



# INDIA FORUM ON **CHINA** @ MUMBAI

4th-6th December 2023



The BRI Transformed ?  
**China's New Global Initiatives on**  
**'Development',**  
**'Security' &**  
**'Civilization'**



# **REPORT**

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*The India Forum on China (IFC), organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) is an annual conference where eminent scholars, practitioners and policymakers from India and other countries hold in-depth deliberations on a topical theme pertaining to China in an Indian setting and keeping in mind Indian perspectives.*

The **India Forum on China (IFC)**, launched in 2017, is an annual flagship conference organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, in cooperation with various Indian universities, and academic institutions. Every year eminent scholars, practitioners and policymakers from India and other countries hold in-depth deliberations on a topical theme pertaining to China in an Indian setting and keeping in mind perspectives from India. Each successive Conference, within the ambit of its theme, takes into consideration a variety of sub- themes, and seeks to develop a coherent analysis. The themes and sub-themes are analysed through a multi-directional and inter-disciplinary approach. At the culmination of each Forum, a detailed and comprehensive report is prepared, which is aimed at policymakers, media, and interested public.

The Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi and the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung organised the 1<sup>st</sup> IFC @Goa at the International Centre Goa on 15-16 December 2017, in cooperation with Goa University. The theme was **Deciphering China's Quest for Global and Regional Leadership**. Held shortly after the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the deliberations and outcomes of the Congress informed the discussions at the Forum. Arguments pertaining to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its efforts to fashion new institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), its growing soft power capabilities and technological prowess were examined in detail. Amb. Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary, Government of India & Member, Governing Council, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi delivered the Keynote Address titled 'Overview of China's Quest for Global Leadership'.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> IFC @Goa was organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, in partnership with the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, and in cooperation with Goa University, from 7-9 December 2018. As 2018 marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China's economic reforms and opening up, the theme of the conference was **Changing Drivers of China's Economy**. The Forum brought together over 40 experts who offered their insights and perspectives on several sub-themes

including the ramifications of the structural rebalancing of China's economy, and its implications for India and other players. The Keynote Address at the 2<sup>nd</sup> IFC @Goa was delivered by Prof. Ashwani Saith, Professor Emeritus, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University, Rotterdam titled 'Socialism, Pioneer of Capitalism - and Global Power: The Latent Leitmotif of Chinese Development?'.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> IFC @Goa, that was organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi and the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung in cooperation with Goa University, from 5-8 December 2019, experts deliberated on the theme, **China and Asia's Changing Geopolitics**. Sub-themes at the Forum included Asia's geopolitical changes, evolving discourse on the Indo-Pacific, Beijing's cultural diplomacy, the US-China trade war and other such topics of contemporary relevance. Discussions also focused on China's approach while dealing with the world and the role played by Xi Jinping. Additionally, some participants also brought in the domestic dimension, particularly the role of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the Chinese economy. The Keynote Address at the 3<sup>rd</sup> IFC @Goa was delivered by Mr. Richard McGregor, Senior Fellow, Lowy Institute, Sydney titled 'Xi Jinping and Chinese Power'.

The 4<sup>th</sup> IFC @Goa was organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi and the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung in cooperation with Goa University, from 3-4 December 2021. The theme of this Forum was **CPC at 100 and China's Future**. Experts deliberated upon themes ranging from 100 years of the Communist Party of China (CPC), cultural and intellectual traditions in China to China's developmental aspirations and regional ambitions, and great power competition. The Forum reflected on the history of the CPC, the Party's growth not only in membership numbers but also in its influence over a span of 100 years. The changing nature of Chinese foreign policy especially in the context of the Indo-Pacific was examined at the Forum. Prof. Rana Mitter, Professor of History and Politics of Modern China. University of Oxford delivered the Keynote Address titled 'How New is China's New Era under Xi Jinping'.

The 5<sup>th</sup> IFC @Goa, organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi in partnership with the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, with Goa University, and focused on one of the most discussed and speculated-upon events of 2022 all over the world - the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. With its far-reaching implications for Chinese politics, economics, society and with a concomitant impact on strategic and security aspects in the neighbourhood and beyond, the theme of this Forum naturally selected itself: **The Communist Party of China in the**

**'New Era'**. Organised over two days, 27-28 November 2022, the 5th IFC @Goa witnessed the participation of more than 40 experts, including scholars, practitioners and policymakers from the economic, foreign policy, security and technological domains. The Keynote Address was delivered by Prof. Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, Vice-Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and the Valedictory Address titled, 'Xi Jinping's China: Denouncing the Era of "Crossing the River by Feeling the Stones"' was delivered by Prof. B.R. Deepak, Professor, Centre for Chinese & South-East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

In keeping with our past practice, a report aimed at policymakers, media and interested public will be prepared based on the deliberations at the conference.

**The reports of the previous Forums can be accessed on the ICS website (<https://icsin.org/india-forum-on-china>).**

## CONCEPT NOTE

Over the course of the past three years, China has unveiled a set of three key propositions that experts believe would shape its foreign policy in the coming years: the Global Development Initiative (2021), Global Security Initiative (2022) and Global Civilisation Initiative (2023). Together, the three initiatives encapsulate China's approaches to the world economy, international security and its preferred political values. Beijing seems to be articulating a world with Chinese characteristics even as it contends with myriad domestic economic and social problems as well as remains a distance from the US in terms of global military might or economic influence. These three initiatives, are, however, important precisely because of China's willingness to promote them despite such shortcomings or weaknesses; it is important for scholars and analysts to understand these initiatives and how they scale up from the Belt and Road Initiative instead of simply dismissing them as more of the same.

Like previous IFCs, the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC will take a multi-layered and policy-oriented approach to analysing and debating a wide array of themes related to China's approach to international politics and global governance. Under the rubric of the GDI, GSI and GCI, the conference will revisit China's projects as well as narratives on connectivity, the environment, science & technology, history, political systems and global values, among other things. Bringing together some of the finest minds in China Studies from within India and across the world, the various sessions of the Forum will offer a nuanced and in-depth discussion of China's three global initiatives. How does one understand the GDI amidst the backlash against the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)? What implications does China's alternative security architecture have on existing regional and global security architecture? How does Chinese political culture condition its approach to global values and norms? Can these initiatives be merely understood as China seeking leadership of Global South efforts to "decentre" the global governance framework? Or are they more properly understood as part of China's structural rivalry with the US, India, EU and other democracies? These are some of the several questions that the Forum intends to deliberate on.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INAUGURAL SESSION

- The 6<sup>th</sup> India Forum on China @Mumbai was held from 4-6 December 2023. The Conference was organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies, in partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar University; Centre for Advanced Policy Research and Initiatives; Yashwantrao Chavan Centre; the University of Mumbai; and, CKT College, Mumbai. The theme of the Conference was ‘**The BRI Transformed? China’s New Global Initiatives on ‘Development’, ‘Security’ & ‘Civilization’**’.
- The **Chair** for the Inaugural Session, **Prof. Alka Acharya**, Honorary Director, ICS, noted that the themes of the three new initiatives, particularly development and security, resonate with the moods and aspirations of the people in developing countries. This aspect has been configured by the PRC in the implementation and promotion of these initiatives. She stressed the importance of looking back and tracing their origins and evolution to better comprehend how China has been reaching out to and promoting its interests with, the developing countries. According to Prof. Acharya, given the consistency with which China has championed the cause of the developing world – now being referred to as the ‘Global South’, a historical perspective would enable us to understand whether the three ‘new’ initiatives were old wine in new bottles or new wine in old bottles.
- **Dr. Ajit Ranade**, Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, delivered the **Keynote Address** titled, *Engaging With China: Options and Strategies*. He highlighted the fact that India and China together make up 40% of the global population, and by extension, a significant part of the world’s economy. Given this stark reality, it is only pragmatic for India to engage with China. He also stressed the need to undertake a comprehensive study of the nature of this engagement, and India’s options. He highlighted the need for India to secure a market share in China's consumer economy, particularly in the tourism sector. According to Dr. Ranade, attracting Chinese capital could help address India's trade deficit and foster economic growth. He also provided insights into China's economic transformations, including shifts from manufacturing to services. Dr. Ranade concluded by



emphasising a strategic and multidimensional system of engagement with China, considering common interests and acknowledging the need for both countries to coexist on the global stage.

