

Yannan Roundtable I

The Discourse of the Monroe Doctrine around the Globe: Hegemony and Counterhegemony in the Modern World

April 1, 2021

Yannan Roundtable is a new series of events run by the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS). The Salon series provides an arena for conversations across disciplines on the topic of “global governance and development,” with the aim of facilitating talks, communication and cooperation between scholars of different disciplinary backgrounds and from different faculties to better respond to the increasing demand for cross-disciplinary knowledge production in a progressively globalized world. This Salon saw scholars of various fields and disciplines coming from PKU’s School of Foreign Languages, School of Government, School of Journalism and Communication, School of International Studies, Department of History, Law School, School of Education and Department of Sociology. Tenured associate professor Zhang Yongle, from the Law School, gave a presentation titled “The Discourse of the Monroe Doctrine around the Globe: Hegemony and Counterhegemony in the Modern World.” The Salon was hosted by associate professor Chen Yifeng from the Law School.

Research on the Monroe Doctrine — Why now? And what method to use?

Zhang Yongle’s interests in the Monroe Doctrine derive

from the political reality of the revival of the Monroe Doctrine in US politics. Despite the fact that the then US Secretary of State John Kerry publicly stated in 2013 that the era of the Monroe Doctrine was over, the Trump administration tightened its control over Latin America during the period between the end of 2018 to early 2019 and claimed that the Monroe Doctrine was a very correct and great policy. However, when it came to China, Donald Trump averred that both China's policy on the South China Sea and its "Belt and Road" Initiative were implementations of China's version of the Monroe Doctrine. Donald Trump's use of the term "Monroe Doctrine" in these two contexts had two opposite connotations: It had a positive meaning when he applied it to the US, but it had a negative meaning when he applied it to China. From this arises a question: what is the definition of the Monroe Doctrine?

Zhang Yongle contended that the discourse of the Monroe Doctrine produced multiple "versions" of the Monroe Doctrine in its circulation around the globe. In Europe there was pan-Europeanism that claimed "Europe for the Europeans." In Germany, there was the theory of *Großraum* (Great Space). In Japan, there was the East Asian Monroe Doctrine and Asian Monroe Doctrine—we can also see the Monroe Doctrine behind the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In Italy, there was the Monroe Doctrine for the Balkans. Leon Trotsky once criticized Joseph Stalin's policies as "the Monroe Doctrine

within socialism.” Australia had its own version of the Monroe Doctrine in the South Pacific. Africa, too, has had its own Monroe Doctrine — Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican black nationalist and pan-Africanist, advocated “Africa for the Africans.” The colonial policy pursued by Charles de Gaulle in West Africa was at the time referred to as the French Monroe Doctrine. Jawaharlal Nehru of India had the South Asian Monroe Doctrine.

As for modern China, various discourses on the Monroe Doctrine have also appeared. The discourse of “China for the Chinese people,” derived from “America for the Americans,” is Monroe Doctrine’s manifestation on a state or national level. What is interesting is that the discourse within China has also expanded from the state level into the provincial level. Thus, first of all, there was the combination of anti-Manchu regionalism and the discourse of the Monroe Doctrine; then, the Doctrine’s diffusion into a number of provinces and regions was manifested in a variety of provincial Monroe Doctrines during the period of inter-provincial autonomy — “Guangdong for the people of Guangdong,” “Zhejiang for the people of Zhejiang,” “Hunan for the people of Hunan,” to list a few examples. In order to trace the full trajectory of the Monroe Doctrine’s spread, Zhang Yongle attempted a typological analysis on the matter.

Zhang adopted four different methods in his research. The first was to provide a definition for the Monroe Doctrine from a

global intellectual history approach. According to him, his approach to the issue was not only from the perspective of intellectual history, but also from that of global history. However, he pointed out, research on intellectual history was not merely a matter of keyword research.

Second was to apply the research methods of conceptual history. This involved taking a concept as a signifier and extracting the signified in different context and practices. Therefore, it required an examination of the developments of the concept's expression and its acquisition of specific meanings throughout its circulation from one country to another, and from one era to the next.

Third was to apply morphological methods. A concept constantly underwent transformation, and, similar to the way Wittgenstein talked about family relationships, although the final product might be very different from the initial stage, its changes in the intermediate spectrum were continuous.

Fourth was to realize how the concept of the Monroe Doctrine has been affected by empire and international law, which is a new path in the fields of international law and world history. The study of international law itself cannot be simply classified as a product of the struggle between territorial and sovereign states in the Westphalian system but should be discussed in the context of the struggle of empires on a global scale. Zhang Yongle argued that research should trace the

evolution of international law and examine the impact of the Monroe Doctrine as a concept of empire building on the changes in international law.

As for data gathering, he utilized the materials he collected from Chinese newspaper databases as well as existing literature and examined the resources with his new awareness of the issue.

The Evolution of the Monroe Doctrine as a Concept: The US, Germany and Japan as Examples

The US

The US was the birthplace of the Monroe Doctrine, and the background of its proposal, in 1823, was Europe's Holy Alliance's intention to strangle the independence movements in Latin America. The UK had hoped to announce a joint declaration with the US in objection to the European states' intervention against Latin American independence movements, but the US president James Monroe envisioned future US expansion and deemed a joint declaration with the UK would restrain the US from doing so, and therefore declined the British proposal. The US foreign policy principles stated by President James Monroe during his State of the Union Address on December 2, 1823, to the Congress were later referred to as the "Monroe Doctrine," and can be summed up as follows: The US remains neutral on existing European colonies and protectorates in the Americas and does not get involved in wars between European states; meanwhile, the European powers should not

interfere with the affairs of American countries. The slogan “America for the Americans” was also put forward then.

