



15th ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF CHINA STUDIES (AICCS)

SPECIAL THEME: *Connected Geographies and Cultural Interfaces*

17-19 November 2022

VIRTUAL MODE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Organised by

**INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES, NEW DELHI
& INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
GUWAHATI**

in cooperation with

**GAUHATI UNIVERSITY & OMEO KUMAR DAS
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND
DEVELOPMENT**

in partnership with

INDIA OFFICE, KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The 15th All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS) was held on November 17-19, 2021, in virtual mode. The Conference was organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) and the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, in association with Gauhati University & OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, and in partnership with the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS); the Special Theme of the Conference was “**Connected Geographies and Cultural Interfaces**”.
- A large number of individual abstracts were received in response to the Call for Papers for the 15th AICCS. Many of these were excellent in terms both contemporary and long-term relevance, methodology, content and research focus. Of the 142 abstracts received, we shortlisted 73 abstracts. And of the abstracts selected, only about 26 full papers were finally received from which 15 were selected by a board of reviewers for final presentation through a rigorous process based on the importance and originality of the theme, methodological rigor, in-depth research and significance of the findings.
- Notably, the 15th AICCS attracted representation from nearly 35 institutions and more than nine hundred participants. The platform brought together scholars from diverse disciplines and training, central and state universities, and research institutions and think-tanks. The sharing of research and exchange of perspectives under the aegis of the 15th AICCS has the potential to launch significant academic collaborations in future.
- In their opening remarks at the Inaugural Session, the Honorary Director, ICS, Prof. Alka Acharya and the Director of IIT Guwahati, Prof. T. G. Sitharam dwelt on the special strengths and features of the respective institutions, their research profile and scholarship and expressed their hopes for future collaborative works through the AICCS network.
- In his opening remarks, Dr. Adrian Haack, the Director of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in India, spoke of the strategic importance of connecting regions between two or more nation-states and how such regions can become a place of socio-political-cultural exchange and understanding. He also opined that India and China can only mitigate their differences through dialogue and mutual understanding, and academic research has an important role to play.
- In her comments, the Convener Prof. Sabaree Mitra traced the journey of AICCS from its inception in 2006 to the present when it has become a prominent platform for

showcasing research in India on China; through collaboration with different institutions and universities across the country. She hailed the pioneering role played by the AICCS in mentoring young and emerging scholars from different disciplines with interest in studying China and in building strong scholarly and research networks among them.

- Prof. Sukanya Sharma, Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, said that IIT Guwahati was expanding its ambit in various fields of research and given its location as the gateway to India's North-east, much more funding by the state and central government was essential to enable more intensive and serious research work.

- In the Keynote Address titled, '**China and Southeast Asia: A Contemporary History**', eminent historian Prof. Prasenjit Duara elaborated on how trade, civilizational exchanges and dynastic interest in China and South-East Asia from medieval times till the present shaped the entire region. He emphasized the importance of historical developments, viz, the ancient imperial tribute system of China, the sea and land silk route from China to east Asia to India, and trade and commercial exchanges in the region since the medieval times to the present, which will help us to understand the present-day socio-political-cultural structure in the region. He also explained that through in-depth historical analysis of trade and commercial exchanges we will be able to understand the rationale behind China's BRI project and also be able to comprehend the trade exchanges between PRC and other countries.

- The 15th AICCS had three Special Panels reflecting diverse interest and concerns, covering themes of regional interactions and strategic significance, of historical and cultural connections, both tangible and intangible, through history, and a Special Panel on the State of China Studies in India. As a Curtain Raiser to the 15th AICCS, a panel discussion was organised on its eve on November 16, 2022, on the theme of the **CPC's 20th Party Congress** chaired by Prof. Alka Acharya. The panelists were Dr. Shannon Tiezzi, Prof. David Zweig and Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty. All the Special Panels were conceived and convened by scholars with substantial body of work on these niche areas and were by invitation.

- Special Panel I on the ***State of China Studies in India*** was convened by Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary and was chaired by Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty. Four presentations by five scholars approached the theme from different perspectives to analyze the gaps and challenges evident in the way China Studies has developed in India. Adopting cautious optimism, the panelists highlighted the questions and choices facing the Indian scholars as they attempted to overcome limitations of field work and resources.

- Special Panel II on the *Institutional Interfaces & Informal Histories in the Himalayan Contact Zone* was convened by Dr. Swargajyoti Gohain and chaired by Prof. Mahendra Lama. This panel explored connected geographies through cooperation, co-existence and collaboration across political boundaries in the Himalayas. The presentations examined interfaces across the Himalayas by studying histories of institutionalized as well as informal networks. Some of the questions explored were the following: How does the circulation of Buddhist monks, pilgrims and scholars map a contact zone? How do ideas, narratives, and knowledge stemming from both official and popular sources create connected geographies? What are the processes of their production, and implications of power and privilege? The panelists explored these questions through a historical and anthropological lens.

