

**The 30th New Buds Salon**  
**The World and Middle East amid Great Changes**  
**March 30, 2021**

The world is undergoing great changes unprecedented in over a century. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has sped up the evolution of this situation. The world economy still stagnates, and international trade and investments have shrunk to a large degree. In addition, the process of economic globalization is being challenged by trade protectionism and unilateralism. With the landscape of the international economy, science, technology, culture, security and politics undergoing profound changes, the world has entered a period featuring unrest and change. Against this backdrop, the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS), in partnership with PKU's School of Economics, hosted a series of New Buds salons on the theme of "Senior diplomats talk about the great changes unprecedented in over a century" at the third anniversary of the establishment of the institute. The 30th New Buds Salon invited Zhai Jun, Chinese special envoy for Middle East affairs and former Chinese ambassador to France, to make a presentation focusing on "The World and Middle East amid Great Changes."

**Major features of current international situation**

At the start of the salon, Ambassador Zhai mentioned that China has grown from a regional power to a world power. In this sense, it is our priority to have a better understanding of the world, study the world, and better respond to the changes of the world landscape. He pointed out six major features of the current international situation.

First, the balance of international powers is evolving rapidly, a process that can be generally summed up as a “rising East and falling West.” A hundred of years ago, Western countries headed by the US occupied the center of global politics and economics, dominated global economic activities and determined the development direction and path of global politics. Today, the political center has started to lean toward the East. The East, especially the massive developing countries, have begun to obtain more discourse power on the global political stage.

Impacted by COVID-19, the year 2020 has seen the accelerated evolution of the international power balance that features a “rising East and falling West.” Statistics of the International Monetary Fund showed that China’s economic output is leaping from its two-thirds to three-quarters of the US output.

In 2019, China’s total GDP was 67.2 percent of the US; in 2020, the number climbed up to 71.4 percent. Statistical data forecasted that this year’s proportion may reach 75.1 percent. Since Brexit, China’s overall strength has caught up with the EU, and the current accelerating shrinking of the power gap between China and the US is the most significant sign of a “rising East and falling West.”

From the geographical perspective, Asia’s share in the world’s economy is for the first time expected to exceed 50 percent this year. The East Asia sector, especially, is ushering in a new round of chances for growth. In the next ten years, the combined GDP of China and the US may exceed half of the world’s total economy, which makes the two major engines

more significant in promoting the world economy. In other words, the overall strength gap between other countries and China and the US is changing from a difference in quantity to a difference in level. The US is still the world's top economic power, and China is quickly catching up with it. The speed of China's development will be a key variable in the future international landscape.

Second, the relationship between major powers is undergoing profound adjustments. In recent years, domestic racial conflicts in the US have intensified and the gap between the rich and poor has widened. Meanwhile, the Trump administration's response to and control of the epidemic has been chaotic, and the Chinese government has frequently been smeared and blamed. At present, Sino-US contradictions are gradually becoming the main contradiction in international relations, and Sino-US competition is gradually becoming the main line of international relations.

With changes seen in relations between several major powers, other countries have started to adjust their foreign and domestic policies. At present, besides Sino-US contradictions, another two pairs of "triangle" relations play a crucial role in the evolving international situation – Sino-US-Russian relations and Sino-US-European relations. In recent years, the US has intensified its sanctions on Russia. Under pressure from the US, both China and Russia have stepped further into multiple cooperation fields, supported by the framework of comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era. China and Russia have gradually become important powers in safeguarding a stable global strategic landscape.

After the Biden administration came to power, a new round of adjustments have been made on relations between big powers. Despite uncertainties in the future of Sino-US relations, Biden's foreign policy has given a clue that the US is attempting to revive its alliance system and return to multilateralism in fighting against COVID-19 and climate change, among other international cooperation agendas, and the Sino-US relationship has in general started to return to stability. However, it remains to be seen whether the US is truly engaged in multilateral cooperation or only in selective and exclusive multilateral cooperation. In addition, Europe's awareness of strategic autonomy has increased, and Sino-European relations have been in the process of development. The success of the China-EU Investment Agreement negotiations last year is a major positive result of bilateral cooperation. What's worth noticing is that the internal unity of Europe is encountering new challenges. Currently, European countries prefer to cooperate on certain agendas, which means that they are only cooperating in specific and limited fields.

Third, conflicts among different countries focusing on global governance issues have become more prominent. The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 pressed the "pause" button for global development, and the world economy also saw a severe recession. Many countries, whose total GDP accounts for half of the world, have raised the bar for entry of foreign investment to force globalization to shift from being driven by profit-seeking capital to being driven by effectiveness and security, while guiding the industrial chain to shift from a globalized pattern to a diversified, regionalized and localized pattern.

In the medium- and long-term, capital's nature of profit-seeking determines that the general trend of economic globalization will not change. However, the lack of international public health governance exposed in the epidemic makes the global governance mechanism with the United Nations at its core face the risk of being marginalized. Specifically, the risk of anti-globalization will increase sharply in the future, and the contest between multilateralism and unilateralism, and between progressive forces and hegemonic powers, will become the main thread of the reform of the global governance system. As the defender of multilateralism and the free trade system among developing countries, China will have more intense debates with developed countries over the rules and order of globalization in the future.

