

The 2nd Broadyard Workshop

China and Its Neighboring Countries: Trends and Opportunities

April 12, 2018

Focusing on “China and Its Neighboring Countries: Trends and Opportunities,” the Second Broadyard Workshop (博雅工作坊) was held in Room 305 of the School of Economics at Peking University (PKU) on April 12, 2018. Ning Qi, dean of PKU’s School of Foreign Languages and Prof. Shen Zhihua of the Department of History at East China Normal University, chaired the workshop, with professors Ma Rong, Han Dongyu, Wang Hao, Zhang Hui, Duan Qing and Zhai Kun giving presentations.

Prof. Ma from the Institute of Sociology and Anthropology, PKU, gave a presentation titled “Strengthening investigations and research on neighboring countries’ historical and current social situation.”

Prof. Ma said that he has gone to many countries and regions, but based on his own experiences of doing sociological surveys, has learned that many domestic scholars have a very limited understanding of foreign countries.

Taking students of Hindi majors at PKU as an example, he pointed out these shortcomings. Young scholars that can speak Hindi are in great demand by China, but due to students’ personal reluctance and local living conditions, many students who study Hindi are not willing to go abroad. Although they are learning Hindi, they don’t really understand India. He also

mentioned that even some embassy staff are reluctant to go abroad. Going abroad is not as attractive as it was in the 1980s.

The skills possessed by Chinese diplomats are not ideal either. He said that he found most of the embassy personnel in Kazakhstan can only speak Russian, which is far from sufficient if they want to understand the local conditions.

On the contrary, diplomats from the US, Japan, the UK, and Russia take on many tasks every time they go aboard [including learning the language and local culture]. They are very dedicated and can gain a clear understanding of the population, societal conditions, political parties, religions, and laws.

He pointed out that language skills are greatly needed to do research in order to have a full understanding of a target country, since we are now introducing China to the world, and must smoothly carry out the Belt and Road initiative (BRI).

He cited several former colonies as examples, noting that apart from Thailand, countries in Southeast Asia were mostly colonies of the past. Although the official language is now the language of the colonizers, it is the local languages, not English, that are used in grassroots communities, laws, and social situations. If diplomats are not familiar with the local languages, they cannot conduct in-depth investigations and research.

Another example is that the UK sent geographers to local areas to investigate and study the local language, religion, society, law, ethics, conditions, and so on, which laid a solid

knowledge foundation for them to formulate effective local colonial rules.

However, many Chinese companies are now rushing to go abroad without a good understanding of national conditions, including local laws, customs, local social tensions and tribal conflicts. The companies believe that keeping good relations with government agencies is the only thing that matters, and end up stumbling into huge problems that put their investments at risk. Prof. Ma said that the current scarce knowledge of target countries and insufficient talent pool means that the workload facing us is huge.

In order to change this situation, he proposed that it is necessary for foreign language colleges and various colleges to propose a long-term plan for sending students abroad. It takes years of accumulating information to know a region such as Kenya or Myanmar well. These students will not only learn languages, but also understand the society of the country, observe the country's economy, and study its law, ethics and methods of communication.

These students' years of study and research will help build up sufficient knowledge reserves. At the same time, it is necessary to establish some contacts through these students. When the students enter the workforce, they can continue to cooperate with their former foreign teachers. This will help China gradually accumulate knowledge of the target countries,

including the history, geography, natural resources, politics, economy, and law.

Prof. Ma also thinks highly of the significance of foreign students in China. First, cooperation with international students can deepen the understanding of the society and mindset of a given country. Second, these international students will develop an affection for China after receiving education and support from their teachers here. They will have a certain degree of familiarity with China after returning to their home countries, thinking of China as their second home. This is very important for the development of all aspects of China.

He said that he has been receiving applications from Pakistani students for the past two or three years. In order to promote the BRI, China has proposed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Therefore, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided a considerable number of scholarships to Pakistan, but Pakistani students must obtain a letter of acceptance from domestic universities to meet the requirements. Therefore, many Pakistani students want to come to China to study.

However, Ma also pointed out that accepting international students is not easy for teachers. First is the language problem. Second, international students rarely study Chinese topics. In order to know the topics of interest to the international student, the teacher should understand the topic and the country and do a

lot of preparatory work. It is also not easy to guide papers in foreign languages. Therefore, if the school does not have any incentives, the teachers will not be willing to do this. Ma mentioned that currently, there is a lack of policies providing incentives in this respect, so some problems have appeared and these projects have not progressed as they were designed.