- Special Panel III on the *Geopolitics of Transborder Waters* was convened and chaired by Prof. Nimmi Kurian. The panel debated the imaginative counterpoints to pluralize the imagination of the Brahmaputra by mapping voices, aspirations and perceptions from a borderlands perspective. Many of these issues are located at the intersection between rights and resources, ecologies and cultures, making them central to the ability of people to realize their rights to resources. The presentations foregrounded these questions against a critical assessment of the dominant geopolitical framing of transborder water politics to explore the extent to which such a framing reduces valuable dialogic space and compounds the risk of a misalignment of interests among national, subnational, regional riparian stakeholders.

- There were two Special Lectures by eminent scholars of China. On the first day, Dr. Madhavi Thampi spoke on ‘**World War II: The Crucible of Modern Sino-Indian Relations?**’ wherein she focused on three aspects of wartime relations between India and China, namely unprecedented official recognition given to the expansion of ties in diverse spheres, impact of the war on the movement of peoples between India and China, and the complicated political dimensions of the relationship; she argued that relations between India and China during 1939–1945 have been neglected not because they were of little consequence, but because of a blinkered approach to the subject of India-China relations, i.e., the tendency to frame their historical relations within bilateral relations or a ‘friendship versus enmity’ binary, that obscures the complexity and diversity of their connections.

- On the second day of the conference, Prof. Lu Xiaoning delivered a Special Lecture on ‘**Mobile Attraction: Travelling Film Projectionists and Rural Cinema Exhibition in Mao’s China**’. Her paper explored the role of film projectionists as proactive agents and problematized the understanding of Chinese socialist cinema merely as a tool of state propaganda. Prof. Lu argued that it is important not only to study the ideological content

of socialist cinema but also to look beyond the textual, because cinema achieves its political function by encountering its audience. Furthermore, there is a much larger social and cultural role played by the projectionists who would put up versatile performances during the film exhibition; they mediated traditional cultural forms and modern technological spectacle, they guided their audience through the film and manipulated them into viewing the film through political lens.

- There were five Thematic Panels on *Northeast India & Trans-Himalayan Connections: Culture & Trade*; *Northeast India & China: Cultural & Educational Interfaces*; *China, India & Southeast Asia: Policies & Perspectives*; *China's External Relations: Trade & Foreign Aid*, and *Chinese Discourse & Praxis*.

- The first three panels pertained to the special theme of the Conference and showcased a range of topics especially relevant from the perspective of the people of the north-eastern states as also from a policy perspective. The last two panels focused on China's external relations and domestic governance shaped through specific exercises of building discourse and praxis.

- The Thematic Panels consisted of 15 papers selected from the 26 full papers submitted; these papers reflected an extremely wide range of interests, disciplines and training of scholars, and displayed new innovative and interdisciplinary approaches that sought to move away from conventional categories.

- This was reflected in the paper titles such as '(Dis)Connections, Residues and Tibetan Buddhism in the Eastern Himalayas', 'Influence of Chinese Vloggers in Northeast India: A Study on the Vlogs of Li Ziqi and Dianxi Xiaoge', 'The 'Pauk-Phaw' Factor in India's Act East Policy', 'Decoding China's Foreign Aid Policy: The Case of Pacific Island Countries', 'Rocking the Cradle, Ruling the World: Crafting the Ideal Citizen through Children's Songs in the People's Republic of China' and many others.

- It is from these papers that one will be selected for the **MSB Award**, which is conferred each year to commemorate the legacy of the late Prof. Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea, an iconic Indian scholar of China Studies.

- The Valedictory Address titled, '**Lessons from the Last 75 Years: India and China**' by Ambassador Nirupama Rao was a rich exposition of India-China relations which have displayed many layers and complexities in modern and contemporary times with roots in history. As India's internal ambitions are moving in the direction of development and

growth by eliminating poverty and building a resilient manufacturing base, China's domestic and external policies, Amb. Rao argued, are increasingly being guided by authoritarianism, 'wolf-warrior' diplomacy and over-militarization. Given the ground realities, the valedictory also charted a trajectory for India's regional partnerships since a clash of ambitions between India and China in the future could not be ruled out. Amb. Rao felt that scholars and practitioners have a role to play in mitigating the differences between India and China.

- The four lectures, i.e., the Keynote Address by Prof. Prasenjit Duara, the Special Lectures by Dr. Madhavi Thampi and Prof. Lu Xiaoning, and the Valedictory Address by Ambassador Nirupama Rao laid out important sets of principles and frameworks for the study of China today; the lectures also highlighted new avenues of research and the possibilities of new directions of inquiry.

- It was announced that the 16th AICCS will be held in Hyderabad in November 2023, in collaboration with the Department of Political Sciences, Central University of Hyderabad. Dr. Bhim Subba, representing the Department of Political Sciences, Central University of Hyderabad, welcomed the collaboration and invited all present to participate in the 16th AICCS.