Fourth, the world economy has entered a period of unconventional recession. In 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic caused a sharp decline in the world economy and caused a global recession. The International Monetary Fund estimated that the world economy fell by 3.5 percent in 2020, with the economic aggregate of developed economies shrinking by 4.9 percent, and emerging markets and developing economies by 2.4 percent. At present, thanks to large-scale vaccination and the support of macroeconomic policy adjustments in major economies, the world economic recovery in 2021 is expected to be strong. Predictions of global economic growth this year are 5.5 percent by the International Monetary Fund, 5.6 percent by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 4.7 percent by the United Nations, and 4.0 percent by the World Bank.

As far as the US is concerned, the Biden administration recently introduced an economic stimulus plan totaling \$1.9 trillion. At the same time, the US is also advancing a domestic vaccination plan. The country's economic growth this year is expected to be more than 3 percent. But at the same time, an external spillover effect has been brought about by US monetary easing, and its impact on the debt problems of developing countries has aroused the concerns of many experts, which will bring uncertainty to the recovery of the world economy.

Fifth, debates over national systems and development models have become fierce. The epidemic is a comprehensive crisis and a big test for national governance. Confronted by the epidemic, responses from China and Western countries constituted a sharp contrast. When the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, China was the country facing the most severe situation, with its confirmed cases accounting for 67 percent of the world and its death toll 74 percent of the world. But now China has achieved many significant strategic results in fighting against the epidemic nationwide and reviving its economy. This, to a large extent, demonstrated the advantages of China's system. In contrast, the US is the only superpower in the current world. Its population is less than 5 percent of the world. But US cases comprised more than 20 percent of confirmed cases and deaths all over the world.

After the Biden administration came to power, the US domestic epidemic was eased due to adjustments in prevention and control measures. But still, the big price the US had paid and the lessons drawn from the previous administration has exposed a series of social problems, such as imbalanced

distribution of capital, dislocation of resources and social resources, and the low administrative efficiency caused by central and local governments' independent governance. In this regard, some American and Western scholars and politicians have rationally considered the drawbacks in their systems. But most people have sensed more strategic anxiety and started to further discredit China's political system and distort China's development intentions and its domestic and foreign policies in an attempt to use ideology as a starting point to provoke new conflicts between civilizations. In general, the division between the development paths of China and the West has become more prominent.

Sixth, a new round of scientific and technological revolution is going to stir from its slumber, and the digital development gap continues to widen. During the epidemic, new business models such as the digital economy and online offices have ushered in vigorous development. Over the next few years, emerging technologies such as fifth-generation mobile communication technology (5G), artificial intelligence, and life science and technology will make significant progress and spark a revolution in communication. The depth and breadth of the communication revolution and AI revolution will exceed any previous industrial revolution. The advancement of digital technology is bound to lead the development of a digital economy and digital currency, and give birth to new forces that will promote the reform of the international currency system. The research and development and supervision of encrypted digital currency will make great progress. At the same time, as technological competition becomes the leading force in

geopolitical and economic competition, signs of the winner-take-all principle in all fields are becoming increasingly obvious. The trend of scientific and technological nationalism is beginning to rise, and countries will step up the strategic deployment of technological innovation. Science and technology competition between big countries will become more intense, and the technological gap between developing and developed countries will also be further widened.

### **How to deal with the new international situation**

From the perspective of foreign affairs staff, Ambassador Zhai put forward six ideas on how China should respond to the new international situation:

First, concentrate on handling your own affairs well. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized when presiding over a symposium attended by experts in the economic and social fields that we must have a deep understanding of the new features and requirements brought about by the development and changes of the main contradictions in Chinese society and the new contradictions and challenges brought about by the complex international environment, recognize changes correctly, respond to changes scientifically, and seek changes actively. We should also have the courage to face the challenge, be good at turning crises into opportunities, and strive to achieve higher quality, more efficiency, and fairer, more sustainable and safer development. We should always bear in mind that China is still a developing country. Although China has reached three-quarters of the level of the US in terms of economic aggregates, there is still a big gap between China and the US in terms of development quality. In the future, speeding up development and



revitalization will remain our top priority, and letting the people lead a better life is our long-term goal. In the current diplomatic work, we must focus on grasping the characteristics of the new development stage, publicize and promote China's new development concepts, and create a favorable external environment for the establishment of a new domestic development approach and the implementation of the "14th Five-Year Plan."

Second, keep the general stability of the Sino-US relationship. In foreign affairs work, there is a popular saying: "Neighboring countries are the top priority, big powers are key, and developing countries are the foundation." In general, Sino-US relations are the most important factor in China's foreign relations. It should be fully recognized that the Sino-US competition is inevitable, long-term and complicated. On the one hand, the US has treated China as its main competitor and challenged China frequently in sovereignty-related issues such as the Taiwan issue, Xinjiang issue and Hong Kong issue. We should be determined and confident, never allowing the US to interfere in China's core interests. On the other, we have always hoped that China and the US, as the two major powers in the world, will establish a bilateral relationship featuring no conflicts, no confrontation, equality, mutual benefit, cooperation and a win-win approach. We've always tried to conduct dialogue with the US in areas where it is possible to have cooperation, such as epidemic prevention and control, climate change and global economy recovery, so that Sino-US relations will be controllable and predictable.

