

The 48th Broadyard Workshop
Seminar on Consider-All-Factors Study of Asian
Civilizations Project
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The Seminar on Consider-All-Factors Study of Asian Civilizations Project was held at the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) on October 15, 2021. Professor Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS and head of the project, presided the meeting where leaders of the eight sub-project teams presented their research plans and discussed sub-project names, research approaches, research questions, team staffing, sub-project collaboration, allocation of project funds and other questions. The eight sub-projects and their respective leaders are: Natural Environment and Resources in Asia - Xu Liyan, research fellow at the College of Architecture and Landscape of Peking University; Origination of Asian Civilizations - Wang Xianhua, professor at the Institute of Global History of Civilizations of Shanghai International Studies University; Asian Nations and Their Evolution - Tian Geng, tenured associate professor from the Department of Sociology of Peking University; The Evolution of Religions and Values in Asia - Zhang Jiamei, associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages of Peking University; Legal Systems in Asia - Chen Yifeng, associate professor at Peking University's Law School; State-building and Political

Development Paths in Asia - Wang Weihua, associate professor at the School of International Studies of Peking University; Economic Development in Asia - Zhang Yaguang, tenured associate professor at the School of Economics of Peking University; Exchanges and Mutual Learning Among Asian Civilizations - Du Xianbing, associate professor at the Institute of European Civilization of Tianjin Normal University.

1. Natural Environment and Resources in Asia

Xu Liyan, research fellow at the College of Architecture and Landscape of Peking University, has a different perspective from other members of the project due to his background in science and engineering. He believes that, since “environment and resources” are part of “geography” in a disciplinary sense, the sub-project of “Natural Environment and Resources in Asia” intends to explore the relationship between geographical factors and civilizations by studying civilizations in a broader geographical context.

“Environmental Determinism” is a classic and controversial Western theory on the relationship between a civilization and its physical environment. Although a long-standing theory, “Environmental Determinism” has flaws in its empirical studies and has strong ideological and racial biases. Therefore, “Environmental Determinism” and the “Orientalist” perspective it implies should be criticized, making it necessary to construct a new research paradigm and methodology.

To that end, Xu Liyan proposes to use the research paradigm of Complex Adaptive System (CAS), an approach adopted in the 1960s as criticism against environmental determinism and logical positivism, which advocates seeing the world from an evolutionary perspective, especially when observing a complex or coupled system of society and nature. CAS emphasizes key concepts such as complexity, adaptability, network and interaction. Asian civilizations and their geographical environment form a coupled system where humans and geographical factors adapt to and shape each other. In this complex and interactive network, civilizations interact with each other in a way that they evolve together for survival.

Xu Liyan's research consists of four parts. The first two parts are descriptive research which aim to provide an overview of the origination and natural environment of each civilization center and an analysis of the relationship between humans and natural environment. Based on the above-mentioned empirical research, the latter two parts are to construct a co-evolution model of the human-geography coupling system to illustrate the historical and geographic evolution over time.

Part 1 "Overview of Resource and Environmental Conditions in the Cradles of Asian Civilizations and Analysis of the Relationship Between Humans and Natural Environment Since the Last Glacial Period" will look back at the past 10,000 years and employ traditional methods in geographical studies

such as mapping and creating geographical information database. It will focus more on natural geography such as land features, forms and structure in Asia, but will also include human geography by creating several major civilizational centers and some smaller civilizational units on the map. The most important task of this part is to collect empirical data and sort out evident mapping relationships, for example, as China spans over two typical climatic zones, there should exist an evident coupling relationship between its geographical distribution and civilizational units.

Part 2 “Analysis of Geographical Impacts on the Exchanges Between Ancient Asian Civilizations” will mainly explain the impacts of geographical conditions on the exchanges between civilizations. For example, exchanges between civilizations could be hindered by mountains and rivers, but could also be accelerated by corridors. This part will also take empirical research as the basis and supplement with necessary descriptions.

Part 3 “Analysis of the Development Paths and Mechanisms of Ancient Asian Civilizations from the Perspective of Resource and Environmental Constraints” will establish a model. Instead of constructing a qualitative description-induction model, as is often the case in traditional geographical studies, Xu Liyan is keen on constructing a quantitative modeling-deduction model. In his view, “Natural Environment and Resources in Asia” is such an encompassing topic that it would be unrealistic for the various

sub-projects to rely on historical materials to study civilization-related matters; however, if the project could use a network system model to do abstract evolutionary simulation through network dynamics, it may be able to provide more sophisticated analysis and come to conclusions of greater universality.

By introducing two quantitative studies on the rise and fall of the Angkor civilization and the climatic adaptability of the Huai'an-Qingkou hub of the Grand Canal, Xu Liyan proposes that the sub-project construct a socio-ecological network model --- a geographical mapping network ABM --- of civilizational evolution and interaction. The model will be built on an optimal framework in which civilizations at turning points, as key actors, make decisions on the allocation of human, intellectual, and natural resources under resource and environmental constraints for the benefit of their own survival.

Part 4 "Analysis of the Changes in the Relationship between Humans and Natural Environment Since Modern Times and Their Impacts on the Development Paths of Asian Civilizations" will perform an evolutionary simulation with the model built in Part 3. The simulation results will then to be compared with the parameters from a model trained with historical facts to establish a baseline model, which then will be used for setting up various scenarios for analysis and discussion.

