

## **Preamble**

COVID-19 has been raging throughout the world since the beginning of 2020. Based on their own national conditions, countries all around the world have taken different preventive and control measures to confront the challenges brought about by the rare pandemic to public health, the economy, society and international relations. In order to have a clear view about the ideas and mechanisms of different countries in response to the pandemic as well as the impact of such measures on the world structure, the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) and PKU's Office of International Relations held an online Broadyard Workshop (博雅工作坊) seminar series, titled "The Global Epidemic: Observations and Analysis by Diplomats."

Cases of COVID-19 infection confirmed in the UK have reached more than 250,000 with a death toll of more than 36,000 since the first report of two cases of infection in the country, on January 31, 2020. The number was second to the US, topping other European countries, and was the second highest in the world. Over the past three months, the UK's approach to the prevention and control of the pandemic has gone through several different phases. In the beginning, the government was inattentive to the pandemic and blindly confident of its ability to overcome it. Subsequently, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and

some high-ranking government officials became infected, which drew global attention. Then, decision-making departments were shown to be divided in their opinions on when to institute lockdown measures, which led to a “disastrous April” that witnessed a multiple increase in confirmed infections and a high death toll. At the time, some British people believed that the government’s hesitation and failure of decision-making should be blamed for the situation. However, others pointed out that the reasons behind the country’s dilemma was the excessive privatization of public services, especially the excessive privatization and low budget of the National Health Service (NHS), which has triggered a public health security crisis for the people of the UK.

Why did the British government’s anti-epidemic measures undergo the above-mentioned changes? Is seeking “herd immunity” an effective way of dealing with COVID-19? What were the reasons for the repeated delays in implementing lockdown measures? How will the pandemic impact the UK, post-Brexit? The online workshop invited Ma Zhen’gang, the former Chinese ambassador to the UK; Prof. Jia Qingguo, from PKU’s School of International Relations; and Prof. Su Jian, from PKU’s School of Economics, to discuss the above questions from the perspectives of politics, economics, society, history, culture, and public health.

**The 34th Broadyard Workshop**  
**The Global Epidemic: Observations and Analysis by**  
**Diplomats (V): The UK**  
**May 29, 2020**

The workshop was moderated by Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS. Ma Zhen'gang, the former Chinese ambassador to the UK, delivered the keynote talk.

Ma's talk focused on the general situation of the pandemic in the UK, the pandemic's impact on the country and the cultural roots of the difference in approaches to the pandemic control measures between China and the West. He first reviewed how the pandemic developed in the UK and its efforts in fighting against the virus, pointing out two characteristics for COVID-19's spreading around the world. First, the outbreak was sudden and fierce. The virus spread to 211 countries and regions in a short time. According to statistics, as of May 29, the number of cases of infection confirmed globally had increased to 5.67 million, with a death toll of more than 350,000. Second, COVID-19 spread everywhere, regardless of race, region or country, or whether developed or developing country. The US, despite its being the most developed and strongest country in the world, is currently the country with the worst epidemic situation and largest death toll in the world.

Ambassador Ma categorized the attitudes toward and measures taken by countries in response to the pandemic into

three models. The first model, represented by China, featured a united effort by all nationals to take every possible measure to fight against the epidemic; this model has achieved a phased victory in curbing the spread of the virus. The second was the European model, represented by Italy, Spain, Germany, France and the UK. These countries generally went through a similar process — from being indifferent during the beginning stage, to paying insufficient attention due to the limited number of cases of infection during the second stage, to starting to take some necessary measures amidst hardships due to the rapid increase of infections during the third stage, and finally, during the fourth stage, to starting to resume daily life and economic activities due to a declining number of infections and death toll and the passing of the epidemic's peak. The third model, represented by the US, featured the Trump administration's disregard for the pandemic with its single-minded fixation on the general election and winning re-election. Throughout 2020, it kept shirking its responsibility and, instead, blamed China for the pandemic. As a result, US prevention and control measures were too little, too late, which allowed the virus to spread rampantly. By the end of May, the number of infections was as high as 1.7 million, and the death toll exceeded 100,000, which was the highest in the world. Despite the fact that some states seemingly avoided high numbers of infections, there was still no sign of a turning point as far as the entire country was concerned.

As for the UK, the pandemic appeared relatively late. Its first case of infection was reported on January 31, and only a few new infections appeared in the following month, which triggered little attention from the government. As could be seen from the telephone call between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and President Xi Jinping on February 18, although Johnson expressed his condolences to the Chinese people and appreciation for the actions taken by China, and announced that the UK would continue providing support and assistance for China, his tone showed his attitude as being merely a disinterested bystander and sympathizer.

However, the virus was already spreading rapidly in the UK. The cases of infection sharply increased in March and the total number of infections by early May was over 200,000, with a death toll of over 30,000, thus ranking the UK among top of the world's infected countries. During another telephone call between Johnson and Xi on March 23, Johnson's attitude had by then undergone a huge change: he claimed that he would learn from China's experience, showed his gratitude for China's support and assistance, and agreed with Xi that the pandemic saw no boundary as well as agreeing with Xi's proposal to strengthen international cooperation. In addition, by then the virus had infected a number of high-ranking officials, including Boris Johnson himself and Prince Charles, among others.

