

Moderator's introduction to the workshop

The Central Asian political arena has seen a series of positive changes over the past five years. Kazakhstan designed the “Nurly Zhol” (meaning “bright path” in the Kazakh language) in 2014, aiming to massively develop its domestic infrastructure. Uzbekistan successfully fulfilled its political transition in 2016. The new Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev started radical economic reforms immediately after he came to power, sparing no effort to improve diplomatic relations with surrounding countries and promote economic cooperation with big powers. In 2017, Kyrgyzstan President Sooronbay Jeenbekov reiterated a commitment to the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, regarding connection and trust between regions as an important goal during his tenure in office. In March 2018, leaders of the five countries of Central Asia met in the capital of Kazakhstan to promote political and economic relations among different countries in the region. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned countries have sought to integrate with China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI) to varying degrees and in different fields.

At the same time, the security challenges facing the countries of Central Asia remain severe. First, Central Asian extremists who participated in the wars in the Middle East are returning home, due to the strengthening of international counter-terrorism forces as well as Syrian government forces gradually regaining their lost territory. Second, Afghanistan, adjacent to southern Central Asia, has seen activity by the Islamic State's local offshoot -- known as Islamic State-Khorasan, or ISIS-K. At the same time, US President Donald Trump's signal that the army will withdraw from Afghanistan has created new variables for the prospects of peace in Afghanistan and the security environment of Central Asian countries. Third, the emergence and spread of extremist ideology constitutes a potential threat during a critical period of social transformation in Central Asian countries. Regional security is the foundation of economic development and mutual trust and cooperation among Central Asian countries. How will Central Asian countries respond to the challenges above in the new era? How can security be ensured through regional and international cooperation mechanisms? How should these countries balance the two major issues of security

and development?

The new situation of the internal and foreign affairs and security of the Central Asian countries mentioned above deserves in-depth analysis and discussion. This workshop invited domestic experts who have kept an eye on Central Asian issues to discuss important issues related to Central Asian security and development and provide advice to governments and enterprises.

Prof. Yang Shu opined that the security situation in Central Asia is relatively static. In terms of China's understanding of Central Asian security, it has been greatly influenced by Western academics, which exaggerated the seriousness of issues such as water resources, borders, and terrorism. The study of Central Asia nowadays is too narrow and misses important issues. The central purpose of area studies is academics, not to serve as a think tank. Research Fellow Sun Zhuangzhi said that the current focus of Central Asian countries is improving their power structures and stabilizing their political situations. The financial and debt situation of Central Asian countries deserves attention. Four major indicators can be used to observe the political and social development of

Central Asian countries: controlling force, enforcement, cohesion and an ability to withstand turbulence. Prof. Pan Zhiping stated that pan-Turkism in Central Asia is in resurgence. Central Asian countries have a long way to go in eliminating extremism. The focus of US policy toward Central Asia currently is to put pressure on China. Research Fellow Xu Tao said that the geographical situation of Central Asia, the positioning of the big power game players, and the national situations of various countries have basically remained unchanged. Issues such as borders and water resource allocation that arise after a country becomes a sovereign state are the main dynamics. Prof. Chang Chun expressed his belief that medical and health cooperation is an important starting point for the implementation of the BRI, effectively enhancing cultural influence and providing support for political relations and economic cooperation. Research Fellow Zhang Ning pointed out that the current security risks faced by Tajikistan are not serious. Extremist organizations are not large in number and Tajikistan's security risk prevention and control is effective. The main challenge now is eliminating extremism. Assistant Professor Shi Yue introduced the

Astana International Financial Center, a key project of Kazakhstan's economic reforms, noting that relevant units participating in China-Kazakhstan economic and trade cooperation must pay attention to the development of this institution, and make use of the convenience it provides to improve the quality of project-based cooperation.

The participating scholars expressed their belief that the security situation in Central Asia is relatively stable, and the focus in the political field of Central Asian countries is to stabilize their power structure. Traditional research topics on Central Asia, including water resources, border disputes, and terrorism, do not pose a challenge to the overall security situation. Under the pressure of the global economic downturn, the challenges in the economy and for people's livelihoods are more severe.

In terms of relations with China, recent public opinion has been frequently influenced by events related to the "China threat" theory, and "pan-Turkism" combined with extreme nationalism has a tendency to reemerge. This has a negative impact on economic and trade cooperation under the Belt and Road framework.

Stewards of the economic and trade cooperation

with Central Asian countries under the BRI should be alert to corruption in commercial projects and its negative impact on the two countries' relations. The BRI can bring health care and finance into the public eye. The initiative can diversify fields of cooperation based on the characteristics of countries and regions.

The participating scholars suggested that area studies should be based on academic research, and provide policy recommendations for related fields on the basis of promoting academic research. In the future, cooperation under the BRI will be more diversified, and more talent in the fields of finance, law, accounting, medical care, and agriculture will be needed.

Shi Yue

November 3, 2019

The 25th Broadyard Workshop
Central Asia's security and development
in the new era
October 17, 2019

Since the 1990s, security and development have been two of the most important themes related to Central Asia discussed by domestic academia. Against the backdrop of the many changes in the situation inside and outside Central Asia, it is time to gather top domestic scholars in this field to discuss the situation in Central Asia. On October 17, the 25th Broadyard Workshop (博雅工作坊) of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) entitled “Central Asia's security and development in the new era” kicked off, inviting 11 experts and scholars to have an interdisciplinary academic discussion on the changes to the geopolitical situation of Central Asia, relations between Central Asian countries, the security situation in Central Asia, and cooperation between China and Central Asia from political, economic, religious, and security perspectives.

Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, said in his opening remarks that Central Asia is gradually walking toward the center of the world stage, gaining

more and more attention. It is timely and necessary to discuss the security issues of Central Asia now. The reality is that domestic research about Central Asia is far from adequate and even poor. Due to restraints from historical factors, many people do not pay much attention to the Central Asian region and lack understanding of it. He pointed out that the workshop establishes a platform for Central Asian studies, delivering the hope that face-to-face discussion among experts and scholars could produce sparks of academic ideas and insight.

Prof. Yang Shu from Lanzhou University gave a speech titled “Basic Features and Influence of Geopolitics in Central Asian Countries.” He pointed out that the concept of a “new era” is not suitable to be used in foreign publicity, because the concept does not exist in the target countries. In addition, China’s Central Asian research is weak and its research team has been shrinking slightly. By contrast, Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are important areas in high-level decision-making. In this way, the research about this region and the importance of this region are unbalanced.

He opined that in the short term, the security

situation in Central Asia will remain the same, unless there are major changes inside Central Asian countries or events that harm the security environment of the international community. He also stressed that China's understanding of the security situation in Central Asia is highly impacted by Western academia, which overestimated the risks brought about by Central Asia's security issues, water resource and border issues, Islamic extremism and terrorism threats, and paid too much attention to some fake information.

With regard to Islamic extremism and terrorism, he opined that the domestic academic community has misjudged terrorist activities in Tajikistan — a considerable number of people regard armed opposition as a terrorist force, but it is not. In addition, he expressed his belief that it is unnecessary to focus too much on the methods and results of the transfer of power in Central Asian countries. The focus should be on policy changes, not leadership changes.

Yang Shu said that China should take note of issues in Central Asia but does not have to be too concerned about them. First, the odds of Central Asian countries encountering major security threats are low; second, to some extent, the so-called “color

revolutions” have not affected other countries, but it is important to pay attention to Islamic extremism and terrorism because this region is closely connected with Xinjiang. The degree of Islamization in Central Asian countries is relatively lower than in the Islamic world, especially in areas such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. At present, the connection between Xinjiang and Central Asia’s extremist forces and terrorist forces has become less and less. Third, social instability in Central Asia is largely due to social security issues caused by economic problems.

Yang Shu pointed out that current Central Asian research has the following problems. First, the scope of research is too narrow. Most of the current research focuses on Central Asian countries’ foreign relations or the relations between China and Central Asian countries, while other aspects are rarely involved. Second, Western countries’ evaluation of Central Asia has affected our evaluation of Central Asia. Third, some important issues, such as the “China threat” theory in Central Asia, are being avoided. Fourth, more study is needed on the transfer of power in Central Asian countries, such as Nursultan Nazarbayev’s transfer of power in Kazakhstan. Fifth, a proper look

needs to be taken at China's relations with some Central Asian countries. It is worth exploring whether China and Central Asian countries really had a "traditional friendship on the Silk Road."

Yang Shu opined that it is beneficial to push forward Central Asian research, expanding the important field of area studies in China. The central purpose of area studies lies in academics, not functioning as a think tank. It is fine for area studies to supplement existing research on international relations or international issues, but the field should not take think tank research as its main direction. The reason is that it involves different scientific research directions and the training of academic teams. This is a very important issue. It is not appropriate to set uniform requirements with administrative orders.

Sun Zhuangzhi, director of the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, CASS, gave a presentation entitled "New changes in the current Central Asian situation and new developments in relations between Central Asian countries." He said that the academic teams engaged in Central Asian studies are shrinking in scale and the growth of high-level research talent is relatively slow. However,

many young people have started to become interested in Central Asian issues, which is a good sign. He hopes to promote Central Asian studies to achieve more results using the platform of PKUIAS.

Sun Zhuangzhi opined that there are two reasons for the attention gained by Central Asian countries in recent years. One reason is the new changes happening in the region. The other is the continuous improvement of the relations between China and Central Asian countries. The Central Asian region has been a field of competition among big powers where all kinds of factors clash with each other. In this way, external factors will play an either positive or negative role in the stable development of Central Asia.

He pointed out that studies of Central Asia usually involve topics related to politics, economics, sociology, security and foreign affairs. The evaluation of a certain country's situation usually focuses on changes in the leadership, system reform, confrontations of political forces and major political events. Over recent years, the basic tendency of Central Asian countries has been completing their power structure and maintaining stability. Currently, the political situation in Central Asian countries is basically stable.

A major event in Central Asian politics this year was the sudden resignation of Nursultan Nazarbayev. The drama between the incumbent and former presidents of Kyrgyzstan reflected an escalation of domestic political conflicts. The reason that Nazarbayev chose Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as his successor is that Tokayev had followed him for a long time. In addition, Tokayev worked abroad for a long time and had no connection with domestic interest groups. In Kyrgyzstan, due to various problems such as regional and ethnic issues, the new president will inevitably have conflicts with the former president as he secures his own power base and group interests. By comparing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, we can find clues about some common characteristics of Central Asian politics.

In the field of Central Asia studies, what currently draws the most attention is non-traditional security issues. Meanwhile, the region also faces severe ecological security, food security and energy security problems. Due to the poor defense capacity of Central Asian countries, the region is also challenged by traditional security issues, and needs international help.

Economically, Central Asian countries have

maintained a basic trend of growth. But they must pay attention to government finance, including foreign debt levels, because China is a creditor country to many Central Asian countries. Poor finance conditions may trigger debt risks. In addition, Central Asia countries need to pay attention to inflation. The high inflation caused by Uzbekistan's reforms is one of the factors causing social instability. In addition, Central Asian countries are also very concerned about people's livelihood due to severe poverty.

