

Institute of Chinese Studies

# WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*A Comparative Assessment  
of the 'Greening Process' in  
China and India*

## REPORT

Speaker :

**Justin Joseph**

*4 October 2023*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The seminar focused on comparing the ‘greening’ process in China and India. The speaker emphasised that in both countries, the ‘greening’ process presents a unique challenge — balancing rapid development with ecological sustainability.
- Joseph noted that both nations employ state-led initiatives to address environmental issues. China orchestrates public participation within a controlled framework, treating the public as passive audiences. In contrast, India experiences a more dynamic form of public involvement, where citizens actively shape environmental policies.
- The speaker employed the securitisation framework of the Copenhagen School in International Relations in his analysis. China’s policies prioritise economic development over environmental concerns. In contrast, India strives to strike a balance between economic growth and ecological conservation. Highlighting a gap in this framework, Joseph also noted how it often overlooks societal factors.
- Joseph concluded by suggesting that it is essential to collectively reimagine the securitization framework in order to fully understand how actors, processes, and outcomes interact in the context of environmental policy-making in countries like China and India. This perspective acknowledges the evolving role of the public and non-state agencies in shaping environmental policies.

## REPORT

**Speaker: Dr. Justin Joseph**, Assistant Professor at the GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hyderabad.

**Chair: Dr. Joe Thomas Karackattu**, Associate Professor at the Humanities and Social Sciences Department at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras.

**Date:** 4 October 2023

**Venue:** Zoom Webinar

The seminar delved into an in-depth exploration of China and India, two pivotal actors in the global economic arena, as they actively embrace a process termed as "green transformation." This involves the integration of ecological considerations into their policy-making and implementation. What makes this process especially noteworthy is that it poses a unique challenge for countries in the Global South, where they must strike a balance between development and sustainability, unlike their counterparts in the Northern Hemisphere.

The discussion shed light on the initiatives driven by Chinese and Indian governments respectively as they tackle pressing environmental issues. To gain a comprehensive understanding of their policy approaches, the speaker utilized the securitization framework developed by the Copenhagen School (International Relations). This evolving scenario in the Global South offers an exciting opportunity to redefine established international relations theories. It is intriguing to note that the current securitization framework does not adequately account for the role of societal factors. Applying this framework, the presentation uncovered phenomena like the rise of non-state actors in traditionally inflexible systems in China. Additionally, it also explored various forms of public participation in shaping environmental policies.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Joe Thomas Karackattu briefed the audience on China and India transitioning towards "green transformation". While environmentalism was once a novel

concept, both countries have increasingly made significant strides. In China, this journey commenced in the 1990s with the establishment of the first environmental non-governmental organization. Notably, both countries grapple with the delicate balance between development and sustainability, creating a unique challenge. Environmental concerns continue to be a sensitive issue, particularly in China.

In his talk, Dr. Justin Joseph discussed that the greening process in China and India reflects a distinctive interplay of ecological and economic dynamics. Environmentalism has taken root in both countries, albeit through markedly different paths. While China's environmental movement is carefully regulated by the government, in India, environmental activism is characterized by its spontaneous and self-driven nature. This contrast in regulatory frameworks is emblematic of the differing political systems and societal responses that underpin the greening process in these two Asian giants.

The speaker spoke about China's environmental activism, which is largely orchestrated by the government. Environmental protests are often stringently channeled and managed—this approach has been effective in ensuring stability within the country. The Chinese government has adopted extraordinary measures to securitize the environment, addressing it as a top-down concern to safeguard its authority and maintain legitimacy. This strategy includes deploying policies and behavioral interventions, such as the "war against pollution" campaign initiated by President Xi Jinping in 2014. This high level of securitization is encapsulated by the official incorporation of "ecological civilization" into the Chinese constitution in 2018.

The speaker argued that on the other hand, India's greening process is characterized by the organic and autonomous nature of environmental activism. Environmental movements in India have been a natural response to the ecological concerns that emerged in the 1970s. Notably, the Chipko Movement in the early 1970s, led by environmental activist Sunderlal Bahuguna, showcased the potency of civil society in addressing environmental issues. The state did not orchestrate such movements—these were grassroots initiatives aimed at protecting the environment and the rights of marginalized communities.

Additionally, the speaker also discussed that in India, security discourses surrounding the environment have developed from the bottom-up. The constitutional framework allows for

public participation and advocacy, and these elements are a fundamental part of India's democratic fabric. This bottom-up approach is evident in the proactive stance taken by the Indian judiciary in environmental conservation. The National Green Tribunal, a specialized environmental court in India, for instance, plays a pivotal role in resolving environmental disputes and ensuring compliance with environmental laws.

Dr. Joseph concluded that it is challenging to determine the unequivocal success or failure of these two distinct approaches to greening; it is clear that each is deeply rooted in their respective political and societal contexts. These approaches also challenge the conventional Western understanding of securitization, where the public is typically seen as an audience rather than active participants. Understanding the unique characteristics of environmental securitization in non-Western political systems like India and China is essential for comprehending the complexity of the greening process in the context of these emerging global powers.

*This report was prepared by Supradip Das, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

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