

## **Moderator's introduction to the workshop**

Ever since Netanyahu was elected as prime minister of Israel for the second time in 2009, the Netanyahu government has insisted on and strengthened the Jewish identity of Israel, passively dealt with the Palestinians on peace talks, and strongly opposed the negotiations and deals on the nuclear issue between the Obama administration and Iran. After Trump was elected as US president, the Netanyahu government strengthened its coordination and cooperation with the US, which led Trump to make a slew of major adjustments to its policies toward the Middle East in favor of Israel: recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, quitting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), restarting economic sanctions on Iran, and formally recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

In the new parliamentary elections held in April 2019, the Likud Party led by Netanyahu defeated its main rival, the Blue and White. Netanyahu claimed that "the right-wing camp will continue to lead Israel for the next four years." The purpose of this workshop is to analyze the in-depth domestic and foreign reasons for the long rule of Israel's right wing and its impacts on the country's domestic and foreign affairs, so as to explore the orientation and new tendencies of the state of Israel.

Prof. Lei Yu from Northwest University noted that once Netanyahu succeeds in forming the cabinet, it will be his fifth term as Israeli prime minister. He may become the prime minister with the longest serving period in Israeli history by breaking the record of 4,875 days kept by David Ben-Gurion.

Prof. Uri Ben-Eliezer, chair of the Department of Sociology, University of Haifa, explained that it is the common goal of Israel's right and left wings to establish a Jewish state. The left wing pretended to accept the "divide-and-conquer" plan. But in fact, it hoped to found the state and the army first, through which it could gather the force to acquire all its desired territory. The right wing highly emphasizes the sanctity of the nation's territory and is willing to take all kinds of illegal means to control it, including undermining democracy. Over the past few years, the Israeli right wing has abandoned elements of democracy, questioned diversified thought, and even attacked freedom of expression. Thus Israel has become a narrow democracy with its rule of law being gradually destroyed. The reason Netanyahu is protected lies precisely in his identity of being a representative of the ethnic nationalist tradition.

Prof. Song Lihong at Nanjing University said that the most important development in the Jewish world in recent decades is the increasing number of methods and rising capability of fundamentalists to influence the views and values of the modern Orthodox parties, although there are not many fundamentalists. An iconic feature of current Jewish fundamentalism is that the disciplinary function of the text in the current Jewish religious life has become increasingly important, even overwhelming ancient Jewish customs.

Wang Yu, an associate professor at Peking University, believes that the principal contradiction in Israeli society is the confrontation between secular and religious forces, which is prominently reflected in politics as an issue of exempting ultra-Orthodox Jews from military service. Most Jewish

religious figures oppose the secular Zionist movement and establishing a secular Israeli state, arguing that it undermines the process of God. However, the religious Zionists approve of military service. Their attitude toward the Zionist movement is short-term cooperation, and they consider establishing a secular Israel state as part of a sacred plan.

Yang Yang, deputy dean of the School of Asian and African Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, said that whether the “Deal of the Century” can be accepted by both Palestine and Israel depends on a number of factors, including whether the deal meets the minimum demands of both Palestine and Israel, whether it can be supported by major Arab countries, and how the Trump government exerts its influence on both sides. However, the most important factor will be the influence of the internal political environment of Palestine and Israel.

According to Hillel Cohen-Bar, head of Department of Islam and Middle East Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, religious factors are playing a critical role in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Religion, rather than international law, is occupying a central place in the Israeli and Palestinian discourse systems. When Jews and Muslims fight for their rights, they do not fight because of a UN resolution or material factors, but religion.

Yu Guoqing, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, believes that Israel will strive for the “Deal of the Century,” the new American peace initiative in the Middle East, which is favorable to them. In this way the country can create a more optimized security environment for the future development of the state of Israel.

She Gangzheng, an assistant professor of international relations at the School of Social Sciences at Tsinghua University, said that Trump's fundamental purpose for supporting Israel has been to cater to a wide range of American voters to ensure that he will be re-elected in the 2020 election, rather than catering only to Jewish voters. This is because evangelical Christians and most Americans still sympathize with Israel. The Trump administration currently believes that the division of the Arab world, especially the fear of Iran in the Gulf states, can cushion the impact of the recognition problem of the Golan Heights. However, if further maximum pressure is applied and support for Israel alienates the Arab world, the White House's efforts to contain Iran may backfire.

In summary, Netanyahu led the Likud Group to govern Israel for the past 10 years, when Israeli society has become increasingly right-leaning and conservative. Religious parties have been playing an increasingly important role, which has inevitably produced massive negative impacts on the peace talk between Israel and Palestine. Even if Netanyahu is replaced by Blue and White leader Benny Gantz and no longer re-elected as Israeli prime minister, Trump will find it difficult for his "Deal of the Century" to make a difference. It is impossible to bring lasting peace for Israel and Palestine with the US government's continued favor for Israel. For these reasons, it is not necessary for the Chinese government to change its basic attitude toward the two countries and its established policy of supporting Palestinian statehood.

The right-leaning tendency and conservativeness in Israel is a reflection of the intensification of its domestic political and

social contradictions. This has negatively affected the peace talks and the peace progress between Israel and Palestine. China's public communications should be objective and treat developments in a rational manner. We should avoid excessive criticism to prevent forming public opinions of "bad Israel" and "good Palestine," which may interfere with China's impartial foreign policy between Israel and Palestine.