In the field of diplomacy, China should pay attention to changes in the international and regional situations and the direct impact brought by the games of great powers in Central Asian countries. The recent problems between China and Kazakhstan, and China and Kyrgyzstan, are also related to Sino-US trade friction, because when big powers have conflicts, small countries have to make a choice. Small countries will strive for more wiggle room by seeking balance among big powers. Small countries also hope to take advantage of big powers with regards to regional cooperation. China is a big power. Central Asian countries have more or less become accustomed to depending on China economically due to China's large

economic input. However, China still does not have a big influence on Central Asia, which is a problem to be resolved.

Sun Zhuangzhi proposed four major indicators to evaluate Central Asian countries: controlling force, enforcement, cohesion and the ability to withstand turbulence. Controlling force determines whether the country can function normally, including the management system established by the country, the relationship between the central and local governments, and the authorities' supervision and control of officials. Enforcement refers to the extent policy is carried out, including whether the responsibilities of governments at different levels are clear. The Central Asian countries have retained the Soviet Union's vertical leadership system and formed a huge official system. Thus, enforcement mainly relies on administrative efficiency. Cohesion mainly depends on the identity of the country. Since Central Asian countries are multi-ethnic, factors like religion, civic awareness and whether multiple cultures can be inclusive and share common values affect national identity. The ability to withstand turbulence is the ability to cope with crises and challenges, limit

turbulence to a minimum, and quickly bring itself back to a stable state.

Prof. Pan Zhiping from Xinjiang University gave a presentation titled “Analysis of the security situation in Central Asia in the new era.” He pointed out that the incident that took place in August in Kyrgyzstan was not a color revolution but internal turmoil triggered by the conflicts between the South and the North. “Color Revolution” refers to the non-violent revolutions manipulated by Western countries, especially the US. But nowadays, the US is rarely interested in Central Asia.

Pan Zhiping noted the resurgence of pan-Turkism in Central Asia, pointing out that Turkic-speaking countries organized an irregular summit after the disintegration of Soviet Union, which started to become institutionalized in 2011. It is mainly convened by Turkey with participation by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the pan-Turkism textbook *General History of Turks* (《突厥通史》) is used in primary and secondary schools.

Pan Zhiping opined that the elimination of extremism in Central Asia still has a long way to go.

Islamization in Central Asia is much lower in extent than that in the Middle East and mainly exists in Uzbekistan and southern Tajikistan. Uzbekistan has transformed the traditional mahalla with strong religious features into a new mahalla that is now like a community organization directly under the strict rule of the government. It currently works well, but risks still exist.

There are two major border issues in Central Asia. One is the border between Kazakhstan and Russia, which has been resolved relatively smoothly. The other is the nine enclaves involved in the Fergana Basin issue. The previous conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was related to this, but this was a matter for the border police, not involving the national defense forces, let alone military confrontation.

In terms of the US perception of Central Asia's geopolitics, Pan Zhiping expressed his belief that the US is becoming increasingly worried. He pointed out that the Rand Corporation announced 20 years ago that the US would maintain its supremacy and never allow China to grow strong, even if it rose peacefully. George W Bush advocated the "Color Revolutions" in the Caucasus and Georgia. Later, the US launched the

“Great Central Asia” strategy and “New World Order” strategy. By the time of the Trump administration, the US was very anxious and unscrupulous. The challenge we face is Trump’s unpredictable nature. For example, the US has recently paid attention to the so-called “human rights issue” in Xinjiang. Its secretary of state talked to the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian countries, alleging that China’s actions in Xinjiang had nothing to do with counter-terrorism. This reflects the US intention of interfering in Central Asia and creating chaos in Xinjiang.

Prof. Wu Dahui, director of the Center for Eurasia Strategy Studies in Tsinghua University, took Kyrgyzstan as an example to analyze the new “China threat” theory.

Wu Dahui first pointed out that the traditional “China threat” theory originated in Europe and later spread to Australia and the US. The “China threat” theory generally has four directions, namely, the “population expansion theory,” which holds that China has too many people and does not have enough food to eat; the “economic aggression theory,” which holds that China’s economy has become so strong and that China has become an economic beast; the “military

threat theory,” which holds that China’s military expenditure has increased too fast in the past ten years; and the “ideological expansion theory.”

He stressed that the new “China threat” theory in Central Asia is different from the traditional “China threat” theory. Take Kyrgyzstan as an example. The current relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China is presumably at its lowest point since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The new threat theory has three perspectives. One is the threat of corruption from China. Not long ago, Almazbek Atambayev was arrested, mainly for corruption in the implementation of some projects related to China.

Correspondingly, Kyrgyzstan believes that the economic activities of Chinese enterprises in Kyrgyzstan have contributed to corruption and that the Chinese government has connived with and supported Chinese enterprises to obtain economic benefits through illegal means.

The second perspective is China’s debt threat, which is probably the most popular “threat theory” among countries along the Belt and Road. Kyrgyzstan’s debt to China is about \$1.683 billion, accounting for 44.7% of its total foreign debt.

Kyrgyzstan believes that it has exceeded the danger line and is likely to have to “cede land and pay compensation” in the future. The third perspective is China’s racial threat theory. Xinjiang is the region with the largest number of cross-border ethnic groups, and all five Central Asian countries have cross-border ethnic groups. Wu Dahui said that the logic of the so-called “racial threat” lies in Kyrgyzstan’s belief that Xinjiang’s anti-terrorism measures threaten the human rights of China’s Kirgiz ethnic group. If the Kyrgyz government does not intervene, China’s Kirgiz ethnic group will no longer exist in 15 to 20 years. With China’s gradual growth in strength, the issue of Chinese Kirgiz who have migrated to Kyrgyzstan will become an excuse for China to interfere in Kyrgyzstan’s politics.