- The **Congratulatory Message** was to be provided by **Shri Sharad Pawar**, former Minister of Defence, Government of India. However, due to the requirement of his presence at the Indian parliamentary session, he was unable to join the session. The former Defence Minister's message was read out by Ms. Mohini. It began by spotlighting China's rise and its centrality to international politics, the global economy, and other non-traditional domains of international relations. He noted that China has become increasingly active in global multilateral fora. At the same time, China has developed a parallel multilateral architecture in its immediate geographical vicinity, and is in the process of expanding it further, which demonstrates how China is relentlessly striving to realise the China Dream, and consolidate power. Beginning with the Belt and Road Initiative, China has increased the pace of its outreach, which is being taken even further with this latest announcement of the three new global initiatives on Development, Security, and Civilization. Shri Sharad Pawar congratulated the Institute of Chinese Studies, and the other organisers for convening the 6<sup>th</sup> India Forum on China @Mumbai, and for providing a platform for comprehensive debates and discussions on a subject of great significance in the current situation.
- The **Vote of Thanks** was presented by **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, Convener, 6<sup>th</sup> India Forum on China @Mumbai; and, Associate Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

## SESSION I

- The first session of 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai was titled, "**The Global Development Initiative - I**", and it was chaired by **Prof. Rajat Kathuria**, Professor and Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR.
- In his introductory remarks **Prof. Kathuria** reflected on the historical dominance of the Anglo-Saxon system in global institutions such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and the United Nations. He noted that the emergence of alternative systems like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and, more recently, the Global Development Initiative (GDI), are seen as

responses to a sense of dissatisfaction with the current global order. The GDI can be viewed as a manifestation of China's desire to expand its economic influence globally, through concerted and strategic efforts.

- **Dr. Rajiv Ranjan**, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi; and Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, delved into the ideological underpinning of the GDI, which he argued was a fusion of Confucianism, Marxism, and a constructive approach to international relations. In his presentation, Dr. Ranjan pointed out that China's goal to lead the Global South, reshape normative values, and challenge Western discourse on governance and human rights.
- **Dr. Dilini Pathirana**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Commercial Law, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, with her legal expertise, emphasised the role of Chinese investments in critical infrastructure projects, ranging from ports to telecommunications, that have implications for Sri Lanka's domestic politics and security. In her presentation, the speaker made a distinction between grants, loans, and direct investments brought in by China, highlighting the legal obligations associated with each. The speaker discussed legal challenges in Sri Lanka such as alleged violations of fundamental rights, constitutional challenges, and elaborated on the hurdles in the way of accessing legal documents pertaining to Chinese investments in Sri Lanka.
- **Dr. Sadia Rehman**, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Atatürk University, Türkiye, noted that China, despite proposing GDI, has prioritised BRI projects in Central Asia due to the region's geostrategic importance, energy resources, and connectivity. Central Asia is crucial for China's strategic and economic interests. The engagement is seen as fostering economic development, increasing foreign reserves, and contributing to the de-dollarisation process.

## SESSION II

- The second session of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC was titled, “**The Global Development Initiative - II**”, and was chaired by **Prof. Mridul Nile**, Professor, Department of Civics and Politics, University of Mumbai.
- In his opening remarks, **Prof. Nile** referred to China's desire to reassert and reformulate the global order and governance, while noting that China’s perceptions are simultaneously undergoing significant transformation. Prof. Nile pointed out China's growing obsession and insecurity with regard to its position in the current global order, especially under Xi Jinping's leadership over the past decade.
- **Dr. Priyanka Pandit**, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies, Shiv Nadar University, Delhi-NCR, framed her arguments within the theoretical debates of liberalism and mercantilism. With the State Owned Enterprises (SOE) as the main focus of the discussion, China, in her view, is being portrayed as the bearer of the mercantilist torch, influencing global order and governance. Dr. Pandit emphasised the need to disaggregate SOEs, their financing practices, and their role in overseas infrastructure investment projects in order to better analyse initiatives such as the BRI and the GDI.
- **Dr. Lin Ya-ling**, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, discussed the differences and similarities between the BRI and the GDI, in the context of China's foreign policy. The speaker noted that Southeast Asian countries remain China's main priority, and emphasised China's role as a global development actor and a responsible major developing country. Amidst increasing scrutiny of the BRI, China positions the BRI and the GDI as dual strategies; even as the BRI undergoes a transition with a focus on smaller investment projects, both initiatives aim to respond to major power competition, particularly in Southeast Asia and in the Global South.
- **Mr. Amit Bhandari**, Senior Fellow, Gateway House, Mumbai, delved into China's significant investments in South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan and Sri Lanka. He emphasised the economic challenges arising from the BRI. While China has been the largest investor in the

region, the speaker pointed out that the debt incurred by these countries has worsened their economic and political crises. He argued that there have not been any major Chinese investments in the region in recent times, largely due to the domestic developments in the host countries and China's internal economic challenges. He questioned the impact of the GDI, highlighting its potential limitations in addressing domestic governance issues in partner countries.

### SESSION III

- The third session of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai was titled, “**The Global Security Initiative – I**”, and was chaired by **Dr. Jabin T. Jacob**, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies; and, Director, Centre for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR.
- **Dr. Shen Ming-shih**, Research Fellow and Director, Division of National Security Research, and Acting Deputy CEO, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, examined a range of themes in his presentation, from international relations and security issues to specific cases such as the Taiwan situation, cyber threats, and China's influence on global organisations. In his view, it needed to be closely examined whether the GSI genuinely addressed global security concerns or served as a tool for China to advance its own interests. Dr. Shen also highlighted various perspectives related to China's commitments within the GSI, juxtaposing them with potential contradictions or concerns with regard to China's actions, such as territorial disputes, support for certain countries, and other global security issues.
- **Lt. Gen. S.L. Narasimhan**, former Director General, Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies, New Delhi, put forward three aspects in his analysis of the GSI: the effectiveness of the GSI within China's broader strategy, the current status of, and developments under, GSI, and the potential implications for South Asia. He noted the interconnectedness of the GDI, the GSI and the GCI, as part of a larger strategy to create an alternative global architecture in both security and economics and argued that China's aim was to leverage existing global systems to its advantage. The core commitments under the GSI were discussed, with a focus on their

manifestations in South Asia. Referring to the importance of the Central Asian nations in the success of the BRI, he stressed the relevance of Central and South Asia within China's three new initiatives.

#### SESSION IV

- The fourth session of the Conference was titled, '**The Global Security Initiative – II**', and was chaired by **Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar**, Associate Dean, External Relations, School of Government, MIT World Peace University, Pune.
- The **Chair** introduced the theme of the session, and linked it to the discussions of the previous sessions. Dr. Sudhakar opined that China is clearly asserting its intentions to play a major role in developing and managing a new security paradigm in the 'New Era', something that China had avoided so far. Hence, this can be seen as China's signal to the world, that it will not remain constrained by its geographical backyard.
- **Dr. David O. Shullman**, Senior Director, Global China Hub, Atlantic Council; and Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, expressed his assessment about how the GSI fits into Xi Jinping and the party state's strategic and foreign policy goals, and how it aims to transform global governance to better suit the party's ambitions for global leadership. He argued that China conveniently uses the principles of non-interference and sovereignty in its favour, to ward off global criticism of its human rights policies. Furthermore, he expressed the view that China also employs the GSI to legitimise its indirect support toward Russia.
- **Dr. Wu Tsung-han**, Assistant Research Fellow, Division of Cyber Security and Decision Making Simulation, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, explored the theme of the Digital Silk Road (DSR) under the GSI. He argued that although these two projects were launched at different times, they converge and mutually support each other with the final aim of enhancing Chinese global influence. He also noted that Africa holds major relevance when it comes to China's engagement policies toward the Global South.

- **Dr. Anand P. Krishnan**, Fellow, Centre for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR, provided a historical context in his study of private military contractors and drew attention to the fact that the development rationale of China's 'going-out' strategy and outward investments was relevant in understanding the role of private military companies. Political instability, ethnic tensions, terrorism and other major security concerns that affected Chinese investments abroad, also contributed significantly toward the same. Yet, according to Dr. Krishnan, these private military companies have largely been founded by former Chinese state security officials, and thus the monopoly of violence lies with the state. He also highlighted how these companies operate in a grey area, and hence the Chinese government can forego responsibility in case of abuse of power on foreign soil.

#### SESSION V

- The fifth session of the Conference was titled, '**The Global Civilization Initiative**'. The session was chaired by **Mr. Manoj Kewalramani**, Chairperson, Indo-Pacific Research Programme; and China Studies Fellow, Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru.
- Introducing the theme, Mr. Kewalramani provided useful insights into the GCI, which according to him has the most significant normative influence of the three. He further noted that the focus of the GCI is essentially on challenging the global liberal ideas such as freedom, social progress and the individual at the centre of society.
- **Dr. Shih Chien-yu**, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, focused on the issue of ethnic minorities within the ambit of the GCI. He underscored the domestic aspect of the GCI, and asserted that the initiative is an attempt to rewrite people's understanding of universal values and rights like freedom and democracy. By placing the right to work as the top priority, and individual freedom as the last, the CPC, in his view, tries to justify forced labour in Xinjiang and its ultimate aim is to generate a mindset based on discipline, social rules, and working ethics, with little to no regard for individual liberty.

