

The 1st Broadyard Workshop
Experience, Theories and Methods
of Conducting Area Studies

April 12, 2018

The first workshop of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) focused on the experience, theories and methods of conducting area studies, and attendees had an in-depth discussion on the topic. The first half of the workshop was chaired by Prof. Gao Bingzhong of the Institute of Sociology and Anthropology at PKU, and the second half was chaired by Associate Professor Niu Ke of the Department of History at PKU.

Prof. Wang Hui from the Department of Chinese and Department of History at Tsinghua University was the first to speak. In his presentation, he expressed his views on the fundamentals of area studies, the methodology of cross-area studies and the redefinition of the scope of area studies.

Wang Hui said that area studies has suddenly become an important discipline in China. Globalization, especially China's new role in globalization, and the Belt and Road initiative are the driving forces behind the surge in interest in area studies. Various institutions, including state institutions, enterprises and public institutions as well as international organizations, are all in demand of talent in this field. However, although many colleges and departments are working in what we usually call the field of area studies, the scope of area studies as a special field does not seem to be clear. The most fundamental basis for area studies should start with basic research, not just think tank research. Without basic studies of language, history, literature,

culture and religion, we cannot lay the foundations of area studies firmly. Think tank research is also important, but the importance of basic research should be emphasized to a greater degree, Wang Hui said.

He stressed that the importance of basic research lies mainly in its ability to provide understanding. The field of area studies was formed after World War II with the US at the center. Unlike the Oriental studies programs in Europe, area studies in the US was part of its strategic research, serving its overall strategic objectives. This is not to say that all area studies researchers were fully connected to the state, but the relationship between area studies and overall strategy is always there. It is impossible to understand the basic conditions for the establishment of post-World War II area studies programs only from the perspective of collecting materials and documents while ignoring the whole ideology and political strategy behind it. Historically, area studies in many countries reached its apex when their empires expanded. This is the case with Britain, the US and Japan. When the empire began to shrink, area studies also shrank. Wang Hui said that from the historical experiences, the formation of area studies around the world is related to the formation of hegemony.

In the past 30 to 40 years, the Western world has been reflecting on this field. Wang Hui stressed that when we begin to design area studies programs in China, we need to systematically summarize and sort out these reflections from the West, and should not repeat the same mistakes. Wang Hui also compared the different political, military and cultural orientations of the US toward China and the Soviet Union

during the Cold War, arguing that area studies provides different historical understandings even at the strategic level, and that only area studies based on basic research can provide a deep understanding of these issues.

The second point Wang Hui emphasized was the importance of a cross-area perspective in area studies. He argued that a large amount of area studies research is actually country-centered and then applied to other areas. This is not real cross-boundary studies. In some area studies research, cross-area perspectives are developed at the outset. Such a cross-area perspective has a methodological problem to solve. Because of the marginalization of area studies in Western humanities and social sciences, area studies does not produce theories nor real discourse, and it just copies the words, theories and frameworks of others. This is the methodological problem the field must solve, particularly in adapting a cross-area perspective.

In order to change this status quo, the first step is not to separate area studies from basic research in the humanities and social sciences. In the past, the basic research of humanities and social sciences was mainly based on Western experiences. To a large extent, the hegemony of humanities and social sciences is the hegemony of Western history, that is to say, the Western framework was applied to other regions. But today, with globalization and greater access of regions for study, area studies can shoulder the mission of restructuring social sciences and humanities. Area studies no longer applies the general paradigm of social sciences and humanities to a certain area; rather, it opens up new horizons and acquires new knowledge from area studies research, thus fundamentally changing the basic

paradigm of humanities and social sciences. Wang Hui said that area studies will have a great impact on the whole range of humanities and social sciences in the 21st century.

Area studies should break two tendencies. One tendency is to think of changing history as a special space, ignoring that spaces have their time attributes, and they are an open and ever-changing experience. Everything has its own time and space, and has connections with other times and spaces. This is important to consider. The second tendency is completely ignoring the space attribute. The phenomenon of writing a thesis only based on data without understanding local culture is an example. These tendencies will bring a crisis to area studies.

Finally, Wang Hui reminded everyone to think about the scope of area studies. In his view, China's focus over the past decades of reform and opening-up has been westward-looking, and now it will shift back to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This requires us to seriously think about our attitude toward area studies. He proposed a methodological solution to the problem: redefining the scope of area studies. He said we should consider several questions about area studies in China. First, what central regions are excluded from area studies in China? Are they the subjects of general social sciences or area studies? Second, are we in the regions or are we outside the regions? He emphasizes that "otherization" should be treated dialectically, and philosophically "otherization" is sometimes the process by which you look at yourself in reverse. China's area studies should also be an opportunity for China to re-understand itself and break through the one-sided perception of itself obtained from the mirror of Western countries. He argued that China

should have an intellectual revision of its own understanding and image as it undergoes area studies.

The second speaker was Qu Jingdong, professor of the Department of Sociology at PKU. The theme of his presentation was “Area Studies as a Study of Civilization.” He explored the significance of area studies to China and the cosmopolitanism of area studies from the perspectives of civilization studies and knowledge paradigms.

First, Qu Jingdong expressed his views on area studies at PKU. He argued that area studies, if carried out by PKU, should no longer only focus on such issues as a branch of a discipline, a local or national culture, language, politics and political interactions in the context of international relations or simply from the perspective of a nation. Rather, Qu Jingdong said PKU should undertake area studies in the context of ancient-modern relations and in the context of the world today. PKU’s area studies should provide a basic paradigm for area studies in light of China’s own civilization, in order to build our own knowledge system.

Another point he stressed was that area studies should also deepen our understanding and knowledge of our own civilization. In that sense, he argued, area studies actually carries a huge burden. If PKU wants to highlight such an academic ambition in its area studies, PKU should take original research and theoretical development as a core effort, and reject other superficial approaches to area studies.