Wu Dahui finally pointed out that there will be new varieties of the “China threat” theory and it is impossible to completely eliminate them. The best protection for Chinese enterprises operating overseas is to abide by laws and regulations. No matter whether the market in the host country is mature or not, enterprises should engage in economic activities based on market principles. In countries with an

underdeveloped economy and facing periods of uncertain political transformation, major infrastructure projects need to proceed cautiously. After all, the role of the Chinese government is to guide rather than make decisions. In addition, it is necessary to have an international vision and diplomatic awareness when dealing with issues concerning cross-border ethnic minorities.

Su Chang, a research fellow at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, focused her presentation on the evolution of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia.

Su Chang pointed out that Islamic radicalism was the prequel to Islamic extremism in Central Asia and an important stage in the development of extremism. The historical background of the evolution of radicalism was the revival of Islam and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With the worsening of conflicts between the Islamic world and the West, the political characteristics of the revival of Islam were obvious, which objectively intensified radicalism. Under the background of the revival of Islam, radicalism in Central Asia began to

sprout and developed rapidly when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Although Islamic radicalism in Central Asia has a profound fundamentalist aspect, its connotation is political, and it seeks political goals rather than religious ones. Its development process can be divided into four stages:

The first stage was the embryonic stage in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, the target of the Central Asian militants was the Soviet government. They mainly resisted atheism through propaganda and enlivened the revival of Islam. They did not establish a complete organization or ideological system. In the late 1970s, Central Asian militants set up a revolutionary organization. In the early 1980s, this organization began to promote radical ideas. At the same time, Wahhabism in the Middle East entered Central Asia and was accepted by some Islamists. Some political ideas in Wahhabism coincided with the political demands of revolutionary organizations. Revolutionary organizations accepted some ideas from Wahhabism and integrated some ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, hoping to gain political leverage. With the development of radicalism in Central Asia, Wahhabism became the main ideology of revolutionary organizations. In the

1970s and 1980s, revolutionary organizations had a great influence on Central Asia. Some spiritual leaders in Fergana accepted Wahhabi ideas and took their students to build mosques and religious schools in Central Asia to spread Wahhabi ideas. Two of the students later became the founders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the largest terrorist organization in Central Asia.

The second stage was 1979-1989, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. This led to war, and radicalism developed dramatically. During the war, Afghan resistance organizations had a great influence on the Central Asian Muslim soldiers in the Soviet army. Through various kinds of propaganda, they attracted many Central Asian soldiers to defect. After the war, the Central Asian Muslim soldiers brought back the radical ideas of the resistance organizations to Central Asia. It can be said that the Afghan resistance organizations cultivated the first backbones of Central Asian Islamic radicalism. During this period, Afghanistan connected extremists in the Middle East with radical forces in Central Asia, promoted the awakening of nationalism and the emergence of extremism in Central Asia, and ended the isolation of

Central Asia from the outside Islamic world.

The third stage was the rise of political Islamic forces after the independence of Central Asian countries. Political Islamic forces were political and religious organizations in the early days of the independence of Central Asian countries, and were an important carrier for the transformation from radicalism to extremism. In the early 1990s, two major conflicts accelerated the formation of radical forces. One was the conflict between Hanafi and Wahhabi. In the late 1980s, the Wahhabi and the traditional Hanafi in Central Asia had a controversy in Fergana. The controversy quickly expanded into opposition between religious organizations and sects and became increasingly fierce. Wahhabis firmly promoted the Islamization of the country and opposed Israelis and atheists. The second conflict was the opposition between the regimes of the Central Asian countries and the Wahhabis. For example, after Uzbekistan became independent, most Muslims supported the current regime, but Wahhabi in Fergana continued to incite local Muslims to confront the government. This ideological opposition quickly turned into conflicts. These radical forces established political parties and

associations, established ties with overseas Islamic organizations, and also participated in regional movements. An evolution from radicalism to extremism, with political Islam as the carrier, occurred before and after the independence of Central Asian countries.

The fourth stage was the transformation of political Islamic forces from radicalism to extremism in the early days of independence of Central Asian countries. During this period, political Islamic forces developed rapidly, and they mainly evolved from three sources. First, political opposition with religious overtones, such as the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. Second, local religious forces, such as some folk religious leaders in Fergana. Third, the radical forces formed in the 1970s and 1980s, including some religious parties in the early days of independence of Central Asian countries. Their rapid development promoted the occurrence of riots. For example, the riots in Namangan in 1991 marked the beginning of a large-scale shift of political Islamic forces in Central Asia to extremist organizations. Since then, various political and Islamic forces in Central Asia began to use violence to confront the regimes, and the

confrontations became more and more intense. Since 1993, most political Islamic forces have gone underground and some have gone to Afghanistan and formed new terrorist organizations. The early days of independence of Central Asian countries were a period in which radicalism grew rapidly and evolved.

Su Chang pointed out that the above conclusions show the relationship between the Central Asian state regimes and Islam, and the opposition between Hanafi and Wahhabi during this period. It should be noted that the core of these ideologies reflects the thinking of Central Asian countries about development. These views carry distinct political characteristics, and are one of the key factors for the transformation from radicalism to extremism.

Regarding the relationship between radicalism and extremism in Central Asia, Su Chang believes that radicalism essentially belongs to the political category and has emerged and evolved in the form of social ideological trends, driving a variety of social movements with political overtones. Its purpose is to win participation in national politics through radical ways, and establish a regime dominated by Islamic values. Radicalism and extremism are closely related,

but there are three major differences. First, they have different sources of ideology. Radicalism mainly comes from fundamentalism and Wahhabi ideology. Extremism mainly refers to the radical ideological trends that emerged in the process of the Islamic revival, and some ideological theories from Islamic extremist organizations in the Middle East and South Asia. At the same time, extremism integrates some characteristics formed in the process of Islamic localization in Central Asia, and its core is Wahhabism and concepts of jihad. Second, the behavior is different. Radicalism uses less violence and takes the form of associations and religious parties. It seeks to participate in political activities, tries to enter the political mainstream and seeks to control the country's development path. The behavior of extremist organizations in Central Asia is to carry out violent terrorist attacks, with the goal of undermining stability in Central Asia and overthrowing regimes in Central Asia. In addition, radicalism and extremism are different in terms of emergence and development: radicalism germinated in the 1970s and 1980s, while extremism evolved under the complicated historical conditions after the disintegration of the Soviet Union

and the establishment of sovereign states in Central Asian countries, and reached its peak in the late 1990s, with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and landmark events in the three southern Central Asian countries. After 2010, with the extremism in the Middle East spreading to Southeast Asia again, radicalism in Central Asia rose again.

