

## **Area Studies Towards the 21st Century: Global Experiences and China Paradigms II**

**April 13, 2019**

At the one-year anniversary of the establishment of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS), an international conference titled “Area Studies towards the 21st Century: Global Experiences and China Paradigms” was held on April 12 and 13, 2019. Nearly 50 international scholars from more than 20 countries and regions as well as experts from domestic universities and research institutes gathered together to discuss theories, methods and experiences of area studies. To enhance the communication between scholars from different countries and regions, the conference designed six parallel panels, with the themes being respectively “New World, New Area Studies,” “Theoretical Paradigms of Area Studies,” “Regional Experiences in Area Studies,” “The American Perspective in Area Studies,” “Regional Cooperation and Common Development” and “Regional Focus: Southeast Asia and the Middle East.”

### **I: “New World, New Area Studies”**

Tom Rafferty, principal economist specializing on China from the Economist Intelligence Unit, analyzed the global outlook for 2019 on political and economic development.

Rafferty opined that, first, the global economic development in 2019 will slow down, affected by the China–US trade war and sluggish domestic demand in the EU and the US. In contrast, Africa and Latin America will see robust economic growth. Second, the

China–US trade war will continue. Third, affected by the Belt and Road Initiative, the original balance among different powers around the globe will be overturned.

All in all, the 2019 global economy will meet a downturn. Big economies, including North America, the EU and China, will see their economic development slow down; Africa and Latin America will maintain economic growth; and India will keep the same growth rate as the past year while ASEAN will see an economic downturn. In addition, the trade war will be the biggest global risk between 2019 and 2020. Large debt risks account for three of the world’s top ten risks, among which is China’s rising debt ratio and the US’s housing debt problems after the financial crisis. Oil prices will continue to fluctuate and will remain at \$60–70 during the next few years.

Rafferty opined that the tension in Sino–US economic relations may continue, and then affect agriculture, currency, and intellectual property rights. Sino–US bilateral negotiations may also last for a long time. US economic growth will continue slowing down between 2019 and 2020, with the first quarter of 2020 probably seeing a downturn, which poses challenges to the US economy. Overall, the US economy under the Trump administration will weaken. On the other hand, the Chinese economy, possibly affected by the Sino–US trade war and debt problems, may see its GDP growth rate limited to around 6 percent in 2020. Meanwhile, China will also encounter some prominent problems, such as the disappearance of the demographic dividend and the aging of the population.

Given that area studies is preconditioned by some form of reasoned framing of geographic entities and their boundaries, Yoichi Mine, a professor at Doshisha University in Japan, presented the frame of “Afrasia,” the term originally coined by the historian, Arnold Toynbee, by way of resurrection of the Bandung spirit in new contexts. “Afrasia” is a generic term that combines Africa and Asia. He said that, according to the UN Population Division, the breakdown of the world population in 2100 is projected to be 4.9 billion Asians, 4.4 billion Africans and 1.9 billion people in the rest of the world. By then, more than 80 percent of the world population will be Asian or African. Globally, Asia will maintain an important position in terms of population and economic strength. However, as the population of Asia already reached 3.78 billion in 2001, the main driver of global population growth will come from Africa. Population expansion will lead to a complete shift in the distribution of global population, thereby providing more opportunities for development. Therefore, in the future, Afrasia will continue to enjoy a demographic dividend.

The continuing growth of the Afrasian population also means a lot of challenges. First, fast population growth will bring about huge pressure on food security and food sovereignty in African countries. Second, Africa will encounter side effects from global industrialization, mainly from global climate changes, when pushing forward rural development. Third, urbanization will be a big challenge facing Afrasian areas because it makes great demands on civil infrastructure. Fourth, international migration will accelerate, with its

format shifting from “migration from developing to developed countries” to “migration between developing countries.” Fifth, national policy makers need stronger coordination to proactively and effectively solve social issues brought about by rapid population changes, such as the aging of the population, child welfare issues and women’s issues.

Yoichi Mine opined that there are three determining factors for population: fertility rate, mortality rate and migration rate. The fertility rate of African women has started to decline since the 1980s and, according to the UN, 80% of the world’s population will be Afrasians in the early 22nd century, but probably will not increase above that, as the Afrasian population explosion will not be long-lasting. Undoubtedly, however, the huge population in Afrasian areas will play an important role in the future development of the world. Politically, the foundation for realizing world peace will be to keep political stability in Afrasian joint areas, namely the Middle East and North Africa. How to achieve such stability is still a critical question. The quality of communication between Africans and Asians will seriously affect the future of the world. At present, responsible dialogue between the two regions and opportunities for them to learn from each other are still rather limited. Thus, the big powers in the Afrasian region in the future should not behave as the Europeans did in the past, but should adopt cooperative measures to deal with multiple challenges.

Barney Walsh, a teaching fellow and research associate at the

African Leadership Center, King's College London, made a presentation about African statehood in a multi-polar world.

Certain problems and power relations have been long existed in Africa, such as colonialism and slavery. The “state” system, which is the cornerstone of contemporary international relations, has never fully settled into the African context. The state in Africa seldom looks like the Westphalian and Weberian constructs that it is expected to be. Many regions in Africa are still applying traditional governance methods. Due to the lack of a transformation process, the tension between Western colonial governance and traditional governance has contributed to the emergence of continuing conflicts and problems.

The world is in an era of atomization and globalization. The state system plays a complex role in the development of Africa. Different state systems affect each other. Factors needed in state-building tend to form a balanced structure after interactions within, such as the emergence of the United Nations and its role in regional issues. In the development of the world, the leadership of the state is crucial. Africa's previous national governance was seen as a failure. China has provided not only material assistance to Africa, but also much experience in national governance and economic development models.

Besides material assistance, such as building traffic infrastructure and investing in agricultural technology demonstration centers in Africa, China is also helping Africa establish its national framework via, for example, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). China insists on its signature principle of non-interference when

providing assistance to Africa. Although “doing nothing” is the best way to effect “non-interference,” China does not choose this way; instead, it helps cultivate elite figures and political participants, enriches Africa’s military talent pool and invites African representatives to visit China, and these activities serve the shaping of the state system.

The West has always looked at Africa in an arrogant manner. But at the same time, its naiveté and ignorance in this respect has led it to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to deal with complicated African issues, triggering lots of problems. Issues in Africa are rather complicated and keep evolving, hence more thinking and discussion are needed to ensure the development in that region.

Liu Haifang, director of the Center for African Studies, PKU, introduced China’s African studies in the global context. She explained that China’s African studies originated at PKU, having been founded by Yang Renpian, in 1958. Prof. Yang emphasized that Chinese scholars should master languages and first-hand materials. In 1962, he promoted courses targeting Africa. Taking advantage of his personal funds and social network, he collected documents and magazines about Africa at PKU’s library. After the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), China saw its second generation of scholars in African studies, with three research directions available: PKU’s focus on African history and contemporary issues, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ focus on political economics, international relations and policy orientation, and Nanjing University’s emphasis on

geographical economics and agricultural issues of Africa. During that period, students were able to get access to systemic learning in Africa-related courses, including a general history of Africa with an emphasis on language abilities, followed by cooperation with international scholars afterwards.

Since the beginning of the new century, China established the FOCAC, with the Chinese government investing a lot into China–Africa relations; meanwhile, from the business perspective, a large number of Chinese enterprises rushed to Africa for investment and cooperation, and, from the angle of the public, the Chinese public has increasingly gained a better understanding of Africa. A new generation of scholars in African studies, equipped with good educational backgrounds, have emerged in this period and conducted high-quality studies. Meanwhile, a lot of African students have come to China for study and returned home after graduation, contributing to China–Africa relations in various ways.

Liu Haifang pointed out that, unfortunately, African studies seems to be gradually losing its momentum. The government has put in place incentive mechanisms to push forward African studies, but it is still a question whether scholars would personally and proactively push forward African studies. Africa has many unique characteristics, but people have not given the continent the attention it deserves. Therefore, relevant policy measures to aid the field need to be strengthened. In addition, traditional African studies is currently facing huge challenges because of the variety of methodologies being

used. Insisting on social science methodologies will benefit African studies. African studies should enhance cooperation with area studies, and scholars studying Africa should pay attention to new approaches and promote the overall development of the field.

Dragana Mitrovic, head of the Center for Asian and Far Eastern Studies, University of Belgrade, analyzed the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Eastern European countries, starting from the “16+1” cooperation (cooperation between China and the 16 countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Mitrovic pointed out that Central and Eastern European countries have differing political backgrounds and history. Some of them remained under the former Soviet bloc while others joined NATO; hence, their ideologies and political attributes exhibit many differences. In addition, the different economic development levels of these countries over the past dozen years have led to their having different economic interests, making it difficult for China to provide them with unified market planning when engaged in trade interactions with these countries.

Meanwhile, the EU has been on the alert against China’s possible “economic interference” in Central and Eastern European countries. China has provided privileged loans in the past for certain EU-member Central and Eastern European countries with the goal of helping these countries in their infrastructure construction. In this



regard, the EU was concerned about the possibility that China would thereby weaken the EU mechanism to some extent. The EU leadership considers that, while such an approach may be a shortcut, it does not benefit the long-term development of these countries. On one hand, some EU member countries rely on China's investment and loans, and sometimes they would achieve their goals by participating in the BRI. On the other, China also relies on these countries, providing loans in exchange for certain benefits, such as facilitating the entry of certain enterprises, such as Huawei, to the European market. Many EU members question China's intention in that they are not sure about the consequences if China were to control some European companies through capital and trade interactions or even thus obtain a huge influence on certain industries. However, overall, most Central and Eastern European governments hold a positive attitude toward trade interactions with China, and have switched their policies to promote regional win-win cooperation and active participation in trade cooperation.