Area studies has played a pivotal role in the construction of the entire modern knowledge system in China over the past 100 years. Western modern ethnography, paleology, theory of

evolution and other knowledge systems that emerged based on colonies and empires are, to some extent, the starting point and foundation of Chinese modern science. Forerunners like Wang Guowei were inspired by Western literary and paleontology studies to help build our entire archaeological and paleogeography system, and without them we would not have seen such progress. However, we should recognize that our system's foundation is precisely the West's own new paradigm that emerged from the transformation of modern knowledge in the 19th century. This was brought about by area studies in the Western sense. Chen Yinke's efforts aim to learn a variety of regional languages and cultural theories from the West to re-understand the very complex structures of China.

Qu Jingdong stressed that from this point of view it is clear that area studies is by no means confined to a particular region. Rather, it and the system of knowledge, our new ideas and new paradigms, our understanding of our own civilization, and the relationship between world civilizations as they enter world history have all reconstituted a process of reflection, understanding, and re-understanding.

It was from this point of view that Qu Jingdong said that the field of area studies is a worldwide study and that area studies needs a new vision of the world. He said that works like those by Huntington are the most fundamental works of area studies. In his opinion, area studies must have two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. Vertical studies involve the structure of regional civilizations and track of every change in their history. Horizontal studies include a civilization interaction with its neighboring nations.

An example of this is the medieval Arab world and Europe. The so-called revival of Greek civilization in Europe was largely enabled by records and translations of the classical world retained by the Arab world.

Qu Jingdong said that area studies should not be confined to research methods, but should be based on our understanding of ourselves and the most critical issues in the West. In this sense, he argued, area studies should not be a field based solely on modern narrowly defined nation-states. For example, when a Portuguese writer trained in Britain and well-versed in British civilization writes in Portuguese, he is no longer confined to the Portuguese language and the concept of Portugal as a country. He is tackling the core issues and practical difficulties regarding the future direction of civilization in Europe and the world at large. Area studies focuses on the relationship between any region and the whole world, and it also focuses on the different responses from a region's traditions and current situation in the context of world history. Take Turkey, studied by Prof. Zan Tao, as an example. Today we treat Turkey as a nation-state that bridges the Eurasian continent. Especially after the modern reforms from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, we regard Turkey as a modern nation-state. But even now, Turkish intellectuals, entrepreneurs, elites, and even some civilians imagine a Turkey based on the Ottoman Empire or earlier history. This means their vision of Turkey's future will still be built with the long history of Turkish civilization at the core. From this example we can see that we can't only study the relatively narrow problems facing Turkey today, such as how Erdogan handles interest-based relations with other countries. The more we study in this limited

way, the less we understand Turkey. Today's problems are all related to the history of the Ottoman Empire in this region, which has influenced languages, Europe-Asia relations and the relations among the three major religions in the Near East. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to understand the relationship between area studies and the entire world at all levels.

Finally, Qu Jingdong stressed that research in area studies is a mirror for China to reflect on itself. In his view, the issues confronted by area studies are not only issues in the regions studied, but also our own issues. For example, only if we understand the problems of Turkey today will we understand the ethnic problems in Xinjiang today. Also, only if we understand the system of the Hinayana Buddhism in Southeast Asia can we understand the process of the seesaw balance between the ethnic minority groups in our southwest region and the country in terms of religious culture over the long course of history, and understand how these different religions and ethnic groups can build a complete political community and their own identity, to answer the question of "Unity in diversity of the Chinese nation" put forward by Fei Xiaotong. Therefore, no matter whether the area we are studying is bordering us or not, it constitutes a new understanding of ourselves, and it also constitutes the most important opportunity for Chinese civilization to understand, constantly reflect on and construct itself in a very comprehensive manner. Such was the case in ancient China. Our ancestors already did this. In the writings of the ancients, we can clearly see the process in which they went back to self-examination, recognition and continuous growth. In

this sense, area studies is closely related to our own philosophy, history, literature and understanding of our own civilization. This is the case with our understanding of Chinese traditions, and this is more the case with our understanding of contemporary China. Qu Jingdong said that our imagination in dealing with our own problems comes largely from, and even has to rely on, area studies in this sense.

Qu Jingdong also proposed that area studies could help China break out of a pattern of understanding the world in terms of relations between China and the West. He argued that China has been looking at the world and itself from the reference point of Chinese and Western issues for more than 100 years. We grow and adapt in a space of world history built with the West as the main body. This still determines the way we look at the West, the rest of the world and our own country. In fact, we already understand the West, which is dominated by Western Europe, but we do not understand the layers of relations that extend around the world. If area studies can be understood in the above manner, it is now critical for us to understand the rest of the world and to understand ourselves.

Qu Jingdong said that area studies is not only an indispensable part of a complete knowledge system, but also an important foundation for the future. If the area studies program at PKU is carried out only in form of a think tank, international relations analysis, or foreign language study, and area studies in this way chooses only a single path of the many possibilities, Qu Jingdong feels that the program will not succeed. He said we should work to build area studies into a discipline that can bring all these issues together.

The third speaker was Prof. Li Chenyang, director of the Department of Social Sciences of Yunnan University and director of the Myanmar Research Institute. He delivered a presentation on the theme “Thinking and Perspectives in Studies of Contemporary Issues in Area Studies.”

He put forward his own views based on the current situation of area studies in China, citing five examples of incorrect “Chinese-style thinking” and five perspectives that should be cultivated. He also gave examples of how to deepen our studies of current affairs in area studies.

Li Chenyang, who has rich experience in the study of current affairs in area studies, pondered the problems in area studies in China and offered criticisms of the field. Generally speaking, area studies is a comprehensive field of study. It covers the comprehensive study of the history, culture, ethnicities, religions, politics, economy, military affairs, security situation, diplomacy and international relations of an area or a country. However, he said that since the reform and opening-up, area studies in China has become more and more concentrated on current political, economic, international relations, diplomatic and other issues, with an emphasis on studies by think tanks, with less and less focus on history, religion, culture and other aspects. He said there are many problems that arise if we define area studies as think tank research. He said it seems easy to do area studies, especially on modern issues, but in fact it is quite difficult. He believes that with the implementation of the BRI, the dramatic increase in the quantity of China’s research results in area studies in recent years has not brought about a matching increase in the quality of research. For

example, scholars in the field of international studies have mostly misjudged the political situations of other countries and their policies toward China. In their practical work, scholars often fail to find the reasons behind events. He said that explanations of current affairs given by some Chinese scholars are generally unconvincing.