Wang Suolao

June 1, 2019

**The 19th Broadyard Workshop**  
**The Orientation and New Tendencies of the State of**  
**Israel**  
**May 24, 2019**

The 19th Broadyard Workshop (博雅工作坊) of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) was initiated by Wang Suolao, deputy director of PKUIAS. Many Chinese and foreign scholars from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, University of Haifa, Peking University, Tsinghua University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Nanjing University, Northwest University and Shanghai International Studies University attended the workshop and engaged in thorough discussion.

Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, said in his opening speech that many academic events have been held during the first year since PKUIAS was established, and about 20 Broadyard Workshops have been held. The institute hopes to promote China's understanding of various countries and regions through special reports and dialogue with scholars, and thus promote the development of area studies in China. This workshop on Israel's orientation and future development is an academic reflection and discussion on some current political and social changes in Israel.

Associate Professor Wang Suolao pointed out that as a comprehensive and interdisciplinary research institution, PKUIAS does not focus on topics based on a specific discipline, but hopes to invite experts and scholars of different disciplines

to discuss the topics from different perspectives, so as to find their roots and explore more connotations. This workshop invited many experts and scholars from different disciplines, including politics, international affairs, religious studies, history, and sociology.

This workshop focuses on Israel's orientation and future development in the context of Middle East turbulence. The Middle East's situation has been very intense since it experienced the "Arab Spring," the rise of the Islamic State, the conclusion of the Iranian nuclear agreement and the withdrawal of the US power. Israel is a very important country in the Middle East and has always played a very important role in the situation in the Middle East. During the ten years since the current Prime Minister Netanyahu was elected in 2009, significant changes have also taken place inside Israel. In 2018, Israel passed the Jewish Nation-State Law as one of its basic laws. In the recent parliamentary election, Netanyahu's party won again and declared publicly that the country will still be dominated by a right-wing government for four years.

In light of this, the main topic of this workshop is: in which direction will Israel develop? What is its orientation as a country? What status and treatment will be offered to Israeli minorities in the future? The experts and scholars participating in this workshop have all studied, worked and lived in Israel, including two well-known professors from Israel, Uri Ben-Eliezer, chair of the Department of Sociology, University of Haifa, and Hillel Cohen-Bar, head of Department of Islam and Middle East Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. They are expected to have in-depth and fruitful discussions on related

topics.

Lei Yu, a professor of history at Northwest University, gave a presentation entitled “Viewing trends of Israel’s politics from the 2019 elections.” She first introduced the institutional framework of the Israeli parliamentary elections. With a one-chamber parliament, the country is a single constituency with 120 seats and a four-year term. There are only two prime ministers in history who have completed their four-year terms: Golda Meir and Menachem Begin. Others all held elections for the next term in advance. Israel is a country that adopts a proportional representation system. It allocates seats in proportion to the total number of votes received by candidates from different parties.

Lei Yu said that the 2019 Israeli elections mainly have four features.

First, the Likud Group and the Blue and White had a close contest by winning 35 seats each, indicating that the right and left are becoming balanced. This is very rare in Israeli history. The main reason for this is that Israel’s electoral reforms increased the starting point of the percentage of votes obtained for seats distribution from 1.83 percent to 3.25 percent, which is conducive to forming large parties and caused the close contest between the two large parties.

Second, Jewish ultra-Orthodox has a solid foundation. Statistics show that the ultra-Orthodox are mainly impoverished people in Israel with a relatively stable population, offering a steady number of votes and seats from the parties they support, Shas and United Torah Judaism. However, this also represents a very sharp domestic contradiction for Israel. One of the



important factors causing Netanyahu's cabinet to collapse this time was a religious conflict with the ultra-Orthodox.

Third, there is a decline in the support rate of Israeli Arabs for their political parties. Statistics show that in the five general elections from 2006 to 2019, the number of votes obtained by Arab political parties gradually declined. Compared with the Arab population, which accounts for 20 percent of the total population, their parties only have 10 percent of the total seats, which is a relatively small proportion in the parliament. After the parliamentary election results came out, the Arab parties gave up on recommending their candidates support a new government, with the occupied 10 seats not participating in the competition for the post of prime minister, which was a very special case.

Fourth, it is difficult to form a cabinet. The competition was stiff during the election. The number of parties participating in the election exceeded 40 for the first time, and 11 entered the parliament in the end. It is quite difficult to form a cabinet due to problems in Israel's political system, and many technical issues need to be resolved, such as the allocation of ministerial seats. Now Netanyahu is still making his final sprint. Once he successfully forms his cabinet for the fifth time as prime minister, he may become the prime minister with the longest serving period in Israeli history by breaking the record of 4,875 days kept by David Ben-Gurion.

Uri Ben-Eliezer, chair of the Department of Sociology, University of Haifa, gave a presentation entitled "Why is it Difficult for the Israelis to Make Peace with the Palestinians? The Israeli Right-Wing from a Sociological Perspective." He

pointed out that even though Netanyahu was accused of corruption, Israel's right-wing parties still won the elections. These parties even tried to take measures to protect Netanyahu from charges. It is their special national identity that made the Israelis show strong protection for Netanyahu.

According to Ben-Eliezer, the "Uganda crisis" in the Zionist movement reflects two opposing nationalisms. One is civic nationalism, liberal nationalism or state nationalism, which considers the nation and the state are one, for the state creates the nation, and a nation represents the voluntary contracts between different races, religions, genders, and ethnicities. The other is ethnic and cultural nationalism, which is based on ancestral blood lineage and the specific territory that has belonged to the state since ancient times. In general, ethnic nationalism occupies a central place in Israel, and Israel's right-wing is supportive of extreme ethnic nationalism, even if it means breaking the law.