There are two links between radicalism and extremism. Both ideological trends have clear political purposes, that is, to establish organizations under the banner of Islam and to establish a theocratic regime. In addition, they influence each other in the process of development. Extremist organizations have absorbed some radical forces. Radicalism still exists in Central Asia today and has an impact on the security of Central Asia.

As to the relationship between radicalism, political Islamic forces and extremism, Su Chang argued that radicalism shifts to extremism with political Islamic forces as the carrier. Political Islamic forces are not only a form of transition from radicalism to extremism, but also an intermediary between the two. Radicalism has evolved from an ideological trend to a movement, driven by political Islamic forces. Some radical

political Islamic parties and groups had strong intentions to participate in and discuss politics before and after the independence of Central Asian countries.

According to Su Chang, one of the reasons why extremism is widely spread in Central Asia is that the officials and the people of Central Asian countries have a vague understanding of some issues, and lack the ability to identify these issues in depth, which is the key element to resisting extreme thoughts and persisting in radical reform. Various social ideological trends related to extreme thoughts are mixed. Different social groups in Central Asia have different misunderstandings about these issues, exacerbating the complication of social ideological trends in Central Asia. The division and even fragmentation of social outlets has provided extremism and extremist forces with opportunities to assimilate radical Muslims. Conflicts between different social ideologies have become more and more acute.

After the independence of the Central Asian countries, the most complicated problem is to think about their development path. In the process of the disintegration of the traditional society, what kind of national spirit should a nation establish?

She pointed out that the social ideological trends in Central Asian countries are diverse and chaotic, and their ability to resist external extremism is limited. Facing complex and profound social ideological trends, we need to study the following issues clearly.

First, how receptive is traditional society in Central Asia to various ideological trends in the external Islamic world? In which group of people or ethnic groups are these trends more likely to be accepted?

Second, why do Central Asian countries lack the ability to distinguish among various ideological trends?

And third, which parts of Islamic fundamentalism have been used by extremist forces and mixed into extremist theories to become tools to promote radicals to transform into extremists?

Su Chang finally stressed that radicalism and extremism are not religions. Among complicated ideological trends and fierce political conflicts, radicalism and extremism are jumbled up in a way that is difficult to sort out and deal with. It is of practical significance to study Islamic radicalism as it relates to these trends and conflicts. Compared with extremism, radicalism spreads more widely because it often does not emphasize violence, and many people have a vague

understanding of its legitimacy and morality. In addition, Central Asian countries have no legal definition of radicalism, so radicalism becomes more difficult to control.

Xu Tao, a research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, delivered a speech entitled “Geopolitical Opportunities and Challenges Faced by Central Asian Countries in the New Era -- Variable and Constant Factors in Regional Development since the Independence of Central Asian Countries.” Central Asian countries have been independent for 30 years. From this vantage point, Xu Tao reviewed, evaluated and predicted the overall political and economic situation in Central Asia by summarizing the constants and variables in social development and nation-state construction in Central Asia.

Xu Tao said the constants mainly include three aspects. First, the basic geographical situation has not changed. Central Asian countries are landlocked countries and are located in the most central region of Eurasia. Even with the great development of science and technology, the basic situation of the geographical problem of Central Asia has not changed, and the

difficulty and cost of communication and dialogue with the world are still relatively high. Second, the influence of foreign powers on the Central Asian region has not changed. It can also be said that the geopolitical situation of the region has basically not changed. This is a relatively important indicator for examining its economic security. Third, the influence of some ethnic elements in Central Asia on the development of nation-states has not changed. Even in the era of globalization in the 21st century, the traditional nomadic and oasis civilization in Central Asia still persists in its infiltration into society, politics and economics, and plays an influential role. This is highlighted in the strong influence of tribal politics in Central Asia. Tribal consciousness is higher than national consciousness, and national consciousness is higher than patriotism toward the country. Many problems are solved not from the level of nation or country but from the tribal level. For example, the root cause of this year's power transfer conflict in Kyrgyzstan lies in the uneven delivery of services and benefits to appease family interests and group interests. Similar situations also occurred in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Some difficulties encountered by Chinese-funded enterprises and institutions in Central Asian countries and some obstacles with the state or local government can be solved at the family level. This brings about many problems for long-term cooperation.

The variables in the development of Central Asia are reflected in three aspects. First, the biggest variable is that the position of these countries in the world has changed. The Central Asian countries have achieved the status of sovereign countries in a truly modern sense and can independently choose their own development path, national model and relations with the world and neighboring countries. This variable has been in play for nearly 30 years since the early 1990s and is of great significance. Secondly, the influence of big countries on Central Asia has changed. With changes in the whole international power structure, the great powers have had different ways of influencing the region. This was true in the era when Russia and Britain had big power competition in Central Asia, before the Soviet Union integrated, in the 10 years prior to the independence of the Central Asian countries, and the 15 years after their independence. In short, great powers not only try to strengthen their

military, economic and cultural presence in the region, but also play games that impact the formulation of regional rules and the direction of development. Third, the differences among Central Asian countries are widening, and the relations among the countries have also undergone great changes. In particular, the meeting of Central Asian leaders in 2018 focused on improving the relations among countries and solving border territorial issues and water resource issues left over from the Soviet era. This is a sign of the continuous changes in the relations among Central Asian countries. Even so, the historical burden is too complicated and significant to be completely resolved through a summit. Not long ago, a border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan occurred, which shows that these issues will continue to have an impact on the relations between Central Asian countries. Although these issues are currently under control, if there is an unexpected incident that leads to a country losing control or nationalism rising, it may trigger a greater response in the region.

