, including efforts to integrate India through the I2U2 and IMEC projects. The presentation emphasised that Saudi Arabia was on the verge of joining the Accords before the October 7th attack, a development now "completely out of the question," leaving the Abraham Accords "in a bad shape."

The core of Dr Khushnam's argument regarding China's gain centred on a concept he called a "deliberate strategic move." He suggested that China is intentionally keeping the US and its allies preoccupied in the European and Middle East theatres (Ukraine and Gaza) to secure a "free hand" in the Indo-Pacific. The US's commitment in the Middle East, he argued, has become "completely loose," a fact underscored by the attack on Qatar (a mere 30km from a US base), which led Arab allies to doubt the reliability of US security guarantees.

In contrast, China is asserting a consistent, pro-Palestine diplomatic stance, aligning itself with the Global South and the Arab world. China's strategy is not one of direct confrontation, but rather using platforms like the May 25th GCC-ASEAN-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur to issue joint statements that are "very strong and very firm" on the Palestinian question. This approach expands its political and diplomatic influence. Dr. Khushnam concluded by highlighting China's three key demands for the region: a Two-State Solution with the 1967 borders, Jerusalem as its capital, and Gaza governed by Palestinians, a position that offers China geopolitical convenience in its pursuit of a multipolar world order.

Mr. Sanoop Sajan Koshy explored how China's engagement with its immediate neighborhood, particularly in South Asia, reflects a combination of economic ambition and strategic statecraft under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The speaker examined how China's periphery diplomacy has reshaped South Asia's economic landscape through infrastructure financing, trade expansion, and digital connectivity, while also confronting growing concerns about debt sustainability, trade imbalance, and legitimacy among recipient states.

At the outset, the presenter outlined the conceptual framework of China's *periphery diplomacy*, a key component of Beijing's foreign policy under Xi Jinping since 2013. Periphery diplomacy refers to China's strategy of engaging, influencing, and sometimes reshaping its surrounding neighborhood to secure its regional interests. Economics and trade form the central pillars of this diplomacy, as China seeks to present itself to neighboring countries as a source of economic growth, opportunity, and provider of public goods. As scholars like Professor Song Guoyou of Fudan University have noted, Beijing's economic engagement in Asia offers an alternative mechanism for conflict resolution and regional cooperation, laying the foundation for what Chinese policymakers term a "new Asian economic order."

The presentation then situated the BRI as the principal instrument of China's periphery diplomacy in South Asia. Since its formal elevation in 2013, the BRI has become the centerpiece of China's regional engagement, encompassing large-scale infrastructure, energy, and connectivity projects. The speaker observed that South Asia has emerged as one of the most significant targets of BRI financing, with billions of dollars invested in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. These projects—ranging from ports and highways to power plants and airports—have undoubtedly expanded physical connectivity and economic integration. However, they have also generated considerable debate over their financial terms and political implications.

Focusing on three country case studies—Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal—the paper analyzed how China's financing models have varied across South Asia and how recipient states have responded to the resulting debt challenges. In Pakistan, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stands as the flagship BRI project, initially valued at $46 billion and later expanding to over $60 billion by 2022. About 70 percent of its funding came through Chinese corporate loans, 28 percent through concessional loans, and only 2 percent as grants. The fiscal burden of CPEC, which accounted for roughly 17 percent of Pakistan's GDP in 2017, has since raised serious concerns over repayment capacity and economic dependency.

In Sri Lanka, projects such as the Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City were financed through long-term loans and equity arrangements amounting to $1.4 billion. Although Chinese loans constituted around nine percent of Sri Lanka's total government debt, their concentration in high-value strategic projects contributed to broader concerns about sovereignty and economic over-reliance. By 2023, China held about 52 percent of Sri Lanka's total foreign debt, illustrating the scale of its financial exposure. Nepal's experience, in contrast, has been relatively cautious. Most of its Chinese-financed projects, including the Pokhara International Airport and proposed Trans-Himalayan Railway, have been based on concessional loans and grants. Consequently, Nepal remains far from debt distress, with Chinese debt forming only a minor portion of its total external obligations.

The presenter further supported these arguments with trade data from 2010 to 2024, which revealed a persistent and widening trade imbalance between China and its South Asian partners. For example, in 2024, Chinese exports to Pakistan stood at $20.2 billion compared to Pakistan's $2.38 billion exports to China. Similar asymmetries characterise China's trade with Sri Lanka and Nepal, reinforcing a pattern of one-sided dependence rather than mutual interdependence.

In conclusion, the paper argued that while China's periphery diplomacy through the BRI has produced tangible *strategic gains* in terms of infrastructure development, connectivity, and regional integration, it also faces serious *legitimacy challenges*. These challenges arise from perceptions of debt dependency, unequal trade relations, and the domestic political backlash in recipient countries. The speaker concluded that future engagement under the BRI framework in South Asia is likely to emphasise multilateral cooperation and diversified partnerships as countries attempt to balance growth ambitions with fiscal prudence and political legitimacy. The presentation offered valuable empirical insights into the complex interplay between China's strategic ambitions and the agency of South Asian states within the evolving structure of regional diplomacy.

Dr. Mayukh Mukhopadhyay explored how China is using the medium of podcasting to quietly project its national image and build international influence. The presentation was framed by the seminal work of Joseph Nye, who coined the term "Soft Power", the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion. Dr. Mukhopadhyay's research posited that China is now engaging in a "quiet race" for "hearts, minds, and the eardrums" by transmitting influence through "intimacy and narrative" via sound, a phenomenon he termed “sonic soft power”.

The presentation established that while Western podcasts are characterised by open debate using RSS technology, Chinese podcasting, which has been exploding since 2019 on platforms like *Ximalaya,* is distinctively shaped by state control yet thrives on personal connection. Hosts often adopt the persona of friends or mentors, building trust in a digital environment where traditional state media often breeds scepticism. Dr. Mukhopadhyay noted that podcasters master the art of navigating "invisible red lines" by using "metaphors, humour, and coded language" to maintain authenticity while self-censoring — a tension he identified as Intimacy versus Regulation.

The research, which utilised a mixed-methodology approach involving a sample of 50+ podcasts across different channels (including AI-generated summaries of the Chinese versions), identified three key pathways for this Sonic Soft Power:

First, Entrepreneurial Learning: Podcasts serve as an "audio MBA" for urban China, with 68% of listeners tuning in for startup and policy insights, effectively aligning personal ambition with the state's developmental narrative.

Second Brand Diplomacy: Small, niche podcasts create "safe sonic spaces" to discuss sensitive topics like gender, mental health, and LGBTQ themes, fostering a sense of shared humanity and modernity.

Third, Community Dialogue/Corporate Diplomacy: Companies like Xiaomi use podcasts not just for advertising but to "humanise" their brand by sharing stories of creativity and care. Mayukh cited a study showing a significant boost in brand equity (25% increase) among listeners, though he did not detail the methodology for this specific correlation in the initial response.

From a policy perspective, Dr. Mukhopadhyay argued that podcasting has become a part of China's "evolving diplomatic toolkit", shifting from direct propaganda to "infotainment diplomacy". This approach blends education, emotion, and technology to project a national image and build a trusted brand presence. He also noted that regulators are beginning to experiment with "special podcasting zones" to allow safe creativity, signalling a shift toward ecosystem-led governance. AI is a key component, with recommendation algorithms and AI-assisted summaries turning ambiguous data into personalised influence.

The presentations generated an active and engaging discussion, particularly around the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the study. A key area of debate centred on the distinction between sharp power and soft power. Dr. Mukhopadhyay was invited to respond to a dominant Western academic perspective, reflected in reports such as those by the National Endowment for

Democracy, which argues that authoritarian states like China deploy soft power instruments as forms of sharp power.

In response, Dr. Mukhopadhyay explained that the findings of the study suggest that Chinese podcasters are not primarily engaged in short-term or coercive influence operations. Instead, they are pursuing long-term and organic audience growth by foregrounding authenticity and relatability. He argued that listeners are sufficiently discerning to identify overt propaganda, which compels content creators to prioritise genuine engagement. This approach, he noted, aligns more closely with the core logic of soft power, even when the broader intent of the state may be strategic. The emphasis, therefore, is on co-opting audiences through shared experiences, empathy, and perceived similarity rather than exerting direct coercion.

The discussion also raised questions regarding the audience traction of these podcasts within an increasingly competitive digital media environment, as well as the methodological rigour of the study's content analysis. Addressing these concerns, Dr. Mukhopadhyay clarified that the research adopted a mixed-methods approach, employing data triangulation through the analysis of over fifty podcasts alongside published media statistics. To illustrate audience reach and relevance, he shared an anecdotal observation from an international academic conference, where a scholar specialising in China studies confirmed that he and his peers regularly listen to these podcasts as sources of research insight. This, Dr. Mukhopadhyay argued, demonstrates that while audience growth may be gradual, it is deliberate and consistent with a long-term strategy aimed at organic influence.

Finally, Dr. Mukhopadhyay noted that data collection involved the use of AI-generated summaries of the Chinese-language podcasts. These summaries were utilised because the original Mandarin versions were the only accessible formats available to non-Chinese-speaking researchers, ensuring both feasibility and analytical consistency within the study.

A participant raised a critical question on how recent political resets in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal have affected China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) engagements, particularly in light of ongoing controversies surrounding these projects. Akhilesh from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) further contributed by highlighting the challenges faced by BRI projects in Pakistan, with special reference to environmental and socio-political concerns in the Baluchistan region.

In response, Mr. Koshy acknowledged the complexity of domestic political dynamics and their significant influence on BRI implementation. He noted that legitimacy challenges continue to recur in China's overseas infrastructure engagements, especially in contexts where Chinese financing is perceived as an alternative to International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans. Such perceptions have produced mixed public reactions, often reflected in electoral outcomes, as observed in countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal. Despite these challenges, he emphasised that Beijing has undertaken efforts to improve the image of the BRI by integrating environmental and sustainability standards. This shift includes a move away from large-scale "hard infrastructure" projects towards "small and beautiful" initiatives designed to enhance environmental compatibility and local acceptance.

Addressing a broader conceptual question on whether periphery diplomacy should be understood solely in economic or trade-related terms, Mr. Koshy clarified that, historically, periphery diplomacy has encompassed multiple dimensions, including cultural exchange, people-to-people interactions, and political influence. However, he noted that his paper deliberately focused on economic and trade aspects, particularly examining how Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and BRI projects have contributed to deepening financial and economic linkages across South Asia.

Elaborating on the political developments highlighted by a participant, Mr. Koshy also observed that despite ongoing debates over debt-trap diplomacy, China continues to remain a major trade partner for several South Asian states. In Sri Lanka, China has emerged as the second-largest bilateral trading partner, while Pakistan continues to expand its engagement through the proposed "CPEC 2.0," which seeks to broaden the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor into new sectors and infrastructure domains. He clarified that Pakistan's reported "exit" from CPEC pertained only to a single railway project rather than a comprehensive withdrawal. Similarly, in Nepal, despite political sensitivities and a tradition of multi-vector diplomacy, engagement with China persists through trade and infrastructure cooperation. Nepal, he noted, continues to balance relations with multiple partners while selectively exploring opportunities under the BRI framework.

The discussion then shifted to a broader strategic level with a question from another member of the audience directed at Dr. Dattesh Parulekar. The participant sought further elaboration on Dr. Parulekar's argument regarding China's efforts to construct a "China-centric universe", particularly in relation to the blue economy and China's growing activities in West Asia and the Gulf region.

In response, Dr. Parulekar situated China's actions within the larger context of global geopolitical competition. He argued that Beijing's strategy reflects a combination of strategic restraint and calculated opportunism. Rather than directly confronting the United States, China appears to be pursuing a deliberate approach that allows Washington to remain preoccupied with conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, including the Ukraine war and ongoing instability in West Asia. This strategic distraction, he suggested, provides China with greater strategic space to consolidate its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Dr. Parulekar linked these observations to the broader conference theme, "Rewiring Globalization: The China Factor in Trade, Commerce, Technology, and Sustainability", by highlighting how China is reshaping patterns of connectivity and influence across regions. He noted that in West Asia and the Gulf, China's engagement in trade, technology, and the blue economy is expanding rapidly. However, rather than pursuing overt confrontation, China relies on economic diplomacy, technological partnerships, and strategic investments to advance its interests while avoiding direct conflict with the United States. He concluded that this approach reflects Beijing's effort to shape a global order aligned with its strategic priorities without fundamentally destabilising existing power structures.

Overall, the interactive session highlighted the layered and multifaceted nature of China's regional and global strategy. It underscored how China's economic statecraft through the BRI and related initiatives intersects with domestic political dynamics, environmental considerations, and shifting global power equations. The discussion also reflected the diversity of perspectives among scholars and practitioners, reinforcing the view that China's rise continues to generate significant analytical debate and strategic concern across multiple domains.

Day II

Thematic Panel IV

China’s Role in Regional & Global Security

The fourth thematic panel was titled, “China’s Role in Regional & Global Security” and was chaired by **Dr. Anand P. Krishnan**, Fellow, Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker was **Dr. Sreshtha Chakraborty**, Assistant Professor, Bennett University, Greater Noida, and her paper was titled “Asian Security Roles in a Recalibrating Gulf: China, India, and Gulf Regional Architecture”. The second speaker was **Mr. Vivek Y. Kelkar**, Columnist, Researcher, and Analyst, who presented on “Trade, Coercion, And Contestation: Asean’s Strategic Vulnerability Amidst The US-China Rivalry”. The final speaker was **Ms. Saumya Shivangi**, Research Scholar, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and she spoke on “Theatre of India-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean: A Case Study of the Maldives”.

The Chair opened the session by introducing the three panellists and briefly outlining their respective papers. He provided a short overview of the themes under discussion, noting the panel’s relevance to China’s expanding political, economic, and security footprint across key regions. This framing set the context for a comparative assessment of China’s engagements in the Gulf, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region.

Dr. Sreshtha Chakraborty's paper addresses the strategic transformation currently underway in the Gulf region and its impact on regional security architecture. A central theme is the gradual disengagement of the United States, traditionally the main security guarantor, reflected in more selective engagement with the Gulf. This shift has triggered debates on the direction of Gulf security and potential security gaps. Dr. Chakraborty highlighted critical events, such as the September attack on Hamas leadership in Doha near the substantial Al-Udeid airbase, emphasising the region’s volatility. Key drivers identified include the US pivot to Asia, the withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal in 2018, and the adoption of the maximum pressure doctrine and America First policies that have further disrupted regional equilibrium. Notable incidents, such as General Qasim Suleimani's assassination, have intensified proxy conflicts. Sreshtha argues that Gulf-Asia relations, notably those with India and China, remain rooted in economic interdependence while increasingly incorporating political and security dimensions. A crucial question underpinning the analysis is whether there is a security vacuum and the existence of a ‘post-America moment.’ Sreshtha posits that while the U.S. remains central, Asian powers, rather than replacing American dominance, seek to create a multipolar order through infrastructure, economic investments, and a complementary mix of ‘look East’ and ‘look West’ policies.

Dr. Chakraborty discusses why Gulf states pursue greater strategic autonomy and balance, citing diversification strategies like Vision 2030 and efforts to move beyond rentier economics. The report examines whether Asian involvement is ‘counter-hegemonic,’ concluding that Gulf states maintain the West as a permanent security anchor, and notes that Asian powers, especially China, are **still** limited so far in their military engagement. When evaluating China’s actions in the Gulf, Ms. Sreshtha distinguishes between initial strategic hedging and an evolving approach characterised by diplomatic engagement, comprehensive partnerships, and the promotion of regional management without foreign dominance. Recent developments, like China’s mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and advocacy for BRICS and SCO, underscore its growing profile. India’s historic engagement is based on economics, energy, and a large expatriate population. India is advancing its role through counterterrorism, defense collaboration, and food and energy security. Policies such as Think West and Extended Neighborhood indicate increasing Indian involvement. Ms. Sreshtha discerns convergences—economic cooperation and support for multipolarity, and divergences, such as India’s historic roots and China’s more transactional approach. Maritime security, border disputes, and strategic intent further differentiate India and China. Sreshtha highlights India’s position as a trusted partner and China’s as an alternative to the U.S. in Gulf perceptions. Infrastructure strategies like IMEC versus BRI reflect wider competition. In conclusion, Ms. Sreshtha finds that both India and China have outgrown bilateral ties to pursue omni-balanced, multi-dimensional hedging strategies. The resulting Gulf regional architecture is becoming increasingly exclusive, interconnected, and multipolar.

Mr. Vivek Y. Kelkar’s paper focused on the evolving geopolitical and economic positioning of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) amid intensifying competition between the United States and China. He addressed ASEAN’s strategic vulnerabilities and the complex web of economic, political, and security interdependencies that define its role in the rapidly transforming international order.

The speaker started by stating that the global trade system is undergoing a profound transformation, characterised by the reconfiguration of power relations and growing tension between economic and security imperatives. He talked about three interconnected factors shaping the current landscape. First, the rise of economic nationalism in major powers such as the United States and China are leading to domestic industrial production being prioritised over orthodox liberal trade. Examples include the Trump administration's tariff policies, President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, and China's Made in China 2025 initiative both of which prioritise internal industrial goals over multilateral trade commitments.

The second factor that he noted is related to ASEAN's deep connectivity with China's manufacturing and supply networks, which leads to both opportunities and dependencies. These relationships complicate foreign policy decisions for ASEAN member states, who are forced to balance their economic reliance on China with the political and strategic necessity of maintaining positive relations with the United States. Thirdly, uncertainties surrounding US policy during the Trump regime and China's actions in the South and East China Seas have deepened regional anxieties about maintaining their autonomy.

The speaker also stated that ASEAN's responses have been neither uniform nor unambiguous. Member states do not fully trust or have identical strategic policies regarding the two major powers. The region's primary challenge lies in navigating three undesirable outcomes, which include Chinese dominance, American withdrawal, and regional instability. In this manner, the speaker noted that ASEAN's long-standing strategic culture of maintaining balanced engagement with great powers while safeguarding their autonomy still exists, but under a much more difficult geopolitical situation.