Israel's founders are called the Second Aliyah, who emphasized the essential nature of ethnicity and refused to work with Arabs. In their opinion, land is sacred and indivisible, and belongs to the Jewish nation only. It is natural for the Palestinians to reject the Zionist's plan, and their national conflicts began in 1920. It was also during that period that right-wing forces emerged, who were advocating the establishment of a Jewish state in a more radical way.

It is worth noticing that establishing a Jewish state is a common goal of the right-wing and the left-wing. The left-wing socialist leaders are also ethnic nationalists who believe that nations are determined by history rather than individual choices.

They also believe that territory and sovereignty are indivisible, and the goals of the Zionist movement will be achieved by military means in the end. Therefore, the left-wing only pretended to accept a divide-and-conquer program, while actually hoping to found a state and an army first before gathering forces to acquire the entire territory.

Unlike the left-wing gradual approach, the right-wing appears to lack political rationality. They highly emphasize the sanctity of the territory, and are willing to take all kinds of illegal means to this end, including undermining democracy.

Until the 1950s, plans to occupy all the holy lands in Israel still existed. After the 1967 war, Israel finally succeeded in occupying a part of it. The distinction between the “Israeli Holy Lands” and “State of Israel” further narrowed, and ethnic nationalism reached its peak. The year 1977 was another turning point in Israeli history, when the right-wing parties won the elections for the first time and the new government used state power to continue merging these lands.

However, internal changes took place in Israel in the 1980s, when the territorial issues became increasingly complicated. On the one hand, a free civil society emerged in Israel, emphasizing individual willingness and freedom, privatization, and minimal state intervention. At the same time, many public criticisms were made against the 1982 Lebanon War and the first Intifada in 1987, claiming that the military methods failed to resolve political issues and the occupation was not irreversible. As a result, the public turned to support the Oslo Accords. This showed that Israel was turning to adopt citizenship, freedom, and state-based nationalism.

On the other hand, Messianic and fundamentalist religious movements appeared at the same time. These movements encouraged Jews to develop new settlements based on the holy texts. Subsequently, due to the failure of the 1993 Oslo Accords and the Camp David peace talks in 2000 supported by civil society, the anti-national forces of Jewish fundamentalists continued to increase. In fact, it is difficult for any Israeli government to challenge fundamentalist settlers because they position themselves as the true representatives of ethnic nationalism and Judaism.

Ben-Eliezer pointed out that in the past few years, the Israeli right-wing have abandoned democracy, questioned pluralistic thought, and even attacked freedom of speech. It has made Israel a narrow democracy and the rule of law has been gradually destroyed. Netanyahu is protected precisely for being a representative of the tradition of ethnic nationalism, who placed the concept of “Great Israel” above politics, the will of the people, and even the law. It has led to questions on the possibility of achieving peace with extreme ethnic and religious nationalism being in a dominant position.

Song Lihong, a professor of philosophy at Nanjing University, gave a speech entitled “Jewish Fundamentalism and the State of Israel.” He said that the secular ideology of Zionism shaped Israeli society. For a long time before and after the founding of the state, it defined itself by breaking with traditional Judaism and took pride in it. However, this situation is changing, and religion has returned to Israeli public life.

The religious Jews in Israel are all Orthodox. Basically, they can be divided into two sects. One is the modern Orthodox,

who regard tradition as a personal choice and way of behavior, and does not impose its own will on others. The other is the ultra-Orthodox, also known as Haredim in relatively neutral Hebrew language. It means “those who tremble” in the presence of God. The members of the latter sect are all fundamentalists.

Song Lihong said that although the fundamentalists are not great in number, they are increasingly able to influence the perceptions and values of modern Orthodox Jews. This is the most important development in decades inside the Jewish world. To a large extent, modern Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel has favored the ideology of Haredim Judaism and regards settlement by Jews in the ancient Jewish homeland (the West Bank of the Jordan River) as the most important religious commandment and a necessary condition for the belief in Judaism. Their strategy for politics tends to be aggressive.

From an external secular perspective, Haredim interact with Israeli society and government as a unit and seem to be a social group with common values. From an internal perspective, it is more like a social type than a sect. To be more precise, there are many disagreements in the internal religious doctrines of Haredim, and the authority structure is loose, with each part acting of their own free will. There is no central agency to coordinate and unify their actions and positions.

Today’s Haredim can be divided into three groups. First, Hasidim, who are extremely resistant to secular and modern cultures. The origin of their behavior is the piety movement in 18th century in Eastern Europe, focusing on spirituality rather than studying traditional texts. Second, the “opponent” (Mitnagdim), who are named for their opposition against

Hasidim. Their worldview is less closed than Hasidim, and they pay more attention to traditional text learning. During the latest Israeli elections, the two sects of Haredim have been concentrated in the United Torah Judaism.

Third, Middle East Jews. They used to live in the Islamic world. They identify with Shas and are culturally conservative. They are more ethnic-oriented, and are not that rigid in their religious positions. It is agreed that the three groups above are difficult to generalize about in terms of ethnic composition, cultural traditions and external stance. But as fundamentalists, they still share some family similarities.

In summary, one of the hallmarks of the current Jewish fundamentalism is that the disciplinary function of the text in the current Jewish religious life is becoming increasingly important, even overwhelming ancient Jewish customs. The trend that contemporary religious communities increasingly rely on codes and various commentaries works to guide and solve practical problems first began to emerge in the 1950s. Text was given unprecedented authority and the book tradition has overtaken the life tradition.