Regarding the above plan, Zan Tao pointed out that, in addition to the coupled geographical region of the Eurasian steppe,

the long-term and fundamental impacts of the Tibetan Plateau on Indian and Chinese civilizations and even those in the entire East Asian region were also worthy of consideration. Wang Weihua inquired about endogenous technical issues and specific parameter settings of the model, and emphasized the importance of standardizing map use. Wang Xianhua pointed out two potential issues in the framework of the model. First, the difficulty in obtaining ancient climatic data and the fact that related research and analysis are relatively primitive may challenge the validity of the model; Second, it is necessary to establish a valid model for macro studies, as it remains to be seen whether a micro-level model derived from individual case studies is applicable to a macro-level studies of Asian civilizations. Du Xianbing noted that, given natural environment being the most direct cause of the differences among Asian civilizations, this sub-project should consider the extent to which geographical environment led to the differences among Asian civilizations in different periods and in different dimensions. Qian Chengdan recognized the well-defined focus and approach of this sub-project, but pointed out two issues to be aware of: One is to consider responding to the “World Island” theory when discussing “Environmental Determinism” and “Orientalism”; Second, the sub-project should focus on the most critical parts of relevant quantitative research in its report due to word count constraint, and present the results in a more readable way to reach a broader audience.

2. Origination of Asian Civilizations

Wang Xianhua, professor at the Institute for the Global History of Civilizations of Shanghai International Studies University, believes that the sub-project of “Origination of Asian Civilizations” should address three issues: the rationality and legitimacy of “Asian civilizations” as a concept in the studies of history of civilization, the characteristics of the origination process of “Asian civilizations”, and the basic sequence of development and key features of the traditional societies formed by “Asian civilizations”.

The first issue is highly theoretical and sets the norm for subsequent narratives and presentation of “Asian civilizations”. The second has universal importance as the origination of “Asian civilizations” is also part of how human civilization originated both logically and historically. The third demonstrates, through narratives, the normative historical process and social characteristics of the traditional societies as part of “Asian civilizations” and provides readers with historical contexts. In addition, he believes that more discussion is needed on the definition of “civilization”, for which he proposes to use the term “public sphere” instead.

Wang Xianhua pointed out that the above three research tasks should focus on the following three points in their methodologies and approaches.

First, further discuss the concept of “Asian civilizations” at theoretical level. “Asian civilizations” is both a generic concept and a meta-concept, the former implying a general understanding of various civilizations and traditions in the Asian region, while the latter implying a meta-concept one proposes about human civilizations based on such general understanding. Therefore, an attempt to approach “Asian civilizations” as an inductive generic concept would entail making comparative studies of civilizations, especially by comparing civilizations and traditions in Asia with those in Europe and America. As a meta-concept, “Asian civilizations” is part of our understanding of the entire human civilization, with an emphasis on the “Asian” humanistic core. Therefore, the theoretical discussion of “Asian civilizations” would entail innovative application of existing theoretical frameworks in making comparative cultural studies. “Asian civilizations” can work both as a generic concept and as a meta-concept of human civilization, and it is a legitimate concept both in theory and in practice.

Second, take ancient Mesopotamia and ancient China, the two most representative civilizations, as the starting point to examine the specific origination of “Asian civilizations”, which will be a process to gain a new understanding of the origination of human civilization. So far, academic research on the origination of human civilization mainly relies on archaeological discoveries in Asia and Africa. The research on Mesopotamia,

China and India in Asia, and that on Egypt along the Asia-Africa border have remained the most significant subject areas in the studies on human origination and origination of human civilization.

With regard to research approach and methodology, the research on the origination of Asian civilizations will first and foremost draw on worldwide archaeological and anthropological research. However, since this research aims to propose innovative views, it is necessary to refer to research results on the origination of human civilizations in other regions as well, in addition to the research on ancient Mesopotamia and ancient China, the two most representative civilizations. On the research method front, in addition to the traditional methods commonly used in studies on the origination of human civilization, new techniques used in areas such as ancient-DNA research, microscopic archaeology, and paleoclimatology will also be employed.

Third, improve the traditional methodologies in historical sociology to provide an analytical narrative on the evolution of the traditional societies in Asia and reveal the understanding of such traditional societies through analysis, argumentation and comparison. "Asian civilizations" encompasses traditional societies in China, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia and other regions. This sub-project will mainly draw upon the research approaches and methods used in historical sociology, where the tradition represented by Michael Mann has become, to

a certain extent, a major branch of writing about global history for some time, mainly due to its distinctive awareness of methodology, with which it has established a set of effective methods to display in various dimensions the social conditions in a given historical period. However, the methodologies in historical sociology are not immune to neglects or bias when used to study certain aspects of social life, such as natural environment, science and technology, and spiritual traditions, therefore, it is important to make improvements to these methodologies.

Wang Xianhua finally reported the assignment of team members' responsibilities and proposed to present the research results in two parts, with the first part focusing on theoretical discussions and the second on historical analysis.

Qian Chengdan recognized Wang Xianhua's focus on innovation and brought up two points for consideration: First, it is important to have a global awareness, in other words, in addition to Mesopotamia and ancient China, the origination of civilizations in north and south Asia should also be included. Second, it should address the emergence of civilizational roots, particularly the roots of different values, with a focus on the Axial Age.

3. The Evolution of Asian Nations

Tian Geng, tenured associate professor at Department of Sociology of Peking University, believes that the sub-project of "The Evolution of Asian Nations" is essentially a study on

civilizational dynamics in the formation of Asian nations, which aims to provide methods for and paths to explaining the characteristics of Asian civilizations.

