

Moderator's introduction to the workshop

The Area Studies Think Tanks Exchange Meeting was held at Peking University on June 22, 2021. Hosted by the Institute of Area Studies (PKUIAS), it aimed at further promoting the development of a new type of think tanks in area studies at PKU and improving the think tank function of giving advice to policymakers. Participating in the meeting were Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS; Prof. Zhai Kun, deputy director of PKUIAS; Prof. Wang Dong, deputy director of the Office for Humanities and Social Sciences; Liu Peng, deputy director of the Party Office and President's Office; and Jin Ge, director of the Theory Office of PKU's Party Committee Propaganda Department, as well as 39 other representatives from area studies centers.

In his remarks, Prof. Qian Chengdan said that the meeting was focused on sharing and communicating how to better write area studies policy consultation reports, also known as internal reference reports. The meeting is a follow-up to the PKU Area Studies Exchange Meeting held on April 12, 2021, and a response to and implementation of requests raised by the area studies centers at that meeting.

Wang Dong introduced the history and present situation of PKU's think tank development, including the development of PKU's think tank work team, the "Double First-Class" Initiative and PKU think tank reports. Liu Peng discussed the university's submission method for decision-making consultation information, and shared his experience from the perspective of the style, topic design, and structure of the submitted materials and how to improve the odds of these materials being accepted

and adopted. Jin Ge introduced the development of think tanks and reporting channels at PKU. Using specific cases, he also analyzed in depth and in detail how to transform research results into practical use. Zhai Kun shared six advantages that PKU's scholars have in writing area studies policy reports, and how to develop academic research into policies and suggestions that serve the country.

After the presentations, the attendees from area studies centers engaged in detailed exchanges and discussions on the experience shared by the four presenters, and put forward expectations and suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of area studies think tanks.

The 44th Broadyard Workshop
Area Studies Think Tanks Exchange Meeting
June 22, 2021

The meeting aimed to further promote the development of a new type of area studies think tanks at PKU and effectively improve the think tank function of giving advice to policymakers. Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, expressed his gratitude to the experts and scholars for their active participation, and briefly introduced the purpose of holding this event. Prior to this, PKUIAS held the Area Studies Exchange Meeting on April 12.

At that meeting, attendees had some discussions on how to strengthen PKU's area studies, and proposed some suggestions. Scholars from some centers suggested that many teachers are very good at doing basic research, writing papers, and writing monographs, but do not know how to effectively write think tank reports and suggestions for policy making. To this end, PKUIAS, the Office of the Party Committee, the Publicity Department, and the Office for Humanities and Social Sciences jointly organized this meeting on think tank work to clarify questions from experts and scholars from related centers.

Wang Dong, professor of International Relations and deputy director of PKU's Office for Humanities and Social Sciences, gave the first speech. He mainly shared his insights focusing on the history and current situation of think tank development at PKU and progress in think tank work since PKU held the first think tank work symposium on January 10, 2020.

He said that PKU has a long history as a center for think tanks in the country. Broadly speaking, the history of PKU as a

center for think tanks can be traced back to master scholars such as Ma Yinchu, Fei Xiaotong, and Li Yi'ning. They were not only academic scholars, but also very concerned with the major strategic issues facing the Party and the country. They have made many very important policy recommendations based on their profound academic attainments. Therefore, PKU has a long and excellent tradition of think tank research.

He continued that the mission in the new era is finding a way to continue the fine tradition of promoting national progress and national rejuvenation with academics. At present, the work of PKU's think tanks can be briefly summarized as "21+13+16+300." The number 21 means 21 liberal arts colleges and departments; 13 means 13 important humanities and social sciences research centers with the Ministry of Education; 19 means 19 actual research institutions (including PKUIAS); 300 means the current 300 nominal research organizations without actual institutions, including the research centers represented by the attendees today. In addition, PKU has established more than 30 research centers with relevant government departments and ministries. Therefore, in general, the special characteristic of PKU think tanks is "comprehensive disciplines." The strong foundation and applied disciplines reflect PKU's strengths, featuring a rigorous learning style, realistic innovation and independent thinking. The think tanks' purpose is to provide consulting services for policymakers. PKU think tanks fully serve national strategy and local development needs, and cooperate closely with multiple ministries and various provinces and cities, demonstrating the overall history and current situation of the development of PKU think tanks.