The driving forces forming the characteristics of contemporary fundamentalism are highly complex. The development of Yeshiva is the internal institutional factor contributing most to the Haredim's worldview. Today, the Yeshiva in Israel has transformed from an academic institution that trains elites and community leaders to a religious institution that fosters Jewish worldviews and forges Jewish identities. Unlike the Haredim in Western Europe and the US, there is a large-scale phenomenon of full-time religious texts reading

among Israel's Haredim.

In order to deal with this problem, since the beginning of this century, the Israeli government has taken measures in terms of willingness to work, channels, skills, and subsidies to guide and encourage the Haredim to obtain employment. The government intends to reduce the poverty of the Haredim population, leading them to participate in the economic development of the secular state, and bridging the gap between Israel's secular and religious forces. However, these policies hardly alleviate the conflict between politics and religion. First of all, the various measures of the government lack priority. The idea is unclear, and it is difficult to solve the problem of motivation, especially the restrictions of Jewish law. Second, under the existing model to promote employment, Haredim women's desire to work is significantly higher than men. This actually strengthens Haredim's view of work and cannot narrow the distance between the Haredim and modern society. Meanwhile, occupations in high-tech and other fields are becoming increasingly popular among the Haredim, because the jobs pay well and the Haredim do not have to contact with the outside world. The trends are likely to strengthen the existing separatist movement and weaken the social integration process of the government. Third, the policies lack coherence and execution. The Haredim continues to make efforts in the political field. It is difficult for members of the sect in important positions to give up their vested interests, so there will be policy twists and turns in the future. Finally, some scholars point out that modern fundamentalism often absorbs and makes use of modern elements in struggling against the modern world.

Employment itself is only a means for Haredim to better practice their own worldview.

Song Lihong opined that the large-scale migration of the Jewish population since the end of the 19th century was an external factor in the rise of fundamentalism. Population movement results in the transplantation and adjustment of tradition, and also means that different generations of Jews must have different understandings of Jewish tradition. The transformation of the function of Yeshiva came into being in order to resist the tide of secularization. The schools turned to religious texts for spiritual fulfillment and solutions for current dilemmas and problems and tried to reshape and consolidate Jewish identity.

In the face of hostility from neighboring Arab countries, Western countries have demonstrated stronger opposition to Zionism. Jewish fundamentalists cannot get rid of insecurity and mental distress, and therefore the motivation to turn to books will get stronger. At the same time, if Netanyahu wants to form a cabinet, he must unite with the Haredim parties, who are bound to put forward demanding requirements. The expansion of fundamentalism is likely to be a fundamental problem faced by the Israeli government for a long time.

Wang Yu, an associate professor at PKU's School of Foreign Languages, gave a presentation entitled "The Political Manifestation of the Main Domestic Contradiction in Israel: The Tug of War on the Military Service of Ultra-Orthodox Jews." She opined that the main contradiction in Israeli society is the opposition between secular and religious forces, which is prominently manifested politically by the exemption of



ultra-Orthodox Jews from military service. Despite being an old topic, this issue didn't attract public attention until in 2011. At that time, a large-scale protest broke out in Israel against high commodity and housing prices, demanding social justice and pointing directly to ultra-Orthodox Jews who possess many privileges in Israel. The issue of exemption from military service became a point of friction between secular and religious forces.

The tradition of exemption from military service can be traced back to before the founding of Israel. Before the war broke out in 1948, the students of seminaries were exempted from military service on the basis of their experiences with the Holocaust and the development of Judaism after the war. After the founding of Israel, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion exempted some students of seminaries from the military service at the request of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious party. However, due to the problem of moral injustice, the number of people who enjoyed this privilege was limited to 400, and they were strictly required to devote all their time and energy to studying the religious texts and were not allowed to do any other work.

In 1968, Moshe Dayan became defense minister, increasing the number of privileged people to 800. The biggest change came in 1977, when Likud came to power for the first time, promising to exempt people studying traditional religious texts from military service and abolish the maximum number. Secular forces became increasingly discontent with this and sued in Israel's Supreme Court but lost. Since the constitutional revolution in the 1990s, the Supreme Court has the power to review violations of the constitution.

In 1998, the Supreme Court ruled that it was illegal for the Ministry of Defense to exempt theological students from military service, and new laws needed to be established to make it legal. After the approval of the famous Tal Law in 2002, the number of theological students exempted from military service exceeded 60,000. The act became a tool for ultra-Orthodox Jews to be exempted from military service, causing more dissatisfaction. In 2012, the Supreme Court of Israel ruled that the Tal Law was unconstitutional. This triggered a crisis for the ruling coalition of the Netanyahu government. The Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home) party and the Shas Party have different views and fought over the new military service bill, threatening to withdraw from the ruling coalition. The Kadima Party joined the ruling coalition and stabilized the political situation. But two months later, the Israeli cabinet still collapsed, and a general election was held ahead of schedule.

The election was influenced by a large-scale social protest movement after 2011. Many new political parties focusing on socio-economic demands joined the cabinet, establishing a ruling coalition without ultra-Orthodox religious parties for the first time in more than a decade. In 2013, a new act was passed, which stipulates that ultra-Orthodox groups who have reached the age of 22 on the day when the act was passed are completely exempted from military service; people between the ages of 18 and 22 can be exempted from military service year by year; and those under the age of 18 should begin military service or replace military service with other forms of social service from 2017.