Peou Yang, secretary general of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, pointed out in his presentation that China is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and plays an important role in the stable development of global politics. Under China's efforts, Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, have been able to make greater contributions on the platform of the UN in policymaking, UN peace-keeping operations, environmental protection and economic development.

After the Cold War, China's independent foreign policy achieved significant progress. The Chinese economy realized rapid growth through reform and opening-up, and through communication and cooperation with different countries. Over the recent three decades, China has further deepened its reform and opening-up and witnessed great changes in society. Therefore, Cambodia hopes to learn from China's experience in economic and social reform in order to seek for better development.

The BRI, connecting Asia and Europe, has tailor-made a number of cooperation programs for the countries and regions along the "Belt and Road." China's efforts in helping construct infrastructure in these countries and regions have played a positive role in their development. Many Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, hope to have long-term cooperation with China. To date, the BRI has obtained positive remarks from most countries and regions.

Peou Yang opined that the reform and opening-up has integrated China into the world economic system, attracted a great amount of investment into China and promoted employment and development. Investors should pay attention to local culture and get involved in local communities and schools, which would also benefit the spreading of Chinese culture. China has conducted a number of good quality cooperative projects with Cambodia and established many agencies. Cambodia hopes to further promote cooperation with China, build a stable partnership and promote regional development.

Gao Jian, secretary general of the Shanghai Academy of Global

Governance and Area Studies, stated his understanding of and views on the paradigm of area studies. He said that for a long period in the past, when referring to international relations, he could not find a proper theoretical framework for a Chinese paradigm, with the result that he sometimes had to follow a Western mode of thinking and apply Western methodology in doing research, which was not acceptable for him.

From the perspective of academic thinking, per Thomas Kuhn, the forming of a paradigm is affected by certain factors. The first is motivation, which is the purpose and impetus for doing research. The second is the angle, that is, from which angle one observes the world. Some scholars believe that the paradigm of area studies was established based on Western countries' motivation; for instance, area studies during the colonial period served colonialism, while the US developed area studies after World War II in order to establish its status as the world hegemon. Following that line of thinking, is China's motivation for starting to do area studies, as Huntington put it, to seek hegemony after the UK, France, the US and Germany? Of course not.

From the perspective of historical process, China achieved its development not through looting or colonizing other countries but through the endeavors of generations of its people. From the perspective of international relations, China has insisted on the principle of peace in its previous practice and in the future, as peace is the foundation on which to cooperate with other countries. Meanwhile,

international society generally holds a pessimistic attitude toward the future of the world, deeming that the world will become even more unbalanced in the future. But much of the Chinese government's foreign policy is about how to achieve a balance between developing and developed countries and a balance between China and its neighboring countries, how they should develop together and how they should help each other. Therefore, the path of peaceful development will be the main momentum for pushing forward the theoretical consciousness and the forming of a paradigm for China's area studies.

Shi Zengzhi, a professor in the School of Journalism and Communication, PKU, talked about the theory and practice of discourse practice in the development of globalization. She pointed out that languages, as the medium for communication and interaction in daily life, have become an unavoidable issue in area studies. In this regard, media studies and communication studies have more in-depth theoretical framework and practical discussion, whereas interdisciplinary studies aim at breaking the academic barriers among different disciplines. With the rise and development of massive social media platforms as well as the convenience and speed in listening, speaking, reading and writing, communication is happening ubiquitously. The forms of communication and variety of media are changing peoples' attitudes, psychology and behaviors and also quietly reforming society, which become the underlying logic for social development.

The invention of internet social media is undoubtedly another revolution following the digital medium. Social media users fully participate in all kinds of communication and interactions, and freely produce or choose a scene as background, having mutual interactions, learning from each other and getting to know each other with the involvement of their mood, consciousness and sensation. It means that people-to-people communication has shown an emphasis on value rationality, with a slew of insights and thoughts being active at multi-levels and in multi-systems, making social relations based on languages more vivid and complicated. Therefore, we should pay attention to different effects produced by different narrative approaches in doing area studies, be alert for the confusion caused by cognition, and put emphasis on the “self-estrangement” (the estrangement effect is a performing arts concept coined by German playwright Bertolt Brecht) and recognition of state-nation identity and community identity. We should not only realize the differences in the choice of media, language expression, narrative approaches, and cognition modes in people’s interaction and communication, but also understand the similarities within the differences.

## **II: “Theoretical Paradigms of Area Studies”**

Christopher Gerry, head of the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford, explained his understanding of area studies. He opined that area studies becomes unique against the backdrop of globalization and internationalization. On one hand, although there are many researchers in area studies, only a few of

them understand the evolvement of the discipline and the dimension worth attention. On the other hand, area studies are not recognized as a discipline on some occasions, with some academic journals even reluctant to publish papers about the research achievement of area studies. In addition, some hold that university-based area studies should take on the responsibility of serving as think tanks to provide data and policy suggestions for the government. However, how to effectively take advantage of the fruit of area studies is still worthy of discussion. Some people complain that area studies is exclusive and insulated. This, however, may be due to other disciplines' lack of understanding of area studies.

In face of various challenges and judges, area studies should insist on the following aspects. First, area studies should continue its self-critique and pay more attention to studying the particularity of areas; area studies have huge interdisciplinary potential which, however, has not been fully realized yet. We should combine the perspectives of both quality and quantity research, fully explore the possibilities of interdisciplinary research, and have more reflection and critiques over intellectual production. Area studies, as a discipline, should be based on scholars having broad background, and should lay emphasis on basic questions and pay attention to universal laws. We should establish a dialogue pattern that seeks common ground while reserving differences to have cross-language and cross-cultural dialogue and challenge the so-called "truth." We should have more communication with scholars to not only get to know the facts but

realize their correlation through dialogue.

Injoo Sohn, director of the Institute for China Studies, Seoul National University, pointed out in his presentation that policy-applicable theory is an important theory during the integration of area studies with social sciences. Area studies needs to solve some generic problems, such as sovereignty, cyber security, environmental development and unemployment. Area studies needs to develop policy-applicable knowledge and theory about the generic problems of human society in an age of globalization. The purpose of problem-driven research is neither to test the explanatory power of general theories nor to provide specific technical suggestions about a local problem. Rather, it is to develop conceptual models of policy instruments, which draw on multiple theoretical traditions.

Some problem-driven specialized research, such as research on Chinese language, may encounter difficulties when communicating with other disciplines. In this way, researchers coming from different disciplines have to conduct interdisciplinary research, thus providing possibilities for more extensively applying research result in other disciplinary fields. In regard to Chinese studies, interdisciplinary research can help researchers to better study Chinese policies. From the disciplinary perspective, China has many fragmented research fields with different problem directions and quantitative goals. Social scientists are accustomed to do research with lots of data, which may lead to “insulated research.” To avoid that, problem-driven approach is the proper way for them to do research.

Policy-applicable theory has been applied in East Asian economic cooperation research, such as proposing to imitate the IMF to establish an AMF (Asian Monetary Fund), establishing a stable currency union and creating a common exchange-rate mechanism. In order to establish an East Asian economic cooperation community or monetary fund organization, the first priority for each country is to have sovereignty transference to ease the pressure caused by competition and strengthen their regional identities.

Niu Ke, an associate professor in the Department of History at PKU, introduced the US system of regional and international studies and its implication for contemporary China's area studies.

He expressed his belief that area studies should first emphasize its international orientation. In recent decades, the term "international studies" has been increasingly used for area studies, but this expression is more suitable for an international knowledge complex than "area studies." It means that when conducting area studies, it is also necessary to emphasize its international orientation, so as to mobilize, coordinate and integrate all the original academic system's fields and factors about the external world.

Second, the research approach of Orientalism is flawed. Area studies needs the support of an academic system, and also should focus on the research methods of social science. After World War II, area studies in the US abandoned the research paradigm of Orientalism, and officially incorporated into the academic field many things that were previously not considered to be formal academic



research objects. Also they were rationalized and legalized through building academic systems. In terms of research method, the importance of social science was further stressed.

Third, area and international studies is a large, complex, and important study, which cannot and should not be framed and guided by “think tanks;” otherwise, it would undermine the “intellectuality” of both area studies and think tanks. After World War II, area and international research studies in the US mainly existed under the framework of the “discipline of liberal arts and science” in the university system. This basic system stipulates the identity and attributes of area studies as basic academics and “exclusive research.”

Fourth, although the roots of area studies have made it inevitably pay more attention to the research methods of foreign policy and international relations dimension, area studies should also focus on its own cultural field, which supports and fosters the sense of questions on the external world’s knowledge and determines the form, style and breadth of outside knowledge.

Despite various problems, dilemmas and shortcomings in historical and realistic US area and international studies, China must attach importance to, understand and refer to it. This is because such research has had profound rationale and foundation, scale, achievements, influence and paradigm meaning in the contemporary worldwide specific academic system, as well as the inclusiveness, flexibility and ability to adapt to changes and self-changes in history. Of course, China should not and cannot replicate the US template; but

in the contemporary efforts to build “area studies,” the actual process and ideological resources of US area and international studies, including resources for self-criticism and reflection, should become an important source for China to obtain principles, methods and strategies. It can even be regarded as one of the important starting points and foundations of knowledge and thoughts in China.

The presentation by Aviad Kleinberg, head of the Department of History at Tel Aviv University, was titled “Learning from the Past to Shape the Future.” He expressed his belief that history covers many past areas. In the course of historical evolution, the changes in natural environment, such as geography and climate changes, were relatively small, while the changes in language, culture, and behavioral patterns were extensive. At the same time, the nature of human nature does not change. Therefore, it is equally important to analyze both the horizontal and vertical differences. During the second half of the 20th century, there was a view that history could not inspire people, and the fashion to regard history as a mirror actually gives rise to a prejudiced study, which often produces misunderstanding. In this regard, Kleinberg believes that history is a treasure house where all human knowledge and wisdom from the past is accumulated. We should maintain a prudent attitude and pay attention to the experience accumulated in history.