As one of the origins of human civilization, Asian civilizations comprise a number of ethnic groups, making it complicated to discuss or record the history by ethnic groups, therefore, instead of discussing the history by ethnic groups, this sub-project intends to draw upon the space-time view in the studies of regional history and the theoretical framework on ethnic groups in historical sociology to review the long-term ecological evolution and civilizational history by dividing the Asian civilizational space into several civilizational arenas along Central Eurasia (land) and the Indo-Pacific oceans. Each civilizational arena is a settlement space in human ecology, where ethnic groups are the core actors. In addition to giving a brief account of ethnic ecology, the core discussion about each civilizational arena will be around its ethnogenesis and ethnic interaction; in other words, the research will use the method of human ecology to explain the genesis of and interaction between ethnic groups in each civilizational arena.

The reason to center the discussion on ethnogenesis and ethnic interaction is not only due to the fact that they are paradigms of interest to social scientists, but also because the relationship between civilization and nation-state has been a core subject in civilization theories after World War I. Western

intellectuals who have gone through the two world wars, especially those from Europe, have established well-defined theories in the subject. Given that civilizations thrive by spreading across borders, while nation-states survive, to some extent, by closing their borders, does it mean nation-states are a key force in cutting off civilizations? In this sense, ethnic groups will eventually evolve to face the issue of nation-state building. As a primary identity and a uniting power, ethnic groups stand out from other civilized identities and form their own boundaries. Since ethnic interaction is in effect a process of civilizations breaking nation-state boundaries, does ethnic identity become stronger or weaker with peace or conflicts between ethnic groups? The competition between civilization and nation-state can be viewed as an undercurrent in social science theories on civilization or nation-state. As historical studies and humanities studies use similar concepts of civilization and nation-state, this research will focus on the two mechanisms of ethnogenesis and ethnic interaction.

A civilizational arena, as an ethnic ecology, has four key narrative pillars, or fundamental dimensions in which changes in a community are observed in the studies of human ecology: adjustment, assimilation, transformation, and competition, which determine how actors, such as humans, industry, or ethnic groups, live in a settlement space. Placed in the historical context of each civilizational arena, the four pillars are to be the starting point for

analyzing the evolution of ethnic groups in the space. The form and order in which the evolution take place in the four dimensions determine the types of ethnic groups the actors eventually evolve into in the settlement space -- whether they become a master or a servant, or marginalized in the civilization. Analyses in the four dimensions will provide an overarching framework for the historical narratives of each civilizational arena.

This research will review two core sets of research literature. One is the historical works with a focus on Asian history, the general history of Asian civilizational arenas, and the history of ethnic groups in each civilizational arena. The other is the social science literature that studies Asian nations, including comparative historical research, especially social science works authored by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists from the perspective of human ecology, as well as by historians with keen interest in social sciences.

Tian Geng proposes that the research set five civilizational arenas, including East Asia, the eastern part of Central Eurasia, the part of Central Asia extended to Turkey, the Southeast Asia region including the South China Sea, and the South Asian subcontinent. Regarding the English translation of the term “*ronghe* (融合)” in Chinese, Tian Geng prefers “assimilation” to “integration” because, on the one hand, it is a common term in social science, and on the other, it has become a neutral word in the American academia. Regarding whether “nation” should be

interpreted in its political sense or in the sense of cultural kinship, he believes that current social science research encompasses a spectrum, at one end of which is primordialism, a theory that emphasizes blood kinship and became the theoretical foundation for the racial disasters of the 20th century, while at the other end is pure constructivism, which believes in the role of civilization in the development of common ethnicity. For example, the French Revolution implanted civilization as a commonality into the French ethnicity by eliminating the shared blood kinship. However, France, which regards civilization as its ethnicity, has found itself caught in many challenges. Therefore, the present issue is how to get rid of the tension between the two and create a healthy concept of nation.

4. The Evolution of Religions and Values in Asia

Zhang Jiamei, associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages of Peking University, presented the research plan of “The Evolution of Religions and Values in Asia”. She analyzed the relationship between religions and values in Asia by examining the role that the relationships between intellectual history, politics and religions play in constructing social orders.

In the development in all fields, including the development of human cognition of the world, the cognition of humans themselves, the establishment of social orders, organization of production and artistic creation, religions have emerged, established and evolved over a long passage of time to become

part of human life in all aspects and have been playing different roles in different periods and in different regions. From east to west, religions, ranging from Shinto in Japan, Confucianism and Taoism in China, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism in South Asia, Zoroastrianism in Iran, Islam in Saudi Arabia, to Christianity and Judaism in the Palestinian territories, have seen conflicts and assimilation in the process of their respective development and dissemination. Thoughts, precepts and rituals of these religions have infiltrated into every nuanced aspect of life and have become the root of thoughts in their own regions by shaping world views and values.

Roots of world views, shaped by natural environment and humanistic conditions, have become an integral part of lives of local people and are still having an impact on ethnic relations, identities and other aspects of the world today. This sub-project will construct three trees: one to focus on Confucianism in East Asia, one on various religions in India, and one on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The reason for using this three-tree structure is that the branching can illustrate the process of religious dissemination and communication, in which conflicts and integration took place as cultures from different regions encounter one another. Take Buddhism for example, it spread in inland China, Japan, Southeast Asia and Tibet in different ways. By examining how well Buddhism has disseminated and what has become of it in different regions, the study could find out which

concepts, ideas, and lifestyles have been absorbed by local cultures. Conversely, the study could also explore the core connotation of Asian values and how the way of thinking and lifestyle in secular societies have been influenced by religious factors.