Ambassador Ma pointed out that at the beginning of the

pandemic, due to the lack of medical equipment, the UK decided to not test people with mild symptoms, but only those with severe symptoms. As a result, many cases of infection were not detected and treated in time. As a result, many asymptomatic virus-carriers were present in society, like time bombs. After drawing lessons from other Western European countries, the UK's anti-pandemic measures were generally efficient and effective. For instance, Boris Johnson launched a coronavirus action plan. On March 12, the risk level of the epidemic was set as high; on the 16th, the government announced its measures to strengthen prevention and control of the pandemic, requiring people with symptoms and their family members living together to stay at home for 14 days and calling on people to work from home and cancel non-essential social activities and travel; on the 20th, it required schools to be closed, and public facilities such as bars, restaurants, theaters, and cinemas to be temporarily closed. Strict social distancing measures were adopted on the 23rd to stop large gatherings and close stores other than those selling necessary items, as well as gymnasiums, libraries, and religious places. In addition, the UK began to actively participate in international anti-epidemic cooperation, not only donating hundreds of millions of pounds to the WHO and the International Red Cross, but also investing a lot of money in vaccine research and development.

Ma opined that, as of May 29, the UK held a cautious

attitude toward the pandemic and was considering the resumption of daily activities. The government raised five preconditions for the lift of its lockdown, including the continuous decrease in the numbers of new infections and deaths, a drop in the infection rate to a controllable level, and no second outbreak of the epidemic. If these conditions were met, the lockdown would be lifted in a moderate, small-scale, and step-by-step manner. The British government announced a “road map for reopening society” on May 10, saying that England would have a gradual and phased easing of the lockdown, such as allowing those who were not able to work from home to resume work and business, and a phased return of students to primary schools, starting from June 1. In addition, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could also make decisions based on local conditions. Overall, the UK’s epidemic prevention and control went from a phase of disregarding the virus at first, then to paying attention to it but having no effective countermeasures, and then to the stage of having effective measures and a positive attitude toward the pandemic, and finally to achieving some results. Although the numbers of confirmed cases and deaths were still increasing, the growth rate was gradually declining.

Ma opined that the pandemic impacted life in the UK at all levels, especially its economy. The UK squandered three years before formally exiting the EU earlier this year, leaving a slew of issues to deal with. Boris Johnson had planned to deal with all

the issues relating to Brexit by the end of this year. However, the outbreak of the virus made it impossible to achieve that goal. Under the double blow of Brexit and the pandemic, the UK's economy suffered huge setbacks, and this may plunge it into the most serious downturn of the past 300 years, Ma said.

As of May 29, statistics showed that, compared with the previous quarter, the UK's GDP contracted by 2% in the first quarter of the year and possibly faced a greater decline in the second quarter; meanwhile, the unemployment rate hit a new high over the previous ten years, and the number of applicants for unemployment benefits in April reached a new record of 857,000. It was estimated that the annual tax revenue would be reduced by 130 billion pounds. Faced with this situation, the British government introduced various support policies. In addition to a budget of 30 billion pounds to deal with the epidemic, it also provided a total of 350 billion pounds (330 billion in government-guaranteed loans with preferential interest rates and 20 billion in direct financial support) to help enterprises affected by the epidemic. In addition, the government introduced a subsidy program to help companies pay 80% of their employees' wages. This policy benefited 10 million people. As of May 29, the British economy had not fully returned to normal. Per Ma, it would improve, but not by much. Ma pointed out that, different from other European countries, the UK would be seeking new ways out after Brexit in that it



could not forge ahead with EU member states as it had done before but now has to go ahead alone. Although the UK has exited the EU, a slew of issues had still not been resolved, such as needing to discuss with the US about relevant agreements, renegotiate treaties with many countries, propose a globalized UK, and reopen communication channels with countries all over the world. Prime Minister Boris Johnson must shoulder heavy responsibilities, and it is still unknown how the UK would deal with its relations with Europe. The advantage of the UK lies in its open economy and the importance of its foreign trade and investment in the world. Should its advantage, with a solid foundation, be well utilized, the result would not be bad.

In terms of the impact of the pandemic on UK politics, Ambassador Ma said it would not be as obvious as it was on the US. The main problem facing the UK is the populism that has emerged in recent years, especially the serious struggle surrounding whether to leave the EU or not. Not only is the division of society and the struggle between the two parties fierce, but the struggle within the Conservative Party is also fierce. These problems have not been resolved and have only been temporarily shelved due to the impact of the epidemic. In short, no matter whether from the perspective of politics, the economy, or society, the epidemic has only exacerbated the difficulties facing the UK, and many problems still need to be solved after the epidemic.