- **Dr. Abbas Bobokhonov**, Head, China Studies Program, Institute for Advanced International Studies, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent, spoke on the GCI in Central Asia and the prospects of, and problems in, its implementation. He argued that in recent years Beijing has begun to discuss regional processes and developments with the countries of Central Asia, without Russian involvement and has moreover focussed on strengthening its cultural and humanitarian presence in this region, beyond the formal sphere of intergovernmental relations. This is reflected in the establishment of Confucian Institutes across Central Asian nations. Notably however, not all countries in the region have expressed support for the GCI, and await greater clarity on this initiative.
- **Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar**, Associate Dean, External Relations, School of Government, MIT World Peace University, Pune, explored the impact of the GCI in South Asia. He highlighted China's attempts to initiate dialogue with various sections of society in each country, instead of mere government-to-government interactions – which he considered as a variation on the 'Middle Kingdom' approach, wherein the Chinese civilization guides and leads other civilizations toward progress. In his opinion, China's attempt was to undermine India's civilizational legacy in South Asia. It was therefore important for all countries in the region to develop without losing sight of their own culture and traditions.

### VALEDICTORY SESSION

- The Valedictory Session of the 6<sup>th</sup> ICS @Mumbai was Chaired by **Prof. Ravindra Kulkarni**, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mumbai.
- **Adm. Arun Prakash**, former Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy, delivered the **Valedictory Address**. Presenting his insights and point of view based on his naval background, Adm. Prakash dwelt on India-China relations and the current international situation. He argued that it is imperative for India to assert itself, and drawing on its civilisational history. Seriously consider making a determined bid for leadership of the Global South. He further stressed on the development and effective employment of military diplomacy within the overall engagement strategies of India.

- The **Conference Report** was presented by **Dr. Arvind Yelery**, Convener, 6th IFC; and, Associate Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Summing up the discussions during the various sessions of the Conference, Dr. Yelery reiterated that notwithstanding China's posturing, it is imperative for India to engage. He also pointed out that the Conference has covered two important aspects: first, situating and examining the logic, optics and operative side of the three initiatives, and secondly, comparing them *vis-à-vis* the BRI. There would inevitably be a debate world over on these initiatives, as different interest groups and communities visualised the various ways in which the GDI, GSI and the GCI would fructify. He thanked the speakers, the audience, the volunteers and the organisers for their contributions toward the success of the 6<sup>th</sup> India Forum on China @Mumbai.
- **Prof. Ravindra Kulkarni** concluded the session and the Conference by exhorting the scholars and academicians to move forward with more comprehensive efforts, toward providing the right academic research, academic development and academic initiatives that would support India's foreign policy, diplomacy and strategic planning in the long run.



## CONFERENCE REPORT

### INAUGURAL SESSION

The Inaugural session of the 6<sup>th</sup> India Forum on China (IFC) @Mumbai was chaired by Prof. Alka Acharya, Honorary Director, Institute of Chinese Studies; and, Chairperson and Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The theme of the Conference was *The BRI Transformed? China's New Global Initiatives on 'Development', 'Security' & 'Civilization'*. Prof. Acharya highlighted that the Global South has emerged as an important framework to look at how China is positioning itself in the world today. Hence, it is of great relevance to have a historical perspective on these developments. The Chair asserted that through these three initiatives one can see China yet again positioning itself as a major economic power and as an emerging strategic player in an emerging scenario. Therefore, China is a power that India has to engage with, and this engagement largely depends on how India understands these initiatives. Prof. Acharya noted that the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai marks a major step toward understanding China's aims.

The **Keynote Address** was delivered by **Dr. Ajit Ranade**, Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune titled, *Engaging with China: Options and Strategies*. Dr. Ranade noted that India and China make up 40% of the global population, and to not engage is a foregone conclusion. He also noted that both India and China constitute a major part of the global economy, and India's trade with China is the most dynamically growing trade in the world. Highlighting the size of their respective markets, it was posited that, while dealing with China, it is an imperative to follow a policy of engagement rather than disengagement. In light of this challenging reality, it is only practical for India to involve itself with China. Additionally, Dr. Ranade emphasised the importance of conducting a thorough examination of the dynamics of this engagement and exploring India's various options.

Thereafter, he touched upon US-China trade barriers imposed by the Trump administration and noted that, despite this, the trade still ranged over \$650 billion. Dr. Ranade also provided context pertaining to trade during the Covid era, which witnessed concerns over engaging with China, and highlighted the shift in policies made by various nations and multi-national companies in the post-Covid era. Trade

with China, according to him, has reached new heights in recent months, and it is imperative for India to engage keeping in mind the emerging opportunities. Although China has ushered in opportunities for the nations of the world, it is also important to take into account the issues it is currently facing on the domestic front, which include challenges such as the socio-political and economic ramifications of the Zero-Covid policy, crackdowns on companies, debt crises, rising youth unemployment and supply chain diversification.

It was also noted that the nations currently engaging with China are aware of the emerging domestic verities in China, and are attempting to reorient their policies accordingly, and India must also operate with caution. Shedding light upon China's three new global initiatives, Dr. Ranade, mentioned that they are aimed at earning the goodwill of the people of developing countries. In keeping with this line of thought, he raised a pertinent question: is China pursuing these initiatives out of domestic weakness, or newfound confidence to engage with the world? Bringing in the strategic aspect of India's engagement with China, Dr. Ranade noted the importance of viewing China through a strategic prism, and operating accordingly. The differences with respect to the Chinese governance model, society, and geography are relevant variables in the context of engagement with China. Therefore, India's options with respect to the same need to include government to government, people to people, military to military, and finally cultural to cultural engagement, effectuated through a comprehensive framework, in line with India's strategic aims.

A brief round of questions followed Dr. Ranade's address, and a range of questions were raised focusing on India's potential options with respect to engaging with China. Among these, a pertinent question was raised on what India should invest more in, digital highways or tangible infrastructure. Addressing the question, Dr. Ranade emphasised that India needs to first focus on enhancing its economic policies and outreach, streamlining them to suit the emerging global scenario, before it endeavours toward regional and global initiatives along the lines of China's BRI, GDI, GSI, and GCI. The discussion also looked at how Indian businesses can navigate the complex business landscape of Chinese state-owned enterprises, among others. Dr. Ranade suggested that despite the challenges, there are opportunities for Indian companies in China's consumer market, pharmaceutical sector, and supply chains. The importance of being part of global value chains was also highlighted.

**Shri Sharad Pawar**, former Minister of Defence, Government of India, was scheduled to present the **Congratulatory Remarks** at the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai. However, his presence was required at the Parliament of India at short notice. Shri Sharad Pawar's speech was delivered on his behalf by Ms. Mohini, Research Scholar, University of Mumbai. The former Minister's speech focused on China's path to modernisation with unique characteristics, and the role of the Communist Party of China in maintaining control over the population, and by extension the trajectory of China's rise. The speech highlighted China's global impact, and economic growth, with special emphasis on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which recently completed a decade. China's efforts to shape the world order in alignment with its interests can be seen over the last few decades. According to Shri Sharad Pawar, China has found ways to assert its centrality in international politics, economy and other non-traditional domains. The three new global initiatives take China's aim of revisualising the global order further, although it remains to be seen how the world reacts. It was posited that that the more China endeavours to circumvent the extant international laws, the more it threatens the existing international order.

Shri Pawar's speech further noted that China has become increasingly active in regional multilateral fora including the ASEAN. Following its successful application for access to international institutions such as the WTO, it has endeavoured to create a parallel multilateral architecture, first in the regional sphere, and then on the global stage.. This stands as evidence as to how China is relentlessly striving to realise the China Dream. According to him, China has undertaken an approach in stark contrast to the West, where it is now distancing itself from established international norms, and therefore, emerging as a threat to its Asian neighbours. The speech ended by praising the Institute of Chinese Studies for providing a platform, through the India Forum on China, for such debates, and Shri Sharad Pawar acknowledged the relevance of engaging in more such discussions on China's actions and their implications.

**The Vote of Thanks** was delivered by **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, Convener; and, Associate Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Expressing his gratitude to the audience, which included scholars, practitioners, and students, he noted the value added to the conference through the collaboration between diverse institutions brought together by a shared interest in understanding China. Acknowledging the contributions of all partner institutions, Dr. Yelery thanked them for their support, and lauded all the organisers and volunteers for the successful culmination of the Conference. Further,

he underscored the importance of such institutional partnerships, and noted the avenues for future collaborations.

