

## **Moderator's introduction to the summer camp**

The Institute of Areas Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) was established on April 12, 2018. It is a comprehensive academic platform for area studies that has as its main tasks the conducting of academic research, the cultivation of talent, serving as a think tank, and hosting international academic exchanges. Talent cultivation means recruiting and fostering interdisciplinary high-quality PhD students to meet the urgent needs of the country's One Belt and One Road initiative (BRI) proposal and social and economic development. Its first batch of PhD students will be bachelor-straight-to-doctorate students whose research directions span Middle East studies, Russian and Central Asia studies. To this end, PKUIAS held the "2018 National Excellent University Student Summer Camp" on July 6, 2018.

As of July 27, 2018, the institute received a total of 248 application submissions. Applicants were from all over the country, majoring in foreign languages, political science, history, economics, law, management, sociology and other humanities and social disciplines. Based on their academic performance, rankings, scientific research work, and awards, the institute selected 35 students to attend the summer camp at PKU. Between August 28 and 31, 2018, the summer camp was held at Jingyuan Courtyard 5 on the PKU campus. The students arrived on August 28, attending the opening ceremony and four lectures on August 29. On August 30, they were divided into different groups to have discussions based on the lectures and then had a written examination and attended the closing ceremony on the

morning of August 31.

In view of the importance of the lectures to the selection of excellent campers, the institute invited four scholars and experts who specialize in Middle East, Russian and Central Asian studies to be guests. The guests were Sun Zhuangzhi, director of Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); Ning Qi, dean of PKU's School of Foreign Languages; Wang Lincong, research fellow at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS; and Wu Bingbing, director of the Institute of Arab-Islamic Culture of PKU. They gave lectures titled "The Strategic Situation of Central Asia and the One Belt and One Road Initiative," "The Building of Russia's National Image," "Security Issues and Governance in the Middle East," and "Iran in the Middle East Strategic Context."

The summer campers said that the four lectures greatly expanded their horizons. The four heavyweight experts' carefully prepared lectures deepened their understanding of Russia, Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as the Belt and Road initiative, national image building, security and governance, and strategic issues and other theoretical and practical topics. After three days of study, on the basis of group discussions, interviews and written examinations, the institute selected six campers from 35 students, as the first batch of bachelor-straight-to-doctorate students of PKUIAS.

Wang Suolao

September 15, 2018

## **2018 National Excellent University Student Summer Camp August 28-31**

To help excellent university students in China better understand the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) and to build an interactive platform between young students and well-known experts in area studies, PKUIAS held the “2018 National Excellent University Student Summer Camp” at the university from August 28 to 31. A total of 35 outstanding university students from PKU, Renmin University of China, Nankai University, Fudan University, Xiamen University and Lanzhou University participated in the summer camp.

On the morning of August 29, the summer camp’s opening ceremony was held at the Jingyuan Courtyard 5 on the PKU campus. Ning Qi, dean of PKU’s School of Foreign Languages, hosted the ceremony. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, gave a speech.

Prof. Qian Chengdan first extended a warm welcome to the participants. He said that area studies is not a new discipline. After the end of World War II, some famous international institutions of higher learning in the West established a batch of area studies institutions, such as the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University in the US. There are lots of well-known scholars in these institutions, and they have produced many academic works with global influence. China’s research on foreign issues started very early, but China did not formally adopt the specific terminology of area studies or regard area studies as a research field with Chinese characteristics and

academic relevance. PKU has a very strong faculty conducting foreign research, who have long been studying issues in different regions and countries. However, these research forces are scattered in different departments and disciplines, and failed to join forces in their efforts. To solve this problem, PKU established the Institute of Area Studies in April, hoping it could integrate relevant disciplines and promote the development of area studies at the university.

Prof. Qian Chengdan pointed out that area studies is not one single discipline, but a highly interdisciplinary integration of various fields. The research covers almost all subjects from science to liberal arts and from social sciences to humanities. People who do area studies must have a very broad knowledge background and be particularly proficient in one field. Therefore, students who wish to be engaged in area studies should not only cultivate a very broad knowledge base, but also establish a firm goal to become a leading expert in a certain field. Because China has so many talented people, China's area studies has the potential to take a leading role in the world. Prof. Qian expressed hope that through the summer camp, students could learn PKUIAS' basic concepts in area studies, understand the basic situation of the institute and experience the institute's strong academic atmosphere and high-quality teaching resources. He welcomed the students to study at PKU in the future and become the first group of students at PKUIAS.

After the opening ceremony, Sun Zhuangzhi, director of the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, CASS; Ning Qi, dean of PKU's School of Foreign Languages; Wang Lincong, research fellow of the Institute of

West-Asian and African Studies, CASS, and Wu Bingbing, PKU's State of Qatar Chair in Middle Eastern Studies, gave lectures on Central Asia, Russia and the Middle East issues, and answered questions from the campers.

The title of Sun's lecture was "The Strategic Situation of Central Asia and the One Belt and One Road Initiative."

According to Sun, Central Asia is usually considered a political concept. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the five Central Asian republics became independent as the current Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. They cover about 4 million square kilometers and have a population of about 70 million. The region is bordered by Russia to the north, Iran and Afghanistan to the south, Azerbaijan to the west across Caspian Sea, and China to the east. The five countries have a common border of more than 3,000 kilometers with China. They are all located in the hinterland of the Eurasian continent. Uzbekistan is known as the "double-landlocked" country. Although the five countries are generally regarded as one unit and they have similarities in cultural traditions, they are actually very different from each other. Especially after independence, the development gaps among the five countries are becoming increasingly obvious. For example, Kazakhstan's per capita GDP in 2017 was higher than that of China, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are very weak economically and have a very small population.

Sun said that Central Asian countries have unique cultural traditions and strategic positions. First, they are at the intersection of the three ancient civilizations: East Asian civilization, South Asian civilization and European civilization.

More than 130 ethnic groups live in this region. Among the major ethnic groups in each country there are many tribes and branches, with extremely complicated ethnic relationships. In addition, there are many religions in the region, including Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Various religious sects can be seen in the religions. In Islam, for example, there are more than ten religious sects in Central Asia. Central Asian countries share an identity as Muslim countries and share a history, culture and tradition in the process of Islamization. However, they are also unique in many aspects, and the cultural differences are the most obvious. The relations and conflicts between ethnic groups and religions are also very complicated. After their independence, the countries strengthened their consciousness of national identity, and ethnic contradictions were sharpened. Central Asia has two very important historical courses, one is Turkicization and the other is Islamization. Its Turkicization was related to China. After the Tang Dynasty defeated the Eastern Turkic Khanate and the Western Turkic Khanate, the Turks began to move westward, and Central Asia's Turkicization gradually began. Central Asia's Islamization was related to the occupation by the Arab Empire. National identities in Central Asia formed relatively late. The Tajik nationality was formed in the Samanid Dynasty in the 10th century. The Kazakh nationality, the Uzbek nationality, and the Kyrgyz ethnic group were formed after the 16th century.

