Beijing Forum 2019
Governance and Civilization:
The Origins of the State across Civilizations (III)

On the morning of November 3rd, the panel "Governance and Civilization: The Origins of the State across Civilizations" opened in Meeting Room No. 2 of Yingjie Exchange Centre, Peking University. Professor He Zengke from the School of Government, Peking University, served as the chair.

The first speaker was Rabab El-Mahdi, an associate professor of the American University in Cairo. The theme of her speech was: "The Arab Spring: Failure of the Regime or the Demise of the State". Mahdi first focused on the definition of the state, arguing that the state is a complex system. Her conclusion was that protest is not only an outburst of anger, but also a challenge to the existing order. The reason is structural. Therefore, we should understand this struggle in a social background, and, at the same time, we must call for a regime that can transcend social order.

The second speaker was Swagata Sarkar, a professor from Jindal Global University, India. His topic was: "The State in India: a Genealogy". He focused on why India has formed a strong country, but only has weak institutions. Sarkar expessed his belief that the answer to this question could be found in Indian culture. He first introduced a brief history of India. Then, Sarkar argued that one thing worthy of attention is India's "five-year plan". In his view, there is no clear criteria of a strong or weak institution, and for India, the performance of institutions is varied. The quality of institutions should be understood from the two dimensions, one is "transaction politics" and another is "identity politics."

The third speaker was Deep K. Datta-Ray, a visiting professor from Nanyang Technological University. His theme was: "The Origin and Future of Modernity: The West, India, Diplomacy". The reason Professor Datta-Ray chose the diplomatic dimension is because he believed that diplomacy is also part of modernity. Ray's discussion of diplomacy was mainly carried out from the dimension of negotiation. The question raised by Ray was, what is modernity? Why did India not transform into the Western style? Ray expressed his belief that this could be understood through the "coconut tree" theory. Coconut trees transplanted to other places may not be able to survive. So it is impossible for

Western invaders to reach a "unification" between the East and the West by imposing their values, thereby achieving "assimilation". The British colonial history is a good illustration of this. All in all, culture matters.

The fourth speaker was Professor Tetsuo Otani from Tohoku Fukushi University. His theme was: "How Zen Master Dogen Considered Nation and Political Power". Master Dogen was a famous monk in the Kamakura period in Japan. He traveled to China to study Buddhism and created a Japanese Buddhism called Caodong Zong. Professor Otani's speech involved two major themes: First, the attitude of Master Dogen to politics. In general, Master Dogen believed that he should not be involved into politics, which was the king's dominion. Second, Master Dogen's opinion of the relationship between Dharma and state. In Master Dogen's view, Dharma was the "Heart of the Buddha" (fo zu xin), whereas politics was the "Heart of public" (wan ji xin), and there were strict differences between the fozuxin and the wanjixin. This relationship between religion and politics, in the words of Master Dogen, was that "if integrity and truth always exist, the world will be a peaceful place."(zheng fa zhu, er tianxia taiping)

The fifth speaker was Olga Vladimirovna Mikhaylova, an associate professor from the Lomonosov Moscow State University. Her topic was: "Network Governance As a Response to the Challenges of Digital Era". Mikhaylova focused on three key-points, first, what is network governance; second, why should we choose network governance; third, Russia's practices in network governance. In her view, there is an conflict Russia. The majority of netizens are young people, who can accept the Internet, while most of the government officials are older people, who can not accept the Internet. That makes for some conflicts. However, Mikhaylova expressed her belief that public administration can not be a bottom-up hierarchy, and network politics will and must be prosperous in public administration.

The sixth speaker was Allen M. Turner, Senior Chairman of Columbia College, in Chicago. His theme was "Inventing America." Turner's speech focused on the question of how people with different political ideas, different lifestyles, and even different races and region beliefs have created such a different state—the USA. Using American history, Turner thoroughly analyzed this issue through looking at Columbus's voyage, American statehood, slavery, women's suffrage, the two world wars, and current American political practices, thus constructing his own American story.