## SESSION I

The first session of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC titled, “**The Global Development Initiative - I**”, was chaired by **Prof. Rajat Kathuria**, Professor & Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar Institution of Imminence, Delhi-NCR. The first speaker of the session was **Dr. Rajiv Ranjan**, Assistant Professor, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. His paper was titled, *Global Development Initiative and Sustainable Development Goals: Casting ‘Chinese Ideology’ in Developmental Leadership*. The second speaker was **Dr. Dilini Pathirana**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Commercial Law, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, whose paper was titled, *The Legal Implications of Chinese Investments in Sri Lanka: A Critical Discussion on the Colombo Port City Project*. Followed by Dr. Pathirana, the session featured **Dr. Sadia Rahman**, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Atatürk University, Türkiye, whose paper was titled, *China’s Global Development Initiative in its Peripheries — Why is Central Asia Left Out*.

In his introductory remarks, the Chair, Prof. Kathuria, reflected on the historical dominance of the “Anglo-Saxon system” in global institutions such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and the United Nations. He noted the emergence of alternative systems, like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI), as responses encompassing the growing dissatisfaction with the current global order. Prof. Kathuria drew parallels with the realm of sports, where European and American dominance is being challenged by alternative leagues, suggesting a broader trend across domains, where the status quo is being challenged. according to him, the GDI is also being viewed as a manifestation of China's aim to expand its economic influence globally. Prof. Kathuria emphasised the importance of understanding the subtle messaging and the role of influence embedded in China’s three new global initiatives.

The first speaker of the session, **Dr. Rajiv Ranjan**, discussed the uncertainty surrounding China's Global Development Initiative (GDI), drawing parallels with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He posited that the GDI, as part of its primary objectives, aims to address Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), and reshape the global development agenda. He further delved into the ideological underpinnings of the GDI, emphasising the fusion of Confucianism, Marxism, and a constructive approach to international relations. Dr. Ranjan also shed light upon China's attempt to emerge as the leader of the Global South, reshape normative values, and challenge Western discourse on governance and human rights. According to Dr. Ranjan, the GDI can be viewed as China's endeavour to institutionalise its leadership and introduce a new set of normative values to global governance. He also touched upon China's changing stance on human rights and its efforts to dismantle the dominant Western perceptions with regard to the same. The GDI, along with the Global Security Initiative (GSI), according to Dr. Ranjan, represents China's bold move to enlist support from the countries comprising the Global South and enhance its profile at the United Nations. Dr. Ranjan noted that the GDI forms part of China's overarching strategy to shift global discourse away from the West, and legitimise China's actions by linking its initiatives with existing global developmental goals, and presenting a more lucrative set of options to developing nations.

**Dr. Dilini Pathirana**, employing her legal expertise, emphasised the legal grounds and ramifications of Chinese investments in critical infrastructure projects, ranging from ports to telecommunications, which have significant implications for Sri Lanka's domestic politics and security. She employed the Colombo Port City project as a case study, and stated that the project was initiated by the Sri Lankan Port Authority, and was later facilitated by the China Communication Construction Company. Dr. Pathirana noted that the legality of the project, whether financed through loans or direct investments, has a huge impact on the domestic political situation in Sri Lanka. She outlined the controversies surrounding the project, including issues related to blatant circumvention of environmental laws, opaque procurement processes, and the challenges faced by scholars and experts in accessing the legal contracts signed by China and the Sri Lankan government. Despite these challenges, however, the project was successfully concluded. The reclamation of land from sea, which was a part of this bilateral project, has now been designated as Sri Lanka's first special economic zone, although concerns remain with regard to China's influence on the SPEZ. To substantiate her arguments pertaining to the legal ramifications of receiving financial aid from China, Dr. Pathirana distinguished between grants, loans, and direct investments, and highlighted the legal obligations associated with each. Furthermore, she shed light upon the legal challenges of China's aid to Sri Lanka, such as the alleged violations of fundamental rights of citizens, constitutional challenges, and the aforementioned ongoing struggle to access legal documents. Dr. Pathirana concluded by noting that despite criticism surrounding the legality of Chinese investment projects in Sri Lanka, various new investment projects

continue to remain on the table. She further stated that the legal landscape remains complex, taking into account the existing challenges, and the growing competition in securing investment projects in the island nation.

**Dr. Sadia Rahman** began her presentation by referring to the arguments made by Prof. Kathuria pertaining to the prevalence of the “Anglo-Saxon system” in the present global liberal order. Building upon the same, she posited that Chinese concerns over the existing global order, with its foundations in the “Anglo-Saxon system”, have manifested through China’s foreign policy overtures, notably the three new global initiatives. Dr. Rahman shed light upon the historical context of China's integration into the liberal order, referring to the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and the Tiananmen Square incident (1989) as periods of isolation, which were followed by China’s opening-up to the global economy. According to Dr. Rahman, the China has presented the GDI as an economic model of statecraft, focused on non-traditional security issues, emphasising four critical principles: true multilateralism, development, developmental cooperation, and practical cooperation. She noted that China, despite proposing GDI, continues to prioritise BRI projects in Central Asia due to the region's geostrategic importance, especially with regard to its abundant, untapped energy resources. These energy resources are crucial for China's strategic and economic interests, both domestically and internationally. Dr. Rahman noted that the BRI projects in Central Asia are categorised into infrastructure, energy, mining, food, and agriculture. She referred to the bilateral nature of these projects, with a focus on energy needs and the need to secure China's own economic growth. Addressing China’s footprint in Central Asia, she argued that the region, although not included within the GDI, is essential for the BRI due to its strategic and facilitative role. She provided data on China's exports, imports, and foreign direct investments in Central Asia, showcasing the economic impact of the BRI projects on the region. The Chinese engagement with the region, according to Dr. Rahman can be viewed as fostering economic development, increasing foreign reserves, and contributing to the de-dollarisation process, with one of its eventual aims being the overthrow of the US dollar’s global hegemony.

Following the speakers’ presentations, the Chair, Prof. Kathuria, took the discussion forward by inviting questions from audience. The questions covered various aspects, including the environmental impact of GDI in Nepal and other developing nations, concerns about Chinese investments in Sri Lanka and their implications for India, and queries pertaining to the key terms and conditions in agreements related to Chinese projects in Sri Lanka and Central Asia. The panellists provided their

insights into these aspects, discussing environmental considerations, Sri Lanka's governance issues, and China's investments in the region.

## SESSION II

The second session of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC was titled, “**The Global Development Initiative - II**”, and was chaired by **Prof. Mridul Nile**, Professor, Department of Civics and Politics, University of Mumbai. The first speaker for the session was **Dr. Priyanka Pandit**, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR, and her paper was titled, *The Internationalisation Paradox: China's State-Owned Enterprises and Global Development Initiative*. The second speaker of the session was **Dr. Lin Ya-ling**, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, who spoke on *Multilateralism with Chinese Characteristics: Comparing BRI and GDI*. The final speaker for the session was **Mr. Amit Bhandari**, Senior Fellow, Gateway House, Mumbai, and he discussed the *BRI in South Asia: Sri Lanka and Pakistan*.

In his opening remarks, Prof. Nile, briefly touched upon China's three new global initiatives, and referred to the central role of global governance in Chinese foreign policy. He emphasised China's efforts to influence Asia, especially India's neighbourhood, through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). He noted China's strategic aim to reassert and reformulate the global order and systems of governance, portraying itself as a “middle kingdom undergoing significant transformation”. Prof. Nile drew attention to China's growing obsession and insecurity regarding its position in the existing world order, especially during the course of Xi Jinping's leadership in the past decade. According to Prof. Nile, the BRI has been portrayed as a dominant driving force in China's transformation, and the GDI can be viewed as China's strategic attempt to dismantle Western developmental models and replace them with the Chinese model.

**Dr Priyanka Pandit**, the first speaker of the session, framed her arguments within the theoretical debate of liberalism and mercantilism in economics and political economy. The historical coexistence of these two models was discussed, particularly as a factor in the growth of Asian powers. China was referred to as the “bearer of the mercantilist torch”, and Dr. Pandit directed particular focus to China's State Owned Enterprises (SOE). The speaker noted that while SOEs continue to play a crucial role in

China's overseas developmental initiatives, a significant amount of scepticism has also emerged with regard to their fundamental motivations and methods. Dr. Pandit argued that this uncertainty could be attributed to the close relationship between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the SOEs. Concomitantly, there is also a notable lack of transparency within the operating processes of the SOEs, rendering their methods of operations susceptible to significant apprehension. She further delved into the impact of potential positive feedback of global expansion of SOEs on their parent companies in Beijing. The discussion also involved the employment of theories of economic integration, with a focus on institutional match or mismatch between the home and host countries. Dr. Pandit further emphasised the need to disaggregate SOEs, their financing practices, and their role in overseas infrastructure investment projects to in order to effectively analyse initiatives such as the GDI and the BRI.