Mr. Kelkar explained how China's engagement with ASEAN extends beyond diplomacy to include both deep investment and supply-chains, creating conditions that weaponise interdependence and vulnerability. Both China and the United States have used economic networks and technologies as tools of geopolitical leverage. ASEAN states, therefore, experience both "sensitivity" to economic shocks and "vulnerability" to disruptions they cannot easily afford to resist. He also discussed the fragmentation of global trade flows into politically aligned blocs, with the World Trade Organisation warning of rising protectionist measures. For the US, China's expanding regional influence directly challenges the primacy the US has had in the past. The US continues to rely on bilateral alliances, such as those with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, and initiatives like the QUAD to counterbalance China's influence in the region. At the same time, China's approach — shaped by geopolitical concerns and security perceptions — is aimed at ensuring that their influence is maintained in the Nine-dash line through projects like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). RCEP allows China to strengthen its economic relations with ASEAN through shared trade rules and supply-chain integration. The speaker continued to highlight the increased importance of China in ASEAN's trade figures and dealings, where it has managed to replace the US.

The speaker concluded by stating that ASEAN faces an existential dilemma. Its export-driven economies are deeply entangled with both US and Chinese markets, leaving them vulnerable to coercion from either side. This could result in a shift in ASEAN's position as a neutral party. The speaker noted that the eventual outcome of this tussle depends on two main things, namely, China's ability to maintain sustained domestic growth and the US' ability to integrate military strategy with coherent economic vision for the future. Finally, he proposed that the global vision on international trade will be less focused on the US in the near future, and this structural reconfiguration appears logical. Therefore, how ASEAN seeks to preserve autonomy amid structural shifts in global trade and its capacity to balance the two dominant powers will play an important role in determining its future as a regional organisation.

Ms. Saumya Shivangi's presentation explored the India-China strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean theatre, focusing on the Maldives as a case study. She situated her analysis in the context of globalisation, which has made boundaries increasingly fluid. Drawing on border studies, she explained that maritime boundaries are driven by practical concerns, navigation, resource extraction, and security — rather than just territorial control. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was cited as the key framework governing modern maritime zones. Ms. Shivangi detailed the Indian Ocean's historical and contemporary significance as a trade and security hub, noting its critical role for global shipping and oil flows. She highlighted six strategic chokepoints that give the region its unique geopolitical importance. The presentation outlined how the Indian Ocean's profile has risen since the colonial and Cold War eras, with international competition intensifying around maritime trade, piracy threats, and growing influence from major powers, especially India and China. The speaker described India as the principal resident naval power and discussed China's long-standing maritime ambitions, particularly its investments in dual-use ports under the so-called "string of pearls" strategy. She addressed the Maldives' central place in this rivalry, noting the nation's efforts to balance ties with both India and China, as seen in recent high-profile diplomatic and security events.

Ms. Shivangi analysed the Maldives' foreign policy through the lens of "shelter theory," arguing that as a small state, the Maldives manages great power engagement to secure economic growth, political stability, and climate resilience, even at the expense of some autonomy. Close alignment with India has been persistent, although recent years have seen greater outreach to China, a development reflected in infrastructure projects, port visits, and high-level diplomatic engagements. The presentation concluded by emphasising the Maldives' dynamic "balancing" approach. Despite leaning toward India, it pursues relationships with China and the United States to maximise economic and security interests. Stability in the Indian Ocean remains a mutual concern for India and China, despite their rivalry. Ms. Shivangi suggested that limited cooperation—such as anti-piracy operations, disaster relief, and economic development, can coexist with competition. However, deep-seated mistrust, India's and China's divergent Indo-Pacific visions, and Maldivian domestic politics keep the rivalry at the forefront, positioning the Maldives as a focal point of intersecting interests and regional strategies.

During the interactive session, the Chair began by asking for clarification from Dr. Sreshtha Chakraborty regarding her mention of a "spillover" from South Asia that could happen in the Gulf, seeking elaboration on what form this spillover might take. Additionally, he asked Dr. Chakraborty to elaborate on GCC countries and the varying dynamics of different countries within this group in their engagement with China. Addressing Mr. Vivek Y. Kelkar, the Chair inquired whether ASEAN should be viewed as a cohesive bloc or if there were political and economic policy differences among its member states, particularly when comparing China's engagement with countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

In response, Mr. Kelkar acknowledged that ASEAN is far from uniform in its approach to China. He noted that nations such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia display distinct economic and political dynamics. Vietnam, for instance, retains historical memories of past wars with China and is sceptical toward increasing Chinese investments. In Malaysia, local manufacturers have begun losing market share and have also been affected by the import of low-priced Chinese goods. At the same time, Indonesia is already witnessing job losses linked to these trends. He also stated that these patterns point to early signs of strain in domestic industries and reflect growing unease over economic overdependence on China.

The Chair also raised the question to Ms. Shivangi about how domestic political factors influence foreign policy orientations regarding China in the Maldives. He also enquired whether China has managed to secure a better grip on these domestic factors. He also remarked that the Maldives face an existential threat in the form of climate change and asked what the Maldives brings to the table in its engagement with India and China. Ms. Shivangi responded that leadership changes within the Maldives do influence its foreign policy, with policy shifts clearly visible under different parties. In response to the question of the climate change crisis, Ms Shivangi stated that India has played a proactive role as a first responder during environmental crises, such as water shortages, while the Maldives continues to navigate a balance between its partnerships with the two major powers.

An audience member asked about China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) and whether it had altered Beijing's approach toward regional engagement. Other comments from the audience included questions regarding the conceptual clarity of "strategic rivalry," and the continued use of notions like the Maldives being located in "India's backyard." Another audience member posed a question to Dr. Sreshtha regarding her opinion on whether India's soft power diplomacy could be translated into something more meaningful and aligned with the strategic cooperation. In response, Dr, Sreshtha described India's historical and civilisational linkages with the Gulf. Additionally, she stated that while India continues to project itself as a trusted and reliable partner, China's expanding influence cannot be understated. The speaker highlighted India's five strategic partnerships focused on maritime security and intelligence cooperation but also acknowledged challenges in taking forward this soft power diplomacy.

In his closing remarks the Chair complimented the panellists but also urged them to move beyond descriptive accounts toward more analytical engagement with Chinese sources. The Chair also talked about the importance of consulting primary materials, including Chinese-language policy documents and China's public diplomacy on social media, to capture China's goals and aspirations in a more accurate manner. In the same vein, the panellists were also advised to be cautious in using

Western terminologies and to reflect critically on conceptual framings to avoid perspective bias. He also warned against the dangers of mistranslation from Chinese to English.

Special Panel IV

Rewiring Globalisation — The China Factor in Trade, Technology, and Sustainability in a Multipolar World

The fourth Special Panel was titled, "Rewiring Globalisation — The China Factor in Trade, Technology, and Sustainability in a Multipolar World", and was chaired by **Prof G. Venkat Raman**, Professor, Indian Institute of Management Indore; Convenor, 18th AICCS; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies. The first speaker was **Dr. Amitendu Palit**, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economics), Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, who presented on "Trade Fragmentation and Supply Chains: Identifying the New Dynamics between China and Global South". The second speaker was **Prof V. Ramakrishna**, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Department Chair (Strategy and Entrepreneurship), China Europe International Business School (CEIBS), who spoke on "Technology Development in China". The third speaker was **Mr. Birottam Dutta**, Commercial Director, India Subcontinent, Cabot Corporation, who presented on "Navigating the Intersection of Digital Innovation and India-China Collaboration". The final speaker was **Amb. Smita Purushottam**, Founder, SITARA; and, former Ambassador to Switzerland, the Holy See, and Liechtenstein, and she spoke on "China's Digital Sovereignty Policy".

In his opening remarks, **Prof Venkat Raman** provided an insightful overview of the ongoing global discourse on the changing nature of globalisation. While some scholars predict deglobalisation or "slowbalisation", he argued that this does not signal the end of globalisation itself but rather a transformation into a new phase led by emerging powers, particularly China. He described this evolution as the "rewiring of globalisation". These changes are driven by shifts in supply chains, innovation systems, and digital architectures. Such developments have significant implications for various areas including national security and sovereignty. Central to this transformation, he emphasised, is China under Xi Jinping's leadership. He referred to the phenomenon as "Xintralisation," The Chair then introduced the session's speakers, outlining their respective topics. He gave an introduction to issues such as trade fragmentation, China's technological rise, sustainability transitions, and digital sovereignty. He concluded by stressing the importance of examining how these global dynamics shape India's national security interest.

Dr. Amitendu Palit examined the emerging fragmentation of global trade and the consequent reconfiguration of supply chains in the context of shifting geo-economic alignments. The talk was framed around the argument that global trade is increasingly fragmenting along politically aligned blocs, a process that has been accelerated by the widespread adoption of *de-risking* and *diversification* strategies across major economies.

It was observed that this trend has disrupted China's traditional trade and investment relationships particularly with the Global South as both sides seek to diversify markets and reduce vulnerabilities. The reorganisation of global production networks was described as being shaped not purely by economic efficiency but by strategic and political calculations. Countries were said to be reorganising supply chains to align with trusted partners, thereby forming *geopolitically secure trade corridors*.

The US–China rivalry was identified as a key catalyst in this fragmentation. It was noted that recent U.S. policies especially the imposition of new tariffs and restrictions on technology exports—have intensified this trend, most notably in *semiconductors, critical minerals,* and *clean energy sectors*. These measures, it was explained, have contributed to a deepening bifurcation in global trade systems and to the creation of parallel value chains.

Attention was drawn to the concept of strategic capitalism, under which capital-exporting nations increasingly assess their international economic engagements through a *national security prism*. It was observed that this approach has redefined the purposes of trade and investment: economic flows are now being treated as instruments of statecraft. Reference was made to *WTO Article 21*, which permits trade restrictions based on security concerns, as a legal framework increasingly being invoked to justify such actions.

The reconfiguration of supply chains was presented as both a symptom and a driver of these global shifts. It was observed that trade is becoming more concentrated within clusters of politically aligned economies, leading to what Dr. Palit described as a "club-based" pattern of globalisation. This has had two major consequences: first, the consolidation of production networks within the strategic or ideological blocs led by the United States and China; and second, the marginalisation of low-income economies that lack the strategic heft to shape global supply-chain rules.

Middle powers those accounting for between one and four percent of global trade were described as emerging as critical intermediaries in this new system. Their choices, it was argued, could influence the balance of global trade alignments. However, the Global South, while vast in potential, was portrayed as being more reactive than proactive in this reordering, often compelled to adapt to the decisions of the major powers.

Particular emphasis was also placed on services supply chains, including *shipping, logistics,* and *tourism*, which are often overlooked in conventional trade discussions. In these domains as well, China was noted to hold a dual role as both a major producer and consumer occupying a central position in the global trading system.

In conclusion, it was suggested that a new geo-economic landscape is being formed, wherein China's relations with the Global South are being recalibrated under conditions of de-risking and strategic competition. The question posed by Dr. Palit was whether China could reposition itself as a *responsible and stabilising power* in this fragmented order, and how this evolving pattern might reshape the future of global trade and economic governance.

Prof. Ramakrishna began his presentation by noting that there has been considerable discussion on whether China has surpassed, is surpassing, or is catching up with the United States in technology. His objective was to assess how China performs in foundational technologies compared to the United States. He explained foundational technologies as those on which entire technological stacks are built. He began by examining operating systems, explaining that American systems such as Windows, iOS, and Android dominate globally, including within China. These systems have vast developer communities and deep enterprise integration worldwide. Most Chinese users, whether individuals or enterprises, continue to depend on these Western operating systems. China has, however, been making efforts to develop its own systems such as Kylin OS, which is based on the Linux kernel, and Harmony OS, developed by Huawei. Harmony OS claims independence from Android and has gained traction mainly within China's Huawei ecosystem, especially in IoT devices rather than smartphones. Huawei reports that around one billion devices run on Harmony OS, including 20 to 25 million Huawei smartphones. Interestingly, Huawei now ranks second in China's smartphone operating systems, ahead of Apple's iOS and behind Android. Still, Chinese operating systems have limited international visibility and developer support.

Moving to semiconductors, Prof. Ramakrishna cited research, including that from India's Takshashila Foundation, showing that China lags behind leading companies like TSMC, Samsung, and Intel by about five to seven years in cutting-edge chip production. While the global frontier is at the three- and two-nanometer levels, China currently produces seven-nanometer chips and is most comfortable with 14-nanometer and above, which are used in sectors such as automobiles, appliances, and telecom. He highlighted that China is the world's largest semiconductor market, consuming 29% of global semiconductor value. Therefore, the restrictions imposed by the United States on technology transfers to China also hurt Western companies. There is growing pressure from these companies to relax controls on the export of lithography equipment, EDA tools, and advanced chips.

He then discussed programming languages, noting that while languages like C++, JavaScript, and Python are open source, the organisations that govern their standards are based in the United States. This means that, to some extent, they are controlled by American entities. However, developers from China, India, and Europe also contribute significantly to these global standards. China remains dependent on these standards but is an active contributor. He observed that just as China leveraged the transition from internal combustion to electric vehicles to dominate a new sector, a similar opportunity may arise with the global shift from general-purpose programming languages to domain-specific languages. This could open a new area of competition where Chinese firms might establish a strong presence.

In discussing big data and cloud infrastructure, he stated that the United States dominates globally through frameworks such as Hadoop and Spark and services like Amazon Web Services, Azure, Google Cloud, and IBM Cloud. However, China's advantage lies in the size of its domestic market. Companies like Alibaba, Tencent, and Baidu have captured this market and built massive enterprises without expanding much beyond China's borders. Prof. Ramakrishna observed that Chinese firms are now expanding into Southeast Asia. During his recent visits to Singapore and Malaysia, he noted prominent advertisements for Alibaba Cloud in Kuala Lumpur, indicating regional expansion.

Regarding database technologies, he explained that global dominance remains with companies such as Oracle and Microsoft, which have strong enterprise adoption. Chinese companies like Huawei, Ant Group, and Ping An are competitive domestically but lack global recognition. He added that China's attempts to insulate its technological ecosystem from Western influence have both advantages and disadvantages, as they reduce global integration. On AI frameworks and 5G, he pointed out that the United States leads in AI through TensorFlow and PyTorch, supported by large global developer communities. China's AI frameworks from companies such as Baidu and Huawei are strong domestically but have limited international adoption. However, in 5G networking, China has achieved clear global leadership. This is one area where it has decisively leapfrogged ahead of other nations. Finally, he discussed industrial software, stating that American and European firms like Siemens, Dassault Systems, Synopsys, and Cadence dominate this field. China's position is weak here, and it faces significant vulnerabilities due to technology transfer restrictions.

In conclusion, Prof. Ramakrishna summarised that China is very strong in areas such as 5G, fintech, applied AI, and regional cloud services. It has been moderately catching up in databases and big data. China remains significantly behind in operating systems, advanced semiconductors, programming languages, and industrial software. He emphasised that despite these gaps, China's technological progress over the past forty years has been astonishing. Comparing China and the United States today, he said, is itself proof of China's tremendous scientific and technological advancement. He concluded by remarking that while his assessment presents a 'photograph' of the current situation, the 'movie' is ongoing, and in the coming years, the picture will look very different.

Dr. Birottam Dutta focused on the intersections of digital innovation, sustainability transitions, and the evolving dynamics of India–China collaboration. It was observed that four decades of rapid economic expansion in China have resulted in significant environmental degradation and deepening concerns over energy security. To address these twin challenges, a comprehensive top-down strategic reorientation was undertaken by the Chinese state to promote clean energy, curb pollutant industries, and reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

It was highlighted that China's industrial and technological transformation in the past decade has been marked by extensive capacity-building in solar, wind, battery, and energy storage technologies. This expansion, it was noted, was supported by sustained R&D investment and policies such as the Environmental Protection Law and the national campaign known as the *"War on Pollution."* These policy instruments, along with the tightening of environmental norms and the strict enforcement of emission controls, were said to have accelerated the transition towards sustainability.

A particularly significant phase was identified around 2017, when stricter pollution norms were suddenly introduced across industrial provinces. Factories were subjected to intense inspections and emission audits, leading to forced shutdowns or relocations within two to four months. This period was described as a watershed moment that reflected China's determination to tackle pollution at its source. The speaker noted that as a result of these measures, air and water quality improved considerably, and fossil fuel consumption plateaued a trend that marked a decisive step toward what Chinese policymakers describe as the vision of *"ecological civilisation."*

Parallel to this clean-up drive, an expansion of clean energy infrastructure was undertaken, encompassing electrification, renewable transport, and energy storage. China's large-scale rollout of solar and wind facilities, as well as advances in electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing, were said to have reshaped the global sustainability landscape. By the end of the decade, it was observed that China had emerged as the dominant global player in clean technologies, producing the majority of the world's solar panels, EV batteries, and electric vehicles with approximately three out of every four EVs still manufactured in China.

It was noted that these achievements stand in contrast to the limited progress in other major economies. The United States, for instance, was described as having shown little interest in building large-scale clean energy industries, while Europe's approach was characterised as more punitive and regulatory, with several internal challenges. In this context, China's proactive industrial strategy was said to have allowed it to occupy the leading position in global clean energy production and export.

Dr. Dutta also examined how this transformation has affected the Global South, including India. Between 2010 and 2020, the cost of solar and wind energy declined sharply largely due to China's manufacturing scale which made clean energy adoption viable in Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and India. However, it was cautioned that structural challenges persist. China's ability to opaquely subsidise its industries has led to overcapacity and dumping of products in other markets, which undermines domestic industries in emerging economies. Furthermore, China's preference for an export-oriented rather than investment-based approach has limited local capacity-building in these regions.

For India, it was acknowledged that ambitious renewable energy targets have been set, but dependence on Chinese inputs for solar manufacturing continues to pose strategic and economic challenges. Recycling and circular economy practices were identified as weak links in this chain. It was suggested that while efforts are underway to reduce dependence on China, such a process will require many years to materialise fully.

In conclusion, Dr. Dutta underscored that China's clean energy transformation represents a watershed moment in global industrial history. The dual processes of domestic ecological reform and international technological dominance have positioned China as the most influential actor in the global sustainability transition, with deep implications for India and the wider Global South.

Amb. Smita Purushotam focused on why digital sovereignty is essential for India and what to learn from the Chinese model. She noted that while the kinetic threat from China is often discussed, the gap between India and China has continued to widen in every sphere. She highlighted data control and surveillance as the two main issues under digital sovereignty. She referred to the book *Underground Empire*, commented upon by Paul Krugman, which shows how all information flows through the U.S. National Security Agencies and how digital data and financial flows are controlled by the United States. She said American platforms exercise considerable influence over national security, economic systems, and individual digital lives.

This data becomes readily accessible to them. Referring to the U.S. Cloud Act, she explained that the US government has the right to any data residing in any part of the world. She also noted that several Indian systems such as DigiLocker, the government e-marketplace, highways information, and health systems are hosted on Google or Amazon Cloud.