Halford John Mackinder's Heartland Theory is the most generally referred to description of the strategic importance of Central Asia. But in fact, China was the first to discover the important strategic position of Central Asia. In Chinese history,

Zhang Qian's travel to Western Regions reflects the strategic value of the region. After that, the importance of Central Asia has also been related to the rise of neighboring empires. For example, the descendants of the Timurid Empire traveled through Central Asia to Afghanistan, then conquered South Asia to establish the Mughal Empire. Another example was the Great Game between the former Soviet Union, or even earlier, Tsarist Russia, and the UK. The two examples both show that the region has been a place with extremely intense geopolitical competition since modern times. In addition, Central Asia is an important land transportation hub in Eurasia. It is much closer to travel from China to Europe through the second Eurasian Continental Bridge in Central Asia than through the Russian Siberian Far East. In terms of land transportation, Central Asia is placed with great hope as a Eurasian continental bridge.

Sun pointed out that after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian countries, they faced an initial task of establishing their political systems and development path, and urgently needed to realize political and economic transformation. However, they encountered many difficulties in the process of transformation. One of the most difficult was to establish a modern nation-state. Before being annexed by Tsarist Russia, most of the countries were feudal khanates or very small countries established by nomadic peoples. Therefore, the task of consolidating political power and building a state system was very arduous after their independence.

The five Central Asian countries established political systems and decision-making methods with their own

characteristics after their independence, which ensured their domestic stability and order. The five countries generally established a presidential government. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan turned to a parliamentary system because of intense domestic political struggles.

The five countries all adopted a multi-party system, but the role of political parties was seriously weakened. The current presidents of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan both have ruled for a long period of time, and two irregular regime changes have occurred in Kyrgyzstan. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan achieved a smooth transition of power after their first presidents' sudden deaths from illness.

In the process of building their nations, Central Asian countries faced hidden dangers. The regimes' deficiencies and the intensification of power struggles have continually undermined the stability of the political situation up to the present day. This is despite the fact that maintaining the authority of the central government, and especially of the president, is considered appropriate and beneficial to the consolidation of national sovereignty and unity and accepted by Central Asian society. The corruption of officials and the decline of people's living standards have also led to growing social dissatisfaction. The political structure of Central Asian countries has been constantly adjusted. The legislative systems have changed frequently, and even the constitutions have been modified at will. In addition, the personal power of presidents is too large, and family powers and vested interest groups hold political power and suppress other political factions. This can easily make political disputes go to extremes.



Some objective factors have also brought challenges to the stability and development of Central Asian countries. First, social polarization and poverty problems are serious. Second, after the independence of Central Asian countries, the countries adhered to a secular political system, even as Islam rapidly emerged in the lower classes. Extremist forces are the biggest enemy of the current regimes in Central Asian countries. In addition, the external environment of Central Asia is complex, and the political influence of superpowers, especially the US, cannot be underestimated. Affected by multiple factors, Kyrgyzstan has now become a “new hot spot” in political struggles in Central Asia. A number of political conflicts have come to a head and the turbulent situation is still continuing.

Economic reform is another major task facing Central Asian countries following their independence. At the end of the 1990s, the five Central Asian countries experienced steady development and maintained a high rate of development for about 10 years, because of their relatively good natural resource endowments. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in particular have abundant energy reserves. At the same time, the economic integration of the region is affected by the policies of superpowers. The Central Asian countries’ foreign exchange markets opened up at an early date and have been in close contact with Western financial institutions. Since 1997, many international financial crises have brought heavy losses to the financial systems of Central Asian countries. Especially after the second half of 2008, the economies of the five Central Asian countries have felt tremendous pressure brought about by the global economic crisis. Although anti-crisis plans or measures

aimed at stimulating growth and increasing employment were introduced, the effects were not pronounced. With severe inflation, the living standards of the residents declined, dissatisfaction with the government rose, and social unrest increased.

In the past two years, the economic growth of Central Asian countries has been relatively stable. Statistics show that in the first half of 2018, the economic growth rate in Tajikistan reached 7.2%, the rate Turkmenistan reached 6.2%, and the rate in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was over 4%. According to a World Bank report, Kazakhstan's GDP in 2017 ranked 55th among the 200 countries in the world; Uzbekistan ranked 85th; Turkmenistan ranked 88th; Kyrgyzstan ranked 145th; and Tajikistan ranked 147th.

Sun believes that the current economic problems in Central Asian countries are obvious. Their investment in the environment is poor; domestic markets suffer from poor development, and income is low and with poor prospects of improving in the short term. The countries' economic structures are abnormal, rely heavily on external countries, face a heavy debt burden and have insufficient funds. Their products' international competitiveness is limited, and they mainly rely on the output of energy and raw materials. As a result, their trade deficit has been expanding continuously. In addition to political and economic challenges, Central Asian countries face many traditional and non-traditional security challenges. The most prominent non-traditional security threat is drug smuggling in Afghanistan and other transnational criminal activities. The threats of terrorism, separatism and extremism are still very

serious. Ecological security, food security and financial security are also very urgent problems in some countries. The biggest feature of these non-traditional security issues is that they are mostly transnational regional issues, causing widespread harm to the stability of Central Asian countries.

In addition, the issue of the “Afghanistan syndrome” also has an important impact on the stability of Central Asia. The escalation of the Afghan civil war in the late 1990s and the rise of the Taliban have had a direct impact on the stability of Central Asia. As the US and NATO announced the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, Afghanistan’s neighboring Central Asian countries worry about the future of the situation in Afghanistan. They are afraid that another warlord dogfight will appear, and the Taliban, which the US made a futile effort to suppress for 10 years, may once again try to establish an Islamic regime in Afghanistan after the US and its NATO allies’ withdraw.

In the autumn of 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed during a speech in Kazakhstan the joint construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the relationship between China and Central Asia became closer. Sun pointed out that Central Asia was the main land route between China and Europe on the ancient Silk Road.