Contextualising China's foreign policy overtures within the fold of multilateralism, **Dr. Lin Ya-ling**, discussed the differences and similarities between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). Dr. Lin asserted that Southeast Asian countries remain China's primary targets, and noted China's emphasis on its role as a global development actor and a responsible major developing country. According to Dr. Lin, with China's rapid economic growth, President Xi Jinping has actively engaged in international affairs, with a concerted focus on multilateralism and multilateral institutions. The BRI, initiated in 2013, aimed to enhance diplomatic ties, deepen regional connectivity, and address domestic challenges such as China's economic slowdown and corruption. Amidst the increasing scrutiny of the BRI, in Dr. Lin's view, China has positioned the BRI and the GDI as dual strategies within its its foreign policy. While the BRI has focused on regional connectivity, among other challenges, the GDI aims to cover diverse areas such as poverty reduction, food security, climate change, and digital economy, with an emphasis on people-centered development. Dr. Lin argued that these initiatives are a response to major power competition and echo China's commitment to multilateralism. While the BRI has undergone a transition with a focus on relatively smaller investment projects, both the initiatives aim to respond to major power competition through engagement under the garb of various developmental projects, especially in Southeast Asia and nations that comprise the Global South. Dr. Lin further noted that the GDI, especially through its employment of the United Nations as a platform, also reflects China's commitment to multilateralism and enhancing its global voice and influence.



Discussing China's significant investments in South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan and Sri Lanka, **Mr. Amit Bhandari** highlighted the economic challenges arising from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Mr. Bhandari, with special reference to Sri Lanka, noted that the debt incurred by these countries, under the BRI, has worsened their economic and political crises. In Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was initially seen as a strategic project to support an ally in economic distress. However, Mr. Bhandari noted that the bulk of the investments, both proposed and actual, are solely in the power sector, and are coupled with serious challenges such as high-interest rates on Chinese loans. Turning to Sri Lanka, he mentioned that the partnership with China was established during the Sri Lankan Civil War, with Chinese investments split between equity and debt. He raised concerns about overbuilding and potential corruption in China-led infrastructure projects, which could lead to further economic challenges and debt defaults in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Mr. Bhandari argued that there have not been any major Chinese investments in the region recently, in part due to existing crises in the host countries, and China's own internal economic challenges, characterised by the economic slowdown, among other aspects. He further questioned the impact of the Global Development Initiative (GDI), referring to its diffuse objectives and the potential limitations of addressing domestic governance issues in partner countries. Mr. Bhandari also laid emphasis on the challenges faced by South Asian countries due to Chinese investments, and the difficulties in maintaining the existing mega-projects. and posited that Chinese overtures in these countries have significantly reduced their chances of achieving economic normalcy in the near future.

The session culminated with an interactive session, where the questions ranged from the sustainability of BRI projects to the domestic debates in Pakistan and Sri Lanka with regard to these infrastructure projects. The discussion that ensued also included aspects such as project quality standards under the BRI and the GDI, the susceptibility of host countries to incurring massive debts, and the impact of SOEs on China's attempts at privatisation. The profitability of projects under the BRI and the GDI was discussed in terms of inflated costs, Chinese equipment and labour, and high-interest rates. The interactive session also focused on China's own economic complications, and the challenges it faces in sustaining its financial commitments to other nations under the BRI and the GDI. The session concluded with an emphasis on the importance of examining institutional and structural issues and evaluating the employed economic models, and the feasibility of projects for both China and host countries.

### SESSION III

The third session of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai was titled, “**The Global Security Initiative - I**” and chaired by **Dr. Jabin T. Jacob**, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies; and, Director, Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR. The first speaker for the session was **Dr. Shen Ming-shih**, Research Fellow and Director, Division of National Security Research, and Acting Deputy CEO, Institute for National Defence and Security Research, Taipei. His paper was titled, *Military-Civil Fusion in the GSI*. Followed by Dr. Shen, **Lt. Gen. S.L. Narasimhan (Retd.)**, former Director General, Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies, New Delhi discussed the Global Security Initiative in South Asia, in his paper titled, *The GSI and its Implications for South Asia*. **Dr. Jacob** began the session with a brief introduction of the speakers, highlighting their contributions to the field of China studies, while emphasising the importance of constructive analysis.

**Dr. Shen Ming-shih** covered a range of aspects in his talk, from international relations and security issues to specific challenges such as the Taiwan situation, cyber threats, and China's influence on global organisations. Dr. Shen highlighted his scepticism toward the Global Security Initiative (GSI), questioning if it genuinely addresses global security concerns or serves as a tool for China to advance its own interests. In this respect, he emphasised how the ever-increasing civil-military fusion in China is acting as a facilitator for China's GSI. Further, Dr. Shen noted a slew of factors pertaining to China's engagement with the rest of the world. The first factor focused on the vision of common comprehensive cooperative sustainable security, and the speaker cited issues such as the South China Sea disputes and China's security promises to the Philippines. The second factor, noted by Dr. Shen, emphasised China's commitment to the concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity, however, in his view, significant concerns have emerged, especially through the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Dr. Shen discussed China's adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter, as the third factor, with concerns pertaining to China's support for Russia in the ongoing Ukrainian conflict. The fourth factor, according to the speaker, refers to the resolution of water resource conflicts, particularly between India and China. Here, Dr. Shen highlighted the existing agreements between the two countries, while also noting China's unilateral disregard for the same, especially through dam-building operations. The speaker asserted that the fifth factor addresses the peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue, with a specific mention of the Taiwan issue, and doubts about China's commitment towards a peaceful resolution in this case. Within the ambit of the sixth factor, Dr. Shen shed light

upon aspects of security in both the traditional and the non-traditional domains, including cyber-attacks carried out by China against Taiwan. He further outlined a timeline of key events related to GSI, including Xi Jinping's direct involvement in its formulation, as well as the process of its development over the last few years. Further, he also highlighted various existing perspectives with regard to China's commitments within the GSI, juxtaposing them with potential contradictions and concerns, apparent through China's actions, such as the non-resolution of its existing territorial disputes, and blatant support for belligerent countries.

The next speaker, **Lt. Gen. S.L. Narasimhan**, put forth his arguments around three primary aspects: the suitability of the GSI within China's broader strategy, the current status of, and developments under, the GSI, and the potential implications of the initiative for South Asia. He noted the interconnectedness of the GDI, GSI, and GCI as part of a larger strategy to facilitate an altered global architecture in both security and finance. The speaker highlighted the strategic timing of the initiative's announcement in September, which coincided with the UN General Assembly, which he ascribed to China's attempt at garnering international support. He referred to China's aim to leverage existing global structures to its advantage rather than creating entirely new structures. China's core commitments under the GSI, as well as the GCI, were briefly discussed, focusing on their manifestation in South Asia. Lt. Gen. Narasimhan presented examples of how China is building bilateral relationships in South Asia, particularly with Bhutan and Nepal, with the aim of resolving existing boundary disputes, and influencing matters of security. He also noted the willingness of Pakistan to support China's new global initiatives and touched upon Sri Lanka's emerging role as a naval support base. The speaker also highlighted the pro-China leanings of the Maldives, especially after the recent Presidential elections in the island nation.. Additionally, the General also discussed the current situation in the Central Asian Republics, and argued that there exists a division of responsibility between Russia and China in terms of economic and security interactions in the region. Lt. Gen. Narasimhan concluded by emphasising the importance of the Central Asian Republics in the success of the One Belt, One Road initiative, and linked it to the evolving scenario in South Asia, where China's new initiatives are currently being implemented. In his view, the growing presence of China in both of these regions, along with China's attempts to usher in connectivity through its initiatives spells a need for concerted caution among the nations in the region, especially India.

Following the speakers' presentations, the floor was opened for an interactive session with the audience. The discussion that ensued assessed China's focus on specific regions, such as the South

China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and Taiwan, within the context of the GSI. Concerns pertaining to China's territorial claims, increased military activity in the aforementioned regions, and its approach to conflicts in these areas were also raised. The speakers also referred to the discrepancy between China's claims of broad support and the varying levels of endorsement from different nations falling within the fold of the three new initiatives in addition to the BRI, with a focus on Central Asian countries. The discussion also addressed the alternatives India can provide to counter these initiatives, given the potential fallout of China's actions in South Asia and Central Asia.

