

Forms of Power Transition in Central Asian Countries and Their Assessments

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On September 2, 2016, Karimov, who had served as president of Uzbekistan for 25 years, passed away. Uzbekistan held a presidential election on December 4 of the same year and the then Prime Minister Mirziyoyev won the election with 88.61% of all votes, marking a completion of a smooth power transition in Uzbekistan. Thus far, three forms of power transition have emerged in Central Asian countries (except Tajikistan in which a civil war took place), namely, violent street revolution, parliamentary election, and power transition among political elites under the baton of the leaders. This paper is structured as follows: firstly, it provides a summary of the above-mentioned three forms of power transition with a focus on analysis of the characteristics and causes of each form; secondly, it makes a general assessment of the three forms; and finally, it gives a brief analysis of the fourth form of power transition that is likely to emerge in Central Asia.

I. VIOLENT STREET REVOLUTION

In March 2005, the Kyrgyzstan opposition party protested against the election fraud of the regime leading to the outbreak of the Tulip Revolution, and as a result the Bakiyev administration of

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the Southern Fraction replaced the Akayev administration of the Northern Fraction. In April 2010, protests erupted in Kyrgyzstan again and the Atambayev administration of the Northern Fraction replaced the Bakiyev administration of the Southern Fraction. Since the two power transitions in Kyrgyzstan were violent revolutions that erupted on the street, they are called the “violent street revolution” power transitions, which occurred only in Kyrgyzstan.

This form of power transition mainly has the following two characteristics: 1) Violence. Both coups began with protests and demonstrations. The 2005 power transition led to a few casualties and property losses while the 2010 transition resulted in the death of nearly 1,000 people and the looting of shopping malls in Bishkek. A comparison of the two coups reveals the rising level of violence from the protests of the “Tulip Revolution” to the occupation of the TV stations in 2010, and even to the attack of local government buildings and presidential palace; 2) Tribalism. As mentioned above, the result of the two power transitions was the interchange of the administration between south and north, namely the power struggle between the southern tribes and the northern tribes, which, in essence, was the result of re-distribution of state power triggered by tribal struggles.¹

Why did the two power transitions in Kyrgyzstan occur in the form of violent street revolution rather than a less violent one? To answer this question, it is necessary to review the causes of the two coups and find out the common factors. Through reviewing relevant research results, it can be found that the academic circles both at home and abroad identified similar causes of the two coups, mainly including: 1) economic or livelihood issues; 2) the impact of tribalism or North-South problem; 3) major defects in political system which is not in conformity with the political and cultural tradition of Kyrgyzstan; 4) influence of external force, particularly the great powers such as the U.S.; 5) faults of those in power, for instance, corruption and nepotism, etc.² In essence, the turmoil of 2010 was the continuation of the 2005 “Tulip Revolution”,³ and the two coups are considered as failures of the western democratic regime and the Russian authoritarian regime chosen by Kyrgyzstan since its independence.⁴

As a matter of fact, back to the time of Akayev and Bakiyev governments, Kyrgyzstan had neither a real democratic regime nor authoritarian regime, but a hybrid one. A combination of democratic system and authoritarian regime, it is a soft authoritarian system to some extent, which is also known as competitive authoritarianism regime. The main reasons that the soft authoritarianism regime was affected by the “Color Revolution” are because of its following factors: 1) lack of a single and highly institutionalized political party; 2) lack of powerful and effective mandatory security mechanism; 3) weak control of the economic resources; 4) susceptibility to the influences of external linkage—interference from external powers and spread and diffusion of transnational social movements, etc.⁵ As Central Asian countries are more or less exposed to external linkage, this section focuses on the discussion on the manifestation of the first three characteristics⁶ in the Kyrgyzstani regime. Firstly, there were obvious defects in the building of political parties in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan had dozens of political parties, but none of them held a dominant position. In all other four countries of Central Asia than Kyrgyzstan, the political party that supported the President held a dominant position in the Parliament so that the contradictions between the President and the Parliament can be largely eliminated.⁷ And, due to the absence of a dominant political party in Kyrgyzstan, the opposition to the authorities from opposition parties happened all the time, resulting in political unrest and even change of regime. Secondly, Kyrgyzstan lacked powerful and effective security forces to deter opposition parties and safeguard the political stability, which was very essential in Central Asian countries. In fact, Kyrgyzstan is one of the countries with the weakest military forces in Central Asia. In 2005, its military force had only 10,000 poorly equipped soldiers who needed to protect the safety of nearly six million citizens as well as maintain national security and stability.⁸ The weak military force was obviously unable to maintain domestic stability, which was an important reason why the opposition force can overthrow the authorities rapidly. Finally, the government of Kyrgyzstan failed to control the economic resources and made little progress in