According to Zhang Jiamei, this research will focus on two aspects. First, analysis of the natural environmental factors and social process factors in the origination, development, and dissemination of religions originated in Asia. Second, discussion of the religious factors in Asian social values. The research will place the analysis and discussion mainly in historical and cultural-historical contexts. Based on religious-sociological theories, it will explore the relationship between religion and other cultural forms in a society, as well as the social functions of religion. It will use methods such as cross-cultural comparative analysis, historical analysis, investigation research, and statistical analysis to study social construction issues in different religious contexts. The construction of social order involves the relationship between religion and politics, an area that has seen relatively abundant research. The purpose of this research is to systematically discuss the clashes and integration in the dissemination of Asian religions, analyze the role and influence of Asian religions in shaping and changing humanistic social values, and explore the connotation of Asian values.

The research will consist of four parts. Part 1 is about the origination, development, and dissemination of religions. By examining the natural and social factors, this part will conduct an in-depth analysis of the more familiar religions in India and East Asia. It will use the example of today's Jewish communities to illustrate that religion could be a result of both inheritance of philosophical thoughts and emulation of social models, or in other words, religious beliefs do not affect one's cognition of the world. Part 2 will focus on clashes and integration between religions. For example, how Buddhism was localized in different ways across various regions. It will also focus on compensatory absorption. For instance, how Buddhism bridged the gap in abstract concepts in Chinese Han region, and integrated with Confucianism and Taoism to develop into a separate sect of the religion. Meanwhile, as a religion originated in India and its concept of karma-reward rooted in India, Buddhism was also broadly absorbed by Hinduism. Part 3 will discuss the role of religion in the construction of social orders. Part 4 will look at religious factors in the evolution of values and examine the subject, structure and manifestation of various values, such as respect, loyalty and faith, under the influence of different religions, as well as the differences in the relationship between individuals and communities. It will also discuss value consensus that has endured the process of cultural communication and integration.

During the discussion session, Zhang Yaguang noted that if the “and” in “Religions and Values in Asia” indicates a causal relationship, many non-religious factors that had an impact on values could be left out. Qian Chengdan suggested that the team find proper choice of words to incorporate other forms of belief systems such as Shamanism. He also emphasized the importance to examine the commonalities and differences between different religions or belief systems, as well as to look into the status of religion in pre-Islamic Iran in detail.

5. Legal Systems in Asia

Chen Yifeng, associate professor at Peking University Law School, believes the research of “Legal Systems in Asia” should review the evolution of legal thoughts and systems in Asia, with a focus on the transformation from traditional legal orders (e.g. the Chinese, Islamic and Hindu law systems and Jewish law, etc.) to modern legal orders in Asian countries, and respond to theories such as Legal Orientalism, theories on globalization of law and theories on law and development (modernization of law).

Legal Orientalism argues that since Eastern countries did not have laws, it was necessary to subject them to colonial rule. Theories on globalization of law, whether those that have become increasingly US-centered amid the US domination of the world, or earlier European theories that had focused more on the importance of transplanted and modernized law to nation-state building, generally emphasize the impact of law on the

whole world in formality. Theories on law and development or on modernization of law emphasize the role of law in economic and social development in today's nation-state countries. This research should reflect on whether it is necessary to introduce market-based property rights system, transaction system, and democratic system for economic and social development of a country. Based on Asian experience, the research will examine the efforts of Asian countries to address legal issues such as order, justice, dispute settlement, social distribution, among others, and then reflect on liberal views of law such as formalism, nationalism, and judicial centralism. The sub-project will also look at the role and status of law in establishing orders in Asia and the world as a whole, as well as the role of law in maintaining imperial legal order, Asian legal order, and colonial rule.

Chen Yifeng emphasized the following five research focuses. First, to focus on the relationship between the three major legal traditions/legal circles, including Chinese, Islamic and Hindu legal systems, as well as the relationship between smaller independent legal traditions, such as Jewish and Persian laws, and large cultural circles, civilization circles, and empires. Second, to focus on transformation of law and issues such as how colonialism impacted and transformed traditional law systems, the role of law in nation-state building, the relationship between economic globalization and establishment of rule of law in a market economy, the role of international human rights law in

constitutionalism construction, as well as the relationship between anti-globalization and restoration of traditional legal systems, etc. Third, to focus on the introduction of and the interaction between other legal traditions, such as the mutual influence of and interaction between common law system, civil law system, socialist legal system, and Christian legal system. Fourth, to focus on the interpretation of legal concepts, for instance, how “East” and “law” have been defined in legal discussions of “law” in the East. Given that Eastern traditions emphasize legal pluralism, which is distinctively featured by the interaction between national law, religious law, international law, local customary law, and tribal law, it is important to consider the competition, interaction, and infiltration among legal traditions. Fifth, to focus on transformation of law in imperial historical context, that is, to what extent law played a fundamental and structural role in capitalist expansion, decolonization movement, and other exogenous changes.

On the research methodology front, the research will focus on the role of law as culture, tradition, values and order, rather than merely as text. It will examine the mutual influence between national law and traditional legal system, the interaction between law and society, politics and economy, as well as the role of law as a technical and an institutional element in establishing imperial/regional orders.