Ma believes that both the country and schools need to offer support in these areas to achieve good training for international students.

At the end of his speech, Ma talked about the terminology used in discussing cross-border ethnic issues. He said that the borders of China were not naturally formed. Treaties after 1840 framed the borders; therefore, many members of traditional tribes or ethnic groups ended up living in other countries. Citing one of his previous articles, “How to Treat the Concept of Cross-border Ethnic Groups,” Ma said he does not support the concept of “cross-border nationalities.” In China, the “Chinese nation” means all Chinese people, so Ma does not support the common phrase saying there are “56 nationalities within China.” Rather, he thinks they should be called “56 ethnic groups.” The use of the phrase “cross-border nationalities” should be avoided, because it will cause many problems. Therefore, Ma believes that these people can be called “cross-border ethnic groups.”

He noted Chinese who have acquired American citizenship in the US cannot be considered as members of the Chinese

nation, just as foreigners who adopt the Chinese nationality are members of China. This should be based on the concept of nationality, not culture.

He also noted that although the term “cross-border ethnic groups” is preferred over “cross-border nationalities,” it should be used with caution.

The second speaker was Prof. Han Dongyu, vice president of Northeast Normal University. His speech was titled “Theories and practices of ‘Scholars protecting the borders.’”

Han said that China needs to learn from the ancients to become a major power. The *Twenty-Four Histories* in ancient China not only included studies of Chinese regions, but also extensively covered surrounding areas. Han emphasized that since China now wants to truly return to the center of the world stage, it must learn from the ancients.

He believes that the ancient Chinese have two ways of thinking about territory. One is cultural territory, and the other is geographical territory. Before Emperor Qin Shihuang, the first person ever to unify China, the word territory was a blend of both the cultural and geographical meanings.

Han said that the situation along China’s border areas is very serious. He said China must properly face the situation and deal with its affairs in accordance with international law. This raised the question about how scholars along the border areas treat their basic responsibilities to the nation in the current

situation.

Han took the East Asian research team in the Northeast China as an example. He believes that research institutions in these frontier regions have geographical advantages and they are more intuitive about the situation of neighboring countries. But there are also some disadvantages, which is that they tend to have narrow views when analyzing local issues.

Prof. Han and his team have come up with a concept regarding how to defend China's border areas through academics they dubbed "scholars protecting the borders."

This concept had not been officially written about before, but the idea has existed in the past. Prof. Han wrote a paper called "Theories and practices of 'Scholars protecting the borders.'"

The phrase "scholars protecting the borders" refers to the academic responsibilities and functions consciously held by researchers who are engaged in relations between border areas and neighboring countries or regions in order to safeguard national sovereignty and regional security. Some teams from the State Council have conducted research in China's Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest regions, and found that the current so-called world history research is about histories of different countries and regions, but it should also include the history of international relations in different areas.

For example, in the Northeast, we are targeting Japan, North

Korea, Russia, and the Far East; in the southwestern region, we are targeting the history of Southeast Asia and the history of South Asia; and in the northwest, we are targeting the history of Central Asia and the history of the Middle East. This division of researchers by geography is due to China's big size.

Research institutions and universities in border areas should take on the responsibility to solve the problems that the country is currently facing. Han stressed that the relations between China and its border areas are as fraught and dangerous as they've ever been, except in times of war.

Han said that "scholars protecting the borders" is not nationalism. On the contrary, it is patriotism, a deep love for one's homeland. Han cited the example of Confucius and Duan Muci (Zigong), one of the disciples of Confucius. Han said patriotism did not prevent Confucius and his disciples from pursuing higher ideals. Therefore, internationalism and patriotism are like two wheels of a bicycle, both of which are indispensable.

George Orwell, a man who opposed war, admitted after the defeat of the Battle of Dunkirk in the UK that he was a patriot deep inside and would fight against the Nazis. Han also cited many other examples to explain the difference between nationalism and "scholars protecting the borders."

Prof. Han mentioned that in ancient China, frontier poets like Gao Shi and Wang Wei were actively committed to

defending the Northwest frontier. He said that when China was invaded by other neighboring countries, the Northwest region, which was handed over to scholars to defend, was preserved. However, the East Asian region, which was handed over to the bureaucrats to defend, was lost territory by territory.