Third, help the world economy to speed up its recovery

based on the achievements made in China's domestic economic recovery. China needs to inject momentum into the world economic recovery, further expand its opening-up, give full play to its strong domestic demand potential as a super-large market, and contribute to the recovery of the global economy with its own economic development.

Fourth, continue to deepen international and regional cooperation and promote the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement as soon as possible. At present, China has been engaged in promoting regional cooperation in various fields, such as advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, creating a new landscape of Sino-European economic and trade cooperation, moving forward Sino-Japanese-Korean tripartite mutually beneficial cooperation and proactively participating in the global research and development plan for COVID-19 vaccines. In the future, we still need to actively participate in regional and international cooperation.

Fifth, take the initiative to participate in the reform of global governance. This year marks the 50th anniversary of China's restoration of its lawful seat in the United Nations and the 20th anniversary of China's accession to the World Trade Organization. We should continue to adhere to multilateralism, openness, tolerance, mutually beneficial cooperation, and advancing with the times, and always stand on the side of international justice. We should give full play to the core position and role of the United Nations in international affairs, continuously enhance the effectiveness and authority of the World Trade Organization, and continue to actively participate

in the reform of the global governance system. We should also work with all parties to formulate global digital governance rules and promote the establishment of a more fair, reasonable, and inclusive global governance system.

Sixth, continue to promote mutual understanding between countries. We should actively develop friendly exchanges with people from all over the world, encourage different countries to seek common ground while shelving differences, seek common development, promote exchanges, encourage mutual learning and strive for harmonious coexistence among different civilizations. General Secretary Xi Jinping once proposed that we should “tell the Chinese story well,” which has profound practical significance at present. “Telling the Chinese story well” is to allow the world to understand China more objectively, to understand the socialist system with Chinese characteristics more accurately, and to continuously enhance mutual trust between Chinese people and the people of the world. We should tell the world the story of Chinese people’s endless efforts to strive for better future. We are not showing off the results we have achieved today. The victory of the revolution is the result of hard struggle. So is the happiness of the people and the success of socialism. We should tell the world the story of China’s peaceful development, which will only provide the world with opportunities but not threaten anyone. We have never thought of replacing the US as the hegemon of this world. We just hope that we can do better and make people’s lives better.

Ambassador Zhai concluded that in face of the complicated international situation under the great changes in over a century, we should strengthen the awareness of not only opportunities

but also hardships and dangers. No matter how the international situation changes, China should hold up high the flag of peace, development, cooperation and win-win cooperation and unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, which is determined by China's basic national situation. We should always maintain a sober political mind, a high degree of political sensitivity, firm self-confidence and proactivity, and strive to turn the once-in-a-century changes into once-in-a-century opportunities when doing our work in various fields. We should also strengthen our bottom-line thinking and fully recognize the uncertainty and instability of the international situation. We should know that Western countries represented by the US will not passively watch China's stable rise. The Biden administration's coming to power will not change the essence of US policy toward China. Instead, its attitude toward democratic issues and human right issues may be tougher than the Trump administration's, and it will possibly unite with other Western countries to attack China. In the mid and short term, we are facing increasing difficulties and obstacles. China's strategic competition with the US will be long-term, and needs our preparation for a long-term fight.

### **Middle East region amid great changes**

Ambassador Zhai said that the precondition of analyzing Middle East issues is the understanding of its important strategic significance. Geographically, the Middle East spans Asia, Africa and Europe, connecting the Mediterranean, the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. During the recent Suez Canal jam in Egypt, the economic loss per hour was as high as \$400 million, which shows its importance as a key

transportation hub for international sea routes. In terms of resources, the Middle East is rich in energy resources, with 56 percent of the world's oil reserves and 44 percent of the world's natural gas reserves. Ambassador Zhai proposed that an analysis of the Middle East region during the period of great changes can be done from four perspectives:

First, the Middle East is a participant in the evolution of international forces featuring a “rising East and falling West” and is generally in a backward position. The “changes” over a century are first reflected in the accelerated evolution of the international balance of power. In the past few decades, emerging markets and developing countries headed by China have achieved relatively high economic growth, their share of the world economy has continued to rise, and these countries have gradually become an important engine for world economic growth. As the world's largest oil producers and the pillar of international energy security, the Middle East countries have also played an important role in this process. Among them, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are members of the G20. Rich Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman have quickly accumulated wealth by relying on petrodollars, with the per capita GDP long being at the top in the world. Israel's innovative strength is second to none in the world.

However, global economic growth has been sluggish in recent years. Major oil-producing countries in the Middle East have been industrially impacted by shale oil and new energy sources. At the same time, they have suffered multiple external blows such as the continuous downturn in oil prices and the

spread of the global epidemic, and faced great pressure in developing their economies. Take several regional powers as examples. Iran has been subject to economic sanctions by the US for a long time, Egypt has suffered setbacks in its development, and Turkey is also facing economic challenges brought about by the sharp drop of the lira. From a horizontal perspective, the economic development of the Middle East is not as good as Southeast Asia, South Asia and other regions; from a vertical perspective, the Middle East's economic growth is highly dependent on resource exports. The level of their industrialization is generally low, and unemployment and poverty rates have risen rapidly in recent years.