Zhang Yongle contended that the Monroe Doctrine was a perspective rooted in spatial politics: the US drew boundaries in space and created a dichotomy between the corrupted, despotic Europe and the republican Americas. Once the spatial dichotomy was established, the US then started to build up a homogeneity within each space and cleanse the space of alien factors — the European factor, for example, was an alien one manifested in the Americas in the form of colonies. At the time, there were still many European colonies in the Americas, and although their existence predated the Monroe Doctrine, the US took up an aggressive attitude toward European colonialism and proactively attacked on the latter. During the westward expansion of the US, the Monroe Doctrine was utilized to legitimize its need for expansion: The US claimed that if any peoples of the Americas wished to join the US, no European power should intervene.

As the US’s overall national strength increased, US president Ulysses Grant further demanded that no American country should cede any territory to European countries — not even in the form of gift. After the US Civil War, the US accelerated its self-construction as a regional power, and the UK tacitly acknowledged the US’s hegemony in the Western hemisphere, especially after the Venezuelan Crisis of 1895. With

the addition of the Roosevelt Corollary, articulated by US president Theodore Roosevelt, the US had in effect become an international police force in the Americas. In this phase, the Monroe Doctrine gradually morphed from “America for the Americans” to “America for the Americans (from the US).” The US’s demand for open doors in China is also closely connected to the Monroe Doctrine. The Open Door Policy was established in the later 19th century and was explained by president Theodore Roosevelt as the US’s practical Monroe Doctrine in Asia; the US could utilize the Open Door policy in Asia to restrain the European powers from intervening in China. Therefore, we can argue that President Theodore Roosevelt linked the Open Door Policy to the Monroe Doctrine.

During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson vied for global hegemony and thus had to reinterpret the Monroe Doctrine and weaken the concept of space within the Doctrine. The core of the Doctrine therefore was transformed into championing the right of each country and nation to decide its own path of development without interference from other countries or nations. In this way, the Doctrine could be applied to the whole world. Although Woodrow Wilson’s attempt at building the US into a global hegemony failed, the US tried again after World War II and this time it finally succeeded. In summary, the development of the Monroe Doctrine has never deviated from a deep-rooted way of thinking: it always draws a

boundary over a specific geographic region and defines a homogeneity within the region, then excludes anything alien from the region. In this way, the Monroe Doctrine is used to justify an even expansive and aggressive action with defensive rhetoric. To this day, the US is still applying defensive rhetoric to legitimize its aggressions. In this aspect, the US differs greatly from British and French colonialism.

Germany

In pre-World War I Germany, there had been discussions on whether to build a Greater Germany or a Lesser Germany. The core concept of “Central Europe” was in particular imbued with the imaginations of numerous German scholars working on geopolitics. The defeat of Germany in World War I marked the failure of German Emperor Wilhelm II’s attempt at global hegemony, and the post-War Versailles–Washington system further imposed systematic suppression on the Weimar Republic. Despite this, Germany strived to become a regional hegemony, a cause for which Carl Schmidt in the 1930s provided a rich theoretical foundation. Zhang Yongle saw Carl Schmidt as a theoretician for regional hegemony: Germany on the one hand opposed global hegemony as a regional hegemony, while on the other hand, ignored the weaker and smaller countries and nations within its own region and suppressed them.

Carl Schmidt held that, historically, there were two strands of the Monroe Doctrine: the Monroe Doctrine in its initial phase,

which was the true, authentic Doctrine, and the Monroe Doctrine after Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson's reinterpretation, which was guided by universalism and interventionism and thus became the re-defined Monroe Doctrine. The latter version of the Doctrine was not what Carl Schmidt advocated as the authentic Monroe Doctrine; hence he strove to oppose the inauthentic with the authentic. Based on this, he proposed the theory of "Großraum" — "Great Space" — and argued that the US hegemony in the Americas was the first "Großraum." At the core of each Great Space lay a single leading power that directed the whole Space with its nation's own principles.

What Carl Schmidt did was applying the US discourse to oppose the suppression of Germany by the US through the Versailles–Washington System. He also took the US as a precedent to provide discourse guidance and support for Germany's own pursuit of regional hegemony. However, since Carl Schmidt was already losing favor politically within the Nazi Party when he proposed the Großraum theory, the theory did not have any consequential influence on Adolf Hitler and the Nazi ideology. Its impact on Japan, however, was far from insignificant. During World War II, a great many Japanese scholars on international law modelled on Schmidt's ideas in their attempt at constructing the so-called "broad international law."

Japan

Japan may have adopted the discourse of the Monroe Doctrine even earlier than Germany did. In 1872, the Japanese Foreign Ministry hired the French-born American Charles William Le Gendre as an advisor. Le Gendre elaborated the Monroe Doctrine to his Japanese employers and advised that Japan should also practice some form of the Doctrine in East Asia, similarly to how the European powers were behaving in East Asia. A newly emerging Asianism soon started to merge with the Monroe Doctrine.

Based on his archival research, Zhang Yongle argued that a landmark incident took place in 1898: Konoe Atsumaro published an article in the journal *Taiyō* (*The Sun*) contending that the “Yellow and White races” would eventually fight each other, and that Japan should be the champion of the “Yellow race” and unite the race in its fight against the “White race.” Hence, Asia, instead of Europe and North America, was the party that Japan needed to have on its side. Other arguments of Konoe Atsumaro, such as the preservation and protection of the whole of China, could also be found in this article. Konoe Atsumaro also contributed to the founding of the *Tōa Dōbunkai* (East Asia Common Culture Society) which left a remarkable imprint on the Chinese elites in Japan—both the revolutionists and the loyalists — at the time; he had ties with figures such as Sun Yat-sen and Kang Youwei alike, and when he first met Kang

Youwei, he told him that the future of Asia lay on the shoulders of Japan and China.