If issues in Central Asia can be resolved, the path of the new Silk Road will be smooth. Therefore, the stability of the Central Asian region will be closely related to the promotion of the “Belt and Road” initiative in the future. It should be noted that the superpower competition in Central Asia is quite intense. In particular, the development of energy resources in Central

Asia has been hot in recent years, and Central Asia's strategic position in the international energy supply market has become more important. In the future, the interaction of major superpowers and the establishment of regional security mechanisms will determine whether regional energy resources will bring Central Asian countries prosperity and stability or trigger more intense conflict.

The situation in Central Asia is dominated by superpowers. Different superpowers have established competing regional organizations and cooperation plans in a geopolitical competition. Generally speaking, the current situation in Central Asia has the following characteristics. First, countries strive to maintain the continuity of policies to stabilize economic growth. Second, the development of the economy is not balanced. The imbalance shows in many fields including politics, economics, military affairs and culture. This imbalance is both among different countries and also different regions within single countries, triggering many conflicts and problems. Third, the external pressure faced by Central Asian countries has increased without precedent, and security challenges have increased significantly. The most important and direct challenges come from Afghanistan. Indirect challenges include furious competition between superpowers, the changing situations in West Asia and South Asia, and the impact of international markets. Fourth, in Central Asia, various international mechanisms are trying to play a bigger role and make progress in certain areas, but the final implementation of their plans faces many difficulties. The contradictions and conflicts between these international cooperation mechanisms have become

prominent, and they are encountering old problems.

Central Asian countries have been pursuing a policy of friendship with China since their independence, which to some extent has alleviated the military pressure on China's northwestern border and improved China's external security environment. However, this has also created a series of new problems. For example, Central Asian countries' internal political and economic conflicts have spread to China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and some external anti-China forces have used Central Asia to undermine China's unity and stability. Due to the complexity and the possible variables of the regional political and security situation, the changing situation in Central Asia has had a direct impact on China's strategic interests. In recent years, cooperation between China and Central Asian countries in various fields has become deeper, and their bilateral cooperation has been continuously improved. Cooperation platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) have been established. In addition, the two sides have also tried to cooperate in many other fields like agriculture, tourism and environmental protection.

Sun pointed out that the changes in Central Asia's strategic structure have had a direct impact on the security of China's western border and the economic development of Northwest China. The favorable aspects of the impact include a higher level of bilateral cooperation, new progress in cross-border law enforcement and security cooperation, and remarkable results of regional anti-terrorism efforts under the framework of the SCO

and CICA. On the other hand, disadvantages include increasing non-traditional security threats in Central Asia, a growing geopolitical rift in Central Asia, negative effects on mutual political and security trust between China and Central Asian countries caused by Western penetration, and difficulties in completely eliminating separatist forces.

Since China proposed the “Belt and Road” initiative, Central Asian countries have expressed great interest. In June 2016, President Xi Jinping pointed out in his speech at the Uzbek Parliament that China and the Central Asian countries have historical, traditional and geo-cultural advantages that will help them jointly build the “Belt and Road.” His remarks have been widely supported and endorsed by the peoples of all countries.

China regards Central Asia as a key area and an important partner to co-build the “Belt and Road.” The two sides should further synergize their development strategies and plans, jointly find the entry point for cooperation and continuously improve the level of cooperation. China is willing to work with Central Asian countries to promote the construction of the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor. Sun said that he hopes that China and Central Asian countries can further promote friendly relations by cooperating with the “Belt and Road” initiative, broadening areas of cooperation, and deepening civilian exchanges and mutual trust among peoples.

The second lecture, “The building of Russia’s national image,” was given by Ning Qi, dean of PKU’s School of Foreign Languages and executive deputy director of PKUIAS. During the one and a half hour-long speech, Prof. Ning Qi

talked about how Russia builds its national image by analyzing Russia's national character, national ideology, and the different approaches it takes toward home and abroad.

Prof. Ning Qi said that Russia has the world's most extensive geographical territory, contains high-value natural resources, and is also a place that has changed its social conditions and shifted away from totalitarianism after experiencing trauma. Historically, Russia was always unified by an individual dictator who ruled the country with the support of a powerful military and a large bureaucracy. In such an empire, state power is highly concentrated, almost unconstrained, and legitimized ideologically by forces such as the Orthodox Church, which has transcended the boundaries of languages and races and given the ruler a near-mythic status. From this process, Russia in history was actually more like an empire. Interestingly, although a huge empire, Russia always felt that it was being bullied when it was engaged in wars with other countries. However, its territory always expanded after each time it was "bullied." Therefore, we can see that Russia's national character contains very complex ingredients. From a cultural point of view, before the 19th century, the Russian nation did not have national characteristics in a broad sense. Peasants, the majority in its population, were basically uneducated serfs. Due to their lack of education, their national identity and cultural identity were a blank slate. After reforms by Peter the Great, Russia, with the Orthodox Church as its main religion, established its military, governmental, and commercial institutions based on the model of Protestantism, and its aristocratic culture was established according to the Catholic model.

Ning Qi pointed out that the national image is the general evaluation and recognition given by the external public and the internal public of the nation to the state itself, the state's behavior and the activities of the state and its achievements. It is a combination of the country's perception of itself and the perception of the country by other actors in the international system; that is, self-identification and others' recognition. The national image reflects the evaluation of a country's overall strength. It affects an individual's recognition and identification with the national community, affecting national cohesiveness and the sense of belonging of the people, and also complexly affects other countries' and nations' acceptance and evaluation of the country's government, its people and all the country's spiritual and material products, determining the country's position in the world. As a soft power or power of influence, the national image profoundly affects relations between countries, the policy direction of a country, and also the public's perception of the country. It should be emphasized that national image as a subjective impression actually constitutes people's presuppositions about a country and its people. A negative national image will make people more or less, consciously or unconsciously, treat the information and behavior of the country and its people with a hostile and exclusive attitude, or even a preconceived prejudice. A positive national image often makes people willing to treat the country and its people in a more understanding, friendly, and accepting way. Shifting negative presuppositions into positive presuppositions often requires paying a high price. Therefore, governments of all countries attach great importance to the shaping of their national image.



According to Ning Qi, shaping a national image is divided into internal identification and external recognition. In terms of the exploration of self-identity, it was not until the 19th century that Russian people began to realize that they have unique national characteristics – ones that can be defined based on non-religious standards such as races and languages. Russia, which had often felt confused, began to look for its position in the modern world – a position that matched the vast territory it occupied. The search for national characteristics originated from debates among the intellectual elites in the 19th century. This search brought about unprecedented political instability in the 20th century. To date, this search seems to have continued.

