

KEY TAKEAWAYS

4th INDIA FORUM ON CHINA @ GOA

100 YEARS OF CPC & CHINA'S FUTURE

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**INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES
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**IN COOPERATION WITH
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4th India Forum on China
“100 Years of CPC and China’s Future”

Hosted by
Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) and
the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)
in cooperation with Goa University

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi and the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) organized the 4th India Forum on China (IFC) in cooperation with Goa University to explore the theme ‘**CPC at 100 and China’s Future**’ on 3-4 December 2021 at Cidade De Goa, Goa. The Keynote Address was delivered by Prof. Rana Mitter, Professor of the History and Politics of Modern China, University of Oxford on ‘How New is China’s New Era under Xi Jinping’. The conference was organised in hybrid mode and it included seven engaging sessions with over forty eminent speakers from across the globe. The forum discussed themes of contemporary relevance in relation to China such as National Rejuvenation: Sustaining Authoritarian Legitimacy; Power-Projection in the Indo-Pacific; Cultural and Intellectual Traditions; Great Power Competition; China’s Developmental Aspirations; Decoding China’s Regional Ambitions; and Communist Party of China (CPC) at 100.

Inaugural Session

- In the last two years, China’s presence in areas such as strategic affairs, global governance, economic relations, defense and trade and investment has become more visible.
- Some of the important developments in international relations such as the geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, formation of new geopolitical alliances and discussions about building supply chain resilience are all intertwined with China’s growing global influence.
- Owing to recent events in Sino-India ties and as a country aiming to expand its own footprint, India’s equation with China occupies a central place in India’s geopolitical as well as economic policy making. It is, therefore, important for India to discern the various strands of interaction that the other major countries have with China.
- As China celebrates the centenary of the CPC, important changes are taking shape in China’s domestic politics but all the changes in their domestic sphere have ramifications for the world and India.

- In 1921, the CPC was established with an aim of seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Through a century of endeavours, the CPC has overthrown the three big mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism.
- With merely over 50 members at the time of its founding, the CPC today is the world's largest governing party with more than 95 million members, in a country of more than 1.4 billion people.
- In Xi Jinping's new era, the nature, ethos and role of the CPC has undergone a fundamental shift. The Party is firmly in control of the government, the military and increasingly the business and society in China.
- China's developmental agenda and strategies are being realigned under the rubric of dual circulation and common prosperity.
- Xi Jinping's Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation encompassed ambitious goals for 2035 and 2049 but it has a limited window of opportunity to achieve these goals because of numerous challenges and multiple transitions.
- China is a country in hurry rising in a crowded geopolitical field, which is increasingly assertive, in pursuit of its contested and unilaterally defined core interests.
- The CPC's vision of future is one dominated by an all-powerful party state controlling all domains of domestic activity.
- Innovation is at the helm of China's plans for the future but the most important question is whether China's innovation is self-reliant. Similarly, considering China's recent policies it is important to understand if China is likely to become a responsible power or an aggressive one.
- Germany's politics has undergone an important change in the recent past with a tripartite government coming into power. With regards to China, Germany's new foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock maintained that Germany will cooperate with China in areas where it is possible, however, it will push back where required.
- The European Union's take on China is similar as it intends to provide an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through its Global Gateway plan, launched in December 2021. The plan does not intend to challenge China but aims at supporting infrastructure development around the world.
- China's BRI initially seemed fair but its political ideology and the way the projects under BRI were developed was neither convincing nor fair.
- As China has risen in the world, it has grown increasingly opaque with regards to its domestic affairs.
- One of the main elements of Xi Jinping's Chinese dream is the great reunification of China.
- There exists only one Chinese identity and differences are not tolerated- forced assimilation of Uyghurs and integration of Hong Kong with the mainland are some examples.
- The coalition agreement of the new government in Germany has sent a clear message of where the relationship between China and Europe is heading. Taiwan is a major concern for the EU.