Ambassador Ma focused on the differences between the two different cultural systems behind the fight against the epidemic in China and the West. Regarding the question of why China was able to effectively control the COVID-19 epidemic, but Western developed countries with high-level medical and health facilities found it to be so difficult, Ma pointed out that, in addition to the different social systems and difficulties of wearing masks, we should explore more the deep-rooted civilizational or cultural differences. Through this fight against the epidemic, he saw the superiority of Chinese civilization and tradition, which was at this critical moment more advanced than Christian civilization. China's civilization showed the following characteristics with regard to the epidemic:

First, the people were valued highly. Since ancient times, China has emphasized that the people are a country's most precious resource, and the founding principle of the Communist Party of China was indeed to serve the people, which was also the original intention of the Party. In this fight against the epidemic, China adhered to a people-oriented fundamental principle from central to local-level government, taking people's life and health as its first priority. China adopted the most stringent measures. Regardless of the cost, the medical fees of all infected persons were born by the country, which is something that Western countries have been unable to do. By contrast, the "herd immunity" proposed at the beginning of the

pandemic was in essence the willingness to sacrifice some people's lives and health. Such a philosophy, which would be hard to accept in China, was deemed as a solution by some in the West. Sweden, in fact, put it into practice in its fight against the pandemic.

Although the UK did not actually implement the “herd immunity” policy per se, many poor people and the elderly were still unable to receive timely and good treatment due to the low quality, poor service, and delays of the universal medical insurance system. Per Ma, although the West also values humanitarianism, their human rights and humanitarianism are not shared by all people in the world. For example, in the US, it only belonged to wealthy whites at first. Later, with the continuous emergence of democratic movements in society, women, the poor and black people gradually began to gain the right to vote. It can be seen from this that the concept of “the people” in Christian civilization is different from that in Chinese cultural traditions.

In addition, democratic elections in the West have currently completely changed in nature. The most important democratic method in the West is electoral democracy, which in turn has led to the multi-party system. These two points are often the benchmarks used by the West to measure China. They accuse Chinese officials of not being elected and China of not implementing a multi-party system. Indeed, the early stage of

Western civilization reflected democracy, but the current election democracy in major Western countries such as the UK and the US is very different. The different parties' goal is to be elected and represent the interests of their own party and class. They can disregard the interests of the people. Therefore, there is a big contradiction between constituency interests and national interests, Ma said.

Second, the whole world as one family. The Chinese people's efforts were made not only for themselves but also for the whole world. During the fight against the pandemic, the concept was manifested as "when difficulties arise in one place, aid comes from everywhere." However, the West is different. The Christian faith does require people to come forward and help others when they encounter difficulties. However, Westerners lack the Chinese people's ideals and the will of the whole people, so many of the measures taken by China could not have been effective in these countries, Ma said.

Third, placing the interests of the larger group above private interests. Per Ma, it is the Chinese people's traditional patriotic sentiment to put the nation's and society's interests above personal interest. For instance, the pandemic poses hardships on everyone, but considering the interest of the whole nation, everyone obeys the arrangement of the government. As for Wuhan, with a population of 11 million, the sudden lockdown brought huge difficulties and inconvenience to the

local people. But every Wuhan resident accepted the measures and endured the hardships, because they cared about the whole Hubei Province and the whole country. But this would be unimaginable for Westerners who put their individual interest as the first priority. Such a cultural difference was quite visible during the fight against the pandemic.

Fourth, anti-racism. Per Ma, Westerners always think that white people and Christianity are superior. At the beginning of the epidemic, some Westerners thought that the virus was mainly contagious among Asians or “the yellow races.” Therefore, anti-Chinese voices advocating Chinese exclusion appeared in Western society. Many overseas Chinese were discriminated against and even verbally abused and beaten up, being called spreaders of the contagious virus. Although in small number, these people displayed a serious racist tendency. This also explains why Western countries did not take COVID-19 seriously in the first place and showed a humanitarian sympathy toward China, Ma said.

Ambassador Ma also noted the special relationship between the US and the UK. Due to voices in Western societies led by the US to hold China responsible recently, Trump and other American politicians have been passing the buck to China. The UK, as a special partner of the US that must rely more on the US after Brexit, has seen some people closely following the US steps. In this situation, the UK will possibly make some

anti-China policies or policies harmful for China. For example, it has been reported that the UK has begun to sway in its stance on issues related to Huawei. Overall, China's outstanding performance has boosted its international influence. But at the same time, we should be vigilant that under the big changes of the world's power structure, anything can be an excuse for some politicians in the West to attack China, Ma concluded.

Prof. Jia Qingguo, from PKU's School of International Studies, also discussed the different views on the anti-epidemic performance of the East and the West. He pointed out that the fight against the epidemic has been phased. So far, Western countries have generally performed poorly in response to the epidemic, especially compared with East Asian countries. For example, the total number of deaths in the US has been the highest, and the death rate per capita in the UK has been among the highest in the world. He pointed out the following reasons behind the phenomenon.