At the same time, in order to encourage the employment of

ultra-Orthodox, instead of not allowing people who don't perform military service to work, the act removed all working restrictions for those who are exempted from military service. This seemingly generous bill aroused extreme opposition from the Haredim and led to violence.

Israel held another general election in 2015 because of the collapse of Netanyahu's ruling coalition. After the election, Netanyahu established a right-wing ruling coalition including all religious parties. The act passed in 2013 was repealed. Religious parties then proposed their own bill on military service, but it was again declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in December 2017. The issue of military service for the ultra-Orthodox remains unresolved. In 2018, Netanyahu again announced an early general election because he could not bridge the conflicts within the ruling coalition. In the 2019 general election, one of the key factors affecting the establishment of Israel's ruling coalition is still the battle between secularists and religious parties on the issue of military service.

The Haredim's fierce resistance to military service has something to do with the relation between religion and state in Israel. According to political affiliation, the Haredim can be divided into Zionist Jews, non-Zionist Jews and anti-Zionist Jews. Most religious Jews oppose the secular Zionist movement and the secular Israeli state, believing that it undermines the process of God. The religious Zionists approve of military service. They take a cooperative attitude toward the Zionist movement over the short term and consider establishing a secular Israel state as part of a sacred plan.

Wang Yu opined that the influence of religious parties is on

the rise in Israeli society. Religious communities have a very high fertility rate and rate of population growth, and have formed a relatively fixed community, which not only prevents the attrition of the Haredim community, but also causes it to grow because of the privileges it enjoys. In addition, extremely high voter turnout and political participation gives them strength. Because they have joined the ruling coalition of successive Israeli governments and can bargain with the ruling party to gain benefits, they have a strong influence in the political arena. After the general election in April 2019, religious parties joined the cabinet with a large number of votes, indicating that they will become increasingly powerful, thus making it difficult to make progress on the issue of military service.

Yang Yang, associate professor at the School of Asian and African Studies in Shanghai Foreign Studies University, gave a presentation entitled “The Internal Palestine-Israel Situation before the Deal of the Century.” He pointed out that Trump has not yet announced the contents of the Deal of the Century, but the prospects for Palestine and Israel are still not positive. The political situation of the two sides has an important impact on the acceptance of the deal.

It is said that the US has indicated that the upcoming “Deal of the Century” will cover all issues including borders, settlements, security arrangements, Jerusalem and refugees, hoping that Palestine and Israel can carry out further negotiations on this basis. Yang Yang opined that the acceptance of the agreement by both Palestine and Israel depends on the following conditions:

First of all, whether the plan meets the minimum requirements of the opposing sides. For Palestine, the plan requires at least a commitment to Palestinian statehood; a number of territorial exchanges between Palestine and Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders to maximize the continuity of the Palestinian territory; and the commitment that the capital of Palestine is East Jerusalem which will be under Palestine's sovereign jurisdiction. For Israel, the agreement should address Israel's security concerns and ensure Israel's demographic composition and its existence as a Jewish State. The border negotiations must take into account large settlements, maintain the unity of Jerusalem, and ensure that Israel has unhindered access to its regions, settlements and holy places.

Second, whether the primary Arab leaders are willing to support the efforts of the US to make Palestine and Israel accept the plan to at least serve as a basis for further negotiations. If the minimum requirements of Palestine are not met, Arab leaders are unlikely to support the plan. Otherwise they will be accused of betraying the Palestinian cause.

Third, whether the Trump administration can exert influence on both Palestine and Israel. Trump's punishment of Palestine has been going on for a long time. Palestinians know that they will be punished even more severely if they reject the US initiative immediately, which could hurt Palestine's economic situation and destabilize the leadership of its self-governing institutions. Israel has benefited a lot from Trump's unilateral actions, and therefore it may fear that vested interests could be reversed if Trump's peace initiative is flatly rejected. In addition, the Trump administration also has some

incentive options. If the deal facilitates the release of all Palestinian prisoners and allows Palestinians to enter the Israeli labor market, Palestine is more likely to accept the initiative. The deal could also provide Israel with a defense agreement, and promote neighboring Arab countries to jointly negotiate economic development plans with Palestine and Israel, etc.

Finally, whether the internal situation of Palestine and Israel allows them to accept the plan. Most Palestinians question the fairness of Trump's unannounced peace plan, taking an increasingly hardline attitude toward it. At the same time, unresolved domestic disagreements also make it difficult for Palestine to respond consistently to a possible peace plan. The legitimacy of Mahmoud Abbas is doubted. Hamas holds a negative attitude. There may even be a new round of violence to prevent accepting a peace plan. However, we should also note some positive factors, such as the balance of power within Palestine still favors secular nationalists. Also, Mahmoud Abbas still has effective control of Fatah, maintaining a moderate stance on a peace agreement and reconciliation with Israel. Palestinian security forces remain strong and effective. They maintain some security cooperation with Israel's security and intelligence department.

Israel's domestic environment is not conducive for restarting peace talks. Israelis' support for a peace plan has fallen from 68 percent in 2006 to 49 percent in June 2018. The 18-to-24-year-old group is the least supportive of the two-state solution. The repeated failed efforts to realize peace and the continuous outbreaks of violence since the 1993 Oslo Accords have continuously reduced the confidence of supporters of a

two-state solution, while opponents have shown greater commitment, mobilization and organizational skills. This was also reflected in the general election in 2019. Both Likud and the Blue and White party tried their best not to express support for the two-state solution, indicating that even the centrists in the Israeli political landscape no longer use a commitment to reach a peace agreement based on the two-state solution as their main campaign platform. Likud and the Blue and White party seem to be neck and neck in the election. On the whole, however, support for the center-right wing is stronger than the center-left, so Likud still has the advantage.