Han gave the example of Song Jiaoren and Jiandao, also known as Gando or Kando in Korean. This term describes the Chinese border areas to the north of the Tumen River and the south of the Hanlan River. The area is now affiliated with the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Northeast China's Jilin Province. Han said that after the Japanese annexed North Korea, they used the opportunity to try to start engulfing Northeast China. For this reason, the Japanese described the current Yanbian as North Korea's territory. At that time, Song Jiaoren went to the three northeastern provinces to start an uprising. He accidentally discovered the intrigue of the Japanese in the area, so he began to study the issue seriously and wrote a 60,000-word article called *The Jiandao Question*. He was a revolutionary, but on this issue, he was a senior scholar. After writing the article, Song Jiaoren went to various places in China's Liaoning Province, Korea and Japan and did a lot of research using both Chinese history and Korean historic documents. These research results helped China win an advantageous position when negotiating over the border demarcation with relevant countries. Han emphasized that Song

Jiaoren once said that he wrote that book for defending each inch of Chinese territory, not for earning a few cents.

Based on the example of Song Jiaoren, Han pointed out that establishing think tanks nowadays is the echo of our morality and inner conscience, not catering to the needs of the others or “earning a few cents.” But the phenomenon of researching topics to cater for others still exists, which is not considered to be either doing academic work or bearing responsibilities for the sake of the country.

Han stressed that scholars must stand up when China is at a crucial moment. Although we usually adopt the objective methods of conducting scientific experiments when managing liberal arts research, and intellectuals’ sense of mission is declining, Han believes that in the face of difficulties, intellectuals will definitely stand up for their homeland again.

At the end of the presentation, Han expressed his high expectations for PKUIAS, and called on everyone to strengthen their sense of responsibility and mission as a scholar, join in the ranks of taking up academics as a weapon to protect our borders, and make contributions to China when the country is in a disadvantageous international situation.

The third speaker was Prof. Wang Hao, deputy director of the Department of Asian and African Studies at PKU’s School of Foreign Languages. His presentation was titled “Studies on the Relations between China and Its Neighboring Countries, Taking

Sino-Mongolian Relations as an Example.” Wang Hao shared her experience of studying Sino-Mongolian relations over recent years. She said that Sino-Mongolian relations have developed rapidly in the past years, and the country attaches great importance to the study of Sino-Mongolian relations. The Mongolian Studies Center at PKU has undertaken nearly ten national, provincial or ministry-level projects and commissioned projects in the past ten years.

Wang Hao pointed out that China-Mongolia relations are two-sided, unlike what newspaper stories reflect.

President Xi Jinping visited Mongolia in 2014, and the voices for establishing a Sino-Mongolian corridor were relatively strong.

However, communication and understanding among the people of the two countries is far from adequate.

The Mongolian Studies Center, when doing these ten studies, concluded that the foundation of China-Mongolia relations was not solid enough. Although there are some cooperation projects between China and Mongolia, there is no new expansion of the ties between China and Mongolia. Therefore, China-Mongolia relations are very worthy of our attention and thought.

Currently, there is no large-scale strong domestic team in the field of Mongolian research. In the 1960s, there was a research institute of peripheral relations at Inner Mongolia

University, which did much fruitful research. However, after the transformation of Mongolian society, there was a shortage of researchers at the institute. In the 1990s, the Mongolian Research Association was established in China. In the beginning, this association could integrate the research forces of PKU, the military and so on. However, by the year 2000, it failed due to many problems including a lack of funds. Therefore, although there were many subjects worth researching in the border areas and Mongolia, no valuable results have been collected. Young scholars studying Mongolia in China are very scarce now. Many studies have been conducted on border trades and mine development since the 1990s. Research achievements in these two areas, as well as Mongolian diplomacy and third-party neighbors, are many. However, Wang Hao pointed out that the academic weight of these academic achievements is relatively low. Rather, what really needs attention should be sensitive topics such as Mongolia's independence. Studies on the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Mongolia in 1949 and the normalization of China-Mongolia relations in 1989 are even more rare.

Wang Hao mentioned that the Mongolian Studies Center is translating the archives of Mongolia, but due to a shortage of personnel, they have to resort to students who have graduated to help translate. These archives involve dialogue between China and Mongolia, and Mongolia's relations with neighboring

countries. This is valuable and worthy of study.

Wang Hao emphasized that studying the Mongolian issue should not only focus on Mongolia itself. China-Mongolia relations include multiple factors, such as Russia and the US. The construction of Mongolian Railways is an example of this.

In 2014, Mongolia's parliament passed a decision to construct wide-gauge rail in the north, narrow-gauge rail in the south, and 200kilometers of standard rail. Many people have discussed why this is the case. In fact, for historical reasons, Mongolia has only 50% of the railway rights to its own railways, and the remaining 50% are held by Russia. Mongolia cannot completely determine its own railway construction. These are all historical issues, and they have an impact on the construction of the Sino-Mongolian Economic Corridor.

