

The 21st New Buds Salon
Relations between China and its neighbors after
COVID-19: Southeast Asia
July 18, 2020

Since the beginning of this year, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused catastrophic losses to countries around the world, and it has also profoundly affected the development of the global political and economic structure. For China, the pandemic has not only exerted influence on public safety, health and economic and social development, but also reshaped the surrounding environment to a large extent. To this end, the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) held a series of New Buds salons on the theme of “Relations between China and its Neighbors after COVID-19,” inviting young scholars in related fields at home and abroad to discuss this topic. This salon focused on the relationship between China and Southeast Asia. The salon was moderated by Xu Chuanbo, a postdoctoral fellow at PKUIAS.

Liu Xiaofeng, a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography, University of Hong Kong, approaching the subject from the notion of geographical boundaries, explored border control and its impact in Southeast Asian countries during the epidemic. A boundary can be described not only as a division of material space, but also includes the invisible boundaries and control mechanisms in politics, economy and society. Some scholars think that the trend of strengthening globalization will gradually eliminate boundaries between countries. However, as

the COVID-19 epidemic spread rapidly in early 2020, we have seen how border control, from regions and countries to towns and communities, could be set up at any time. Not only are boundaries far from fading, they have been reemerging in various forms, Liu said.

Southeast Asia was less affected by the first wave of epidemic, and the region's overall epidemic prevention and control has been quite satisfactory. Among Southeast Asian countries, the mainland countries on the China-Indochina Peninsula have been more effective in their epidemic prevention efforts than the island countries. Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and other countries have controlled the total number of confirmed cases in each country to several hundred. Since human beings can infect each other, the control of personnel movement is a common means of infectious disease prevention and control. Externally, the actions of the nation-state are manifested in the control of national borders and the filtering of those who are allowed to enter the country through citizenship and other factors. Internally, it is manifested in the blockade and isolation of regions and cities to reduce the population flow. With the aggravation of the epidemic situation, the border control of Southeast Asian countries has gradually shifted to imposing a greater degree of entry restrictions, changing from initially restricting people from areas with severe epidemic situation to some countries banning non-citizens from entering. Through the protection afforded by these tough policies, the borders of Southeast Asian countries during the epidemic period have provided an important feature: enhanced filtering and reduced permeability. In addition, due to the closure of ports or

restrictions on customs clearance, the mobility and permeability of goods have also been reduced, Liu said.

The development process of border control has been characterized by technicalization, expansion and elasticity. The conception of a boundary has changed from the traditional understanding of it as being like a line to emphasizing cross-boundary behavior at certain targeted areas. The setting up of health checks at airports or customs portals in order to prevent the introduction of diseases has become a common border control method during the epidemic. Such inspection also reflects the increasing technicalization of border control: customs inspection infrastructure, such as thermal scanners, has developed unprecedentedly, and border management is closely linked to the use of equipment and devices. Border control has also shown expansion and flexibility: under detection and isolation measures during the epidemic, it takes longer to cross the border, the amount of time and necessary space for cross-border behavior has increased, the time and place of isolation are included in cross-border behavior, and the concept of the boundary has expanded from the concept of a line or point to a buffer area.

During the epidemic, Southeast Asian countries implemented strict border control on personnel movement while providing more convenience for the inflow of commodities. The cross-border control of commodity goods included not only inspections at the gateway, but also encouragement or restriction policies that were implemented to achieve cross-border acquisition of key materials. As the epidemic eases, some characteristics of the border will gradually fade and there will be

a gradual return to the porous border, but the smooth cross-border circulation of the pre-COVID-19 era is still far away, Liu said.

The rapidly evolving border control has changed the flow of people and goods, directly or indirectly affecting national security and the economy. During the epidemic, the main tasks of border control shifted from traditional military defense to non-traditional security fields, such as biological security and life security. With the tightening or closure of official customs clearance channels, the number of illegal border crossings has increased, and security problems brought about by these behaviors are more serious than before. Smuggling and illegal immigration have always been one of the important non-traditional security issues between China and its land neighbors in Southeast Asia. The phenomenon of smuggling has become more widespread, and the prevention and control work in Fujian, Guangxi and other places more challenging, Liu said.

As the epidemic situation has gradually eased in Southeast Asia, some countries have begun to open their borders conditionally. However, given the instability of the epidemic situation, the opening of the border will necessarily be cautious and slow. In the short term, the opening of borders for the movement of people will be decided through negotiation and will be flexible and dynamic. First, decisions on the opening of borders will resume through bilateral or regional multilateral negotiations, and will be opened first in regions with good epidemic prevention and control performance and strong prevention and control capability. Second, the border situation will be dynamic and may be readjusted at any time according to

the development of the epidemic on both sides of the border. And finally, the boundary will be flexible. In the process of changing from completely closed boundaries to porous boundaries, their screening function will be flexibly scaled to control the number of people crossing the border, Liu said.

In the long run, as the epidemic subsides, the flow of people will gradually return to its pre-epidemic state, but from the perspective of the industrial chain and trade, there will be more stable boundaries between countries or regions in some industries. When conditions permit, countries will move medical supplies and other industrial chains back to their own countries or to areas that can guarantee supply. Due to border obstacles, some links in the industrial chains will be broken, industrial chains will be adjusted and reorganized, and the trend toward regionalization of the industrial chains and supply chains will intensify. China and most Southeast Asian countries have recovered quickly from the epidemic, and their local production has been relatively less impacted. However, the re-opening of the border has been relatively slow, and poor trade will impact the status of industrial chains. Accelerating the flow across the border between China and Southeast Asian regions and strengthening the integration of industrial chains within the region may be important ways to cope with the impact, Liu said.

Zeng Weifu, a PhD candidate from Mahidol University, Thailand, pointed out that, during the epidemic, ASEAN countries chose China's governance model and the Western governance model. China's governance model showed great advantages and could be used for reference by ASEAN countries, Zeng said.