Second, the Middle East is not only a victim of the unrest in international order but also a weather vane for the brewing of a new order. The biggest changes in a century are mostly manifested in the profound adjustment of the international order. The geographical location of the Middle East region is generally at the edge, and in the global governance arena, Middle East countries, especially the Arab countries, are obviously absent without any voice. Without a big say when discussing critical issues related to their vital interests, they usually become the sacrifice in deals.

In history, the Middle East has always been at the forefront of the game between great powers, and it is also the place where great powers rise and fall. Taking the Palestine-Israel issue, the root problem in Middle East, as a representative example, long-term competition between big powers has caused severe destruction in the Middle East region. The geopolitical landscape of the region was ripped and pulled again and again,

and conflicts and disputes between various factions in the region have intensified, which has led the region to become the eye of the storm for global unrest and a source of terrorism.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Arab Spring. A main feature of the current situation in the Middle East is Arab countries' overall weakening. Egypt, once the largest Middle Eastern country, has long suffered from social unrest. Countries like Syria and Iraq have been plagued by war and terrorism. Meanwhile, during the "Arab Spring," the Muslim Brotherhood rose rapidly with its mass base, and gradually formed a pro-Muslim Brotherhood camp headed by Qatar and Turkey, and an anti-Muslim Brotherhood camp represented by Egypt and other Gulf countries. This makes the contradictions in the Middle East more complicated. The current Middle East issue not only involves complicated historical disputes among the five major groups — Arabs, Jews, Persians, Turks and Kurds — but also involves religious disputes between Shiites, traditional Sunni and the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, the Middle East situation is related to the struggle over regional interests between big powers such as the US and Russia.

At the same time, a new international order is beginning to surface in the Middle East. After the Biden administration came to power, the US set its tone to strategically withdraw from the Middle East. Russia is attempting to take this opportunity to have more influence. Europe's strength has not matched its ambition in terms of Middle East affairs. Currently, the Middle East has become an important field for China to carry out its big power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. China in the future will be more active in participating in Middle East affairs

to expand its influence in the region.

Third, the Middle East is an “underachiever” in terms of the emerging technological revolution. From an international perspective, the emerging technological revolution is being further advanced in globalization. Technology and innovation have more and more become important components of a country’s hard power. Each country has started to actively integrate into the world economy, seeking an advantageous position in the global industrial chain and supply chain. In the Middle East, except Israel which is strong in the innovation and research and development field and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates which are making rapid progress in the fields of weapon manufacturing and aerospace, Middle Eastern countries mostly have not fully taken advantage of the bonus of economic globalization, but occupied a backward position in the development of the global high-end manufacturing industry and high-tech industry.

Fourth, the Middle East is a concentrated area where populism has emerged. Since the Arab Spring, due to demonstrations launched by the public from various countries in the region as well as agitation by the US and other Western countries, Hosni Mubarak, Muammar Gaddafi and other long-ruling strong leaders have successively stepped down. As a result, populist ideas came into these countries. In addition, various thoughts such as sectarianism, pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism, political Islamism, and Islamic fundamentalism have been influencing the region for a long time, becoming an important internal cause of the unrest in the region.



## **Prospects for China's Middle East policy**

When it comes to China's Middle East policy in the context of great changes, Ambassador Zhai pointed out that the main driving force behind the great changes in a century is China's continued rise. At present, the US has regarded China as the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century. The core of the Biden administration's new policy toward the Middle East is to reorganize the Middle East alliance system with value-based diplomacy, reshape the leadership and influence of the US in the region, and at the same time regard the Middle East as an important factor for its global strategy of containing China.

The Middle East region's significance to China is mainly manifested in three aspects. From the perspective of sovereignty, the US and some Western countries have recently attacked China frequently with no basis over the Xinjiang issue. If Saudi Arabia, as the center of Islamic countries, could stand on our side, it would be a powerful counterattack to Western countries. From the perspective of security, dealing effectively with the relationship with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other countries benefits China for controlling the security threats brought about by religious extremist and separatist forces from their root. From the perspective of energy, more than half of crude oil imported by China every year comes from the Middle East. China is also the biggest buyer of Middle East crude oil. It means that the economic significance of the region to China goes the other way as well.

Ambassador Zhai also pointed out that an important factor that influences China's Middle East policy in the future is the US adjustment of its regional policy. Under the framework of

the Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy, the US's strategic contraction in the Middle East is a general trend. Seen from the five-point initiative proposed by State Councilor Wang Yi when he visited the six countries of the Middle East, one of the changes in China's future policy toward the Middle East is to actively make plans in more dimensions. For example, during this visit, China proactively proposed to hold an authoritative international conference on the Palestine-Israel issue, and suggested holding in China a multi-lateral dialogue conference to encourage equal dialogue and consultation. The proposal of the five-point initiative embodies China's initiative and creativity to participate in Middle East affairs, which is a change from the past.