Kleinberg said that in the context of globalization, the borders among countries are becoming more blurred. Emerging political forces are competing in the world, while political enemies are quite

distinct from each other. This situation constitutes a major challenge for area studies and challenges its “comfort zone.” People can understand the culture of the target area only through an ideological double crossing. In addition, the communication of global culture often has misleading effects. The new situation requires researchers not to build a new paradigm of thinking in the old data system, but to see the relationship between world order and global values.

Kleinberg pointed out that the “Silk Road” may become the core of China in the 21st century. It is a long-standing historical and cultural phenomenon, and the initiative is not nostalgic, but a future-oriented move. What role Israel should play in the new Silk Road is a key point of research at the Tel Aviv Research Center. Israel is located in the intersection of Europe, Asia and Africa, and should play a role in bridging and helping close the gap. The outside world used to have concerns as to whether the analytical framework of the research center would be controlled by politicians and entrepreneurs. Kleinberg expressed his belief that the integration of economics, politics, science and history should not be just for Silk Road research. In the end, he said that history is not only one part of area studies, but one kind of area studies itself. Researchers should ask whether historical research can be self-reflective, and they should provide advice to decision-makers.

Sanusha Naidu, a senior research fellow with the Institute for Global Dialogue at the University of South Africa, introduced the foundations and realities of the development of area studies in South

Africa. She said that it is a very complicated process to conduct area studies in South Africa. South Africa is relatively independent among all the African countries, and academic research must not only learn from history, but also take reality into consideration.

First of all, factors in South Africa, including racial discrimination, tribal relations, and political and cultural relations have had a major impact on area studies. For example, in South Africa, identity issues influence the education system. South Africa has two levels of education systems, elite education and secondary education, which are fully reflected in higher education. Under this kind of education system, all groups are eager to identify themselves, which brings problems to the setting and naming of related courses.

The influence of international relations and diplomacy on South Africa's national policies also should be considered when designing a curriculum of area studies, such as the isolation policies against South Africa by Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola and so on. Apartheid research is also an important issue in South Africa's area studies. In South Africa during the 1990s, academic hot topics and curriculum design in politics, history, sociology and other disciplines all centered on the possibility of negotiating for a peaceful model.

South Africa is important to Africa and the world as a whole, and even the integration of the world cannot ignore the voice of South Africa. It is an important issue how the world views South Africa and Africa. Is South Africa still important? Is it still an apartheid country? Is the principle of economic distribution in South Africa fair? These

are all hot topics to discuss. South Africa's think tanks and universities play an important role in conveying South Africa's voice, but they are also facing some problems, such as lack of definition and professional dimensions of area studies. This may improve as relative policies are made, as all research is related to the tendency of reality. Competition in academic research urges researchers to think about how to define the academic space for area studies, which will affect where resources are channeled. In addition, what is the research direction of area studies? Should it be policy-oriented? What is the student's interest in area studies? How can the universalization and popularization of area studies be promoted? These problems are all facing South Africa's area studies and need to be well considered and solved in its future development.

Chen Qi, a professor at Tsinghua University, analyzed the relationship between area studies and international studies. He said that area studies have always existed in China, but previous research was not yet included in that formal disciplinary system. In recent years, as China's international status has improved, its national interests and demands have become more and more global, and its relations with developing countries have become closer. As a result, it is urgent for China to understand the political, trade, economic and legal systems of these countries. With the same logical starting point as that of the US in the rise of area studies after World War II, and in the context of the BRI, the rising interest in China's area studies is closely related to the country's urgent policy needs.

In addition to policy needs, the development of area studies also requires the inner motivation created by disciplines and knowledge. In the past 40 years, China's international relations discipline has flourished. However, the mainstream research paradigm of international relations research is to treat a country as a "black box" and regard each country as a sovereign state within the international community, with no difference in nature, but only strong or weak abilities. Now that the "black box" is being opened, how should the new knowledge of the discipline grow? For example, countries with or without religious beliefs may be different in nature. Recognizing this difference will open another door for the study of the disciplines of politics and international relations, making the theme for area studies discussion richer and more interesting.

Area studies should be problem-aware. Area studies are a comprehensive topic, but the current discipline is differentiated. The knowledge of one country is divided into different fields, such as economy, law, and history. Under this pressure, research should strive to discover the intellectual problems that humans have not yet solved, so as to represent the interdisciplinary analytical thinking. Also, the meaning of the problem itself is more important than the domain and the solution paradigm to which these problems belong.

At present, China's area studies is facing some challenges. First, area studies requires an administrative institutional body and a political machine constructive system; otherwise they will be at a disadvantage in resource competition. Second, there is currently no

authoritative journal on area studies, and articles on area studies produced currently cannot be published in the best journals. Third, the setting of the curriculum system is a huge difficulty. Finally, how to assess students' knowledge reserve and how to set questions on basic principles in exams are issues that need to be paid attention to and urgently addressed.

Sun Feiyu, deputy dean of Yuanpei College, PKU and an associate professor of sociology, explained how area studies can be inspired by social research. He pointed out that *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, the important work of American cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict, is an anthropological work, but it is hard to say that it is not a work of area studies. Could we regard Chinese society itself as a region for area studies? Could area studies experience be gained from such social surveys and experience studies? These are questions worth considering.

Over the past 40 years, much knowledge on Chinese social studies has been accumulated. But today, it is obviously not enough to understand the in-depth knowledge that makes this society work merely by understanding the society from surface phenomena, such as policies and political systems. This is the duality of Chinese sociological research—it must be based on the policy, system, and social structure on the surface of Chinese society, yet it is also necessary to see the in-depth influential mechanism. As a result, the concept of “social ground” was introduced. “Social ground” refers to those unchanged/stable stuff in the history. For example, although

China has experienced great social changes, it has retained cultural consistency, which is closely integrated with the times.

Fei Xiaotong once put forward his theory of “differential pattern,” and its basic connotation is that different social relationships between people correspond to different behavioral ethics, and different behavioral ethics represent different interest appeals. Such a network of relationships and corresponding behavioral patterns are important models for people to understand Chinese society. The “differential pattern” theory is widely used because it is not a surface structure and policy, but an in-depth knowledge.

The mourning apparel custom representing the Chinese society’s traditions can be regarded as an interpretation of the social structure of “differential pattern” to understand the scope of traditional Chinese families. For example, the five-mourning-apparel custom still widely exists in China’s vast rural areas so far. This is not written or theoretical knowledge, but knowledge passed down orally and a real behavioral pattern. Different mourning apparels correspond to different interpersonal relationships, which embodies ethics. The social structure associated with the mourning apparel custom represents the basic structure of Chinese people’s self-identification and action ethics, and such structures still exist in today’s society. Such behavior and the ethics embodied within it are an important starting point for people to understand Chinese society. In summary, the basic feature of anthropology’s origin is to study the culture of other peoples. Therefore, it is very possible to incorporate



anthropology and sociology into area studies, so that their results will inspire area studies.

### **III: “Regional Experiences in Area Studies”**

Nikolay Samoylov, director of the Center for Chinese Studies, Saint Petersburg State University, described his research on the “frontier zone.” He took the gradually developed and deepened social and cultural interaction and symbiosis in the Sino-Russian border since the 18th century as the entry point, and introduced the frontier zone, a concept with a broader historical, geopolitical and cultural meaning.

Modern scholars consider the frontier zone to be a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that covers not only its political, economic, geographical, historical and industrial aspects, but also its philosophical, cultural, spiritual and mental aspects. It seems to us that the frontier zone is a specific intermediate zone between two different sociocultural systems, absorbing significant components from both sides, while at the same time remaining different from them in a variety of parameters. One of the most important features of the frontier zone is a specific similarity of economic life in the regions on the both sides of a border, and, what is more important, a “polyphonic” culture. Very often the population of the frontier is economically, and even culturally, more closely tied to the neighboring country than to its own political, administrative and socio-cultural “center.” Samoylov stressed that the frontier zone plays an important role in forming a long-term and sustained geo-cultural space on the borders between

geopolitical and geo-cultural areas. Geo-cultural space is a system of stable cultural realities and perceptions evolved in a particular area as a result of co-existence of cultural traditions and norms, and the functioning of its own image of the world. Thus, the understanding of frontier as a zone of passage and interaction rather than a barrier should be very productive.

Samoylov used examples of socio-cultural interaction between China and Russia in the Sino-Russian border region to illustrate the significance of frontier zone research. While the large-scale sociocultural systems of China and Russia are shaping their own geo-cultural spaces in different ways, their interaction within geopolitical and geo-cultural spaces continued to occur during the 18th to 20th centuries.

It is still possible to observe the frequent interactions between Chinese and Russian social culture in the Sino-Russian border area between border cities, such as between Blagoveshchensk and Heihe, between Zabaikalsk and Manzhouli, and between Suifenhe and Grodekovo. Each of them represents a modern illustration of geo-cultural symbiosis. Samoylov pointed out that since the establishment of the Sino-Russian border area, it has represented a positive space for social and cultural interaction. Now that the people of the two countries are also interacting in various fields within the area, an in-depth study of these processes should become part of contemporary area studies.

Alexander Lomanov, head research fellow at the Center of

Asia-Pacific Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAN), gave a speech on China studies and contemporary explorations in oriental studies in Russia.

Several years ago, Russian scholars debated the prospects for Russian oriental studies. The reason for the dispute was the suggestion to include the discipline of “Oriental and African studies” into the group of “political sciences and regional studies.” Some scholars regarded oriental studies as a complex discipline, stating that it was necessary to learn about oriental people’s lifestyle instead of being limited to academic studies of the discipline, or its cultural and humanitarian components would be lost. Another school of scholars had contrary view. They underlined the importance of studying China, saying that there would be no stagnant development in China while Confucianism served as the engine for China’s all-around progress.