Zeng Weifu said that the countries that chose China's governance model have learned from China's anti-epidemic experience and increased their ability to publicize knowledge regarding COVID-19. Governments required people to wear masks and keep social distance, closed key cities, tightened entry and exit restrictions, closed schools and other public facilities, and restricted gathering for parties. The above measures have achieved good results. Take Thailand as an example. Thailand did not take strict epidemic prevention measures at the beginning of the outbreak due to the pressure of public opinion from Western countries. After the rapid spread of the epidemic, it was not until the Thai government was forced by the public to follow the Chinese model that it effectively controlled the epidemic, Zeng said.

China's governance model provides another advantageous reference of experience and governance options for the vast number of developing countries and the international community. This model mainly has the following three characteristics. First, most leaders have many years of grass-roots work experience and can make decisions based on the actual situation of the grass roots. Second, the implementation of the policy has undergone comprehensive and objective consideration. When formulating the policy, the leadership will first try it out on a small scale and then spread it to the whole country after passing practical tests. Third, in the process of governance, they can listen to the real voice of the people and continuously optimize decision-making to meet the vital interests of the people, Zeng said.

The Western governance model emphasizes the spirit of democracy and the rule of law. In the process of fighting the

epidemic, the government considers the private sector to be responsible for itself and hopes to achieve the goal of “herd immunity.” However, the countries adopting this model have one after another become the hardest hit areas of the epidemic. The anti-epidemic process has revealed some inherent defects of the Western governance model. First, Western thinking is relatively rigid and often has the characteristics of either-black-or-white or either-this-or-that. Second, the Western thinking often carries out “social and cultural transformation” to other countries in line with Western values under the slogan of “democratic transformation” and labels this as “universal values.” Third, some Western leaders lack enough ruling experience to cope with the test of unexpected events, Zeng said.

Most ASEAN countries that have adopted China’s governance model have entered the final stage of the epidemic and gradually restored normal social order. Reducing the impact of the epidemic on economy has become an important issue currently facing governments. ASEAN is an important trading partner of China, and bilateral trade remains at a relatively high level in the difficult situation. This is related to the emphasis of the Chinese government on building a community of shared future for mankind in the process of global governance, so as to strengthen the empathy-shaping of the community of shared future with neighboring countries. China and ASEAN have a historical tradition of mutual help. China not only provides material and technical support in the anti-epidemic efforts of ASEAN countries, but also devotes itself to social and economic cooperation after the epidemic. More importantly, China has provided ASEAN with a new option of governance, namely,

China's governance model. Francis Fukuyama, an American scholar, said in a statement on the national model that China's national governance model is only applicable to China, not to other countries, and China's governance model is not reproducible outside of China. However, during the epidemic, China's governance model has shown great advantages over the Western governance model and provided another option for the world, Zeng concluded.

Zhang Yuju, a PhD student at the Research School for Southeast Asian Studies, Xiamen University, analyzed the impact of the epidemic in Myanmar on China from different angles and discussed the significance of China's anti-epidemic assistance to Myanmar.

Myanmar's first COVID-19 case occurred in the Chin State. In the process of epidemic prevention and control, the ability of the Myanmar government to cope with emergencies has increased, but its ability to deal with major emergencies still needs to be improved. Due to the historical tradition of mutual assistance between China and Myanmar, as well as considerations of humanitarian and strategic benefits, China has provided assistance to Myanmar, Zhang said.

China has formulated different assistance measures according to the development trend of the epidemic situation in Myanmar. If the outbreak in Myanmar gets completely out of control, China will step up border control to prevent the large-scale entry of refugees, and will send a medical expert group to Myanmar to exchange anti-epidemic experience. If Myanmar needs it, China will send relevant personnel to Myanmar to assist the Myanmar government in maintaining

domestic order and provide material support. Under the condition that the epidemic situation in Myanmar is under control but there is still uncertainty, China will restrict the abnormal movement of personnel across the border. When necessary, China will send medical experts to Myanmar to provide material support. When the epidemic situation in Myanmar is effectively controlled, China will still control the border to prevent the abnormal flow of personnel. China will help Myanmar strengthen the training of its medical personnel and improve their professional ability to deal with public health emergencies, Zhang said.

China's anti-epidemic assistance to Myanmar is of great significance. From a macro perspective, it reflects China's strategic consideration of joining hands with Myanmar to build a community of shared future for mankind. During the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Myanmar, President Xi Jinping stressed that the world today is experiencing unprecedented changes in a century. He pointed that the international community is increasingly becoming a closely linked community of shared future. However, there is still injustice and inequality in international relations. There is still a long way to go to safeguard world peace and promote common development. Under the new situation, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are not outdated, but have never-fading charm. China is willing to work with Myanmar to set an example for promoting and practicing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, set an example for exchanges between countries, and promote the international community to jointly build a

community of shared future for mankind. China's assistance to Myanmar is conducive to building a community of shared future between China and Myanmar. China-Myanmar relations have entered a new era of development. The two sides need to work together to build a community of shared future, put the fundamental interests of the two peoples first, consolidate political mutual trust, expand practical cooperation, establish close people-to-people exchanges and maintain friendly relations between the two countries. China's assistance to Myanmar amid the epidemic situation has profoundly interpreted the partnership between China and Myanmar, which are close to each other and share weal and woe. It has vividly demonstrated the brotherly friendship of the two peoples in sharing difficulties and helping each other, Zhang said.

From a micro perspective, China's aid to Myanmar is conducive to safeguarding China's overseas interests and social stability in border areas. China extends a helping hand when Myanmar needs it, which reflects China's great power style and the feelings and responsibilities of the Chinese people, and wins the respect of the Burmese people. China's assistance to Myanmar in effectively controlling the epidemic situation can not only promote the solution to Myanmar's ethnic armed group problems, but also help maintain social stability in China's border areas along Myanmar, Zhang said.