Wang Hao said that the Ministry of Education is currently assigning topics for its registered studies centers, including pragmatic research topics and basic research topics, but it would be better to allow these centers to decide the topics to research on their own. The Mongolian Studies Center has enough material to do in-depth and long-term academic research, but it will be passive and face insufficient time to do assigned research topics. Wang Hao emphasized that if these long-term studies yield results and are handed over to China's foreign affairs departments, the foreign affairs officials will understand the historical background when making decisions.

Wang Hao also talked about his own views from the perspective of teaching and training students. She hopes that the newly established PKUIAS will give students enough opportunities to broaden their horizons. She cited examples of reports that Kim Jong-un would meet Trump in Ulaanbaatar, saying that many people said they could not understand the choice of location. But based on both history and relevant documents, many clues about the decision can be traced.

With today's deficit of scholarship, students and diplomats do not understand this. Therefore, we need to put more investment in talent cultivation in order to be able to carry out more in-depth and extensive research.

Prof. Zhang Hui, deputy dean of the School of Economics at PKU, gave a speech on the topic of "Studies of the economic theory paradigm of the BRI," reviewing the proposal, formation and development of the BRI. He considered the reasons for the proposal of the initiative and mentioned a number of points.

First, World Bank statistics about the world's total import and export trade since 1960 show that global economic development experienced four levels of development:

- 1960-1975: An average growth stage with a growth rate of 2.0%
- 1975-1989: low growth stage, 1.1%
- 1990-2007: explosive growth stage, 2.2%

- 2008-present: stagnation growth stage, -0.2%

From 2008 to today, the situation is more difficult than that between 1975 and 1989, so it is necessary to come up with countermeasures. Second, the BRI is a response to the intrinsic demand represented by Asia's rapid share of the global economy. According to prices adjusted to 2005 levels, Asia accounted for 17.03% of global GDP in 1970, and 31.10% in 2012, surpassing Europe as the continent with the biggest economy in the world.

Third, the income gap between developing and developed economies is widening. Economic problems are manifested in politics, and the conflicts between developed and developing economies are deepening, as well as the conflicts among developed economies.

Fourth, Zhang Hui discussed the timing of the BRI. He said that seen from both the economic aggregate and per capita GDP, China has made a great economic leap since the start of the reform and opening-up policy in 1979, and the nation's economic structure has improved a lot. Zhang Hui emphasized that China's economic status in the world in 1990 was very low, but since 2013, our position has been increasing significantly.

Fifth is the problem of the economic development paradigm. Currently, China is in the "middle" of the economic development model. We export intermediate goods to developed economies, and import intermediate goods from developing economies; and we import final consumer goods from

developed economies and export final consumer goods to developing economies. The United Nations representative in China proposed that China is a bridge between developed and developing economies. China has closely linked developing and developed economies.

Sixth is the issue of proximity. Zhang Hui said that any rising country needs to look for a close economic cooperation zone. Britain, France, and Germany are all in the same situation.

China is in the middle of many trade systems. It is in the middle of six major trade corridors involving 67 countries and regions. Based on studies on economic development, China is in the middle. More than half of the world's countries and regions are more economically developed than us, and about half are less developed than us. The world is like the image of the Arabic numeral "8." China is in the middle. The circle below represents developed economies, and above represents developing economies.

Countries and regions along the Belt and Road can also be represented by the figure "8," with China still in the middle. Therefore, we can say that the theoretical paradigm of the world's current economic situation is an "8." Economic data shows that it is beneficial for countries and regions along the Belt and Road to cooperate with China, which connect them to the crux of the "8."

Seventh, Zhang Hui discussed how to advance the initiative.

Economic data shows that the prospects for China to become the world's biggest economy within the 40 years since China's reform and opening-up appeared to be 8%. But in the future, the probability is more than 60%. China can cooperate with countries and regions along the Belt and Road to do a lot of things, increasing its economic prospects.

However, Zhang Hui emphasized that the BRI faces two problems. The first one is a shortage of talent, and the other is a shortage of experience. After the great maritime era [in the 15th century], China closed its doors. In the past five hundred years, China has less experience in international affairs than previously. The BRI was proposed only four years ago, so overall China's experience is still insufficient.