Vasiliy Mikhaylovich Alekseyev, the sinologist who specializes in China studies, expressed his belief that sinologists must understand the Chinese language, as well as traditional Chinese classics. He defined three kinds of sinologists: those who are complete sinologists, those who are partial sinologists, and those sinologists who only are able to read materials in foreign languages instead of in Chinese. At the same time, he identified two forms of China studies. One is without Sinology, such as the St. Petersburg study in the 19th century and the Moscow school in the 1920s and 30s, which was completely out of touch with Chinese consciousness and culture. The other is

without Chinese background text. Alekseyev expressed his belief that China studies must be based on first-hand materials, and studies without original Chinese materials should not be called Sinology.

Lomanov stressed that it is a must to study Chinese cultural traditions and the country's traditional methods and self-adjustment to adapt to modern characteristics before studying contemporary China. Sinology is of great significance for Russian diplomacy and Asia. As a template for cross-regional research, area studies can play an important role in the development of bilateral relations.

Lomanov expressed his belief that current China studies cannot exist without a grasp of Chinese characteristics and culture. Sinologists must understand China's road of foreign development and China's cultural self-confidence and cultural consciousness. This should also be the case for non-Western studies. It is necessary to put area studies in the actual environment and strengthen social science research in all aspects, such as the development of national consciousness. For area studies in Russia, this is the moment when opportunities and challenges coexist: on the one hand, it is necessary to develop area studies in non-Western regions, to preserve and inherit the Russian oriental studies tradition; on the other hand, the Eastern inclusiveness is used as a methodology to try to make countries and regions, traditional culture and modern culture not be mutually exclusive. According to Duan Demin, an associate professor in the Department of Political Science, School of Government, PKU, the current difficulties faced by European governance are also indicative

of the predicament of global governance.

Duan first pointed out the great advantages of European integration, which mainly include peaceful development, economic prosperity, increased freedom, and protection of human rights. At the same time, he also pointed out that, in recent years, anti-integration voices inside Europe have been rising sharply. They mainly feature opposition to immigrants, suspicion of or opposition to the EU, demands for “recapture of sovereignty” and strong left/right-wing populism. He expressed his belief that the source of these problems can be analyzed from two perspectives. One is to focus on the failure of European governance, and the other is to question whether people have a far-sighted vision for long-term interests and demands that transcend their local communities.

Regarding how to reasonably arrange the overall interests and local interests, Duan pointed out that the overall interests and local interests cannot be coordinated with each other at any time. Therefore, European identity is crucial to the success of the European plan. Similarly, the predicament faced by European governance at present also indicates that global governance is in a dilemma.

Liu Debin, director of the Institute of International Studies at Jilin University, analyzed the challenges of building a Northeast Asian Community from a global and regional perspective. He pointed out that in recent years, the world situation has undergone major historical changes mainly in five aspects. First, the old international system is collapsing, but a new one has not yet been formed. Second, China is

not the only emerging new power, and there are also India, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Russia, and so on. Each major country is repositioning itself. Third, this year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of international relations discipline. Over 100 new countries have emerged in the world, and many of them are only 50-60 years old. They had not yet completed the Westphalian-style state building when they entered the new era of informatization, globalization, and industrialization. Therefore, many new problems have arisen. Fourth, the development logic and governance system of developed countries are facing challenges. Economic globalization and social informatization are changing the institutional arrangements of countries, and the rise of populism is only a prelude. In the end, regional communities may be one way out for a new world because big powers must seek a balance in national strength. The situation in which the US rules and influences the world with one kind of value will no longer exist.

Regarding building the regional community, Liu expressed his belief that the concepts of “us” and “them” are an important issue. There are three kinds of logic in the evolution of these two concepts. First, “we” are connected by blood, geography and other factors, and we construct our notions of ourselves in opposition to “them.” Second, the construction of “us” is based on the opposition of others, such as the opposite camps in the formation of the EU during the Cold War. Now, the opposition does not exist anymore. Is this the cause of the EU’s predicament? Third, there is differentiation and reorganization

between “us” and “them.” We may assimilate them, or they may assimilate us.

Liu said that the theory of international relations still cannot find a way forward on the proposition of building a community with shared future for mankind. This is also a paradox of the theory of international relations. The original intention of international relations studies was to avoid the recurrence of the tragedy of World War I, but the cultivation of international relations talent often only focuses on how to make their own countries win in the international competition and game. We may have to wait for future generations to solve this paradox.

Kimitaka Matsuzato, a professor in the Department of Law, University of Tokyo, delivered a speech titled “Cultural Geopolitics and Area Studies.” He stated that as a research method, cultural geopolitics is a combination of transnational approach and focus on identity politics.. According to traditional political science, domestic politics and international relations constitute world politics. State and non-state actors (political parties, trade unions, NGOs, and others) compose domestic politics, while states and international organizations are the main actors of international politics. In the contemporary world, non-state actors directly (without state mediation) contact each other and directly lobby foreign governments and international organizations. A collection edited by Thomas Risse-Kappen criticized Kaohane and Nye’s zero-sum understanding of relations between states and non-state actors. According to them, if

a state is weak, transnational actors (TNAs) can hardly operate in the country. My opinion is that relations between states and TNAs vary depending on the region of the world and that it is not productive to argue these relations in a general manner, ignoring regional specifics.

In area studies, we should avoid confusing cultural geopolitics with several other concepts. First, cultural geopolitics understands culture as resource, rather than discipline, so culture can be reinterpreted and reconstructed according to the actor's intention and expectation. Second, cultural geopolitics is different from soft power. Soft power is generally reflected in a state's public relations and diplomacy, although non-state actors also have soft power. In such diplomatic relations, non-state actors play only an auxiliary role. There are both conflicts of interests and coordinative agreements. Third, cultural geopolitics is different from classic geopolitics. In the era of classic geopolitics, states were the main actors in geopolitical competition, while currently TNAs play a significant role in geopolitics. Baliram Deepak, director of the Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Nehru, India, discussed the current state of Chinese studies in India. Based on the inheritance, transformation and development of Chinese studies in India, he analyzed the contributions of different schools to the understanding and study of China, as well as the different problems faced by area studies in the construction and development of this discipline.

According to Deepak, area studies could be regarded as an extension of the continuation of Orientalist scholarship in Europe, and



projection of the American power around the globe after World War II, especially during the Cold War. The end of the Cold War was followed by the globalization and liberalization, where liberal order created by the US and supported by its allies threw new challenges to area studies. The development of area studies in India is facing some difficulties. How to make area studies, which integrates many social sciences, absorb the theoretical advantages of each discipline more fully, and how to include language and translation studies in its research dimensions, is an important problem we are facing at present. Deepak stressed that researchers of area studies must pay full attention to the understanding of the local language and culture in order to build a reasonable theoretical framework, so it is necessary to strengthen the integration of language disciplines with area studies in India.

In India, most of the China experts trace the origin of China studies from Calcutta University when courses were offered in Chinese in 1918. But Deepak expressed his belief that these were first introduced in Bengal during British India by a missionary named Joshua Marshman (1768-1837). Marshman not only translated and printed the Bible in Chinese, but also brought out the first English translation of *The Analects* from original Chinese in 1809.

The 1962 border conflict between India and China exposed varied weaknesses of India not only in terms of its defense capability but also its shallow understanding of China. For the sake of strategy and security, India then paid more attention to the study of China than ever before. New institutions were established, such as Centre for

Chinese Studies, Delhi University (DU) and the merger of Indian School of International Studies (ISIS) founded in 1955 into the newly founded Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 1970. The DU saw the establishment of an independent research center, the Centre for Chinese Studies (1964) which was changed to the Department of East Asian Studies in 2003. Parallel to the various schools of Chinese studies is the China Studies Group (CSG) think tank movement of Indian diplomats, which failed to bridge the structural gap between Chinese studies and the core disciplines of political science, but it brought together a group of like-minded scholars and eventually laid the foundation for the China Studies Institute (ICS) in New Delhi. However, because these scholars' mastery of language was not up to the level of professional research, they could not solve the problem of discipline and integration area studies. According to Deepak, after a long history of development and exploration, although area studies are still confronted with many problems, such as the disconnection between research and discipline setting, being constrained by Euro-centrism, lack of necessary literature resources and financial support, and inadequate integration of language and area studies, there are still broad prospects for Chinese studies in India due to the rise of China and the visible shift in the gravity of power moving toward the Pacific. In the future, the Indian government needs to invest in building capacities in Chinese and China studies on the one hand and the universities and institutions need to get rid of some of the existing problems on the other hand.

#### **IV. “The American Perspective in Area Studies”**

Jason Ruiz, an associate professor at the University of Notre Dame, discussed American studies and the transnational turn. He pointed out that American studies began to take shape after World War II and then accelerated in the Cold War. In the 1950s, with the expansion of universities and the increase of enrollment, the government began to fund American studies programs. During the Cold War, American scholars adopted a broad international approach to the study of the so-called “Americanness.” Many academic achievements at that time supported the political stand of American exceptionalism and strengthened the idea that the US held a unique, strong and even superior position in the world order. By the 1980s, as the demographic structure of universities changed, academia began to respond to social movements and identity politics. Scholars began to reject the use of exceptionalism to study the US and to seek ways of thinking about “Americanness” that did not support the Cold War belief system, which held that the US was inherently unique and superior in the world. On the contrary, scholars in this period began to question many central ideas and beliefs related to American culture.

The most striking change in American studies after the Cold War took place in the 1990s, when the “transnational turn” became part of the academic movement. The transnational turn refers to the motivation of scholars in the field of humanities and social sciences to take transnational states as their main research object. According to some scholars, “American studies” not only means the study of the US,

but also interest in the knowledge of the Americas as a whole. This means looking at “Americanness” from a global perspective.