Zhang Yongle argued that Konoe Atsumaro's assertion was made against the background of the noteworthy incident of the attack by the US on the Philippines, which was viewed by the Japanese and Chinese elites as a blatant threat by the "White race" to the "Yellow race." Despite Konoe Atsumaro's proposal, the comparatively weak overall power of Japan deterred the regime from announcing it as its official ideology. The struggle between the "Yellow and White races" became even more taboo in the Japanese official discourse after the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in 1902. However, in his meeting with Japanese diplomat Kaneko Kentarō, in 1905, US president Theodore Roosevelt encouraged Japan to take up an "Asian Monroe Doctrine." President Roosevelt envisioned Japan implementing some version of the Monroe Doctrine in Asia covering the area stretching from the Red Sea to the Kamchatka Peninsula to rid the land of European colonizers.

During World War I, Japan partially incorporated the Monroe Doctrine into its foreign policy and made the "Twenty-One Demands" to the Yuan Shikai government of China, attempting to sweep the whole of China into its sphere of influence. Traces of the Monroe Doctrine in action could also be seen in the later Nishihara Loans. In the Lansing-Ishii Agreement signed on November 2, 1917, the US recognized

Japan's envisioning of Japan-China relations in a similar pattern as the US-Mexico relations. In fact, the US acknowledged Japan's special sphere of interest in China in the hope of having Japan keep the European powers — Russia in particular — at bay.

Japan soon met suppression from the international community. Initially, Japan gained benefits from the Paris Peace Conference after World War I; the transfer of Shandong from German to Japanese control was recognized by the international community and Japan became one of permanent members of the Executive Council of the League of Nations. Article 21 of the Covenant of the League of Nations was proposed by US president Woodrow Wilson, who mentioned in it the idea of regional understanding and argued that the validity of engagements within geographical regions should not be affected by decisions of the wider international community, which in effect excluded the affairs in the Americas from the jurisdiction of the League of Nations. Japan expressed absolute understanding and support for the concept of regional understanding. However, the Nine-Power Treaty, signed during the Washington Naval Conference, in 1922, revisited the Shandong Problem, and, as a result, Japan was compelled to give up multiple military and political interests. The reinforcement of the Powers' shared control over China restrained Japan's pursuit of its "special interest" in the country

and set back the implementation of Japan's "Asian Monroe Doctrine."

The outbreak of the economic crisis in the late 1920s triggered a wave of trade wars between the Powers. Faced with economic exclusion by the other Powers, Japan heightened its plans of invading Manchuria, to which the 9.18 Incident (the Mukden Incident) was closely linked. The League of Nations issued numerous statements regarding the incident, whereas Japan also argued based on international law — for example, it was argued that Article 21 of the Covenant of the League of Nations could be applied to its Manchurian affairs as they were within the range of "regional understanding" and thus should be free from international intervention from outside the region. Some scholars on international law also claimed that Japan's actions were sanctioned by the US, quoting President Theodore Roosevelt's encouragement for Japan to take up an "Asian Monroe Doctrine." The US, of course, did not accept such a statement and Japan ended up withdrawing from the League of Nations. The Japanese discourse on the Monroe Doctrine henceforth evolved from the East Asian Shared Culture Alliance to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as Japan, in effect, expanded the Japanese Monroe Doctrine's sphere of action to cover the lands and seas from the Indian Ocean to the South Pacific.

The Chinese Experience: Anti-Manchu Sentiment and

Provincial Regionalism

The Monroe Doctrine affected China in two ways: on the one hand, it descended from the supranational level to the provincial level, and even to the sub-provincial level in some places; on the other hand, it was the response of the Chinese elites to the Monroe Doctrine as practiced by the US and Japan, which could be traced back to foreign missionaries who came to China in the 19th century.

The Monroe Doctrine was spread among the Chinese elites in the late 19th century, when they were moved by Japan's social and political reactions toward the US invasion of the Philippines and influenced by Kono Atsumaro's relentless advocacy of the Asian Monroe Doctrine. Zhang Yongle pointed out the pioneering effort by the *Qing Yi Bao* newspaper editing team led by Liang Qichao in popularizing the Monroe Doctrine amongst the Chinese elites in Japan at the time. Liang Qichao first paid attention to the US entry into the Philippines, then to the political slogan "America for the Americans," followed by the Filipino resistance to the US and the creation of the "Philippines for the Filipinos" spirit. Since the incident, the slogan "China for the Chinese" started to circulate among the Chinese elite circles in Japan, implicitly expressing an anti-Manchu sentiment and a wish to expel the Manchus from China. The concept was also utilized in 1900 to oppose the Eight-Nation Alliance's invasion of China, as could be seen in claims such as "China is for the

Chinese, the Eight-Nation Alliance must not invade and occupy China.”

The Monroe Doctrine on the Provincial Level

The application of the Monroe Doctrine on the national level soon spread to the provincial level in China. Ou Jujia, who once assisted Liang Qichao, transformed the Doctrine into a regionalist slogan and put forward the saying “Guangdong for the people of Guangdong.” He argued that the province of Guangdong only fell to the Powers because of the Manchu authority’s incompetence and proposed to gain independence for Guangdong first, then gradually unite other newly independent provinces to eventually form a new, independent China. Now that a “New Guangdong” had been proposed, other started to call for “New Hunan” and similar goals under the influence of Japan-educated Chinese elites. Although anti-Manchu sentiment gradually declined and disappeared due to the adoption of the “Five Races under One Union” principle by the Republic of China founded after the Xinhai Revolution, regionalism survived and continued to thrive during the Republican era. Regionalism was frequently utilized to compete against other provinces or even in confronting the central government. Yuan Shikai put in considerable effort into state-building to cope with regionalism, such as centralizing the military and reconstructing the national fiscal system. However, the provinces all opposed his proclamation of himself as emperor and overthrew him,

resulting in the bankruptcy of his endeavors in state-building. The fragmentation of provinces reached a new high after Yuan Shikai's death.