Netanyahu's future will also bring uncertainty to the "Deal of the Century." If the charismatic leader steps down, it will be a heavy blow to right-wing forces and will open a competition to become Likud's new leader. New competitors may tend to be tougher to show that they are the true right-wing leader who can succeed Netanyahu.

Hillel Cohen-Bar, head of the Department of Islamic and Middle East Studies at Hebrew University, gave a presentation entitled "The role of religion and holy places in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." The presentation interprets the Palestine-Israel issue from a religious and historical perspective, rather than from the international relations perspective, paying more attention to people's emotions and what people are thinking. Cohen-Bar claimed that the decisions and actions of political parties are based on people's emotions, and that many of the current problems are related to the religious factors of Judaism and Islam respectively.

Cohen-Bar started his presentation from the angle of

Jewish and Islamic perceptions of religion. Both Judaism and Islam are monotheistic religions, believing that the only God created the world and observes what happens in the world and any individual's behavior. According to Judaism, God created the world. Abraham discovered God. He has two sons -- Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac was the ancestor of Judaism and Ishmael was the ancestor of Islam.

The Quran also considers the Jews to be the chosen people of God, but the difference is that the two sides diverged over a period of time. For example, the Quran believes that Jews are also God's chosen people, but because Jews do not obey God's will, they have no right to live in the Holy Land. If Jews were to obey God's will, they could continue to live in the Holy Land. As the Koran states, when the Jews were deported again, the Jews had no right to return to the Holy Land, thus being disqualified from being God's chosen people. In 620, God sent the Prophet Mohammed to the world, and Muhammad brought the Quran to the world, where the idea of God's chosen people was abandoned and all people were equal. Muhammad tried to persuade the Jews that he was also their prophet. Some Jews accepted the idea but most refused to. Muhammad expelled and even killed Jews who did not accept him as a prophet, which marked the beginning of the relationship between the two religions. In many places, Jews live under the rule of Muslim and keep their identity as ethnic minorities, which means that Muslims cannot force Jews to believe in Islam, but Jews must accept Muslims' identity as the ruler, which is an agreement reached between the two religions.

Cohen-Bar said that the factor of religion, which is the



basis of politics, cannot be excluded from political issues when analyzing Palestinian issues. It is religion rather than international laws that occupies the central place in the Israeli or Palestinian discourse system. When Jews and Muslims are fighting for their rights, such as settlement or border issues, the driving factors behind it are not UN resolutions or material factors, but religion. The reason why peace is now unavailable between Israelis and Palestinians is that peace is not the most important value to them. Even if they considered peace to be the most important thing, their understandings of “peace” differ. It is easy to talk about peace while difficult to achieve peace. But it is still not impossible to find a suitable way to achieve peace if we understand the deepest emotional factors.

Yu Guoqing, a research fellow at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave a presentation entitled “Analysis of Israel’s Security Environment and Security Policy.” He first briefly introduced the changes in the territorial scope of Israel and Palestine from 1948 to 2019, especially the basic situation of the Golan Heights, and divided the evolution of Israel’s security environment and security strategy into five phases.

The first phase is from 1948 to 1967 when Israel strived to ensure survival through territorial expansion. The Israelis used pre-emptive measures to launch the Suez War and the Six-Day War and maximized its seizure and occupation of Arab countries’ territories during the war to ensure its security. It sought recognition by the international community and tried to expand its international living space and strengthen its international status through establishing ties with Third World

countries.

The second phase is from 1967 to 1991 when Israel took territory as the chip for negotiations. After the war in 1967, Israel used the unprecedentedly large territories it occupied as chips to divide-and-rule the Arab states. It achieved peace with Egypt, started to face up to the Palestine Liberation Organization, and obtained a comprehensive military advantage and nuclear weapon capacities to crack down on nuclear facilities and tendencies. More importantly, Israel became special strategic allies with the US.

The third phase is from 1991 to 2000, when Israel exchanged territory for peace. Israel participated in multilateral Middle East peace talks, the three-party talks between Palestine, Israel and the US, the Madrid Conference, the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and the 2000 Camp David summit, achieving phased results in promoting Palestinian autonomy. However, the failure of the Camp David summit hit the peace forces in Israel, leading to a move to the right in Israeli politics.

The fourth phase was between 2000 and 2016 when Israel tried to establish peace through security. At this stage, the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks encountered a deadlock, extreme armed forces of non-state entities began to threaten Israel's national security, and the Arab Spring and the subsequent turmoil in the Middle East also caused new changes in Israel's security environment. At this stage, tough Israeli national leaders dominated the national security strategy, did not take the initiative to negotiate with Arab states, cracked down on Palestine's hardline factions, and emphasized that any peace negotiations and programs must guarantee Israel's security.

The fifth stage is from 2017 to date, a phase in which Israel optimizes its strategy and security by seeking security through building alliances. Since Trump came to power in the US, US-Israel relations have seen unprecedented improvements. On the one hand, Israel has comprehensively enhanced its strategic partnership with the US, using the US to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. This phase features Israel's focus on curbing and cracking down on Iran, and its willingness to improve relations with moderate Arab states such as Saudi Arabia in order to optimize the domestic environment. Israel will strive for the implementation of the favorable US-version Middle East peace plan, the so-called Deal of the Century, to create a more optimized security environment for the future development of Israel.