Ruiz argued that discussing the relationship between American studies and area studies is a complex task. In the US, both were invented during the Cold War. Although American studies were seen as an area studies field as early as the mid-20th century, most scholars are now unhappy with the relationship, saying that American studies are trying to challenge rather than reinforce the authenticity of national boundaries. Ruiz stressed that American studies and area studies were born during the Cold War, but that American studies have undergone significant shifts in national research categories. This can be confirmed by the Department of American Studies he works at, which focuses on US cultural relations with Latin America. He expressed his hope that through exchanges and discussions at the symposium on area studies, more enlightenment could be gained from the transnational turn of American studies.

Prof. Da Wei of the University of International Relations focused on the current situation of American studies in China. He said that the US is the largest research object in China’s area studies. The issue of the US concerns people from all walks of life in China, and the study of the US is often mixed with China’s strategic study and international strategic study.

At present, American studies is divided in China. There is a gap between American studies and studies of the Americas. Many of the Chinese scholars who work for the institutes of American studies

mainly study Latin American countries, not including studies of the US. In fact, there are different orientations between American studies and studies of the Americas, which are the result of the differences in language and culture, and also arise from the fact that there are totally different disciplines behind Sino-American and Sino-Latin American relations. China–US relations are more related to China’s security research, economic research and international relations, while China–Latin America relations are more about development.

There are two totally different orientations for American studies in China, and they are in an almost “parallel universe” relationship. One is American research stimulated by policy demand; and the other is humanistic research. American studies in China is largely policy-oriented and, although of high practical value, policy needs appear to be hampering research of other aspects.

Da Wei stressed that there are three ways to promote American studies. First of all, efforts must be made to improve the level of studies of critical figures, while strengthening the scientific degree and the studies of political psychology and other aspects. Current studies of critical figures are limited to the study of characters’ lives. Second, the problem of obtaining accurate information should be solved as soon as possible. At present, there are three major obstacles in this regard: the quality of information is poor, information is too diversified to be distinguished, and the flow of information is hindered. Especially during the Trump administration, the US intends to block the exchange of Chinese scholars. And, third, enhanced integration is

very important. There are reasons behind the splitting of American studies and studies of the Americas, and the splitting of domestic studies and foreign studies, so the first priority should be strengthening the integration. In addition, the links between the social science research community and the humanities studies, as well as the relationship between American studies and area studies in other regions, should be strengthened in order to improve the quality of American studies.

Cui Shoujun, an associate professor at Renmin University of China and director of the Center for Latin American Studies, gave a presentation on Latin American studies from the perspective of area studies. He pointed out that China–Latin America relations have developed rapidly in recent years, and while China has paid more attention to Latin American studies, there are still many problems in this field.

First, policy support is stronger than the degree of academic argumentation. Latin American studies in China are not initiated by scholars from bottom to top, but are guided by top-down policies, which are weaker than those regarding American studies. Second, the academic standards of papers are closely related to journals. Such a mechanism makes it difficult for area studies to publish theoretical results. Even scholars specializing in Latin American studies still know little about Panama and other important countries, and the evaluation mechanism needs to be improved urgently. Third, domestic researchers have done enough qualitative research on Latin America,

but not enough quantitative research, and there are almost no quantitative research results. For example, it is hard to find data and information about the image of Latin America in the hearts of the Chinese people. Fourth, the soft power research is not enough. The political, economic and trade exchanges between China and Latin America are increasingly closer, but the exchanges between ordinary people are infrequent. Within Chinese people's understanding of Latin America, "football" is the only thing they care about, and they know little about other aspects of Latin American countries. Therefore, people-to-people exchanges should be strengthened, and more accurate research directions should be grasped. Finally, there is a lack of interdisciplinary studies. We should think from different perspectives, strengthen dialogue and discussion among different industries, and establish an academic community that includes entrepreneurs, media, scholars and diplomats for regular exchanges.

From a practical point of view, during the development of its relations with Latin America, China should pay attention to the following points. First of all, more attention should be paid to the factors of the US in Sino-Latin American relations. China has always regarded Sino-US relations as the most sensitive and important relationship, and many conditions in Latin America are closely related to the US. In addition, the US-Latin America trade volume is three times that of China-Latin America trade volume, US investment in Latin America is twice that of China. The acceleration of Chinese investment in Latin America is higher than that of the US, but the total

volume is still low. The above-mentioned situation makes Sino-US relations one of the core contents of Sino–Latin American relations.

Second, China–Latin America cooperation should draw on the strength of third parties, such as Southeast Asia and Japan, to strengthen cooperation. China has become the country with the most land acquisitions abroad, including in Latin America, which has attracted much international criticism. China should weaken its Chinese color and advocate mutual benefit and win-win situation, so as to promote inter-regional cooperation among countries. Cooperation between China and Latin America should also be more precise in identifying cooperating countries and target countries, with a focus on those countries with high rates of return on investment.

Finally, China should obey the law of market operation and pay less attention to the similarity of ideology. For example, its cooperation with Venezuela ignored the law of the market economy operation, because Chile can bring more benefits in all aspects; in fact, however, China’s cooperation with Chile is weaker than that with Venezuela. In this respect, China should pay more attention to the diversification of investment.

Yuan Dongzhen, deputy director of the Latin American Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, also discussed the trends and challenges of Latin American studies in China.

The study of Latin America in China has undergone four stages of development: before the early 1960s, the study of Latin America in China was basically a blank page. After the Cuban Missile Crisis,



Latin American studies entered the first stage of development, with some universities offering courses of Latin American studies. From 1960s to 1970s, Latin American studies stagnated. Since 1979, Latin American studies began a new stage with the establishment of three important organizations related to Latin American studies. Since then, many colleges and universities have established Latin American research institutions; as a result, Latin American disciplinary systems have been gradually improved. Since the 21st century, Latin American studies have entered a new era with fruitful results.

At present, there are mainly the following achievements in Latin American studies in China: The Latin American Institute of the Academy of Social Sciences is the center among a number of specialized academic and research institutions. There are many Latin American research centers in universities, and many effective studies have been carried out by the departments responsible for Latin American affairs in government agencies. In the disciplinary system, in addition to the traditional teaching fields such as politics, economy, social culture and Latin American literature, the number of universities studying Latin American history is increasing, and some foreign language universities have reached a more comprehensive level of Latin American culture research. Finally, the ability and level of international exchange and cooperation have greatly improved compared with the past, and the ability of international dialogue has been constantly strengthened.

At present, there are some new trends in Latin American studies

in China, with the number of researchers increasing the scope of research expanding, and the studies evolving gradually from focusing on translation and introduction of foreign scholars' research works to conducting a comprehensive research including basic theoretical and issue-oriented researches. . The research paradigm has also undergone tremendous changes, focusing on both basic and frontier research. Many scholars who are committed to frontier research have adopted new academic paradigms to penetrate into the frontier areas including the urbanization of Latin America. The research field tends to be more diverse, including new disciplines such as anthropology, jurisprudence, and religion, and some scholars can also conduct Latin American studies through field work. Prof. Dong Jingshen, director of PKU's Department of History, expressed his belief that some problems cannot be ignored in current Latin American studies. First, we need to further strengthen the construction of research teams as young scholars are short of experience. Second, the quality of research institutions needs improvement as some institutions are poor in planning and lack a clear research direction. Third, our attention to international academic development is far from enough; as a result, domestic research lags behind the international cutting edge. In terms of history, we should pay more attention to new trends in the research of international history and cultural history. Fourth, the barriers between Latin American studies and international politics studies and international relations studies still exist, so it is impossible for Latin American studies to take reference from the research results of other

fields. From the perspective of history, besides mastering first-hand historical materials, we should apply more often the methodologies of politics and sociology to form an interdisciplinary research paradigm.

Felipe Muñoz, deputy director and professor of International Economics at the Institute of International Studies, University of Chile, discussed Latin America's trade policy under political uncertainty.

He said research has shown that the world GDP has tended to slowly rebound after having experienced decline over the past several years; thus, some economists believe that the world economy has entered a recovery period following the financial crisis. In fact, however, when the Western economy was seeing signs of recovery, the Latin American market was shrinking with its commodity prices declining. Such economic fluctuation has triggered the attention of Latin American countries. Statistics from the UN shows that commodity export from Latin American countries increased after the crisis, but it has not reached the volume of export before the crisis. In addition, although Latin American exports are diversified, most of the countries' products are assembled in other countries. The profit of Latin American countries from their export of natural resource-oriented commodities is limited. At the same time, their high value-added industries are fewer, and their market prices are rather fragile and vulnerable to the influence of external factors, thus are subject to fluctuations. If the GDP growth slows down in countries that cooperate with Latin America, Latin American countries will be affected immediately. Therefore, it is quite difficult for Latin

American countries to maintain stable growth.

From the international perspective, many Latin American countries have a relatively low international status, greatly relying on international multilateral trade rules. In this way, once multilateral trade rules are damaged, Latin American countries suffer heavy blows. For instance, during the Doha Round of world trade negotiations, launched in 2001, Brazil, as one of the host countries, failed to achieve any agreements. Nowadays, as e-commerce rules become more refined and completed, Trump administration's new trade policy may have a significant impact on the e-commerce sector, while many Latin American countries are not able to solve this problem. Against the background of the growing gap between the development of different countries, certain strata in many Latin American countries still have not harvested the dividend of globalization. Under the influence of Trump, the US withdrew from the TPP, and the rules of the North American Free Trade Area were re-negotiated, which was not good news for Latin American countries.

For a long period of time, most of the South American countries were governed by center-left parties. Since 2010, the political situation in Latin America has shifted from center-left to center-right, and even to the far right. And the Latin American region has switched from the process of integration to open negotiation, with some countries starting unilateral trade reforms to try to integrate into the global trading system as soon as possible. In fact, Latin American countries should be more open to trade and bilateral cooperation in that the

practice has proved that interactions of many major economies in the world would have an impact on Latin America, including the cooperation of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the development of the North American Free Trade Area, and China's BRI initiative. Although the EU will also have an impact on Latin America, the current chaos in Europe objectively requires Latin American countries to wait and see. In the future, how to make Latin America better adapt to the new world situation is a question worthy of consideration for each Latin American country.