Session 1: National Rejuvenation: Sustaining Authoritarian Legitimacy

- Over the past few decades, particularly the last two years, the world has witnessed eminent shifts in China's political functionality and its approach towards world politics.
- The notion of establishing legitimacy through authoritarianism has always dominated the Communist regime's approach in shaping its domestic political narrative and influencing its diplomatic dealings with other nations on the global platform.
- In an authoritarian state, legitimacy is a matter of authority but even the most rigid regimes need some degree of acceptability and accountability to sustain themselves.
- China is striving to increase its legitimacy in both national and international sphere through three main strategies: by enhancing its degree of acceptance in international institutions and integrating itself into the global economy; by intensifying CCP's performance output to set new standards for global governance; and by exercising CCP's power to legislate laws and rewrite historical narratives about Chinese exceptionalism to its own advantages.
- In the context of 'Legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party', the popular phrase - "The empire long united must divide and long divided must unite" from the historical novel "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms" stands significant.
- Understanding how the Chinese leadership has maintained legitimacy, sometimes even in the aftermath of some major disasters such as the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution was raised.
- In case of Chinese imperial rule, religion did not play any role in legitimising the Chinese imperial rule. This had significant consequences as it meant that the Emperor was not subject to a higher Law or class and therefore there was no higher authority to which the Emperor was accountable. Therefore, in China, there is "Rule by Law" and not "Rule of Law".
- The power to write the history of the previous dynasty was used to legitimise the present Dynasty's seizure of power and to perpetuate claim to the mandate of heaven.
- Mao actively worked to separate China from its imperial past while Xi on the other hand glorifies Confucius and the imperial past.
- While most Chinese are aware that their lives have been better than that of their parents, in the current era, the Chinese doubt that their children will lead better lives than them.
- Therefore, the focus has now shifted to regime efforts, regime propaganda and to build more populist goals such as common prosperity, fighting inequality, self-reliance and bringing back egalitarianism.
- The CCP is seeking new sources of legitimacy for internal governance, a phenomenon that is not unique to China and can be seen in other big countries as well. The renegotiation of social and political contract in China is heading towards something like legitimacy with Chinese characteristics.
- However, the Party did deliver prosperity to a large number of Chinese for which it deserves due credit.

- At present, the elite are very concerned about Xi's anti-establishment policies and the middle class is concerned about the era of prosperity coming to an end.
- However, CCP's ability to adapt to new changes should not be underestimated.
- At present, the root of Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy lies in its performance. The communist regime is an output-based governance system in contrast to elected forms of government in democracy.
- Xi Jinping's path for achieving the goal of common prosperity differs from that of Deng Xiaoping's reformation - which entailed the idea of common prosperity for a few first and for all after a while.
- Xi is adopting these populist policies in order to align the leadership of the communist party with the common people.
- China's foreign policy is not different than the foreign policies of other state-actors- within the international system it also prioritises and defends its national interests, and worries about its image in the international platform.
- According to Xi, Marxism is not the reason for the sustenance of CCP's legitimacy. The continuous advances in Sinicization of Marxism which includes ceaseless adaptations to basic tenets of Marxism to China specific realities is the real reason behind the Party's longevity.
- CCP also maintains its legitimacy by using one of its most powerful agents which is the state-run media.
- Today, in addition to traditional media CCP uses social media and other new media platforms to boost its legitimacy.
- Social media platforms which could have become sites of public dissent have evolved today into sites of surveillance, control and mobilising public opinion in favour of the party.

Session 2 - Great Power Competition

- The current global order is at an inflection point as there are growing tensions in a number of regions.
- Though Russia is not discussed much, it is a significant piece of the puzzle in the current international order especially in the context of its growing relations with China.
- Both Russia and China dismissed 'The Summit for Democracy' with Russia labelling it as recipe for disaster.
- China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific could either be a calculated play to replace the USA or an accidental imperial ambition but in both cases the interests and values of other countries are negatively affected.
- It is important to understand China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific and the contributions of QUAD partners in the region.
- The pandemic was an opportunity for China to change its ways and build trust, however, it has only deepened and accelerated mistrust, which has led to an increase in partnerships and coalitions to

enhance the other countries' balancing capabilities. Countries will form a web to deter and balance Chinese power.