She mentioned that algorithms generated through data use are encouraging extremist opinions by creating echo chambers. She drew references from the book *Human Compatible*. Referring to the 1999 book *Unrestricted Warfare* by two Chinese colonels, she said that while it focused on psychological warfare, algorithmic control has become a similar modern form of influence. She also noted that companies like Google have acquired Waze, which develops target lists based on tracking and profiling and that logistics data in India runs on Google Cloud. She pointed out that CIA agents have been recruited by big tech companies, and that CIA-incubated firms such as Palantir discuss ideas like "dark enlightenment" and 'accelerationism', reflecting dangerous ideologies.

She described two models of data sovereignty, the American and the Chinese. The American ecosystem is built around semiconductors, where Indians have a strong role, as every chip in the world has an Indian design footprint. However, she cautioned that just as economic and credit systems have been weaponised, digital ecosystems can also be weaponised. On the Chinese side, she said Huawei has led advances in semiconductor technology and EUV. China has developed a full technology stack, including cloud, servers, apps, superapps, and hardware. Even though it is five to seven years behind, she argued that China may close this gap quickly.. She explained that the Chinese model is based on law, citing their Cybersecurity Law, Data Security Law, and Personal Data Protection Law. These frameworks protect critical infrastructure and control cross-border data flows. China also aligned trade and investment policies with industrial policy strategy, joining the ITA and WTO only after strengthening domestic industries and disregarding constraints that affected its policies. In contrast, India gave up industrial policy space after signing the ITA in 1996, which harmed domestic firms like Wipro and HCL. She emphasised that big tech needs to be curbed, pointing to China's regulation of Alibaba and Didi. In India, she warned that big tech firms already have a strategy to influence trade agreements, quoting economist Abhijit Das on digital trade clauses that prevent India from taxing or regulating foreign digital players and from promoting domestic champions like Zoho.

She said India is giving away its policy space by agreeing to concessions with the UK, EU, and US on source code access, cross-border data flows, and government procurement. She expressed concern that India is losing leverage by not using its brainpower as a bargaining tool, having given up compulsory licensing and other industrial measures. She highlighted environmental and social issues with data centers that consume massive water and energy resources, noting that local communities in the US have resisted them. She questioned why India cannot have data centers that host its own algorithms and viewpoints, saying current arrangements drain domestic resources while empowering foreign systems. She compared China's digital economy, over 10% of its GDP, with India's software exports of $220 billion, which generate no domestic feedback loops. She cited Nvidia's and Microsoft's rising valuations driven by Indian engineering talent, and noted that this value creation happens outside India's borders. She said these trends cause major economic and strategic losses for India, including in military capability, since network-centric warfare requires integrated, indigenous systems. She concluded by saying India needs a digital industrialisation strategy to undo these concessions and a digital sovereignty law ensuring that Indian regulations apply to all digital products in India. While India should maintain global platforms like Google and YouTube, it must develop a hybrid system that retains value within the country and protects the national interest.

During the interactive session, audience members raised a range of questions addressed to the panellists. One participant asked Prof. Ramakrishna about China's challenges in advanced semiconductor technology and industrial software, mentioning China's "AI Plus" initiative to integrate AI across industries. He asked whether the dependence on proprietary industrial software could be weaponised by the United States. Prof. Ramakrishna responded that such restrictions could occur, as some industrial software also comes from Europe. However, he added that curbing exports to China would hurt Western companies' profits because China is the largest market for industrial software and chips.

Another participant asked about building indigenous digital infrastructure in India and the implications for land and poor communities, as well as the future of minority and tribal communities amid cultural nationalism. A question was also raised to Dr. Palit about how middle powers like India and Brazil could use BRICS to shift from being rule-takers to co-shapers of trade norms. Another participant asked how India could maintain independence in industries related to data and climate change without falling into the US or Chinese spheres of influence. In his response, Dr. Palit explained that economic coercion in trade relationships can exist but is usually short-lived. He said countries tend to prepare for coercive actions, leading to diversification and de-risking strategies. On BRICS, he said the grouping began as a financial market proposition and its credibility depends on implementation. Rule-making within BRICS would be determined by the balance of power among members, and while sustainability could be managed, challenges would remain.

Amb. Smita Purushotam added that there is enough land to build infrastructure but emphasised prioritizing India's own needs first, such as building domestic data centres instead of depending on foreign investments. She also said there should be a movement by civil society to regulate AI and its applications to prevent extremist tendencies and ensure alternative viewpoints. In response to other questions, she said the absence of digital governance benefits big industrial houses that have tied up with global tech firms without considering national, land, or water interests. She called for a digital industrialisation policy promoting domestic champions through public procurement, R&D funding, and incentives, and highlighted inefficiencies in procurement processes. She said the Indian state must regain strength to protect the national interest. The discussion concluded with remarks from Prof. Ramakrishna, who said US–China economic relations remain fundamental and interdependent, and that while contests over rule-setting may emerge, complete decoupling between them is not feasible.

Thematic Panel V

Domestic Determinants of Foreign Policy

The fifth thematic panel was titled, "Government and Politics", and was chaired by **Dr. T.G. Suresh**, Associate Professor, Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker was **Mr. Albin Thomas**, Doctoral Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, and he presented on "Economic Diplomacy in Xi Jinping's Foreign Policy Concepts: A Comprehensive Analysis". The second speaker was **Ms. Himadree Sonowal**, Doctoral Scholar, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, who spoke on "Contextualising the People's

Republic of China's Approach towards its Diaspora". The final speaker was **Dr. Bhim B. Subba**, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

The Chair began by underscoring the dynamic interplay between external pressures and domestic determinants in shaping PRC policy, explaining that the panel would focus on domestic drivers of China's foreign engagements. He introduced the speakers and gave special mention to Bhim B. Subba for his work that sought to move beyond ideological explanations of the Communist Party of China (CPC), emphasising organisational mechanisms, recruitment practices and cadre policies.

Mr. Albin Thomas began his presentation by outlining his research focus on the economic diplomacy dimension embedded within Xi Jinping's foreign policy concepts. He noted that while there is extensive scholarship on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the New Development Bank (NDB), little research has systematically examined how Xi's broader conceptual frameworks, particularly the Community of Common Destiny and the New Type of Major Country Relationship, translate economic tools into instruments of diplomacy.

His central research question, therefore, asksed: How does Xi Jinping's foreign policy conceptual framework employ economic diplomacy as a tool of statecraft, and what implications does this have for China's international relations? To analyse this, Mr. Thomas employed David Baldwin's theory of economic statecraft, which defines the use of economic means, both positive and negative, to achieve foreign policy goals. Positive economic sanctions, such as trade agreements, investments, and development aid, are used to foster cooperation and influence, whereas negative sanctions, including trade restrictions and asset freezes, serve as punitive measures.

Mr. Thomas argued that Baldwin's theoretical framework is particularly useful for analysing China's economic diplomacy, as it provides analytical tools to evaluate how economic strategies advance policy goals even without factoring in domestic political variables. China, he explained, uses trade, investment, and financial policies as foreign policy instruments to promote its diplomatic objectives while simultaneously advancing economic interests.

Turning to Xi Jinping's foreign policy concepts, Mr. Thomas highlighted two central frameworks:

the Community of Common Destiny (or Shared Future for Mankind) and the New Type of Major Country Relationship. He explained that the Community of Common Destiny reflects Beijing's aspiration to reshape global governance and promote interconnected development through five key dimensions, namely, political partnership, security, economic development, cultural exchange, and environmental cooperation. President Xi's speeches, particularly those referencing the China-Africa Community of Shared Future, demonstrate how China translates this concept into practice through infrastructure projects — roads, railways, ports, industrial parks, and special economic zones — which embody Baldwin's notion of positive economic sanctions.

Mr. Thomas illustrated these linkages through a structured framework connecting China's economic instruments (for example, BRI, AIIB, concessional loans, trade agreements) with political objectives (for example, regional integration, strategic influence, and leadership in global governance). He emphasised that China's investments and financing mechanisms, especially through the BRI and NDB, are designed not only to build infrastructure but also to create long-term dependencies and foster China-centric economic networks.

The second concept, the New Type of Major Country Relationship, is founded on three principles: no conflict or confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. Under this framework, China promotes equal dialogue and seeks recognition as a great power. Thomas demonstrated how trade incentives and investment promotion under this concept align with Baldwin's idea of positive economic sanctions. Preferential trade terms, bilateral investment frameworks, and co-financing initiatives exemplify China's strategy of fostering interdependence and shared interests.

However, Mr. Thomas also addressed China's use of negative economic sanctions, noting examples such as the "unreliable entity list" and export restrictions on critical minerals, recently applied to companies using Chinese rare earths. These restrictive measures mirror Western-style sanctions, despite China's public criticism of such practices, and serve political objectives such as asserting sovereignty and demanding equal treatment.

In the evaluative part of his analysis, Mr. Thomas assessed how China's economic diplomacy fulfils Baldwin's foreign policy goals: acquiring or maintaining allies, securing access to resources, and influencing international behavior. Drawing from the literature, he cited instances such as the

China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which enhances China's access to the Arabian Sea while deepening strategic ties with Pakistan, and the BRI's role in creating alternative global partnerships and diminishing Western influence. He also noted China's financial engagement with the Philippines following the South China Sea arbitration, where Beijing leveraged loans and investments to influence Manila's stance.

In conclusion, Mr. Thomas argued that China predominantly employs positive economic sanctions — including infrastructure investment, development finance, and trade integration —to achieve its foreign policy objectives. These efforts collectively advance three overarching goals: (1) recognition of China's great power status, (2) promotion of alternative governance models, and (3) expansion of China's regional and global influence through economic interdependence.

The chair reserved his comments to be given towards the end of the session, however, he did note that the speaker's correlation between Xi Jinping's economic diplomatic thinking and China's statecraft was an interesting argument.

The next speaker, **Ms. Himadree Sonowal**, examined how the People's Republic of China has re-envisioned its diaspora policy as a strategic and moral instrument of statecraft. She began by observing that China's overseas population–over 49 million people across 130 countries–constitutes one of the most extensive and economically potent diasporic networks in the world. While earlier migrations were politically or economically motivated, the contemporary Chinese diaspora is largely shaped by the pursuit of higher education, technology, and entrepreneurship. These communities function as conduits of remittance, knowledge transfer, and reputational capital for the Chinese state.

Ms. Sonowal located the theoretical foundations of this policy in China's civilizational-state discourse. Drawing on Zhao Tingyang's *Tianxia* ("All Under Heaven"), she argued that the concept provides a moral framework envisioning world order as interconnected and hierarchically harmonious under Chinese leadership. Tu Weiming's idea of an *anthropocosmic space* extends Chinese civilization beyond territorial boundaries, situating diaspora members within a shared cultural and ethical sphere. Building on Jiang Shigong's notion of *historical continuity of the Party-state*, she explained that the CPC portrays itself as the legitimate heir to China's civilizational sovereignty. Together, these frameworks allow the state to integrate external Chinese communities into its ideological orbit, cultivating a transnational identity that transcends citizenship.

She supplemented this with references to Zhang Weiwei's interpretation of China as a non-Christian civilisation that seeks moral rather than missionary universalism, and to Yan Xuetong's call for *humane authority* as an alternative to Western hegemony. Through this lens, the diaspora becomes both a moral and a strategic resource–agents of soft power who project the image of a culturally confident and ethically assertive China.

The presentation traced key policy milestones in this engagement. The 1991 K. C. Wong Fellowship marked early outreach to overseas scholars. The 2008 Thousand Talents Plan institutionalised large-scale recruitment of scientists and innovators. Subsequent initiatives–including the Chunhui Cup Competition (2009), Homeland Serving Action Plan, and 2010 Overseas Talent Database–formalised state-supported technology transfer. By 2013, under Xi Jinping's leadership, the diaspora policy was explicitly tied to the *Chinese Dream* and national rejuvenation, with directives urging intellectuals abroad to "serve the motherland in whatever capacity possible." In 2018, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office was merged into the United Front Work Department, signalling the Party's direct oversight of global diaspora networks. The most recent initiative–the Beijing Overseas Talent Aggregation Project (2019) – consolidates recruitment and collaboration with expatriate professionals.

Ms. Sonowal presented empirical findings that reinforced the policy's success. A 2018 study found that China-born researchers publishing jointly with U.S.-based scholars accounted for 38 per cent of China-addressed papers in science and engineering. Diaspora scientists were nearly 1.8 times more likely to cite Chinese research than non-diaspora peers, illustrating sustained intellectual linkages. A one-unit rise in returnee employees increased patent applications by 17 per cent, while a similar rise in technologists boosted innovation by 10.6 per cent (Qiao et al., 2025). High-skill returnees clustered around state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, strengthening innovation ecosystems and start-up collaborations.

Her conclusion summarised the transformation of "brain drain to brain circulation." Diaspora engagement now functions as a critical pillar of China's innovation economy and its quest for global leadership in science and technology. Yet, she cautioned that this strategy has exposed overseas Chinese to geopolitical vulnerabilities–especially amid rising suspicion in host countries such as the United States and Australia. She cited the U.S. "China Initiative," where scientists of Chinese origin faced scrutiny, as evidence of diaspora communities caught in a "crossfire of loyalties". Ms. Sonowal concluded that China's approach merges *civilizational identity with strategic rationality*, using the diaspora both as cultural emissaries and as instruments of national legitimacy.

Dr. Bhim Subba emphasised that his paper is a work in progress, seeking to offer a fresh analytical lens for understanding the Chinese political system. Instead of viewing China primarily through the lens of the Communist Party's dominance, he proposed reversing this analytical perspective by examining the Chinese state without giving too much agency to the party-state.

He began by posing an important question: how can China's political system be understood if analysed from within the frameworks of Western liberal political science? Further, how do Chinese scholars themselves conceptualise the relationship between the Party and the state? His focus, therefore, was on the process of legitimizing the Party's governance through the People's Congress system, and on understanding how the state functions as a key agent within this configuration.

Explaining the People's Congress system, Dr. Subba described it as the national legislature of the state, distinct from the Party's Central Committee. While there is a considerable overlap, many senior members hold dual roles within both structures, he underlined that the National People's Congress (NPC) operates as the highest organ of state power as per China's Constitution, which declares that "all power belongs to the people". The People's Congresses, therefore, serve as the mechanisms through which the Chinese people exercise state authority at national, provincial, and local levels. He further elaborated on the institutional architecture of the NPC, including its Standing Committee, which acts as the permanent body of the Congress, and its linkage with the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an advisory body comprising not only party members but also figures from sports, religion, and other social sectors. Importantly, he highlighted the presence of eight non-Communist democratic parties, whose members, often highly educated and foreign-trained, function as vice-chairs or advisors within the system. These groups, though not oppositional, serve as interest or pressure groups, contributing policy suggestions and expert advice to the decision-making process.

Tracing the evolution of the party-state relationship, the speaker noted that during Mao's era there was little to no division of labour, the Party entirely dominated governance. A degree of separation between Party and government emerged in the 1980s but contracted again after the 1989 Tiananmen crisis. Under Xi Jinping, especially post-2012 and more prominently after 2017, there has been a reconsolidation of power, with increasingly blurred boundaries between Party and state institutions. For instance, Dr. Subba cited the creation of the National Supervision Commission (a state body) in 2017, which works closely with, and one step below, the Party's Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, illustrating both cooperation and hierarchical interdependence.

Dr. Subba argued that the stability of the Party and the state are interlinked, and that when the Party is stable, the state remains stable. Comparing leadership styles, he observed that while Mao was a "strong leader but an institution destroyer," Xi Jinping has emerged as a "strong leader but an institution builder". Under Xi, regularisation of NPC sessions and strengthening of state institutions have enhanced the legitimizing capacity of the Party's governance.

In conclusion, the speaker emphasised that the People's Congress system epitomises the legitimising agency of governance in contemporary China. While critics often dismiss it as a "rubber stamp" body, its formal role in endorsing decisions and institutionalising Party authority remains crucial. China today, he noted, has shifted its political vocabulary from "revolution" to "governance", focusing on ruling and administering the state rather than transforming the Party.

The Chair opened by commending the conceptual clarity of Dr. Subba's presentation on the Chinese political system, noting its refreshing emphasis on the state within the party-state framework. He suggested that a useful extension of the argument would be to explore how the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) operates as a deliberative mechanism within governance, highlighting that deliberation, even within non-democratic systems, remains a vital dimension of political legitimacy.

Turning to broader reflections, the Chair began with Albin Thomas's paper on economic diplomacy in Xi Jinping's foreign policy. He praised the analytical precision of terms such as economic statecraft and trade restrictions, which encourage a rethinking of how China's external engagements are understood. He cautioned, however, against attributing all economic initiatives solely to Xi Jinping's personal will, emphasizing the limits of individual agency in policymaking. Invoking Karl Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire, he observed that leaders act within historical and structural constraints that shape their decisions.

The Chair further reflected on China's attempt to articulate a new universal language of global engagement through ideas like the Community of Common Destiny. He drew a historical comparison to the Western world's ability, especially through figures like Woodrow Wilson and the Fourteen Points, to promote a compelling vision of universalism that underpinned Western institutional hegemony. China, he argued, is striving to construct a similar ideological vocabulary to frame its leadership in global governance. While such initiatives may not yet rival the Universalist appeal of Western discourse, they signal Beijing's aspiration to define a shared global narrative.

Discussing Ms. Sonowal's paper on Chinese intellectuals and the civilizational turn in diaspora politics, the Chair appreciated her nuanced mapping of how China cultivates a renewed sense of belonging among overseas Chinese communities. Yet, he urged caution against reading this solely as a product of state policy. Historically, he noted, relations between the Chinese mainland and diaspora communities were marked by long-standing alienation, especially from the late Qing through the Republican and early Communist periods, when ideological and economic divides ran deep.

The recent reconnection, he argued, arises not merely from ideological persuasion but from China's material rise, its economic dynamism, and political stability. The civilizational discourse thus operates less as a cause and more as a rhetorical articulation of an existing sentiment of renewed affinity.

In his concluding remarks, the Chair cautioned against viewing China's global ascent through the simplified lens of authoritarian expansionism. He emphasised that China's actions are deeply shaped by structural conditions and economic imperatives, not just deliberate ambition. Using the

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an example, he argued that the project also reflects efforts to manage excess capital and industrial capacity within China's economy, rather than a purely geopolitical design. He drew parallels to earlier global financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which similarly generated debt dependencies in their developmental engagements.

