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Before joining ADBI, Yixin Yao worked at the Ministry of Finance (MOF) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in various capacities, most recently as Director, Division of Finance and Project Programming, Department of International Economic and Finance Cooperation. In this role, she was in charge of preparing the PRC Country Partnership Strategy and leading all loan negotiations between MOF PRC and the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), KfW, the OPEC Fund for International Development, the Green Climate Fund, and the Governments of Austria and Israel.

Prior to that, she worked as the Fund Manager of the ADB-PRC Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund at ADB headquarters in Manila and as First Secretary for the Mission of the PRC to the European Union based in Brussels. Throughout her career, she has focused on public finance and fiscal policy, international financial cooperation, sustainable development, green finance, and intellectual property issues. She has also worked as a Senior Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of Minnesota and visiting scholar and research fellow at the University of Hong Kong's School of Economics and Finance. She holds a PhD in economics from Northwest University and Lanzhou University, and master's and bachelor's degrees in law from Peking University.