At present, the epidemic situation in Myanmar has been effectively controlled. As of July 16, 2020, a total of 339 cases had been confirmed in Myanmar, of which 270 had recovered and 6 had died. During the epidemic, China's assistance in providing technology and materials to Myanmar played a

positive role. China's assistance to Myanmar also reflects strategic considerations at a higher level, which is conducive to promoting social development in the ethnic armed group areas and creating opportunities for the process of national reconciliation in Myanmar, Zhang said.

Liang Jin, a graduate student from the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, shared his views on the plight of Southeast Asian migrant workers amid the epidemic, and discussed the impact of the governance of Southeast Asian labor groups on the construction of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

With the spread of COVID-19 in the world, migrant workers have become a weak link in the epidemic prevention. According to the statistics of the second edition of the Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers, released by the International Labor Organization, there were 7.4 million migrant workers in Southeast Asia in 2017, accounting for 60.7 percent of ordinary migrants. Migrant labor can not only meet the labor demand of the host country, but also provide economic benefits for the home country, and promote the economic and social development of the home country and the host country, thus driving the trend of global economic integration, Liang said.

Migrant workers in Southeast Asia face the risk of infringement of their legal rights, and the unfavorable hidden dangers threatening regional security and social stability will increase. During the epidemic, the increase in infections caused by the clustering of migrant workers seriously revealed their difficulties in surviving. Take Singapore as an example. The infection rates of clustered migrant workers in Singapore has

shown an explosive growth, far exceeding the number of local residents infected. Migrant workers have become a major weakness in Singapore's epidemic prevention, Liang said.

Migrant workers mainly face the following problems in this epidemic. First, the living environment is harsh. Most migrant workers live in crowded dormitories, low-cost apartments and other simple facilities. In a narrow and crowded environment, they cannot keep a suitable social distance. Most asymptomatic and mild symptoms are not easily detected. Viruses can easily lurk in enclosed spaces and accelerate infection. Second, the government treats migrant workers and local residents differently in its epidemic prevention policy. Migrant workers are unable to be admitted into the social security system due to difficulties in obtaining citizenship, thus are unable to enjoy policy conveniences. Third, affected by the epidemic, the entry restriction policies of various countries are mainly aimed at foreign groups, including workers, which directly affects the livelihood of migrant workers and makes them jobless and unable to return home. They can neither enjoy the medical treatment of their own country nor the medical insurance of the host country for COVID-19, and the families of migrant workers may also have difficulties in living because they cannot receive remittances. And finally, the problem of illegal workers also deserves attention. There are a lot of illegal workers in the migrant worker group. Most of them enter the host country illegally, lack legal documents, and cannot and will not be registered and managed by the host country. Once illegal workers are infected with the virus, on the one hand, it is difficult for them to receive medical treatment in the host

country; on the other hand, they are worried that their illegal status will be discovered by the host country and, therefore, choose to avoid treatment. During the epidemic, Malaysian police arrested hundreds of illegal foreign workers in order to prevent the epidemic from spreading among illegal workers. However, large-scale arrests would make workers hide, and would cut off their access to treatment and increase the risk of infection and transmission of the virus. In addition, law enforcement officers may also be infected with the virus because of the arrests, or infections may spread in the detention facilities of the Immigration Department, Liang said.

Liang Jin argued that all parties should pay more attention to migrant workers and jointly deal with their survival difficulty. First, ASEAN needs to strengthen the protection of migrant workers in the region. Although ASEAN has established a protection mechanism for migrant workers, ASEAN's response to the crisis of migrant workers amid the epidemic is slow. Second, the host country needs to strengthen the management and assistance of migrant workers, including providing necessary living security and medical security to migrant workers, and providing timely treatment to migrant workers who have been infected with the virus, Liang said.

During the epidemic, the survival difficulty of migrant workers has affected, to varying degrees, the implementation of the BRI projects in various regions of Southeast Asia. First, the BRI projects have been facing a shortage of labor. Under the condition of clustered infection of workers in Southeast Asia, a lot of migrant workers were not able to continue to work in the short term. Southeast Asian countries have implemented

large-scale entry restriction policies, which have greatly reduced the flow of migrant workers among Southeast Asian countries. Companies that provide services for the overseas projects of the BRI also face the risk of labor shortage. Second, the problem of migrant workers has exacerbated the risk of rising ethnic and migrant conflicts. Although China and Southeast Asian countries have maintained a trend of friendly anti-epidemic cooperation at the government level, the phenomenon of exclusion against China, such as discrimination against Chinese workers, still exists in countries and societies, such as Singapore and Indonesia. The management of migrant workers is a difficult problem facing all countries during the epidemic. Considering the reality of the long-term existence of the epidemic, the problem of migrant workers will inevitably coexist with the epidemic for a long time. Therefore, relevant countries and international organizations should strengthen the management of migrant workers, Liang said.

Zhang Yifan, a PhD candidate at the School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China, analyzed the development status of local Chinese-funded projects based on his field research in Kyaukpyu, Myanmar.

China, which is adjacent to Myanmar, has developed rapidly after the reform and opening-up, and its demand for oil and gas has been surging. Crude oil imported from the Gulf countries of the Middle East must pass through the Strait of Malacca before it can be transported to China. To break this deadlock, China has launched engineering projects related to its strategic oil needs at Thailand's Kra Isthmus, Pakistan's Gwadar Port and Myanmar's Sittwe Port, Zhang said.

At first, China hoped to cooperate with Myanmar to build Sittwe Port, in Rakhine State, into a deep-water port as the starting point of the China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline. Until 2008, the Myanmar military government had given the right to rebuild Sittwe Deep-water Port to India, and China considered building the Kyaukpyu port. Myanmar's military government wanted to emulate the successful experience of Shekou Port in Shenzhen and build the Kyaukpyu port into an important engine of Myanmar's economic development. In 2011, China and Myanmar reached an agreement on infrastructure construction in Kyaukpyu port. In 2013, the section from Kyaukpyu to Anning, Yunnan, of the China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline was completed. Through the oil and gas pipeline linking China and Myanmar, inland areas such as Yunnan, Chongqing and Guizhou, in western China, can use oil and gas resources from Kyaukpyu, Myanmar, Zhang said.