Scholars from PKU think tanks — in ideological theory, economic development, political systems, social management, law, national governance, international strategy and many other fields — have provided very important academic and intellectual support for the major strategic initiatives of the Party and the country. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, PKU, in accordance with the requirements of General Secretary Xi Jinping to build a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics, has initially established a group of new-type university think tanks, including the Institute of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the Institute of Area Studies, and the National School of Development, which have important influence at home and abroad. The PKU think tanks are expected to gather the strength of PKU, represent the voice of PKU, exert influence, and shape ideological leadership, thus serving the development of Beijing and the development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, and making due contributions to policy-making for major strategies of the Party and the country.

In the past few years, PKU's think tanks have achieved fruitful results. For example, PKUIAS is not only a university-wide area studies basic platform, but also plays a leading role in nation-wide area studies; the National School of Development is a national high-end think tank; the Beijing Development Institute is a high-end think tank in the capital; the Institute of International and Strategic Studies ranks ninth in the world's university think tanks according to "Global Go To Think Tank Index Report," and the Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding (iGCU) ranks 76th in Asia's best think tanks

on the list. In short, PKU's development of a new type of think tank has been fruitful and has achieved remarkable results both at home and abroad.

In addition, according to preliminary statistics, since 2016, various PKU think tanks have received a total of 75 approvals from State-level leaders, of which nearly 50 have received written or oral approvals from the General Secretary, mainly related to ideology and politics, economics, foreign relations, social governance, legal system development, public opinion publicity, and public health. Many attendees of today's meeting have made important contributions.

Prof. Wang Dong also introduced the main content of the think tank symposium on January 10, 2020, and the progress related to the work of the PKU think tanks since the symposium.

PKU established a think tank work team in December 2018, and held the first think tank work symposium on January 10, 2020. Secretary of the Party Committee of PKU Qiu Shuiping and President Hao Ping delivered speeches, and Vice President Wang Bo introduced the development of think tanks. The meeting mainly discussed the following three things.

First, the think tank work team was adjusted, the top-level design was further improved, and the overall planning was strengthened. The Party secretary and the president of PKU both serve as team leaders, the functional departments serve as team members, and the PKU Think Tank Work Team Office is set up, which is currently attached to PKU's Office of Humanities and Social Sciences and is mainly in the charge of Prof. Wang Dong.

Second, the "Several Opinions of Peking University on Strengthening 'Double First-Class' Development and Promoting

the New Type of Think Tanks” (“Opinions” for short afterwards) was issued for soliciting opinions.

Third, “Peking University Think Tank Top News” (“Top News” for short afterwards) was launched as the highest-level platform for the results of PKU think tanks. It is responsible for optimizing and integrating the reporting channels of PKU policy reports.

The think tank work symposium created a new situation in the think tank work at PKU. The “Opinions” contains four important measures, involving an academic evaluation mechanism, an incentive mechanism, talent team building, reporting channels, and so on. The first measure is to strengthen the Party’s leadership and overall coordination of the whole school. It includes giving full play to the role of the think tank work team and its office and adhering to the concepts of “small institutions” and “wide networks” to solidify and cultivate the PKU think tank community, and integrating liberal arts, sciences, medicine, and engineering to organize major think tank research. The measure encourages the continual expansion of university-ministry cooperation and university-local government cooperation. PKU Party Secretary Qiu Shuiping said that think tank development and PKU’s “double first-class” development share the same origin, and they have the same goal in their respective focuses. In other words, think tank work takes basic research as a foundation. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen applied research to form a benign situation where basic research and applied research complement each other, thus promoting discipline development and “double first-class” development. Finally, the overall development of PKU think

tanks featuring coordinated openness, collaborative innovation, disciplinary integration, and common development will be formed.