In 1917, Woodrow Wilson re-interpreted the Monroe Doctrine. As the US joined the World War and the US propaganda machinery started working in China, the lower elites of China gained more knowledge about the US and began to feel an affinity for the latter. They saw the combination of the Monroe Doctrine and federalism as being the embodiment of democracy. They believed that few differences lay between the two, only that one worked on the international level whereas the other worked on the national level, both manifesting the spirit of democracy. By 1917, the Republic of China began to head down the road to dissolution. All forces sought to unite the country, but none was competent enough to achieve the goal without difficulty.

As an attempt to overcome this obstacle, calls for inter-provincial autonomy started to appear in 1920. Elites in this period mainly advocated for the Monroe Doctrine for particular provinces and the slogan in the formula of "X Province for the people of X province" became popular, such as "Guangdong for the Guangdong people," "Zhejiang for the Zhejiang people," and "Anhui for the Anhui people." Twenty or so similar expressions were in public circulation at the time; some were explicit — the Guangdong Monroe Doctrine, the

Mukden Monroe Doctrine, the Yunnan Monroe Doctrine, to name a few. Others were strong slogans in the aforementioned pattern. These versions of the Monroe Doctrine were mainly used to oppose governmental officials from other provinces. Examples of this included demands for the highest provincial military commander to be from the province itself and deportations of military commanders from other provinces. Moreover, the provinces also advocated against interventions from the central government.

Multiple variants derived from the concept of the provincial Monroe Doctrine. One example was the Monroe Doctrine of Sun Chuanfang. Sun Chuanfang was from the southeastern region of China. He created a five-province space for his own version of the Monroe Doctrine in that region, planning on expanding the space to cover the whole of China. Therefore, the Five-Province Monroe Doctrine he espoused took a turn from the defensive to the offensive. Zhang Yongle contended that, even though he didn't carry out evidential research on possible influences of Woodrow Wilson on Sun Chuanfang's ideals, the latter's discourse of the Monroe Doctrine did not differ much from Woodrow Wilson's wordings; when the regime was on the defense, the Monroe Doctrine could be used to protect its territories and its people from external assaults; meanwhile, it asserted that it would not intervene in the affairs of others. When the regime was on the offense, however,

the concept of space in the Doctrine weakened and the core of the Doctrine was reinterpreted as democracy, autonomy and self-determination. This version of the Monroe Doctrine could be further elaborated as follows: Since people in some regions could not be in charge of their own destiny, the countries (or provinces) that follow the Monroe Doctrine should help them out by carrying out reasonable interventions.

Disenchantment with the Monroe Doctrine

Sentiment toward the Monroe Doctrine also underwent a phase of disenchantment in China. Multiple elites who were initially influenced by the Japanese Monroe Doctrine eventually became disenchanted. Not long after he exiled himself to Japan, Kang Youwei realized that the Japanese would never really help him, so he left Japan shortly thereafter and stopped talking about the Meiji Restoration and the Monroe Doctrine. Liang Qichao went through a similar process; in the beginning, he was influenced by the Japanese Monroe Doctrine and adopted the pan-Asianist discourse of Japan, but he soon realized that Japan had sinister motives; henceforth, he claimed that the center of Asia should not be Japan but China and argued for a pan-Asianism that centered around China.

Sun Yat-sen spent his early career in Japan giving public speeches to raise money for the cause of revolution in China. Although he had been supportive of Japan, the Japanese government's imperialist acts, such as its assistance in support

of the Duan Qirui administration, made him realize the true face of Japan. In 1924, Sun Yat-sen started to incline toward pan-Asianism. He mentioned the contrast between the “kingly way” and the “high-handed way” and saw the Japanese as practicing the high-handed way whereas the Russians were behaving regally, stating that, although it was a country of the “White race,” Soviet Russia should be an ally of China.

Chiang Kai-shek initially referred to the US Monroe Doctrine as imperialist but changed his words during World War II, when he regarded the Japanese Monroe Doctrine as vicious and the US Doctrine as benevolent. The main reason behind this shift in tone was his need for US support.

The “Zhan Guo Ce” School elites, who returned to China after studying in the US and Europe, also went through a change in their attitude toward the Monroe Doctrine. They were mainly influenced by German thought, such as that of Oswald Spengler and Friedrich Nietzsche, which predicted the emergence of several major hegemonies in the world, a reorganization of the world under some grand imperialist system, and the eventual global unification under one regime. The elites of this school envisioned similar reshuffle of order in Asia and hoped that China could play its role in this process.

Finally, Zhang Yongle commented on Li Dazhao’s attitude toward the Monroe Doctrine. Li Dazhao had already seen through the evil intentions behind Japan’s adoption of the

Monroe Doctrine before he traveled to Japan for his studies. During his time in Japan, he lived through the “Twenty-One Demands” incident and his understanding of Japan became clearer. After returning to China, he wrote a series of articles exposing the true intentions of Japan’s following of Monroe Doctrine. In addition, he criticized the supranational Monroe Doctrine and the provincial Monroe Doctrine together, thinking that if the Powers wanted to expand abroad, their Monroe doctrine would expand to the supranational level; Chinese warlords had no power and could only fight each other internally. Out of this developed the provincial Monroe Doctrine of the warlords.

Li Dazhao envisioned, first, a revolution to end the chaotic wars between the warlords and the Monroe Doctrine on the provincial level and, second, a clear-cut stand at the international level, for which he proposed a new kind of Asianism — not a hegemonic one but one that respected the will of each nation to develop independently and finally unite voluntarily to form some sort of regional order. Zhang Yongle spoke highly of Li Dazhao’s ideas and expressed his belief that Li’s ideas were a very important discourse asset for the Communist Party of China.