Xu Tao opined that, in general, Central Asia is developing under the interaction between variables and constants, and will release a lot of energy under the

influence of these two forces, such as changes in domestic and foreign policies, the emergence of extremism, and some problems that appeared during the shift of government. Grasping these main constants and variables benefits our observation and judgment about the development of Central Asia in the future.

Prof. Chang Chun from PKU's School of Public Health gave a presentation entitled "Opportunities and Challenges for Medical and Healthcare Cooperation from the Perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative." Chang Chun discussed the status quo, the necessity for healthcare cooperation under the backdrop of the BRI, and challenges for healthcare cooperation among countries along the Belt and Road, as well as opportunities and recommendations for healthcare cooperation.

Chang Chun opined that there are several dimensions to the necessity for healthcare cooperation under the backdrop of the BRI. First, health is closely related to development. *The Beijing Communique of the Belt and Road Health Cooperation* suggested that health is a prerequisite and consequence of development. Second, countries along the Belt and Road may encounter common health problems such as

natural and epidemic diseases in specific countries and regions. The open flow of people, local development and construction may increase the mobility of pathogens, causing more risks of potential outbreaks of infectious diseases. In addition, changes in people's behaviors, lifestyles, cultural habits, and dietary structures caused by trade and product transactions may bring about shared health problems, which will require everyone to work together to solve. Third, with the improvement of living conditions and economic and social development, people's needs for health care have increased. Governments of various countries have taken health care as an important area of concern. Each country's unique experiences have led to their own advantages. Exchanges and sharing expertise in health care among different countries are of great significance to promoting the health of countries along the Belt and Road.

At present, the healthcare cooperation along the Belt and Road is mainly divided into three types. The first type is multilateral and bilateral cooperation based on existing coordination mechanisms. The second type is medical and public health assistance. The third type is cooperation in the field of traditional medicine,

including the promotion of traditional Chinese medicine overseas and support for cross-border medical care. For example, the health cooperation between Kazakhstan and China mainly has four aspects. One is the cooperation between medical institutions and universities. The second is cross-border medical care cooperation, which involves private traditional Chinese medicine clinics and cross-border medical services. The third is the cross-border medical service platform led by China, which has spread out to include 24 hospitals in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and other countries. The fourth is a rehabilitation center built in Khorgas by China to provide targeted medical services.

Healthcare cooperation along the Belt and Road faces many challenges. First, there is plentiful inter-governmental cooperation but insufficient private cooperation. Second, the economic capacity and the investment in healthcare differ in each country, so different countries have different capacities and demands. Third, language barriers have brought great obstacles to communication and cooperation. Fourth, a coordination mechanism has not yet been implemented.

Chang Chun opined that China has two expectations in health care cooperation. First, considering its own security and development, China hopes to enhance its soft power, promote the implementation of the BRI, and improve the health of Chinese people through learning from others and improving its own epidemic prevention capacity. Second, China hopes to win the support of the public of countries along the Belt and Road in order to create a visible example of win-win cooperation.

There are also many opportunities for health care cooperation along the Belt and Road. First, more and more countries have responded to cooperation under the BRI. Second, China attaches great importance to this cooperation from central to local governments, showing a positive willingness to participate. Third, China has accumulated some experience in providing medical assistance to foreign nations, and also in the healthcare cooperation along the Belt and Road. Last, there are wide opportunities for health care cooperation in many areas. These include the prevention and control of infectious, non-infectious and chronic diseases; maternal and child healthcare; improvement of water resources and environmental health;

healthcare system construction and national health programs; personnel training and research cooperation; medical equipment and technology, especially telemedicine and cooperative medical treatment; and the promotion of traditional medicine and traditional Chinese medicine.

Chang Chun put forward five suggestions for carrying out healthcare cooperation on the BRI. First, escalate health cooperation to a strategic level. Second, implement the policy of “integrating health into all aspects.” Third, be demand-oriented, integrate with local societies and cultures to study the actual needs of countries and focus on the experience of the people to win word-of-mouth and public support. Fourth, do a good job of top-level design, achieve orderly development, and carry out pragmatic cooperation. Fifth, domestic participants should give play to their own advantages to offer their signature products and avoid internal vicious competition.

Zhang Ning, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, spoke about the security situation in Tajikistan. He said that, overall, the security situation in Tajikistan is stable, the possibility for the outbreaks of traditional military security

incidents is small, and counter-terrorism and counter-extremism are top priorities. Following an official assessment report by Tajikistan on its situation, Zhang Ning introduced the counter-terrorism and anti-extremism situation in Tajikistan from three aspects.

First, the report states that currently active terrorist organizations fall into three categories, namely The Islamic Renaissance Party, the Islamic State and traditional organizations. The Islamic Renaissance Party had about 40,000 members when it was legal. After being classified as an extremist organization in 2015, it has become the most active terrorist organization. The Islamic State has not engaged in very many terrorist incidents in Tajikistan. It mainly liaises and publicizes terror, having a great impact on Tajikistan's migrants in Russia. In addition, traditional organizations that have existed since Tajikistan's independence, such as Hizbut-Tahrir, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and others, have deep-rooted influence, and have also branched out extensively in recent years.