- Quad as a group would merely focus on the four countries working together to build resilience.
- It is also important to understand the significance of the security pact between Australia, the US and the UK
- While the AUKUS pact is still at its embryonic stage, it stands as a symbol of commitment at the highest levels between the three countries.
- The pact is driven by China, as Australia-China relations decline and the strategic circumstances of Australia are rapidly changing.
- Polls conducted in Australia state that 16 percent of Australians trust China to act responsibly in the world, which is a significant drop from 52 percent, three years back.
- Regarding Australia's domestic capabilities for long-range missiles, historically, it followed the right policies but failed in execution as can be seen in a number of failed submarine deals in the past. Australia will need to step up diplomatically, politically and economically.
- With regards to China-Japan ties, there have been both ups and downs in the past fifty years.
- At present, China-Japan economic relations are thriving but the overall relations have reached its lowest point.
- There is a sense of deep mistrust between the two nations – the Senkaku islands, China's military expansion and Japan's mention of Taiwan at the Human Rights Accords have caused significant friction in ties.
- In the recent years, Japan has shed its preference for accommodation and has been far more forthright, as seen in the general elections in Japan this year - no political party took a conciliatory line on China.
- While militarily and diplomatically, relations between China and Japan have been tense, the Japanese have successfully compartmentalised political and economic relations.
- Chances of an arms race, space and cyber contestations are increasing in the region and an overlap of agendas can push towards a major security dilemma.

Session 3: Cultural and Intellectual Traditions

- In order to understand the direction in which the CCP is headed, it is important to understand China's thought world and the impact of Chinese history on its politics.
- China has a lively and diverse intellectual world and Chinese intellectuals are ambitious with optimistic attitude about China's rise.
- Most of the establishment intellectuals are patriotic Chinese who are proud of China's rise.

- One can even identify a slight pushback against the CPC and its course of actions in the international sphere in the writings of establishment intellectuals, indicating the existence of some degree of intellectual pluralism in China.
- It is important to judge the present with the prism of the past and the use of cultural civilizational and strategic attributes to connect to a nation's behaviour.
- While China is considered one of the world's oldest civilizations, it must be kept in mind that it is the Han ethnic group which constitutes a majority of its population. In this sense, China has not always been a unitary state, which existed only for brief periods of time.
- Today Chinese governance is not about accommodation and integration in the democratic sense, but about assimilation and overwhelming others with a fixed identity.
- China is today pursuing a combination of Ming's maritime expansion and Qing's continental expansion.
- The Work Report presented by Xi Jinping in the Party Congress of 2017, declared that the Party will not forget its initial intent - of creating a new culture.
- National humiliation has driven much of Chinese politics. The Opium War, ceding of Hong Kong, the annexation of Chinese territory by Britain and Russia, and other injustices wrought upon China have continued to inform China's regional outlook today.
- In the decades after Mao Zedong, diversity in cultural production grew, and the country saw the rise of new aesthetes, as a monolith gave way to pluralism.
- In the Xi era, conservative ideals are visible in many of his speeches, with key formulations being the China Dream, Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and a sense of cultural confidence brought by the fragmentation of mainstream Chinese culture, and an anxiety about Chinese culture losing its Chinese-ness.
- "Marxism Sinicized" is a western term, while within China it is referred to as "adapting Marxism to Chinese reality".
- The term "Sinification of Marxism" emerged under Deng Xiaoping, and was affirmed by Jiang Zemin.
- In the 20th century, "Xi Jinping Thought" is at the core of Marxism in China. The official narrative is one that cannot be contested, with historical nihilism being incorporated into CPC discourse.
- Cultural superiority is evident in the narratives used by China today, while large parts of it- including Marxism and the hybrid economy model- are borrowed from abroad.