In conclusion, the Chair urged the audience to move beyond viewing China as a monolithic authoritarian state. The CPC's governance incorporates deliberative and adaptive mechanisms through institutions like the National People's Congress, which, though under Party control, still facilitate structured debate and some degree of inclusion. Reducing China's politics to Xi's personal leadership, he argued, obscures the institutional complexity and policy pragmatism at work.

He closed by commending the presenters' empirical depth and encouraging continued inquiry into how deliberation, legitimacy, and adaptation interact within China's evolving political system. This deliberative system is crucial for accommodating "many of the non-CPC voices" and helps the system "absorb... political shocks", a characteristic often associated with democracies.

During the interactive session, members of the audience raised several important questions. Addressing Mr. Albin Thomas, one participantt remarked that the extensive paper appeared to echo the Party's narrative, particularly the framework of "win-win cooperation". Citing critical scholarly views that interpret the phrase as "China wins twice", he questioned whether the concept of win-win represents an ideological cover for exporting a governance model that comes with implicit costs. Mr. Albin Thomas responded that the countries in which BRI has reached they are in need of infrastructures and thus for them it's a simple bargain with China. In addition to this China does not come with an ideology when compared to IMF funds, which often include extensive conditionalities.. Thus what China is exporting is not an authoritarian model but a developmental model, which has also served as a way for China to fix the issue of overcapacity.

Another participant asked Ms. Sonoawal whether the attitude of local communities towards the Chinese diaspora has changed, particularly in light of COVID-19. She also raised a conceptual observation regarding *tianxia* (All under Heaven), suggesting that the notion of "one family under heaven" could enrich the paper's Confucian framework, and recommended examining how contemporary scholars reinterpret *tianxia–yi jia* to denote either global or China-centric orders.

Responding to the interventions, Himadri contextualised her analysis within the broader civilisational and educational revival accompanying China's rise. She argued that since 2008, a sense of renewed confidence has shaped both state and societal self-perception, coinciding with the Beijing Olympics and China's growing global presence. She noted that the *tianxia* (all-under-heaven) concept remains ideologically ambiguous, universal in rhetoric but China-centered in practice — with diaspora communities positioned at the periphery of this imagined world order.

The speaker also explained that state engagement with overseas Chinese today partly compensates for historical alienation, when diaspora groups were viewed as bourgeois or political suspects. This shift now emphasises kinship and inclusion under the "one family" narrative. Addressing questions on diaspora attitudes, she observed that anti-Chinese sentiments in host societies, particularly in the United States, predated COVID-19 and intensified during the U.S.–China trade war. Policies like the "China Initiative" stigmatised Chinese scientists as potential spies, prompting the Chinese state to frame itself as a protector of its diaspora. Consequently, while sections of the Chinese-American community grew insular and cautious, others fostered pan-Asian solidarity, notably among Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese Americans, in response to shared experiences of discrimination.

Dr. Bhim B. Subba was asked if Xi Jinping was running the Communist Party of China or whether the Party was using Xi to maintain legitimacy. Further, the participant also asked Dr. Subba who ultimately governs China, whether it is the Party of Xi Jinping. In response, Dr. Subba elaborated on the evolving structure of China's governance institutions. He noted that between 2008 and 2018, data on Leading Small Groups (LSGs) became less transparent, though content analysis indicates a rise in state-led LSGs compared to party-led ones. Many of these bodies have since been elevated into commissions, reflecting deeper institutionalisation of state authority under party control.

Addressing the issue of party-state legitimacy, he emphasised that recent policy documents reinforce the idea that governing the Party well ensures effective governance of the State. Thus, the state's role is fundamentally to legitimise the Party, a message directed both domestically and internationally.

On institutional independence, he clarified that while constitutional provisions permit some oversight, the extent of autonomy depends on the policy area. Routine administrative matters may allow limited checks, but questioning decision-making at higher political levels remains tightly controlled. The Chair then formally ended the discussion.

Thematic Panel VI

Resource Politics and Environmental Geopolitics

The sixth thematic panel was titled, "Resource Politics and Environmental Geopolitics", and was chaired by **Prof. Alka Acharya**, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. The first speaker was **Mr. Amit Ranjan Alok**, Doctoral Scholar, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, who presented on "China's Electro-Magnetic Grip: The Physics, Geopolitics, and Supply Chain Dominance in the Global EV Revolution". The second speaker, **Mr. Chaitanya Deshpande**, IBSA Fellow, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, spoke on "Water, Power, and Geopolitics: China's Hydropower Investments in South Asia".The third speaker was **Dr. Ipshita Bhattacharya**, Assistant Professor, The Bhopal School of Social Sciences College, Bhopal, and she presented on "The Impact of China's Dominant Rare Earth Element (REE) Sector in the Global Market and the Discomfort in Global Politics". The final speaker was **Ms. Vishnupriya P.K.**, Doctoral Scholar, Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delh, and she presented a paper titled, "Chinese Dominance in Critical Mineral Resources and Geopolitics of Supply Chains".

In her opening remarks, Prof. Acharya pointed out that resource politics has been a relevant issue in international politics for centuries, and resources were seen as leverage that countries had and were a major factor in international trade. But the environmental factor in resource geopolitics has started to emerge as an important factor in the last three decades, especially since the start of the modernisation process in emerging economies. This rapid industrialisation and modernisation of economies have generated a huge toll on the environment due to a growth path dependent on resource intensive and unsustainable practices. This environmental abuse has brought all of us into the same boat where we either swim or sink together. The challenge of environmental threats, which has spawned its own kind of geopolitics and the underlying aspect of resource politics, persists, and, we still find that resources are being used as leverages even at a time when we acknowledge that the challenges are going to affect us all.

In his presentation, **Mr. Amit Ranjan Alok** examined the global electric vehicle (EV) revolution as a convergence of technological innovation, sustainability goals, and geopolitics, with China at its centre. Around 60% of global EV manufacturing and 80% of global lithium-ion battery manufacturing is done in China. China has become the battery powerhouse of the world, and CATL and BYD, Chinese technology giants, control more than half of the global EV market. Rare Earth Elements (REEs) are used to manufacture EVs as they increase the power, thermal stability, Lightness, and efficiency of the motor. REEs are the basic building blocks fueling the EV revolution in China and the rest of the world. China processes approximately 85% of the global REEs, thereby dominating worldwide REE processing. China now dominates the global REE processing, Lithium-ion manufacturing and EV manufacturing supply chains, thus, making China the epicentre of the global EV revolution and also giving it the power to largely control the reins of the industry and the supply chains.

China has been able to revolutionise its manufacturing industry and become a leader in the EV industry by horizontal and vertical integration. China has been able to operationalise all the steps in the EV supply chains, from securing the raw materials (REEs), mass production of Lithium-ion batteries to assembling and manufacturing EVs, leading to vertical integration. The perfect example of this is BYD, an EV manufacturing giant in China, manufacturing 50% of the EVs in China. BYD is directly sourcing raw materials (REEs) from Pakistan and Congo, manufacturing Lithium-ion batteries in-house, and assembling EVs in its factories in Shenzhen, Qinghai and Changsha. The Chinese government has also played a huge role in strengthening the EV manufacturing sector in China through its policies like Made in China 2025 and BRI. The government is providing significant fiscal stimulus to the EV sector through the Made in China 2025, and EV manufacturers are able to export EVs to countries in Africa and Latin America through BRI.

The rise of China, coupled with its unquestioned dominance of the REE processing, which is not only a major component in EV manufacturing but also other technologies like chips — has created deep concern among other global powers such as the US. The strategies for countering China include reshoring, resource diversification, supply-chain security, and regulatory measures. Other countries like the US, EU, and Japan are developing strategies to counter China's dominance in the EV industry through initiatives such as: the US strategy of self sufficiency through domestic mining in California, the EU's Critical Raw Material Act, Japan's stockpiling strategies, and cooperative frameworks under the QUAD.

The next speaker, **Mr. Chaitanya Deshpande**, began by stating that the South Asian region boasts one of the world's largest river systems, including the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra, all originating in China. As the world's largest hydroelectric power producer and an upper riparian state, China wields considerable influence over regional water resources, particularly through dam construction and hydropower projects. China has actively sought to strengthen its strategic partnerships with Nepal and Pakistan by constructing major hyperpower projects.

Notably, approximately 20-25 per cent of Pakistan's power generation relies on hydroelectric power, while Nepal possesses the potential to generate 43 gigawatts of hydroelectric capacity. However, both countries face limitations in harnessing their full potential due to political instability, financial constraints, and technological challenges. China's involvement in these nations seeks to address these shortcomings by financing and constructing major hydropower projects. Yet, it is not the only external actor shaping the hydropolitical landscape of the region.

The academic discourse on hydro politics, which gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, often revolves around the debate between conflict and cooperation resulting from external powers constructing large dams in fragile states. China's dam-building activities have frequently been analysed within this framework. Some studies argue that by building dams in weak and fragile states, China provides a degree of legitimacy and stability to these governments through tangible benefits such as enhanced energy generation, improved irrigation, and infrastructural growth. Conversely, other scholars raise concerns about the environmental degradation, social displacement, and unsustainable debt associated with these projects.

Empirical analyses of Chinese dam construction in Southeast Asia, particularly in Cambodia and Myanmar, have produced mixed findings. While some works describe these ventures as forms of "hydro-imperialism," others recognise their role in promoting development in recipient countries. Building on this body of literature, the paper under discussion focuses on the cases of Pakistan and Nepal, using secondary data and a qualitative approach to examine the strategic, economic, and environmental implications of Chinese hydropower projects.

In Pakistan, China's investments in hydropower projects extend beyond economic cooperation and carry significant geopolitical ramifications. Three of these projects are located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, a region under dispute between India and Pakistan. Despite India's repeated objections, China has continued these projects through the financial mechanisms of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an integral component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While these initiatives have contributed to social and economic benefits within Pakistan, concerns persist over the financial burden they impose. Of Pakistan's total debt to China, approximately USD 29 billion, around 22 per cent is linked to hydropower ventures. Furthermore, nearly 95 per cent of the CPEC financial arrangements are structured as loans, intensifying apprehensions of a potential debt trap. The strategic positioning of these projects near India's borders amplifies their geopolitical significance and fuels regional tension.

In Nepal, China's engagement under the BRI since 2017 has focused on developing underutilised hydropower potential. Chinese investments have supported major projects such as the Upper Tamakoshi, Upper Trishuli 3-A, and Upper Marsyangdi plants. These developments have contributed to Nepal's energy sector by reducing power shortages and improving electricity access. Nonetheless, the country's hydropower investment patterns are heavily shaped by domestic politics. Shifts in political leadership often determine whether projects receive backing from India or China, creating a fluctuating policy environment.

India's reaction to China's hydropower investments has varied across contexts. In Pakistan, the response has primarily been limited to diplomatic criticism, particularly regarding projects in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The strategic implications of these developments, however, are significant, as the dams may indirectly legitimise Pakistan's presence in disputed territories. Moreover, China's growing role as a stakeholder in the Indus Water Treaty has raised concerns for India, especially amid recent disputes over treaty interpretation.

In contrast, India's engagement with Nepal has been both coercive and cooperative. In 2018, India pressured Nepal to revise its energy import policy to restrict electricity purchases from countries lacking bilateral investment treaties. Consequently, Nepal agreed not to buy power from Chinese-funded projects, handing over two projects to Indian companies instead. Alongside this coercive dimension, India has also promoted regional energy cooperation by facilitating tripartite hydroelectric trade among India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The first such transaction occurred in 2024, marking a milestone in regional power exchange.

Dr. Ipshita Bhattacharya began her presentation by noting that in the 1950s, the US was the dominant player in REE processing with Mountain Pass, California, as their major mining site. But they gradually realised that REE processing is highly polluting and incompatible with evolving U.S. environmental regulations. So, in the 1970s and 80s the US transferred their technical knowledge and much of the REE industry's infrastructure to China. Over subsequent decades, China systematically built an unparalleled dominance across the entire REE value chain through strategic planning and substantial capital investment. China now controls 71% of global REE extraction, 90% of refining and separation capacity, and 92% of permanent magnet manufacturing, constituting near-total control of the sector.

REEs are crucially important in the defence sector and the clean energy sector. The US Department of Defence (DoD) released a White Paper in 2012, followed by a 2013 congressional report, stating that the US defense sector — especially the F35 fighter jet program— requires approximately 420 kilograms of REEs, while Virginia- and California- class nuclear submarines use approximately 4,600 kilograms. Other equipment —such as GDANS night-vision goggles, radar systems, and precision-guided munitions—also rely heavily on REEs, making the US military structurally dependent on Chinese supply of REEs. China controls the REE supply chains through strategies such as geopolitical weaponisation, creating single point of failure, processing bottlenecks, and strict export licensing regimes. Export restrictions deployed during diplomatic tensions (for example, the 2010 China–Japan rare earth dispute and the 2019 U.S.–China trade war) exemplifies geopolitical weaponisation. China's control of midstream processing — where even foreign mines must send concentrates to Chinese refineries — creates systemic vulnerabilities. Its export control licensing further imposes *de facto* extraterritorial oversight, requiring any entity using China-processed REEs to obtain case-by-case approvals.

In her presentation, **Ms. Vishnupriya P.K** examined the evolving dynamics of economic tensions between China and the United States, with a particular focus on China's growing dominance in the global critical minerals supply chain. The discussion began by situating the issue within the broader U.S.–China trade war, where the Trump administration's 125 per cent tariff on Chinese goods prompted retaliatory measures from Beijing, created widespread instability in global markets. China's export controls on critical minerals escalated geopolitical uncertainty and compelled the United States to reassess its own supply chain vulnerabilities. Within this framework, the paper identified China's near-monopoly over critical minerals as a key geopolitical instrument. The study had three objectives: first, to analyse China's dominant position in the global critical mineral supply chains; second, to interpret this dominance through a neo-mercantilist theoretical perspective; and third, to examine global responses to China's expanding influence.

Employing a neo-mercantilist lens, the presentation argued that China's state-led interventions seek to consolidate strategic control over global supply chains. Neo-mercantilism, rooted in strengthening national power through protected industrial development, aligns with Chinese policies promoting technological upgrading and supply chain insulation. Classical thinkers such as Alexander Hamilton advocated reducing foreign dependence — ideas echoed in Chinese intellectual traditions. Figures like Wei Yuan, Sun Yat-sen, Wang Tao, and Li Hongzhang emphasised state-led industrial modernisation, foreign knowledge acquisition, and building strong defence-oriented economies. Wei Yuan's statement — "We must study the foreigners' methods and techniques… to strengthen our national economy and defence" — captures this continuity.

The paper filled a research gap by applying neo-mercantilist theory to China's mineral strategy, an area overshadowed by tariff-centric scholarship. Using qualitative methods and secondary sources, it acknowledged limitations such as restricted access to primary data.

China's rise in global production networks was traced to the post-2000 shift of supply chains from the global north to the global south. China built specialised "supply chain cities" and export processing zones, now accounting for 67% of global processing exports, compared to Mexico's 18%. Nearly one-third of China's imports fuel export-processing industries, demonstrating the scaling of its manufacturing ecosystem. COVID-19 disruptions highlighted China's indispensable role in global value chains. Shortages in electronics, medical gear, and automotive components revealed deep structural dependencies.

Central to the analysis were China's export controls on germanium, gallium, graphite, and antimony (2023–2025), which demonstrated Beijing's willingness to deploy economic tools for strategic leverage. While controls on germanium and gallium had limited immediate impact, restrictions on graphite and antimony significantly affected battery and semiconductor supply chains. Chinese ministries justified the controls as security measures in compliance with international obligations, communicated transparently through China–US and China–EU Export Control Dialogues.

In conclusion, the presentation stressed that China's dominance stems not merely from resource endowment but from sustained investments in technology, midstream processing, and high-value refining. Its neo-mercantilist strategy integrates economic capability, technological control, and geopolitical influence, positioning China to shape the future structure of global economic power.

During the interactive session, an audience member emphasised evaluating dominance through the lens of substitution possibilities, noting that certain segments of the supply chain — such as processing — are not protected by unique intellectual property and can therefore be replicated by other countries. He illustrated this by pointing out that although Congo produces 60% of the world's cobalt, this does not translate into geopolitical leverage because other states can reorganise or relocate critical stages of the supply chain. Recycling, he added, represents another viable pathway for reducing dependence on Chinese processing capacity, and countries like Japan have made significant advances in this area. Since recycling can recover a substantial proportion of critical materials, diversifying into recycling ecosystems can offset China's processing advantage.

Gallium and germanium provide instructive examples. After China introduced export restrictions, global prices rose; once prices increase, countries that had not previously invested in processing now find it economically viable to do so. Previously, China's extremely low prices discouraged other countries from entering the market because the cost–benefit equation overwhelmingly favoured Chinese suppliers. By raising prices through export controls, China unintentionally incentivised competitors to build their own processing capacity. He concluded by noting that these dynamics — price shifts, substitution potential, and new investment incentives — are crucial for analysing the long-term implications of China's dominance. He invited the researcher to share further insights if such substitution effects were analysed in the paper.

Mr. Amit Ranjan Alok, in his response, stated that approximately 85% of the REE processing is conducted in China. However, other countries have also begun expanding their participation in this segment of the supply chain. This is partly because they source raw materials from multiple locations, and once these supplies enter their systems, their own consumption patterns shape the demand dynamics at subsequent stages of processing. Consequently, these shifts in demand contribute to the recent surge in prices.

Another participant asked Ms. Ipshita Bhattacharya how minerals — given their critical role in daily life and in producing key commodities — should be categorised, and whether they ought to be treated as public goods or as strategic commodities within international legal frameworks. Ms. Bhattacharya responded that REEs underpin everything from consumer electronics to advanced defence systems, and because their applications span public welfare and national security, they should be treated as public goods.

Addressing Mr. Deshpande, a participant asked about India's response to the $167 billion Yarlung Tsangpo dam and its potential as a "water bomb". In response, the speaker noted that China's potential threat lies in its ability to store water and release it abruptly during conflict times, akin to a water bomb. While this is a significant concern, the actual impact has been the alteration of water flows. Notably, this has also affected the Siang River, also known as the Brahmaputra River, which flows into India. Noted that the real threat lies less in deliberate water attacks and more in alteration of river flows, which already affects the Siang/Brahmaputra and raises concerns for Assam.