When Chinese-funded projects were built in Kyaukpyu, they faced local ethnic problems. Rakhine state has had ethnic and religious conflicts between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims since Myanmar's independence. In recent years, the Rohingya issue has gradually risen to the international level, and the Rohingyas have won sympathy and support from the West. At the same time, the Rakhine people, as the other party to the conflict, have not received the same treatment. A lot of Rakhine people have a low favorable opinion of some foreign forces, international non-governmental organizations and the Western media. A Myanmar's National League for Democracy came to power in the central and most parts of Myanmar, Rakhine State was ruled by the nationalist Arakan National Party.

The Arakan National Party advocates safeguarding the interests of the Rakhine people and implementing a tough policy toward the Rohingyas, which is different from the international calls for reconciliation between the Rakhine people and the Rohingyas, Zhang said.

After the Myitstone hydro-power station project in northern Myanmar was suspended in 2011, the negative sentiment of the younger generation in Myanmar toward Chinese-funded projects increased. Some groups and individuals believed that Chinese-funded projects have not benefited the local people, and their operations are not transparent. Some non-governmental organizations, student organizations and farmers' organizations even organized demonstrations to oppose the continuation of relevant Chinese-funded projects. This negative sentiment has also spread to Kyaukpyu, Zhang said.

Since the reform in 2010, Myanmar's demand for foreign capital has soared. Apart from Chinese capital, which dominated during the military government, funds from Western countries, Japan and India have also poured into Myanmar and formed a giant competitor with Chinese capital in Myanmar. The US regards Myanmar as an important part of its return to the Asia-Pacific region. Former US President Obama visited Myanmar twice during his presidency. Since 2011, Japan has provided a large amount of economic assistance to Myanmar every year. In addition to providing economic assistance to Myanmar, Japan also pays special attention to the implantation of soft power. Japanese-funded enterprises have received favorable comments since their entrance into Myanmar. Polls in Myanmar show that the people of Myanmar, represented by the

Burmese, believe that Japan is Myanmar's best partner. After the Modi government came to power, nationalism prevailed in India. In addition, Myanmar was once a province of British India for a long period of time under the rule of British Raj. Nationalists in India even claim that Myanmar is a lost territory of India. The Indian media once regarded China's port construction in Rakhine State as part of a "pearl chain" and launched fierce competition with China there, eventually obtaining the right to build Sittwe Port, while China had to settle for second best by carrying out the project in Kyaukpyu, Zhang said.

The COVID-19 epidemic has put Myanmar under great public health pressure. Myanmar's economy has a low ability to resist risks. According to statistics, more than 5,600 factories and workshops have been shut down due to the epidemic, and more than 250,000 workers have lost their jobs. During this period, Myanmar's ability to attract foreign investment has dropped sharply, and it has not been easy for the economy to get back on track. While facing great economic pressure, the NLD government will also face the challenge of the upcoming election. When Western countries begin to pay more attention to controlling the epidemic domestically, they will pay less attention to Myanmar. The NLD government will need to re-weigh the economic benefits of Chinese-funded projects. At present, it is a good time for the Chinese projects in Kyaukpyu to catch up and get back on track. To do so, it will be important for Chinese enterprises to consider how to recover from the disaster, reduce the worries of the people of Kyaukpyu, and be prepared to discuss and deal with them, Zhang said.

To sum up, the Chinese government and relevant

Chinese-funded institutions should still actively strive for the construction of projects in Kyaukpyu and restart the Kyaukpyu-Kunming railway. China's construction project in Kyaukpyu Port is of great significance to China and Myanmar. In this election year in Myanmar, China should make preparation to deal with risks for a long time. While China invests funds abroad, it should also strengthen its soft power and consider local livelihoods, cultural and religious factors related to the project, Zhang concluded.

Ho Xuzhe, a Malaysian postgraduate from PKU's School of International Studies, analyzed Malaysia's domestic politics around the "mask interaction" between China and Malaysia.

During the most severe phase of the fight against the epidemic in Wuhan, Malaysia donated 18 million medical gloves to China to help local medical teams fight the epidemic. When the epidemic situation in Malaysia deteriorated, the Chinese government also made material donations to Malaysia to help it fight the epidemic. However, at the same time, China and Malaysia encountered friction in some fields. In mid-April, a Chinese exploration ship conducted investigations in the waters near Malaysia. China stated that the exploration vessel was working normally in the South China Sea under China's jurisdiction, but the US questioned China's seizing the opportunity to expand China's sovereignty while Southeast Asian countries focused on fighting the epidemic. Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded that the incident of the exploration ship entering Malaysian waters might lead to misjudgment and affect the peaceful situation in the region and expressed its hope that the incident would be resolved through

peaceful negotiation, Ho said.

Ho Xuzhe argued that Malaysia's "mask aid diplomacy" and independent diplomatic actions regarding its sovereignty during the epidemic reflected the unique diplomatic hedging behavior of small- and medium-sized countries in Southeast Asia. "Hedging" originates from the behavior taken by individuals in the financial field against their understanding of the risks, while in the field of international relations, competition among large countries forms the conditions for small countries to take the hedging strategy. There are three main characteristics for small countries to take hedging actions: (1) they will not clearly line-up behind one side or the other when big countries compete; (2) they will indirectly push back, but will not directly resist political pressure from other countries; and (3) they will conduct diplomatic negotiations in a mostly low-key way, rather than adopting directly confrontational diplomatic behavior, Ho said.