The second measure is to speed up the development of a new type of think tank talent team

This includes setting up think tank positions for research, hiring full-time contract researchers on a trial basis, perfecting internal dual-employment and external part-time hiring mechanisms, building a network of think tank experts, and promoting the recruitment of post-doctoral fellows in special think tanks. These measures are still in the exploration and trial stage. They rely on the active exploration of all departments and centers to jointly promote the building of a new type of think tank talent team, and to discover measures that are consistent with PKU's own strengths as soon as possible.

The third measure is to improve the evaluation mechanism and reward mechanism for think tank work.

The “Opinions” emphasizes the improvement of think tank evaluation and incentive mechanisms as an important measure for the development of a new type of think tanks at PKU. The “Opinions” clearly aim to incorporate think tank work into the academic evaluation system, adhere to classified evaluation, and focus on actual contributions.

In addition, the “Opinions” states it is necessary to set up a special fund to support high-quality think tank research and strengthen the publicity and rewards for good results. At the university system level, the university uses PKUIAS as a platform to fully support PKU's area studies. As the next step, PKU will consult with various colleges and departments, and

encourage them, based on their own actual conditions, to establish a think tank work evaluation system that conforms to PKU's fine academic traditions as well as its actual conditions and academic strengths. All in all, think tank work must be included in the academic evaluation system. Only in this way can think tank work truly form a virtuous circle, a sustainable development mechanism, and an effective team that perseveres in the development of think tanks.

The fourth measure is to open up channels for information communication, report submission, and aggregation, including the effective operation of "Top News," which serves as an overall landmark platform representing the highest level of PKU think tanks.

The "Opinions" proposes establishing a reasonable and efficient editing mechanism and team, and integrating the reporting channels of the university's think tanks. PKU needs to make great efforts to stand out amid healthy competition for think tank development, including opening up channels for the submission of papers, channels for information aggregation, and a timely feedback mechanism for policy reports.

After the decision to launch "Top News" on January 10, 2020, the work of PKU think tanks has made the following progress.

First, after the outbreak of COVID-19, the university decided to launch a special issue about the fight against COVID-19, but the university was facing a very difficult situation. Thanks to colleagues from all departments of the school, "Top News" continued to be printed and reported with high quality amid the epidemic, ensuring the smooth

development of the PKU think tanks' epidemic research work. In April and May of the same year, the "Top News" had achieved very good results, with many of its opinions adopted by the central government, and approved by even the central leadership and the General Secretary.

Up to now, 352 of its issues have been reported upward, and 244 experts and their teams from dozens of departments have provided 616 articles. Most PKU teachers have participated in the writing and related work of "Top News." According to preliminary statistics, more than 90 articles have been adopted by various ministries, and more than 30 have been approved by the central leadership, of which 10 were approved by General Secretary.

In addition, during the epidemic, PKU quickly established the "COVID-19 Prevention and Control Special Project." It covers 55 topics in total, spanning public health, emergency management, public opinion guidance, market supervision, law, psychological guidance, humanistic thinking, social reform, macroeconomics, and foreign-related situations. A lot of outstanding results have also been reported to relevant decision-making departments through "Top News." Several closed-door seminars on special topics were also organized, and suggestions were reported to relevant departments.

Second, seven colleges and departments were visited last year for the conducting of extensive social research, learning of experience inside and outside the university, and exploring the development of think tanks, which included the development path for talented students and incentive mechanisms. Reports based on relevant investigations were submitted to the university

leadership and received their approval and instructions. This is a very important task for the social science department.

Third, other key work included organizing and participating in a series of high-end forums to give the voice of PKU and the producing of a series of high-end think tank conference platforms, such as the Lanting Forum and the Sino-Japanese Harmony and Cooperation Civilization Forum which saw the participation of Liu Yandong, Wang Yi, Fukuda Yasuo and other politicians and well-known experts from various countries. These meetings had a very wide range of social and international influences and were highly affirmed by the central government.

Fourth, the work in progress includes upgrading the Beijing Forum, striving to build it to be a world-class, open, think tank-type academic and ideological bastion. The work is also further serving major national and local strategic needs, strengthening ties between the think tanks and local governments. The “Foreign Work Centenary Seminar” held recently is a very important measure. In the implementation of the “14th Five-Year Plan” and the “14th Five-Year Plan for the development of liberal arts,” think tank building is a very important issue, and the “Opinions” points out that the development of a new type of think tanks is also a very important strategic measure for PKU to promote its “double first-class” development.