reform. In terms of economic growth, the performance of GDP growth rate of Kyrgyzstan prior to the two Revolutions was not too bad, for instance, the GDP growth rate was 7.027% in 2004 and 2.886% in 2009, respectively.⁹ However, due to unequal distribution of wealth in Kyrgyzstan, the economic growth rate did not necessarily bring about improvements in the living standards of the people. In fact, since its independence, more than 30% of the population live at or below the poverty line in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰ The occurrence of the “Color Revolution” in 2005 and 2010 was influenced by a series of factors, such as occasional factors, internal development drive and external intervention. Just as some social movement researchers have questioned, why grievances are voiced everywhere while protests do not occur at all times? Therefore, it is a quite complicated progress to estimate the exact time of the outbreak of the “Color Revolution”, which will not be further discussed here. Anyhow, the public’s grievance against the regime is always a vital factor affecting the stability of the country, and whether it is possible to prevent piled-up grievances from turning into mass protests depends largely on Kyrgyzstan’s state capacity. As it had turned out that the situation of Kyrgyzstan in this regard was worse than those of other Central Asian countries.

Moreover, the poor power operation by the authorities in Kyrgyzstan is another important cause for the outbreak of the two Revolutions. Generally speaking, the main purpose of the political system reform introduced by the authorities in Kyrgyzstan under both the Akayev regime and the Bakiyev regime was to consolidate its ruling status rather than to build a modern state. This has resulted in Kyrgyzstan as an example of failure of “soft authoritarianism” or “competitive authoritarianism”. A successful soft authoritarianism system requires the authorities to: 1) have a core constituency; 2) be able to mobilize people other than the core constituency through bribery or blackmail; 3) have the mandatory power to suppress the opposition force; 4) be able to control the flow of information effectively; 5) prevent the opposition force from winning mass support.¹¹ As far as Kyrgyzstan is concerned, its soft authoritarianism is a failure. Certainly, there are some differences between the Akayev

regime and the Bakiyev regime. For instance, Bakiyev was more unscrupulous in nepotism and more alienated from political elites than Akayev; in terms of democracy, although Akayev showed a growing tendency towards concentration of power during the late stage of his regime, he was basically more liberal and more moderate toward the opposition party than Bakiyev; in terms of foreign policies, Akayev was more moderate in the implementation of multi-lateral balanced diplomacy policies. As a result, the Russia-Kyrgyzstan relationship did not deteriorate significantly as Kyrgyzstan developed a relationship with the West, while Bakiyev's haste and even greed in the implementation of the foreign policies directly led to Russia's discontent, which, in turn, played a very important part in the overthrow of the Bakiyev regime. Although what we are discussing here is the similarities between the two "Color Revolutions", the differences between the Akayev regime and the Bakiyev regime are also noteworthy.

The main problem with the authorities themselves was the failure to use the "justice tempered with mercy" policy. On the one hand, both Akayev and Bakiyev had no effective control over the country. For instance, the weak security forces were unable to maintain the stability of the state and effectively control the flow of information. On the other hand, neither Akayev nor Bakiyev offered sufficient benefits to their own supporters, the public and even the opposition parties when in office. After coming into power, both of them were keen to consolidate their own powers and failed to reach a compromise with the opposition parties; corruption and expansion of family power were rampant; most of the elites who served the former governments were marginalized; life was even harder for most of the people. Under these situations, an effective way for the opposition parties and the public was to resort to violent means to jointly overthrow the government. During the process of power transition, the aim of the opposition elites was to seize the power while that of the public was to change the regime. The emergence of the election crisis and the split of the elites provided an opportunity for the power transition¹² and the public discontent and grievance turned out to be a powerful force that overthrew the regime when they were instigated by the opposition parties.

II. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Following the coup in April 2010, with the collapse of the Bakiyev regime and the establishment of the interim government, the interim government of Kyrgyzstan adopted a new constitution, and declared the switch from presidential system to parliamentary system on June 27 of the same year. The state power was then transferred from the interim government which was established through the “People’s Revolution” (the most popular name for the April incident in Kyrgyzstan) to the elected government smoothly. Unlike the old parliament that was considered as “a decorative element of a system of authoritarian and totalitarian rule”¹³, the establishment of the parliamentary government was regarded as a milestone in the democratization process of Kyrgyzstan, receiving a lot of credit both at home and abroad. In view of the status quo, in comparison with the previous two violent transitions of power in the form of violent street revolutions, Kyrgyzstan completed the power transition by means of parliamentary election smoothly and successfully subsequent to the 2010 coup. In this paper, such kind of parliamentary election power transition is considered the second form of power transition in Central Asian countries.