When the big powers were wrestling in the Cold War, Southeast Asian countries had just become independent. Due to this special international political background, they took hedging actions in diplomacy. In the post-epidemic period, Malaysia's diplomatic interaction with China showed the characteristics of active and passive hedging behavior. The active side is reflected in Malaysia's own complaint of sovereignty infringement and its desire to take leadership in the governance of regional affairs. The passive side is reflected in Malaysia's economic exchanges with other countries, which restrict its diplomatic autonomy. In addition, Malaysia's own national conditions also affect the passivity of its diplomacy.

Malaysia's multi-ethnic groups include Islamic society and Malaysian Chinese society. These factors lead Malaysia to adopt passive diplomatic methods when dealing with China. Considering its own basic conditions, Malaysia hopes to conduct diplomacy with major powers including China through negotiation instead of choosing direct conflict, Ho said.

There has long been a problem of ethnic opposition in Malaysia, and, during the epidemic, some Malaysian politicians politicized the problem. In June this year, in an exclusive interview with Hong Kong's *Asia Times*, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir once again put forward the theory of overseas Chinese wealthiness, stressing that Chinese in Malaysian cities are very rich, while the economic situation of Malays in Malaysia's rural areas is poor, and the gap between the rich and the poor is large. This problem has a certain negative impact on Malaysia's ethnic relations and even Malaysia's social stability, Ho said.

Regarding the reason for the gap between the rich and the poor between Chinese and Malays, Ho Xuzhe said that during British colonial rule in Malaysia, Britain constructed the identity of "Malay" to meet the needs of technology and capital. Before the British colonial rule in Malaysia, there were also social relations between royal families and Malay natives in various parts of Malaysia. Therefore, the "Malays" are not only an imaginary community built by colonization, but also a network of Malaysian royal families. Most Malaysian Chinese are descendants of Chinese who migrated from southern Fujian, Guangdong and other places from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. They include Chinese who

speak different Chinese dialects and Chinese who use English and Malay as a medium of communication. The Chinese in Malaysia are culturally diversified and are defensive toward the policies of the Malay government. They believe that Malays dominate political power, Ho said.

After Malaysia became independent in 1963, local Chinese and Malays were largely involved in different economic sectors. The activities of Chinese were mainly in cities, while those of Malays were mainly in villages. In 1971, Malaysia's leadership put forward a new economic policy, hoping to lift Malays out of poverty and reduce the gap between rich and poor ethnic groups. However, although the consideration of the new economic policy was to help some Malaysian ethnic groups out of poverty, in the long-term implementation of the policy, those who benefited from the policy were instead a few Malaysian elites and a few rich Chinese, and the concept of ethnic division in Malaysia has always existed in Malaysia's politics, Ho concluded.

In his comments, Associate Professor Song Qingrun of Beijing Foreign Studies University briefly summarized the context of Southeast Asian studies. He pointed out that Southeast Asian studies have entered a more in-depth and detailed stage. A good academic article should combine factual cases with theories. Before case analysis, it should analyze the development framework of relevant theories and observe a specific case in detail for a long time. When selecting topics, young scholars should avoid topics that cover too wide a scope and should focus on novel topics. In writing papers, research fellows should place more emphasis on the interaction and

cooperation between China and ASEAN, and avoid expressing subjective view of China's superiority and leading to the conclusion that China forces ASEAN countries to accept Chinese cultural output. During the writing process, one should distinguish and refine some concepts, Song said.

Prof. Zhai Kun, deputy director of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University, proposed a four-dimensional evaluation index, expressing his hope that the standard could guide young scholars to progress and grow. First, the topics should keep up with the times. Young scholars should provide the intellectual community, society and even policy community with new knowledge, new problems, new theories and new methods of the changing world. When analyzing new problems, we can innovate on existing theory and explain the problems with new theories. When analyzing problems, we can adopt new methods such as big data. Young scholars should learn how to apply new knowledge and exercise their ability to make suggestions. Second, research topics should attach importance to the special presentation of local knowledge. Third, academic presentations should have a high degree of academic completion and should attach importance to the organic combination of specific cases and theoretical systems. Last, the combination of expression and interaction is also very important, Zhai said.

The 22nd New Buds Salon
Relations between China and its neighbors after
COVID-19: Russia
July 23, 2020

Since the beginning of this year, the COVID-19 global pandemic has caused catastrophic losses to countries around the world, and it has also profoundly affected the development of the global political and economic structure. For China, the pandemic has not only exerted influence on public safety, health and economic and social development, but also reshaped the surrounding environment to a large extent. To this end, the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) held a series of New Buds salons on the “Relations between China and its Neighbors after COVID-19,” inviting young scholars in related fields at home and abroad to discuss this topic. This salon focused on the ties between China and Russia. Six young research fellows from China and Russia were invited to make presentations at the salon. Guan Guihai, associate professor from PKU’s School of International Studies, and Shi Yue, assistant professor from PKU’s School of Foreign Languages, made comments. Zhuang Shiqi, a postdoctoral fellow of PKUIAS, moderated the salon.

Natalia Demina, a graduate student at the School of Politics and Law at Communication University of China, gave a presentation on “China-Russia economic ties amid the impact of the epidemic.”

According to Demina, economic and trade exchanges

between China and Russia have become increasingly frequent in recent years. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the two sides had particularly prominent economic contacts in three major areas: oil and gas, electronic products and tourism. However, the COVID-19 epidemic has severely infringed the economic cooperation between the two countries, causing huge economic losses. After the COVID-19 outbreak, China's oil demand has been going down, with its daily consumption decreasing by 2 million barrels.

At the same time, international oil prices dropped by 15 percent in early February alone. It was roughly similar for the natural gas market. China might cancel 70 percent of its natural gas import orders, while international natural gas prices have dropped by about 20 percent. The epidemic also hit China's smartphone export to Russia, causing losses to Chinese manufacturers. As for tourism, the Russian government banned Chinese tourists from entering Russia in late February in order to control the spread of the epidemic. It is estimated that Russia's economic losses will reach \$100 million due to the sharp decline in Chinese tourists, Demina said.