Russia explored its identity from the social and psychological perspectives. The internal cause was the victory in the war against Napoleon in 1812, which succeeded in stimulating the patriotic enthusiasm of all walks of Russian society and dramatically changed the self-consciousness of Russians. Literary works, including Nikolay Mikhailovich Karamzin's *History of the Russian State* and a large number of poems written by Pushkin, marked the full flowering of cultural and historical national awareness in Russia. In addition, the cultural retrospection about the victory in the war against Napoleon eventually gave birth to the greatest literary work in Russian history, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It can be said that beginning with this war, the national consciousness of the Russians started to awaken. External factors driving Russian's exploration of its national identity included Peter the Great's reforms and Catherine the Great's acceleration of the adoption of European civilization into Russia, deepening Russia's

connection with the West. And due to the increasing popularity of higher education, people were increasingly eager to clearly define the relationship between Russia and Europe. Meanwhile, the young Russian generation, influenced by German Romanticism, could not find an effective way to have a wide influence on society or realize their personal ideals. This generation deeply reflected on themselves and defined their identity as thinkers of great ideas. By the end of the 19th century, the rise of nationalist ideas in Russia, especially the development of new popular and urban journalism, led to the appearance of secularized Russian nationalism in this multi-ethnic empire. Since then, nationalism had enabled Russia to promote Russification within the country. At the same time, it created a Pan-Asian and Pan-Slavic dream of expansion, hoping the country would become stronger. But unfortunately Russia was defeated in its wars against the Japanese in 1904 and 1905. In a subsequent war, it also lost to Germany. Russian chauvinism started to weaken and the empire's fragility due to its excessive expansion became obvious, leading to a series of revolutions in Russia at that time, which eventually developed into the establishment of a communist system. Ning Qi opined that German Romanticism, especially Marxist dialectical materialism, played an important role in leading and pushing forward the Russian October Revolution, which made great thinkers feel that they finally found a weapon.

After entering the 20th century, World War I and the social unrest at that time made Russia's exploration of its identity in the first 20 years of the 20th century go deeper into an exploration of the most basic rational behind politics. It was a

gradually progressive process. At first, Russia wanted to rely on the rule of the upper class and seek political rationality from top to bottom. Therefore, in the last period of Tsarist rule, they chose the cultural and religious approach, trying to transcend or avoid politics. For example, Fyodor Dostoevsky proposed that Russian thought can absorb all the ideas developed by Europe in different national environments, and in Russian people's characteristics, perhaps all the contradictory elements in these European thoughts can be reconciled and further developed. Vladimir Solovyov hoped to find a peaceful identity for Russia on the spiritual level, which would make Russia play a non-violent and non-political role in the world. Nicolas Berdyaev added nationalism to Solovyov's beliefs and proposed another kind of Russian thought. He portrayed Russia as a country with extreme contradictions: autocratic rule co-exists with anarchism; extreme pro-Russia chauvinism co-existed with the extreme embarrassment with the country; and people ostensibly knuckled under to the ruling authorities, but deep inside, they had infinite spiritual freedom. Nicolas Berdyaev hoped that World War I could inspire the masculinity of Russians. He believed that the essence of the Russian nation lies in the spiritual exploration of the creative thinkers and artists. Russians should be pilgrims in essence. The vast land of Russia gives them inspiration, but does not put their life in order. The way to free Russia from all kinds of painful experiences has transcended the scope of geography and entered the level of history. Therefore, Russia shoulders the mission entrusted by heaven and is destined for Christianity.

Russia's repentance and reconciliation would not be on the

personal level, but the national level. It was believed that Russian society could be more energetic in some way than any current Christian country. At the same time, the Marxists in Russia affirmed the core views of the Russian intellectuals in a new way, telling them that history is destined to develop in the direction of freedom. If the social elite joined the revolution, it was possible to realize this ultimate pursuit. Therefore, they staged a revolution.

The Russian October Revolution brought communist theories to China. The Russia-centered Soviet Union appeared and lasted for about 80 years. During this period, Russians' exploration of political rationality was sociological and anti-religious. They fully believed in the power of political measures, and such political measures, especially Marxism, became the official ideology that later provided the legal basis for the Soviet Union regime. Lenin's *The State and Revolution* attracted a large number of intellectuals who believed in human perfection and accepted the invitation of the Bolsheviks.

By the end of the 1980s, when people thought about political rationality, a new perspective emerged. They wanted to both strive for cultural and religious support and be able to gain flexibility in their sociological and anti-religious views.

Especially with Gorbachev coming to power, a post-war ban on information from and about the West was lifted, making Russian people more urgently desire freedom. They were exposed to ideas about religion and cultural heritage that had been banned for a long time. This pushed them to think about the personal responsibility one should shoulder. At this time, Gorbachev's reforms and new ways of thinking emerged. After

the attempted coup on August 19, 1991, Gorbachev was ousted from his position, which was followed by the independence of the republics in the union. On December 26th, the Supreme Soviet declared the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russia became the independent Russian Federation. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia needed to accelerate its search for a new national identity. In the process, it again adopted the Eurasianism that emerged during the World War I. In fact, Eurasianism is essentially a geographical conception about Russian identity, which expressed a vague desire in the Russian intellectual community that hoped Russia could restore its former identity as an empire. In terms of its geographical location, most of its territory is in Asia, but Russia considers itself to be a European country, an identification which benefits it on the international stage. Because Russia is located between Europe and Asia, it can play an expanded role in geopolitics. It can both have Asian friends and draw close to Europe.

As a new country that inherited most of the Soviet heritage, what exactly did Russia inherit? Ning Qi said the Russian Federation is a multi-ethnic country with a population of 140 million, the seventh most populous in the world. It is located in the eastern part of Europe and the northern part of Asia. It is home to more than 130 ethnic groups and has 45 indigenous minorities. With a land area of 17 million square kilometers and a total of 89 federal entities across 11 time zones, Russia is a multi-religious country, with the Orthodox Church the most important religion. At the same time, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Catholicism also have a large number of believers inside

Russia's territory. The length of the entire border is more than 60,000 kilometers, the coastline more than 38,000 kilometers, and its border with China more than 4,000 kilometers. Ning Qi believes that the double-headed eagle on the Russian national emblem represents the contradictory characteristics of Russia: forbearing and unrestrained; impulsive and good at reflection; sophisticated but pure in many things; lazy but diligent; seemingly obedient but desperately desiring freedom; barbaric in behavior but rich in cultural treasures; swinging between the East and the West but loyal to itself; feeling suffering but treating itself as the world's redeemer.