Therefore, Prof. Wang Dong expressed his hopes that all teachers continue to vigorously support the work of PKU’s Office of Humanities and Social Sciences and PKU’s think tank work in the future.

The second presentation was delivered by deputy director of the Party Office and President's Office Liu Peng.

Giving a brief introduction to the Party Office and President's Office, he said that the offices are overall coordinating organizations used to handle documents, meetings, and other matters. Information work is an important part of the work of the two offices.

The information work has been highly valued by the central government. When inspecting the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the General Secretary once said that the information obtained through the General Office of the Party Committee and the office system is the most important and reliable channel for leadership to make decisions. There are two direct bridges between the school office of PKU and the superior office -- one is the General Office of the Ministry of Education and the other is the General Office of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee.

In addition, to strengthen the understanding of the situation at the grassroots level, the General Office of the Party Committee set up a direct reporting point at PKU in 2011, and the General Office of the State Council also set up a direct reporting point at PKU in 2020, which has been at the preliminary stage. The information work of the two offices is divided into several major sections. One is work information about the important work progress of the school. Another is emergency situations. Still another is the reporting of consultation information for decision-making. The information reported to the General Office of the Party Committee and General Office of the State Council accounts for a large

proportion.

The establishment of a direct reporting point by the Central Office of the Party Committee reflects the unique nature of PKU. There are relatively few direct information reporting points set by the Central Office of the Party Committee in colleges and universities. Currently, there are only 13 offices of this kind nationwide, with four in Beijing, which are at PKU, Tsinghua University, Beijing Normal University, and Renmin University of China; Fudan University in Shanghai; Nanjing University in Nanjing; Zhejiang University in Zhejiang; Jilin University in Northeast China; Wuhan University in East China; Sun Yat-sen University in South China; Sichuan University in Southwest China; and Lanzhou University and Xi'an Jiaotong University in Northwest China. There are relatively more direct reporting points set up by the General Office of the State Council. In addition to the government office system, there are other reporting channels. One is central-level media. For example, Xinhua News Agency and the People's Daily have their own internal reference report channels. The Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China focuses on the development of high-end think tanks across the country.

In addition, some information will also be solicited through giving suggestions to the National People's Congress and CPPCC representatives. In any case, the Party and government office system is the most important channel for reporting.

There are currently three main forms of information provided by the General Office of the Party Committee. The first is giving proposals for themes to write on, and this form accounts for a relatively large amount of the information it

provides. The time allowed for an article to be prepared is variable, and is usually about two weeks. The second is to pitch monthly topics. The next month's topic is usually pitched on around the 25th of each month. The third is the volunteered submissions by relevant teachers.

Liu Peng gave some practical suggestions on the writing of policy reports. From the perspective of the format of the submitted materials, the generally recommended length is around 3,000 words. The beginning of the article should contain basic information from the author, such as name, unit, title, and so on, followed by a leadership certificate.

The written section generally has three major parts. The first part provides a basic introduction to the reported research field. It is suggested to use a lot of numbers and statistics. The second part combines various fields of academic knowledge to analyze the characteristics of the event and do some analysis on the trend it represents. The third part provides countermeasures and suggestions, which are generally written item by item. Such a structure is in line with the requirements of the superior, and makes the probability of the article being adopted higher. In addition, the topic of the article is also very important, and more sensitivity is needed for some important facts that are happening now.

To increase the adoption rate of articles, in addition to choosing a good topic and setting up a good organizational structure for the article, there are several suggestions in terms of organization.

The first is to give full play to the strength of PKU's humanity disciplines and the comprehensive advantages of

multiple disciplines based on profound academic skills. This is a very important foundation for the think tank submission work. The advantage of university research institutes lies in their ability to combine practical issues with academics. Second, it is recommended to give full play to role of academic leaders, think tank experts and scholars.