If the epidemic continues, the economies of China and Russia will suffer greater losses, and their future economic cooperation will face enormous challenges. Considering the political pressure exerted by Western countries, both China and Russia have expressed their willingness to strengthen mutual cooperation with each other. Not long ago, the heads of the two countries exchanged phone calls, showing a positive attitude. What is more important, China reduced its share of oil imports from Canada and increased them from Russia. This decision was

of great symbolic significance. In short, although the epidemic has affected the economic ties between China and Russia, it has not undermined the basis of bilateral political cooperation. The essential basis for China-Russia economic ties still exists, Demina concluded.

Song Jiaxin, a PKUIAS PhD student, gave a speech focusing on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in Russia. She first introduced the historical and modern development of TCM in Russia. First, as it is regarded as an alternative therapy to the modern medical system, TCM is not recognized in Russia. Also, the level of TCM doctors in Russia is uneven. Some scams have been carried out in the name of TCM, and unqualified TCM clinics are being closed from time to time.

Russia has set strict market access thresholds for TCM, making it go through complicated registration procedures before entering the market, which has increased the pressure on TCM companies. Russia imports many more Western medicine products from China than TCM products.

Song analyzed the issue of “how to better promote TCM diplomacy with Russia” from the perspective of public diplomacy. She expressed her belief that “public diplomacy” is governmental behavior designed to realize national interests. The government authorizes other departments in society to entrust domestic or foreign actors to conduct bilateral exchanges with the foreign public through media and other communication methods, so as to increase its reputation and recognition, clarify information, spread knowledge and shape values.

Inspired by the three-aspect theory of public opinion while referring to the survey report of the Higher School of Economics

(HSE), National Research University, Song ranked the four actors — government, private think tanks, media, and enterprises and universities — according to its level of centripetal force and the influence on foreign policies. She expressed her belief that think tanks and media belong to the ground level, and enterprises and universities to the second level. The Chinese and Russian governments' intended TCM diplomacy must engage with at least one party among potential partners, including think tanks, media, enterprises and universities to reach the Russian people.

Song Jiaxin made the following suggestions on promoting TCM diplomacy with Russia according to the analysis above. The Chinese government should take the lead in formulating the macro framework and behavioral rules for TCM diplomacy, and strive for more chances for TCM to be legitimized in Russia through political, economic and legal measures. Through exchanges between relevant institutions of the two countries, the awareness of Russian think tanks and media of TCM can be strengthened. Thus, TCM will be able to win recognition from Russian society through adoption of a variety of means.

The Chinese government should negotiate with the Russian government to appropriately simplify market access requirements and government review for TCM companies and flexibly arrange TCM products' clinical trial periods. Chinese companies should also make full use of business associations in obtaining information. They should also pursue development together with peer companies, share resources and explore the market with joint efforts to promote TCM services and products abroad, Song said.

At the same time, colleges and universities should cultivate international TCM professionals with a solid base of TCM theory, in addition to the target language and cross-cultural communication skills. Cultivating inter-disciplinary TCM talent requires the joint efforts of China and Russia. The two countries' governments should strengthen academic exchanges between medical universities and launch joint talent cultivation programs and collaborative scientific researches, Song concluded.

Zhuang Shiqi, a PKUIAS postdoctoral fellow, gave a presentation titled "Chinese overseas students in Russia amid the epidemic." He said that Russia experienced a low birth rate in the 1990s, which made it difficult for Russian universities to recruit enough students and obtain sufficient income from tuition. Although the government has increased investment in colleges and universities, it has been offset by factors such as rising commodity prices and rates. As a result, Russian colleges and universities have developed a strong desire to recruit more foreign students.

At the same time, Chinese students are under tremendous pressure to go for further studies and in job hunting, and returnees with overseas studying experiences have certain advantages in employment. In addition, people-to-people exchanges, economic cooperation and trade, and political mutual trust are regarded as the main pillars of Sino-Russian friendship. As a result, Chinese students are increasingly enthusiastic about studying in Russia, Zhuang said.

Zhuang pointed out that Chinese students are playing an important role in information exchanges. The information they bring back to China helps break the stereotype of Russia formed

in the last century. In Russia, the influx of Chinese students has also opened a window for local people to learn about China. However, the huge influx of Chinese has also made some Russians feel threatened. At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, Chinese overseas students studying in Russia were stigmatized. And due to poor management there, there was panic buying in Russia. Chinese students' lives became rather difficult there. Return tickets to China were expensive, and there was a huge risk of getting infected on the trip as well.

The enthusiasm of Russian universities to recruit Chinese students remains unabated despite the impact of the epidemic. Statistics show that there are 98 Russian universities with Chinese websites, and some Russian universities have even extended their hopes that Chinese high school graduates could directly apply to them. On the whole, the number of Chinese students applying for Russian universities has increased because the two main factors for Russian universities' recruitment of Chinese students have not been weakened—that is, Russia's economic difficulties and the great political significance of international students, Zhuang concluded.

Zou Wenhui, a PKUIAS doctoral student, gave a presentation titled “The grassroots community operation of Russia's strong country and strong society public crisis management mechanism from the perspective of the response to the COVID-19 epidemic.”

Zou first analyzed the epidemic situation in Russia and pointed out that, although the situation has been generally stable, efforts to control the virus have clearly encountered a bottleneck. Although the authorities have adopted a series of risk

management and control strategies, the number of daily confirmed cases remains high, and there is insufficient momentum for the epidemic to subside.

She pointed out that there are four major reasons for the poor epidemic prevention and control in Russia. First, the lack of accuracy of reagents and short supply of protective materials make it impossible to effectively judge, screen and identify cases of infection, which has led to small-scale group infections in various regions. Second, religious conservatism hinders the epidemic control.