The spirit and values of the Orthodox Church are precipitated in Russia's national characteristics, and have solidified as a way of thinking and attitude toward life. The church's spiritual conception and values are a common trait shared by Russians. The double-headed eagle not only indicates Russia's ambition but also its extreme contradictions and unpredictability. Precisely because of this unpredictability, we must understand the country from its national and cultural characteristics. And when Russia needs to move forward to its next historical step, it needs to shape a positive national image.

Since Putin came to power, he has attached great importance to building the image of the country, and has worked hard to shape a positive image of Russia. Especially after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis and the return of Crimea, which led to sanctions from the West, Russia needs to move beyond the current standoff. In this context, Russia reshaped the country's image with two top international sporting events held in its country. The first is the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. In the

international context at that time, it can be said that Putin was pinning his political future on the Winter Olympics, hoping to restore Russia's image as a great power. In the process of hosting the Winter Olympics, Putin personally served as the "ambassador" to choose Sochi as the place to hold the event. He met five heads of state in Sochi. He also specifically met gay athletes in bars, and hugged and talked with them. Hosting the Sochi Winter Olympics was actually a strong national dream for Russian sports. In order to truly realize the dream, Russia invested unprecedented amounts of human and material resources, demonstrating in various fields its ambition to restore itself as a great power. For example, during the torch relay, a Russian astronaut took an Olympic torch for a spacewalk for the first time. This feat was regarded as a message to the world that Russia is the strongest country in outer space. The Winter Olympics shouldered a lot for Russia. It was not just a sports meeting, but also demonstrated that Russia is getting stronger.

Prof. Ning Qi showed a short video about the opening ceremony of the Sochi Winter Olympics, which comprehensively showed Russia's long history and the Russian dream. She said that when people watched the opening ceremony, they felt it not only a sports event, but a feast of culture and art. The core idea was that Russia is not the barbaric, vulgar, or ignorant country that many people imagined, but a country full of national wisdom and strength. At the Winter Olympics, Russia won the first place on the medal list and realized its sports dream on its own territory.

After the Sochi Winter Olympics, Russia held its second major international sporting event, the 2018 Football World

Cup. From the perspective of international politics, the outside world held various views toward Russia hosting the World Cup. But, undoubtedly, Russia once again successfully boosted its national image. Especially in the final stage of preparations for the World Cup, Russia suffered from Western economic sanctions, but still systematically prepared under very unfavorable conditions, which showed excellent organizational capacity. The football diplomacy during the World Cup was considered to be successful on a historic level. During the competition, Putin met dozens of heads of state and government representatives who came to watch the game inside and outside the stadium, and met with leaders of 14 countries at the final on July 15. In terms of propaganda, Russia launched a series of posters, one of which featured the former Soviet football player Lev Ivanovich Yashin, the only goalkeeper in Russia who received the Golden Ball award, and the one who led the former Soviet Union team to win the European Cup in 1960. Through the unique artistic style and color matching, the poster projected Russia's history from the Soviet past to the present, creating an effect that the grand scene from 1960 came alive again in the 2018 World Cup.

The organization of the World Cup in Russia won the praise of the media in various countries. The event spanned 11 cities, so Russia officially launched a series of convenient policies, including providing football fans with ID cards and simplifying visa procedures. In addition, perhaps because the outside world had low expectations of the event, its smooth execution won great praise. The Russian team performed well in the World Cup, further highlighting the success of the event.



Prof. Ning Qi raised the question of how to shape the image of a nation, and pointed out that the shaping of a national image lies more in the spread of culture and civilization than spending a lot of money on publicity.

Wang Lincong, a research fellow at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies, CASS, gave a report titled “Security Issues and Governance in the Middle East.”

Wang Lincong said that turmoil and conflict are a prominent feature of the Middle East, and even a normal state of affairs in the region. From a global perspective, the Middle East is the largest and most prominent weak point in the global security system. Numerous elites in the political science field have considered how to resolve outstanding issues, but it is actually very difficult. In the era of globalization, the security issues in the Middle East have spread to the whole world.

The Middle East is not a geographical category, but a cultural, political and historical category. The concept of the Middle East actually stems from a Eurocentric world view. In the eyes of Europeans, especially in the era of European colonialism, they were the center of the world, and divided the outside world into the Near East, the Middle East and the Far East based on the distance from them. China, Japan, and all regions east of India are generally called the Far East, while the areas between Europe and the Far East are generally called the Middle East. Geographically, the Middle East refers to a combination of Europe, Asia and Africa, usually including the West Asia region and the northeastern countries of Africa, including Egypt and sometimes Sudan, which is the Middle East in the narrow sense. The Middle East in the broad sense refers to

the West Asian and North African countries, basically including Afghanistan, Turkey, North Africa, Egypt, Sudan, and the entire Arabian Peninsula.

Wang Lincong said that security is the primary aspiration of human society. Many famous scholars have analyzed the need for security. For example, Abraham Maslow regards security as a primary requirement after satisfying survival needs. Security includes global security, regional security, national security and personal security. Among these, personal security is the most important. Security usually includes political security, economic security, social security, military security, cultural security, ecological security, and information network security. It refers to the security that exists or is to be established in different fields, or security issues to be solved. After clarifying the above concepts, the way to achieve security involves different security concepts. The concept of security is based on the perception and judgment of security and security threats, namely how to recognize security and feel secure, how to deal with security threats, and the countermeasures proposed based on this understanding and judgment. There are two types of security views. One is the traditional sense of security, that is, the pursuit of absolute security. Absolute security means seeking total security for oneself at the expense of the security of others. In recent years, the US proposed its perspective about security in many fields, which embodied absolute security concepts featuring a zero-sum game. In contrast is the “new security concept.” In 2014, President Xi Jinping systematically elaborated on it at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. He called for a concept of common,

comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. What's worth emphasizing is common security, which is universal security. In the era of globalization, the globalization of security issues means that personal security issues may become security issues that spread to others and even the whole globe. Universal security is increasingly important. In addition, security must be sustainable, secure and guaranteed. Security should also be equal and inclusive. Development is the foundation of security, and security is a prerequisite for development. Based on different security concepts, different countries have formed different security mechanisms throughout history, including regional security, collective security, and alliance security. Now more emphasis is placed on common security and building a security community. In fact, the community of common destiny China proposed to build is also a community of common security.

Wang Lincong believes that there are two types of problems that usually pose a threat to security. One is traditional security issues and the other is non-traditional security issues. Traditional security issues usually arise in the form of military warfare. Non-traditional security risks became prominent after the Cold War. These risks are mainly reflected in security threats from terrorism and ecological climate change, and threats to the financial sector and information networks. These security issues have risen from the level of the individual to national level, and even threaten all of humanity.