She Gangzheng, an assistant professor from Tsinghua University, gave a presentation entitled "Motivation of the transformation of the US Middle East Policy and its impact on Israel's future development." Combing the current progress and future possibilities mainly from the perspective of US-Israel relations, he opined that US-Israel relations top Israel's list of important bilateral relations, and at the same time, Israel is far more important to the US than other US allies such as Japan and Australia.

She Gangzheng first analyzed the Golan Heights issues. He said that due to the long-drawn-out unrest in Syria, control of the southern region of Syria has kept switching between government and non-government forces. Israel is worried that Iran or Hezbollah, which Iran supports, will use Syria as a springboard to attack the Golan Heights and even other parts of

northern Israel. For this reason, the left, center and right factions in Israel contend that they will never give up sovereignty over the Golan Heights. As early as in 2015, Israel requested the US to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, but was refused by Obama. After taking office, Trump did not conceal his strong support for Israel. In 2019, he declared that the Golan Heights belonged to Israel. The reason was that the Golan Heights was effectively controlled by Israel after 1967. Iran's provocations and the activities of Hezbollah are likely to make the Golan Heights the starting point for the next attack. Therefore, it is reasonable for the US to recognize the Golan Heights as belonging to Israel before a peace treaty is reached.

Trump suddenly publicly acknowledged its recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March, mainly to support his center-right political allies in Israel, and especially to help Netanyahu, who was plagued by corruption investigations, win the parliamentary election. This tactic worked, with Likud and the right-wing government eventually winning more than half of the votes.

The deep consideration of Trump is to use Israel to contain Iran's power in Syria to safeguard the US's strategic interests in the Middle East. Behind Trump's coming to power is American people's demand that the US input more energy to domestic affairs rather than overseas. His strong support for Israeli territories reflects the current need of the US for a stable and reliable ally in the Middle East to ensure it could maintain its effective deterrence against Syrian government forces, Russia and Iran after withdrawing most of its military forces from the Middle East.

The fundamental reason for Trump to do this is to cater to the American people and win re-election in 2020. Since Trump participated in the presidential election, the Republican Party has been striving for Jewish votes. But the ultimate goal of Trump's pro-Israel policy is not Jewish voters, but to solidify the support of Evangelical Christians and most Americans, who still sympathize with Israel.

From an international perspective, Trump's decision will certainly damage the image of the US as a mediator. The US has always claimed that territories should not be obtained through wars. However, it supports Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. China, the European Union, Russia and many Middle Eastern countries protested this, especially Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. The Trump administration opined that the division of the Arab world, and especially the Gulf states' fear of Iran, can alleviate the impact of its recognition of Golan Heights. However, if the US further exerts maximum pressure, and alienates the Arab world by going too far with its support of Israel, the backlash may reverse the efforts of the White House to contain Iran. This would not only affect the situation in the Gulf, but also trigger more anti-American sentiment. In the long run, it would harm the national security of Israel and the US, and harm the regional and global situation.

During the discussion session, the participating scholars exchanged views and had in-depth discussions on topics including the reason for Netanyahu's success in the election, the future of Israel, and the role of religious factors in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Wang Suolao: Why could Netanyahu win the election

despite suffering from so many accusations?

Lei Yu: Although many accusations are disadvantageous to Netanyahu, he is embraced by lots of Israelis. The decade between 2009 and 2019 when Netanyahu was in office are deemed to be Israel's golden decade, which saw Israel's journey to prosperity, with its GDP increasing by 7 percent annually. A prosperous economy pushed more people to favor Netanyahu. In addition, Netanyahu claims he is the only person qualified to safeguard the security of Israel and guide international relations. Considering that the Israelis are most concerned about security currently, Netanyahu still has strong appeal.

Uri Ben-Eliezer: I'm not sure whether the right-wing party winning the election is due to the Israelis' concern about security issues, considering the Blue and White party also attaches much importance to security. I think the difference between the two parties lies in the attitude toward the occupied territories. The right-wing parties do not want to give up these territories, while the center-left may compromise in certain circumstances. The Israelis lost their confidence in peace after the second intifada. Out of the consideration of security and religion, voters do not want the Israeli government to give up these territories, thus choosing the right-wing party in the election.

Yu Guoqing: Viewed from the perspective of religion or culture, Israel is becoming more and more religious, or more conservative, giving people a more right-leaning and tougher worldview. If Israel wants to exist over the long term in the Middle East, will its national policy have to change?

Song Lihong: The political power of the ultra-Orthodox in Israel is growing, which is in line with the global situation.

Ultra-Orthodox is on the rise in the Islamic world, the Middle East and even many countries we consider highly secular, such as the US. This rise takes advantage of the cultural pluralism in modern society, because pluralism continues to encourage minority groups to speak up, but unintentionally has led to these groups becoming isolated and divided from society. This trend does not show any signs of easing or change, and is becoming even more pronounced.

Wang Yu: Peace in the Middle East and the Palestine-Israel peace process have disappeared from Israeli public's focus. They are concerned about security, livelihood, the conflict between religious forces and secular forces, and other internal issues. The Arab world is now coming apart, and the Trump administration shows favoritism toward Israel. In this sense, Israel has no pressure to survive. If there are no major external changes, such as Israel facing a military defeat, the situation will not change.

Audience: Since the 1970s, some sociologists and new historians have given a new interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and these interpretations conflict with Israel's official interpretations. What is your (Hillel Cohen-Bar's) opinion on these interpretations?