#### **V:“Regional Cooperation and Common Development”**

The presentation by Eng Seng HO, a professor of Anthropology and History, Duke University, was titled “Inter-Asian Concepts for a New, Connective Area Studies.” He opined that when the US became a global power after World War II, area studies was developed there to inform its burgeoning relations with other countries. To provide information for the government's foreign policy, the US developed area studies in many universities and trained area specialists in narrow but deep ways to understand individual countries, societies, languages and regions. China today is in a similar position, needing to develop expertise across much of the world. But unlike the 20th century after World War II, the 21st-century world is globally interconnected. China today cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of yesterday's American-style area studies, which focused on single areas but was blind to external connections. Chinese policy recognizes the importance of connections, for example, in its signature BRI. While

geostrategic rivalries dominate the news, other important relations between world regions—in production supply chains, finance, trade, media, migration, religion, education, social mobility, cross-cultural marriage/kinship and history—are not sufficiently researched or understood but need to be. Both policymakers and the public need to know what is at stake beyond narrow political rivalries. This is the urgent task for a new, connective area studies.

He opined that since the proposal of BRI, China has been building better relations with Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Africa. The BRI can not only help China expand its domestic market but also give China access to the world market and boost China's development through optimizing element allocation. In fact, as early as 1980s, academic circles have opened up to the new perspective of Asian integration that combines Central Asia, West Asia and East Asia. Such a perspective can be traced back to before the Portuguese colonial period in the 16th century, when Asian countries intercommunicated and learned from each other. Their colonial history brought division and isolation between Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia, and also created great difficulties for academic research. After the Cold War, due to globalization, the reintegration of Asia is the general trend. The "Belt and Road" is becoming a track connecting countries, providing new opportunities for Asian integration.

Prof. HO made four suggestions for the new connective area studies and talent training. First, mobility should be emphasized in the training program so that students will have the opportunity to conduct

fieldwork in target countries. Students should be guided to pay attention to the changes in society and find new entry points. Second, we should focus on the organic connections between regions, rather than purely comparative studies. Cross-regional research should focus not only on the flow within society, but also on the relationships between societies that were separated in the past. Third, we should pay attention to the circulation of resources, recognizing that nature has created the flow of resources, and integrate the social units of different societies and countries. Finally, we should re-examine our country from an external perspective, while drawing on the experience of other countries.

Prof. Zhang Hui, vice dean of the School of Economics, PKU, made a presentation titled “The Belt and Road Initiative: A Study on the Paradigm of Economic Theory.” He pointed out that, from the perspective of regional and global development, China’s BRI is based on three types of demands: First is the inherent demands of world economic development. Since 2008, the world economy has been at a low ebb. The differentiation within developed economies has been intensified. The domestic income gap has widened greatly, and the US and Europe frequently have seen “black swan” events happen in their political arena. In this way, the world economy urgently needs new development momentum. The second is the inherent demands of Asia’s rise. In the feudal era, Asia was a leader in the world, but after the Industrial Revolution in the West in the 18th century, Asia as a whole began to decline. In 2012, Asia’s share of the global economic

aggregate surpassed Europe to become the world's largest continent. Asia also needs new forces to reintegrate the world resources. The third is the inherent demands of global polarization. At present, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening in developed countries, along with a high unemployment rate. The solution provided by China is to find new ideas and methods to resolve the world's division, while implementing the BRI and building a community of shared future for mankind.

Zhang Hui expressed his belief that the internal economic development paradigm of the BRI is embodied in the value cycle system. Within the framework of the division of labor and cooperation in the world economy, more than half of the economies maintain close ties with China. China undertakes new technologies and new industries of developed countries and sells intermediate products to them; it strengthens industrial cooperation with developing countries and purchases their primary products. From the perspective of the global value cycle, on the one hand, China and developed countries have formed a cycle system based on the industrial division of labor, trade, investment, and indirect capital flows; on the other hand, China and other developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have formed a cycle system based on trade and direct investment.

Zhang Hui said that China's huge domestic market has brought about huge increases in its manufacturing, which has provided a relatively low threshold for the modernization and industrialization of developing economies and served as a connection point between



developing and developed countries. China's reform and opening-up have created tremendous success. It is China's responsibility to propose the BRI at the proper time, and China's successful experience can be used as a reference for developing economies.

Wang Lei, an associate professor of Beijing Normal University and director of the Center for BRICS Cooperation Studies, introduced the development of studies on BRICS in his presentation.

At present, there is no unified definition of BRICS studies in Chinese academia and political policy circles, with three views being the most popular ones. First, it is basically equivalent to country studies, especially of the four major member states excluding China. Second, BRICS studies is considered as a composite and cross-regional research agenda, with a focus on the multilateral cooperation among BRICS countries. Third, it is considered as a collective research agenda that belongs to the research agenda of global governance. Wang Lei expressed his belief that BRICS studies should fall into the category of area studies.

The concept of BRICS was coined by British scholar Jim O'Neill in 2001. It was originally used for data analysis in investment, trade and industry, with emphasis on application. Since 2001, scholars in many fields have begun to study the trade structure, economy, and industrial investment of the five countries, and so the concept was formally formed. Afterward, the political cooperation among the BRICS countries officially started and played a strong role in promoting a cooperation mechanism in this region. At present, the

BRICS cooperation mechanism has been established as one of the four major platforms for China to participate in global governance, and it hosted the Xiamen BRICS summit in 2017. The rapid development of the BRICS cooperation mechanism has provided valuable development opportunities for the BRICS research community in China, and Chinese scholars have also received various government support.

China's current studies on BRICS countries have the following characteristics. First, the main academic institutions focusing on BRICS countries are mostly located in Beijing, with some other important research institutions scattered in East China, South China, and Southwest China. These research institutions mainly fall into two types. One is those institutions that have directly been named a BRICS research center or research institute, and the other is focused on the research of emerging economies or emerging markets. Second, a joint-action mechanism has formed between academia and policy orientation of BRICS countries. The main driving force of related research comes from the decision-making needs of government departments, with policy research accounting for a large proportion. Third, the key areas and topics of BRICS research are firstly global governance, and then international mechanisms.

The reason why China's BRICS research has achieved certain results is, first, it takes full advantage of external political promotion and government's policy requirements to ensure that research can start quickly; second, the precise discipline positioning highlights the

characteristics of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, with global governance as the framework; third, it focuses on the construction of research institutions and teams; in addition, this research has an international nature.

Hany Besada, the senior research coordinator of the United Nations Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC), focused his presentation on global health governance and South–South cooperation. He said that global health governance is a valuable topic. All parties should focus on cooperation among developing countries within the framework of South–South cooperation, and at the same time establish a triangular cooperation model, that is, a developed and two developing countries realize cooperation and common development. At the same time, he expressed his hope that the mechanism of South–South cooperation could be applied to the development of Africa to ensure the equal development of developed and developing countries.

Promoting the development of health is an important part of the sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations. At present, some countries have become models in this field by strengthening South-South and triangular cooperation. For example, Cuba pursues a health internationalism policy and strives to promote cooperation between countries of different income levels. Cuba trains international doctors to assist low- and middle-income countries in Africa. Over the past 60 years, more than 30,000 doctors in Cuba have provided health services in more than 100 countries, performed

millions of surgeries, and provided guidance to more than 50,000 medical students from developing countries.

Internationalism, as a global trend, will promote broader economic and social cooperation. Cuba has the world's largest medical school and has adhered to medical internationalism for more than 60 years, which, on the one hand, is conducive to converting medical capital into commercial value; on the other hand, has also improved its international status.

Another example is China's expansion of its influence in Africa through soft power. Like Cuba, China regularly sends medical teams to Africa to help local people. Over the past five years, the number of Chinese medical personnel has increased tenfold. Not only has China sent many excellent doctors to Africa, but it has also sent medicines and medical equipment, which are very much needed in Africa. But the behavior has also caused controversy, with many people thinking that China's various actions in Africa are for its own benefit. In this regard, Besada expressed his belief that Africa's rich natural resources, such as metals and oil, are indeed vital to China's economic development. This mutually beneficial development model is important, but pure humanitarianism and altruism cannot be ignored.

Besada stressed that the world should recognize the importance of the solidarity between countries in the global south, and it is also necessary to establish the tripartite cooperation mechanism and strengthen North-South cooperation, pushing forward the common development of the whole world.

Sereyvath KY, director of the Institute of China Study, Royal Academy of Cambodia, analyzed the prospect of Sino-Cambodia cooperation in the context of the BRI. He said that China and Cambodia have established a comprehensive partnership in development through BRI since 2011. Cambodia believes that establishing a community with a shared future for mankind is also the voice of the country, while the BRI expresses the common expectations of developing countries similar to Cambodia.

The fruits of China–Cambodia cooperation are first reflected in trade. In 2017, Cambodia’s foreign trade totaled \$25 billion, of which trade with China reached more than \$6 billion. China has sent a lot of products to Cambodia, and at the same time, Cambodia’s export growth rate has increased. Cambodia has benefited a lot from its trade with China. Secondly, in terms of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), China’s investment in Cambodia accounted for more than 40% of Cambodia’s total FDI in 2017. Although the increase was not large, compared with the decreasing investment from Western countries, the trend of China–Cambodia cooperation has become increasingly stronger. In terms of special economic zones, Cambodia currently has five special economic zones co-established with China, which have provided Cambodia with lots of employment opportunities, especially in the textile industry. Special economic zones can help Cambodia improve its manufacturing level and export its products to Europe. In addition, China and Cambodia also have a lot of cooperation in the financial field. The status of RMB in Cambodia is the same as that of

the US dollar, which can be used directly for payment. Banks and large companies can also use RMB directly. The cooperation between the Chinese and Cambodian banks has provided Cambodia with many financing opportunities and secured a stable capital flow from China. More importantly, Chinese culture has had a profound impact on Cambodia. In recent years, more and more Chinese tourists have travelled to Cambodia, and many local vendors can speak Chinese. The opening of the Confucius Institute in Cambodia has given more Cambodians the opportunity to learn about all aspects of Chinese traditional culture.