Seen from the above aspects, security in the Middle East includes the security of the overall region, the countries within it and the people. The security issue in the Middle East refers to

the damage or threat to the interests of the Middle East countries and their people, and the obstacles and challenges encountered in maintaining such security interests. Although the relevant concepts are relatively clear, Western scholars have long understood Middle East security issues as a response to Western interests being threatened in the Middle East. Therefore, no matter what the particular US, UK or French strategy in the Middle East, they all have the same goal of preventing the emergence of a strong power in the Middle East, maintaining control over the Middle East and its oil resources, and managing conflicts in the Middle East. Such a security perspective actually ignores the real security issues in the Middle East. This leads to difficulty in resolving security issues in the Middle East.

During the Cold War, the Middle East was the main site for US-Soviet Union competition. The Arab-Israeli dispute is the main security issue in the Middle East.

From 1990 to 2010, the security problems in the Middle East have undergone profound changes, with terrorism being the main focus in the Middle East. The Afghan war and the Iraq war have seriously damaged the security structure in the Middle East, breeding a series of new security issues. Since the end of 2010, turmoil in West Asia and North Africa has swept into the Middle East, and the security situation has further deteriorated. At present, the Middle East has serious security problems. First, the threat of extremism and terrorism is increasing day by day, posing a major challenge. Second, competition in geopolitical interests has led to disorder in the Middle East and frequent outbursts of local wars. Third, non-traditional security issues, relating to food, water, population growth, energy, finance and

refugees, threaten stability in the Middle East. The current new phenomena and new features of the security issues in the Middle East have three aspects. First, the traditional and non-traditional security situations have deteriorated at the same time. Second, political security issues have become prominent and become the focus of security issues in the Middle East. Third, security issues in the Middle East tend to be complex. Religious extremism and terrorism are rampant, the ecological security predicament is becoming more and more serious, and social security issues are more complicated. In some countries, the gap between the rich and the poor has intensified, and the unemployment rate of young people has risen. Meanwhile, sectarian and ethnic conflicts also pose serious challenges to the security of the Middle East, highlighted by the rise of the Islamic State after the Iraq war, and the Kurdish independence issue in the Middle East after the “dismemberment” of Iraq.

Wang Lincong said that the root causes of security issues in the Middle East involve international, regional and national levels. From an international perspective, since the Middle East has not had a core power since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the dominance of the region has always been in the hands of Western powers. The extraterritorial forces’ domination or influence of the international order and regional interests in the Middle East has caused the long period of instability of the Middle East. This fundamental factor can be summarized as “externality.” From a regional perspective, the conflicts between the countries in the Middle East have intensified, among which there are historical grievances between Arabs and Jews, between Arabs and Persians, as well as the

Palestinian-Israeli conflict and conflicts caused by the Syrian war. From the national level, conflicts between ethnic groups within a country, as well as various kinds of problems in social and state governance, have bred national separatism, separatism and tribalism.

The current predicament of security issues in the Middle East is manifested in three levels. At the domestic level, the Middle East countries are in a critical period of transformation. The complexity, twists and uncertainties of this process have intensified the security dilemma within the Middle East countries. The various conflicts in political and social transformation have been released or erupted in a concentrated manner, which has formed a comprehensive impact on internal security.

From a regional perspective, first of all, disputes among countries continue unresolved, and to a certain extent have formed a knot in which nobody wants to make a compromise. Second, dramatic changes to the status quo in the Middle East have deepened the security dilemma in the region. The reshaping of the Middle East, a new round of geopolitical competition which is unprecedentedly fierce, and competition between the Middle East countries themselves, have formed a new security dilemma. Third, some Middle Eastern countries have developed a tit-for-tat security strategy based on traditional security concepts, and intensified regional security dilemmas. For example, Israel pursues an “offensive traditional security concept,” Iran pursues a “defensive traditional security concept,” and so on. From an international perspective, the extraterritorial powers have long confronted each other in the

Middle East and have not really promoted peace and stability in the Middle East. Instead, their confrontations have intensified the conflicts in the Middle East, posing a serious threat to the region's security. In addition, conflicts often occur between extraterritorial countries and the Middle East countries, leading to the destruction of the original security order in some Middle Eastern countries.

Security management in the Middle East is a global issue. However, the Middle East countries generally lack a practical approach to governance, have no clear governance goals, and lack effective security control mechanisms, thus falling into security and governance problems. From an international perspective, extraterritorial hegemonic countries turn a blind eye to security issues in the Middle East, or continue to create new trouble or attempt to solve problems with traditional security approaches. The US has often suppressed dissidents and formed an alliance system that is consistent with its own interests. The biggest feature of such a security alliance system is its exclusiveness. This results in the transfer of the security crisis to the outside world as a cost of maintaining a secure alliance. After Trump took office, he rebuilt the security system in the Middle East and formed an alliance system with Israel, Saudi Arabia and some Gulf countries to suppress Iran, posing a serious challenge to the security of the Middle East. At the regional level, existing security cooperation organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council show obvious limitations, exclusivity and even aggression. From the national level, many Middle Eastern countries tend to "outsource" their security.

For example, Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia often

choose to follow the US lead in the field of security, rely on oil for development, and get security guarantees through the purchase of US armaments or by joining the US security system. However, this “security outsourcing” is not reliable, and the US government’s change of attitude toward Mohammad Reza Pahlav, the last Shah of Iran, is a forerunner of this fact.

Wang Lincong said that the idea of advancing security governance in the Middle East includes three aspects. The first is strengthening the building of the region’s own security capabilities and shedding its “security dependence.” At present, the Middle East countries do not have enough awareness of establishing their own independent security, and lack independent security capabilities. From Afghanistan to Iraq, to Syria, Yemen, and Libya, the top priority for these war-torn countries in need of reconstruction should be security reconstruction. If security reconstruction cannot be advanced, reconstruction in other areas may be in vain. The second aspect is promoting security through development. In the long run, security governance needs to rely on sustainable development and independent development. At present, independent development in the Middle East is insufficient, resulting in a lack of a foundation for security. In recent years, some Middle Eastern countries have recognized this problem and proposed re-industrialization, striving to achieve independence and sustainable development. Egypt is a typical representative of such countries. The third aspect is advancing the construction of security mechanisms in the Middle East with a new security concept. The new concept of security is based on the concept of universal security and common security. Only in this way can



the regions' security be reliable, long-lasting and secure.