In the Q&A session, audience members raised questions about China-Israel relations, China's relations with Middle Eastern countries amid the pandemic and China's regional balancing strategy. Answering these questions, Ambassador Zhai said that China and Israel hold an Innovative Comprehensive Partnership, which is supported by mutual interests in various fields. China's position on the Palestine-Israel issue is clear, which is to implement the "two-state solution." China has always supported active mediation by the international community toward this goal. In terms of China's relations with Middle Eastern countries amid the pandemic, he pointed out that at the beginning of the outbreak of COVID-19, the first to call to send a message of condolences to President Xi Jinping was from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The third phase test of Chinese-made vaccine was carried in the United Arab Emirates. China also provided medical material support to many

countries in the Middle East. It can be said that China's cooperation and friendship with Middle Eastern countries have been further deepened.

As to China's regional balancing strategy, he said that China has made efforts to give consideration to reasonable concerns from each side in its diplomatic work. The Middle East Security Forum held in China in 2019 and the proposal from Wang Yi in his visit to the Middle East to hold a multilateral dialogue conference for regional security in the Persian Gulf region are two examples that embody China's efforts to improve the relationships among Middle Eastern countries. Ambassador Zhai also encouraged students to try analyzing questions from political perspectives and cultivate the good habit of in-depth thinking.

Wang Suolao, deputy director of PKUIAS, summarized the presentation by Ambassador Zhai. He said that starting from Zhai's personal experience in dealing with foreign affairs, Zhai not only objectively categorized the current international situation but also put forward his subjective thinking on specific diplomatic work and the situation of the Middle East. He added that Ambassador Zhai mentioned several times "telling the Chinese story effectively" in his speech, which showed his people-first approach as a senior diplomat.

## **The 31st New Buds Salon**

### **The Enlightenment of Pre-Qin Thought amid Great Changes**

**April 19, 2021**

The world is undergoing great changes unprecedented in more than a century. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has sped up the development of this situation. On the one hand, the world economy still stagnates, and international trade and investments have shrunk on a large scale. In addition, the process of economic globalization is being challenged by trade protectionism and unilateralism. With the landscape of the international economy, science, technology, culture, security and politics undergoing profound changes, the world has entered a period of unrest and transition. Against this backdrop, the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS), in partnership with PKU's School of Economics, hosted a series of New Buds salons on the theme of "Senior diplomats talk about the unprecedented great changes in over a century" at the third anniversary of the establishment of the Institute. The 31st New Buds Salon invited Prof. Wang Qinfeng, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, to give a keynote presentation titled, "The Enlightenment of Pre-Qin Thought amid Great Changes."

Prof. Wang Qinfeng pointed out that the understanding of "great changes" can be analyzed in two dimensions. The first dimension is the world, and the second is China. Seen from the international dimension, the world order shaped by World War I and II is facing unprecedented big changes. From the domestic dimension, the big changes are not only unprecedented over a century, but even as Li Hongzhang said in 1873 in his report to

Emperor Tongzhi, are “great changes unprecedented in over 3,000 years,” a period that dates back to Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771BC). The changes that started in Chinese culture and history since the Western Zhou Dynasty have not yet been completed even today. At the time, Li Hongzhang had to face the developed weapons, ships and culture of the West. Now, China still faces Western technology, industry and culture that are all in an advanced position. This means that the situation faced by China in these two different eras are no different in essence. As for China, great changes have not only brought about huge pressure but huge opportunities. Whether China can take the initiative amid these great changes, create another era of prosperity, bring in a renaissance of the Chinese civilization and step to the top of the world are questions worth in-depth research.

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers once proposed calling the period from 800 BC to 200 BC the “axial age.” During those 600 years, all the great thinkers in the world were born, such as the ancient Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Shakyamuni Buddha of India, and China’s Laozi, Confucius, Mencius, Han Feizi, and Mozi. According to Jaspers, the “axial age” was the first awakening of human beings’ self-consciousness, and human beings and nature were truly separated at this time. For China, the “axial age” coincides with the pre-Qin period or the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period.

Jaspers believes that the intellectual wisdom generated in the “axial age” still affects mankind. Whenever the development of human civilization faces difficulties, mankind will always go

back to the “axial age” thinkers. In China, Wang Anshi’s Reform, the Gongche Shangshu movement (a political movement in the late Qing Dynasty, seeking reforms and expressing opposition to the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895) and the Hundred Days’ Reform also looked back at the pre-Qin period (“axial age”) to find an ideological basis. Prof. Wang Qinfeng opined that today’s human beings are facing a huge change, and they may need to continue to trace back the thoughts of these ancestors for advice.

Jaspers pointed out that every great improvement of the individual stems from reconnecting with the classical world. In the growth process of an individual, a very important channel for progress in thought or individual comprehension is derived from the classical world. Contact with the classical world is contact with the thinking of the “axial age” or the thinking of the pre-Qin period. Therefore, Prof. Wang Qinfeng opined that while studying their own courses well, contemporary college and university students should also learn some classics and ideas from the pre-Qin period, and gain enlightenment on how to behave and do things through dialogue with the ancients.