Li Chenyang analyzed the reasons for this situation. He said that the basic reason is that, as a comprehensive research discipline, area studies as a whole lacks a theoretical system, methodology, perspective, and systematic thinking. For example, when we study the politics of an area, we may use political theories; when we study its diplomacy, we may use diplomatic theories; and when we study its nationality and religion, we may use national religious theories. In short, area studies has no overarching methodology or theory, nor does it possess uniqueness.

To make things worse, many people do not yet have theoretical preparation, so many scholars in area studies tend to take things for granted. Some scholars might, after meeting with some experts in a country, cite what these experts say as accepted theories and use them as examples. Li Chenyang said such behaviors are too simplistic.

He also said that currently there is a lack of standardization in area studies and there are also some bad tendencies.

The first bad tendency is that some people seek quick success and instant rewards in the field, specializing in popular countries and hot topics. They have no fixed research focus, and mostly are engaged in macro research without the support of details. They do not have a solid academic foundation, and do

not do academic research first. They are only keen on policy research.

Second, the academic training of researchers is not standardized. The field of area studies has high requirements for researchers. Specifically, it requires them to understand the history, culture, and language of a country, as well as to have a good grasp of the theory and methods of a discipline to study a specific problem. In addition, writing, research and analytical capabilities are also needed. There are very few people who can do all these at the same time.

Third, area studies in China are disconnected from the field's international academic community. At present, China's area studies articles published in English or in the target language are rare.

Fourth, many researchers have not dealt with the relationship between “points” and “planes.” It is difficult for scholars who do research in a certain country to have a comprehensive understanding of the situation in neighboring countries. This is very limiting, because many problems are not just a country's problems, but are closely related to neighboring countries, regions and the world.

Finally, although the BRI has made area studies in China an active field, all scholars are doing research on hot topics, and many basic research issues have been neglected. Moreover, most of this research is macroscopic research, lacking in-depth study of the issues concerned. In contrast, Japan's area studies research on Myanmar, which goes deep into the revenue-raising system and effectiveness of a prefectural state, is well worth learning from. Despite the above problems, Li Chenyang said that we

should not belittle ourselves now. Rather, we need to build up a system of area studies of our own.

According to Li Chenyang, there are several patterns of Chinese-style thinking that are harming the prospects of area studies.

First, researchers are accustomed to using habitual thinking to analyze the political situation and foreign policy of other countries. Take the 2015 general election in Myanmar as an example. Before the election, China's foreign affairs and security departments believed that the ruling party could continue to stay in power. The reason for the judgment was the assumption that when a ruling party faced a crisis of life and death in a general election, it would certainly cheat to maintain its political power. However, since Myanmar first had parliamentary elections in the 1920s and 1930s, its people have never allowed this kind of thing. Another example is that we usually think that if we want to become wealthy, we must improve the transportation situation first. However, people in other countries often do not think this way. Moreover, we often believe that it is in the interests of other developing countries to develop economic relations with us. However, many countries do not think so. They are certainly concerned about development, but in their view, it is not because of the government or policy that they are unable to develop now. This may have something to do with their religions.

Second, researchers like to apply their experience in some countries to other countries. For example, although Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia are all countries that believe in Theravada Buddhism, the behaviors of the people in these

countries vary widely. Although Myanmar and Thailand have similarities in their policies toward China, their ways to deal with similar China-related issues are still significantly different. So our policy toward Thailand will not easily work in Myanmar. The career path of diplomats can also cause similar problems. When Chinese officials from embassies in Europe, the US, and Australia transfer to embassies in Southeast Asia, they like to use their experience from previous countries to deal with present countries. This is often problematic.

Third, we often confuse ethnic Chinese relations by blood, their cultural identity and national identity. Take the case of Myanmar's Kokang people as an example. Although the Kokang people are all Han people, they are legitimate national minorities in Myanmar. When the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) [representing the Kokang] was beaten by the Tatmadaw, many people in China believed that the MNDAA's situation was analogous to their married daughter being bullied by her husband's family, and that China should step in. But this concept is wrong.

Fourth, we sometimes deliberately create certain problems that do not exist or deliberately raise the seriousness of certain problems. For example, there are people who say that, in Myanmar, American warships and planes are about to enter, and there are many mercenary armies in North Myanmar. But these problems are fabricated.

Fifth, on the one hand, some of us oppose the "China threat" theory. On the other hand, we consciously and unconsciously have a "China-centered" theory and a "Sino-foreign friendship" theory.

Li Chenyang said that research in area studies must avoid these misunderstandings and put an end to the above-mentioned “Chinese-style thinking.” Otherwise, our methods will not be able to achieve our goals and the work we do will be counterproductive.

Based on the above analysis, Li Chenyang proposed to the cultivation of five perspectives in area studies.

A historical perspective comes first. Problems that occur or exist in our present day are often closely related to history. For example, Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and other countries has obvious differences with Islam in the Middle East. This is because Islam adjusted when it adapted to local societies in the process of entering Southeast Asian regions.

Second is the cultural perspective. Take railway construction as an example. Some Southeast Asian countries believe that they cannot directly refuse cooperation projects proposed by friendly neighbors or friends. So they chose to constantly raise the price to maintain their own interests during negotiations, which makes Chinese feel wronged. This should prompt area studies scholars to try to really understand the culture of the target country.

Third is a global or regional perspective. Problems in any region are generally not isolated. The problems must be related to changes in the global or regional situations or global or regional political transformation. For example, the political transformation of Myanmar must be related to the US and the political transformation in the entire Southeast Asia region.