Hillel Cohen-Bar: In my opinion, the history taught at school always advocates that they are good people and their opponents are bad people. However, war is complicated, and we cannot interpret it from the perspective of a single party. From the perspective of Israel, they have the right to occupy the Holy Land, which is the perspective for old-school historians to interpret the history. But new historians prefer another

perspective, believing that the Jewish massacre of Palestinians was not written in the history books, and it is not clear whether the UN resolution in 1947 is legal. These new historians opined that some Palestinian views are correct, and even though Zionism is a movement of justice, some errors existed in the process. This cannot change the understanding of the Zionist movement, and can only change the way of narrating the 1948 war.

Uri Ben-Eliezer: Historians between 1940 and 1980 are deemed as part of the Zionist movement. They selectively recorded history while neglecting the issues of Palestinian Nakba and refugees among others. New historians tried to revise the history and started studies on these issues. For instance, having dissenting views on the refugee issue and the number of refugees, they went to many cities and villages to do field work, looked up previously banned materials and drew new conclusions. Personally, I don't think the number of refugees is very important. What really matters is that the Israeli government didn't allow the refugees to return.

The attendees also discussed the role of religions in Palestine-Israel conflict.

Uri Ben-Eliezer: Europe has seen great changes since 18th century, known as emancipation. In this process, many Europeans gave up their religious beliefs, and the Jews were also affected. Outside of Poland, many Jewish people became secular, and some even developed a new ideology – nationalism. Zionism is only one form of nationalism. In general, nationalism is active among secular Jews. In my opinion, more than 50 percent of Jews are unreligious and proud of being secular. My



father is a secular Jew and a professor studying religious texts because Zionism brought about new interpretations for the Hebrew Bible. Although interpretations of religious texts are divided between atheistic Jews and Jews believing in Judaism, both of them have retained their virtue as Jews.

The Jews established their identity because they were not accepted by the environment they lived in. My family emigrated from Ukraine to Palestine in 1882. When they were in Ukraine, they were not deemed as Ukrainians although they didn't believe in Judaism. The Nazis also sent many secular Jews to concentration camps. I think Prof. Cohen exaggerated the role of religious factors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Religious factors are important, but the situation is far more complicated. In my opinion, nationalism is more important and even more destructive. I would like to remind people that during the Oslo Accords period, most Palestinians except Hamas may have agreed to the two-state solution. In this sense, this issue may not solely be determined by religion.

Hillel Cohen-Bar: Regarding Jewish nationalism, Palestinian nationalism, and their relationship to religion, I think the Jewish nationalism movement would not exist without secular Judaism or without religion. In terms of both population and ideology, secular Jews or atheistic Jews are disappearing. I do not mean that they have no right to exist. Rather, religion is currently the main driving force for Israel's politics and society, and this is a process. In Europe, Jews are sometimes identified as Jews by other ethnic groups not for religious reasons, and some Jews are indeed assimilated. But the point is what happened after they returned to the Holy Land. They began to

speak Hebrew, speak the language of the Hebrew Bible, learn the Hebrew Bible from the original text, and explore social justice under its rules. But this causes a problem, because the Hebrew Bible is composed of 24 books, and most of them are about the superiority of the Jews and the promised land of the Jews. It says others should obey the Jews or be deported, and so on. When secular Jews only accept some parts of the Hebrew Bible, they lose its completeness. This also brings difficulties to the study of the Hebrew Bible, especially at the basic education stage. Different interpretations of the Hebrew Bible by secular and religious Jews are part of the problem, not the solution.

Wang Yu: I agree with Prof. Hillel Cohen-Bar's analysis on the religious factors in Palestine-Israel conflict. In the past, we mostly thought that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was of a terrorist nature, or an international conflict, a political conflict, an economic conflict, and a dispute over land and water resources. But compared to these, religious conflicts that have lasted for more than two thousand years are more prominent and more difficult to resolve. I also think that the first generation after the founding of the State of Israel was secularist Jews, but after that were more religious Jews. So I'm worried about the future.

She Zhenggang: I think the reason for the escalation of the war lies in the intolerance of different ethnic groups. Both sides of the conflict use religion as an excuse for an unwillingness to compromise.

Hillel Cohen-Bar: I think the peak of the growth of religion in Jerusalem was in 1990s. Religion has seen a decline there since 2018. But it is difficult for me to talk about the future

because there are many secular right-wingers. As for whether religion is an excuse for hindering the peace process, if religion is not important, the religious discourse would not be supported and followed by the public. This proves that religion is part of people's identities. This is also reflected in both the Zionist movement and Palestinian nationalism.

Uri Ben-Eliezer: Why does Trump support Israel? Is it because of American political tradition, because of American evangelical Christians, because of a powerful Jewish lobby, because Trump appreciates Israeli politics, because Trump is a friend of Netanyahu, or because Israel is a strategic partner of the US?

She Gangzheng: My presentation involved all the above-mentioned elements, but emphasized the two factors of evangelical Christians' influence and strategic assets. Of course, the traditional lobby group and personal relationships between Trump, Kushner and Netanyahu also played an important role. As you mentioned, what Trump will learn from Israel's political approach to "terror" could be a new research perspective to interpret Trump's policy.

Associate Professor Wang Suolao said at the conclusion that the workshop was a successful, high-level meeting. The participating experts and scholars had an in-depth discussion and exchange on the orientation and new tendencies of the State of Israel, and gained a more comprehensive understanding of Israel. China and Israel are of great significance to each other, and announced an innovative comprehensive partnership between both countries in 2017. China pays close attention to Israel's development and tendencies. In the future, there will be

more opportunities to discuss issues related to the Middle East and Israel.