#### SESSION IV

The fourth session of the Conference was titled, '**The Global Security Initiative – II**'. **Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar**, Associate Dean External Relations, School of Government, MIT World Peace University, Pune, chaired the session. The panel included **Dr. David Shullman**, Senior Director, Global China Hub, Atlantic Council; and, Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, **Dr. Wu Tsung-han**, Assistant Research Fellow, Division of Cyber Security and Decision-Making Simulation, Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, and **Dr. Anand P. Krishnan**, Fellow, Centre for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi-NCR. The first speaker, Dr. Shullman, discussed the implications of the Global Security Initiative (GSI) for China's conceptualisation of an altered world order in his paper titled, *China's Global Security Initiative: The Blueprint for a Transformed Global Order*. Dr. Wu, reflected on the convergences between the GSI and the Digital Silk Road in his paper titled, *The Digital Silk Road under the GSI*, and Dr. Krishnan analysed the confluence of private military contractors and the GSI in his paper titled, *Private Military Contractors and China's GSI*.

The chair, **Dr. Sudhakar**, drew attention to on China's overt claims about playing a major role in building and managing a new security scenario in the 'new era' under the leadership of Xi Jinping, which, in his view, China was so far reluctant in proclaiming. He went on to highlight various instances to support this claim, such as, China's involvement in the Iran-Saudi Arabia deal, discussions with Bhutan on resolving their boundary dispute, and statements on the Russia-Ukraine war. The overarching theme, according to Dr. Sudhakar, is that China is extending its influence beyond its immediate neighbourhood and is actively participating in global security affairs.

The first speaker, **Dr. David Shullman**, highlighted the inherent contradictions between the lofty principles of the GSI and Beijing's pursuit of narrow political interests that underscore the utility of the GSI in China's propaganda efforts. His arguments focused on how the GSI aligns with Xi Jinping and the party-state's strategic foreign policy goals. This includes the GSI's role in categorising and managing core security interests, utilising diplomacy, and driving the transformation of global governance to suit the Communist Party of China's ambitions for global leadership. Dr. Shullman further highlighted how China employs the GSI to justify its actions. For instance, China's support toward Russia, even as it invaded a sovereign nation, was justified by invoking the GSI's tenets on respecting sovereignty, and non-interference in the internal matters of other countries. He also noted Beijing's opposition to the so-called "bloc relationships", and its tacit support for countries like Russia, Pakistan, North Korea, and Iran, despite claiming no formal alliance relationships. Dr. Shullman emphasised that the GSI must be viewed as part of China's comprehensive vision for a new world order, where authoritarian governance is accepted as legitimate, along with China's objective to compete with the United States for global leadership, and by extension, challenge the foundations of liberal democracy. According to Dr. Shullman, China's rise, as indicated by the GSI and its sister initiatives, reflects a shift away from integration into the existing order dominated by the USA. These initiatives are intended to respond to global changes and if managed properly, could establish China as the centre of global governance. Beijing's ambition with the GSI goes beyond mere power competition, and it seeks to replace liberal democracy, and reshape the global order. This systemic competition, Dr. Shullman argued, underscores China's push to make the international system more conducive to authoritarian governments. Hence, the speaker emphasised the need to consider and analyse China's initiatives seriously, given the potential influence on global governance and the perceived appeal of democracy in the developing world.

**Dr. Wu Tsung-han**, the second speaker of the session, discussed the Digital Silk Road (DSR) under the Global Security Initiative (GSI). According to him, although these initiatives were launched independently, there exists a potential convergence, offering mutual support to enhance China's global influence. Dr. Wu highlighted the varying interpretations of the DSR, proposed by different scholars. He focused on one such interpretation, where the DSR includes far more countries than those China has formally signed MoUs with. According to this perspective, the DSR is considered a subset of the BRI, with the strategic aim of augmenting China's digital connectivity with participating countries, and ultimately expanding its influence across the digital domain. Dr. Wu also highlighted another interpretation that perceives the DSR as a commitment without a singular geopolitical objective,

allowing participating countries and companies to shape its development. Despite the differing interpretations, the prevalent view is that the DSR is intended as a supporting framework within the BRI. The overarching aim of this set-up is to extend China's influence within UN-led mechanisms, and counter the influence of the US and its allies. Moving forward, Dr. Wu also focused on China's growing cooperation with the Global South, where Africa has emerged as a crucial region, with approximately 70% of undersea cables built by the Chinese company, Huawei. However, concerns and challenges surrounding the DSR have also emerged, including apprehensions regarding how secure Chinese digital products actually are, the authoritarian nature of China's government, and the potential risks to privacy of citizens and their data. According to the speaker, China aims to mitigate these concerns by positioning the DSR and the GSI within the realm of cooperation and development. However, he cautioned, cybersecurity and cyber sovereignty remain as matters of great concern. In conclusion, Dr. Wu reasserted that recent developments suggest that the DSR and the GSI can mutually support each other, therefore, leading to potential convergence. The enhancement of China's global influence, and the potential reshaping of the strategic landscape of the BRI, remain as the overarching objectives. At the same time, Dr. Wu argued, questions regarding China's economic slowdown and its capacity to sustain and successfully manage these ambitious projects persist, allowing for the emergence of uncertainties with regard to the perception of China on the global stage.

**Dr. Anand P. Krishnan**, the final speaker of the session, delved into the employment and role of private military contractors within the context of China's GSI. H Dr. Krishnan also contextualised the broader role of private military contractors, and the private military industry in the emergent global milieu. Elucidating upon the central thesis of his paper, he noted that the evolution of warfare over the last several decades, marked by the introduction of relatively small-scale, transnational conflicts, coupled with increased outbound investments, has accentuated the importance of private military contractors. Scrutinising the increasing prominence of the private military industry, Dr. Krishnan argued that the rise of these entities has been popularised through pop culture, with notable examples such as the Wagner Group and Blackwater PMC amassing unprecedented media attention, particularly during the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. He further posited that China's 'going out' strategy, characterised by increased outward investments, can be seen as a focal point in the rise of these companies. As Chinese investments increased, the speaker further argued, the need to secure assets and protect personnel became paramount, leading to the creation of a new market for private security. Supporting his argument, Dr. Krishnan, cited the Chinese white paper on national defence from 2019, which emphasised the safeguarding of overseas interests as a core mission. He further discussed how

Chinese private military contractors differ from their Western counterparts, and stressed upon the disparity in combat experience. Dr. Krishnan noted that unlike Western private military contractors, the Chinese lack the required combat experience. Notably, the top-down programmes introduced by Xi Jinping, including the BRI and the GSI, lack substantive legislative or regulatory mechanisms, operating within a legal grey area which allows the state to maintain control, with considerable flexibility. Furthermore, this also enable the state to deny responsibility in the case of infringements abroad. Interestingly, Dr. Krishnan noted, the primary clientele for private security companies are China's State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). As SOEs expand within the BRI, these private military companies have found increased opportunities, and in turn, an ever-expanding role. However, the speaker argued, despite these opportunities, structural deficiencies within these companies persist, partly owing to blurred lines between private and public in the operations of these SOEs. Most private military companies, headed by former state security officials recruit extensively from among former People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops and police forces, and operate under the close scrutiny of the CPC. Dr. Krishnan concluded by emphasising that the intricate interplay between private military contractors, the GSI, and China's evolving strategies unveils a complex landscape that warrants continuous examination.

Several questions were raised by the audience during the interactive session, and covered the impact of the denial of crucial technology by Western countries on China's DSR. The discussion also delved into the GSI's alignment with China's revisionist or reformist ambitions, and the various structural and operational divergences between China's private military companies and the more prominent military contractors such as Blackwater PMC and the Wagner Group. Another important dimension was brought in during the ensuing discussion, in the form of the environmental challenges posed by China's new global initiatives, and how it intends to mitigate the same, given the Chinese commitments to SDGs.

## SESSION V

The fifth session titled, '**The Global Civilization Initiative**' was chaired by **Mr. Manoj Kewalramani**, Chairperson, Indo-Pacific Research Programme; and, China Studies Fellow, Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru. The panel featured three speakers, **Dr. Shih Chien-yu**, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute for National Defense and Security

Research, Taipei; **Dr. Abbas Bobokhonov**, Head, China Studies Program, Institute for Advanced International Studies, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent; and, **Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar**, Associate Dean, External Relations, School of Government, MIT World Peace University, Pune. The first speaker, Dr. Shih, discussed the implications of civilizational initiative for minorities through his paper titled, *The Place of Ethnic Minorities in the GCI*. Dr. Bobokhonov spoke next, and covered the relevance of Central Asia to the GCI in his paper titled, *The GCI and Central Asia*. The final speaker, Dr. Sudhakar, laid down a foundational understanding of China's GCI, and linked it to its endeavours in South Asia in his paper titled, *The GCI and South Asia*.