First, the COVID-19 has its unique characteristics. Unlike previous coronaviruses that have high mortality and low infectivity, such as Ebola, SARS, and MERS, COVID-19 is highly infectious and has a relatively lower mortality rate (although much lower than the previous viruses, it is much higher than ordinary flu). There are only two ways to deal with this particular virus: one is to develop specific drugs and vaccines; the other is to isolate people by quarantining them to

limit its spread, which has been termed social distancing by Western countries. The first method has been difficult to achieve in the short term because research and development takes time and may not be successful. For example, humans have not successfully developed specific drugs or vaccines for decades in the fight against AIDS. Therefore, the only effective measures in the short term are isolation and quarantine. But this triggered two serious consequences that were hard to accept by Westerners. First, it restricted people's freedom. Social distancing means they are not able to go wherever they want, and communication between people is also restricted. Since they only regarded COVID-19 as a severe flu, they could not understand why they had to be restricted. Second, it led to economic stagnation. Isolation and quarantine caused the closure of factories, the unemployment rate soared, and the economic losses were huge. More social problems would arise if it lasted too long. In addition, some American studies showed that, in the long run, people who are isolated at home are prone to death from mental illness or other diseases triggered by depression, and this result may exceed the harm caused by COVID-19.

Prof. Jia Qingguo opined that it has been a headache for the leaders of Western countries to make tough decisions when the low-death rate of the virus brought about restriction of freedom and economic losses, among other consequences. Especially

under the so-called Western democratic system, there is a cacophony of conflicting voices, and nobody listens to the suggestions of scientists, or people make their own judgments on the validity of science, only relying on their own experience. As a result, it seemed that there was no good solution. It was this kind of entanglement in decision-making that for a time delayed prevention and control work. Before they took effective isolation and quarantine measures, the epidemic broke out. The medical system was unable to deal with the sudden increase in confirmed cases so that many people could not get medical treatment. In terms of making moral choices — taking Italy and the UK, for instance — they sometimes tended to first treat younger people or those who could live longer when they were in a dilemma. In this situation, the elderly could be discriminated against. These factors led to the death of a large number of patients. In addition, Western countries underestimated the infectiousness and potential harm of this virus in the first place, thinking that the epidemic was very far away from them, thus they did not prepare well basic medical reserves.

Second, the Western countries chose the wrong models to learn from. Due to their bias against ideology, Westerners do not like to learn from China. Although China's anti-pandemic measures were strictly based on scientific suggestions and highly effective, they still considered China to be an



authoritarian country, so that many things, such as lockdown and strict community management, could not be indiscriminately copied by them. Only after the pandemic got worse with a large death toll did they take these measures reluctantly. Western countries in the first place learned from Japan and Singapore, and then from South Korea. At first, Japan impressed Western countries by its small number of infections and deaths, and its humane measures without applying isolation or quarantine. But later, they discovered that this was because Japan only tested severely ill patients; this was because, considering the planned Olympic Games later that year, they were worried that too high a number would scare away potential visitors to Japan for the Games. As for Singapore, it did not take very strict isolation and quarantine measures at the beginning. A key reason behind that was that Singapore is a very disciplined country, and it had many other measures to prevent the spread of the virus. However, Singapore ignored the problem of its foreign workers. The crowded housing conditions of this group, with hundreds of thousands of people being relatively poor and prone to spreading the virus, caused the number of infections in Singapore to skyrocket for a period of time.

Third, cultural differences. Per Jia, the most important difference between Eastern and Western countries lies in the balance between personal interests and group interests. Western countries also attach importance to group interests, only that

personal interests come first. Their philosophy proclaims that when everyone's individual interests are protected, social interests or group interests are also protected. Chinese Confucian culture also emphasizes the two kinds of interest, but places the focus on group interests. From the government's perspective, it proclaims that, under certain circumstances, personal interests can be sacrificed for the sake of group interests. It also explains why China took so many "extreme" isolation and quarantine measures and Chinese people accepted it without seeing large-scale opposition. This would not be the case if this same situation were attempted in Western countries.

As for the influence of the pandemic on China-UK relations, Prof. Jia opined that China-UK relations had been impacted by Sino-American relations before the pandemic, and that the UK must have been under tremendous pressure from the US. At the beginning of the epidemic, the UK took an arrogant attitude toward the disease, thinking that it possessed a pretty good medical system whereas China did not. But after the epidemic suddenly got out of control, it became depressed and desperate, having no idea of what to do. Then, voices accusing China began to appear in the UK and followed the US to demand for compensation from China, blaming China for the pandemic. The UK was also increasingly being influenced by the US in other respects. Meanwhile, some events may have accelerated the trend, such as the recent Hong Kong question.

Prof. Jia said that the future development of the epidemic remains to be seen, and we should not draw conclusions prematurely. At present, in the next stage, Western countries have two advantages in responding to the epidemic: First, the more people are infected and recover, the more people there will be with immunity; second, the scientific research strength of these countries is very strong, including virus research and the development of vaccines and specific drugs. China should take this historic opportunity of being the first to get beyond the epidemic to speed up the resumption of business and production and develop its economy.