Fourth is the comparative perspective. For example, scholars engaged in Southeast Asian studies should not only

focus on the target country, but also pay attention to their neighboring countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Greater Mekong Sub-regional Cooperation group, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation group, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor. In-depth research papers are difficult to write if a scholar neglects to consider the influence of major powers (US, Japan, Russia, India and the EU) in this region and doesn't conduct comparative research.

Fifth is the perspective of Chinese politics. Diplomacy is the extension of domestic politics. Chinese scholars engaged in area studies must both meet the academic needs of international research and serve national strategies. There are still many perspectives that need attention in area studies, but the above five aspects are the most important.

Finally, Li Chenyang, based on his own experiences, expressed his views on how to deepen area studies.

First of all, the accumulation of knowledge is of great importance. It is necessary to have the accumulation of knowledge of regional and national history, as well as global history and the history of civilization. Moreover, researchers must have a solid language foundation, mastering both English and non-common languages.

Second, researchers must have a solid theoretical basis. When studying the political, historical, economic, international, diplomatic, social, and ethnic issues of a certain country or region, researchers should know theories and methods from certain fields and not be limited to describing facts. Moreover, it is necessary to carry out in-depth and continuous fieldwork and

observe the development and changes of countries or regions all year round.

Third, an analytical framework for major issues needs to be established. Taking Myanmar studies as an example, the major problems in Myanmar's political economy should be summed up by several patterns that do not change within a certain period of time, which are equivalent to certain theorems that can then be used to verify other information.

Finally, a strong academic network must be built up. In the field of area studies, researchers should have some personal connections in China, in the target countries, and in European and American academic circles. Otherwise, research results will not be adequate for policy guidance or academic development.

The fourth speaker was Niu Ke, associate professor with the Department of History at PKU. The topic of his speech was "The [Academic] Discipline System, General Education and Area Studies." Niu Ke, based on his experiences in developing the report outlining the plan for area studies at PKU, and in studying the specific history of area studies in the US during its founding period, put forward his own view on the relationship between the academic discipline system and general education.

He said China's area studies have flourished due to a push from the Ministry of Education that treats area studies as part of a think tank movement, but much of our understanding, discussion of disciplinary epistemology, and sociology of knowledge oriented discussions still lag behind. He studied American planning, deliberation and discussion from 1943 to 1953, and he concluded that we have a long way to go before we catch up to where the US was in this field 70 years ago.

Niu Ke introduced the unique advantages of area studies in the US. In his view, area studies are generally a study of the outside world. This kind of study has existed throughout history, but in a way that was vague or marginal and weak. Under the nation-state system, establishing academic traditions and knowledge production systems for information outside of a community or nation-state has a long history. The West has a developed system of linguistics and oriental studies. The uniqueness of area studies established in the US is that it breaks the narrow perception of regions and incorporates many cross-border studies, which represented a new orientation. Regional and international studies in the US are supported by a unique and powerful force, which gives an important supplement and sparked a reorganization of the modern humanities and social science system dominated by the modern academic system and the subject science and technology system. In the process of creating area studies, the Americans were very conscious to create a distance from traditional Oriental studies, and even a distance from modern linguistics. They made great efforts to establish a path to cover the societal knowledge of the whole world.

Today, European countries with powerful Oriental studies traditions, such as Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany, are increasingly adopting the American model, introducing the concepts and organization of American-style area studies, etc., which shows that American-style area studies has unique advantages. During this process, scholars have harvested many fruits of constant self-correction and self-reform.

Niu Ke said that area studies has three basic functions in the modern university system.

First, it expands foreign studies. In the opinion of Americans, within the current disciplinary system, there is too little research on the outside world. Old Oriental studies departments that had been established were far from sufficient, and Oriental studies, to a great extent, did not fall under the social sciences. The social sciences in the US were Western-centric and limited in terms of the scope of research. In Niu Ke's opinion, many of the things we are reflecting on today were actually considered by the Americans before World War II. Not all of America's assumptions were successful, such as its desire to include Western Europe and the US as one region in the area studies framework.

Before 1945, Americans had little research on Western Europe, but today, in the excellent history departments of American universities, research on foreign history often accounts for over 70% of the overall research.

The second function is to promote interdisciplinary development in the US. The US has suffered so-called "discipline isolationism" in the process of coordinating the modern disciplinary system. Some leading social scientists believed that some common, basic, important, and profound problems could not be effectively solved under the old disciplinary system.

Therefore, interdisciplinary work became a slogan and symbol, and this interdisciplinary effort is mainly achieved through area studies. Area studies is the largest, most systematic and profound interdisciplinary effort in the history of American

social sciences. Without area studies in the US, its social sciences would not be on the scale they enjoy today.

The third function is to improve Americans' ability to understand and appreciate the world in various ways at all levels. Tibetan Buddhism, for example, has become fashionable in the West, and this is closely related to the aesthetic preference that area studies has developed on university campuses. People like Hans Morgenthau, who advocates power politics in his own academic field, saw at the beginning of the establishment of area studies that the study of foreign countries requires fundamental changes to Americans' aesthetic preferences for the outside world, forming an ideological movement that aims to eliminate American's debate over their differences from others.

Niu Ke argued that although we are very different from the US, we have advantages over the US in some areas. For example, at PKU, our advantage in foreign languages today is something that Americans did not have from 1945 to 1950. But in other respects, such as our planning, our deliberations, and our epistemological discussions of the subject, we are still far behind the US at that time. The quality of the documents during the founding of area studies in the US is not easily seen today in the documents of our area studies.

Niu Ke emphasized the importance of general education for area studies. Today, we attach great importance to general education among undergraduates, but the leadership of universities, and those who participate in the area studies movement, especially the organizers and leaders, must have a clear self-awareness that they also need general education themselves. He said that through interviews, he found that

scholars of various disciplines tend to understand area studies from the perspective of their own disciplines. For example, scholars at the institute of international relations place area studies under the concept of international studies, failing to understand that area studies is fundamentally trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary, and is an upper-level structure that accommodates all disciplines.