Thematic Panel VII

Pluriversal Knowledges and Sustainability: Comparing Possible Pathways of Rewiring Globalization in China and India

The seventh thematic panel was titled, "Pluriversal Knowledges and Sustainability: Comparing Possible Pathways of Rewiring Globalisation in China and India", and was chaired by **Dr. Aparna Vincent**, Assistant Professor, Humanities and Social Sciences Area, Indian Institute of Management Indore. The first speaker was **Prof. Madhulika Banerjee**, Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi, and she presented on "Pluriversal Knowledges and Sustainability: A Theoretical Framework for Comparing Possible Pathways of Rewiring Globalisation in China and India". The second speaker was **Ms. Devahuti Sarkar**, Doctoral Scholar, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi, and she spoke on "Agro-ecological Practices as a Response to the Climate Crisis: Comparing Pathways of India and China". The final speaker was **Mr. Akshay Bhambri**, ICS-HYI Fellow and Doctoral Scholar, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi, who presented on "*Retour à la Nature*? The Making of the 'Natural' in Traditional Medicine".

Dr. Vincent began by explaining that the term "pluriversal" draws on de-colonial and anthropological scholarship to reject a single, homogenising narrative of globalisation and to foreground multiple knowledge systems, ecological imaginaries and cultural values. The Chair stated the panel would examine how diverse epistemologies — indigenous, traditional and locally embedded knowledges — might offer alternative, more just and ecologically attuned pathways to sustainability, particularly in the Asian civilizational context.

In her presentation, **Prof. Madhulika Banerjee** critically challenged conventional Western frameworks of development and sustainability by emphasising the importance of pluriversal knowledge — diverse, non-Western epistemologies — in rethinking pathways to sustainability in India and China. Prof. Banerjee explored how dominant industrial and economic models are rooted in borrowed templates that prioritise mechanised, fossil-fuel-dependent production, homogeneous products and a resource-centric view of nature. Her research advocated for a systemic shift towards valuing local, sustainable practices embedded in traditional knowledge systems that recognise the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

The uncritical acceptance of these models has entrenched a system of conspicuous consumption and GDP-centred prosperity, leading to deep ecological and social contradictions. She argued that sustainable development, within such frameworks, is an oxymoron, since it cannot emerge from the very structures that generate environmental degradation and social inequality. The lecture called for a politics of knowledge, which is a revaluation of alternative epistemologies marginalised by industrial modernity. Prof. Banerjee emphasised that outside mainstream science and economics, many communities in the Global South, including in India and China, possess rich knowledge systems that offer sustainable modes of production and social organisation. These "plural knowledges" operate beyond state and market structures and embody a more harmonious human – nature relationship. They represent not static traditions but dynamic, adaptive systems that continue to evolve.

Drawing on examples such as Ayurveda, Prof. Banerjee demonstrated how indigenous knowledge systems have historically engaged, contested, and negotiated with modernity to create innovative hybrid practices. Unlike industrial innovation, which prioritises efficiency and scale, these forms of innovation retain ethical and ecological limits, including the concept of 'enough', which defines sufficiency as a material as well as a spiritual principle. They foreground embodied practices, local production, and the rational use of machines alongside human labour, all grounded in ecological cycles. Furthermore, she argued that sustainability must integrate both economic and social dimensions. Issues of caste, gender, and inequality have long distorted production and consumption patterns; therefore, any sustainable model must also strive for social justice, equity, and democratic participation. Sustainability, she stressed, is inseparable from egalitarian social relations.

In her conclusion, Prof. Banerjee called for revitalising rather than reinventing alternative systems of production, consumption, and distribution already functioning across India and China. The task is to recognise, support, and theorise these existing practices while challenging embedded discrimination and hierarchies. She outlines three key analytical parameters for future research: the material basis of alternative pathways, the actors involved (state, private, or community-based), and the initiatives that challenge dominant knowledge systems. Her framework thus offers a comparative, de-colonial lens for reimagining sustainability beyond the industrial paradigm, rooted in plural knowledge and transformative politics in the global South. This framework urges us to look beyond the narrow confines of industrial growth, embracing diverse knowledge systems that can lead to truly sustainable futures in India, China, and beyond.

Ms. Devahuti Sarkar began by explaining that her paper explores the recurring agrarian question of how both countries have engaged with agroecology as a potential response to the climate crisis. Ms. Sarkar situated her discussion within the broader development trajectories of India and China. Over recent decades, discourse has largely focused on China's industrial and technological transformation, often side-lining the agricultural sector that once formed the bedrock of its economy. She noted that similarly, India has pursued industrial and technological growth while continuing to view agriculture primarily through the lens of productivity and self-sufficiency. She further explained that her research seeks to challenge this industrial bias by reasserting the historical, economic, and ecological significance of agriculture in both countries.

Consequently, she offered a critique of the Green Revolution, which reshaped agricultural production in India and China during the 1960s and 1970s. While new technologies such as hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers, and machinery promised to end food insecurity, they also produced severe ecological and epistemic crises. Ms. Sarkar argued that this model displaced community-based knowledge systems, led to over-dependence on market systems, degraded 40% of arable land, and pushed small farmers into chronic debt. In China, the consequences have been similar. She also drew inspiration from scholars like Vandana Shiv, who have critiqued the model as a "sociotechnical ensemble" that is "inherently reductionist" and "represents epistemic violence."

Ms. Sarkar also talked about agroecology as an emerging alternative paradigm. She described agroecology as not only a science but also a set of practices and a social movement that seeks to reintegrate ecological principles into farming while simultaneously empowering civil society and farmers' organisations. The speaker then contrasted the evolution of agroecology in the two countries. She stated that in India, it largely became a part of state policy due to civil society efforts, while in China, it was developed as an institutional and scientific field often framed as "eco-agriculture". She observed that in China, agroecology's institutionalisation led to it being delinked from its social and political dimensions, reducing it to a technical intervention rather than a transformative paradigm.

She then stated that the rise of greenhouse emissions attributed to agricultural farming makes agroecology not a romantic return to tradition, but a strategic imperative for both countries. This requires the existence of two complementary pathways. The first requires a normative push, embedding ethics and ecological awareness into agricultural policy, education, and practice. The second involves strengthening socioeconomic mechanisms like legislation, market regulation, and incentives that bolster agroecology.

Ms. Sarkar further analysed contemporary sustainability discourses, noting that India's recent initiatives, such as the *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana* (National Mission for Natural Farming), signal growing institutional recognition of sustainability concerns. However, the speaker argues that this initiative remains technocratic in nature and that "organic" is being shaped into a market strategy without any transformative meaning. China's state-led concept of 'ecological civilisation' draws from Daoist ideas of harmony and appears to offer a cultural alternative to Western environmentalism. However, in practice, this remains technocratic, prioritising precision agriculture and smart farming. Both models, she concluded, risk reproducing the same productivist logic that agroecology seeks to overcome.

While concluding, Ms. Sarkar argued that while both India and China have recognised the need for sustainable agriculture, neither has achieved a genuine paradigm shift. India's approach remains fragmented and civil-society driven, whereas China's is ideologically powerful but institutionally limited. True sustainability, she stated, involves reimagining rural communities not merely as sites of production but as custodians of ecological knowledge and care.

Mr. Akshay Bhambri began by setting two disclaimers. First, unlike many marginalised knowledge systems discussed by previous presenters, traditional medicine in China and, to an extent, in India has not been suppressed but rather transformed and integrated into state narratives of nationalism and modernisation. The first part of the talk outlines a methodological intervention rooted in Science and Technology Studies (STS) and influenced by scholars like Benjamin Elman. The approach rejects the assumption that science, expertise, or truth are neutral or given; instead, they are seen as socially constructed yet materially stabilised. Thus, the speaker asked, 'What enables statements such as "China is a technological state" to emerge?', highlighting that categories such as technology, innovation, and progress are historically negotiated and politically embedded. This lens shifts focus from what technology does to what technology means in China's modern imagination, especially how it organises truth, order, and legitimacy.

In the second part, the speaker examines the construction of the natural through traditional medicine in China and India. Beginning with Rousseau's call to 'return to nature', the talk questions what *'natural'* truly means in the context of medicine. From early U.S. advertisements for 'Chinese Doctors' in 1799 to the 1970s countercultural rediscovery of Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the *natural* has been repeatedly invoked, but it is not timeless. Rather, it is historically, politically, and materially constructed. The speaker argues that both TCM and Ayurveda were modern reinventions, not unbroken traditions. TCM, for instance, was institutionalised in the 1950s by the Communist Party to integrate Chinese and Western medicine as part of nation-building. The very term *'Traditional Chinese Medicine'* is a mid-20th-century construct. Even the idea of *Qi* as *'energy'* was reframed in the 1970s through scientific translation influenced by Soviet research. Ayurveda followed a parallel yet distinct trajectory, shaped by colonial encounters, political patronage, commercialisation, and globalisation.

There were three core arguments. First, the meaning of 'natural' in TCM and Ayurveda is historically contingent and politically charged, shifting with state and market agendas. Second, the 'natural' is produced through epistemic and technical mediations via standardisation, translation, and scientific legitimation. Finally, framing these medicines as sustainable alternatives often reproduces modernity's contradictions. Thus, the natural functions as a strategically mobilised category that authenticates, commodifies, and modernises traditional practices. It legitimises products that are scientifically standardised yet detached from their local ecological roots, such as turmeric transformed into curcumin or ashwagandha into pharmaceutical supplements.

In conclusion, the speaker emphasised that traditional medicines like Ayurveda and TCM are entangled systems that reflect history, politics, and capital. These systems, once rooted in local ecologies and philosophical worlds, have been reconfigured through state and global forces. A critical understanding of technology, medicine and nature enable us to consider them not as fixed truths but as evolving, contested and politically charged constructs intertwined in modernity.

The interactive session started with questions from the Chair. Dr. Vincent asked Prof. Banerjee about the conflict between local knowledge production and Western-dominated technological platforms. The Chair stated that even when academics like the panellists try to present alternative worldviews, they are forced to constrain themselves to the Western-built academic and institutional systems. The Chair then described Ms. Sarkar's approach as "boundary-pushing" for bridging diverse epistemic worlds and acknowledging the structural challenges of doing so. Along these lines, she directed a question to Ms. Sarkar about how she would deal with working in the context of the "messy", context-bound concepts and the necessity of aligning them into "publishable categories" recognised by academia.

Responding to this, Prof. Banerjee emphasised the need to continue such engagements despite disciplinary resistance. She argued that true academic progress depends on actively challenging dominant paradigms. She cited her own experience of publishing interdisciplinary work in Indian journals such as *Studies in Indian Politics*, which she noted are increasingly recognised internationally. She also put forth the point that Western academia is not a monolith and that there exist marginalised but important spaces within it that also have a de-colonial perspective. She also talked about the teachings of her mentor, Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, who taught that meaningful research questions must emerge from the ground rather than from established academic texts. In this manner, she promoted the theme that research must be guided by the lived realities of activists and locals on the ground and not Western-influenced frameworks.

An audience member asked Ms. Sarkar why structure and productivity are perceived negatively by her in local contexts. Prof. Banerjee responded that structure is not inherently the problem; the issue lies in who defines the norms and by what standards the structure is defined. She stated that historically, structure has been used to marginalise alternative knowledge systems in favour of a dominant framework. Ms. Sarkar added that the goal should be the reversal of marginalisation, not reverse marginalisation. The objective is not to replace one dominant knowledge system with another, but to foster an exchange of knowledge in which all epistemic traditions can coexist and be valued equally.

When asked about indigenous cooperation in agroeconomy in China, Ms. Sarkar responded by elaborating on examples from China's southern regions, where communities practise traditional agroecological methods such as rice-fish rotation, the use of multi-perennial plants to prevent erosion, and alternative systems of measuring production.

An audience member also countered Mr. Bhambri's statement that the meaning of *Qi* (气) as vital energy was first established during the Cold War after experimentation by the Soviet Union and the US. In response, Mr. Bhambri clarified that while concepts such as *Qi* have existed for millennia, their meanings have evolved as these systems encountered modern science and institutional frameworks.

Special Panel V

China's Technological Advances & Trade Restrictions

The fifth special panel was titled, "China's Technological Advances and Trade Restrictions", and was chaired by **Mr. Ashok K. Kantha**, former Ambassador of India to China; Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi; and, Distinguished Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi. He welcomed participants and emphasised the continuing relevance of this discussion, noting that it served as a unifying thread throughout the 18th AICCS. He remarked that the AICCS had taken its special theme very seriously this year, devoting multiple sessions to the strategic and economic dimensions of China's rise in the technology sector. The first speaker was **Prof. G Venkat Raman**, Convenor, 18th AICCS; Professor, Indian Institute of Management Indore;

and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and spoke on “China’s Disruption of Tech Value Chains”. The next speaker was **Mr. Pranay Kotasthane**, Deputy Director, The Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru, and presented on “Foundational Factors Behind China’s Tech Trajectory”. The final speaker was **Dr. Antara Ghosal Singh**, Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, whose presentation was titled “Geopolitics of Technology: Chinese Domestic Discourse”.

Mr. Kantha noted that the conference had already engaged deeply with issues such as China’s innovation drive, President Xi Jinping’s so-called “tech obsession”, and the emerging dominance of China in high-tech, green, and strategic industries, which he described as “China Shop 2.0”, signalling a new phase following the country’s earlier dominance in labour-intensive industries post-WTO accession. He also highlighted the dual implications on China’s technological surge: for developed economies, it represents a challenge to long-held industrial advantages; for emerging economies like India, it offers both an opportunity, through access to affordable green technologies, and a challenge in building domestic capabilities. He concluded by outlining the format: ten minutes per presentation, followed by a moderated conversation and an extended interactive session to ensure greater audience participation.

Prof. G. Venkat Raman presentation analysed China's escalating strategy of utilising its vast dominance in rare earth elements and critical minerals as a major geopolitical tool, noting a significant recent step with the imposition of new export controls in October 2025. This strategy of restricting material exports, first employed in 2010 against Japan, is now aimed at Western firms in response to trade disputes. China's dominance can be traced back to 1992, when the country declared its intention to turn rare earth elements into the “oil of China.” While the US was initially the global leader, its production declined in the mid-1990s due to global trade regulations that permitted offshore manufacturing. A critical failure point was the 1990s approval for the sale of the US firm Magnaquench, a manufacturer of essential rare earth magnets used in computer hard drives and jet guidance systems, to Chinese owners with close ties to Beijing. This sale, and the subsequent closing of the facility to send all equipment in China, was completed while the Bush administration was preoccupied with the War on Terror and efforts to socialise China into the international system. As a result of these strategic moves and Western complacency, China now controls over 90% of the world's supply chain for rare earth materials, encompassing production, refining, and exporting, and is responsible for over 90% of global magnet manufacturing.

The new policy, enacted on October 9, 2025, significantly escalates this leverage. China's Ministry of Commerce added five new elements to its control list, including those with critical military applications, such as Europium used in laser technology. Beyond materials, the new rules strictly prohibit unauthorised technology export related to the mining, processing, and magnet manufacturing of rare earths. Critically, the policy implements a point-of-origin rule similar to the US Chips Act: any company manufacturing a product overseas that contains certain Chinese inputs must apply for an export license to sell that product to a third country. This is how China is weaponising its supply chain power in a reciprocal move against US actions that limited chip exports to China. While the US managed to recover from earlier sanctions, it will be immensely difficult for the rest of the world to quickly compensate for China's rare earth monopoly. The speaker pointed out the US's own vulnerability: the domestic rare earth facility at Mountain Pass, California, had to close in 2002 due to environmental standards and lack of industrial support. Though the facility was reopened in 2012, the US still lacks the domestic refining capacity and is forced to ship its raw materials to China for processing, illustrating how China has leveraged heavy investment, state control, and subsidies to gain and maintain its overwhelming dominance in this critical global industry.

Dr. Antara Ghosal Singh began her presentation by briefly outlining her research methodology, which involved analysing Chinese-language media, think tank publications, and academic works to capture evolving public and elite sentiment within China on key geopolitical and geo-economic issues, particularly those relevant to India. Her presentation provided a window into the ongoing economic and technological debates in China's domestic scholarly community. Dr. Singh noted that the tone of contemporary Chinese discourse is marked by confidence and triumphalism, reflecting a belief that China is successfully countering U.S. trade restrictions and even "winning" the trade war. She cited data showing that Chinese exports had grown by 7% until September 2025 and that the country's trade surplus was projected to exceed USD 1.2 trillion for the year. With manufacturing now accounting for nearly 30% of global output, 'Made in China' has, she argued, become an economic foundation for numerous developing countries, including India.

However, this external success contrasts with China's internal challenges. Dr. Singh observed that despite strong manufacturing performance, China's domestic economy has not regained vitality. The producer price index (PPI) has remained negative for three consecutive years, indicating falling prices, reduced corporate profits, and industrial "involution". The continued slump in the real estate market, sluggish consumption, declining foreign direct investment, and rising market costs have all contributed to mounting economic strain and employment pressures.

A major question among Chinese economists, she noted, is why consumption has not increased despite extensive government intervention. Typically, when a country's per capita GDP reaches USD 13,000–14,000, consumption becomes the primary growth driver, but this transition has stalled in China. One emerging explanation within Chinese policy circles is that Beijing's techno-nationalism, its strong emphasis on technological self-reliance and industrial modernisation — has been counterproductive. This singular focus has sidelined sectors such as consumption, finance, and real estate, creating imbalances within the domestic economy.

According to Dr. Singh, prominent Chinese scholars now argue that China cannot escape its economic stagnation merely by overcoming technological bottlenecks. Without sufficient domestic demand, the expansion of high-end manufacturing risks aggravating the economic slowdown rather than alleviating it. Some economists have even begun drawing parallels with the pre-Depression United States, cautioning against over-dependence on industrial strength alone.

A related line of criticism targets the government's limited policy toolkit, focused mainly on subsidies, tax cuts, and short-term relief, while avoiding deeper structural reforms. Some scholars advocate stabilising housing prices, expanding the role of finance, and adopting debt expansion strategies similar to those underpinning US global economic dominance. In their view, China should not compete only in manufacturing but also in global finance and debt-led economic leadership.

Dr. Singh concluded that these debates reveal significant policy confusion and anxiety within China regarding its economic future. For India, she emphasised, understanding this ongoing transition, neither uncritically accepting the narrative of China's success nor dismissing its resilience, is essential for sound policy formulation.

Mr. Pranay Kotasthane presented an assessment challenging the linear projection of China's future technological success based on its achievements over the past decade. It argues that the current wave of technological restrictions imposed by China stems from a position of both strength and weakness, and that several foundational factors that previously drove China's success are now in decline.