Prof. Su Jian, from PKU's School of Economics, made a presentation focusing on the pandemic's impact on the global economy. He summarized the impact from two aspects: one was that the pandemic has caused the world economy to stagnate; the other is that the pandemic has changed the path of the world economy, but where it might go in the future still requires research and judgment.

In the medium and long term, since both developed countries and China are currently facing the problem of overcapacity, the world economy was in fact already deteriorating before the outbreak of the pandemic. In this context, the world economy needs technological progress and product innovation to provide people with new consumption, thus realizing new healthy growth to maintain long-term

development. Without new products, many industries cannot be driven. This will lead the economic development of all countries to rely on fiscal and monetary policies, which would be very unfavorable to economy. For example, monetary policy stimulates investment by reducing interest rates. If the interest rate drops to 8 percent and the expected return of a certain project is 9 percent, entrepreneurs will have the willingness to invest. But many projects are long-term, and the interest rate fluctuates and may even skyrocket to 10 percent very soon. As a result, the project will suffer an economic loss, and banks' non-performing loans may increase, eventually turning into a banking crisis. This is how the 2008 financial crisis occurred in the US. Another example is fiscal policy, which is also trying to expand demand and reduce its own quality, thereby burying the hidden dangers of debt crisis. Therefore, according to Su, the economic development stimulated by long-term fiscal and monetary policies is likely to be of low quality. Only by constantly making new products can we ensure a sustainable and high-quality economic development. However, there is no new technological revolution or new products coming out. The information technology industry once promoted an industrial revolution and experienced a long cycle, but it has now reached its end.

Prof. Su also said that, due to the less than ideal world economic situation, all the countries in the world have been

sparing no effort to achieve economic development. In this regard, Trump may be the best leader among Western countries in that his policy has deviated from orthodox macroeconomic policy. It is no longer demand management but stimulating supply, which is similar to China's supply-side reform. Trump's reforms are ostensibly to reduce costs, implement substantial tax cuts, and promote streamlining administration and delegating power. He has vowed to cut taxes by trillions of dollars and abolish laws and regulations that bind enterprises.

Through cutting taxes and fees, the US surprisingly has been able to bring its production costs in line with China's. Thus, we can see the effective implementation of related measures. Once the cost drops, the competitiveness of American products will rapidly increase. As a result, the American economy will stand out among the developed countries. Notably, however, costs cannot fall indefinitely, and the reduction in fees and taxes in the US is also unsustainable. Product innovation is ultimately the only path to take. In other words, during the three years of Trump's administration, although the US economy has performed well, its stamina is declining. Even if there were no pandemic, its economic recession would worsen, along with a declining effectiveness of its supply management and cost reduction. The pandemic has caused a very large and unexpected impact on the world economy, which regrettably backfired to cause a worsening relationship between China and developed

countries, even increasing hostility. Should this situation continue, the international economic environment will thoroughly deteriorate, which will have a very unfavorable impact on China, Su said.

Prof. Su also analyzed how the pandemic has impacted globalization. He said that one of the advantages of globalization is that it has benefited every country. However, due to the uneven distribution of interest within developed countries, the elites have benefited while the grass-root class has suffered. Since many industries have moved to other countries and many products are imported from developing countries, the resulting industrial hollowing-out has caused much local unemployment. By contrast, in developing countries, almost all nationals have benefited. For example, industrial transfer to China has been followed by foreign investments which have brought about more employment opportunities. Both elite and grass-root classes have seen a rise in their income, as well as a rise in government revenue. The impact of the pandemic may bring big changes to globalization. But it remains to be seen how it will impact the pattern of international trade in the future.

Prof. Su concluded that China's economic development in the past 40 years has benefited from globalization. Without reform and opening-up and joining the WTO, China's economy would not have developed so well. He observed that, before the pandemic, the trend of globalization had begun to reverse.

Whether the pandemic has accelerated or impeded the process of globalization is a question worth discussing. At the same time, he worried that the deterioration of the international economic environment will have a serious impact on China, in that China has relied heavily on globalization in the past. In recent years, the turnover of export trade has accounted for about 20 percent of China's GDP. Based on the principles of economics, the profits gained from foreign trade will circulate within the country and produce a series of indirect effects, which means that 40 percent of China's GDP is related to foreign trade. Therefore, in the new international economic environment, China must consider what adjustments to make in terms of development strategies, development plans, and development paths.