Chen Yifeng also proposed four points for reflection, including the connotation of Asian legal traditions, the diversity within Asia, the relationship between legal traditions and civilizations in Asia and the collaboration with other sub-projects. In addition to emphasizing the particularities of Asian legal traditions, the research should also pay attention to the interpretability and universality of the traditions. Since not much research has been done on Asian legal traditions either at home or abroad due to its complexity, the sub-project is expected to fill certain research gap in this area.

During the discussion session, Chen Yifeng noted the reason that the research on Hindu law system would look back to the colonial period was due to the fact that customary laws in India had been scattered and ununified, therefore, in order to make their rule easier, British colonists created the Hindu law system by compiling customary laws and having Indian classics translated into English and French in Britain. Wang Weihua pointed out the importance to consider an Asian characteristic, that is, unlike in modern laws where jurisdiction is unitary, two parallel systems -- law and tradition --- were both in place in Asia, including Southeast Asia, where they were applied to different issues, therefore, it would be important to consider legal practices in addition to legal reasoning. Chen Yifeng agreed that it is highly necessary to recognize this Asian characteristic, as law systems in Asia did have in place both laws enforced mainly by the state

and laws enforced by other authorities and orders. Tian Geng noted that the so-called fundamental law, which has evolved from traditions, has been most severely impacted by judicial reform in criminal law. Chen Yifeng added that behind any legal reform is the overturning and re-thinking of the concept of order and fundamental values, therefore, even a trivial legal reform could bring profound changes to the values in a society.

Qian Chengdan suggested that, given the number of law-related issues, the research should focus on the most important questions, and take religious laws and law enforceability into consideration. He made the following two suggestions: First, in addition to introducing the form and enforcement of different law systems, the research should also explain their respective core concerns, such as freedom, equality or order. People in Asia have different concerns from those in the West, for instance, Chinese people are more concerned about order than personal freedom. It is not to say which law system is better than the other, but they are simply different due to different perspectives and different core values. Second, it is necessary to examine the extent to which Western legal thoughts were absorbed in different Asian regions in the context of modern Western colonialism and cultural dissemination.

6. State Building and Political Development Paths of Asian Countries

According to Wang Weihua, associate professor at the School of International Studies of Peking University, the sub-project of “State Building and Political Development Paths of Asian Countries” will examine the historical development paths in the two dimensions of “nation-state building” and “state building” and review the political situations in various Asian countries from the perspective of diversity in political development paths.

Western political discourse system used to emphasize the definitive role of form of government, that it, different forms of government, when combined with traditional and modern factors, would determine whether a country could transition to a path toward so-called modernization and democracy. To date, Asian countries that are officially recognized as sovereign states include: 5 countries in East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea and Mongolia), 11 countries in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Brunei and Singapore), 7 countries in South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives), 5 countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), and 21 countries in West Asia (including Afghanistan, which is traditionally considered part of West Asia, and a broader classification also includes Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan).

Based on the classification into the above five major regions, the research will further classify Asian countries by regime type. In Western political system, countries are either democratic or authoritarian regimes, or in some cases flawed democracies, which is in the middle of the spectrum, and hybrid regimes. Such a classification ignores the diversity of political development paths in Asia and its relevance to world politics.

For this reason, Wang Weihua intends to classify Asian countries into six types by political development path: The first type are countries that have insisted on leadership by the Communist Party, such as China, North Korea, Vietnam and Laos; The second type are those which were previously socialist countries led by the Communist Party, such as Mongolia, the five Central Asian countries, and Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; The third type are those that have taken the secular republican path in the standard Western sense during decolonization, such as South Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Turkey among others, which restructured their form of government according to the modern Western structure; The fourth type are Islamic republics, such as Pakistan and Iran (and the previous Afghanistan); The fifth type are constitutional monarchies, such as Japan, which is highly recognized by the West, Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia, as well as Bhutan and Jordan; The sixth type are absolute

monarchies, including Brunei, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Looking back at the political development paths that Asian countries have taken, Wang Weihua believes that Asian countries became part of the world's political system as they started the process of "nation-state building" and "state building" in the modern sense, in which they began to deny their own profound political traditions as they tried to follow the so-called advanced Western path toward "nation-state building" and "state building". It is against this broad historical context that the research is to hold its discussion.

What turning points have led different countries to their current political development paths? In Wang Weihua's view, there are six such turning points: the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of the communist revolution, the post-World War II decolonization in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and the US, the disintegration of the Soviet Union; the Islamic revival, to a certain extent, from the 1970s to 1990s, and the third wave of democratization and color revolutions since the 1990s. It is worth noting that China and Japan each chose their own unique political development path, which led to drastic changes in their respective history (the Old Democratic Revolution in China and the Meiji Restoration in Japan). Since they were not duplicated by other countries, the two paths do not have universal relevance.

Based on the above six turning points, the first part of the sub-project is to classify and define the political development paths taken by Asian countries, and find out the commonalities between these paths, as well as the characteristics and commonalities among countries in the five major regions. It will also observe the extent to which the above-mentioned countries are related to and different from the traditions in traditional farming, nomadic and island regions, respectively, within the framework of their current political development paths. This part seeks to answer two main questions: First, as form of government was never a key issue in Asian politics, though it has become a key issue inexplicably now, is it appropriate to discuss political development paths around form of government? Second, ancient political traditions of Asian countries were reflected in state regimes based on developed bureaucratic systems. Such regimes relied on three fundamental capabilities: military strength, financial resources, and cultural influence, which were manifested in different ways under different historical and geographical conditions in different countries. For example, whether a country's military strength was in cavalry or infantry, or whether it relied on external plundering or internal taxation for financial resources, or whether a country was culturally brought together by religion or ethics, all having had profound impact on how the country is organized in government and in political system.