Zhang Hui also talked about when China will surpass the US. He took the UK and the US as an example, saying that the US manufacturing industry surpassed the UK in 1874, and its GDP exceeded the UK in 1894, but it was not until the Yalta Agreement in 1945 that the US could take the mantle of world hegemony from the UK. The transfer of power between the UK and the US was peaceful. The transfer of power between China and the US can also be peaceful. The transfer of power between the UK and the US was also related to compromises by the US in many areas of interest, and we can also do it.

The second half of the seminar was hosted by Prof. Shen Zhihua, tenured professor in the History Department of East

China Normal University and the director of the Center for Cold War International History Studies.

The first presentation of the afternoon was delivered by the renowned linguist Duan Qing, professor in PKU's School of Foreign Languages, on the topic "Deepening Western Regions Studies Will Rewrite the History of Human Civilization." Prof. Duan is the head of the Sanskrit and Pali Languages Department and the director of the Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature. She focuses on Indian classical Sanskrit grammar, Old- and Middle-Iranian languages and comparative studies of Sanskrit and Chinese Buddhist texts. She is now leading several projects including "Studies on the Sanskrit Palm-Leaf Manuscript that was Once Preserved in the Cultural Palace of Nationalities," "Studies on the Glossary of Buddhism in the Chinese Language Based on Sanskrit-Chinese Comparative Analysis," and "Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary Compilation," and has already received provincial and national research grants for several of her works.

Prof. Duan opened her speech by expressing her support for the decision by PKU to establish PKUIAS. She explained that she favors the concept of "Area Studies" over that of "Borderland Studies" because "Borderland" is a rather conservative and complacent concept from the perspective of the Central Plains in East China, which sees these areas as far from the central government and inclined to break away.

“Area Studies,” on the other hand, enables the study of a region from up close and from there extending to surround other areas to look at the links between them.

Prof. Duan went on to review the projects that she and her team had been working on in the past year.

She first talked about their preparation for the publication of the Khotanese *Raśmivimalaviśuddhaprabhā-nāma-dhāraṇī*. This long text was written in Khotanese and was brought into the Tang Empire by eminent monks from the Kingdom of Khotan upon the invitation of the Empress Wu Zetian. It was then translated into Chinese in Chang’an [now Xi’an], the capital at the time, and was later circulated to the Korean Peninsula and Japan. A Chinese version of this text was found in the Seokgatap in Bulguksa in South Korea in the 1960s. The discovery caused a sensation because it is a woodblock print. As for the Khotanese version of the text, no full text had been ever found before, and Prof. Duan’s team is going to be the first to publish such findings. The discovery of this Khotanese full text has significant influence on the studies of the Khotanese language as well as that of Buddhism in the Kingdom of Khotan. With the help of this Khotanese text, we can see how this Buddhist text was translated into Chinese in Chang’an after being brought there. It demonstrates the clear flow of culture throughout the history connecting different areas.

Prof. Duan then introduced a study on *qushu* from the

collection of Lop County Museum. In Pali, *qushu* is defined as “a rug with long hair.” It is a long hair woolen carpet with patterns woven on it. Each one consists of two separate carpets woven together, one on the top of another, which makes it extra soft. The study done by Prof. Duan’s team on five of these carpets received assistance from the School of Archaeology and Museology of PKU, to determine their age and origin.

Judging from the griffin patterns and the depiction of stories from Greek mythology, which have both been proved to be strongly connected to the Scythians in previous studies, the carpets are believed to be of Scythian origin created between the 4th and the 5th centuries.

In a slide show, Prof. Duan showed the audience a picture of one of the carpets she had been studying. On it were scenes of stories of the Greek gods Hephaestus, Aphrodite, and Ares. However, it was not these scenes that first caught her attention, but the three letters above these patterns. They are actually a hybrid of Greek letters and Khotanese letters. And since the Khotanese letters were derived from Sanskrit, this three-letter word actually represents three different languages. It was Prof. Duan who successfully deciphered the word using a rather fundamental linguistic rule. Moreover, this *qushu* also depicts Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of night. The British Museum bought a statue that is said to be of Inanna the Sumerian Queen of the Night on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of its

public opening, but Prof. Duan pointed out that the statue is actually a counterfeit because the outfit of the goddess and the item she holds are different from what the excavated Sumerian tablets say about Inanna. She then compared the statue to the figure on the *qushu*, and argued that the figure on the carpet is the real representation of Inanna, as the clothes she wears and the measuring rod in her hands all match perfectly with the description found on the tablets.