The Chair, **Mr. Kewalramani**, opened the session by briefly introducing the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) and touching upon some of its salient features. In his view, out of the three initiatives, the GCI has the most significant normative influence upon global institutions. He further stated that the GCI essentially seeks to achieve "norm internalisation". Mr. Kewalramani argued that the initiative's aims largely lie in challenging liberal ideas. According to the chair, one of the ways in which China has endeavoured to carry this out is by equating 'liberalism' with 'Westernisation', and in turn, equating 'Westernisation' with American hypocrisy. It was posited that the GCI is the most pernicious out of the three initiatives, as it challenges liberal values such as social progress, freedom, and the centrality of individuals in society.

**Dr. Shin Chien-yu**, the first speaker, began by reiterating the Chair's remark that the GCI is the most significant initiative out of the three global initiatives. Dr. Shih outlined the ways in which both the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI) play an instrumental role in fulfilling and achieving the ultimate goals of the GCI. While noting the global ramifications of the GCI, the speaker argued that it is increasingly relevant to analyse domestic dynamics in China, which, in his view, are also impacted by the initiative. According to Dr. Shih, the GCI emphasises four key aspects: respect for the diversity of civilizations; promotion of common human values; a sequence of values including peace, development, justice, fairness, democracy, and freedom; and, robust international people-to-people exchange. However, beneath the surface, there lie a slew of ulterior motives. Among these, he stressed upon China's aim to expand its influence global, while side-lining the West.. The speaker posited that the UN is anticipated to play a fundamental role in the coming years as China pursues its objectives. Analysing China's actions under the three new initiatives, Dr. Shih highlighted China's pragmatic approach, intervening selectively in regions such as Central Asia, without overextending to areas that involve uncertainty with respect to securing its core interests..



Additionally, the speaker argued, there is an ongoing Chinese effort to reshape the global understanding of universal values. There is an emphasis on prioritising the right to work over concepts like freedom or democracy. In this manner, he noted, the allegations of forced labour in Xinjiang are dismissed by China., and its policies are justified. The ultimate goal, Dr. Shih argued, is to transform the Uyghur population in such a manner that it can be brought under a pan-Chinese civilizational umbrella.

Dr. **Abbos Bobokhonov**, in his talk, shed light upon Samuel P. Huntington's argument with regard to an inevitable global conflict arising out of a clash of civilizations, and posited that China rejects Huntington's proposed inevitability of such a clash. Instead, he argued, China advocates for a future built on cooperation and mutual learning, and this forms the attendant basis of the GCI. Dr. Bobokhonov also highlighted the factors that contribute to the promotion of the GCI, The propagation of the Middle Kingdom notion, in the speaker's view, signifies that China considers itself the cultural, political, and economic centre of the world. This notion plays an integral role in shaping China's views on global governance. In the context of global competition, Dr. Bobokhonov argued, China aims to shape a "belt of civilizations" around itself, primarily through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, it was posited that China intends to enhance its role in global politics and establish itself as a leading global civilisation, while serving as a model for other developing countries. Concomitantly, the speaker highlighted, China's perceived civilizational boundaries extend beyond national borders, as it also subsumes within its fold the Chinese diaspora abroad. Dr. Bobokhonov also brought in the impact of the GCI in Central Asia, and discussed the various prospects and associated challenges with its implementation. Central Asia is viewed as a crossroads between the West and the East, and therefore, plays the role of a key reference point for China's GCI. According to Dr. Bobokhonov,, China possesses strong political and economic influence in Central Asia, and the inclusion of the region into the GCI represents a crucial aspect of China's broader strategy to enhance its influence in economic, political, cultural, and humanitarian spheres

The final speaker, **Dr. Parimal Maya Sudhakar**, elucidated upon how China's introduction of civilisation as an essential actor in international relations marks a departure from its previous emphasis on establishing itself as a nation-state at parity with Western states. Moreover, he noted, the GCI was introduced in a conference of political parties from various nations, and not in the UN or any other multilateral forum. In the speaker's view, this implies that the intended audience did not comprise heads of state or governments. Rather, China intended to focus on the heads or representatives of

political parties. This suggests that China aims to engage in dialogue with a broader spectrum of societies in each country, thus emphasising interactions beyond the government-to-government level. The concept of the GCI, Dr. Sudhakar argued, signifies a reassertion of China's Middle Kingdom notion. China perceives itself as the leader with respect to advancing human civilisation, with the GCI positioning Chinese civilization at the forefront, guiding others towards a common, acceptable level of modernisation and development. He also touched upon India's position vis-a-vis the GCI, arguing that India poses a significant hurdle for China in promoting the GCI, as well as the GSI, in South Asia. Furthermore, he stated, China has proposed several key aspects for South Asia within the framework of the GCI, where China has advocated for modernisation while preserving cultural elements. This, according to the speaker, can also be seen as the core principle within the fold of the GCI.

The discussion that ensued delved into the complexities of interpreting civilisation, and concerns about China's position on concepts such as freedom and democracy. An important aspect with regard to interpreting civilisation was also raised during the discussion, wherein the GCI enables countries within its fold to interpret values, otherwise considered universal, as per their own civilisational imperatives. Concerns were also raised with regard to the GCI facilitating the endorsement and legitimisation of the repression of ethnic minorities, if universal values such as freedom and liberty are granted subjective interpretations. Ultimately, China's *modus operandi* in Xinjiang may also serve as a model for handling ethnic minorities in other authoritarian countries. The discussion also touched upon the risk of endorsing repressive practices under the guise of cultural and civilisational interpretation and the potential consequences for ethnic minorities globally.

### VALEDICTORY SESSION

The Valedictory Session of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai was chaired by **Prof. Ravindra D. Kulkarni**, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mumbai. The final session of the two-day Conference featured a panel of eminent scholars and practitioners, which included **Adm. Arun Prakash**, former Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy, **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, Convener, 6th IFC; and, Associate Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and **Prof. Mrudul Nile**, Professor, Department of Civics and Politics, University of Mumbai

The **Valedictory Address** was delivered by **Adm. Arun Prakash**, who, drawing from his long years of experience in the maritime security domain, elucidated upon the various facets of India-China relations, while granting an in-depth assessment of some of the forces of friction in the bilateral relationship. Contextualising India-China relations within the broader ambit of China's three new global initiatives, Adm. Prakash offered thought-provoking insights, with a special focus maritime security. The Admiral presented a seasoned view of the turbulent international landscape, stressing upon China's potential global role, and the need for India to assert itself against the emergent Chinese hegemony. Shedding light upon the geopolitical developments in India's neighbourhood, from the tense Himalayan border to the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, Adm. Arun Prakash highlighted the manner in which China is expanding its footprint. China's military engagement with India along the Himalayan border, in tandem with its maritime adventurism on the high seas has resulted in a situation where India needs to come forth with a clear strategy. Existing methods of engaging with China have not yielded significant results, and this, in the Admiral's view, poses a serious challenge to not only India, but also to the rest of the region. Explicating recent endeavours made by the Chinese to garner support from fellow developing countries and emerge as the unchallenged leader of the Global South, Adm. Prakash argued that most of these nations face an uncertain future. Taking this into account, it was suggested that India should consider bridging the chasm of uncertainty, and contributing to regional stability and economic prosperity through its leadership of the Global South.

Progressing into the nuanced realm of matters military, Adm. Prakash advocated the employment of military diplomacy in the context of engaging with neighbouring nations, with the aim of mitigating the challenges pose by China. Laying emphasis on multilateral military exercises such as the Malabar, and security groupings such as the QUAD, the Admiral argued that India must leverage its navy within the ambit of maritime diplomacy in order to counter China's increasing influence over the Indo-Pacific. Noting the benefits of such an approach, Adm. Prakash recommended that India should endeavour to expand the range of its maritime network. He mentioned India's successful deal with Singapore, built over years of military-to-military cooperation, which allows Indian warships access to Singaporean naval ports. The speaker also underscored the urgency of this strategic call to action, as China continues to posture itself through initiatives like the BRI, the GDI, the GSI, and the GCI. Adm. Prakash concluded the Address by suggesting that India should shed its inhibitions vis-a-vis power projection and posturing, especially in the face of a rising China. By effectively realising its own strategic aims, India would be in a better position to navigate the tumultuous seas surrounding the

challenges posed by China, and in turn, would be able to both engage and compete with China on a regional and global scale.