The discourse on the Monroe Doctrine returned to the supranational level after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, as the reunification of the country brought

most of the provincial Monroe Doctrines to an end. Chairman Mao Zedong once stated that “The West Pacific is for the peoples of the West Pacific” to counter the US Monroe Doctrine. When Premier Zhou Enlai met with representatives of the Chilean cultural circles, he suggested that, since the US has its own Monroe Doctrine, Latin America should also have a new Latin American Monroe Doctrine. This was clear evidence of struggle against the US using the discourse of the US itself.

Zhang Yongle pointed out that fears over the “Belt and Road” Initiative as being a new version of the Monroe Doctrine were faulty. Historically speaking, the Silk Road was never a sphere of influence of China; neither has China ever had a sphere of influence, defined homogeneity, or pursued foreign relations that exclude “external powers” — and it never would. What has given rise to such skepticism, then? Zhang Yongle pointed his finger at the bias of the West and its conventional thinking. In the British “router” way of envisioning world affairs, for instance, it was believed that the running of the British Empire could be maintained by simply controlling a few major nodes in the world — the Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal, to name a couple — then connecting them in the name of humankind. The “Belt and Road,” however, was aimed at mutual connection and communication, which was completely different from the British idea and even more distinct from the US Monroe Doctrine.

Zhang Yongle concluded that it is still unclear how the future global order would be now that the international situation was constantly changing in the post-COVID-19 era and the US-style globalization was coming to an end. However, a turn in the global order had become evident and spatial reorganization could potentially take place in the future. As the world was no longer flat, various fields were facing new boundaries — Internet orders, financial orders, international production chain and so on — and were undergoing regrouping. What roles would these boundaries play? He stated that multi-polarization was the future but asked what kind of multi-polar world we would like to have. The development of Germany and Japan in the 1930s was a form of multi-polarization that the world did not need to witness again. What we need would be spaces for development that had certain boundaries within which the countries in each space could coordinate and cooperate in working toward achieving common interests for humankind.

Zhang Yongle opined that, in this sense, reflecting on the history of the Monroe Doctrine's development had much to offer for China's planning on its and the world's future. However, the Monroe Doctrine as a hegemonic discourse should be watched with vigilance. China should be extra careful if it were to use similar discourse — expressions like “Asia for the Asians” were already imbued with imperialist and colonialist sentiments and have left a bad impression in global intellectual history. How to

correctly understand the Monroe Doctrine and properly utilize the Doctrine by preserving what was valuable and discarding what was outdated was worthy of consideration for China, he concluded.

After Zhang Yongle's keynote presentation, scholars attending the seminar discussed topics including the concept of spatial politics, the definition of Monroe Doctrine and the regionalist and universalist traits of the Doctrine.

Yannan Roundtable II

Experiencing Southeast Asian Studies in China: A Reverse Culture Shock

April 27, 2021

Southeast Asian studies in China has undergone tremendous changes in the past two decades. As China's political and economic power has gradually but steadily risen, the demands of the Chinese people for a better understanding of the world has grown significantly, which, objectively speaking, has facilitated the rapid development of area studies in China. Although Southeast Asian studies in China emerged much earlier than "area studies," the latter's thriving development has already cast profound influence on the former, which can mainly be seen in the participation of numerous scholars in policy research related to Southeast Asia. This turn toward policy research reflects changes in the norm of Southeast Asian studies in China and echoes the transformation in the trends in Chinese higher education and the society in general. Currently, some imbalance has already begun to show in Southeast Asian studies in China: pre-research projects have expanded rapidly in number and short-term policy research has occupied the absolute centerplate, whereas fundamental research, especially in the humanities, has been further marginalized. Based on their own specialized fields and disciplines, language capabilities, research

directions and local government policy, universities in China have adopted distinct approaches to carry out Southeast Asian studies. In this Scholars' Salon, assistant professor Xie Kankan gave a keynote presentation on the different approaches to Southeast Asian studies and their effects based on an analysis of the development of Southeast Asian studies abroad over the past half century.

I. Southeast Asian studies in the US

A Brief Summary of Southeast Asian Studies in the US

Southeast Asian studies in the US is a result of World War II. After the War ended, the US, under the influence of the broad international atmosphere and especially due to its worry about the communist bloc, started to debate the issues seriously. Against the background of the rise of independent movements across the former colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the US embarked on setting up area studies. The early focuses of the US in area studies were politics, modern history and other macro-scale societal issues.

The first centers for Southeast Asian studies in the US were the two universities of Yale and Cornell, both of which were typical private research universities in the eastern US. They had adequate financial and intellectual capabilities of nurturing an emerging field of studies, a process during which these universities recruited many Americans who had been intimately involved in Southeast Asia before the War, as well as famous

European scholars.

The second generation of Southeast Asia centers came into being in the 1950s and 1960s. The domestic politics in the US during this period went through a major change due to the Vietnam War. Southeast Asian studies in US higher education began to receive unprecedented attention, an example of which was the National Defense Education Act passed in 1958. Meanwhile, the Ford Foundation and a series of other foundations started to generously invest in Southeast Asian studies and set up area studies centers in public universities in the central US.

The third generation of Southeast Asian centers were founded after the Cold War. In post-Cold War US, new regional alliances emerged in Southeast Asian studies while some of the public and private universities chose to follow suit and embarked on their own Southeast Asian studies. Here, a crucial point worthy of further discussion is that Southeast Asian studies is noticeably fragile in the sense that Southeast Asia is extremely diverse — various languages, different circumstances regarding states, religions, economy, and society make the region especially heterogeneous. Therefore, the development of Southeast Asian studies centers should not be rushing toward achieving full coverage of every aspect of the region right from the outset. The growth of centers requires huge amounts of funding which won't necessarily produce immediate effects.