In comparison with the first form of power transition, the second form has some new features. Firstly, the power transition comes without violence. During the years following the adoption of the parliamentary government, the political parties and people in Kyrgyzstan gradually gave up the idea of changing the regime by violent street revolutions, which was evidenced by the successful completion of the 2015 parliamentary election. In this election, the Social Democratic Party defeated the Respublika Ata Zhurt and became the majority party in the parliament, and no significant conflicts occurred between the Bir Bol who advocated a return to the authoritarian regime of the president and the Social Democratic Party. In the meantime, the conflicts between the Bir Bol and the Respublika Ata Zhurt prior to the parliamentary election were successfully smoothed out by the Central Electoral Commission of Kyrgyzstan. Since the establishment of the parliamentary system, there have been some twists and turns

during the process of power transition, but no violent street revolution in Kyrgyzstan took place. Secondly, the legitimacy of power transition. As discussed previously, the legitimacy of the power transition following the 2005 and 2010 street revolutions was questionable while power transition through parliamentary election turned tribal political struggles that disregard the national laws into party competitions within the legal framework of the country. Although the tribal and geographic factors still influenced the political life of Kyrgyzstan greatly, their impact on the elections declined gradually, and the level of legitimacy of power transition was thus enhanced.

Secondly, the process of the power transition tended to be commercialized. In parliamentary elections of Kyrgyzstan, the campaign funds were raised and votes were bought, leading to the prevalence of commercialized politics. It can be learned from observations of the electoral lists of the parties in 2010 that “most parties compile[d] their electoral lists based on ‘money, votes, or both’.”¹⁴ The campaign fee required to be paid by the parties to engage in the 2015 parliamentary election was 10 times that of the 2010 parliamentary election. Several parties withdrew from the election due to lack of funds, which, to a certain extent, weakened the fairness of the election. Moreover, purchasing of votes was found in the 2015 parliamentary election with each vote at a cost of 500-3,000 KGS. In the meantime, as businessmen and government officials (including former government officials) constituted a large proportion of the members of some parties, the operation of power became more and more commercialized. And finally, the power transition process featured with stubborn elitism and distinct party privatization. Since the establishment of the parliamentary system in 2010, far from relying only on candidates’ legitimacy derived from their personal charm and the policies they uphold, parties began privatizing their electoral lists.¹⁵ In Kyrgyzstan, the local elites based on consanguinity and geography secured the power of the hereditary system and won the public support through controlling of regional public resources and distribution of material benefits. Some local elites began to build political parties in their own names one after another, which became a widespread

phenomenon between 2011 and 2012. The phenomenon that local elites forced the candidates to quit election also existed. Therefore, the parliamentary election power transition in Kyrgyzstan is stained by elite manipulation.

The main reasons that Kyrgyzstan adopts the parliamentary election for power transition can be summarized as follows: Firstly, the lessons from the two violent Revolutions. Both of the new regimes emerged from the 2005 and 2010 coups failed to govern the state effectively, and the people were in dire need of a new and effective authority, and they were generally fed up with violent power transition and reached consensus on the form of power transition, that is, through party elections and parliamentary democracy. Following the outbreak of the “Tulip Revolution”, Otunbayeva said, “We are not giving sufficient attention to the development of parties. We are in desperate need of party development, and an alarm is now sounding that summons us to this task.”¹⁶ Against this backdrop, although parliamentary system with feature of party politics may have many deficiencies, the choice was definitely not bad.

Secondly, the contribution of democratic factors at home and abroad. As to domestic factors, Kyrgyzstan intended to establish the Western democracy system immediately after its independence and the first chief secretary Akayev was challenged by other candidates in the 1990 presidential election. After Akayev was elected as the president, he devoted to pushing ahead with the building of democracy, which was manifested in freedom of speech, freedom of the press, emergence of the civil society groups as well as the economic liberalization process, etc. The then US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Tarullo called Kyrgyzstan “one of the countries with the most democracy mindset among the emerging independent countries”. Kyrgyzstan was even known as the “Island of Democracy” in Central Asia.¹⁷ Akayev’s contribution to the development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan was also affirmed. For instance, some scholars argued that “Akayev’s leadership played an important role in determining Kyrgyzstan’s initial liberal political and economic reform path.”¹⁸ As to foreign factors, it was a major part of the US-led Western democratization

process. The “Tulip Revolution” is widely seen as the result of the expansion of US’ democracy camp in Kyrgyzstan and even considered by some scholars as a democratic breakthrough.¹⁹ Moreover, the NGOs and civil society groups dominated by the West are also components of foreign factors that contributed to the democratization of Kyrgyzstan. In fact, the above factors were necessary for the establishment of a parliamentary system in Kyrgyzstan.

