

Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Evaluating the
Dichotomies in India's
and China's 'Regionalism'
in the Indo-Pacific Region*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker :

Kulkarni Mandar Vijay

13 November 2024

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Speaker: Dr. Kulkarni Mandar Vijay, Associate Professor, Economics, GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hyderabad

Chair: Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi

Date: 13 November 2024

Venue: Zoom

- The seminar addressed the contrasting approaches of India and China toward regionalism in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on their strategies to secure their economic and security interests in the Indian Ocean. Dr. Kulkarni emphasised the shift from the Asia-Pacific model to a multilateral Indo-Pacific order that incorporates diverse stakeholders like India, Japan, and the ASEAN.
- Dr Kulkarni outlined India's regional strategy, which rests on strategic autonomy and fostering security partnerships with like-minded nations. Through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and collaborative maritime exercises like Malabar, India promotes a rule-based, inclusive order that respects sovereignty, thereby positioning itself as a stabilising force in the region.
- In contrast, China's strategy revolves around the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the String of Pearls strategy, which focus on establishing a network of ports and infrastructure investments across Asia and Africa. This approach aligns with China's aim to expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific, yet it has sparked concerns regarding economic dependency and regional security, as is reflected in the case of the Hambantota Port lease in Sri Lanka.

- Dr. Kulkarni discussed China's assertive actions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, noting that these moves exacerbate tensions and highlight the significance of ASEAN's role as a neutral player in fostering regional stability. He suggested that ASEAN's positioning could support multilateral frameworks aligned with India's inclusive vision.
- Dr. Kulkarni acknowledged India's challenge of balancing economic engagement with China and its security partnerships. He noted that while economic ties are essential, India must simultaneously strengthen security partnerships to maintain stability. He also addressed concerns over the sustainability of China's BRI, suggesting that debt pressures may lead some nations to reconsider their participation.
- Prof. Alka Acharya commended Dr. Kulkarni's comprehensive analysis, urging the inclusion of cultural and historical perspectives when assessing Indo-Pacific dynamics. Dr. Tiwary concluded the seminar by emphasising the importance of continued scholarly dialogue to shape effective policies in the region, particularly as India and China's strategies increasingly come to bear down upon the Indo-Pacific region.

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