The thoughts formed by the philosophers in the pre-Qin period are the source of Chinese civilization and culture. Hu Shi was the first scholar to use modern academic methods to organize traditional Chinese thoughts. At that time, Cai Yuanpei had a high evaluation of Hu Shi’s *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, saying that it went “beyond the cognition of the ordinary” “by starting with Laozi and Confucius.” In the past, the history of thought often started with the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, and our understanding of the

period between Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors and Laozi and Confucius was half mythology and half history, with unclear written records. Therefore, Hu Shi chose to write from the pre-Qin period, which is clearly recorded, and therefore called the pre-Qin period the source of Chinese culture.

### **Classification of the hundred schools of thought**

“Hundred schools of thought” is a general term. The *Han Shu: Yi Wen Zhi* (*The book of Han: Annals of Dynastic Literature*) has a relatively complete record of the classification of the hundred schools of thought. It recorded a total of 189 schools and cited more than 3,000 classic articles. Most of them have been lost. Sima Tan, father of Sima Qian, classified the Hundred Schools of thought earlier. He divided the Hundred Schools of thought into six schools -- the School of Yin Yang, Confucianism, Mohism, School of Names, Legalism, and Taoism. Among the six schools, Sima Tan admired Taoism the most, believing that its thinking was profound. *Han Shu: Yi Wen Zhi* summarizes a hundred schools into Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Legalism, School of the Military, School of Names, School of Yin Yang, School of Diplomacy, the Miscellaneous School, School of Agrarianism, and School of “Minor-talks.”

In the pre-Qin period, there were only four schools that really had an impact on Chinese society: Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, and Legalism. Han Fei opined that Confucianism and Mohism were the world’s most famous schools. Mencius said that students of the world would either flock to study the Yang Zhu School or Mohism. Yang Zhu was a Taoist.

There are only three schools that really have an impact on Chinese history: Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism. Prof.

Wang Qinfeng said that Confucianism and Taoism have formed the spiritual structure and cultural structure of the Chinese people – actively striving for progress in favorable condition while standing aloof from the world when suffering setbacks. Therefore, there is a saying from Lin Yutang that Confucianism and Taoism are two sides of the Chinese soul.

Confucianism and Legalism formed the political structure of China. Traditional Chinese society in different dynasties followed both Confucianism and Legalism in governing the country. Mohism ended completely during the Qin and Han dynasties, without playing a big role on Chinese history. It did not reemerge until the Qing Dynasty.

In addition, there was a School of Diplomacy in the pre-Qin period. Scholars from this school were originally court officials responsible for etiquette and receiving guests. They later became tacticians. Tacticians were a bit like current diplomats. Appointed and authorized by the emperor, they served as an envoy abroad.

### **The relationship between feudal princes in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period**

In 770 BC, Emperor Ping of Zhou relocated the royal house eastward, thus ending the Western Zhou Dynasty and beginning the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. The society of the Western Zhou Dynasty was basically in a stable state, while the Eastern Zhou Dynasty had been chaotic. The Eastern Zhou Dynasty was divided into the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. There are two ways of dividing the two periods. One is the death of Emperor Jing in 476 BC, and the other is the state of Jin being encroached upon by three other states of Han,



Zhao and Wei in 453 BC. The handling of relations between feudal princes in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period was different. Meeting and forming alliances were the approaches taken during the former, while the *hezong* *lianheng* approach (horizontal alliances theory and vertical alliances theory) was mainly taken in the latter.

According to *The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*, there were 800 feudal princes in the Western Zhou Dynasty. The emperor granted his land to nobles that were divided in five ranks as Gong, Hou, Bo, Zi, and Nan. During the Spring and Autumn Period, the feudal princes began to merge. For example, the state of Qi annexed more than 20 states ruled by feudal princes, and the state of Jin annexed more than 40 states. In this process, the Five Overlords of the Spring and Autumn Period emerged – Huangong, the ruler of the state of Qin; Wengong, the ruler of the state of Jin; Xianggong, the ruler of the state of Song; Mugong, the ruler of the state of Qin, and Zhuangwang, the ruler of the state of Chu. The formation of the five overlords was through the meetings among feudal princes and the establishment of alliances. The most typical example is the Zhaoling Alliance in 656 BC (with the help of Guan Zhong, Huangong of Qi took eight feudal princes to convince other feudal princes in Zhaoling to form an alliance. The state of Qi was elected as the overlord, and a rule to not invade each other was formed). Another form of alliance was a gathering that was presided over by a weak power and participated in by ministers rather than monarchs which aimed to achieve a cease fire. In 576 and 546 BC, the state of Song proposed and presided over two such events, during which it was recognized that the states

of Jin and Chu shared equal powers, and jointly maintained social stability and harmonious coexistence among the feudal princes. The alliance to cease fire which was convened by the state of Song played an active role in the stability of Chinese society during the Spring and Autumn Period, the people's ability to live and work in peace and contentment, and the progress of society.

There were seven major states in the Warring States Period, which were Qin, Wei, Zhao, Han, Qi, Chu and Yan. The peaceful coexistence among feudal princes in the Spring and Autumn Period changed during the Warring States Period, when the strategy and tactics taken by each state changed to *hezong* and *lianheng* which are respectively represented by Su Qin and Zhang Yi.

### **Enlightenment of pre-Qin thought amid great changes**

The enlightenment of pre-Qin thought amid great changes has three dimensions.