Prof. Su pointed out that, more accurately speaking, the pandemic did not press the pause button of the world economic machine, but rather the adjustment button, which pushed forward changes on the development path of the world economy. In this sense, the international economic environment that China had been a part of would never return. What would be the condition of the world economy after the pandemic? Per Su, the economic crisis during the pandemic seems to be serious but it is different from other kinds of crises. As an unexpected shock, it will not continue. Once the pandemic ends, people's lives will return to normal, industries will resume business and production,

and the economy will return to its previous state. Su expressed his belief that the trend of the global economy in the short term mainly depends on the situation of epidemic prevention, such as whether vaccines and specific drugs can be developed will determine the duration of the crisis and the speed of people's resuming work. In addition, this epidemic may give birth to a revolution in the field of biotechnology. A new technological revolution must emerge to save the world economy, and crises usually lead to technological progress. For example, World War II and the Cold War accelerated the revolution in information technology. Now countries in the world are investing significantly in research and development in biotechnology, especially vaccine research and development. If a new technological revolution is generated from this, it may promote a new round of growth in the world economy. However, it should also be noted that technological progress is unpredictable. No one knows whether it will occur, or occur with what kind of results, or how strong will be the effects it will bring. Long-term observation is needed in this regard, Su concluded.

Hu Li, a post-doctoral fellow of PKUIAS, shared her view of the British National Health Service (NHS) system. She said that research has found that in the process of the UK's response to the pandemic, its NHS system was not effective enough. The British government has been insufficiently funding the system for a long time. According to data from the Organization for



Economic Co-operation and Development, in 2019, the British government's spending in the medical and health sector accounted for the lowest proportion of GDP, only about 9 percent, compared with that of France and Germany, which each spent more than 11 percent. Another set of data showed that the ratio of doctors and nurses to each 1,000 people in France and Germany was both over 10, while in the UK, the ratio to each 1,000 people was about 7 doctors and nurses. It can be seen that insufficient medical resources limited the ability of Britain to fight the epidemic, and the recovery rate was the lowest among European countries. In addition, the number of beds in British hospitals dropped from 300,000 in 1987 to about 150,000 in 2019.

Hu Li pointed out that criticism of NHS as not being effective enough has also been expressed within the UK, mainly among public health experts, front-line medical staff and researchers of medical reforms. A number of British professors blamed the British government after the pandemic broke out, claiming that long-term NHS reform had left the system in a state of paralysis and led to its very complicated structure. At the beginning of the establishment of the NHS system, in 1948, it was a nationalized system and the State administration was responsible for its management.

Under these circumstances, since hospitals are State-owned, its medical staff are also hired by the State. If there is a health

crisis, the State has a strong mobilization capacity. However, since Margaret Thatcher came to power, in 1979, the UK has carried out continuous marketization- and privatization-oriented reforms on the NHS system, trying to change it to be like the American medical service system of today. They believed that it could save the country's medical expenditure and improve the efficiency of medical services. However, in fact, the reforms were not completely successful. Since the NHS system enjoyed a high support rate from the British people, the reforms could not be achieved overnight, and the system was only able to be changed little by little. The reforms have lasted for nearly 40 years and were still going on in 2019. As a result, the structure of the NHS system has become unstable, even fragmented. Many State-owned hospitals have been privatized, leading to a situation where many poor people could not be treated during the crisis, while the rich had their own doctors. Meanwhile, private medical services have gradually developed.

During the pandemic, the UK witnessed some strange phenomena. For example, the UK built a field hospital known as the Nightingale Hospital, but only a small number of patients were admitted. Although there was a large number of confirmed cases in the UK, many of the hospitals had empty beds. The reason for this was that the British government had contracted out many tasks and functions that the government should do to private companies, such as building hospitals and recruiting

medical staff. As a result, the NHS system was not able to play an effective role in this crisis, Hu concluded.

During the Q&A session, the presenters and audience members exchanged ideas focusing on the pandemic and UK bipartisan politics, the future of neoliberalism, the development tendency of post-Brexit UK and changes in the world's power structure.

Regarding why the British government's poor anti-epidemic measures did not cause public dissatisfaction and why the British people resisted wearing masks, Prof. Jia expressed his belief that these questions are actually quite difficult to answer. Why were the British psychologically so reluctant to wear masks? The reason may involve their way of living. Europeans and the Americans rarely wear masks. At the beginning of the epidemic, there was a good excuse that the supplies of masks were not enough; therefore, masks should be reserved for medical staff. In fact, the British and Americans were still reluctant to wear masks even after the supply of masks was guaranteed. Many people thought that wearing masks was highly unfashionable so that, even if they wore them, they should choose specially designed, stylish ones or artistic ones. The masks worn by Trump were specially designed for president, as were the masks worn by many senior officials and elites, which were not the ordinary masks worn by the public.

Although the British government did not perform well in

pandemic prevention and control, the British people still believed that the government had done a good job. According to the polls reported by *The Guardian*, on April 26, many people in the UK believed that although China had outperformed the UK in their anti-epidemic effort, the UK outperformed the US, which made them feel superior to the Americans in this regard. In fact, from a per capita perspective, the death rate in Britain was higher than that in the US because the UK had a smaller population. However, the public did not feel this way. In addition, they attributed China's good job in their anti-pandemic effort to taking measures only possible in so-called authoritarian states, which would therefore be impossible to implement in the UK. In this sense, they felt it was no wonder that the British prevention and control of the pandemic was not as good as that of China. Therefore, they drew the conclusion that the UK was doing the best it could, Jia said.