Overall, by giving an account of the diversified political development paths taken by different Asian countries, this part will refute the dichotomy of democracy and autocracy currently popular with the Western academia. Then, it will examine the diverse practices and historical evolution of the institutional systems and capacity building in Asian countries. It will also consider the fact that political traditions have, in most cases, left a legacy on the political development paths of these modern Asian countries, or have led to certain restrictions, which are simply different from those in the current mainstream political discourse system.

The second part of this sub-project will engage in dialogues with Western theories around four key propositions and seek alternative explanations within the above-mentioned framework. First, to have a dialogue with the mainstream discourse narratives in nation-state building and explore evolutionary paths to political community from the perspective of Asian experience. Second, to have a dialogue with the myths about Eastern despotism. Categorizing the precocious Asian bureaucratic systems, which have shaped diverse paths, as despotism shows a lack of respect for the traditional political realities in Asia. Third, to have a dialogue with the traditions of national liberation movements and rethink the influence of the legacy of colonial rule and national liberation movements on state building in Asian countries and the formation of their political development paths. The movements

will be divided into the following types: national revolution, communist revolution, and peaceful independence. Fourth, to have a dialogue with James Scott's theory about peoples in mountainous frontiers escaping being governed in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, and seek appropriate explanations based on different experiences of various Asian countries. The four dialogues will revolve around one central task, that is, to re-examine the experience of "nation-state building" and "state building" in Asian countries, analyze the impact of history on the choice of political development paths by different countries, and predict the future direction of political development paths.

Finally, based on the historical review and reinterpretation of the key issues, the research will come to a general conclusion about the interactions between state building and policy paths in Asian countries. The conclusion is to address at least two questions. The first is about conflict. The diverse polities in Asia evolved into political communities through interactions and mutual political assimilation in the course of conflicts. The second is about the choice of future paths. What inspiration could a revisit of history provide to Asian countries regarding their future political development? What could China's efforts to modernize its national governance system and governance capabilities mean to other countries? The theoretical dialogues in this sub-project are intended to speak to not only the specific realities in Asia, but also the mainstream fundamental theories in

political science, in a bid to propose a new and more inclusive framework.

In the discussion session, Wang Weihua added that the research would make parallel and contrastive comparisons in the discussion connected by the six turning points. Taking the Communist path as an example, the research will compare the success stories of China and Vietnam, and also contrast countries that have adhered to the Communist path with those that have abandoned it for other paths. In this way, the diversity of paths will be presented at three levels: at the first level are the differences in political development paths among the three major civilization systems, which will mainly focus on the influence of traditional political and historical heritage on modern politics; at the second level are the differences between the six types of Asian countries; at the third level are the country-specific differences. In this way, the research will present in depth the diversity of Asian political development paths.

7. Economic Development in Asia

Zhang Yaguang, tenured associate professor at PKU's School of Economics, believes the sub-project of "Economic Development in Asia" could introduce innovations at foundational level. From the perspective of economic studies, the economic development in Asia involves two themes -- one on economic history and the other on the history of economic thought. Zhang Yaguang himself is mainly engaged in the study

of history of economic thought in China, but this sub-project will mainly focus on some basic issues in economic history. While many Chinese scholars study global economic history, only a limited number of them study Asian economic history, let alone systematic country-specific economic history, where language barrier is the greatest challenge. Therefore, the most important task of this sub-project at present is to address the basic issues in the studies of economic history. By contrast, Asian legal studies has established a well-defined taxonomy, which includes Chinese, Hindu and Jewish legal families, and civilization studies also established civilizational arenas, however, the studies of economic history has not even developed any classic region-based taxonomy. In this sense, the first issue to address is how to classify and summarize the respective characteristics to display the diversity.

This sub-project will follow the principal logic of historical materialism. As the foundation for and an important manifestation of civilization continuation and evolution, economic development is an important indicator of the rise and fall of a civilization. It is also an indicator that can be most easily quantified among all sub-projects. Some data provided in *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, and mainstream research on economic history believe that Asian economies, including China and India, were leading the world before the Industrial Revolution, and even the US at its peak could not

surpass China during the period of Qianlong Emperor. With its rapid recovery since the World War II, the Asian economy has seen many new trends and changes in the past decade. However, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, another very important research literature, quoted Fernand Braudel of the French Annales school in believing that historically China had been lagging behind the West in economic development, a view that we obviously do not agree with. These are two opposing views on economic history.

On the research literature front, only a limited number of classic works are available for reference. Despite its debated China-related data, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* is still a book that provides systematic data. Classic works can provide basic structure and theoretical clues for the reference of this sub-project research. As *The Great Divergence* argues that “(before the mid-19th century) the most developed parts of Western Europe seem to have shared crucial economic features with other densely populated core areas in Eurasia”, it is worth exploring the commonalities within Asia and between Asia and Europe. In *International Relations of Modern China*, Takeshi Hamashita answers to a certain extent the questions about Asia’s motivations, selection criteria, and acceptance methods in economic development, but he still ignores some regions and fields. It will be of significant meaning if we can fill the gap. *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* believes that European

and American countries are the unconscious successors of the industrial revolution of the Song Dynasty. If this is the case, this sub-project should also compare Asian and European economies and examine the succession relationship between them. The discussions in *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* on issues such as “commonality and similarity or characteristics and differences”, “continuity or discontinuity” and “horizontal integration or vertical segmentation” are also worthy of reference from the perspective of economic history.

