



14th All India Conference of China Studies

Special Theme: Society and Culture in China

Organised by

Institute of Chinese Studies

&

Cheena Bhavana, Visva-Bharati University

in partnership with

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The 14th All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS) was held from November 11-13, 2021, in hybrid mode. The Conference was organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) and Cheena Bhavana, Visva-Bharati University, in partnership with the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS); the Special Theme of the Conference was “**Society and Culture in China**”.
- A record number of individual abstracts and panel proposals were received in response to Call for Papers; many of them were good in terms of relevance- both contemporary and enduring- methodology, content and research focus. Of the 147 abstracts received 80 abstracts and of the 9 panel proposals received, 4 proposals were selected. Of the abstracts selected, only about 49 full papers were received and of these, 21 were selected by a board of reviewers for final presentation through a rigorous process based on importance and singularity of theme, academic standard, feasibility and pan-Indian representation.
- It is important to note that 14th AICCS saw representation of close to 45 institutions and more than one thousand registered participants. In other words, the platform brought together scholars from diverse discipline and training, universities- central and state-, research institutions and think-tanks. The sharing of research and exchange of perspectives under the aegis of AICCS has the potential to grow into viable academic collaborations in future.
- In the Inaugural Session the Director, ICS, Ambassador Ashok Kantha and the Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty, made opening remarks that dwelt on the inception and development of ICS and Cheena Bhavana respectively, both unique yet complementary in their historical trajectory and research objectives, and their contribution to China Studies in India.
- In his opening remarks, Mr. Peter Rimmele, the Resident Representative to India of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, discussed about the rise of nationalism in China, the diverse schools of thought that contributed to its present manifestation and maintained that in order to interpret and understand the actions, policies and ideology of Communist Party of China comprehensively, it is imperative to first examine the history, society and culture of the *Red Dragon*.
- The Keynote Address was delivered by practitioner and scholar of eminence Ambassador Shivshankar Menon; the title was “**Internal Drivers of China’s External Behaviour**”. Noting that in the last decade, China has alienated or worsened relations with most of her neighbours, the exceptions being Pakistan, Cambodia and possibly Russia, he explored the possible reasons for this. He felt that the traditional explanations external to China are not sufficient to understand this and maintained that domestic factors now play a greater role than ever before, in driving China’s foreign policy. Bringing together several threads of enquiry, he argued that though in other powers, public opinion and populist politics drive external behaviour, in China, regime survival and calculations of internal stability and economic growth, seem to count for more in China's external behaviour.

- The 14th AICCS had four Special Panels reflecting diverse interest and concerns, covering themes of international relations, social transformation, new cultural formations and a comparative study of how different countries dealt with the challenges of the COVID pandemic.
- Special Panel I on *Family Dynamics in the Twenty-First Century Chinese Society* discussed topics such as study of child-care and elderly-care regimes in Asian countries of diverse systemic profile, child-marriage in India and China, media responses to China's Two-Child Policy and renewed focus on family in contemporary Chinese society.
- Special Panel II on *Chinese Influence in South Asia* was based on a running project of Centre for Economic and Social Progress that explored the question of China's influence in the subcontinent by examining China's growing role across a range of sectors such as education, media, public diplomacy, technology, social media, civil society, religion, governance and so on. The presenters looked at China's approach to South Asia from a theoretical perspective, examined the tools used by China in Nepal and Sri Lanka, AND the Rohingya Crisis of Myanmar and how China influenced the response of Bangladesh.
- Special Panel III on *Social Dimensions and Disruptions caused by Covid-19 in China and India* looked at the massive disruptions caused by Covid-19 in the last two years on lives and livelihoods globally and locally especially in India and China. The topics covered were mobility and immobility during the lockdown in China, disruptions caused in rural China, investigation of the role played by big tech companies, AND the philanthropic landscape during Covid-19 in India and China.
- Special Panel IV on *Media, Society and Culture in Today's China* examined the social media comments and digital media commentaries to highlight the growing influence of social media in and on Chinese society and hence more stringent implementation of Cyber Security Law. The panel also examined the different tools used by the Party to exert authority, AND if and how the Chinese citizens are surrendering their freedom in return of stability and security.
- In a Special Lecture titled “**Governance, Culture and Superpower in the Transformation of CPC Rule**” Prof. Frank Pieke discussed the mobilisation and organisation structure of Communist Party of China (CPC), power of the central leadership and especially of Xi Jinping, Party's revamped united front policies on minorities, religions and overseas Chinese, and the use of different tools including civilizational and even religious claims, by the Party to enhance its legitimacy. He argued that these new modalities of all-encompassing dominance used by the Party will turn the Party into the embodiment of the Chinese nation, never to be challenged and will prime China to become the strongest power in the world.
- There were five Thematic Panels on *Cultural Diversity and Identity Formation, International Trade and Foreign Policy, Society and Politics, History and Cultural Linkages, AND Social Practices and Cultural Dimensions*.
- The Thematic Panels consisted of 21 papers selected from the 49 full papers submitted; these papers were indicative of an extremely wide range of interest, discipline and training of scholars, covered a rainbow spectrum by way of topics and reflected the new innovative interdisciplinary approach that has broken through conventional categories.

- There were titles such as “Democratic Transition, New Taiwanese Identity and Queer Rights Movement in Taiwan”, “The Dualistic Trends of Sinophobia and Sinophilia: Impact on Foreign Policy towards China”, “Imagining the Digital Public Sphere in Xi’s China: Looking at the #MeToo Movement through the eyes of Castells and Habermas”, “Historic Urban Landscape Approach: Application in China”, “Involution or Alienation? Visiting the Issue through Jia Zhangke’s *Hometown Trilogy*” and many more that captured the attention of the emerging scholars of China Studies in India.
- It is from these 21 papers that a paper will be selected for the ***MSB Award***, awarded each year in AICCS in celebration of the legacy of Late Prof. Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea, an iconic Indian scholar of China Studies.
- In the Valedictory Address titled “State and Society in the Studies of China's Democracy: A Critique of Libertarian Resilience”, Prof. Shih Chih-yu looked at the CPC’s attempts to institutionalize and professionalize political control through the notion of *authoritarian resilience*. By doing so, Prof. Shih presented a critical translation of democracy between Chinese and Western thoughts, informed respectively by Confucianism and Liberalism.
- The three lectures- the Keynote Address by Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, the Special Lecture by Prof. Frank Pieke and the Valedictory Address by Prof. Shih Chih-yu laid out an important set of principles and frameworks for the study of China today.
- It was announced that the 15th AICCS will be held in Guwahati in November 2022, in collaboration with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, with active participation of the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University and other academic institutions of Guwahati.
- As is customary, Dr. Pahi Saikia, representative of Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati, co-host of the AICCS next year, welcomed the collaboration and invited the scholars to participate in the 15th AICCS.