Considering the shortcomings of security management in the Middle East, the approach to security governance in the Middle East should also be comprehensively managed from three levels: domestic security, regional security, and global security. From the domestic level, the core issue is to rebuild the security order, followed by the promotion of security through development. And the key to this is to strengthen the building of independent security capabilities. That is, war-torn countries must first rebuild their security capabilities. Meanwhile, most Middle Eastern countries need to effectively solve the people's livelihood issues and ensure political security. From a regional perspective, it is necessary to promote security through cooperation and get rid of "zero-sum" thinking, and especially to get rid of traditional security concepts. From an international perspective, it is necessary to focus on strengthening the control and coordination of the security crisis. The big countries are duty-bound in this regard. The security issue in the Middle East is part of a global problem. Extremism, terrorism, and refugee issues usually spread to other countries, creating spillover effects and chain reactions. Therefore, we should advocate the ideas of the new security concept and the community of common destiny. In addition, we should use the United Nations (UN) as a platform, let the UN play its coordinative role and try to resolve the security issues in the Middle East using a political approach and advance the establishment of a security mechanism in the Middle East.

Wu Bingbing, associate professor with the Department of Arabic Studies at PKU's School of Foreign Languages,

delivered a speech entitled “Iran in the Middle East Strategic Context.”

Wu Bingbing first introduced some concepts relevant to his speech. Islam, he said, is an Arabic word for obedience, the obedience to Allah, the sole God of Islam, and people believing in Islam are called Muslims, meaning those who submit to Allah. Allah is also translated into Chinese as “真主” meaning “true master.” To sum up, the Islamic world is a concept referring to a space, a community, and human beings that believe in Islam. Islam is represented by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an intergovernmental organization of 57 countries from Asia, Africa, Europe and America. It also represents the Muslim community of the world, currently numbering 1.6 billion Muslims in more than 100 countries.

“The Middle East” is a relative geographical concept. The term Middle East represents a power structure, and the phrase itself is a method of control over the region. Therefore, the concept of Middle East is essentially unclear. The number of countries in the Middle East is thought to be 16, from Iran in the east to Egypt in the west, in the general sense of the word. There is some controversy over this view, such as whether Afghanistan and Cyprus are Middle East countries. In addition, there are many interpretations of the concept of the Greater Middle East, so uncertainty is the greatest feature of the concept of the Middle East.

“Arab” is an Arabic word that originally meant nomadic and describes the traditional nomadic way of life in the Arabian Peninsula. Arabs are divided into southern Arabs and northern

Arabs. Southern Arabs are Yemenis, who traditionally settled in agricultural areas, whereas the Arabs discussed here are in fact northern Arabs, or in other words, nomads in the desert.

The concepts of Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East are different. Iranians, for example, are not Arabs, but they are Muslims. Some media often use phrases like “Arab countries such as Iran” in their reports, which is unacceptable to Iran. Therefore, Muslims cannot be seen as a totally homogeneous group. This also reflects the pluralism of Islam, including ethnic pluralism, sectarian pluralism, national pluralism and so on.

Islam is mainly divided into Shia and Sunni. Shia originally meant *sectarian*, and Sunni originally meant *road*. The prophet of Islam was Muhammad, who founded Islam in 610. Since no male offspring of Muhammad survived, it became a big question who would be eligible to succeed him in the leadership of the Islamic world after his death. Ali was the son-in-law of Muhammad and the ancestor of all his male descendants. He was the first one to join Islam and participated in all the battles led by Muhammad. His religious experience and learning are widely recognized and he was considered eligible for inheritance of the leadership role from Muhammad. Before Islam was founded, Arabs lived in the Arabian Peninsula and were in a state of poverty and isolation. After the founding of Islam, Arabs began to expand their territory and accumulated a great deal of wealth in a short period of time. Ali advocated equal distribution of wealth and rejected the privilege of the early religious authority. But a religious privileged class emerged with the expansion of Islam that firmly opposed the dominant power of Ali. Representatives of this class, including

Abu Bakral-Siddiq, Omar and Osman, became caliphs (successors) successively. After they died, Ali inherited the mantle of Islamic power. In the first four orthodox caliphs of Islam, all but Ali were representatives of the privileged class. Sunnis believed that the four caliphates represented orthodox Islam, while Shia believed that the three caliphates before Ali were usurpers of power, and only Ali represented the orthodoxy of Islam. So Islam later assumed that those who followed the tradition of the privileged class were Sunni and those who followed Ali were Shia. This distinction was in fact the result of the struggle for Islamic leadership after the death of Muhammad. As that struggle continued, however, the nature of the struggle changed. After the death of Ali, the Shia developed 12 imams (leaders), who, together with the four Sunni caliphs (successors), formed two systems of leadership that evolved into two systems of power politics or two systems of beliefs, and to this day, the Sunni and Shiite communities. Currently, there are between 160 million and 320 million Shiite Muslims, which account for 10 to 20 per cent of the Muslim population in the Islamic world. In terms of distribution, Iran is the largest Shiite country, with about 70 million people. Iraq, Yemen, Syria and others are also large Shiite countries. In recent years, the Shia population has grown rapidly in Africa, with the population of the Shia community in Nigeria growing from none to more than 10 million in 30 years.

There are also structural differences between Shia and Sunni, which are mainly reflected in religious education systems and the hierarchy of religious scholars. Shiite children can go to ordinary schools for national education or to mosques for

religious education. Mosques have affiliated religious schools, which include three levels, namely, the preliminary level, intermediate level and senior level, starting from primary school. Preliminary education focuses on the basic knowledge of Arabic and Islam, followed by logic and sources of Islamic law. Senior education focuses on advanced studies, similar to the doctoral level. It will take more than 20 years to complete all the three levels. After the knowledge system of language, logic and teaching methods has been basically established, students can apply to their teachers for graduation, and the teachers, rather than the school, issue diplomas, which reflects the view of the Shiites that knowledge needs to be recognized by the authority, which is the individual, not the institution. After receiving all religious education, the identity of the student changes and he becomes a true religious scholar. Religious scholars themselves have a title in Islamic texts. They are called *ulema*, and they have the right to create Shariah, that is, to draw conclusions on issues not explicitly specified in the religious scriptures that would be respected by everyone. Within the Shiite community, religious scholars are hierarchical. At the time of entry into the system, a scholar is known as *hujat al-Islam*. After that, he will, through constant research, make authoritative interpretations on topics of Islamic law. He will write a book which will undergo peer review. If his conclusion is widely accepted, he will be promoted to be an *ayatollah*, known as the “sign of God.” The process will take about 30 years. After becoming *ayatollah*, he will continue to study and write a series of books to win promotion to the rank of grand *ayatollah*. At present, there are about 10 grand *ayatollahs*, 100 *ayatollahs* and 70,000 *hujat*

al-Islams.