With regard to research content, this sub-project will focus on three issues:

First, the development of Asian economy as a whole and similarities between Asian countries in the pre-modern period. It will mainly examine the preconditions of economic development, the common challenges and dilemmas, as well as the common goals and typical performances. The pre-industrial period was dominated by the intensive, decentralized and non-market-oriented small farmer economy, supplemented by the primitive handicraft and business sectors. Despite the many differences in religion and culture, China, Russia, India and other Asian countries shared many commonalities in economic development and faced common challenges as Asian countries. After the Industrial Revolution, many Asian countries, as part of the colonial economy, were forced to join the world economic system to become sources of raw materials and markets for products from

European and American countries. This inevitably led Asian countries to the intertwined and parallel paths toward economic modernization and national independence movement. Asian countries also set modernization as their economic development goal, which encompasses industrialization, urbanization, equitable wealth distribution, social welfare, and social mobility, among others.

Second, the differences between economic development paths within Asia. This part will be more economics-oriented and focus on factors including the driving forces of economic development (government domination or market orientation), industrial structure (unitary or pluralist), ownership structure (shared, private or mixed), development strategy (domestic-oriented or export-oriented), transformation approach (incremental reform, radical reform, or revolution), and distribution mechanism (inclusive or extractive). This part aims to review the economic development strategies and evolutionary routes of the entire Asia. Taking China's modern industrial paths as an example, Lin Zexu and Wei Yuan advocated the development model of "introducing arms industry"; Wang Tao, Xue Fucheng, and Zheng Guanying advocated the "trade-oriented" model, which emphasized developing commerce first; Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao advocated driving the development of the whole economy with industrial development; Sun Yat-sen advocated an "overall strategic" model and believed that "Those

who seek for industrial development cannot succeed if they only focus on one sector; only by establishing a complete industrial system to allow the simultaneous development of different sectors, can the goal be achieved.”

Third, the evaluation of and reflection on the paths of Asian economic development. The economic development of Asia since modern times marks a revival and reconstruction of ancient civilizations and provides feasible solutions for the integration and mutual learning between different civilizations. Reflecting on the characteristics of Asian economic development paths will provide updates to the existing theories of development economics and responses to Western theories such as “end of history” and “clash of civilizations”. The research will also provide an opportunity to discuss China’s role in this development landscape, as well as in the interaction and mutual influence between China and the rest of Asia and even the West.

In respect of research methodology, the sub-project will mainly use case analysis, comparative analysis and quantitative analysis. One of the practical constraints at present is that traditional quantitative empirical data in economic history research cannot support a complete time series or metric analysis. With the method of case analysis, the research will use the cases of representative countries (or regions) and representative time periods to explore the core elements and general patterns of Asian economic development paths, which will form the basis for

examining their commonalities and differences. Based on the case analysis of the “Four Asian Tigers,” the research will examine the respective measures adopted in the stage of government intervention and the stage of combining market forces with government guidance. With comparative analysis method, the research will conduct comparative studies between various civilization circles within Asia and between Asia and the rest of the world to mainly explore the differences between Asian economic development paths and the native models in Europe and the US, as well as the relevance for the world’s economic development in the future. Based on the comparisons between China, India and Saudi Arabia, the research will analyze different industrial paths. The research will use regional, international and institutional databases to extensively collect data and materials about the achievements and characteristics of Asian economic development and use both qualitative and quantitative analysis to reveal the basic patterns and prospects of Asian economic development in a more scientific way. However, there are concerns about the time span and geographic coverage of such databases: data from history and economic history databases may be lacking in comparability, integrity and standard format, as such databases tend to focus on long periods of time; economic databases, though more complete and scientific, mostly started after the WWII, and they generally do not confine their data to

Asia, but instead may cover as broadly as worldwide or as narrowly as specific member states only.

In addition to culminating in a project report, the research also plans to establish an Asian research literature repository and database. While the former can be used for further research on the history of Asian economic thought, the latter can support other projects on Asian economic development. The ultimate goal of this sub-project is to review the commonalities, differences and related evaluations of Asian economic development paths from the perspective of civilizational diversity and inclusiveness, in a bid to provide academic support for Asian civilizations to cooperate in innovative ways and create mutual benefits in the new development context. The research also aims to establish an initial research literature repository and database that reflect the experience of Asian economic development, and provide original insights and research results to lay the foundation for the exploration and establishment of new development theories and frameworks with Chinese characteristics, which share an Asian perspective and global vision.

Qian Chengdan pointed out that, though many scholars have done broad macro research, it is necessary for studies on Asian civilizations, especially those on Asian economy, to narrow down to specific regions, especially to the most important regions and countries. At present, domestic research capabilities in this area are extremely limited, with very few researchers specialized in

country-specific studies, which is even the case for large countries such as the US, let alone for small countries. Though many researchers are engaged in international economic macro studies or overall national economic studies, few looks into specific industries. Therefore, for this sub-project, it would be a meaningful first step to provide a clear account of the economic situation and realities in major regions and certain major countries in Asia. It would then be a step forward to generalize different development paths and models from the data and realities. A third step for the research is to provide theories on a macro and foundational level. In addition, given that Asia is home to economies at different development levels, which range from the second and third largest economies to the third and fourth smallest economies in the world, it is suggested the research provide an overview of the status and level of economic development of Asian economies before presenting the specific situation in each country.