According to statistics in the report, the number and scale of violent terrorist incidents in Tajikistan was

generally small. Some 873 violent terrorist incidents occurred in 2018, and 298 people were arrested, indicating that the situation was suddenly severe last year. Reasons for this increase include the Islamic Renaissance Party being classified as an extremist organization, and the return of terrorists from the Middle East.

Among the 1,899 Tajik citizens who fought in the Middle East in the past six years, one fifth are women, indicating a new situation in which the number of women joining extremist organizations has increased significantly in recent years. This explains why the security department has paid more attention to women. At present, there are more than a thousand extremists in Tajikistan, and about 2,500 Tajik extremists in the border area of northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It should be noted that there are nearly 40 violent terrorist training camps in northern Afghanistan, mainly training terrorists bound for Central Asia, which poses a big threat to China and Central Asia.

According to the report, in recent years terrorist organizations are mainly active in the border area between northeast Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as in the Badakhshan area in the east. Their main

means of liaison and propaganda is via the Internet, and their main targets are young people, women and relatives. The latest change is that they have adopted a “sleeping” mode, carrying out neither activities nor crimes, which poses a great challenge to the security of Tajikistan. To fight against terrorist activities, the Tajik government has taken many preventive measures, such as installing cameras in mosques, classifying detained terrorists, and cleaning up and rectifying mosques.

Zhang Ning pointed out that Tajikistan currently faces many problems in counter-terrorism. First, compared with the current security situation, its anti-terrorism force is relatively weak, and existing personnel and equipment are far from adequate, which can only guarantee future attacks against key targets. Violent terrorist attacks still frequently occur in some weak areas. Second, Tajikistan’s laws have been unable to adapt to the new situation of the rapid development of terror groups, and the government’s pace of modifying its procedures cannot keep up with the speed of change. This has resulted in violent terrorist organizations using legal gaps and loopholes to obtain a larger scope for survival. Third, Russia and the US deliberately exaggerated regional security risks and

engaged in geopolitical struggles in the region, which had an impact on counter-terrorism. Fourth, there is an increase in the number of pilgrims undertaking the Hajj. When they return, they have great influence and prestige in the community. They may become a powerful channel for the spread of religious extremism, or they may become the most effective weapon for fighting extremism. Therefore, it is important to effectively deal with them. Fifth, due to severe corruption, government departments may collude with terrorist extremists and criminal groups, and even law enforcement departments themselves will participate in these activities.

Shi Yue, an assistant professor at Peking University's School of Foreign Languages, gave a presentation entitled "The Astana International Financial Center and China-Kazakhstan Economic and Trade Cooperation." Shi Yue talked about four aspects — an overview of the center, its management structure, the center's current operation, and its orientation and prospects.

The Astana International Financial Center is located in the southern part of the Expo Park in Kazakhstan. It was originally proposed by President

Nursultan Nazarbayev as one of the five reforms in Kazakhstan. It is based on the British legal system and integrates functions like finance, bond management, Islamic finance and financial technology. The center was set up in 2015, and opened on July 5, 2018 on the 20th anniversary of the relocation of Kazakhstan's capital

The top of the management structure of the Astana International Financial Center is the management council. The council includes one chairman and 11 members. The chairman is the current president. The 11 members are appointed by the president. There are six Kazakhstan members, including the prime minister, deputy prime minister, minister of national economy, central bank governor, and the financial center governor. There are also six foreign members, two from US financial institutions, the CEO of Sberbank of Russia, CEO of Yandex, president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and president of the Islamic Development Bank. The daily operation of the center is the responsibility of the center's governor. To some extent, he can bypass the National Bank of Kazakhstan to report directly to the president and prime minister of Kazakhstan, having

considerable financial business authority. Kairat Kelimbetov, the current governor of the financial center, is a heavyweight member of the younger generation of Kazakhstan officials.

At present, the center has a functional department and a business department. The functional department contains the AIFC Authority, Astana Financial Services Authority, AIFC Court and International Arbitration Center. The Astana Financial Services Authority is mainly responsible for all financial operations. The AIFC Authority is responsible for managing other issues outside the Astana Financial Services Authority, including logistics and daily administrative matters. The AIFC Court provides a common law court system based on the norms and principles of English law, and has one Chief Justice and eight Justices. The court does not accept criminal or administrative cases, and mainly deals with civil and commercial litigation between departments under the center.

The current situation of the operation of AIFC involves several aspects. First, the status of Astana as a financial center has quickly risen. Second, business is mostly done on the Astana International Exchange (AIX), which mainly involves stocks and bonds.

Shareholders include the Shanghai Stock Exchange, NASDAQ, Silk Road Fund, Goldman Sachs and the AIX itself. The AIX is now mainly responsible for underwriting Kazakh government bonds and dealing with the business aspects of the privatization of Kazakh enterprises. In addition, the AIX also has a Belt and Road section, which, to a certain extent, integrates with the BRI. At present, there are not many substantial businesses.

Another important business is the AIFC Bureau for Continuing Professional Development. Using the AIFC as the platform, it aims to cultivate talent in the fields of accounting, finance, law, human resources, information technology and business administration in Kazakhstan by taking advantage of the educational resources of universities and training institutions at home and abroad. At present, the training center has opened more than 200 online and offline courses, providing more than 1,000 students with professional skills and English training.