Session 4: China's Developmental Aspirations

- China is the world's biggest economy in terms of Purchasing Power Parity with a largely export led growth. Recently, the CPC announced its goal of doubling China's Gross National Product by 2035, which sums up its developmental aspirations.

- In May 2020, the government introduced the “dual circulation strategy”.
- Private consumption in China is only 39 per cent, which is low compared to 55 per cent in other major economies. This is causing an overdependence on debt fuelled infrastructure spending and exports, exposing the economy to the downturns in global economy that threaten long term financial stability.
- As China emerges as the world’s biggest consumer market, a new kind of home-based globalization is also emerging whereby the international companies can now be persuaded to comply to Chinese standards, promoting them on a global scale.
- Transitioning to this model has not been easy as the export share of China’s GDP continues to surge over the consumption share.
- China also faces the issues of a growing real estate sector which cannot be tamed without affecting the banking systems.
- Questions remain on how the Party will handle these challenges and still retain strong control, and whether, China will be able to liberalize its deeply autocratic system.
- The term “common prosperity” was first used in the 1950s to underline the goal of creating an egalitarian society in China, following the success of the CPC in liberating China from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial past.
- The term underwent a makeover when Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1977 and launched the “reform and opening up” of the economy in 1978.
- Deng’s reforms brought about a four decades long phase of unprecedented and rapid growth which created a mass consumption society.
- Although Deng’s reforms were successfully carried on by succeeding leaders, the export and investment-led growth generated serious imbalances leading to unprecedented levels of income and wealth inequality.
- Two prominent phases mark Xi Jinping’s economic strategies - a phase of emphasizing on “supply side structural reforms” in 2015 to the pursuit of “common prosperity” in August 2021.
- An important objective of the reforms was to shift the economy from its reliance on investment and exports as growth drivers to a consumption, innovation, and service-oriented growth pattern.
- “Made in China 2025” plan was announced in 2015 and it listed some of the key sectors in which China should attain a significant, if not a dominant, position. Semiconductors, robotics, aerospace, green energy, electric vehicles amongst others have been mentioned in the list.
- The “dual circulation” strategy is related to both the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the fallout from the US-China trade war.
- The 14th Five Year Plan, which was released on 14 March 2021, has a full chapter on dual circulation and states that self-reliance is the overriding objective.

- The 14th Five Year Plan talks about achieving “common prosperity” through “new rural revitalization and urbanization strategies.” It puts the concept in the context of bridging the growing gap between the rural areas of the country and the urban areas, and to narrow the income divide between them.
- Understanding the evolution of the concept of ‘Common Prosperity’ and how it may not necessarily be a shift away from growth is important.

Session 5: Decoding China’s Regional Ambitions

- During the Clinton administration, China was a rising economic power and it was expected to become a responsible stakeholder and be a positive contributor to the global system.
- Under the Bush administration, during the global war on terror initiated by the US, China exploited the strategic vacuum in certain areas and accelerated its own rise in those regions.
- After the inception of the Trump administration, US declared China as the primary challenge to the US.
- Under the Biden administration, the US started with its re-engagement with China and in the recent past, Biden has offered China a dialogue on strategic stability.
- In order to maintain a balance of power especially in the Asian region two options are available: great power competition between US and China which would also affect the future of Taiwan or US’s inability to delay China’s growth in the region leading to its desire to stay out of the great power competition.
- Chinese aggressive foreign policy was witnessed in the Indian borders in April 2020 and in the South China Sea since 2015. Similarly, Taiwan’s Defense Identification Zone has been breached over the years.
- According to structural realism, China has to ensure that it becomes a regional hegemon in Asia in order to become a global hegemon.
- With regards to South East Asia, China is looking to recover its territory in this region.
- Chinese Diaspora in South East Asian region does not provide any extra leverage to China as the overseas Chinese are less trusted by the Chinese government.
- The US is an important bilateral economic partner to all of the ASEAN countries except Laos and Cambodia – both of which are not very significant economies.
- Chinese claims in the East China Sea and the South China Sea have been serving an important domestic purpose which has become much more pertinent than any other geopolitical strategic reason in a war.
- China’s foremost priority is in preserving internal stability and legitimizing the rule of CPC.
- Since the 19th century domestic “Chinese policies and China’s foreign policies have intersected and in fact have become indistinguishable”.
- With respect to Afghanistan, China tends to see Afghanistan through a threat prism.