According to the Shiite regulations, an ayatollah has the authority to issue fatwas. Each Shiite follower should follow a Grand Ayatollah, and he must seek approval from the Grand Ayatollah on important issues. In addition, Grand Ayatollah has the right to a “one-fifth tax,” whereby all Shiites give one-fifth of their annual incomes to the Grand Ayatollah. Although followers do this voluntarily, given the large number of followers, the Grand Ayatollah has a considerable annual income. The money could be used to provide scholarships to students in religious schools or to support the operation of mosques. From this, we can see that Shia has a relatively complete structural system, including both an administrative power structure and wealth management system. Sunni does not have such a high degree of organization. For the Shia, the existence of a government or a state does not affect their high degree of internal organization, and even in turbulent times, the development of the Shia will not be affected. The system also works in times of intense confrontation between the king and the Shiite community. Pahlavi, the last shah of Iran, tried to break the system by removing the authority of all religious scholars and forcing the ayatollahs to beg in the street, but he was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution in 1979. To sum up, Shia is a highly organized strict system with a pyramid-shaped power structure which relies on religious education and has a flow of resources and internal input and output.

After introducing those relevant concepts of Islam and Shia, Wu Bingbing explained Iran’s political system. According to reports, Iran built a very complex political system after the

Islamic Revolution in 1979. The top layer is known as the Supreme Leader, which in Farsi originally meant “leader on the top” and has nothing to do with religious and spiritual leaders often mentioned in Chinese translations. The Supreme Leader must be a religious scholar who is not necessarily a Grand Ayatollah, but will eventually be promoted to the rank of Grand Ayatollah. Therefore, the Supreme Leader is essentially a political figure, but he must have a religious identity. The Supreme Leader is elected by an Assembly of Experts of 86 to 88 members which is elected by universal suffrage with a term of four years, and a new Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts when the previous Supreme Leader dies or is no longer suitable for the post as a Supreme Leader. Although the Supreme Leader is for life, there are limitations. For example, the Assembly of Experts meets twice a year to discuss issues such as the health status of the Supreme Leader, and whether he is in trouble for malfeasance and corruption, in order to decide whether to remove him. Therefore the Assembly of Experts serves as a supervising mechanism for the Supreme Leader. Since the Assembly of Experts is elected by universal suffrage and the Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts, the power of the Supreme Leader derives not only from his knowledge of religion but also from the recognition of the people.

The president is next to the supreme leader in the power hierarchy. The president of Iran can be of any identity. The current President Hassan Rouhani is a religious man, while the former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was secular. The president is elected by universal suffrage every four years and

can be reelected for at most one term. Previous Iranian presidents were almost all re-elected and stayed in power for eight years. The results of the presidential election must be recognized by the Supreme Leader. In terms of responsibilities, the Supreme Leader is responsible for strategic decision-making of the state, but not for specific administrative matters, so he cannot intervene directly in the affairs of the president. The Iranian Parliament is also elected by universal suffrage for a four-year term. It has legislative power and meanwhile is supervised and controlled by the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council has 12 members, with 6 religious scholars appointed directly by the supreme leader and 6 jurists recommended by the chief judicial officer and approved by the Parliament. In daily operations, the six religious scholars are responsible for determining whether legislation in Parliament violates the ethical values of Islam, while the constitutionality of legislation in Parliament is jointly determined by 12 members. In addition, the functions of the Guardian Council include vetting the candidatures for election. The Guardian Council and the Parliament supervise each other, in a manner similar to that of the upper and lower chambers of a parliamentary state. Directly appointed by the supreme leader, the chief judicial officer is the head of the judicial system. The term of the chief judicial officer is five years and can be renewed for another five years.

Iran's political system features universal suffrage, a republican system, separation of powers, a constitutional system, and checks and balances on power. The entire system is very complete and has become the system of the Islamic



Republic of Iran, also known as the modern Islamic system. The difference between Islamism and modern Islamism is that the former aims to practice Islam in politics and society, while the latter aims to integrate the concept with a Western constitution, elections, republican system, separation of powers, and checks and balances on power. This can be called Islamic democracy, that is, Islam plus democracy. Iran has all elements of Western republican democracy, but it needs to reflect Islamic values through the supreme leader, the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts and the chief judicial officer, and to reflect republican institutions through the elections of the president, the parliament and the Assembly of Experts. This political system, combined with the inherent high degree of Shiite organization, has enabled Iran to achieve extraordinary stability in the Middle East and become a regional power.

Factional politics is a major feature of Iran's political system, and different political factions occupy different positions in the political structure. For example, conservatives, represented by the current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, believe that the current system is good enough to solve all problems with adjustments. Liberal reformers, represented by former president Mohammed Khatami, believe that the Western system is best. According to them, Iran's system is seriously flawed and complete political liberalization is necessary. Former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a representative of pragmatists, argued that Iran's political system was problematic but radical changes are dangerous. Therefore he tended to be a reformist. There are also pragmatic conservatives between the reformers and the pragmatists,

represented by parliament speaker Ali Larijani. Neoconservatives, represented by former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have said Israel should be erased from the map. Current President Hassan Rouhani belongs to a brand new moderate faction, which believes that all factions are calcified and that new forces need to be found to bring together the elites of all factions. Moderates emphasize solidarity with all and use all factions in a balanced manner.

In Iran's political system, the role of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is to balance the interests of all factions. The conservative supreme leader does not fight for the best interests of the conservatives, but to maximize the interests of all factions, and Iran's interests can only be maximized on the basis of a balance of all factions. So when the reformers are in trouble, Khamenei will go all out to support them, and when they are too powerful, he will support the conservatives and suppress the reformers. This is also a feature of the Iranian political system. There are very complex factional politics in a very complex political system that ensures that Iran finds its best position for stability amid all the upheavals by striking a "balance in balance."

Wu Bingbing said that Iran can be a strong and stable country in the Middle East region, not because it has nuclear technology, missiles, space technology and so on, but because it has struggled to build a complete and balanced political system and institutions over the decades to ensure that it becomes a superpower in the Middle East.

After the four experts completed their lectures, the participants expressed their views on relevant contents of the

lectures, and consulted the experts on issues they are interested in about the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. Over the next three days, 35 participants took a written test and sat for a discussion interview, which determined the six outstanding campers who were offered admission in the institute's bachelor-straight-to-doctorate program.