

Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*The Chinese Community in
India: Negotiating Mobility
and Belonging*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker :

Severin Kuok

11 December 2024

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Speaker: Dr. Severin Kuok, Guest Faculty, Chinese Language, School of Global Affairs, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi

Chair: Dr. Ritu Agarwal, Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Date: 11 December 2024

Venue: Zoom

- The seminar focused on the experiences of the Chinese diaspora in India and how their sense of ‘belonging’ has evolved. It also explored their rich cultural heritage, economic activities, and dual identity as both Chinese and Indians. It further examined how they navigated their belonging and integration within Indian society and beyond. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, integrating history, migration theory, and cultural studies, Dr. Severin Kuok argued that the Chinese-Indians in India and other countries have developed a unique sense of identity and belonging.
- The seminar addressed the voluntary and involuntary migration of the Chinese community from India to China, particularly following the 1962 Sino-Indian War. The speaker provided an in-depth analysis of the socio-political and cultural challenges faced by the Chinese community in the aftermath of the war, with a focus on deportation and subsequent resettlement of individuals in China.
- The 1962 Sino-Indian War was a turning point for the Chinese community in India, with many deported individuals forced to rebuild their lives in unfamiliar territories in China, such as Yunnan Province. These individuals faced significant challenges, including language barriers and a lack of familiarity with Chinese culture. Despite these obstacles, some Chinese-Indian families retained emotional ties with both India and China, blending cultural practices in their daily lives.

- The speaker also highlighted a shift in migrations during the 1960s and 1970s, when many Chinese families in India chose to migrate to Canada, with Toronto emerging as a prominent destination. These families maintained connections with their homeland by continuing business operations in India while relocating their families abroad. This transnational migration fostered a "hyphenated" identity, with Chinese-Indians in Canada preserving cultural traditions such as celebrating Chinese New Year in Kolkata, and seeking marriage partners from India to uphold cultural values.
- The speaker explored the challenges faced by deported individuals, including cultural and linguistic barriers, and the resilience demonstrated in maintaining ties to both India and China. The seminar underscored the complexity of belonging, emphasising that emotional and cultural connections often transcend political identities. The speaker concluded by stating that these transnational identities and cultural bonds endure across generations, bridging national and ethnic divides.

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