China has gained earned the status of an innovation powerhouse, by ranking 10th in the Global Innovation Index and the only middle-income country in the top 30. However, China remains dependent on global supply chains for critical materials, semiconductors, and specialised industrial components. While forced technology transfer, industrial espionage, and state-run firms, etc. were considered common explanations for China's success, the real foundational factors were often overlooked. The speaker identified three critical foundational factors: first, high investment in capabilities and infrastructure, specifically its long-standing commitment to high educational attainment across all levels, which built the necessary human capital base. Second, reforms in the Science and Technology ecosystem, shifting focus from elite R&D institutions to university research and promoting robust business R&D investment. Third, a crucial element of bureaucratic decentralisation and local-level experimentation, where top-down strategic direction was balanced with local flexibility and intensive competition among firms. A final, crucial factor was global connections, particularly the movement of talented overseas Chinese back to the mainland and strong, informal social networks among Chinese American researchers collaborating with colleagues in China.

The speaker then argued that many of these foundational factors have eroded, leading to a less favourable environment for future innovation. The trend toward centralised control and the desire for self-sufficiency has replaced the earlier bureaucratic decentralisation, causing local governments to redundantly invest in the same sectors without market-based competitive advantages. Furthermore, the CPC's imposition of stringent restrictions on private sector tech companies has caused these firms to reconsider future investment. Externally, the world, led by the US, is pushing back. Private sector concerns are reflected in data showing industrial firms suffering their highest loss-making rates since 1998, compounded by local government fiscal stress that will inevitably impact technological investment.

The speaker concluded by addressing the implications of China's own recent export restrictions. He argued that while these geopolitical tensions create creative insecurity leading to short-term innovation, the long-term projection is challenging. The restrictions, such as those on rare earth magnets, are significantly different from complex technological barriers like lithography machines, as they deal with materials and products where substitution is possible. For instance, the total US market for rare earths is relatively small, and materials substitution, such as the use of induction motors or alternative magnets, can be achieved over time. The broad, non-precise nature of China's recent export controls, covering everything from metal melting to diamond wire cutters, suggests China is still experimenting with the instrument, which indicates a position of weakness and uncertainty rather than absolute control. Therefore, the key factors that benefited China's high-tech quest in the past are now more challenging, making a straight-line projection of future success unlikely.

During the interactive session, an audience member asked whether the ongoing debate about China's prioritisation of technology over citizens' needs was a marginal or mainstream discourse, and how openly it was reflected in Chinese social media and academic literature. Dr. Singh responded that while technological advancement remains highly valued, there is **a** growing body criticism of excessive prioritisation of technology at the cost of employment, healthcare, and welfare. This marks a notable shift in discourse, where scholars are now openly questioning policies that once went unchallenged.

A follow-up question from the same attendee sought to understand how China's pride in surpassing the United States in high-technology sectors coexists with domestic criticism that such focus has not translated into economic vitality. Dr. Singh acknowledged the contradiction, noting that while Chinese policies have been performing impressively on the global front, initiatives such as 'Made in China' have not added corresponding vitality to the domestic economy. She observed that this paradox is increasingly becoming a subject of discussion within China.

Another participant asked for clarification regarding Dr. Singh's reference to China's potential bid to emulate the United States in global debt dominance. Dr Singh clarified that this was a reflection of the broader policy confusion within China, where some advocate revisiting earlier real estate and financial expansion policies, others warn of repeating past mistakes. She added that such uncertainty often coincides with a more assertive external posture.

Responding to a final question from the floor on the dual circulation strategy and industrial automation, Dr. Singh observed that China is aggressively pursuing high-end manufacturing and competing with the United States in industrial robotics. However, while China's external (foreign) cycle performs robustly, its domestic cycle remains weak. This imbalance, coupled with the rapid push toward industrial automation, is aggravating unemployment and revealing deeper, persistent structural contradictions in China's economic model.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Kantha noted that while China appears ‘overly obsessed with technology,’ India perhaps suffers from the opposite problem, an ‘underwhelming obsession’ with innovation. He emphasised the need for India to develop a sharper focus on technological progress and innovation-driven growth. He thanked the panellists for their insightful presentations and invited the audience to join him in applauding their valuable contributions to the discussion.

Thematic Panel VIII

Technology, AI and Cyberstrategy

The eight thematic panel was titled “Technology, AI and Cyberstrategy”, and was chaired by **Mr. Pranay Kotasthane**, Deputy Director, The Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru. The first speaker was **Mr. Akhilesh Kumar**, Doctoral Scholar, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and he spoke on “Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence: A Case Study of China’s AI Initiatives”. The second speaker was **Ms. Nalinie Sharma**, Doctoral Scholar, Guru Nanak Dev University, Punjab, and she spoke on “The AI Contest: China’s Ascendancy in a Multipolar World”. The third speaker was **Ms. Nishtha Kumari Singh**, Doctoral Scholar and Dr. TMA Pai Fellow, Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE, Institution of Eminence), Manipal, and her paper was titled, “China’s Cybersecurity Landscape: Actors, Policies and Strategic Objectives”. The final speaker was **Mr. Om Ranjan**, Doctoral Scholar, School of International Cooperation, Security, and Strategic Languages, Rashtriya Raksha University, Gandhinagar, and he spoke on “A Shift in Techno-Politics: China’s Strategic Pursuit to Reshape Global Tech-Commons”.

Mr. Akhilesh Kumar’s presentation examined the emerging landscape of global artificial intelligence governance through a focused case study on China’s evolving AI strategies and their international implications. The speaker began by situating AI as a general-purpose technology whose influence permeates every layer of modern life from cybersecurity and economic systems to societal interactions and geopolitical order. Emphasizing the multidimensional nature of AI’s impact, the presentation noted that the technology reshapes both temporal and spatial dimensions of governance, creating new regulatory risks, ethical tensions, and global strategic competitions.

The core of the presentation engaged with the development of global governance norms for AI, highlighting the fragmentation and rapid evolution of frameworks proposed by states, multilateral institutions, and private actors. Within this landscape, China has emerged as a pivotal actor attempting to define governance architectures and position itself as a rule-shaper rather than a rule-taker. The speaker traced the evolution of China's domestic AI strategies—from early programmatic documents to more sophisticated regulatory initiatives—arguing that these domestic imperatives provide the intellectual and strategic foundation for China's global governance ambitions.

A significant portion of the talk focused on two recent initiatives: the Global AI Governance Initiative (2024) and the Shanghai Declaration for AI (2024). Through detailed textual and contextual analysis of these documents, the speaker highlighted how China articulates a distinctly political-philosophical orientation toward AI governance. Key themes include the emphasis on sovereignty in digital and algorithmic spaces, the prioritisation of development-oriented AI applications, and the desire to construct a multipolar governance environment in contrast to Western-centric regulatory standards.

The speaker's methodology combined qualitative research tools close reading of primary official texts, policy documents, and speeches with insights from extensive fieldwork. This approach enabled the speaker to trace how Chinese conceptual vocabularies and governance imaginaries travel from domestic policy spheres to international forums. According to the findings, China's engagement with global AI governance is neither purely defensive nor entirely strategic; rather, it represents a hybrid posture that fuses national security concerns, techno-geopolitical aspirations, and normative claims about fairness, equality, and "shared development" in AI use.

The study argues that China's approach seeks to turn AI governance into a testing ground for broader global governance reforms it envisions. The speaker noted that China's proposals often reflect a deeper politico-philosophical background rooted in its long-standing principles of sovereignty, state-centered governance, and developmental internationalism. These ideational foundations, the presenter argued, not only inform China's foreign policy more broadly but also shape its specific interventions in tech-geopolitics.

In conclusion, the speaker contended that China's AI governance initiatives must be read as part of a larger strategic effort to recalibrate global governance mechanisms in ways that accommodate non-Western institutional logics. The paper thus contributes to ongoing debates about the future of AI governance, the contestation of global norms, and the shifting balance of power in the governance of emerging technologies.

Ms. Nalinie Sharma's presentation aimed to explore how China's rapid progress in AI is fundamentally transforming global power structures and challenging the US' long-held dominance. The core focus was on analysing China's technological ambitions, strategic positioning, and vulnerabilities within an increasingly complex multipolar world where power is distributed across various states and non-state actors.

The rise of AI is accelerating this shift toward multipolarity, as major nations deploy these technologies for intelligence gathering, national security, and trade advantages. The competition between the US and China in AI has emerged as the defining arena for great power rivalry in the 21st century, exemplified by significant policy initiatives such as China's DeepSeek breakthrough. This technological race is reshaping traditional geopolitical alignments and creating new fault lines in international relations.

While the US and China dominate the AI landscape, the presentation emphasised the growing importance of "swing states" including the UK, Israel, India, and Japan. These countries have substantial stakes in the global AI market and wield increasing influence over international politics. Rather than forming a unified bloc, these nations make strategic decisions based primarily on economic advantage, positioning themselves to extract maximum benefits from the ongoing US-China competition. Additionally, wealthy sovereign players like the UAE and Saudi Arabia have emerged as significant commercial actors in the AI space.

Middle powers such as the European Union and Japan are carving out distinct roles in AI geopolitics, each leveraging unique strengths. The EU boasts a robust startup ecosystem and deep talent pool, while Asian countries possess concentrated technology ecosystems and control crucial hardware manufacturing systems. Gulf nations capitalise on cheap energy resources and vast capital reserves. For these middle powers, relying exclusively on either US or Chinese technology presents serious strategic risks, having a diversified supply chain of AI capabilities essential for maintaining independence and creating critical optionality in an uncertain future.

China's technological strategy has undergone a dramatic transformation, evolving from technology importer to aspiring global leader through state-led capitalism, strategic use of global supply chains, and aggressive techno-nationalism. Beijing has set an ambitious goal of becoming the world's leading AI innovation centre by 2030, signalling its determination to reshape the global technological order.

China has actively sought to influence international AI governance frameworks, most notably through its Global AI Governance Initiative released in October 2023. This initiative advocates for equal rights for all countries in AI development, calls for collaborative approaches to preventing misuse, and demands greater representation for developing nations in decision-making processes, proposing that such discussions occur within UN frameworks. Chinese state-sponsored media portrays this approach as inclusive and contrasts it sharply with what Beijing characterises as US unilateral restrictions designed to preserve American hegemony. Despite projecting an image of self-sufficiency, China's AI ambitions cannot be divorced from global partnerships, with President Xi Jinping publicly expressing willingness to collaborate with other nations to ensure security and build what he terms a community with a shared future for mankind.

China's AI strategy rests on several key advantages. First, it seeks to maintain a first-mover advantage by rapidly identifying global AI trends and implementing applications across institutions and economic sectors. Second, China benefits from strong coordination between government, industry, academia, and the private sector, which receives substantial incentives and support. Third, the country's massive consumer base provides an ideal testing ground for AI applications, allowing companies to scale rapidly and attract funding more easily. Fourth, China maintains significant control over AI hardware manufacturing, particularly in the production of AI chips, giving it leverage over global supply chains.

However, the Chinese AI ecosystem faces several critical vulnerabilities that could constrain its ambitions. The country's relatively lax data privacy policies create both ethical concerns and potential international backlash. Critical sectors such as healthcare remain underdeveloped in terms of AI applications. Chinese startups navigate a complex and sometimes contradictory regulatory environment that can stifle innovation. Perhaps most importantly, China still lags significantly

behind the US in producing high-end chips and advanced manufacturing equipment, creating a technological bottleneck that could prove difficult to overcome. The presentation noted that China's overall AI research capacity continues to trail the US by a substantial margin.
The presentation concluded that while China's AI ascent is actively reshaping global power dynamics and presenting a genuine challenge to US technological dominance, the long-term success of Beijing's ambitions depends critically on its ability to forge and maintain global partnerships, particularly with developing countries. The future of AI governance and the structure of the multipolar world order will likely be determined by how effectively China can leverage its strengths while addressing its vulnerabilities, and how other nations navigate the complex choices presented by competing US and Chinese technological ecosystems.

Ms. Nistha Kumari Singh's presentation offered a detailed and empirically grounded analysis of China's evolving cybersecurity architecture, drawing extensively on recent policy documents, institutional developments, and industry dynamics. The speaker began by emphasizing a major policy milestone: in May 2025, China formally designated cybersecurity as a new pillar of national security, as outlined in the latest White Paper. This document situates cybersecurity squarely within the Global Security Initiative (GSI), presenting it as central to China's vision of a stable multipolar world order and to its aspiration to shape international governance frameworks.

Building on this starting point, the presentation moved to an examination of China's rapidly expanding cybersecurity market. By 2023, the sector was valued at USD 12.42 billion, with projections estimating a 15.6% annual growth rate through 2030. This growth is driven by three primary factors: advances in AI technologies, expanded cloud computing, and increasing automation. The speaker highlighted that the pace of market expansion reflects both domestic demand and geopolitical imperatives, as China seeks to strengthen its resilience in the face of mounting global cyber threats.

This expansion, the speaker argued, makes it essential to map the key actors shaping China's cybersecurity environment. A tripartite structure was presented. At the apex sit the state-led entities, including the CCP, Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission , China's Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, People's Liberation Army, and the State Information Office. These bodies set strategic priorities, enforce regulation, and define the ideological contours of cybersecurity governance. Alongside them are the major SOEs, such as China Electronics Corporation and China Electronics Technology Group Corporation, which anchor state capacity in critical infrastructure protection. The third pillar comprises leading private firms like Qihoo 360, Sangfor Technologies, NSFocus, Tencent, Antiy Labs, and VenusTech. The speaker stressed that although private firms drive much of the technological innovation, they operate within a tightly regulated system that shapes procurement, licensing, and talent recruitment.

The theoretical framework of the study combines insights from neo-realism and neo-liberalism, yielding what the speaker described as a "techno-nationalist" synthesis. On one hand, the state emphasises security, sovereignty, and control; on the other, it relies on private sector dynamism and cross-sectoral interdependence to achieve its digital ambitions.

A detailed historical timeline charted the trajectory of China's cybersecurity governance since 2010. Key moments include the introduction of the cyber sovereignty concept (2010), establishment of SIIO (2011), China's major diplomatic interventions in cyberspace governance (2012–2014), and the promulgation of landmark regulations such as the Cybersecurity Law (2017), the Data Security Law (2021), and the Personal Information Protection Law (2021). Recent regulations—including the Clean Net 2024 policy and the 2025 Comprehensive Network Data Security Management Regulations—further consolidate state authority over data flows and cyber operations.

An important analytical segment of the presentation connected China's distinctions between information security**,** network security, and cybersecurity. These categories respectively correspond to content and ideological management, technical backbone protection, and holistic governance integrating technology, society, and national security.

Of particular interest was the speaker's discussion of China's "Hack-to-Hire" ecosystem**,** demonstrating how civilian hacker communities, university teams, and competitions such as the Tianfu Cup contribute to vulnerability discovery. These vulnerabilities are then routed into databases accessed by state agencies—including the Ministry of State Security—for operational use, reflecting an intertwined state–civilian cybersecurity culture.

At the international level, the speaker noted several structural challenges: persistent cybercriminal skill gaps, cross-border threats, and the need to strengthen governance alliances. China's strategy includes cooperation through BRICS, SCO, and ASEAN, as well as the export of cybersecurity models via initiatives led by firms such as Ping An, Alibaba, Tencent, and Huawei.

The presentation concluded with China's overarching doctrine of "defense through offence." China's cybersecurity strategy, the speaker argued, reflects tight state-private integration and a proactive orientation. Its prioritisation of cyber sovereignty and state-centric governance places China at odds with prevailing international norms, making cybersecurity a key arena of global strategic contestation.

Mr. Om Ranjan's presentation argued that technology is no longer simply a matter of innovation and market competition but has evolved into a theatre of power, ideology, and strategic competition. The speaker used the Made in China 2025 (MIC 2025) strategy as the central case study, applying international relations frameworks, particularly constructivism, to reveal its deeper geopolitical implications. The core argument defined MIC 2025 not as a mere industrial policy, but as a political project fundamentally designed to use technology to reshape power, dependency, and norms across the international system. This claim is based on the policy's explicit linkage of industrial upgrading to strategic autonomy, utilising tools like subsidies and industrial coordination, thereby turning global supply chains and standards into arenas of geopolitical struggle.

The presentation explored two contrasting interpretations of MIC 2025. Proponents view it as Defensive Modernisation, arguing it is a necessary response to real vulnerabilities like choke points in critical supplies and the weaponisation of export controls by foreign powers. Critics, conversely, see it as a push for Systematic Leverage, using China's market scale and subsidies to create durable dependencies on its outputs, which can then be converted into geopolitical influence. The speaker synthesised these views, defining the strategy as selective decoupling: insulating China against critical vulnerabilities while integrating into global value chains where it can gain leverage of scale, thereby minimising dependence while maximising its own influence.

The theoretical framework emphasised the unique role of Constructivism in understanding the policy's normative dimension. When China exports technology through initiatives like the Digital Silk Road, it is not just selling hardware, it is simultaneously exporting a governance model - a vision of state authority over the internet, encapsulated in terms like "digital sovereignty." This creates an engineered interdependence, where China strategically reduces its own import dependence while increasing foreign reliance on Chinese technology stacks, thereby generating asymmetric dependencies for political and economic gain. However, this leverage is conditional and contestable, as external restrictions prompt counter-policies and substitution efforts from other nations.

In terms of future implications, the speaker predicted a mid-term outcome of a multipolar contested tech order, characterised by fragmentation into competing functional blocks. The future trajectory depends on three key variables. China's technological success, the normative traction of its governance models abroad, and the strength of external pushback. The key policy implication for democracies is the need for coordinated action to secure supply chains and invest in alternatives, while middle powers must carefully negotiate access to Chinese tech for development while simultaneously building legal, technical, and diplomatic firewalls to preserve their autonomy. The conclusion stressed that the choice for states is not binary, but requires robust governance that ensures accountability and transparency to prevent technology from consolidating control.

Thematic Panel IX

China's Foreign Policy and Geopolitics in a Multipolar World

The ninth thematic Panel was titled, "China's Foreign Policy and Geopolitics in a Multipolar World", and was chaired by **Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar**, Associate Professor, MIT School of Government, MIT World Peace University, Pune. The first speaker was **Dr. Abhishek Yadav**, Research Analyst, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi, who spoke on "Critical Assessment of China-Türkiye Relations in a Shifting Global Order". The second speaker was **Ms. Mallika Devi**, Independent Analyst, who presented on "Accelerated Deglobalisation Amid US-China Strategic Rivalry". The final speaker was **Prof. Ishani Naskar,** Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and she presented on "Interplay of Geoeconomics and Geopolitics in Asia: How China Benefits from it".

The chair, Dr. Sudhakar, began the session by drawing attention to the US-China rivalry, China in ASEAN, as well as China's foreign relations. He also highlighted China's rise and its engagements with the US and Asian countries that is riddled with economic complexities.