- China always wanted to maintain a kind of buffer with Afghanistan through the Wakhan corridor.
- China would like to economically support the new interim regime in Afghanistan.
- Through its economic and humanitarian support is trying to popularise the narrative that in Afghanistan “China will bring investments while America will bring bombs”.
- The security environment of the South Asian region has changed with political instability in Afghanistan, therefore there is a need for like-minded countries to coordinate on Afghanistan.

Session 6: Power-Projection in the Indo-Pacific

- The Indo-Pacific comprises of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean and is an ideological construct for a regional strategic framework.
- Many Chinese scholars believe that the Indo-Pacific strategy is intended to hedge against China’s foreign and security policy.
- The fundamental aim of the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US is to prevent the rise of China and lessen its influence in order to ensure the US supremacy in the region through political, diplomatic and military support.
- The ad hoc alliances of QUAD and AUKUS complement and undermine one another which adds to the uncertainty of the Indo-Pacific.
- The concept of struggle has gained newfound significance in China’s foreign policy. It was earlier a part of Mao’s thought on proper handling of political contradictions.
- Struggle is a violent concept; emotional, confrontational and physical, as seen in the cultural revolution where the contradictions were emotional, confrontational and physical.
- Under Xi, in 2012, the Chinese dream era opened up, and this great dream called for a great struggle. Xi’s concept of struggle however, is more scientific and rational than Mao’s.
- There are two broad trends in China’s actions in the Indo-Pacific: the first trend is of militarisation and control of the Indo-Pacific for strategic reasons and the second trend is that of exploration of the seas for oil, natural gas and rare earth minerals.
- China’s power projection is natural, as it is natural to be ambitious and must not be treated as an aberration.
- The resurgence of nationalism in Asia is also another problem that China is facing, as countries are now rejecting the several BRI and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) projects.
- China’s attempts at creating disruptions in the Indo-Pacific are dangerous for the global order, and that while China has surpassed USA in terms of a naval fleet, it is still vulnerable.

Session 7: CPC at 100

- The history of CPC is not as nationalistic as it is generally described. The CPC's first party congress in 1921 was sponsored by Communist International (C.I) and a year later CPC decided to join C.I. as a branch and accepted the C. I's leadership over the CPC.
- In the 1930s, strong sentiments of nationalism were witnessed in China which along with differences of opinion between CPC and C.I.
- Even historically CPC has been known to deploy most of its resources for its own development.
- CPC's Leninist characteristics are the key to understanding most aspects of politics in China and the relationship between state and society.
- Many Leninist characteristics in the party both internal and external in nature, have been revived such as selective recruitment.
- In the Xi era, there has been a decline in the acceptance rate of applicants to the Party. However, the rate of acceptance for people with a college degree has increased.
- Externally, the party has a monopoly on the political organization in the country. CPC also has the power to decide what other organizations are allowed to exist in the country.
- In 1999, less than one per cent of the private enterprises had party cells but by the end of Hu Jintao era in 2012, the number grew to 54 per cent. In 2017, the number grew to 73 per cent.
- Thus, a clear effort to integrate the party into the private sector which is responsible for most job creation, tax revenue and economic growth is seen.
- With regards to NGOs, a dual approach is seen: NGOs dealing with job training, environmental education and areas that promote the party's agenda are promoted but a more repressive approach is adopted towards the ones that advocate political rights, labour rights and women's rights etc.
- Earlier, party branches were more of a tool for logistical support but now they are tools for surveillance.
- Among the 13 accomplishments that were listed since the 18th congress, the first was upholding the party's overall leadership.
- According to Xi Jinping thought, the number one principle is to uphold the authority of the party and strengthen the party's centralized leadership over external work.
- The idea of collective responsibility seems to be ending as personal loyalty to Xi is now being emphasized within the party. For instance, the two safeguards policy ensures safeguarding the central committee and safeguarding Xi Jinping as the core.
- CPC's party-building effort abroad is not harmless and should be contained but it should not be treated as an existential threat.
- As China is an important part of the world economy, the CPC is faced with challenges compelling it to extend its reach and extend its influence abroad.
- The global reach of the CPC is thus an evolving response to an aspect of the requirement of China's globalization.