At present, PKU's academic evaluation system is not perfect. Well-known scholars and professors are not very motivated to write internal reference reports. Instead, young teachers, associate professors and assistant professors are more motivated. The submission of internal reference reports is competitive, because after the reports are submitted, people engaged in information work at the ministries are not experts and scholars but general management and service personnel. The sometimes rely on whether the submitter is a professor or a representative of a certain field to determine whether to adopt this article and report it to a superior unit or senior leader. PKU President Hao Ping also specifically mentioned at the beginning of 2020 that he hopes to promote organized scientific research in the school, including encouraging organized scientific research in the liberal arts, to strive for major projects — with senior experts and scholars taking the lead and guiding young people to improve major policy recommendations and effectively do think tank work.

In terms of the adoption of articles, both offices have certain confidentiality requirements for adoption. According to State secrecy regulations, once an article is reported to the Central Office of the Party Committee and adopted, it must be submitted to the Party and State leaders and designated as a

State secret. After the adoption, a notice is issued to tell the submitter that the article was adopted by the Office. The Ministry of Education and Beijing Municipal Government also issue a notice, labelled as “internal.”

There will be feedback after adoption. There are two types of adoption by the two offices. One is the full text of the article is adopted, and the other is that the opinions extracted from the article are combined with the opinions of other experts and scholars. The content of the feedback includes telling which office adopted it, but it will not tell which leader has read it and what instructions the leader has given.

The Office of Humanities and Social Sciences is working hard to summarize the adoption situation at the end of each year and give feedback to various faculties and research institutions. It is linking the number of adopted articles to annual performance awards. Some annual commendations will also be established at the school level.

Jin Ge, director of the theory office of PKU’s Party Committee Propaganda Department, pointed out in his speech that the central government attaches great importance to the internal reference reports provided by teachers at PKU, and has also been impressed by the expertise and contributions of teachers. From the perspective of the national higher education evaluation system, the Ministry of Education has added many non-thesis and non-topic indicators in the “double first-class” evaluation, including contributions to policymaking. Judging from the progress of national think tanks, 25 high-end think tanks play a very important role. But in the future, when facing specific problems, support from various professional think tanks

is still needed. In the future, some small professional think tanks may gradually emerge.

PKU's Party Committee Propaganda Department became one of the first direct public opinion reporting points for the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China around 2006. The direct reporting point of PKU's Party Committee Propaganda Department relies on the management of the university's academic resources, school leaders and the directors of departments. PKU is the one of the top five comprehensive university-based direct reporting points nationwide. It demonstrated that good internal reference report work is not only academically supported, but also has its own features and corresponding transformational work. Three years is taken as a statistical cycle for direct reporting at PKU. In the past three years, 192 articles were adopted, and the General Secretary has given instructions 48 times. The channels are relatively smooth. At the same time, it is realized that for PKU, channels and content are equally important.

PKU's Party Committee Propaganda Department has been expanding the channels for internal reference reports. In the past three years, five relatively stable channels of three types were expanded. The first type is the channels of the CPC publicity departments; the second is the mainstream media channels, including the Guangming Daily and the Economic Daily. In addition, PKU often organizes pitch meetings with the People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency to incorporate the university's intellectual achievements into their reports. The third type is the Ministry of Education. These five direct reporting points are comprehensive and can overall meet the needs of current work.

He also gave some suggestions on topic selection. First is that the topic should be based on specific events. The internal reference report must face the problem head-on and pay attention to timeliness. The General Secretary talked about international communication and showed his concerns about it at a conference recently. If you submitted an article about international communication, the probability of it being adopted is not very high. But if you started from an incident, writing about “how shall we respond to foreign attacks amid COVID-19,” or “how can we do a good job in the publicity work about the upcoming Winter Olympics,” the probability for the article to be adopted will be higher.

Second, internal reference reports must take a big-picture perspective to solve problems at the national level. But articles about some small questions can also be adopted by top leaders, such as the very specific issues of garbage classification and food waste.

Third, there are some problems that the central government has been aware of, but some teachers may still have more suggestions for understanding the problems. The central decision-making support system is large. For example, the country’s foreign policy sources include not only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its subordinate institutions, but also various research institutes at universities, and many official or private think tanks. However, if university teachers still have any other suggestions, they can reflect them in internal reference reports.