After that, Prof. Duan spoke about the cooperative Sanskrit Buddhist text translation center in Thailand. Back in 2012 they had already translated and published *DīghaNikāya*, and they have also finished translating *MajjhimaNikāya*. Prof. Duan and her team have a special office in the center and they would take students there every year to do research. Last year an international academic conference was also held in the center. However, the center is now facing a lack of funding, as the money for the foundation of the center was from public donations solely, and no funds were appropriated by PKU. Therefore, Prof. Duan called for an immediate increase in funding the humanities, as research and studies in humanities need sufficient funding to be able to run smoothly, in contrast to popular opinion. Academic activities such as the research mentioned above, building connections with local scholars, taking students out on fieldtrips and establishing centers all rely on funding.

In the end, Prof. Duan highlighted the urgency of promoting research. She repeatedly used the phrase “time waits for no one,” as the older generation of scholars are starting to face the onset of senility. They possess knowledge and skills, and know how to conduct research and train students. It would be undoubtedly a heavy loss for academia if they have to suspend their studies due to insufficient funding. Therefore, Prof. Duan argued that the most urgent issue now is to increase funding and to initiate research projects.

Prof. Zhai Kun from PKU’s School of International Studies gave a presentation titled “Practical development and academic research in China and Southeast Asia.”

Zhai said that he is dedicated to current research which mainly involves new, living and changing subjects. He says his research is practical and pragmatic. The main methods of current research are long-term observation, field research and communication.

The first method is long-term observation. For example, scholars doing current research are not qualified to be an expert specialized in a certain country or region if they did not do continuous research on the country or region for at least five years, ten years or even fifteen years. Zhai took himself as an example, saying that when he studied Cambodia, he did not have enough understanding of the country until he continued researching two political cycles. After another political cycle, he

had further understanding of the country. He said that one can only become a real expert after witnessing five or six political cycles.

The second method is field research. It is necessary to go to a local area to see the latest developments, and to look back at its history, which are threaded together.

The third method is communication and exchanges. He said researchers should especially stress exchanges with local authorities. PKU is not good at exchanging with local authorities because PKU generally believes that academic work should keep a certain distance from the authorities. However, scholars who do current research often have to be very close to officials. There are two purposes. The first one is to know how policy has been implemented. The second one is to help officials make fewer mistakes, because it is difficult to make policy but easy to make mistakes. Starting from his own observation and understanding, Prof. Zhai pointed out that the current affairs research requires scholars to turn what they observe into their own experience, insight, wisdom and methods.

He said contemporary research has the following four characteristics: The first feature is that it is very useful, which is self-evident. The second is that it is very difficult and will make people exhausted. For example, doing historical research only needs to look back at history, but doing research on the current situation is based on the present. It is daily work, and missing a

day's research will make scholars feel they are missing an important link in history, which is terribly arduous for the scholars. The third characteristic is that it is dangerous and easy to make mistakes. Scholars who do research on the current situation have been trained since they were young. Without enough knowledge and insight, it will be difficult for them to make a correct judgment, so it is very dangerous. Bad decisions are not only harmful to their home country, but also harmful to the relationship between countries. In fact, bad decisions are also harmful to the researcher himself, who will suffer and feel guilty. The fourth characteristic is that the researchers usually feel diffident, because scholars who do contemporary affairs research must study current events every day and sometimes they may lack confidence when making judgments. If they are more exposed to history and theories before making judgements, perhaps their rate of making correct judgements will be improved. He said that since he worked at PKU, he has found that some teachers among his peers have combined historical research with current affairs research.

Prof. Zhai said that his topic for his presentation is Southeast Asia, because he has found in recent years, especially since the proposal of BRI and the 18th CPC National Congress, China's relations with Southeast Asia have undergone changes, and these changes require scholars to conduct interdisciplinary studies in Southeast Asia.

But currently, this interdisciplinary system is not yet established, so it cannot provide enough intellectual support to both current affairs research and policy research. Prof. Zhai wants to do both of these things, but he encountered the same problems that Prof. Duan Qing mentioned, such as funding issues.

Prof. Zhai said that he examined five aspects to see what needs interdisciplinary support. The first aspect is strategic synergy. China's policy toward Southeast Asia is mainly in two categories. First is policy supporting the BRI. Second is concrete policy reflecting the nation's specific strategy with Southeast Asia. The specific strategy with Southeast Asia is continuous, but how does the BRI strategy synergize with specific Southeast Asia policies? The top-level strategic planning, South China Sea strategic planning, and secondary strategic goals all need to be properly coordinated. This requires skilled people to do all the strategic research. When doing strategic research, it is very important to correctly express the basic facts, because if the facts are mistaken, the strategy will fail.