Mr Abhishek. Yadav presented a detailed account of Turkey-China relations from the Turkish foreign policy perspective. He underscored how this middle power navigates its ties with China amidst global shifts. He structured his presentation around the following key areas.

First, Diplomatic Relations: He noted that diplomatic ties were established in August 1971 and have steadily deepened, especially after economic liberalisation in the 1980s. The relationship was elevated to a strategic cooperation framework in 2010, and an inter-governmental cooperation committee was inaugurated in 2015. The latest meeting took place in November 2024 that focused on enhancing political trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. The recent Tianjin Summit at the 25th SCO meeting, where Turkey was invited as a "benchtop owner," further illustrates the evolving political ties.

Second, Economic Aspects: Highlighting the economic aspects from 2015 to 2024, Turkey's trade with China has expanded from $27.8 billion to $48.3 billion. However, the persistent trade imbalance is there, which is around $41.5 billion by 2024 and it points to enduring structural asymmetries. He further added how Turkey faces challenges accessing the Chinese market due to China's competitiveness in manufacturing, while Turkish exports due to the structural composition remain concentrated in low to medium tech industries including automobiles, household appliances, iron and steel as well as textile sectors where Chinese producers already maintain a strong competitive advantage. The surge in Chinese EV exports has intensified the deficit, prompting Ankara to impose tariffs and import restrictions since 2022, which China contested at the WTO in October 2024. Despite this friction, economic engagement continues, exemplified by the renewal of a currency swap agreement in June 2025, which was crucial for Turkey's foreign exchange reserves recovery in 2021. Major investments include BYD's $1 billion EV plant in Manisa Province (planned for 150,000 vehicles/year from 2026) and Alibaba's over $1.4 billion investment in Turkey's e-commerce platform, Trendyol.

Third, Critical Minerals & Tourism: In October 2024, Turkey and China signed an MOU to enhance cooperation in mining, focusing on rare earth elements and critical minerals, including potential joint exploration in third countries. This coincides with Turkey's discovery of the world's second-largest rare earth element (REEs) reserve in Eskisehir, in 2022 and its September 2024 decision to join the US-led Mineral Security Partnership Forum aligning itself with US EU to diversify supply chains and access Western financing and expertise. Tourism data shows Chinese tourist numbers rebounding post-pandemic, from 89,000 in 2022 to 49,733 in 2024. It underscores the sector's resilience and the renewed momentum between both countries.

Fourth, Infrastructure & Connectivity: Turkey is the AIIB's second-largest receiver of investments, after India. From 2018 to 2025, the AIIB will fund 31 projects for $5.692 billion. Connectivity is a big part of working together, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Middle Corridor initiative were made official by an MOU signed at the 2015 G20 Antalya Summit. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor), which connects China and Europe through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, has become strategically important. It offers an alternative to routes through Russia and Iran. Data shows that the transportation traffic on this corridor has picked up dramatically since 2022.

Fifth, Challenges: A significant issue that persists is the historical Turkish solidarity with the Uyghur community in Xinjiang, rooted in shared cultural heritage. While Turkish authorities were quite critical of China's policies in the early 2000s, but in recent years they have toned down their public criticism and chosen to work with China to protect their economic and strategic connections. Mr. Yadav described this as an *"investment for silence"* dynamic. He concluded that China views Turkey as a big market, trading gateway, and a partner in the BRI corridor, while Turkey pursues strategic hedging between the West and the East. President Erdoğan's outreach to emerging powers reflects a pragmatic response to global shifts, not a departure from Western alignments. China supports Turkey's increasing strategic autonomy but remains cautious about Turkey's geopolitical aspirations in Central Asia, East Africa, and Southeast Asia, particularly through the Organization of Turkic States.

Ms. Mallika Devi noted that deglobalisation trends began in 2008, accelerating from 2018 onwards as the US-China strategic rivalry intensified. From the 1990s to 2008, globalisation significantly outweighed deglobalisation; however, the 2008 global financial crisis marked the transition to an era of slow globalisation, or “slo-balisation”. Since 2018, deglobalisation has surpassed globalisation, evident through the increasing adoption of industrial policies and the diversification of supply chains.

The foundations of the neutral hegemonic order had long shown signs of stagnation, and actions taken during the Trump administration hastened its decline. American hegemony now faces multiple challenges, including intensifying great power competition, shifting behaviour among smaller states, and the destabilising influence of transnational movements. These dynamics collectively contribute to the unravelling of the post-war liberal order, commonly referred to as *Pax*

Americana. Both internal and external pressures, such as the relative decline of American power and the rise of China, continue to weaken this system.

John Mearsheimer, in his 2019 analysis, argued that the liberal international order is inherently unsustainable due to flawed assumptions underpinning hyper globalisation. Rising income inequality, widespread job losses, and the empowerment of non-unipolar states have eroded US dominance and weakened the liberal institutional framework that once upheld globalisation.

Deglobalisation is characterised by state-led interventions that strengthen barriers or weaken global networks of interdependence. These interventions include protectionism, trade barriers, industrial policies, and restrictions on labour mobility. However, globalisation and deglobalisation are not mutually exclusive forces. Instead, they coexist and interact dynamically within the international system. Historical instances reflect this interplay: during the 1990s, an era marked by rapid globalisation, Japan witnessed deglobalisation tendencies in cultural revivalism such as Shinto ceremonies and historical reinterpretations. Similarly, Canada faced internal fragmentation through Quebec's separatist movement. These examples highlight that globalisation and deglobalisation are parallel, interacting processes shaping global developments.

The theoretical framework applied to this analysis is the Hegemonic Stability Theory. As articulated by Robert Gilpin, a stable liberal economic order depends on the presence of a hegemon willing and able to maintain global systems of free trade and international cooperation. When the power of the hegemon erodes, the liberal economic order and its institutional architecture also begin to weaken. This theoretical link between globalisation and unipolarity underscores how unipolar dominance enables economic mobilisation, and its decline correlates with the retreat of globalisation.

The period between the 1990s and 2008 represented the height of hyper globalisation. Global exports increased from less than 20 per cent to over 30 per cent within 15 years, while foreign direct investment and merchandise trade grew from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of global GDP. Yet, signs of discontent emerged early, exemplified by the 1999 anti-globalisation protests at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle and at the 2001 G8 Summit in Italy. These movements voiced concerns that globalisation benefited some more than others, emphasising the need for managed and equitable globalisation.

From 2008 to 2018, the financial crisis halted hyper globalisation, triggering a sharp collapse in global trade between late 2008 and mid-2009. Trade and export ratios to GDP fell steeply, and although there was a brief recovery, they failed to return to pre-crisis levels. By 2011, foreign direct investment had plateaued, and while manufacturing trade saw minor growth, overall merchandise trade stagnated and declined again by 2019.

The financial crisis marked the end of US unipolarity, weakening its hegemony and the liberal economic order that had enabled globalisation. The shift also empowered state control over domestic economic and political affairs, reducing the influence of institutions like the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and G7. China's rapid GDP growth, facilitated by the very globalisation championed by the US, led to the "China shock," characterised by job losses and rising inequality in the United States. China's industrial policies, particularly the Made in China 2025 strategy, directly challenged US technological leadership, intensifying strategic competition.

In response, trade was increasingly perceived as a zero-sum game. The US adopted protectionist measures, including tariff wars and a retreat from multilateral mechanisms such as the WTO. Despite minor growth in GDP ratios, trade remained stagnant. The US and China's confrontation underscored a deeper ideological conflict, between state interventionism and free-market globalisation, and between techno-nationalism and interdependence.

As Washington's trade war failed to restrain China's industrial ambitions, the US adopted its own interventionist policies, notably the Inflation Reduction Act. The focus of globalisation shifted from efficiency to resilience, with emerging trends such as re-shoring, near-shoring, and friend-shoring aimed at reducing vulnerability in critical sectors like semiconductors.

Globalisation has thus evolved through distinct phases, globalisation, slo-balis90 ation, and deglobalisation, driven by both economic realities and political discontent. The weakening of US hegemony, coupled with China's rise and the strategic restructuring of global trade networks, defines the current international order where globalisation and deglobalisation coexist as competing yet interlinked forces.

Dr. Ishani Naskar's presentation focused on China's engagement with Southeast Asia, arguing that Beijing employs geo-economic strategies to advance broader geopolitical objectives. She contended that China's approach is characterised by integration with, and expansion of, existing regional frameworks rather than the creation of entirely new structures.

A central theme of the presentation was China's regional strategy and its prioritisation of neighbourhood diplomacy. Dr. Naskar emphasised that there is no singular way to explain the scale and dynamism of China's growth. For a country aspiring to global leadership, sustained engagement with neighbouring regions is essential. Southeast Asia, particularly through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), provides China with a critical arena for such engagement. Unlike South Asia, where India's presence shapes and constrains China's strategic space, Southeast Asia offers a comparatively flexible environment in which China can pursue an adaptive and evolving approach.

Tracing the evolution of China–ASEAN relations, Dr. Naskar noted that China's engagement with ASEAN gained momentum in the post–Cold War period of the 1990s. A defining moment was China's decision not to devalue its currency during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which positioned Beijing as a stabilising actor and generated significant goodwill among Southeast Asian states. This trust subsequently facilitated deeper institutional integration, including China's role as an ASEAN dialogue partner, its participation in ASEAN Plus mechanisms, and the establishment of the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area (ACFTA), which preceded the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Dr. Naskar further explained how the BRI has absorbed and expanded pre-existing sub-regional initiatives, particularly within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Originally conceptualised by the Asian Development Bank in the mid-1990s to enhance connectivity among post–Cold War economies, the GMS became a key platform for Chinese engagement. China's participation through its Yunnan and Guangxi provinces illustrates its preference for provincial-level involvement rather than full national-level commitment. Since 2013, China has reconfigured transport corridors within the GMS into broader "economic corridors," incorporating regulatory frameworks and complementary economic activities.

Addressing debates around the "debt-trap diplomacy" narrative, Dr. Naskar observed that countries such as Vietnam, despite strong ties with the United States, and Laos continue to actively seek Chinese financing for infrastructure and connectivity projects. This, she argued, underscores the complexity of debtor–creditor relationships in the region. She also noted that Chinese policymakers are aware of the risks associated with unviable or “white elephant” projects and have begun adjusting their approach accordingly.

Finally, Dr. Naskar discussed China’s instrumental use of economic statecraft and how it differs from Western practices. She noted that China generally avoids the use of unilateral sanctions against Southeast Asian partners. Instead, by encouraging ASEAN member states to participate in institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), China enhances its influence within international and regional forums on issues including the South China Sea and Taiwan. She concluded that China effectively “free-rides” on ASEAN’s integrative efforts, leveraging the organisation’s centrality and legitimacy to further its own geo-economic and geopolitical ambitions, which align with Beijing’s broader vision of “socialist modernisation.”

The discussion examined contemporary debates surrounding globalisation, deglobalisation, and China’s evolving role in the international political economy, with particular attention to strategic resources, structural shifts in capitalism, and great power rivalry.

One key issue raised was whether China’s expanding engagement with Turkey, visible through rising trade volumes and tourism, can be partly attributed to the recent discovery of rare earth mineral reserves in Turkey. This was framed as a possible strategic effort by China to strengthen bilateral ties and secure a long-term position in the critical minerals supply chain. The broader implication of this question lies in understanding how resource security increasingly shapes China’s external engagements amid intensifying geopolitical competition.

The discussion then turned to the resilience of globalisation in an era marked by deglobalisation narratives. Despite growing scepticism, it was argued that deeply embedded transnational connections, ranging from trade to critical minerals and global production networks, form an integrated infrastructure that no major economy can entirely detach itself from. Established global norms, institutions, and dispute-resolution mechanisms continue to bind states to the global system, suggesting that globalisation as a process will persist, albeit in altered forms.

Ms. Mallika Devi emphasised that globalisation is not ending but evolving. Globalisation and deglobalisation have historically coexisted, but the US–China strategic rivalry has amplified deglobalisation trends. While trade will continue due to its mutual benefits, the composition of trading partners, the speed of exchanges, and the political logic governing economic interactions are likely to change.

On China's growth trajectory, the discussion acknowledged that globalisation both enabled and accelerated China's economic rise. However, this success has also reshaped Western perceptions of globalisation. According to Ms. Devi, had China evolved into the liberal economic leader envisioned by the US and taken on responsibility for maintaining the international economic order, deglobalisation pressures may not have intensified to the same extent. Instead, two key drivers underpin current deglobalisation: unequal distribution of globalisation's benefits and China's failure, at least from the US perspective, to assume the expected leadership role.

The panel further explored conceptual shifts from globalisation to slobalisation and deglobalisation, describing these as phases of declining integration rather than abrupt rupture. Techno-nationalism emerged as a defining feature of the current phase, with advanced technologies increasingly weaponised by states out of strategic necessity rather than intent. This shift has coincided with reduced labour mobility and tighter controls on knowledge flows, exemplified by US restrictions on Chinese access to universities and technology during the Trump administration.

Placing these developments within a longer historical framework, participants noted that globalisation has unfolded in waves, rising and declining over time. What distinguishes the current phase is not merely structural power shifts, such as the relative decline of US hegemony and China's partial rise, but deeper transformations within capitalism itself. The emergence of new variants of capitalism, particularly China's state-led model, challenges Western assumptions and complicates debates over whether China is a revisionist or status quo power.

Finally, the discussion stressed that globalisation has institutionalised norms, regulations, and mechanisms that cannot simply vanish. The key analytical task, therefore, is not to ask whether globalisation will end, but to understand how it is being transformed. A historically grounded approach that incorporates the role of US policy choices and examines how American and Chinese scholars conceptualise these shifts as globalisation, slobalisation, or deglobalisation can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the current transition.

Thematic Panel X

Climate Change, Energy and Sustainable Development

The tenth thematic panel of the conference was titled, "Climate Change, Energy and Sustainable Development", and it was chaired by **Dr. Dattesh Parulekar**, Assistant Professor, School of International and Area Studies, Goa University. The first speaker was **Dr. Veena Roshan Jose**, Assistant Professor of Law, and Head in Charge, Centre for Environmental Law, National Law University, Nagpur, who presented on "China's Renewable Energy Leadership: Implications For Global Supply Chains And Climate Change Mitigation". The second speaker was **Ms. Vaishnavi**, Doctoral Scholar, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and she spoke on "Climate Leadership in Transition: China's Engagement During the US Withdrawal Era". The final speaker was **Mr. Noel Therattil Jackson**, Advocate and Geopolitical Researcher; and, Research Analyst, Centre for Social and Economic Progress, New Delhi, and he presented on "Managing Geopolitical Risks in the Clean Energy Transition".

The Chair, **Dr. Dattesh Parulekar** noted that while global discussions on climate change often centre around Western narratives and the statements of President Trump, there remains a need to engage more deeply with the Chinese perspective on this issue. He stated that climate change is not merely a global environmental concern or an abstract scientific debate, but a human challenge that calls for collective responsibility, preservation, and respect for the planet. Dr. Parulekar observed that while China's domestic policies demonstrate a steady commitment to addressing climate change, its role on the international stage raises important questions. He also asked whether China looks at itself primarily as a sovereign actor or as a stakeholder in the global commons, contributing constructively to combating climate change.

Dr. Veena Roshan Jose highlighted that China's rapid advancements in science and technology are closely intertwined with policy and legal frameworks, particularly in areas such as data privacy, cybersecurity, medical ethics, and environmental sustainability. This multi-dimensional linkage formed the analytical foundation of the presentation, which examined China's role in the global transition towards renewable energy.

The discussion was situated within two central pillars of contemporary environmental governance that have shaped the post-2015 international landscape, particularly following the adoption of the

Paris Agreement. These include the global shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources and the implementation of climate change mitigation policies. The speaker underscored that contemporary economic and policy debates cannot be disentangled from these priorities, as they now exert significant influence on global governance and geopolitical strategies. While broad international consensus exists around these objectives, she noted notable exceptions, referencing remarks by former US President Donald Trump questioning the science of climate change at the United Nations General Assembly.

The presentation then examined China's international climate commitments. The speaker outlined China's ratification of key multilateral agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and the Paris Agreement in 2015. Under its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), China has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions intensity by 7–10 per cent by 2035, expanding non-fossil energy sources to over 30 per cent of total energy consumption, increasing solar and wind power capacity sixfold from 2020 levels, enhancing forest carbon stocks, accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles, and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060. It was noted that this target precedes India's stated goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

A significant portion of the presentation focused on China's dominant position in global renewable energy supply chains. The speaker presented data demonstrating that approximately 80–85 per cent of global solar panel manufacturing occurs in China, compared to about 3 per cent in India and 1.9 per cent in the United States. Similarly, China accounts for over 60 per cent of global wind turbine production, controls roughly 72 per cent of new turbine installations, and hosts between 60 and 75 per cent of global electric vehicle battery manufacturing capacity. These figures illustrate China's near-monopoly influence over critical technologies central to the global clean energy transition.

The speaker attributed this dominance to strong state support, including subsidies, state-led industrial policies, and strategic technology transfer, which have enabled China to rapidly scale production and significantly reduce costs. As a result, clean energy technologies have become more affordable and widely accessible, accelerating global decarbonisation efforts. At the same time, she cautioned that heavy dependence on a single country for critical minerals and technologies introduces systemic risks, including supply chain vulnerabilities, price volatility, and heightened geopolitical tensions. These dynamics, she argued, are increasingly driving strategic competition centred on resource security and industrial sovereignty.

The implications of China's dominance for global climate mitigation were described as dual in nature. On the positive side, China's production capacity has lowered costs, facilitated widespread adoption of renewable technologies, and supported faster emissions reduction worldwide. On the negative side, over-reliance on Chinese supply chains raises concerns regarding geopolitical exposure, trade disputes, and long-term energy security.

The speaker also identified key research gaps, notably the limited integration of global political and economic governance frameworks in analyses of renewable energy supply chains, as well as a lack of comparative policy studies across major economies. In this context, she briefly compared alternative national and regional approaches, citing India's Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, which faces challenges related to scale and technological capacity; the United States' Inflation Reduction Act (2022), which seeks to expand domestic clean energy manufacturing; and the European Union's Green Deal Industrial Plan, which aims to align climate objectives with industrial competitiveness.

The presentation concluded by emphasising that China's leadership in renewable energy is not accidental but the outcome of sustained long-term industrial planning. This includes early legislative interventions such as the Renewable Energy Law of 2005, consistent prioritisation through successive five-year plans, and comprehensive control over supply chains from raw materials to final system integration. The speaker concluded with a call for the pursuit of "sustainable security," advocating diversified and resilient global supply chains built through international cooperation and reduced dependence on single-country dominance.