There are ideas and attempts to conduct area studies within disciplines, but this is not feasible in terms of the university discipline structure and system. Scholars without a general education may make a lot of contributions to area studies. However, there will be a great negative impact if the organizers and leaders of area studies lack general education or lack knowledge in sociology and the philosophy of science, and have no systematic critical approach toward knowledge.

Niu Ke finally criticized the tendency to make area studies independent and become a relatively closed territory. In his view, the first dimension of area studies is that it should be robust in terms of both regional knowledge and a particular area of expertise, regardless of how difficult it might be. We must cultivate a group of scholars who are both authoritative in their original disciplines and have a strong presence in the field of area studies. Such talent can enable our future area studies efforts to go on and enjoy long-term development. There are many tensions between area studies and disciplinary studies. There is a tendency that disciplinary studies squeeze and marginalize area studies while emphasizing studies on domestic issues. In modern sociology and politics, there are various elements of area studies, but few of them are clearly defined.

Traditional disciplines suppress area studies. But area studies tends to eliminate disciplines, and wants to go back to the model established after the 1950s and 1960s that had no disciplinary affiliation, such as the model of the international department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the Institute of Asian and African Studies that PKU once had. If area studies really has no disciplinary affiliation, there will probably be problems in terms of academic qualifications and authoritativeness.

Comments from the chair

Gao Bingzhong: Prof. Niu Ke has interviewed the teachers of PKU and done relevant research in the US, so he has many ideas and shared rich information. His core point is that China's current area studies has not reached the earlier level of the US, and there are indeed problems in all aspects. However, Wang Hui and Qu Jingdong said that area studies has a promising future if it has the ambition to reconstruct social science and refuses to be a marginal field. Now we have established PKUIAS and have sufficient funds. Everyone has been involved in the process. With that, academics can move forward.

Wang Yuesheng: Let me share some thoughts. First, I think our group is very important. The discussion of theory and methodology is a must. Whether at PKU, in China, or internationally, area studies is not a new topic. However, as Niu Ke said, we have encountered some obstacles in area studies. For example, to do regional economic research, you have to know economics and the target area both very well. There are few people who can do it, let alone those who also have

enthusiasm and willingness to get involved in the field.

So, we are either cultivating those who can talk a little about any problem, or those like me, doing economic research in their current region of study. My research is not concerned with the differences of other countries. In my eyes, any region or country is a case. I have an idea and collect a large volume of US data, Chinese data, or data from anywhere in the world to do research. This research is 100 percent discipline-oriented, which is not the same as the area studies in our mind.

In my opinion, whether it is area studies, political studies, humanities studies, or historical studies, we may first have to clarify the basics of theory and methodology before we can progress. This can ensure we head toward the right path in the beginning. Otherwise we will go down dead ends which have been explored and abandoned in the past.

Niu Ke: There is a particularly good sociology study in the US that has not yet been published. After examining the groups engaged in area studies, the study draws a conclusion that training a mature subject specialist, economist or political scientist requires only one-third of the training time of a qualified area studies expert.

Therefore, students have to spend three times as long to become an area studies expert. As a result, their reasonable choice is to engage in discipline research. What should we do in this case? Area studies needs more external input and top-level support than any other type of academics.

In the US, all foreign-related majors must have a greater length of schooling. We wrote in the plan for area studies that the university must offer tangible support.

Questions from Audience

Question: I am from Beijing Language and Culture University. I want to ask Prof. Li Chenyang a question. I am confused about the demarcation between area studies and other studies, such as international relations.

Li Chenyang: This demarcation has been difficult. Just now, Prof. Niu Ke also mentioned some facts regarding the current discipline attribution of area studies. We must expand the attributes of the disciplines of area studies. PKU's practice is to set up a subject of area studies under the foreign language and literature department, and Yunnan University's current practice is to set up a second-level doctoral subject of area studies under politics.

In fact, there are some problems. For example, after the establishment of the subject, what about history, sociology and ethnology? Are they not going to be included? I know that many students who studied Indonesian religion and culture at the foreign languages departments did not pass their doctoral thesis. There was a problem when their degree was assessed. It was considered that their studies were not related to foreign languages and literature. If you set up under the politics department, there is already a secondary doctoral degree in international relations. How do we identify and distinguish them? It is indeed a big problem. When there was no secondary doctoral degree, my students who studied Myanmar issues had to belong to the international relations discipline. Now there are secondary doctoral degrees, and the categories may be a relatively narrowed down. But I don't think it's necessary to distinguish it very strictly and to identify each of them very

clearly.

At the start of the second half of the event, Prof. Gao Bingzhong gave a presentation themed “Exploration of Ethnographic Distribution and Area Studies in the ‘World Society.’” Gao Bingzhong briefly introduced the characteristics of anthropology. He reviewed some ethnographic research by PKU’s anthropology department and discussed the concept “world society.”

Gao Bingzhong said that the anthropology major of PKU has conducted about 30 overseas ethnographic studies in the past 15 years. The current task is to integrate scattered research into systematic area studies. In 2002, Gong Haoqun began to develop an overseas ethnographic talent training program in Thailand. His efforts aim to break the rigid model of anthropology training in China and to standardize ethnographic research in anthropology.

Gao Bingzhong said an important issue in the development of anthropology today is how to make a community ethnographic study more useful to social scientists.

Early anthropology was not concluded from field survey practices, but invented by specific pioneers. It has been about 100 years since Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski invented field investigations. Anthropology is built on the fieldwork of honest people and the anthropology studies of smart people. Only with this combination can anthropology truly become a standardized discipline in social science.

In terms of honest people’s fieldwork, when anthropological researchers do research in a foreign country, they must uphold the mentality of a primary school student for

whom everything is new. They must learn other people's language like a baby babbling out his first sounds.