The second aspect is policy coordination. From the perspective of China, there are mainly four modes of policy coordination — central government-level policy coordination, inter-ministerial coordination, coordination between central and local governments, and between different local governments. These four modes have been changing, especially after the latest

“two sessions.” After the end of the “two sessions” in March, Prof. Zhai published an article stating that this round of BRI policy has to undergo new adjustments. Because the party and government organs have undergone adjustments, these policies must be adjusted accordingly.

On the topic of coordination between local governments, the traditional model of regional development in China is divided into the eastern, southern, western and northern regions of the country. But the emergence of the Belt and Road is breaking down the model of coordinated development among the regions. For example, the “Southbound Channel” is a passage from Chongqing to Nanning, which leads directly to the sea. Along this passage, Guizhou, Gansu, and Guangxi signed an agreement to form a new type of regional cooperation system, which requires new theoretical support. Prof. Zhai believes that this requires the support of domestic experts, especially experts like Prof. Zhang Hui.

The third aspect is project management. The formulation of these policies is ultimately in the form of projects. The categories of the projects include domestic, foreign, new, long-standing, innovative, basic, public welfare and commercial, all of which require skilled management. There are risks in project management. If we don’t understand economic, financial, or risk management, we will not have the power to control discourse. Therefore, expert support is greatly needed.

The fourth aspect is the issue of people's livelihood. Any policy should benefit the people. To benefit people both home and abroad, the issue of people's livelihood must be connected with enterprises and the government. For example, there have been changes in the development of the Southeast Asian market. In the past ten years, it was mainly the government that set up platforms for enterprises, mostly central government-run enterprises and state-owned enterprises. But now, private enterprises have also entered these international markets, such as Huawei, Alibaba and Tencent. This may shape a new production chain and supply chain, leading governments to rethink their policies. These are new changes. If we don't follow up on these changes with research, the theoretical support that is needed when making new policies will be unavailable.

The last aspect is public opinion, technical support, professional assessment, and other aspects of the "software" that makes projects run. To measure whether Chinese policy is doing well in Southeast Asia, some of the standards are whether it helps the local government, whether it causes damage to the ecological environment, how much the employment rate is raised, and whether folk customs have been subverted. This requires a scientific evaluation system, which also needs academic research and academic support.

Prof. Zhai finally pointed out that with the development of this era and the development of Southeast Asia, China is facing

a series of huge changes, which currently cannot be dealt with by any one professional research institute. The changes require an interdisciplinary framework. Similar kinds of problems exist in other regions as well. Therefore, he believes that the establishment of PKUIAS will help break through these barriers to a certain extent, which is very beneficial.

In the discussion session, Prof. Wang Xu from the South Asian Department of PKU's School of Foreign Languages illustrated his feelings about the current interdisciplinary research situation and the significance of the establishment of PKUIAS with three examples.

First, taking his own research as an example, Prof. Wang Xu said that when undertaking the tasks on behalf of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the past, the fieldwork research of PKU's South Asian Department and the South Asian Research Center was mainly conducted in the form of interviews. However, such a method has one drawback: the lack of quantitative scientific analysis, which sometimes leads to unbalanced conclusions, causing bad results locally. Therefore, the South Asian Department and the South Asian Research Center now need to apply the research method of the Department of Sociology, and let more students go to the Department of Sociology to learn methodology, and then conduct research on the basis of sociological methodology.

The second example given by Prof. Wang Xu is about a

country research project conducted by the South Asian Research Center over the past two years. He pointed out that these topics have common interdisciplinary features. For example, there is a topic related to the India-China border dispute, which requires cooperation between the foreign language school and the history department.

Moreover, in the process of completing this report, he also considered the issue from the perspective of international law. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an interdisciplinary communication platform and interdisciplinary cooperation.

The third example cited by Prof. Wang is the study of Islam in South Asia. He pointed out that it will be difficult to understand the current status of the Sufi orders in South Asia if we only study the Central Asian region. This kind of research is not one-way, but multi-directional, and cross-disciplinary. Prof. Wang Xu also cited the example of the Rohingya, indicating that many studies now require cross-regional research. Due to the boundaries between disciplines in different fields, the establishment of IAS will meet this demand, so it is of great significance.