- Chinese students who study abroad on government scholarships are seen as foreign extensions of China's domestic economy and society and are therefore a part of the system.
- The party's ambition is not only to bring Chinese individuals and institutions under control but also to integrate them into a global Chinese nation that unifies its territorial and extraterritorial parts.

Keynote Address

- Discussions about China's place in the world is relatively recent and rising in importance.
- In 2017, Xi Jinping released a formal statement about the new era at the Party Congress.
- It is important to understand the new era from a historical lens, along with a comparison of China with Japan.
- In East Asia, a variety of political and economic narratives have competed with each other, sometimes in succession and otherwise at the same time, but without a grand overarching narrative of democratization.
- Despite the rise of populist policies, a powerful combination of anti-democratic politics and innovation has not been seen in history. In East Asia, the sense of being authoritarian and innovative has come together as coterminous.
- A crucial element of modernity is technology and during the Cold War era, Japanese technology was associated with a more peaceful manifestation of technology.
- The world today is completely different where there is rise of an attractive, technologically enabled innovative consumerist modernity blended strongly with authoritarianism.
- The 2020s are haunted by a Chinese party state that has such advanced technology and money that it could manage the surveillance of every building in New York!
- There are many discussions outside China about the uses and abuses of artificial intelligence but such an explicit statement of the need to use it for control, as opposed to liberation, is quite distinctive to the China of now.
- It is worth looking at Japan to understand that China's new era will not last forever.
- Compared to the other versions of newness, Xi's new era is different because of technology, authoritarian confidence and consumerist economy.

Valedictory Session

- China today is at multiple inflection points but due to the great degree of opacity, it is difficult to gauge where China is headed.
- China is going through a transitional phase economically where dual circulation is being pushed forward and it is to be seen how it will impact the growth prospects of the country.

- Politically, there remains a factional contestation within the CPC which is also a black box.
- The policies used by China are intended to stabilize the rule of the CPC and keep it in power.
- China's aggressive behaviour under Xi is somewhat counterintuitive because it has alienated many countries in the process at a time when great power competition is increasingly becoming sharpened.
- Faced with many challenges, China still holds an aggressive stance in pursuit of its core interests.

In a span of two days, the forum threw open a host of questions about the CPC and China's future. While the external ramifications of CCP at regional and global levels were discussed in an expansive manner, the domestic challenges confronting the CCP were also taken up to some extent. Essentially, the forum has laid grounds for further explorations inside China around issues of surveillance, privacy, people's access to the state, social and popular movements and debates in intellectual political traditions within China- all of which are equally significant in understanding China and its behaviour.

The 4th IFC was fascinating and full of insights. As China is not transparent about its policies and actions, insights from subject experts and practitioners are necessary for the world and especially for India. The forum discussed many topics that were crucial given the fact that China itself is a topic of many variations. As CPC marks its 100 years, it has much to celebrate in terms of its performance which is reflected in the changes China has brought about especially during the period of reform and opening up. Changes in China are still underway in the new era of Xi Jinping which is reflected in the recent Sixth Plenum which elevated Xi's position further. However, in order to be on par with Mao and Deng, Xi would need to deliver.