Third, most people's economic conditions do not allow them to be self-isolated for a long time. Thus, people held protests against the long-term isolation measures, which has led to group infections. Fourth, public awareness of epidemic prevention is weak and the public's compliance with relevant measures is low. Among the four reasons, only the first is related to technical and equipment conditions, while the core of the remaining three lies in the low public compliance with the epidemic prevention measures. In other words, the anti-epidemic measures introduced by the government have not been able to be carried out effectively at the grassroots level, Zou said.

Unlike most Western countries with a liberal tradition, Russia promoted an all-around governance concept of "powerful state, powerful society" after Putin took power. It not only emphasizes social participation in the governance order, but also insists on the state's leading status in governance and the construction of the rule of law. However, the implementation of such a structure at the grassroots level has shown its weakness and led to chaos in its response to this public health crisis, which

has been an important force causing Russia's epidemic prevention to get stuck in a bottleneck, Zou said.

Zou expressed her belief that to maintain the stability of the regime and society after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia's public crisis management mechanism is relatively complete in terms of its legal system and structural design. In terms of the legal system, the Emergency Act and Wartime Law signed by Putin after he took office marked the basic establishment of the legal system for the management of public crisis events in Russia.

In terms of structural characteristics, Russia's public crisis management mechanism takes the president as the core and the Federal Security Council as the central decision-maker, forming a central command system featuring "great president, great security." In addition, the main responsibility of the public crisis management and support guarantee system is to implement the decisions made by the command system. This includes the departments of national security, police, fire fighting, medical care, and public health, aiming to ensure rapid and effective mobilization of all social resources to address crises, Zou said.

Russia's rapid promulgation of a series of decrees such as suspension of navigation, lockdown of cities, and restrictions on travel in the early stage of the epidemic proved that the high concentration of power did ensure the rapid response and favorable decision-making of the command center. However, as time went by, the public crisis management and guarantee system that should have been strongly implemented for decision-making was "deeply trapped in the grassroots of society" and difficult to operate effectively. The reason for this

was that the COVID-19 epidemic was yet another crisis following upon the political power crisis, financial crisis and civil war crisis. Its characteristics of long duration, strong contagion, and extreme individuality, require meticulous and in-depth comprehensive management in the grassroots level, Zou said.

In general, the Russian government's supervision of grassroots communities is event-oriented, relatively concentrated and loose. Hospitals, police, health and other institutions in the support system did not establish a complete communication and coordination platform during the epidemic, and the implementation system of grassroots governance was chaotic, Zou said.

In terms of political structure, contemporary Russia's grassroots governance is mainly achieved through local autonomy. Local autonomy in Russia is based on administrative units where residents live, and local affairs are resolved autonomously through local self-government agencies. Local self-government bodies have a wide range of powers. In terms of maintaining social order and guaranteeing the rights of citizens, local self-government agencies are responsible for ensuring the implementation of federal laws and higher-level state agencies' documents in the local area, and for maintaining local security and public order in emergencies, Zou said.

Existing studies generally point out that it is difficult to integrate legal regulations with real life in practice. On the one hand, state regulations have insufficient binding force on leaders of autonomous regions, and the widespread existence of informal mechanisms in the regional power system also

provides conditions for the formation of local authoritarianism. On the other hand, the state often finds it difficult to provide real guarantees. Although its powers are delegated to local governments, they lack material guarantees, Zou said.

From the perspective of the individual, the space of local autonomy is filled with intricate community groups absorbing, decentralizing, and dissolving the controlling power of the central command system in public crises. These social organizations can be divided into two categories. The first category includes individual citizens and active groups representing residents' interests; the second category includes non-profit organizations, local residents' autonomous organizations, private house owners' associations, housing management companies, and neighborhood committees. These self-governing organizations not only have intertwined functions or gaps, but also often have complicated relationships with the municipal authorities, and have become the tools of the municipal government in grassroots governance. However, in the actual implementation process, they are constrained by internal linkages, Zou said.

Regarding the role of NGOs in Russia's fight against the epidemic, Zou Wenhui expressed her belief that Russian NGOs have indeed served the private sector in terms of material assistance, psychological and infrastructure support, legal services, information collection, and policy feedback during the epidemic. Governance has made a contribution, but its actual capacity for action needs to be combined with more information to be accurately understood. Since a lot of NGOs mainly rely on social and corporate donations, they can easily become

vulnerable to disability during a public crisis, Zou said.

Finally, Zou Wenhui compared Russia's social structure of "powerful state, powerful society" with China's model of grassroots community governance. She pointed out that, although the two countries have both undergone similar changes in different periods, the experiences of China and Russia have been fundamentally different. In China in the 1990s, the functions of units were concentrated in the community. The previous governance model and personnel structure could not cope with the fast-moving governance bodies and the rapidly expanding number of governance entities, which led to a series of efforts to re-implement grassroots control and administration, Zou said.

However, China has always made it clear that communities cannot be separated from the country. It must fill in the control holes and gaps that arise amid social changes, while reduce the governance radius and grid, and implement administrative management to the grassroots level. This is the fundamental goal of all successful or failed attempts. However, Russia was too radical in its destruction of the Soviet "omnipotent state" and "total society" on all sides, making the path to rebuilding the national capacity system after the chaos to be a particularly rugged one, Zou said.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin's strategy of "total Westernization" clearly exposed the lack of the rule of law, and the country began to lose control of grassroots communities. Since then, whether by rebuilding the vertical power system or emphasizing the participation of social forces in civil governance, the capillaries of state power in grassroots

communities have been difficult to repair, and have inevitably made it incompetent to deal with crises, Zou concluded.

The topic of the presentation by Tan Xuechao, a PhD student in the Department of History of Peking University, was “The Historical Memorial of the Great Patriotic War of the Former Soviet Union amid the Epidemic and the Strong Support from China.”