Fourth, the central government may be deeply aware of a problem, but good solutions are still needed. This situation accounts for a large proportion of submitted articles. For

example, “How do you understand and deal with the ‘skate by’ and ‘involution’ remarks of contemporary young people?” “How do we shape the global memory of China’s fight against the epidemic?” “How do we prevent and resolve the risks of small- and medium-sized banks?” Reports on these topics have gradually become policies of the central government.

Fifth, in some cases the central government has been aware of a problem and has a solution, but the problem has evolved or mutated. For example: When will it be appropriate to announce the achievement of a moderately prosperous society in all respects? The central government clearly knows that the epidemic will add challenges to the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and it also knows that the overseas anti-China media will attack us if it is announced. The country had two plans previously. The first one was to announce it at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee as the final result of the “Thirteenth Five-Year Plan”; the second one was to announce it at the end of 2020, because it is the year of completing a moderately prosperous society in all respects. At this time, an expert suggested that COVID-19 has an impact on the psychology and mentality of the people, and the announcement of the completion in 2020 is not very suitable. Strictly speaking, whether it is completed depends on the data for the whole year of 2020, especially in the fourth quarter. If the data for the whole year came out in line with expectations, the completion of the moderately prosperous society in all respects would seem more convincing, and such a big decision should be announced on an important occasion. So, it was not announced either at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central

Committee last year, nor at the end of last year or at the two sessions this year. At the National Poverty Alleviation Summary and Commendation Conference, it was also cautiously announced that comprehensive poverty alleviation is also the bottom-line task of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

With a good topic and an idea to start the article, the following writing method can be adopted. First, the topic should directly express the main idea, with one sentence describing only one thing. Internal reference reports' readers are mainly leading officials with central ministries and commissions. Leading officials with commissions usually browse quickly for the main idea. Leading officials with central ministries read carefully to find ideas to solve problems. Considering the audience's reading habits, the internal reference report should use sublime words with deep meaning. It is best to have 3,000 words. Writers can refer to the writing methods of documents from central ministries and commissions.

Headings are mainly designed to summarize the main idea of the article and attract readers. In drafting the headings, writers should avoid the following common mistakes. Headings such as "analysis of China's current economy," which express only phenomenological analysis and cover a too wide range in meaning, should be avoided. Such headings create aesthetic fatigue, and rarely lead to instructions and adoption. Simple statements such as "win the battle to resume work and production" should also not be used as headings, for they are not eye-catching enough.

Headings like those of academic papers and too abstract are

also not proper. Also, headings should never mistakenly make a major issue look like a less important one. For example, in the “fight against corruption,” it would be better to use the word “strategy” than “fight” to attract more attention of the central leadership.

In writing, syllogism is the most efficient. Efficiency is important for internal reference reports, and an inverted pyramid plus syllogism structure can produce a writing structure recognized as relatively efficient.

A common writing pattern for the first part is to come straight to the point and talk about the current situation. It is best to quote Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, since his exposition on many problems reveals the CPC Central Committee’s attitude. His quote can give readers a cognitive framework to better understand the article’s content. The writer should write about problems with one sentence summarizing the issue and another sentence summing up solution. Paragraphs should not be long.

The second part of the article should analyze the causes or influences of the problems. The third part should analyze the countermeasures. Of course, some internal reference reports are problem oriented, but they do not need to sort out the academic context. Instead, they need to focus on how to understand and how to respond. In terms of providing countermeasures, first give suggestions at the national and strategic level, not specific ones. Second, the writers should list problems in their familiar areas. The central leadership already has a lot of information, and experts should offer suggestions based on their familiarity.

Third, one suggestion should only solve one problem and

clarify one misunderstanding. Superficial and general suggestions are not proper.

Fourth, suggestions should be in line with the operational rules of central ministries, commissions and local places. Fifth, new interpretations can be made for the extension and deepening of central decision-making, but negative judgments should never be made. Constructive suggestions should be provided instead of focusing on criticism.