Prof. Ma Rong added his suggestion that IAS must make some initial achievements, to set up a high reputation. Considering the institute is now short of talent, Prof. Ma Rong suggested IAS start from one or two studies and establish several research groups, which will take in teachers and students

from the School of Foreign Languages, the Department of Sociology, School of International Studies, Department of History and School of Economics to study the basic situation of a certain country from different perspectives using their different expertise and methods from each discipline. Prof. Ma Rong pointed out that there is a great need of such studies in China, which will support the implementation of the country's policies and the implementation of the BRI policy. The country will surely support such research. But first of all, IAS needs to finish these studies in three to five years, and establish our reputation.

Prof. Duan added that researchers should pay attention to security issues no matter what country they are researching. In addition, she also suggested that IAS should do research projects with characteristics that require the participation of expert teams, not the popular projects some culture companies are doing.

Prof. Ning Qi talked about the process for the establishment of IAS. Before the proposal of the BRI in 2013, as early as 2009, the then Executive Vice President of PKU Lin Jianhua already had the idea of setting up IAS. At that time, Lin visited many countries and found that China's understanding of the world was not adequate. Therefore, he wanted to set up an institute at PKU that specializes in area studies. Regrettably, this idea was not put into practice due to Lin being transferred to Chongqing University and later to Zhejiang University. By the time Lin returned to PKU in 2015, the BRI was in full swing. Therefore,

the establishment of IAS became urgent. In addition, PKU has an innate advantage in establishing IAS, because PKU is a comprehensive university with many excellent disciplines, including humanities, social studies, natural sciences and engineering. All these disciplines have intrinsic strength to understand the countries and regions along the Belt and Road as well as and China's role in the future world, and are also willing to help build up IAS.

Therefore, the establishment of IAS was urgently needed to develop the academic disciplines at PKU. At the same time, Prof. Ning also responded to the financial problems mentioned by Prof. Duan and Prof. Zhai, indicating that the university attaches great importance to the construction of PKUIAS. This is because area studies and the "clinical medicine +X" are currently two important platforms launched by PKU. The aim is to integrate all the resources of PKU, not simply the integration of several teams, but also talent training and academic research. PKU sincerely wants to set up IAS as an important platform to adjust the whole university discipline system to serve national strategy.

Therefore, there is no problem in terms of funding, which will include considerable investment from "Double First-Class initiative" policy and social funds raised in the form of donations or special funds. Prof. Ning pointed out that the key point is to first yield academic research achievements to fill in the long-existing gaps in academia.

Prof. Ning also promised to report the problems mentioned by Prof. Duan and Prof. Zhai to President Lin. In addition, she also explained that PKU will employ teachers in various flexible methods. Moreover, scholars not only within PKU, but nationwide or worldwide who are familiar with the areas studies concept at PKU can cooperate in exchanges and research. Prof. Ning concluded by pointing out that PKU is determined to make the institute successful, and has the confidence to push the matter forward.

Prof. Shen Zhihua praised the establishment of PKUIAS, pointing out that PKU has advantages in doing this because PKU has a strong reputation, a good academic foundation and wide appeal. Next he made two suggestions on how to develop PKUIAS.

The first is to communicate with relevant government departments. Based on his experience in the process of collecting materials, Prof. Shen pointed out that the government needs the support of the academic community, and the only problem is that it lacks a platform and a channel for the government and the academic community to communicate. As a result, the government does not know what the academic community is doing, and the academic community has no idea of what the government needs. In addition, Prof. Shen pointed out that to better understand other countries and regions, it is best to have a work station in the local area. Currently, Chinese

embassies' support for academics is insufficient. In many cases, scholars who go abroad to collect information cannot get help from the embassy. Therefore, it is best for scholars to establish their own work stations in the local area where they can directly look through information when necessary. He said that if China wants to spread its presence around the world, academics must go first. What is academia? Academia is a bridge between consensus and the government, an intermediate link, so we can use [PKUIAS] to keep communication open between [scholars and officials].

Prof. Shen's second suggestion is that PKUIAS should gather academic strength from all over the country, because first, the platform is very new, and second, it involves many aspects and cannot develop by only relying on an individual discipline or an individual university. If PKUIAS can mobilize [other] universities and the academic community to work together, PKUIAS will be able to save manpower, material resources and financial resources, and enable scholars or universities with strengths in certain areas to fully play to their advantages. Then, in the end, everyone can benefit from each other's achievements.

A better mechanism or a better platform will help mobilize the advantages of all parties, so Prof. Shen also hopes that PKU will think about this proposal.

At the end of the conference, Prof. Shen concluded that, as

Prof. Duan mentioned, it is really time for us to act now. Once the platform of PKUIAS is developed, experts from all around the country will join, which will bring great benefits to the academic community. Prof. Shen expressed confidence about this bright future.