The dimension of concept of value is how states measure each other. The importance of this concept is self-evident. Once people's concept changes, their perceptions of the world will change, thus their behaviors will have a different impact on the world.

Prof. Wang Qinfeng opined that in traditional Chinese culture, the most basic idea is the unity of nature and man. This idea is more meaningful than the separation of nature and man and the opposition between man and nature emphasized by Western society. According to Laozi, "For I am abstracted from the world, the world from nature, nature from the way, and the

way from what is beneath abstraction.” The concept of harmony between man and nature can also be extended to the concept of harmony between man and man. Western society emphasizes the antagonism and contradiction between man and nature, and the antagonism between man and man, which has caused many problems. A typical example is the “clash of civilizations” proposed by Samuel Huntington.

Convincing people by using morality is a concept mainly derived from Confucianism, which is generally understood as a method of managing the country — the rule of virtue. This idea can also be applied to deal with the relationship between different regions and countries. Prof. Wang Qinfeng believes that, in the process of dealing with international relations, the US mainly uses its strong technological strength and national defense capabilities to “convince people with strength,” which is obviously not as vigorous as the “convincing people with morality” concept of China. The methodology of convincing people with morality is very rich, including emphasizing righteousness over profit, stressing honesty, and emphasizing faith and harmony. Whether it is feasible to convince people with morality in real life needs in-depth research, but this does not stop doing so from being a goal that should be pursued.

The “Doctrine of the Mean” originates from *Shangshu* (*Book of History*). It means to be impartial when dealing with people and dealing with problems, and not to be too extreme or too conservative. Confucianism places the doctrine of the mean as the most basic Confucian thought. In the view of Confucianism, the doctrine of the mean is not only the principle of human behavior, but also the principle of social management

and the most basic principle of nature.

The principle of inclusiveness and forgiveness should be applied when different people or different countries have disputes and conflicts due to their different personalities and viewpoints. It means that when dealing with relations between people, one should be inclusive toward those with different personalities, experiences and characteristics and cooperate with them. For a country, it means to tolerate different civilizations and cultures to achieve peaceful coexistence. In addition, the principle means not only tolerance, but also forgiveness.

Be cautious about the use of military force. Laozi said that if one assists the ruler with principle, philosophy, and value, then do not oppress others with force. If you do, you will suffer retribution. Some sources say that human beings currently have a written history of about 5,500 years, in which recorded wars have occurred more than 14,000 times, an average of 2.6 times per year. Approximately 1.5 billion people from more than a dozen countries participated in World War I, with 30 million casualties. During World War II, more than 3 billion people from over 60 countries participated, and more than 90 million people were killed or injured. Therefore, it is necessary to attach importance to the concept of “cautiously using military force.”

A consciousness of family and nation. Mencius emphasized that “the root of the world is in the state, the root of the state is in the family, the root of the family is in cultivating oneself.” The concepts of nation-state and state came into being with the emergence of modern society in the 1820s. The concept of the nation-state in China was imported from the West, which is different from the concept of the state of feudal princes in early

China. Gu Yanwu's "Everyone should be concerned about the rise and fall of the world" distinguishes the difference between the country and *tianxia* (the world). The demise of a country means the change of the dynasty, while the demise of *tianxia* is the demise of the entire nation and national culture, which impacts all people.

The concept of "the enlightenment of wisdom" is similar to the concept of "methodology" to a certain extent, but it is very different from knowledge. At present, the worship of great thinkers in the "axial age" is not the worship of their knowledge, but the worship of wisdom. In fact, with the development of mankind, our knowledge has long surpassed the knowledge acquired by thinkers in the "axial age." However, in terms of wisdom, we are still far from the thinkers of the "axial age."

Harmony with difference means the coexistence in harmony of different civilizations, nations, and cultures in the world. Confucius said that "Gentlemen seek harmony but not uniformity, and villains seek the converse." The pursuit of complete uniformity between countries and between regions is a villain's approach, while a gentleman's approach is to allow the existence of different civilizations and cultures.

Courtesy calls for reciprocity. The *Book of Rites* says, "It is not propriety not to give out but to receive, or vice versa." This sentence can be understood both positively and negatively. For example, when the US is suppressing China, China can fight back based on this principle. It is easy to get its positive meaning but hard to grasp the negative sense, which needs in-depth study.

Modest and low-key. Laozi said, "A big country may be

compared to a low-lying river, where many streams converge and many creatures are born and bred.” It means that big countries should not be arrogant in the face of small countries, but should be in a lower position and respect small countries. Laozi also said the reason why rivers and seas can be what they are is that they are in a lower position. Otherwise, they would only be a small stream. Laozi’s humble and low-key thinking can be used not only to deal with the relationship between countries and between regions, but also in behavior in society. The application of Laozi’s thinking in human society is to teach people to be humble and low-key, and to be “soft.” According to *Lü’s Commentaries of History*, “Confucius regarded benevolence as noble quality, while Laozi regarded modesty as noble quality.” Laozi emphasized modesty, which was manifested in his famous saying of “softness beats toughness.” This thinking can easily be understood as a trick of strategy. Zhu Xi, a renowned Chinese philosopher in the 12th century, even criticized Laozi as the most ruthless thinker. But this thought is full of wisdom. It can be said that modesty, being low-key, and respect for others are the foundation for people to gain a foothold.