Sereyvath KY expressed his belief that the potential risks of China–Cambodia cooperation in the future are as follows: Cambodia’s “Everything But Arms” (EBA) treatment may be cancelled, which will affect Chinese investment in Cambodia; if the US and its allies impose economic sanctions on Cambodia, China–Cambodia cooperation will be indirectly affected; and China is facing environmental problems when carrying out cooperation projects in Cambodia. Generally speaking, China–Cambodia cooperation has potential yet faces challenges. In the future, the two sides should work together in various fields and improve the quality of cooperation. The first is to strengthen education cooperation; the second is to adhere to the principle of the rule of law; the third is to strengthen environmental protection and improve waste recycling technology; the fourth is to focus on cooperation in the agricultural sector; the fifth is to continue promoting the construction of the China–Cambodia economic

corridor.

Wang Xu, executive deputy director of PKU's Center for South Asian Studies, made a presentation titled "Area studies and less commonly taught language (LCTL) talent training under the BRI: Taking South Asia as an example." He pointed out that, with the proposing of the BRI, the demand for LCTL talent, especially those who understand the relevant regions and countries, has quickly increased. It has brought about opportunities and challenges for the cultivation of LCTL talent.

First, less commonly taught languages are an important tool for understanding target countries in area studies. The BRI initiative advocates peaceful cooperation, openness, tolerance, mutual benefit and win-win, rather than a China-led platform. Therefore, it is very important to communicate and cooperate with the countries along the route, seek common interests, and establish mutual relations. This requires China to pay attention to all aspects of development of the countries along the route and strengthen cultural exchanges. In addition, since most of the enterprises engaged in economic and trade cooperation are micro enterprises, more talent who master specific knowledge need to be cultivated.

Second, university think tanks have their own unique positioning. Their goal of cultivating students is to endow them with a solid knowledge base and the ability to carry out long-term field work; therefore, they require students to pay close attention to target countries. There are currently three types of domestic think tanks in

universities: traditional think tanks, social think tanks, and area studies think tanks. University think tanks have low efficiency in obtaining government information and relatively lack human and financial resources. But university think tanks can make use of interdisciplinary resources to make in-depth policy consultation, not just limited to policy recommendations.

Third, compared with researchers in other disciplines, researchers who major in less commonly taught languages have unique advantages in area studies. Without knowing the local language, it is difficult for researchers to obtain first-hand materials, and it is impossible to truly understand the development of the target country. In addition, only in actual communication with local people are researchers able to truly understand the religion, history and culture of the target country, and thus, to enable local people to accept relevant initiatives.

Wang Xu expressed his view that compared with the talent studying political science and economics, those who focus on area studies should keep a close eye on a specific country for a long time. The former mostly focus on theories, and even if they study a specific country, it is only for a short term. In this sense, LCTL talent and social science talent are not competing, but complementary.

## **VI: “Regional Focus: Southeast Asia and the Middle East”**

Yang Guang, a professor at Shanghai University, began by introducing the development history of China’s Middle East studies.

Domestic Middle East studies began in the 1960s, when China



was blocked by the two camps in the world. In 1961, Chairman Mao Zedong proposed his theory of the intermediate zone. He explained that there was a wide zone between the two camps, mainly composed by the newly independent colonial countries and countries during the national liberation movement. Based on his theory, studies of Asia, Africa and Latin America began to develop in China, which was the beginning of China's area studies.

China resumed its legal seat in the United Nations in 1971, causing increasingly greater demands for China to learn about the world. However, there were no researchers in China. So, the Commercial Press launched a translation campaign and organized scholars nationwide to translate two series of books on world geography and history. The scholars' work played an important role in helping China to learn about the world and laid a foundation for China's future founding of Middle East studies.

Since the reform and opening-up, China's Middle East studies have achieved rapid and large-scale development, which is mainly reflected in six aspects. First, China's scientific research team continues to grow. Second, in addition to a large number of academic monographs and papers, some encyclopedias about Middle East have been published, which embody the rich scientific research achievements during that period. Third, the research fields are continuously expanding. In the past, the studies only focused on Middle Eastern politics, religion, history, and literature; now, these have been expanded to many other fields, including political science,

economics, law, ethnology and sociology. Fourth, remarkable results have been achieved in personnel training. Before the 1980s, China did not have any PhD students specialized in Middle East studies; now, there are hundreds of them. Fifth, the role of Middle East studies in Chinese think tanks has become increasingly prominent. Finally, the exchanges between China and the international academic community have become increasingly frequent, and Chinese scholars have published more papers abroad.

Yang Guang pointed out that current domestic Middle East studies are facing four challenges. First, there is a gap between China's disciplinary system construction and the advanced international level. China's discipline structure is not logical enough, and overall research capacity is weak. Second, there are shortcomings in the field's theoretical foundation and methodology. Empirical methods are widely adopted in China with few theoretical and methodological innovations, which have made it difficult to form characteristics unique to China's studies. Third, there are problems with academic research communication, and the international academic community is rarely aware of domestic research results. Finally, although the number of research teams has increased, the coordination of the relationship between discipline development and think tank research remains a problem.

Keiko Sakurai, a professor at the School of International Liberal Studies of Waseda University in Japan, introduced the university's development of Islamic area studies. She pointed out that as an

emerging academic field, Islamic area studies has three distinct characteristics. First, it covers communities where Muslims exist, regardless of whether they are in the majority or minority. Second, it encourages scholars with different research backgrounds and majors to conduct interdisciplinary studies. Third, it promotes international collaborative studies among scholars from Islamic areas and those from other places in the world. The goals of Islamic area studies are mainly reflected in three aspects: first, to establish an empirical knowledge system on Islam and Islamic areas; second, to deepen the understanding of Islam and Islamic areas from the perspective of history and comparison; third, to come to an evenhanded and just understanding of the diversity and dynamics of the region through academic dialogue and cooperation between scholars inside and outside Islamic areas.

Islamic area studies are different from the Oriental studies that emerged in Europe. The latter tends to oversimplify “the Orient” as the opposite of “the Occident,” while Islamic area studies are able to observe the studied areas from both the internal and external perspectives of Islam and Islamic regions through internationally associated studies. Likewise, Islamic area studies is different than the “area studies” which emerged from the strategic studies of decolonized countries in the Cold War era US. Unlike area studies, which mostly focuses on currently existing nations and geographic regions, Islamic area studies focuses more on cross-border interactions in the Islamic regions of the pre-Modern era. It emphasizes an

in-depth, wholistic understanding of the lives of the people who believe and practice Islam, rather than a limited current affairs perspective. It also encourages integration with arts and sciences research.

With the support of Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT) and National Institutes of Humanities (NIHU), five leading academic institutions have connected together as a network to facilitate Islamic area studies joint-research. Research centers at the University of Tokyo, Sophia University, Kyoto University, the Toyo Bunko Library, and a central office at Waseda University work together to promote multidisciplinary international joint-research on a variety of themes and topics. Waseda University identified "Islamic Civilization and Knowledge" as its central theme and organized research groups to conduct the textual analysis of Islamic ideals as well as the way Islamic ideals have been put into practice in various contexts.

In terms of research results, Waseda University has published some research reports in Japanese and English; translated and annotated classic and contemporary texts into Japanese; published *Understanding Islam*, a series of 24-volume books to help undergraduates understand various topics of Islam; published *Islamic Area Studies Series* in English; and provided academic results for the *Journal of Islamic Area Studies*, which is published annually by the Islamic area studies organizations. In terms of research methods, scholars are encouraged to carry out interdisciplinary studies, especially joint studies with disciplines in the humanities. For example,

they utilized GIS methods to clarify changes in the natural environment, which helped them understand the relationship between the socio-political power structure and changes in the natural environment in Medieval and Modern Egypt. Mahmoud Al-Batal, a professor at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, analyzed the status and challenges of the Arabic and Middle East area studies.

Global demand for Arabic language learning is constantly increasing. From the 1980s to the 1990s, over 4,400 people in the US learned Arabic. Since most of the learners were concerned only about grammar instead of the Arabic cultural context, few could reach an advanced level. By 2013, more than 32,000 Americans had been learning Arabic, and the number has continued to increase in recent years.

A study by Yale University has revealed mainly three motivations for Americans to learn Arabic—daily communication, travel needs and political dialogue. Most of the learners are undergraduates of various majors, who regard the study of that language as a supporting tool to help them acquire professional knowledge. Currently, many teachers who teach Arabic are no longer native speakers, but non-native speakers with a high level of Arabic language skills. Ensuring that not only native speakers can teach Arabic, but also many non-native speakers are helpful in achieving breakthroughs in the non-speakers' learning process.

Al-Batal pointed out that, in addition to modern standard Arabic, there are many local dialects. People speak dialects on many

occasions, but the dialects cannot facilitate large-scale communication. As a result, modern standard Arabic is necessary to learn for people who want to communicate with more Arabic people. In addition, there are different standards in Arabic language learning. Modern standard Arabic is mainly used by academics, and people learn different local dialects in various Arab regions. This is not good. If one wants to be proficient in Arabic, then he or she should go to different Arab regions and learn different dialects. Wang Yu, an associate professor at Peking University's School of Foreign Languages, gave a presentation titled "Analyzing Advantages and Disadvantages of Israel's Multi-Party System Based on the Experience of the Jewish Religious Parties' Participation in Politics."