Regarding the question of wearing masks, Prof. Qian Chengdan said that people in the West have formed a fairly fixed way of thinking about wearing masks. For example, if they catch a cold, they will conduct strict self-isolation at home. After three or five days, if they recover they can go outdoors again to engage in their normal activities. If they do not recover but still have to go out, they would wear a mask, which therefore created the psychological perception that anyone wearing a mask must be unwell. After this perception was formed, a social consensus

was reached that healthy persons do not wear masks. However, in terms of COVID-19, it has been proved that wearing a mask can not only protect yourself, but also others. The problem is that in European and American countries where individualism is particularly emphasized, the intention to put the interests of others first or prioritizing the group interest is very lacking.

Regarding the impact of British party politics on the prevention and control of the epidemic, Ambassador Ma responded based on his personal experience in the UK. He said that when he was ambassador to the UK, the Labor Party regained power after being the opposition for more than ten years. At the time, Blair had a particularly high reputation. One of the characteristics of the Labour Party's policy was that it placed more emphasis on public and social affairs in terms of social policy, while, economically, it basically followed the policies of Margaret Thatcher. Later, Blair proposed a third way, which, in essence, was that the Labour Party's policy would be more inclined toward social politics; in economics, however, its policy would incline more toward the Conservative Party's policy. Thus, the third way was actually a mixture. Under the guidance of this kind of thinking, the Labour Party not only paid more attention to social welfare but could not avoid the trend toward privatization. In the late Blair period, Britain even contracted out prison custody. Therefore, the British medical and health system presented a complicated structure, one effect

of which was that patients had to line up and wait for a long time to see a doctor in a public hospital. Although there are many wards, the quality of service was poor. In contrast, physician services in private hospitals were very good. If one had a problem, a mere phone call could obtain them. Of course, such a benefit was only enjoyed by a small number of people.

Ambassador Ma pointed out that the UK has always been a relatively conservative country. It does not pay much attention to changes and sudden reforms and prefers to implement gradual reforms. Nowadays, there is absolutely no need for revolutionary or major political reforms. In addition, around the Brexit issue, there are increasing contradictions and differences in British society, which have given rise to various forces and the formation of many parties. The increase of parties means an increase of opinions and differences. However, strictly speaking, many factions only represent a certain opinion or a certain interest and do not represent the interests of a certain class. Therefore, such parties will only promote small changes — they will not cause major changes.

Ambassador Ma expressed his belief that, in principle, the Labour Party is influenced by socialist ideology and advocates social democracy, while the Conservative Party is a traditional conservative party. However, in specific practice, different ruling leaders of the same party have performed differently. For example, within the Conservative Party, Mrs Thatcher carried

out drastic reforms when she was in power, which gave birth to the “Thatcher Revolution” and promoted the rapid development of the British economy. However, her successor to the Conservative Party deviated from her path in some matters. Also, in the Labour Party, while Blair was ambitious at first, later, the Labour Party abandoned his original policy. However, the two major parties are not fundamentally different in nature because neither party serves the toiling masses — they only differ in their methods. Therefore, it has been difficult to differentiate between the Labour Party’s and the Conservative Party’s responses to the epidemic, and the government’s strategy is not determined by a single individual. Johnson’s rise to power was a very accidental phenomenon, only happening because Theresa May was forced to resign, after which the Conservative Party elected him leader. During this epidemic, Johnson has had his own considerations. Because he only recently led the UK to complete Brexit, there are still many things he needs to do next. Because he needs to maintain high approval numbers from the people, he will push through policies that will help people’s livelihoods. Otherwise, he may be forced to step down in the next general election, Ma said.

During the epidemic, the shortcomings of Western neoliberalism were unmistakably revealed, and its future was also much discussed. In this regard, Prof. Jia expressed his belief that to discuss neoliberalism one must first define whether you

are talking about economic liberalism or political liberalism. He predicted that the COVID-19 epidemic may have an impact on neoliberalism, including both its economic and political aspects, but this impact should not be exaggerated. In the future, whichever country is able to get past the epidemic the fastest, resist its impact the most successfully, and return to the path of globalization the soonest, will have an economic advantage. In history, Western countries joined the process of globalization basically voluntarily and were not forced. Everyone knew that joining globalization and conducting trade with other countries would bring security risks, but more importantly, it would bring huge benefits. The trend toward globalization is facing considerable challenges, to a large extent because Western countries, especially the US, have not resolved the problem of the social polarization brought about by globalization and other issues. Many people have not only received no benefit from the process of globalization but have greatly suffered from it. If these issues are not handled properly, it will inevitably lead to domestic political backlash, such as the election of a strange leader like Trump. Jia also expressed his belief that, in the future, as long as we can make the most of our comparative advantages, continue to open to the outside world, and, at the same time, solve the problem of domestic redistribution, we can make better use of the opportunities and benefits brought about by globalization.