Regarding the adoption certificate, when the publicity department of the Peking University Party Committee gets an adoption certificate marked as “secret,” writers get a certificate proving that the internal reference report has been “received and adopted by Peking University.” Those whose articles are adopted receive both spiritual and material rewards. We hope to do a better job in writing internal reference reports and give better play to PKU’s role in serving the central government’s decision-making.

The fourth speaker was Zhai Kun, deputy director of the Institute of Area Studies and professor with the School of International Studies at PKU. He expressed his belief that area studies has always been based on statecraft, valuing both enthusiasm and ability. Many advanced and sophisticated topics are being studied at PKU, which gives the school a unique advantage for producing area studies reports.

First, area studies used to be called foreign studies. PKU has a long history of foreign studies, which emerged in the university at a very early time. PKU studies a lot of countries, and each country faces lots of problems. As a result, the university has many experts and completed research in area

studies. Also, the university recruits lots of students for this major. This is a unique advantage of the university, especially the Institute of Area Studies, which pursues statecraft.

Think tanks outside PKU face many restrictions. They cannot send researchers to other countries for long-term stays. Thus, their information is far from enough. Therefore, sometimes their research results are full of errors. However, PKU emphasizes learning the languages of the target countries, and has conducted long-term research in the target countries. So, its research is based on adequate, detailed and accurate information. Of course, area studies at PKU are not impeccable, but the quality of the research results is relatively high. Accordingly, Prof. Zhai Kun put forward the following suggestions:

First, carry forward fine traditions and get rid of stereotyped images. The relationship between academics and politicians is akin to that between doctors and patients. Experts should advise instead of judging from above. The study of ancient history is also of great significance for resolving modern problems. Academics should dig deeper in their research, to benefit the people and the country.

Second, keep researching while innovating, and transform what we learn to practical applications. Scholars of area studies will understand the laws of change of a country or a region after long-time study, and they will have some “surprising” knowledge and opinions in their fields they study. As soon as a country or region changes, they can start writing. For example, General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speech on May 31 required international communication to be credible, respectable,

amiable, and communicators should be modest and prudent. Prof. Wang Jisi from PKU's School of International Studies proposed a long time ago that China should be a modest big power.

In another example, a teacher from Tsinghua University has been asking for more than ten years why people talk about sustainable development, but not sustainable security. The teacher kept writing about it, and finally sustainable security became part of our country's new national security concept.

Third, timeliness is important, but similar events can be summed up for a more in-depth article. There is a traditional Chinese saying that the fastest move makes the best kung fu. It is necessary to write fast, since timeliness is important. However, scholars usually write slowly. It does not matter because similar issues related to the topic of scholars' articles may emerge all the time. Each emergence may give a scholar a more developed idea. Every similar event can add some new material for the article. Moreover, the written internal materials can be converted into academic papers. Of course, a lot of skills are involved in such transformation.

Fourth, PKU cherishes the personal style of each writer, which is well preserved in an internal reference report. Unlike doing research in a government think tank, materials written by PKU's academics feature distinct personal characteristics. The university manages to keep its professors' opinions original with only technical modifications to the style and format. This is probably the biggest characteristic of PKU's think tank materials, which guarantees the survival of the university's glorious traditions.

Fifth, PKU attaches more and more importance to think tank research and its management and coordination. One of the functions of PKUIAS is to serve as a think tank. All teachers have their own channels, and they can directly report their research results to the three major functional departments of PKU, or to PKUIAS. The institute has specially assigned staff members to deal with this, including making style changes. The research centers are also encouraged to meet and talk with PKUIAS, who will help the centers to offer better output.

PKUIAS has two major intellectual products. One is studies on the strategies of other countries and regions, and the other is a social platform for academic research. PKUIAS has a public account “Area Observer” on the news platform thepaper.cn, which has great influence. Each article published by the account has at least 30,000 to 40,000 readers, and some have 6 million. It is a well-built and influential platform.

PKU has an endless succession of talented scholars who are not only good at fundamental research and academic research, but also applied research, with the ability to write policy reports. The country’s strategic needs have generated changes in the preferences for talent training. “Dual-ability talents” who are able to work in both academic and practical departments can be cultivated. PKU is able to meet the demand for such talent.