Anthropological researchers need to be rooted in a small community and keep observing daily life. The researchers must live daily life under the local conditions themselves. They often need to live for at least a year in an environment that is usually more uncomfortable than their normal living environment. It is not easy for researchers to leave their loved ones, leave their social circles and leave their habitual lifestyle. This field research period is "one year of suffering," anthropologists often say. Therefore, the initial test of fieldwork will be difficult for many anthropologists. Many people cannot handle the difficulties of fieldwork, and will not choose this path. But this is only one stage of anthropology. Anthropology is also a discipline for smart people. It requires scholars to observe certain phenomena from the lives of ordinary people in communities, and to draw academic conclusions from these materials. This process requires wisdom, imagination and experience.

Gao Bingzhong believes that anthropological researchers need to transform empirical observations obtained from field investigation into academic theories. They need to reflect on big topics through small local events, research central issues through peripheral phenomenon, and present a culture and civilization as a whole on the basis of trivial daily experience. In addition, via the interpretation of others, we get to know ourselves, and gain a new perception of "us" through our association with others.

These are the two levels of anthropology, according to the classic formulation of Clifford Geertz.

The location of the study is not the purpose of the research. Anthropology does not study the village, but only studies in the village. Recognizing these two levels helps us to cultivate talent and form an authentic area studies practice.

Gao Bingzhong explained the basic meaning of the special phrase “world society,” and its two development stages.

The first stage is its basic meaning. When physical space is divided by sovereign states, a “social” world is created. Individuals and social organizations emerge and become a mass phenomenon. The state becomes not just a country on the world stage.

After China’s reform and opening-up, the experience of leaving China became a mass experience.

Why have I used the concept of “world society,” and not the more common concepts of “cosmopolitanism” and “globalization?”

The first reason is that the phrase “world society” refers to a process that reflects the interaction between people. This is an empirical and popular process, thus with special significance. The second reason is that the external connection of a country is no longer just a relationship between countries, but also a new social space.

In physical space, the distinction of a country’s territory, sovereignty and ownership is clear, but social spaces can be shared and superimposed on each other. The common vision of the “world society” has become a daily experience, and the most basic manifestation is the use of telephones. It was previously difficult to achieve effective and economical contact between different regions, but now you can easily call any corner of the

world. The widespread use of live TV enables people to participate in the same event simultaneously no matter where they are.

The first development stage of the “world society” concept was in the 1940s after the World War II. Expressions like “world society” or “cosmopolitan society” began to be used to describe new phenomena which could not be expressed by the “international” concept, with representative figures including Fei Xiaotong and Paul G. Steinbicker. The second stage is scholars’ discussion of the concept of “world society” since the 1980s, with representatives including Barry Buzan, George Krückken and Gili S Drori.

Today, the idea of a “world society” has gradually become adopted by the public. It has become “politically correct” to adopt this viewpoint. For example, in 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong displayed the American flag after he got on the moon. In contrast, now that the “world society” viewpoint has taken hold, when the American entrepreneur Elon Musk launched the Space X in 2018, it was emblazoned with the words “Made on Earth by humans.” In another example, the music the first artificial earth satellite in China in 1970 played was “The East is Red”(东方红), a classic Chinese Communist party song. In contrast, when China launched the Shenzhou-5 spacecraft in 2003, astronaut Yang Liwei displayed the national flag of China and the United Nations flag in space.

In an era when people are increasingly feeling the existence of a global community of common destiny, “world society” has become a concept that people use when they stand in the

commanding heights of the human experience to express political correctness.

Gao Bingzhong believes that the West is the earliest promoter of the world society concept, and the earliest to conceptualize a world society. In contrast, China had no opportunity to understand world society from its own perspective until the reform and opening-up.

At present, PKU's anthropology program has achieved great results. There are more than 60 overseas ethnographic projects by Chinese academics, more than 30 of which are by PKU teachers and students. The overseas ethnographic projects cover about 30 countries, and 18 involve PKU research. About 20 working languages are involved in these projects, and PKU uses 15 of them. Each individual overseas ethnographic project links up to form a worldwide distribution pattern. On this basis, PKU anthropologists and students have been thinking about how to use this collection of results to create derivative and proliferating academic achievements. A series of discussions have kicked off, two of which are representative: the Belt and Road series and the US series.

In terms of the Belt and Road series, Gao Bingzhong said that it is not the case that the "Belt and Road" existed first, and then academics started studying it. Instead, the Belt and Road initiative emerged on the basis of scholars' academic work. Overseas studies in anthropology will lead and reshape China's social sciences. Without a rigorous investigation of overseas societies, it is difficult for a country to have social sciences scholarship at a contemporary level.

As far as the US series, Gao Bingzhong said that the PKU

anthropology major currently has 20 ethnographic stations in the US. The ethnographic stations in the US are varied, geographically covering the West Coast, Midwest, New England, and South regions of the US. The topics cover development, politics, colonial expansion, religion, race and so on.

In the end, Gao Bingzhong concluded that the study of anthropology can be said to be a process from point to line to plane. The ethnographic studies are scattered points, and the topics are the lines connecting these points, and finally these lines form a certain area that is the plane. The current work is how to do a better job at the level of the plane and how to better integrate anthropology with other disciplines on a solid academic basis. Anthropological investigations and care for human civilization as a whole are two basic links in research. One has the “foundation” function of providing basic overseas ethnographic experience, and the other a spearheading function that can enable the leading researchers to explore the world. In order for these two links to play a greater role in area studies, a platform such as PKUIAS is needed to offer anthropology and other disciplines academic resources, including students, talent and investigation funds.

Prof. Wang Yuesheng of the School of Economics of PKU gave a speech entitled “Experience and Insights of Economic Research in Area Studies.” In the speech, Wang Yuesheng reviewed the fine traditions of economic area studies at PKU, and analyzed why the traditions declined and then revived. He put forward his own multi-faceted thinking on economic area studies.