Know yourself and the enemy. According to Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, “If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles.” The same is true when dealing with area studies issues. If one doesn’t understand other regions or countries but blindly relies on imagination to do research, it will be difficult to solve problems effectively.

The enlightenment of strategy lies in methodology. How to deal with a specific matter and how to take countermeasures are

all questions of strategy. Ideas and values are the most important, followed by specific practices.

Regarding strategy, we should persuade people with morality and emphasize ideas and values when dealing with problems, while at the same time convince people with strength, and use strength as support. Based on the combination of the two, more emphasis should be placed on values.

*Hezong Lianheng*. “A strong power attacks the weak ones on its own; while a weak power unites with the other weak ones to attack the strong one.” In many cases, the two aspects can be combined for consideration. *Hezong Lianheng* also mirrors the idea that the world is not monolithic but can be treated differently. The same philosophy can be seen in Chairman Mao’s Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds.

Overcome strength with softness. Laozi said that “The supreme good is like water, which benefits all of creation without trying to compete with it.” Water benefits all creatures but does not show off. It has no shape but is modest, low-key and tolerant and can purify any sludge and muddy water. Any hard objects can be eventually eroded by water.

Hide one’s capabilities and bide one’s time. This concept did not come from thinkers in the pre-Qin period, but appeared in *The Old Book of Tang*. Emperor Xuanzong concealed his thoughts in political struggles, which is a manifestation of hiding his capacities and biding his time. The source of this thought can also be traced back to the pre-Qin period. Laozi said that if we want to destroy the enemy, we must first make the enemy proud, and take the opportunity to recharge ourselves. Keeping a low profile requires one to talk less and do more. This

thinking is more obvious in Confucianism. Confucius said, “Those who are glib in their speech and wear an ingratiating expression have little benevolence about them,” and, “A gentleman would rather be quick in action than talk a lot.”

During the discussion session, Prof. Wang Qinfeng exchanged views with audience members. He pointed out that traditional Chinese culture, known as *guoxue*, is facing several problems. First, driven by commercial interests, *guoxue* has its reputation decline to some extent; second, historical factors such as the New Culture Movement have led young people to be alienated from traditional culture. Third, the academic field is short of masters who grasp knowledge about both Chinese and Western countries. In response to young people’s difficulty in understanding traditional culture, Prof. Wang Qinfeng suggested that they can start with the five main works of *Laozi*, *The Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean* to accumulate the foundation of traditional culture. He also pointed out that there is both scum and quintessence in *guoxue*. What needs to be passed down today is the national quintessence, and the scum should be criticized rather than inherited. Reform and opening-up requires that China’s traditional culture has enough influence to promote China to become a true big power and make Chinese civilization renew its glory.

When talking about the rise of the Qin dynasty and the vitality of Legalism and *Lianheng* thoughts, Prof. Wang Qinfeng said that the rise of the Qin dynasty was the result of a combination of many factors. Although Legalism provided important help for the Qin dynasty to seize the world,



Legalism's own shortcomings caused the demise of the Qin dynasty after only two generations of rulers. *Lianheng* was only one of the strategies used by the Qin dynasty. When the Qin dynasty was weak, it also adopted the *hezong* strategy. Therefore, in the choice of strategy, the Qin dynasty adopted measures based on actual situations, and finally achieved the unification of the world.

When asked about the similarities and differences between “hiding one’s capacity and biding one’s time (*taoguang yanghui*)” and “sleeping on the brushwood and tasting the gall (*woxin changdan*)” and how to introduce traditional Chinese culture to the West, Prof. Wang Qinfeng said that the goal of *woxin changdan* is to eliminate the enemy, while the goal of *taoguang yanghui* is peaceful coexistence. The two ideas have essential differences. He also said that when interacting with the West, it should be mainly through communication to understand their ideas, and it is not necessary to force others to accept your ideas. Regarding the difference between people first and democracy, Prof. Wang Qinfeng said that the concept of people first involves understanding the ruler and the ruled. Confucianism has two views on people-first thinking. One is Mencius’ “The people are more important than the ruler,” and the other is Hsun Tzu’s “The people are water, and the emperor is the boat.” They are in fact the traditional culture’s understanding of the relationship between the people and rulers, which was proposed under the premise of safeguarding the monarchy. Democracy is an ideology that restricts public power on the foundation of respecting the rights of the people. The two cannot be mixed up.

Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, said in his closing remarks that Prof. Wang Qinfeng's presentation demonstrated the profound philosophies in traditional Chinese thought, and added that these philosophies are applicable in various fields. Prof. Wang Qinfeng analyzed the enlightenment of pre-Qin thought under the great changes from three dimensions. His approach of starting from traditional culture to think and deal with current international issues serves as an enlightenment to the teachers and students in the audience. Traditional culture has gone through two extremes. One is the complete denial of it in the past, and the other is the use of *guoxue* as window dressing. Both approaches are problematic. A correct understanding of traditional Chinese culture, searching for wisdom and ideas useful for today, and learning the essence of ideas from ancient philosophers and discarding the scum are the right starting point for studying traditional culture.