

Report on the academic visit of delegates from Hainan Institute for World Watch (HIWW), China to ICS on 23 August 2018
Venue: ICS Seminar Room, Delhi

An interactive meeting was held between the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) and the fellows and researchers of Hainan Institute for World Watch (HIWW), China on, 23 August. Amb. (Retd) Ashok K. Kantha, Director ICS, made the introductory remarks. The proposed queries made by the director to the delegation concentrated on specific issues between India and China. The following questions were recognised as a part of the discussion.

1. What could India and China do to carry forward the 'Wuhan Spirit', post the summit?
2. How could India address its core issues in its structural relationship with China and collaborate on international issues?
3. What has been China's reaction to the idea of 'Indo-Pacific', as a strategy or construct?

The speaker Prof. Chen Weishu, (chairman of the Hainan Academy of World Watch), noted that in April this year, PM Modi and President Xi Jinping exchanged their views on principal issues of bilateral and global importance, in an informal setting at Wuhan. Both the leaders expounded on their respective visions for national development in the context of contemporary international relations. According to the speaker, the leaders underlined the importance of maintaining peace on the borders as well as strengthening mutual trust and understanding between the countries. He emphasised the relevance of the 'Wuhan Spirit' for the future of Sino-Indian relations. It has resulted in increased interaction between the two governments at political, economic, cultural and educational levels. Thus, the summit was an essential step taken by the two nations to restore the relations that reached a nadir during the Doklam standoff, in 2017.

While defining the structural challenges between the two countries, Prof. Rong Ying, (Vice President of China Institute of International Studies), reflected on the history of the relationship. The speaker noted that PM Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988 was considered as an 'icebreaker' and it facilitated the revival of relations between the countries. PM Gandhi's meeting with top Chinese leaders, including Deng Xiaoping emphasised on the development of bilateral ties and friendship with China for the emergence of an 'Asian century'. The speaker then stated that since the two countries are neighbours, it was inevitable that they would disagree on certain issues. He expressed the need to manage their differences. He asserted that the academic community needed to promulgate 'geo-civilisational' linkages between India and China. In the 21st century Asia, the term 'geo-civilisation' should be transformed to acquire a meaning that would reflect a transcendence, from the narrow confines of political nationalism and the establishment of a cohesive, singular identity. It was through the geo-cultural ties that a new face of civilisation could emerge and would express the Chinese and Indian identities.

The speaker conceded that the Chinese government has refrained from officially addressing the concept of the Indo-Pacific. However, the academic community considered it to be a construct developed primarily by the United States to curtail China's growing power in the region. He agreed to the opinion of the many scholars who appreciated PM Modi's perspective on 'Indo-Pacific' as an inclusive zone with India and China as key stakeholders in the region. The speaker postulated that in the maritime domain, the two countries faced common challenges and had mutual interests in both security and geo-economic dimensions of the Indo-Pacific region. He stressed on the need for a balanced, reasonable and multilateral collaboration between them and argued that there is a need for an enhanced cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and a coordinated effort to ascertain the success of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and BRICS New Development Bank (NDB).

Amb. Ashok Kantha, Director, ICS acknowledged that while India and China are witnessing a convergence of interests, both parties need to commit to addressing contentious issues - including the border - rather than pushing them under the carpet. He noted that the boundary issue generates mistrust between the two nations and its settlement is essential to move forward. The need for cooperation in the maritime domain was stressed. It was also argued that there was a rise in the Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean region while India was showing keen attention to the South China Sea. As such, the two nations are in need of a framework for naval cooperation in issues of common concern such as Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) protection and anti-piracy. Amb. Kantha stated that both parties must bear cognisance of each other's vital interests and avoid positioning themselves in a competitive stance. In conclusion both HIWW and ICS agreed to engage in bilateral exchanges, to collaborate on projects and to organise conferences.

About the Delegation

1. Prof. Chen Weishu, Chairman, Academy for World Watch
2. Prof. Sun Yang, Executive President, Academy for World Watch
3. Prof. Rong Ying, Vice President, China Institute of International Studies
4. Prof. Yu Xiangdong, Vice President, Academy for World Watch
5. Dr. Mao Jikang, Research Fellow, Academy for World Watch
6. Dr. Zeng Xianglai, Assistant Research Fellow, Academy for World Watch
7. Dr. Jiang Zongqiang, Assistant Research Fellow, Academy for World Watch
8. Prof. Zhou Wei, Vice Director, School of Politics and Public Administration, Hainan University