In the meantime, we should also appreciate the importance of key persons to Southeast Asian centers. First, their research interests and topics largely decide the general academic direction of the whole department. Second, apart from their teaching roles, these key persons also play a crucial part in involving social resources in the center and acquiring funding for the center to further improve the center. In this respect, Southeast Asian studies differ from East Asian studies significantly. In East Asian studies, different universities and institutions are in an almost full-on competitive relationship with each other, whereas in Southeast Asian studies, universities are all aware that only through cooperation can each of them produce the best research output, and it was because of this that they jointly established the SEASSI (Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute), which is still active today.

The relationship between area studies centers and existing disciplines

Area studies centers enjoy relatively more freedom and autonomy compared to specific disciplines. The area studies center of Yale University and the University of California, Berkeley, for example, once had the authority to award degrees. However, George Kahin from Cornell University later concluded that if the Southeast Asian center gained its independent status too soon and started to bring up its own students too early in their academic paths, the students' ties with

their primary discipline would be weakened. Therefore, an early independence could actually impair some area studies centers. Relatively speaking, Cornell University's model was more stable and mature in that all students were under the management of their own major, learning in their own disciplines, and all professors were hired by each department. In this way, a very healthy cooperative relationship can be formed between regional research centers and disciplines. As the students all have dual backgrounds in area studies and their primary discipline, they can better fit into the existing academic ecology because of their disciplinary background when they enter the academic job market. If the students have been doing Southeast Asian studies all along, however, they may find themselves with only a narrow range of choices after graduation.

Of course, Southeast Asian studies in the US soon encountered crises. What was very noticeable was that, after the Vietnam War, funding for Southeast Asian studies sharply decreased and the US government's investment into Southeast Asian studies quickly shrank, while area studies in general declined as a field of studies. This crisis in Southeast Asian studies also manifested in a decrease in available academic positions. When the previous generation of scholars retired, the faculties they were affiliated to did not fill in the vacancies. At the same time, many projects of the Southeast Asian centers lost stable funding support.

The academic ecology in the US differs greatly from that in China since the continuation of research projects in the former relies largely on students' interest in selecting courses in Southeast Asian studies. The number of students attending Southeast Asian studies courses continued to drop in post-Vietnam War US and the number of scholars devoted to the studies also took a sharp downward turn. Higher education institution administrators noticeably reduced their attention and effort put into the field of studies. In the meantime, Southeast Asian centers faced competition from institutions doing other area studies. Due to all of the above, Southeast Asian centers suffered a major setback in the mid- and late-Cold War era.

Doubts as to the rationality of area studies from the academia

First, the boundaries of regions are obscure, or contentious to say the least. Is it therefore rational to conduct studies along regional lines? Moreover, area studies itself also has boundaries; what counts as area studies, and what doesn't? In the 1950s and 1960s, there was almost a tacit agreement that regional spaces are the natural carrier of societies. With the success of the independence movements of various nation-states around the globe, areas and states seemed to have become a natural choice for framing research. However, as the world entered the 60s and 70s, such a narrative with nation-state as fundamental analytical units came under criticism from both within and outside of the

academia, and, as a result, the research norm of taking regions as natural carrier of societies was challenged.

Second, criticisms from many scholars with disciplinary backgrounds targeted at the “essentialist” nature of area studies. They argued that scholars in area studies always considered the area they researched as unique and incomparable with others, resulting in the lack of efficient academic conversation between scholars studying different areas and regions.

Third, area studies was rooted in the traditions of Western colonial academic production. As Western academia started to criticize orientalism, the “neo-colonial” or “neo-imperial” tendencies of area studies also received intensive critique.

In general, the development process of area studies in the US since its incipience in the 1950s and 1960s was clearly characterized by its social science–centered focus and the marginalized status of the humanities. By the 1970s, 60 percent of the researchers studying Southeast Asia came from social sciences background. Most of them were political scientists, many others were anthropologists. This basic structure has not had fundamental changes in the field’s later developments, so literature, linguistics and archaeology have always been in weaker positions within area studies. Meanwhile, the focus has mainly been on the major countries in the region — Vietnam receives the most attention from US scholars due to the Vietnam War, followed by Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. As for

external influences, the US academic community has gradually expanded beyond the geographical boundaries of the US and North America and has been maintaining a close relationship with European academia. Comparatively speaking, US researchers do not pay much attention to articles published by Southeast Asian scholars in native languages and treat Southeast Asia only as a place for data collection and theory verification. Compared to East Asian studies in the US, Southeast Asian studies follows a very different research approach and discourse.

II. The “reverse culture shock” experienced by scholars in Chinese Southeast Asian studies

A Brief history of Southeast Asian studies in China

Southeast Asian studies in China can be traced back to the 1920s, when it was initially referred to as “Nanyang” (southern foreign lands) studies. The transformation in the studies’ focus from “Nanyang” to “Southeast Asia” reflected a shift from the production of knowledge related to affairs concerning Chinese nationals living abroad to studies and research on nation-states, which eventually resulted in the creation of Southeast Asian studies in the field of area studies in China in the past decade. In the course of this transformation process, the field of studies in China morphed accordingly when changes took place in government demands or policy as well as the scale of funding. In the early 2010s, area studies as a field of studies appeared in China. By 2019, more than 400 area studies centers had been

registered at the Ministry of Education with many more yet to be recognized, although the majority of them are only nominal organizations without actual institutions.

This trend left a considerable imprint on Southeast Asian studies in China. First of all, Southeast Asia as a region neighboring China is never short of hot topics of interest to China — for example, the South China Sea, the “Belt and Road” Initiative, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as political changes in specific countries in the region. The demand in China for policy studies in Southeast Asian studies has been high in the past ten years. Moreover, as Chinese companies have ventured out of China for business, higher requirements for knowledge production have been put forward. One manifestation of these recent changes is the geometric growth in the quantities of scholars, research projects and academic activities in Southeast Asian studies in China.