Prof. Su Jian agreed with Pro. Jia's view and said that, whether neoliberalism will be adjusted in the future depends on its impact on the economy. Its economic impact is mainly divided into two categories: one is the change in total amount, that is, whether it can stimulate the overall development of the economy; the other is the distribution problem, which often leads to state intervention. He pointed out that the pandemic crisis is a public health crisis, and the economic crisis is derived from it. Therefore, neoliberal policies can play a small role in this crisis. Epidemic prevention is mainly in the field of politics and health policies. In economics, Western countries still adhere to the system of free enterprise. After Margaret Thatcher came to power, the main neoliberal policies were privatization and deregulation. Therefore, it is not very likely that Britain will adjust its neoliberal policy. Even if it is adjusted, the adjustment will not be great, and it will be difficult to make a fundamental change. Although short-term policies will be adjusted, the overall thinking or systemic problems will not change in the short term.

Regarding how British foreign relations will develop post Brexit, Prof. Jia expressed his belief that we can expect the UK to do the following: First, it will rely more on the US strategically. After all, in security issues, it will have to rely on one side or the other, and neither China nor the EU is reliable; therefore, it can only rely on the US. Second, it will likely seek

diversification and openness in the economy, hoping to benefit from the process of globalization. At the same time, however, Britain is now facing a huge dilemma. On the one hand, the UK wants to strengthen economic and trade relations with China and use China's huge market to promote its own development; on the other hand, the US has exerted a lot of pressure on it, and the UK has its own ideas about China's domestic political changes. This has caused it to securitize its economic and trade issues — i.e., look at economic and trade issues from the perspective of national security, especially in the high-tech field. Therefore, it may follow the US to impose restrictions on China in high-tech foreign trade. For example, until recently, the UK withstood the pressure of the US on the Huawei issue and insisted on adopting some Huawei products that it believed would not affect the security of the UK. However, it has recently wavered and said that it will reconsider the issue of cooperation with Huawei. In fact, this matter involves many factors, such as pressure from the US, the feeling of needing to assign blame for the epidemic, domestic politics, and Hong Kong issues. Therefore, in the future, the UK will try to maintain economic and trade relations with China as much as possible but will also gradually stand on the side of the US strategically, especially in matters of high-tech, at least in the short term.

Ambassador Ma also reminded attendees to consider the changes in the world's power structure caused by the pandemic.

For example, the impact of the pandemic on countries must be discussed in a realistic manner. There are a lot of relevant discussions, optimistic and pessimistic, but the actual development of the situation has been more complicated than most people expected, and we should not make qualitative judgments rashly. Take China as an example. At the beginning of winning its fight against the epidemic, many people felt that China occupied a favorable position amid the changes in the world's power structure. At that time, China was highly praised by the world. However, the situation has seen a turn since the US influenced some Western countries, even a few developing countries, to hold China accountable, thereby combining the pandemic with its domestic politics, and using the international environment to attack China. As a result, China may face a more complicated situation in the future, which requires a new understanding of this issue.

Another example is the understanding of globalization. Many people worry that the epidemic will accelerate de-globalization or cause a breakdown of globalization. Such a conclusion should not be drawn lightly. Globalization was not artificially created by a certain individual or a certain country, but is the result of demand generated by the development of social productivity and the continuous improvement of science and technology, and it exists objectively, so it cannot be changed on a whim. Trump has wanted to withdraw from globalization

several times, but the US economy forced him to reenter each time. After all, modern production cannot be separated from globalization, and multinational cooperative production is the most suitable and convenient way. If American companies withdraw from China, many aspects of production will face great difficulties. Although many people worry that the US might confront or isolate China, or even sever diplomatic relations with China, whether the US would dare to take the step of completely cutting off relations with China in terms of economy, trade, finance and other fields is still open to question. Agreeing with Prof. Su Jian's view, Ma said, first, the epidemic has not caused fundamental damage to labor productivity, nor has it stopped the development of new technologies. It only pressed the pause button on economic development. Once the economies of various countries start to recover, their desire to continue to participate in globalization will naturally emerge. Second, globalization will change in that it will have new development, new methods, and new reforms after the epidemic, but it is still too early to make a final conclusion on how it will change, Ma concluded.

Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, said at the conclusion of the meeting that COVID-19 has been something unprecedented and totally new so people have yet to fully understand it. Although it manifests itself as a type of pneumonia, it is not like the pneumonias that people are familiar

with in the traditional sense; although it is a virus, it is different from the viruses that people have encountered in the past. At first people said it was very strange, but this new virus also raised many new problems for people, not only involving health and medicine, but also covering many aspects of social and international relations, including political structure and political system. The problems it raised have even touched upon ideological and theoretical issues. The ideas provided by the three scholars participating in this conference are very important for us, and they have also stimulated us to think. The epidemic has brought great changes to the entire world, and it has also made people see that there is one thing that should not be done, that is, it is not advisable to use ideology to fight science. Science is science and science cannot be denied. I look forward to having more opportunities in the future to continue to discuss world development issues in light of the epidemic.