After the four presentations, the participants talked about some specific questions they met in the daily practice of policy report writing.

Wei Yungaoli, a postdoctoral fellow with PKUIAS, asked how to write policy reports.

Prof. Zhai Kun said that young scholars need to overcome

barriers and complete the transformation from academic research to applied research. Doing this requires some skills, which are not difficult. PKUIAS can organize skill-training sessions for young postdoctoral fellows and scholars. Breakthroughs will be made through special training.

Yin Hui from PKU's School of Public Health, raised two questions. First, what strategy should be adopted for policy briefings led by famous experts? Should it be a team of young scholars or only famous expert figureheads? Second, what is PKU's position in the field of internal reference reports across the whole country, and how does PKU make its voice heard in the fields it is not good at?

Liu Peng expressed his belief that there should not be too many policy report writers for one article. Considering the 3,000-word length of each article, no more than three or at most five co-authors are appropriate. In addition, article drafting still mainly requires a scholar's daily work and academic research, followed by well-known experts serving as figureheads to expand the article's influence. The co-authors can include scholars from outside PKU and even the business circle. But the content is still mainly written by scholars, especially at PKU.

Jin Ge said that the most important characteristic of PKU is its comprehensive performance and leading achievements in its advantageous areas. Among the internal reference reports, the university's most widely approved ones are on international relations, while other disciplines are also developing rapidly. For example, PKU's research on internet governance is flourishing because of the large number of teachers and strong academic teams. In other fields, such as medicine, there is no other

internal reference report in the whole country. It is mainly because medical issues are too specific, and the National Health Commission is the highest level of state department receiving related internal reference reports. However, as long as the internal reference report is well written with a vision of overall situation and able to offer good suggestions, all the disciplines of PKU can make such contributions to the country.

Wang Wei, a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for American Studies asked about how to use foreign sources of information from international relations research in writing internal reference reports, such as information or views from foreign high-level officials.

Prof. Zhai Kun expressed his views that the richness of materials reflects the high-end and unique resources and network available to PKU teachers, which can make the policy reports more convincing.

Jin Ge added that any information submitted to the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee can be as rich as possible, since the department will make a further check on political stances and information sources. The writers should clearly identify the information source in the article. For example, in April 2020, there was an interview project targeting foreign political officials, scholars and think tanks for their views on China. It was a collection of one-on-one interviews, and the interviewees were invited through personal relations.

Prof. Zhai Kun pointed out that PKU's advantage lies in complementing official channels. For example, when relations between China and Southeast Asia were tense, teachers of

Indonesian and Filipino languages at PKU played an important role in bilateral communication.

Liu Peng added that there were similar cases before. When China-US relations became tense, some US scholars have offered their ideas, and some US university scientific research institutions are willing to cooperate with their Chinese counterparts. This kind of information is very valuable. Internal reference report writers can record what they know, make some analysis, and offer some suggestions on relevant policies. For example, if the China-EU Comprehensive Investment Agreement encounters any difficulty, writers can draft an article suggesting areas for China to adopt flexible policies and measures, or which department should take actions. Sometimes topics emphasizing international and foreign trade are more suitable for foreign scholars to talk about, and writers should choose a proper channel to submit the reports.

Prof. Wang Dong added that there is a skillful transition between writing think tank reports and academic papers. The academic discourse system usually features the four steps in the composition of an essay, which are introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up. Academic papers cannot be anonymous and must have information sources. However, when writing think tank reports, writers should stick to the principle of truthfulness. On this basis, they can report all the information at hand, indicating the opinions on certain issues of certain people from certain units. The opinions can be directly used. More professional lectures, salons and training sessions on report writing skills can be held for teachers, especially young ones, if they have such a demand

to improving skills. It will be a very important professional skill.

After the Q&A session, Prof. Zhai Kun summarized the meeting. He expressed gratitude for the three participants from functional departments, who provided very useful guidance, information and support. He also emphasized that think tank research should focus on real practice, which was particularly stressed by Prof. Qian Chengdan. PKUIAS will have face-to-face exchanges with each research center, since they have different target countries. He said that PKUIAS will spare no effort to help develop think tank academic research at PKU.