Ms. Vaishnavi's paper looked at the role China played as a climate leader in a period where the US withdrew from global climate goals under the first Trump term. Her presentation sought to understand whether China used this vacuum in climate leadership to normatively influence other nations and establish itself as a credible actor in global climate governance and finance. While drawing on Robert Falkner and Barry Buzan's theory of great power responsibility under conditions of deep pluralism, the speaker talked about China's evolving role in this context. Within this context, Ms. Vaishnavi talks about the shift from "negative environmental power," which obstructs or hinders climate governance, to "positive environmental power", which ensures cooperation and constructive environmental action. For her, climate leadership entails taking up responsibility and taking deliberate efforts to enhance positive environmental power.

China's climate position, she noted, is shaped by multiple contradictions and motivations. As both the world's largest carbon emitter and a developing country, China faces a dual identity dilemma that complicates its leadership role. It remains vulnerable to climate risks, including water scarcity, flooding, and rising sea levels. Politically, the country seeks to project a stable, long-term governance model that contrasts with what it perceives as a Western short-term perspective on elections and profit, to assume a great power role. Technologically, it has immense advancements in renewable energy and green innovation, which it has started transferring to the global context. Ms. Vaishnavi traced the historical evolution of China's climate negotiations, beginning with its cautious participation in the 1990s and 2000s. At the Copenhagen Summit in 2009, China led the developing countries in rejecting anything that had a binding effect on these countries. After this, China was called an obstructor to climate governance by Western actors. She stated that by the COP 21, it had redefined itself as a bridge between the Global North and South. The Trump era, with the U.S. retreat from climate commitments, thus provided an opening for China to assert leadership in the climate context.

Ms. Vaishnavi then outlined several ways in which China exercised climate leadership through its foreign policy between 2017 and 2021. It reasserted its commitment to multilateralism, taking a proactive role at COP23 and mobilising support for South-South cooperation in climate adaptation. It launched initiatives such as the "10–100–1000 Plan" at multi-lateral forums. China also made pledges, such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2060 and peaking emissions before 2030, written into legislation through the "1+N" policy framework, which combines carbon goals with economic planning. It further announced that it would not build new coal projects abroad and promoted environment-based solutions throughout the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It popularised ecosystem-based adaptation as a tool for climate diplomacy at the international level.

However, the speaker also stated that there were quite a few limitations with China's approach. Ms. Vaishnavi observed that China's climate leadership is a "pick and choose leader" and does not allow the concerns of the developing world to be abandoned while also playing to role of a great power in trying to maintain global climate commitments. She stated that while its contributions to multilateral finance have grown, bilateral climate finance on its side has declined. Much of China's climate diplomacy continues to be characterised by scepticism rather than structural transformation. While concluding, Ms. Vaishnavi reiterated that China's climate leadership between 2017 and 2021 represents a transition from simple participation to actual leadership. At the same time, this leadership is still partial.

Noel Therattil Jackson's presentation examined the structural risks embedded in the global clean energy transition, arguing that although climate change constitutes the defining existential challenge of the contemporary era, the transition to renewable energy systems introduces new vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are particularly acute in the domain of critical mineral supply chains. Rather than framing the issue narrowly around reducing global dependence on China, the speaker proposed a more constructive and forward-looking question: how can India position itself as an indispensable actor within clean energy supply chains.

The presentation highlighted projections by the International Energy Agency (IEA) indicating that global demand for critical minerals, especially those essential for batteries, electric vehicles, and power grids, is expected to quadruple by 2040. While this surge is necessary for decarbonisation, it also risks generating a new form of geopolitical tension. Drawing on Graham Allison's concept of the Thucydides Trap, the speaker argued that competition over critical minerals could become a major driver of strategic rivalry between a dominant power, namely China, and a set of rising or collectively competing actors, including India, the European Union, and the United States.

China's dominance in critical mineral supply chains, the speaker noted, is neither accidental nor passive. China exercises extensive control over the mining, processing, and refining of minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements, supported by long-term state investment and industrial planning. Even in cases where China does not hold a majority share in mining operations, such as cobalt extraction in Indonesia, Chinese firms frequently retain ownership stakes, provide financing, control refining processes, and influence export flows. This has resulted in a level of supply concentration, vertical integration, and market-shaping power that is historically unprecedented.

The speaker further illustrated China's leverage through its use of export controls. When China imposed restrictions on the export of gallium and germanium, global market responses were counterintuitive, with prices declining due to excess domestic supply within China. This demonstrated Beijing's ability to simultaneously influence both market access and pricing. In addition, the extreme volatility observed in critical mineral markets, such as lithium exhibiting monthly standard deviation rates of approximately 300 per cent compared to around 20 per cent for oil, underscored the instability risks inherent in mineral-dependent energy systems.

Three interconnected domains of risk were identified. First, national security concerns arise because defence manufacturing and advanced technologies rely on secure access to critical mineral inputs for semiconductors, aerospace, and defence systems. Second, energy security is increasingly dependent on minerals, as renewable power grids and energy storage technologies are mineral-intensive. Third, techno-economic sovereignty is at risk, as sustained import dependence can undermine domestic industrial development and long-term economic resilience.

The presentation then assessed policy responses by major economies. The United States and the European Union have initiated substantial measures to address these challenges. The US has mobilised financing and policy tools under frameworks such as the National Defense Production Act, alongside the creation of strategic stockpiles. The European Union has set institutional targets for domestic extraction, processing, and recycling of critical minerals. Despite these efforts, both face persistent challenges related to resource availability, environmental sustainability, and the distribution of costs.

India's strategic position, the speaker argued, is more constrained. While New Delhi has launched a Critical Minerals Mission, the allocated budget support of approximately ₹24,300 crore, representing about 0.67 per cent of the Union Budget for 2025, remains inadequate for large-scale industrial transformation. India's late entry into the critical minerals race has left it without exploration infrastructure or first-mover advantages. Several mineral auctions have failed to attract viable investment, and domestic reserves, such as lithium deposits in Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir, remain commercially unviable without substantial subsidies. This raises a fundamental policy dilemma regarding whether taxpayers should bear the cost of securing mineral supply chains.

To address these challenges, the speaker proposed five strategic pathways for India's future national mineral policy. These include focusing on technological substitution by investing in sodium-ion and iron-phosphate battery technologies where India could develop competitive advantage; advancing circular economy innovations to recover and recycle minerals from industrial waste; pursuing bilateral supply diplomacy by emulating China's targeted partnerships in regions such as Africa and ASEAN; instituting mandated stockpiling regimes for critical minerals, analogous to International Energy Agency norms for oil reserves; and adopting a calibrated approach to resource nationalism, including selective export controls linked to incentives for domestic processing, drawing lessons from Indonesia's experience in leveraging nickel resources for industrial development.

In conclusion, the speaker emphasised that China's dominance in clean energy supply chains has profound implications for global geopolitics and industrial competition amid an urgent climate transition. While China's scale and efficiency have delivered benefits in terms of affordability and accelerated deployment of clean technologies, they also expose global energy systems to strategic vulnerabilities. To avoid replacing dependence on fossil fuels with a new dependence on critical minerals, countries must prioritise supply chain diversification, innovation, and international cooperation. For India, the opportunity does not lie in competing across all segments of the value chain, but in pursuing targeted strategic leadership that positions the country as an indispensable and credible player in the global clean energy ecosystem.

During the interactive session, the first question, directed to Ms. Vaishnavi, raised the audience member's concern about China's growing dominance in renewable technologies and green financing. The audience member asked how international institutions could make sure that China's climate leadership does not lead to climate dependency, particularly for countries like India that rely heavily on Chinese green technology and resources. In response, Ms. Vaishnavi acknowledged that while China's contributions to renewable energy capacity are undeniable, its approach to climate financing and environmental governance is not transparent. She talked about the lack of transparency in environmental impact assessments and limited accountability in projects associated with the BRI. She also said that although China announced in 2021 that it would stop financing new overseas coal projects, large-scale renewable and hydropower projects under the BRI still have negative environmental repercussions. These include deforestation, habitat disruption, and the displacement of local communities. Ms. Vaishnavi concluded by stating that even so-called "clean" energy sources like hydroelectricity can and do cause environmental harm.

The second question was to Mr. Jackson and asked whether one should rethink the notion of governance in environmental governance. The audience member stated that, in practice, governance often serves capitalist interests and leads to widening inequalities. Mr. Jackson used a realist lens to state that China's state-led model has effectively subsidised the global renewable energy boom. By driving down the costs of green technologies, China has made clean energy more affordable worldwide. From this perspective, he suggested, countries like India should strategically leverage China's cost advantage while also investing in domestic research and development to avoid overreliance. A follow-up comment from another audience member built on this question, drawing parallels between India's current dependence on Chinese heavy rare earth minerals and its past reliance on China for active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).

Dr. Jose was asked about the lack of any information on hydropower in her presentation. She responded that most renewable sources, including hydropower, carry significant environmental trade-offs. She gave examples such as wind farms disrupting migratory bird routes and large dams displacing communities and destroying river ecosystems. Dr. Jose argued that if environmental impact assessments were conducted with full transparency and rigour, few large-scale energy projects could actually be enacted.

Valedictory Session

The Valedictory Session of the 18th All India Conference of China Studies featured a panel of eminent scholars in the field of China studies, including **Dr. Seshadri Chari**, Chairman, China Studies Centre, MAHE, Manipal; Member, Governing Council, RIS; **Prof. G. Venkat Raman**, Convenor, 18th AICCS; Professor, Indian Institute of Management Indore; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies New Delhi; **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, Co-convenor, 18th AICCS; Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi; and **Prof. Ishani Naskar**, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

Dr. Seshadri Chari delivered the **Valedictory Address** at the 18th All India Conference of China Studies.. He began by acknowledging his long association with Prof. Alka Acharya, Mr. Ashok K Kantha, and Prof. Venkat Raman, and praised the conference series for maintaining its relevance year after year, from Hyderabad to Manipal and now Indore.

Dr. Chari reflected on how, throughout history, many powers and ideologies, such as the empires of Alexander the Great, and the global spread of Christianity, Islam, and Communism, have tried to dominate the world. However, he pointed out that all such attempts eventually failed because of the conflict between nationalism and internationalism, which continues to shape world politics today.

Dr. Chari identified technology as the most decisive factor in global leadership, arguing that "whoever has technology rules the world." From the invention of the wheel to modern digital revolutions, the nations that mastered new technologies also led in defence and global influence. Looking back at the Cold War, Dr. Chari noted that the Soviet Union initially led in space exploration with achievements like Sputnik 1 and the first human in space, but lost its advantage because it could not spread innovation or link technology with economic growth. Consequently, Dr. Chari described today's intense technological competition between the United States and China. He highlighted China's progress in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, semiconductors, and space technology, and mentioned its ambitious future goals in robotics, the industrial metaverse, quantum computing, and deep-sea exploration. He states that China's determination to become self-reliant in technology poses a serious challenge to Western dominance.

In conclusion, Dr. Chari raised an important question on whether this US-China rivalry will lead to a new Cold War or to a shared system where a few powerful countries make the rules for everyone else. He stated that while China has been able to disrupt the U.S.-led order, it has not yet offered a clear alternative model. The future of global politics, he concluded, will depend on whether China's technological rise becomes a strength or a burden in its journey to become a true superpower.

Delivering the **Convener's Report** at the valedictory session of the 18th All India Conference of China Studies, **Prof. G. Venkat Raman** began by extending his gratitude to the Director of IIM, Prof. Himanshu Rai, for his unconditional support and vision in making the conference a success. He recalled how Prof. Rai encouraged him to organise a world-class conference, a sentiment echoed by Prof. Acharya, who pushed the organising team to raise the standards of the conference higher. Prof. Venkat Raman noted that preparations for this conference had been taking place for nearly a year and expressed his deep appreciation to the heads of IIM Indore and ICS for their guidance.

Prof. Venkat Raman described how the long-standing AICCS tradition of inviting the previous year's conveners to the following conference was maintained this year with the presence of Dr. Chari, who had hosted the 17th AICCS in Manipal. He also credited Dr. Chari for inspiring him to professionalise the conference process and for introducing him to the avenues required to secure funding that helped make this year's event possible.

Prof. Venkat Raman also spoke about the challenges of compiling a convener's report, noting that while detailed summaries would soon be available on the ICS website, he wished to take the opportunity to share some reflections and advice, especially for younger scholars in the field of China Studies. He emphasised the importance of reading the conference webpage carefully to understand the broader aims of the AICCS. He stated that these aims go beyond its annual themes and reminded participants not to force-fit their research into the conference topic.

Prof. Venkat Raman stated that the conference had received an unprecedented 160 abstract submissions, double the number from the previous year. After two rounds of review, 36 high-quality papers were selected for presentation across ten thematic panels and five special panels, while trying to ensure that geographic and academic diversity was maintained. He highlighted that this year, the conference aimed to include policy practitioners, business leaders, and CEOs who maintained a strong connection to China alongside scholars, which helped provide real-world perspectives. The special panels explored themes such as India-China trade relations, digital sovereignty, technological disruption, and the future of globalisation, featuring experienced academics and several industry experts. Concluding his address, Prof. Venkat Raman expressed his appreciation to his co-convener, Dr. Yelery, saying that it was their teamwork that made the conference a success. Consequently, he invited everyone to reconvene for the 19th AICCS, scheduled to be held at Jadavpur University in 2026.

Delivering the **Vote of Thanks**, **Dr. Aravind Yelery** expressed his gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of the 18th All India Conference of China Studies. He began on a personal note, reflecting on his long association with AICCS and how it has become a unique space that connects generations of scholars, senior academics, practitioners, and students in China Studies. Dr. Yelery described the conference as an academic gathering and a vibrant community built on shared values of curiosity that tries to build momentum.

He thanked the leadership at IIM Indore and the Institute of Chinese Studies for their exceptional organisation and hospitality, praising Prof. Rai, Prof. Rakesh Ranjan, Prof. Acharya, and Prof. Venkat Raman for their continuous support. Dr. Yelery also expressed deep appreciation to the eminent guests, Mr. Ashok K. Kantha and Dr. Seshadri Chari, for taking time out and attending all the sessions. He especially appreciated Mr. Kantha's insightful contributions and active engagement throughout the sessions.

Dr. Yelery then thanked his co-convener Prof. Venkat Raman, and expounded on his dedication to making sure that every part of the conference went smoothly. He also thanked the selection committee, which carefully reviewed over 160 abstracts and funnelled the best ones to maintain the high standards of AICCS. He made special mention of the young scholars who put a lot of their time and effort into their papers, as well as their patience and confidence. He extended his appreciation for the practitioners who were able to make themselves available and grace the special sessions of the conference on relatively short notice.

He expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the student volunteers and the IIM Indore administrative team, led by Col. Gopinath Pamidi, for their flawless logistics and on-site coordination. He also thanked the PPR division of the Ministry of External Affairs, which contributed a lot to making this conference a success. He further thanked Ms. Aparna Shrivastav from the communications studio, Mr. Bhupendra Panday, Mr. Satyendra Gond, and Mr. Vijay Dadlani, along with the facilities, travel, transport, and executive residence team. He expressed his gratitude to the members of the media team led by Ms. Ananya Mishra and supported by Ms. Riya Jain, and extended his appreciation to Ms. Subhanjali Saraswati for her continued support and assistance. Thereafter, he acknowledged the special contingent from CCCS who contributed meaningfully to the debates.

Concluding his address, Dr. Yelery thanked Dr. Snigdha Konar, who led the ICS team along with Mr. P.R. Singh and Mr. Ram Singh. Finally, he thanked all presenters, researchers, and participants for their enthusiasm and scholarly spirit, and looked forward to reconvening at the 19th AICCS in November 2026.

Prof. Ishani Naskar started her address by congratulating the organisers of the 18th All India Conference of China Studies for hosting an intellectually stimulating event. Prof. Naskar also spoke about the valuable insights she gained during her maiden venture at AICCS. She stated that the two days of the conference and the discussions among the speakers revealed the diversity and depth of China Studies in India. Representing the Hariprasanna Biswas Centre for India-China Cultural Studies, the Jadavpur Association of International Relations and the Department of International Relations at Jadavpur University, Dr. Naskar warmly invited all delegates to the 19th AICCS, which will be hosted in Kolkata from 19th to 21st November 2026. She conveyed her excitement to carry forward the AICCS legacy of fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

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Institutional Profile

The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), New Delhi is engaged in and committed to interdisciplinary research on China. Apart from the annual All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS), the Institute undertakes various collaborative research programmes and multilateral initiatives with prominent institutions in India and abroad, and brings together leading and upcoming scholars through multiple fora. Among its many legacies, it has been conducting the iconic Wednesday Seminar for over 50 years and publishes the *China Report,* a peer-reviewed quarterly journal on China and East Asia, currently in its 61st year of publication.

Established in 1996, the **Indian Institute of Management Indore (IIM Indore)** has been a leader in the field of management education, interfacing with the industry, government and PSUs. With the objective of imparting high quality management education and training, the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India established Indian Institute of Management Indore as Institutions of Excellence. These Institutions are recognised as premier management institutions, comparable to the best in the world for teaching, research and interaction with industries. It is promoted and nurtured by the Ministry of Education, Government of India and is an institute of national importance under the Indian Institutes of Management Act 2017. Situated atop a scenic hillock, the 193 acre campus of IIM Indore provides an ideal backdrop for contemplative learning. IIM Indore has the latest in teaching aids, rich learning resources, a strong IT backbone, state-of-the-art sports complex and hostels as well as contemporary infrastructure.

Indian Council of
Social Science Research

The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) was established in the year of 1969 by the Government of India to promote research in social sciences in the country. The ICSSR is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education, Government of India, and a premier organisation which has been actively promoting and funding social science research in the country since its inception. ICSSR provides grants for projects, fellowships, international collaboration, capacity building, surveys, publications etc., to promote research in social sciences in India. The Council is at present assisting 24 Research Institutes, 6 Regional Centres, and it has 17 new categories of ICSSR recognised Institutes located in different regions of India.

सत्यमेव जयते
Policy Planning & Research Division
Ministry of External Affairs
Government of India

The **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** is the Government body responsible for formulating and implementing India's foreign policy. The **Policy Planning and Research (PPR)** division in MEA plays a crucial role in shaping India's foreign policy by conducting research, analysis, and strategic planning.

The 18th All India Conference of China Studies

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