He said that PKU's economic research in area studies has a strong tradition. He enrolled in PKU's world economics major in 1979, which did economic research in different countries and regions, including the US, the USSR, Japan, Europe and South Asia. In 1958, Premier Zhou Enlai personally instructed PKU and Renmin University of China to establish a world economics major and study foreign economies. In 1959, PKU began enrolling students to the major. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, world economy was one of the so-called four "international majors" of the social sciences, with a long and proud history at PKU.

However, the development of the major was not strong, both at PKU and in the whole country. Wang Yueshang believes that this is closely related to the impact of the domestic situation. At that time, economic area studies were divorced from reality. Although China had launched its reform and opening-up, the country was still relatively closed. As a result, economic area studies had difficulty becoming central to the school's economic studies. In addition, speaking from theoretical and methodological perspectives, the field of economic area studies lacked systematic theories and methodologies, and was often criticized and looked down on by other economic researchers. However, Wang Yuesheng said that even though the development of the discipline has encountered twists and turns, the research of relevant scholars in the 1980s still made an important contribution to China's economic development.

For example, the studies of the economic system of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Hungary at that time had an

important impact on China's subsequent reform and opening-up and the establishment of a socialist market economic system.

Wang Yuesheng continued to say that presently China is again putting emphasis on economic area studies because of the influence of the domestic situation. From an economic point of view, after truly integrating into the global system, China's domestic economic development and international economic development are becoming increasingly closely linked. If China does not understand foreign countries and the world, it will be difficult for China to move forward. The recent Sino-US trade war has also inspired us to further understand the US social, economic and political system, decision-making methods and culture. Only a deep understanding of all aspects of the US can help us make an accurate judgment about the future of its policies.

In addition, in theory and methodology, Wang Yuesheng said that he agreed with Prof. Wang Hui's view that in the future we will not use existing social science methods to guide area studies and the globalization process, but use the achievements of area studies and globalization to re-establish the knowledge and systems of social sciences. The current model for economics is US economics, and the future of economics may encompass a model of the Chinese experience and models of the economic development experiences in other regions. These empirical practices will become important parts of future global economics.

Wang Yuesheng concluded with his own thoughts. First, he said some current research in the field of domestic economics is not solid. He believes that many economics students lack logical

thinking, consciousness of problems and theoretical models when writing papers. Many students' research work is superficial. They look for data, do regression analysis and tests, but lack deep thinking.

Second, there are some misunderstandings in the current economics community, and one of them is analyzing economic development of all countries with only the Western economic paradigm. For example, a conclusion can be drawn from regression analysis with US concepts and models with Chinese data. If the conclusion is inconsistent with that based on US data, it is considered that China has a problem and needs to reform. However, the economic situations in different countries are very different and they cannot be generalized. Regardless of the actual situation, applying the Western paradigm mechanically is not practical at all.

Third, Wang Yuesheng emphasized that the field of political economy should be re-emphasized. Marxist political economics and new political economics are as important as technical methods. They are indispensable in economic area studies.

Fourth, he expressed concern about the increasing marginalization of area studies teaching and research. He said that with the needs of the market, the number of teachers in economics colleges studying economic area studies has been decreasing. The remaining a few teachers are about to retire soon. The lack of talent will become an important bottleneck in economic area studies.

Fifth, Wang Yuesheng opposes the separation between economic research and politics, history, and cultural studies. If

economic area studies wants to develop, it is necessary to strengthen students' training in subjects like political economy, international political economy and international relations based on mainstream economics training. Currently the training in this area is missing or even seriously inadequate. Only by cultivating generalists who are versed in politics, economy, history and culture while mastering economic methods can we truly garner genuine research results.

Sixth, Wang Yuesheng called for the establishment of an inclusive system for the development of multiple languages. In the current teaching and research practice, there is no environment for languages other than English, which is a great obstacle to area studies.

In the end, he believes that appropriate institutional structures and incentives should be built to encourage more people to devote themselves to area studies. Area studies has the characteristic of a long preparation period with small and slow-rising income. In particular, it is difficult to advance in economics departments. The field needs special support to exist and develop.

Fu Zhiming, a professor of Arabic at PKU, gave a presentation themed “Cultivating Talent Who Can Connect China and the World and Exploring the Bridge Communicating History and Future – Theories and Practices in the Cultivation of Area Studies Talent at PKU’s School of Foreign Languages.”

He first stated the inevitability of the rise of area studies and the advantages of PKU in doing area studies. Then he introduced the efforts of the School of Foreign Languages in area studies over the years. He concluded with advice on how to

better build an area studies program.

Fu Zhiming believes that the reason for area studies' flourishing is the needs of politics, most directly the need of the "Belt and Road" initiative. Previously, China's economy was relatively closed, and there was a lack of understanding of neighboring countries. Now China has taken the initiative to look beyond its borders, but still lacks understanding of the rest of the world. Therefore, the country needs think tanks and needs to do area studies. He believes that PKU has sufficient resources to do area studies. Compared with many other colleges and universities that have followed suit to establish area studies institutes to study hot issues, PKU's research will be more pure. Compared with other colleges and universities who lack a professional or foreign language foundation, PKU has unique advantages.

Fu Zhiming said that the School of Foreign Languages has great enthusiasm for area studies. Foreign languages are not only a tool for foreign language practitioners, but also their life and their profession, which can arouse their interest in the languages' target countries. Under the "Belt and Road" initiative, the School of Foreign Languages can make a difference. At present, PKU researchers who study the Laotian economy are not from the School of Economics, but the School of Foreign Languages. Also, those who study the Middle East religion or Islam are not from the Department of Philosophy, but the School of Foreign Languages. This reflects the sense of responsibility and enthusiasm of foreign language practitioners. Driven by such emotions, the School of Foreign Languages is actively striving to establish sub-disciplines for area studies.