Following Adm. Prakash's Address, **Dr. Aravind Yelery**, presented the **Conference Report**. Summing up the entire experience, he reiterated that regardless of the challenges China poses, India needs to engage. He acknowledged the need for nuanced statecraft to address China's coercive power while emphasising that the three new initiatives are designed to keep friends and adversaries alike confused. This, in turn, showcases China's insecurities despite its status as a civilisational state. He drew parallels between the 1971 negotiations between the US and China and the current situation, suggesting that China is now inviting negotiations with other nations. Dr. Yelery posited that China is strategically positioning itself as the party to negotiate with, similar to how the US negotiated with China in the past. This parallel aimed to highlight China's evolving role in international relations and its strategic approach to negotiations, suggesting that China, like the US in the past, is actively shaping the terms of global diplomatic interactions. Noting the diversity of discussions at the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai, Dr. Yelery stated that the Conference has covered two important aspects; first, locating, and inquiring about the logic, optics and operative side of the three initiatives, and weighing them *vis-à-vis* the BRI; and, second, locating and deliberating potential precautionary measures. Lastly, he thanked the panellists and participants for their contribution toward making the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai a success, and stated that the Institute of Chinese Studies shall continue to be at the forefront of discussions and debates pertaining to China, with more such conferences in the future.

The **Closing Remarks** were delivered by **Prof. Mrudul Nile**, who conveyed his gratitude to the organisers, the panellists and the audience for their valuable contributions. Reviewing the process of organising the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai, Prof. Nile commended the efforts made by Dr. Yelery and the Institute of Chinese Studies toward conceptualising and convening an international conference of such scale. The vibrant discussions and ample engagement between the panellists, from across nations, and the audience granted insights into the ever-growing interest in China studies and community of China scholars in India. Prof. Nile conveyed his appreciation for the generous support accorded by the University of Mumbai, the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre, and CKT College. He also exhorted the young volunteers from the University of Mumbai for their help in organising the Conference. The relevance of the 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai was reiterated by Prof. Nile, who further stated that the discussions and debates emanating from the same shall go a long way in deciding India's future engagement with China.

The 6<sup>th</sup> IFC @Mumbai was brought to an official close by the chair of the session, **Prof. Ravindra D. Kulkarni**. Reviewing the proceedings of the Conference, Prof. Kulkarni spoke about the importance of understanding China. China's strategic approach, with an emphasis on its calculative tactics to manipulate perceptions in Asia and beyond was highlighted by Prof. Kulkarni. There is an urgent need, in the speaker's view, to gauge Chinese strategic aims, especially with respect to initiatives such as the BRI, the GDI, the GSI, and the GCI, and for India to develop a comprehensive strategy for engagement. Prof. Kulkarni also highlighted the evolving Indian position with respect to science and technology, economy, and foreign policy and called for an accelerated push for academic research and initiatives to support national interests. The efforts of institutions such as the Institute of Chinese Studies, the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the University of Mumbai toward well-rounded research and academic output were commended by the speaker. Prof. Kulkarni concluded his address by conveying his gratitude to all the organisers and the participants for their engagement and participation.

## IMAGE GALLERY

















## 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 programs 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 59 th year of publication



The **Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies** under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence (SNIoE) is a research centre focussed on the economy, borders and identities, the environment and regional geopolitics of the wider Himalayan region including the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram. While there are scholars of the Himalayas and small centres and research groups focused on the region, there is a need for institutionalised efforts at the national level that brings together a wide variety of disciplinary and sectoral approaches to the study of what is one of the world's most environmentally sensitive and politically fraught regions and one that simultaneously has a significant influence on the economic livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people. At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the role of geopolitics in this region.

Therefore, even as the Centre pushes for an approach to studying the Himalayas that crosses both national and disciplinary boundaries as well as engenders a three-way conversation between central and local governments, academia and the people who live in the region, it also remains sharply aware of and is attuned to geopolitics and the policy imperatives that surround it.

The Centre reflects SNIoE's global outlook and ambitions, focusing on engaging researchers with niche or specialised interest in the wider Himalayas, and identifying and creating a network of scholars in the field, both in India and externally, to support its work. This critical mass of scholars of and from the region will redress the longstanding neglect or asymmetrical representation of the Himalayas and

beyond, in knowledge, discourse and policy interventions. It also aims to develop and utilise strong links with the policy community and government agencies in a mutually supportive exercise.

The Centre also signifies a leadership role for the SNIoE, as it attempts to fill gaps in both academic and policy spaces. This leadership role is in keeping with the University's identity and goals of promoting innovation, creativity and interdisciplinary engagement in the field of Indian education. The Centre also offers the SNIoE's own faculty and students opportunities to collaborate with counterparts from across the wider Himalayan region as well as those working on the region from elsewhere in the world.



**The Centre for Advanced Policy Research and Initiatives (CAPRI)** is a policy research institute established to positively intervene in policy processes to enhance research on social and economic policy issues. Based in Navi Mumbai, CAPRI is committed to bringing newer dimensions and perspectives to policy with advanced policy research and opinion tools, ensuring a prosperous future for Maharashtra and India by promoting sound policy ideas. By underscoring the importance of academic freedom and the promotion of independent research and studies, CAPRI aspires to provide foundations for advancement in knowledge and application of overlapping areas of academic concerns in humanities and social science.



**YASHWANTRAO CHAVAN CENTRE**  
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Late Yashwantrao Chavan - First Chief Minister and Sculptor of Progressive Maharashtra was a visionary leader and aid the foundation of agricultural and industrial development in the state. He gave voice to the lower strata of the society through the strong Panchayati Raj system. He also weaved a strong web of cooperatives across the state. After the demise of Yashwantrao Chavan, his followers came together on 25th November 1984 and decided to take his work forward and accordingly Yashwantrao Chavan Center was established on 17th September 1985 in Mumbai. **Yashwantrao Chavan Center** is a non - partisan and secular platform which aims to address the various pressing issues faced by Maharashtra by creating a dialogue around it. The centre also houses the Yashwantrao Chavan Research Centre of Social Sciences, a think tank. During the last three decades, the center has tried to take forward the vision of Late Yashwantrao Chavan ahead.



मुंबई विद्यापीठ  
University of Mumbai

The **University of Mumbai** is among the first three universities to be established in the year 1857. It is proud to have Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R Ambedkar as its most illustrious and internationally acclaimed alumni. The University has made many other notable contributions to the Indian National Movement and the Social Reform Movement of the Nation. Widely acknowledged as one of the foremost universities in the country, it has left an indelible mark on scholarly and academic growth in India. While the geographical expanse of the university is 700 km, it has more than 850 affiliated colleges and more than 100 recognised institutions. From the tribal students in Palghar district to the metropolitan youth of Mumbai - the University is equally renowned for accommodating all diversities.



**Changu Kana Thakur Arts, Commerce and Science College (Autonomous)**, New Panvel, is a multi-faculty premier institution of higher education with an enrolment of more than 4000 students and offers 15 undergraduate, 15 post-graduate, 01 post-graduate diploma and 07 PhD programmes. The college has received a status of 2(f) and 12 (B) from University Grants Commission, New Delhi and permanently affiliated to University of Mumbai. It is one of the youngest colleges in India to complete three cycles of NAAC accreditation with A grade in first and second cycle and A+ (with CGPA 3.61) in the third cycle (valid till 2024). The college also has been awarded with the status of college with potential for excellence by UGC, New Delhi in 2009-10 which was subsequently continues from 2013-14. The college has 16 faculty as PhD guides, with 60 students completing their PhD and 80 students registering for the doctoral programme. They, together, are working on several research projects and have published research papers in national and international peer-reviewed journals. In order to boost student community's capacities in research, the college motivates and guides them to undertake community-based research projects under National Service Scheme (NSS) department. Over the years, the college has brought up many laurels due to its holistic development and excellence in academics, cultural, sports and social activities at the university, state and national level.



INSTITUTE OF  
**Chinese**  
STUDIES, DELHI  
ESTABLISHED IN 1969  
中国研究院  
德里  
成立于 1969 年

*The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) is a pioneering research institute in India. It evolved from the China Study Group (CSG) established in Delhi in 1969, by academics and researchers from the University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the then Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, along with some diplomats and journalists.*

*Now more than fifty years old and with a nation-wide fellowship and network, the ICS has emerged as an internationally-acclaimed research institute, and a credible non-partisan policy institute, focused on studying and analyzing historical and contemporary issues related to China and the East Asian countries.*

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Website : <https://www.icsin.org>  
E-Mail: [info@icsin.org](mailto:info@icsin.org)



#### ABOUT THE COVER

The dragon sculpture on the cover is from the Nanputuo Temple in Xiamen, Fujian Province, PR China. This temple was first built during the Tang Dynasty (618 -907 CE) and underwent several cycles of destruction and restoration over ten centuries. The latest restoration was done in the 1980s. The Green Dragon depicted sits on the rooftop of the Hall of Heavenly Kings (Tian Wang Dian).

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