Tan expressed his belief that the COVID-19 epidemic has had a huge impact on many fields of the society, including public health, politics, economy, and people’s livelihoods. In terms of international politics, Russia and China have been besieged and attacked by groups of Western countries. Taking this over-all situation into consideration, political and moral support has become very important. For example, during Russia’s high-level commemoration of the 75th anniversary of victory in Great Patriotic War, China showed full support and even sent a guard of honor of the three services to participate in the military parade on June 24.

Viewed from a deeper historical background, the people of the former Soviet Union and the Chinese people both put up a tenacious fight against the fascist forces of Germany and Japan on the two major anti-fascist battlefields in the West and the East. They gave each other support and help macro-strategically. From this point of view, the commemorative activities held by Russia and China can be regarded as a powerful counterattack against various historical nihilist attempts to distort history and obliterate heroes, Tan said.

Combining Joseph Stalin’s and Mao Zedong’s evaluations of the anti-fascist war fought by China and the former Soviet

Union, Tan expressed his belief that the moral mutual assistance between China and Russia was not only based on reality, but also profound historical and national factors. The core principles and positions of the two sides are basically the same. Although the COVID-19 epidemic has impacted both China and Russia, the organic combination of these challenges, historical factors, and the realistic environment has created special opportunities for the diplomatic ties and cooperation between China and Russia with greater practical significance, Tan concluded.

The presentation by Zhang Junyi, a PhD student in the Institute of Russian Language and Culture of Lomonosov Moscow State University, focused on the key areas of Sino-Russian scientific and technological cooperation amid the COVID-19 pandemic. He expressed his belief that the current development of scientific and technological cooperation has had a broad and complex background. First, the structural contradictions between China and the US have intensified during the past five years. Second, the Wassenaar Agreement and other export control mechanisms have been strengthened.

Third, Sino-Russian relations have significantly improved. Fourth, the recovery of Russia's national defense industry has accelerated. Fifth, China has been facing the triple tasks of industrial upgrading, national defense modernization, and building a modernized country with reliable mobilization capabilities. Sixth, the two countries are currently amidst their year of scientific and technological innovation, from 2020 to 2021. Seventh, the COVID-19 epidemic has greatly promoted Sino-Russian scientific and technological cooperation, Zhang said.

Zhang expressed his belief that Sino-Russian scientific and technological cooperation presents the following features. First, the cooperation has been mainly seen in State-owned departments, with the State-owned enterprises, scientific research institutions and universities of the two countries being the main units undertaking the cooperation. Second, the cooperation is mainly concentrated in the fields of military, energy, equipment manufacturing, metallurgy and transportation. Third, both education and scientific research are equally important, and there is a cooperation mechanism between universities of the two countries. Fourth, the cooperation period between the two parties is long and the volume of related cooperation is large.

Regarding the future trend of Sino-Russian scientific and technological cooperation, Zhang expressed his belief that, first, the scientific and technological cooperation between China and Russia would shift from the one-way output of the past to a two-way complementary output. Second, China and Russia would be open to cooperation on advanced and sensitive technologies with defensive features. Third, after the Trump administration took office, it has successively updated the US's nuclear weapons arsenal, appointed assistants for national security affairs, threatened the resumption of nuclear weapons production and testing, and relaxed military regulations on the actual application of nuclear testing, Zhang said.

As a result, China and Russia may cooperate in the nuclear industry, aviation and aerospace industry, large-scale underground engineering, and the peaceful use of nuclear explosions in the future. Their cooperation will be concentrated

in China's relatively weak heavy industry and national defense industry for a long time. China has had many shortcomings in maintaining and building the country's capabilities under the conditions of the Cold War, while Russia has extensive experience in fully organizing and utilizing domestic resources to maintain and build national capabilities (i.e., a mobilized development model). Viewed from a long-term perspective, Sino-Russian scientific and technological cooperation not only has great potential, but also will inevitably transfer from pure "technical cooperation" to "system cooperation," giving full play to the expertise of the two countries in different fields, Zhang concluded.

Guan Guihai, an associate professor at the School of International Studies, Peking University, and Shi Yue, an assistant professor at the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, respectively commented on the presentations, analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of the speakers' research content, and offered advice for all students doing related research: First, although the current conditions do not allow it and it is difficult to do research, everything must be based on academics. The research content must be evidence-based, with all facts and data sourced. Of course, the sources must be credible. Second, not all written materials in Russian are necessarily reliable for Russian studies.

Third, research fellows should use proper academic language. Fourth, all truths come from practice, and any research without the support of survey, practice, experience, and observation is risky and cannot stand the challenge of others. Also, research fellows should never blindly follow the trend in

choosing topics, nor should they attempt to attract the audience by being a “sensational headline writer.” They should exhibit their knowledge and academic level through a painstaking examination and excavating and deducing the results, they said.

Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, concluded the salon. He said that the New Buds Salon was a platform founded by PKUIAS for young scholars to express their opinions and train their abilities on academic and practical issues. Young scholars attending this salon discussed many interesting topics around the theme of “Sino-Russian relations after the epidemic,” including TCM in Russia, Sino-Russian scientific and technological cooperation, and Russia’s powerful-state and powerful-society system. Their presentations reached a certain level, but had some shortcomings, Qian said, adding that the main reason was that they tended to focus more on detailed phenomena instead of presenting enough analysis of the roots of the phenomena.

On the surface, today’s topic was an issue of international relations, but if we only talk about international relations, there would be no way to make it clear, he said, stressing that there are many influencing factors behind the relationship between the two countries, including ideology, values, and internal and external factors in each country and covering a wide range of levels and fields. Only by in-depth analysis of various factors could we truly understand the relationship between countries, and this requires young scholars to strengthen their research and thinking skills, as well as their knowledge base. Qian suggested that students broaden their vision and strengthen their understanding of all kinds of knowledge when discussing issues

about international relations. Therefore, it is recommended that when discussing international relations issues, young researchers should strengthen their knowledge and understanding of all kinds of knowledge other than international relations, and avoid simply discussing facts, Qian concluded.