As for the orientation and prospects of the AIFC, Shi Yue opined that, first, the center mainly provides substantial preferential policy in the fields of revenue and visa issuing, fully integrating with financial centers

in the British and the American systems in terms of management structure, judicial system and work language. It attracts international capital with its relatively high quality State-owned assets and further strengthens relevant fields' competitive capacities, helping to maintain economic development. Second, it improves the human resource level in the capital city of Kazakhstan by cultivating internationalized talent in the AIFC Bureau for Continuing Professional Development. Third, the AIFC will become an important path to the diversification of Kazakhstan industries. Last but not least, the AIFC is related to the financial market inside the Eurasian Economic Union. If it develops steadily, it will become a financial hub connecting to the Eurasian Economic Union in the future and attract investment from different countries. In this regard, it is necessary for China to pay close attention to the development of the AIFC. China should proactively develop the potential value of the center in complementing China-Kazakhstan capacity cooperation and investment programs, promoting the internationalization of the yuan, and combining AIFC's future development path with Sino-Kazak political, economic and trade cooperation, so as to lay the

foundation for the two countries' future development.

During the discussion session, the attendees expressed their opinions on topics related to China and Central Asia in security and development.

Su Chang: The extreme thoughts and extremist activities in Central Asian countries are largely affected by Afghan issues. In recent years, they have been mostly affected by the Islamic State. The decade after the September 11 attacks can be called a "safe decade" for Central Asian countries. Since the attacks, Central Asian countries have begun to crack down on extremist organizations within their borders, and many extremist organizations fled abroad. At the same time, Central Asian countries have begun to use tough means to tackle extremist organizations and ideas. In this way, terrorist activities and extremist organizations' activities have greatly declined in number. Marked by a series of terrorist attacks in Kazakhstan from 2010 to 2011, the activities of extremist organizations in Central Asia are on the rise, but the main forces are still active in northern Afghanistan. After 2017, extremists in Central Asia mainly returned to Afghanistan. Thanks to the "safe decade," Central Asian countries have greatly enhanced both their national strength and

experience in combating terrorism and extremism. Therefore, the extremists who returned to Central Asia are not large in number, but mainly active in Afghanistan.

The violent terrorist attacks in Central Asia are directly related to the region's anti-terrorist efforts. At the same time, issues like the changes of Afghanistan's situation, the progress of peace talks and whether internal unrest will happen all have an impact on the reintegration of terrorist organizations in Central Asia. Northern Afghanistan has seen a comeback of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Currently, terrorist activities and extremist activities are not very active in Central Asia, but the extremist thoughts spreading through Internet have been greatly influenced by the Middle East, Afghanistan and South Asia.

Yang Shu: Is there a high possibility that Kazakhstan and China will have medical and healthcare cooperation?

Chang Chun: Based on the different situations in different countries, I think cooperation is not the only choice but different countries can learn from each other. At present, Kazakhstan is facing heavy financial pressure because it is providing its citizens with free

medical treatment, and is considering encouraging citizens to purchase personal insurance. I think they can take our methods of handling medical treatment problems as a reference, and we could also learn from Kazakhstan's successful experience in providing citizens with free medical treatment.

Su Chang: I would like to analyze the "China threat" theory from a different angle, looking for reasons from inside Central Asian countries. First, Central Asian countries have not integrated well with China in the market economy concept. China quickly established its market economy after its reform and opening-up. However, Central Asia countries still have to cultivate their market economies. In this sense, conflicts may arise between China and Central Asian countries. Second, Central Asian countries have experienced a period of national rejuvenation, which brings about xenophobic sentiment in both the social and political fields. The anti-China wave since last year is actually anti-government in nature. During a power transfer, social conflicts that arise in this process are taken advantage of by domestic political opposition parties, who operate anti-China or anti-Russia activities. Western countries also manipulated this

sentiment behind the scenes. The US has a media camp plan aimed at cultivating media reporters and journalists in Central Asian countries. This is an effort to seek a proper way to establish a Western value system in Central Asian countries. Several of the recent anti-China activities were pushed by the US, and supported by Kazak opposition parties, protest groups and the so-called independent media.

Pan Zhiping: I agree with you. The opposition parties of Central Asian countries blame the governments for corruption and betraying their country to “collude” with China, and usually amplify voices with this message. Some media added fuel to the situation by creating rumors.

Shi Yue summarized the workshop, saying that the conference focused on geopolitics, the security situation in Central Asia, and diversified Sino-Kazak cooperation under the BRI framework. In terms of geopolitics, the participants all mentioned the major international powers’ impact on Central Asia, such as Russia, the US and Europe, as well as the constraints home and abroad encountered by Central Asian countries due to their geographical locations and availability of resources.

Regarding security, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan experienced a shift in power. Turkmenistan has maintained long-term stability, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have met some internal problems. However, the overall security situation in Central Asia is relatively stable, with the main pressure probably coming from extremists.

In terms of diversified cooperation, these countries' central finances rely heavily on profits from energy and mineral resources. Pressure from livelihood issues of the citizens is prominent.

In terms of relations with China, with the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative, both positive and negative phenomena have emerged. This is especially true as the cooperation projects with these countries expand from energy to other fields. In the medical and healthcare field, cooperation faces both promising opportunities and possible obstacles.

Shi Yue pointed out that Central Asia's security and stability is significant to the safety of China's western borders and domestic stability. Development is the key path for Central Asia to relieve its people's livelihood problems, balance internal political forces and resist foreign ideology. Therefore, when studying

the situation of Central Asia, we should not only pay attention to the interaction between Central Asian countries and international powers, but also to the changes to its internal power structure and economic situation.

This perspective is also applicable to thinking about the implementation of the BRI in Central Asia. The methods to combine a certain area's macro-economic situation with business practice may become an important direction for promoting the BRI in the future. Research on Central Asia also reminds us that area studies is a multi-discipline field which requires us to integrate the knowledge and expertise of different majors in a proper way to solve some major topics that are urgent and cutting-edge.

In the future, work related to the BRI should be guided by specific issues, break the barriers between the humanities, social sciences, science, technology and agronomy, form benign interactions among talent of different majors, and jointly promote diplomatic work in the new era.