Wang Yu explained that Israel has a multi-party system and the parties' common political appeal is to maintain and strengthen the Jewishness of the Israeli state at the religious and ethnic levels.

The Israeli parliament consists of 120 seats. Before elections, each party will submit a 120-member list to the Central Committee. The parliament members can be from multiple parties. In elections, people vote for parties instead of specific party members. A party's number of seats in the parliament is determined by the percentage of votes it receives, and only parties that reach the votes threshold are eligible to enter parliament. The winning party must form a coalition with more than 61 seats to lead the government, or the party with the second highest number of votes will have the opportunity to form a coalition. From 1949 to 1996, religious parties gained an average of

13-18 seats in each election, and 20-27 seats after 1996. Therefore, religious parties' seats are very important. Since 1948, there was at least one religious party in the government alliance.

However, religious parties are not reliable political allies, and they have risen in revolt many times and made many Israeli governments fall from power. During the David Ben-Gurion administration, religious parties passed a non-confidence motion due to religious education issues, which eventually led to Ben-Gurion's resignation. In 1952, religious parties withdrew from the government alliance due to the issue of enlisting women into compulsory military service, causing the government to collapse again. After the reorganization of the second government in 1952, Ben-Gurion said he hated bargaining for establishing the cabinet, which he attributed to the consequence of the Jewish people's lack of participation in state responsibility in their long history of exile. Therefore, he tried to reform the electoral system when the third government was established but failed because the minority parties had the veto power. Ben-Gurion eventually resigned. In 1976, the religious parties filed a non-confidence motion because the Yitzhak Rabin government still used means of transportation like planes during the Sabbath. The motion was passed and eventually led to the government's downfall.

However, sometimes, the ruling party government did not fall apart when religious parties withdrew. The Shas party withdrew from the alliance in 1993 due to the Palestinian peace talks, but the Rabin government continued to survive with the support of the Arab parties.

In 2004, religious parties withdrew from the Sharon government due to Gaza issues, but the government survived with the support of the opposition Labor Party. In 2012, the Netanyahu government also survived a similar crisis of religious parties' withdrawal due to the support from the opposition. However, such "lucky" governments are rare, which is because the government usually only gets the support from the opposition party when facing major decisions affecting the future of the country and the nation. Generally, governments are not able to withstand a strike brought by the religious parties' withdrawal.

Wang Yu expressed his belief that religious parties' participation in politics reflects the disadvantages of Israel's multi-party system. First, it is difficult to form a ruling coalition. Second, the alliance's policies are discussed and made by politicians instead of professionals, and some policies may not be beneficial to the country in the long run. Third, politicians bargain over the country's resources, causing unfair distribution of the resources. Fourth, the government is too unstable for policies to maintain sustainable.

According to Sammy Smooha, professor emeritus of the Department of Sociology at the University of Haifa, in Israel, Israel is a rather challenging area studies case. He said that researchers from non-Islamic countries must adopt a global perspective during the studies if they want to learn more about Israel. It is necessary to understand both strategic and non-strategic parts for the studies of Israel and China-Israel relations. Also, issues such as Israel's national security and US-Israel relations are hard to avoid.



Israel's position on the international stage is very important. It is located in the Middle East with an important geographical position and religious influence. It can be said that Israel's stability is the key element to that of the Middle East. Israel is a democratic state and also a nation state. Israel may be only a medium-sized country in foreigners' eyes, but its economic strength is not weak. Israel's national income ranks among the highest in the world, with a high proportion of scientific and technological R&D investment and many of the world's top universities.

Israel is a part of the Middle East, and also a part of the Mediterranean. Influenced by the Mediterranean culture, it connects Eastern and Western civilizations. The conflicts between Israel and the Arab countries are mainly the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Gaza issue, which have been going on for decades and affecting neighboring countries. Despite being the target of boycotts by the Arab countries and Iran, Israel is still a strong country. For Israel, what is most important is how to handle its conflict with the Arab countries.

The US is an important supporter of Israel, but Israel also maintains good relations with China. Therefore, Israel needs to consider two things in the current dilemma, which are how to identify strategic and non-strategic investments and how to handle its relations with China without making the US unhappy.

Israel established diplomatic relations with China in 1992. It is now an important participant in the BRI. Chinese companies have various businesses in Israel, such as developing local tourism and

investing in infrastructure. Maintaining good China–Israel bilateral relations will also greatly benefit neighboring countries. Therefore, researchers studying Israel should also learn about its neighboring countries instead of only focusing on Israel.

Some people think that China’s influence on Israel is very dangerous as China has many strategic investments in Israel, and that such investments can promote economic development but can also imperil national security. To this end, some voices in Israel are pointing out the necessity for Israel to be cautious in its relations with China, and there are also concerns about whether China will pose a threat to Israel. It is worth noticing that Iran is a friend of China, which is also a challenge to Israel.

Yoko Hayami, director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, Japan, delivered a speech on the subject of multilateral and interdisciplinary Southeast Asian studies. She said that Japan’s Southeast Asian studies is a theory-driven discipline on a multi-disciplinary base. It promotes empirical research in a non-regional context and regards as its task the conducting of comprehensive and multi-disciplinary studies while focusing on regional and human development.

The evolution of Southeast Asian studies mainly has three stages. The first was the institutional development stage (1960s–1970s), when area studies and basic thematic research were mainly conducted to learn about the region. The second was the joint research and development stage (1980s), when the studies further identified various

fields of the Southeast Asian region. The third stage of comprehensive regional research and development began at the turn of the century, when the COE plan was implemented. Early research topics included agricultural production, political organization and government procedures, education, languages, economic development and religion. The multi-disciplinary topics in the 1980s included agricultural development in tropical monsoon ecosystems, and the economic development and social base in small-scale hereditary countries. In the 1990s, the relationship between “areas” and “area studies” began to be reconsidered.

Since the 21st century, many new changes and problems have emerged in Southeast Asian social development. With an increasing number of people who are interested in Southeast Asian and ASEAN studies, the focus of scholars’ work has changed: starting from the region itself, their vision has been broadened to the world, forming a sense of coexistence and global awareness of the human biosphere.

Tropical ecology and the social and nursing issues of an aging population are two of the relatively typical studies of the biosphere. The rapid development of agriculture has led to large-scale deforestation of rain forests into arable land, causing extensive forest fires. Blind efforts to increase productivity have resulted in wide environmental damage and many ecological problems, which backfired to cause a series of poverty problems for people. Technologies with productivity as the core are different from those driven by the biosphere. The latter focuses on carbon accumulation,

biological intelligence, and environmental protection. Such studies have also received the attention and support of many scholars and institutions at home and abroad.

Elder care is an important part of humanity's sustainable development. The aging of modern countries is becoming serious and placing a heavy burden on the countries, so proper elder care is conducive to social stability. Japan and Thailand both adopt a "four-side diamond-shaped structure" (country, market, group, family) for elder care, but they are quite different. In Japan, the power of country, market, and family is strong, while Thailand's market is weak and the elder care mainly depends on families. However, Thailand's family size is shrinking. The reason for the difference is that the aging of Japan developed rapidly after the Industrial Revolution, which caused group communities to become weak, while Thailand experienced industrialization and population change in the same period, and the two have developed simultaneously.

Yoko Hayami expressed her belief that previous Southeast Asian studies were based on fieldwork and pursued Western-centered academics, which was based on disciplines. Current Southeast Asian research studies focuses on understanding global issues in Southeast Asia and the pressing realities within the region. It is keen on broader multi-disciplinary studies and inter-disciplinary collaboration among various departments. Strengthening Southeast Asian studies will not only help solve Southeast Asia's current problems but will also provide solutions for a diversified global coexistence and a

sustainable biosphere.

Cahyo Pamungkas, a researcher at the Area Studies Center of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences, introduced the development of area studies in Indonesia from country studies to transnational movement.

Following Indonesia's independence, over 200 ethnic groups on tens of thousands of islands found themselves coexisting in a country with many internal conflicts. Foreign scholars have studied Indonesian society since the colonial period and published many results. In fact, Indonesia wanted to use Western doctrines to conduct area studies and define itself. To bridge the knowledge gap, in 1998, several senior researchers at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences formed the Program of Southeast Asian Study at LIPI which held various seminars and forums on social, historical and cultural studies in Southeast Asia. In 2001, the program formally developed into the Research Center for Regional Resources, and later in 2019, it was renamed the Center for Areas Studies. The Center's studies on each country are all independent, and the focus of area studies varies in different universities. The main topics include the global and regional interactions of Asia, Africa and Western Europe.

Studies on Southeast Asia can be traced back to the establishment of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, in 1778. In 1864 and 1898, two institutions were established in France to study the society and culture of Vietnam, Laos, and Khmer. In 1917, the UK founded an institution to study the affairs of India, Myanmar, the East

and Africa. In 1971, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) was founded in Singapore. In 1973, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences was established. At present, many new social factors are driving the development of Southeast Asian studies, including the formation of a new global order, the interaction between Southeast Asia and the world, and the process of Southeast Asia joining the global supply chain network.

Pamungkas said that major topics of area studies in Indonesia in the future five years will include the influence of the BRI in Southeast Asian society; the formation of economic, cultural and social networks in border cities; Southeast Asian rice and the trade network in ASEAN countries; Indonesian food in the Netherlands -- reproduced cultural network and colonial memories; smart and resilient cities -- the urban planning networks in Asia and Europe.

He pointed out that Indonesia's area studies focus more on academic research rather than political interests. The object of the studies has changed from one country to transnational movements. Their content has changed from regional and global interactions to the construction of economic, socio-cultural and political networks. The goal of area studies is to promote the development of social sciences by developing inter-disciplinary approaches and multi-sited ethnographic research methods.