The following trends have become apparent in Southeast Asian studies in China. As policy studies shifts its direction, major journals in Southeast Asian studies have begun to emphasize the practical significance of proposals and research projects, especially against the background of area studies’ development in China. White papers began to spring up — the majority of them focusing on policy-related issues — which has to a certain degree promoted the formulation of the academic community in China. The speedy progress of the Internet has

made information acquisition increasingly easy, and as information updates rapidly, such development enables scholars to conveniently keep up-to-date on issues and affairs. Most researchers depend on Chinese and English resources for their research, and although first-hand sources in native languages are recommended by the academia, it has not been mandatory. Recent changes in the academic ecology have laid extra pressure on researchers in regard to publication and peer review, pushing more scholars to conducting policy research that can produce output over a shorter period.

Southeast Asian Studies and *Southeast Asian Affairs* are the two most influential journals in Southeast Asian Studies in China. Approximately 40 percent of their contents are specific country-focused research, other frequently appearing topics include ASEAN, the South China Sea, bilateral issues, and sub-regional cooperation, most of which are political and economic issues. Of all the content material, country-specific studies take up 38 percent, of which political issues comprise 47 percent and economic issues 20 percent while social or cultural issues in the broad sense take up only a comparatively small proportion. As for specific countries, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia receive most attention from Chinese researchers, which has much to do with these countries' size, political importance and frequency of emerging affairs. Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines are on a lesser level of

attention. It's worth pointing out that, due to the recent swift development of the situation in Myanmar, research on the country has become unusually active. Relatively speaking, very few scholars focus on Cambodia, Laos, Brunei and East Timor.

Against the background of policy research dominating area studies, primary disciplines — especially humanities — are gradually marginalized. This trend is closely related to the following general circumstances. First, academia in China is profoundly influenced by pragmatism due to the fast expansion of higher education in China in the first two decades of the 21st century. Second, while Southeast Asian studies expands its aspects of interest, the old generation of overseas Chinese who returned to China gradually retired at the turn of the century, which partially resulted in the marginalization of the humanities and history that they had been leading. By contrast, social sciences took a distinctive turn toward scientization and internationalization — the former manifesting itself in the wide adoption or turning toward the social sciences norms in Europe and North America, while the latter is, to be accurate, an extremely unbalanced internationalization. Chinese universities are fervent students of European and North American experience, so neither Chinese institutions nor Chinese students are particularly interested in Southeast Asia. Excellent Chinese students do not usually choose Southeast Asia as their destination of studying abroad because diplomas issued in most

countries in the region may not be recognized when they return to China. This trend applies to the entire region except for Singapore.

In humanities (if we count study of the Southeast Asian languages as humanities), a very clear trend in the past 20 years is that an increasing number of higher education institutes are providing teaching of Southeast Asian languages. However, although language majors are increasing exponentially, they are mostly job-oriented and pay less attention to academic research.

Meanwhile, another noteworthy point is that Chinese students doing Southeast Asian studies abroad frequently fall — to different extents — under the influence of an unconscious “Sinocentrism.” European and North American academia expects Chinese students to contribute to the studies by bringing in more Chinese voices. Chinese students doing Southeast Asian studies in Europe and North America are expected to work on China-Southeast Asia relations or topics related to overseas Chinese instead of researching on mainstream Southeast Asian societies, which is an issue that needs addressing.

Discussion on the relations between area studies and various disciplines in China

The decision to open or close a center for area studies in US universities is closely linked to the specific arrangements and organization of each university. China, however, has a different ecology for area studies: Chinese universities are

prominently influenced by higher authorities. The State Council Academic Degrees Committee in China issued its *Brief Introduction to First-level Disciplines for Degree Awarding and Talent Cultivation*, which Chinese universities have to strictly follow. Currently, country-specific and area studies are set up as a second-level discipline under the first-level discipline of foreign language and literature. With the newly emerging cross-disciplinary subjects, it is getting more complicated to locate area studies within the map of disciplines. Generally speaking, there are three approaches for Chinese universities constructing their own area studies programs:

First are the specialized research institutes at comprehensive universities. PKUIAS was established in 2018, prior to which the university has already established a firm disciplinary foundation. In Southeast Asian studies, for example, PKU runs the five most predominant Southeast Asian language majors. In the meantime, the School of International Studies have always housed scholars conducting research on Southeast Asia while the Department of History has also at least two faculty members working on the region. Therefore, the key point in building the field of area studies for PKU is the integration of existing systems and organizations. Tsinghua University, which until the dawn of the 21st century was still a university specialized in engineering, developed its humanities fields relatively late. However, the university established a doctoral

program in Developing Country Studies in 2011 and has been mainly accepting students with relevant backgrounds in their undergraduate education, such as graduates from language majors of Beijing Foreign Studies University and Peking University, who would start specific disciplinary training in this doctoral program. Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, in comparison, is a standard Chinese university think tank. Although it has been making certain efforts in cross-disciplinary cooperation, the institute's academic research still revolves around a core of international politics.

Second are the foreign or international studies universities with Chinese characteristics. Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai International Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Sichuan International Studies University, Tianjin Foreign Studies University and their like were mostly established in the period between the 1940s and the 1960s. Back then, the People's Republic of China was only recently established and a strong need for gaining better understandings of Third World countries was widely felt, hence numerous language majors were established. Until the end of the 20th century, these universities were specialized universities focusing on foreign languages and literatures. Entering the 21st century, however, they all started to open up majors in political science, economics, law, communications and so on. Despite this, foreign languages and literatures retained their prominent

status in these universities. In the context of the rise of area studies in the past decade or so, foreign studies universities began a renewed attempt in (cross-)disciplinary reform. For example, universities including Beijing Foreign Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and Beijing Language and Culture University set up the second-level discipline of country-specific and area studies under their stronger first-level disciplines of foreign language and literature. Shanghai International Studies University, on the other hand, set up its country-specific and area studies not under the first-level discipline of foreign language and literature but political science which it established in the 1990s. Although these universities adopted different approaches, they were aiming at roughly the same target: to attempt at cross-disciplinary cooperation based on language teaching and research, and to nurture the growth of new fields of studies with the help of strong foreign language programs. The latter approach could be referred to as the disciplinization attempt of foreign studies universities.