8. Exchange and Mutual Learning Among Asian Civilizations

Du Xianbing, associate professor at the Institute of European Civilization of Tianjin Normal University, made a presentation on the guideline, content design, research methodology, reference materials and research plan of the sub-project of “Exchange and Mutual Learning Among Asian Civilizations”.

Du Xianbing's research is guided by the series of speeches by General Secretary Xi Jinping on the community of shared future for mankind and the exchange of civilizations since 2014, as well as Prof. Qian Chengdan's thoughts on the diversity of civilizations and Asian civilizations. General Secretary Xi Jinping's speeches contain various proposals and views on building a community with a shared future for mankind and promoting exchanges and interaction among civilizations, including the following three main points: First is an awareness of the attributes of civilization. Civilizations should be diverse, equal, inclusive, disseminative, and open, so as to provide possibilities for exchanges and mutual learning. Second is the necessity of exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. Exchange and mutual learning are the essential requirements for the development of civilizations. Diversity brings exchange, exchange breeds integration, and integration produces progress. Third is a civilization outlook that emphasizes equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness to facilitate exchange and mutual learning. From a practical point of view, the interaction among Asian civilizations and even among human civilizations should be further promoted to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

Du Xianbing believes that Prof. Qian Chengdan's macro and holistic views about the diversity of civilizations provide theoretical support for General Secretary Xi Jinping's speeches

from the perspectives of the entire human history, global history, and world history, which can be summarized in the following four main points: First, to emphasize the diversity of civilizations. Diversity is the most essential and important attribute of civilizations, as each civilization has its unique characteristics. Second, civilization depends on two vehicles for existence -- the spiritual vehicle, which is embodied in ideologies, and the political vehicle, which is represented by nations. Third, the parallel and independent development of various civilizations has been disrupted by the West since modern times. Modernization and globalization have incorporated ancient civilizations and empowered some of them with new vitality and missions at the same time. Fourth, Asia had been the center of human civilization until the emergence of capitalism in Europe.

This sub-project will focus on the evolution of human civilization over the past thousands of years and review, from a global perspective, the exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations in East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia in cultural, economic, technological and institutional dimensions, as well as the interactions between civilizations in Asia, Europe, and Africa to reveal the inherent patterns and far-reaching influence of exchanges and mutual learning among Asian civilizations, highlight China's contributions to Asian civilizations, explore the value of Asian civilizations to human

civilization as a whole, and consider the necessity and possibility of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

The research will consist of five parts. Part 1 will look at the diverse Asian civilizations, which will examine the various factors contributing to the uniqueness of civilizations in Asia, such as geographical environment, civilization origin, ethnic evolution, climate, geology, water distribution and so on. Part 2 will examine the interactions between ancient farming civilizations and nomadic civilizations in Asia, which includes cultural exchanges, business exchanges, mutual learning of technologies, population movements, and armed conflicts, etc. Part 3 will focus on the internal and external exchanges of modern Asian civilizations. With the spread of Western learning to the East, Western cultures have promoted the transformation of Asian cultures, for example, the emergence of Western learning in China, the Rangaku (Western learning) in Japan, Shixue (pragmatism) and other trends of thought in East Asia. With the expansion of the West and the economic exchanges between the East and the West, Asian civilizations were driven into a world economic system dominated by Europe. The formation of a state is closely related to politics, and regions learned from each other in their striving for national liberation and state independence. Part 4 will focus on the co-prosperity of Asian civilizations in the process of modernization. The Belt and Road initiative has promoted the co-construction of Asian civilizations. Part 5 will

be a theoretical reflection on the exchange and mutual learning among Asian civilizations from the perspective of China.

In addition, the study will also focus on several pairs of relationships: big and small (relationships between big civilizations and small civilizations; between the world and Asia; between Asia and China), more and one (relationships between other civilizations in the world and the Asian civilization; between other Asian civilizations and Chinese civilization), differences and similarities (differences and similarities; local and global), changes and constants (interruption and continuation of exchanges and mutual learning), external and internal (representation and motivation of exchanges and mutual learning), center and periphery (status and influence of different civilizations).

With regard to research methodology, this sub-project will mainly use methods in historical studies. It will use the dual-evidence method to verify written records against unearthed cultural relics to better present the history of civilizational exchanges. It will also leverage the theories and methods of studies on global history to strengthen the comparisons between different periods and between different civilizations, with a focus on the coexistence of different civilizations at various turning points. In addition, it will draw upon research results from archaeology, geography, linguistics, religion, ethnology,

sociology and other disciplines to carry out interdisciplinary research.

The research will refer to works on the history of civilizations, Sino-foreign exchanges, specific Asian countries, and various specific topics. All collected materials will be stored online. Based on the previous thinking, when collecting and sorting out data, researchers will focus on discussions by different scholars on mutual learning among civilizations, as well as thoughts on the positioning of Asian civilizations. It will provide significant inspiration for the project and academic value in general by examining the differences between different scholars.

Qian Chengdan suggested that the research on exchange and mutual learning among civilizations adopt the perspective of global history, and include the spread of culture, musical instruments, fruits, diseases, chariots, horses, bronzes and other artifacts in its analysis to gain a broader vision and originality. In addition, the research should be carefully planned to avoid repeating other sub-projects. Taking religion as an example, this sub-project should focus on the exchanges and mutual learning between religions, while the sub-project by Zhang Jiamei should focus on the evolution of religions themselves.