However, Fu Zhiming said that the barriers to making this happen at PKU are very strict, and the desire of the School of Foreign Languages to cooperate with other social science departments has been mostly frustrated. The only successful example was co-establishing the major of foreign languages and foreign history in 2012 with the Department of History. The creation of this major was of revolutionary significance, led to a leap forward, and earned the first prize of the Beijing Excellence in Teaching award this year.

He put forward his own opinions on talent cultivation in area studies. First of all, researchers not only need to understand English but also need to have a good command of their main language of study. More specifically, they are asked to master English as well as their main language of study. In this way they can use language to understand the culture, ethnicities, religion, and society of the studied areas.

Second, researchers must have a background in an academic discipline. For example, if they want to study the Myanmar economy, then their major should be economics, and they must have economic theory to guide them.

The most important thing is to have first-hand sources. The researchers should go to the target country to conduct fieldwork, not mislead readers with hearsay or rumors.

To cultivate professional talent in area studies, it is necessary to establish a four-advisor system. The language advisor will take charge of students' language proficiency and comprehension; the discipline advisor will guide the research direction in the future. An advisor coming from an international advanced country who studies the same major is also needed.

And a language advisor from the target country also should be taken into consideration. The four advisors form a team to work together to foster outstanding talent in area studies.

When it comes to recruiting area studies students, Fu Zhiming believes that students who are willing to engage in area studies and are willing to contribute and dedicate themselves to this major should be recruited. Only those who are truly passionate about the major will not be afraid of frustration and hardships. Therefore, he did not agree the opinion by Prof. Gao Bingzhong that field research is a painful thing that makes researchers suffer for one year abroad. He thinks that researchers should live a happy life in the studied area and truly integrate into the local society. Fu Zhiming took himself as an example and said that if he wants to go to Russia, he will inevitably be afraid because he does not know Russian and is worried about being deceived there. But if he wants to go to the Arab countries, he will be very comfortable because he knows the local language and can talk to the locals and mingle with them.

Fu Zhiming shared his opinion on hiring teachers. He believes that like-minded people must be hired. Only in this way can they inject energy into area studies. He also said that a good job in area studies is inseparable from the hard work of teachers and their efforts must be repaid. PKU and IAS should carefully consider teachers' remuneration.

In the end, Fu Zhiming expressed his vision to cultivate talent who can connect China and the world. This talent can explore a bridge that can communicate history and future. He hopes that area studies can be supported by the university.

Guan Kai, associate professor of the School of Ethnology

and Sociology at Minzu University of China, gave a presentation themed “Globalization, Area Studies and Anthropology: Focusing on Ethnography.”

Guan Kai first said that he majored in Spanish and the main task during his university life was studying foreign literature. He worked hard doing this every day.

Considering the current relatively weak foreign literature and history training for students, Guan Kai believes that the design and emergence of a discipline such as area studies, including the flow of various resources, is based on decision making processes in society that are structural rather than dynamic. In the case of area studies, this structural determinant is that China must understand and interact with the world. No single phenomenon occurs in isolation.

Guan Kai gave two examples of ethnography helping China understand the world.

The first is a researcher who studies the middle class in Thailand. The researcher coined a term called “spiritual politics.” He found that under the pressure of neoliberal globalization, the Thai middle class needs to draw on religion to ease this pressure. This results in the phenomenon that many members of the Thai middle class have a very neoliberal individualistic ideology while also believing in religion. As a result, there is a middle-class religious practice and a new form of religion.

The other example is that the donors to Tibetan Buddhism are mostly Han Chinese, and even the temples in Nepal are donated by them. It is interesting that this behavior has affected Sino-Nepalese relations, because Nepal’s Tibetan Buddhism

respects the Dalai Lama. This has formed an international problem. So today we can say that any local event has a worldwide significance and there is no isolated phenomenon.

Guan Kai emphasized the importance of conducting research based on ethnography. Through field research, ethnography practitioners can truly understand things like the religious activities of the middle class and the details of daily life in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The knowledge can even subvert the myth of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and this type of knowledge cannot be provided by mainstream intellectuals. Area studies must examine a real community, rather than an imagined one. Therefore, the ethnographic orientation in anthropological research is worthy of attention. It can provide us with details about the real world beyond grand theory.

Guan Kai cautions that rumors stemming from political myths often obscure the nature of an event. For example, the benefit of independence is one of the political myths that major powers are now touting. However, many studies have found that a country's independence will bring about many problems. The independence of Kazakhstan brought the country significant problems. Is the history of this country 500 years or 30 years? This problem is similar to the problem of Chinese people wondering where their family tree should begin. Ethnography is an important method for us to solve many theoretical problems today.

Finally, Guan Kai said that what we really need to do today is thoroughly update our knowledge. The most important task is not to import more tools or translate various foreign language terms and publish books for students to read and hold reading

clubs. Today's world is experiencing a new era, which is not only a new era for China, but also for the world. This new era presents two aspects caused by globalization. First, human beings are closely linked together in an unprecedented way. This has led to new economic opportunities. Second, today's world map is still dominated by nation-state sovereignty. But the nation-states cannot manage time anymore. Time is reorganizing. Various historical resources can be re-allocated from other places. The ones who are telling Chinese historical stories are Americans and they have a certain political purpose in doing this. Therefore, Guan Kai said that today's China needs to know more about itself, understand its relationship with the world, and understand how the world sees China. The answers to these questions can all be found in area studies.

Questions from Audience

Question: On one hand we mingle in the countries we are researching and have empathy with their people, and on the other hand we leverage the research to serve our national strategy. How do we balance these two behaviors?

Prof. Gong Haoqun: When we were studying local people, we did not actually regard them as being in an isolated village. The life of any village is under the framework of state governance and may even be impacted by global commodity or fund flows. For example, my students go to Thailand to do research related to fruit. Since China is importing a lot of tropical fruit from Thailand, like longan and durian, what effect does such trade have on the lives of local people? What is the change in their entire planting technology? What is the

relationship between their local politics and the distribution network? How do all these factors combine to shape their countryside? We want to see how these factors work in actual practice.