Third is the natural division of labor and competition between different provinces in regard to Southeast Asian studies in China. Guangdong and Fujian are important home provinces for overseas Chinese, so their Southeast Asian studies have been paying more attention to Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore since its incipience. Guangxi and Yunnan have only limited numbers of overseas Chinese with local roots due

to their mainly land borders, so their focus lies mostly in China's neighboring countries on the Indochina Peninsula. Meanwhile, a significant change took place at the turn of the 21st century. Universities in coastal provinces, such as Xiamen University, Sun Yat-sen University and Jinan University, all established schools of International Studies based on existing institutes of Southeast Asian studies. With the expansion of the faculty, they also started to emphasize the identity of the school of international studies instead of the institute of Southeast Asian studies and intentionally phase out the concept of "Southeast Asia." Xiamen University and Jinan University retained their previous institutes, such as the academy of overseas Chinese studies and research school for Southeast Asian studies, when opening up the newer school of international studies, whereas Sun Yat-sen University went through a more thorough transformation and eliminated its institute of Southeast Asian studies after the establishment of its School of International Studies.

Another noteworthy point is the relations between research institutions and the domestic political ecology in China. The most prominent of such relations is the inter-provincial competition between Guangxi and Yunnan over the gateway status in China–Southeast Asia exchange and communications. In the past decade, the research journal in area studies of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences changed its name twice

from *Southeast Asia* to *Southeast Asian and South Asian Studies* then to *South Asian and Southeast Asian Studies*, which in effect reflects the shifts in provincial level policies. To align themselves with the changes in policy, research institutes and higher education institutions also adjust their directions and arrangements accordingly.

In general, despite the relatively early establishment of Southeast Asian studies in China, this field of studies has been profoundly influenced by area studies in the past ten years or so. Southeast Asian studies in China is apparently policy-oriented, which resulted in the exponential growth in policy research and language programs. However, fundamental research, especially in the humanities, has become marginalized in such a background. Different higher education institutions have diversified the approaches to Southeast Asian studies based on its own disciplinary assortment, coverage of language programs and local policy.

Southeast Asian studies underwent a so-called “Vietnam moment” in the US in 1975—a decline due to the decrease in Southeast Asia’s relevance to the US after the termination of the Vietnam War. Will area studies also encounter a “Vietnam moment” in China? Most probably, it will not; and even if it does, it will not be Southeast Asian studies who faces such a moment. Aung San Suu Kyi once commented that geographical neighbors are not one’s to choose. Southeast Asia has always

been a vital region neighboring China and its relevance to China will always remain. Benedict Anderson wrote in his autobiography that he considered Southeast Asian studies in the 1950s and 1960s in the US exhilarating because almost none of the issues had been scrupulously studied before. Despite the heritage of colonial research and the tradition of colonial knowledge production, the majority of issues arising in Southeast Asia appeared novel to US academia. As for Southeast Asian studies in China, what's new is actually only the concept of "area studies"; Southeast Asian studies has already firmly established its practices in China. Therefore, Southeast Asia is not fully "novel" for scholars working in Southeast Asian studies in China. Nonetheless, new discussions in this field of studies are absolutely necessary in the current historical background.

Scholars attending the salon discussed topics related to Southeast Asian studies in China after the keynote presentation.

Some scholars commented that academic output in China's Southeast Asian studies is concentrated in topics related to major countries in the region that play relatively more substantial roles in Southeast Asia affairs and China–Southeast Asia relations. In addition, they also have larger economies and stronger international influences. From another perspective, such an imbalance of attention also partially results from the relatively larger communities of researchers working on these countries in

China; the Vietnamese and Thai languages arguably have the most students amongst all Southeast Asian languages, whereas Indonesian studies are also popular due to the large community of returned overseas Chinese from Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s — research on Indonesia in institutions including Xiamen University, Sun Yat-sen University and Jinan University were all initially developed by returned overseas Chinese.

Moreover, the analogy between area studies in China in the 2010s and that in the US in the 1950s shouldn't overlook international studies in China in the 1950s. The 1950s witnessed the proposal of the “Five Principles for Peaceful Coexistence” by China and the speedy development of Southeast Asian studies and, more broadly, Asian, African and Latin American studies in China before the Cultural Revolution. Although the resources available for investing into the field of studies back then are not comparable to those now, the level of attention given to Southeast Asia in the 1950s was very high. Thus, academic attention or focus does shift between disciplines and regions.

Others stressed the importance of universalist expressions of particular regions. Moving beyond the 1980s and 1990s, some US scholars chose not to analyze countries or regions but narrowed the focus down to specific communities. They endeavored to universalize the particular experiences of particular areas and attempted to have them acknowledged by

social sciences as acceptable norms. This is an approach that is worth drawing lessons from for Southeast Asian studies in China.

Assistant Professor Shi Yue from the School of Foreign Languages pointed out in his concluding commentary on the keynote presentation that area studies in China currently comprises two aspects; the first is policy research — studies of the information and intelligence on the country in question, whereas the second is foreign language education, which works to serve the first aspect. These two aspects of academic activities have been active since the inception of this field of studies in China and form the basis of current area studies in the country, which in part led to the barriers between scholars working on different regions and countries. Prof. Shi concluded his remarks by noting that the salon had provided plenty of alternative approaches and suggestions, and it could be expected that area studies would prosper under the joint efforts of scholars from all disciplines.