Thirdly, the adaption of tribal politics to the new situation. Struggles among the tribes for state power were not rare since the independence of Kyrgyzstan and the 2005 and 2010 revolutions are the two typical examples. Following the two Revolutions, the southern tribes and the northern tribes each had the gains and losses in the struggles for state power and both of them acknowledged the negative impacts of traditional tribal politics, for instance, the social disruption caused by the absence of national identity as well as the prevailing nepotism and rampant corruption, which are not only harmful to the stability of the political power, but also rejected by the people. However, the transition to the party politics within the framework of parliamentary system brings about many benefits: 1) the parliamentary system does not alter the essence of tribal politics based on the division of consanguinity and geography, but can endow tribal politics with legitimacy and prevent the conflicts among the tribes from escalating;

2) it can be accepted both by the domestic people and the outside world, especially the West, and is conducive to the stability of the country; 3) it makes room for political compromises and avoids interest conflicts turning into political violence quickly. Hence, the parliamentary election power transition has become an acceptable way of balancing the power and interests under the new situation for various political powers, including tribal forces.

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III. POWER TRANSITION AMONG POLITICAL ELITES

Building of a stable and unchallenged leadership elite group is the key to the smooth power transition.

On December 21, 2006, Niyazov, the President of Turkmenistan passed away suddenly. There were widespread concerns abroad about the possibility of mass unrest in Turkmenistan as Niyazov had not announced his successor in advance. On September 2, 2016, Karimov, the President of Uzbekistan also died of illness without announcing the successor. Similar concerns were held in other countries. However, both countries completed the power transition smoothly. It indicates that the building of a stable and unchallenged leadership elite group is the key to the smooth power transition. The result of the process was open and legitimate, and the process itself was in essence the process of weakening and even excluding the opposition force through using of power, resulting in a situation of no competitive parties were left. Since the situations in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were very similar to each other, this paper regards such kind of power transition in the two countries as the third form of power transition in Central Asia.

A prominent feature of such power transition is the smoothness. Through internal compromise, the political elites of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan avoided the potential domestic unrest due to a power vacuum successfully and completed the power transition smoothly. Following the death of President Niyazov, the political elites in Turkmenistan took a series of measures accordingly. Firstly, under the mandate of the National Security Council, Berdymukhamedov became the acting president. Subsequently, the Parliament held a special session on December 26, 2006 to modify the electoral law to grant Berdymukhamedov the qualification to participate in the presidential election and decided to hold the presidential election on February 11, 2007. Finally, Berdymukhamedov won the election and became the President on February 14. Similarly, after the death of President Karimov, the political elites in Uzbekistan also made a compromise rapidly.

Firstly, the Parliament appointed the Prime Minister Mirziyoyev as the acting president on September 8, 2016. Subsequently, according to the Constitution, the presidential election and Mirziyoyev stood out of the four candidates and was elected as president of the country.

The smooth power transitions among the elites in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan can be attributed mainly to the following two reasons: First, the authoritarian systems in both countries are very strong, which greatly reduce the likelihood of unrest. Unlike Kyrgyzstan's soft authoritarian system prior to the two Revolutions, the political system of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is a system of hard authoritarian system.²⁰ However, both the soft authoritarian system and the hard authoritarian system represent an authoritarian system in essence except that the former relies more on induction force²¹, while the latter relies more on the mandatory force. As discussed previously, a successful authoritarian system shall meet three conditions: 1) a single and highly institutionalized political party, 2) powerful and effective mandatory security institutions, and 3) powerful control over the economic resources. It is obvious that the systems in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are qualified.

Firstly, as far as the pattern of political parties of the two countries is concerned, Turkmenistan is ruled by the Democratic Party only, which has remained the sole legitimate political party in Turkmenistan so far though the Constitution allows for a multi-party system. And, in spite of the multi-party co-existence in Uzbekistan, most of the parties support the President. Moreover, both countries have a relatively comprehensive mandatory security mechanism which can quell the unrest that occurred or is likely to occur timely and effectively. No major upheaval occurred when Niyazov was in power or even until now since the independence of Turkmenistan, while in Uzbekistan, although there have been small disturbances, such as the Andijan incident, they were calmed rapidly without triggering violent unrest. Finally, both countries have very strong control over economic resources. Turkmenistan is the most isolated country in Central Asia. It pursues a neutral policy and is cautious about the entry of foreign economic forces, and

its oil and gas resources serving as the pillar of domestic economic development are under the firm control of the government. Uzbekistan's four pillar industries (gold, oil, cotton and natural gas) are also mainly controlled by the State, and its financial system is also closed and its economic development is less affected by the outside world. As a result, the authoritarian system in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is very stable, this, to a large extent, suppresses the likelihood of violent unrest in the emergence of power vacuum and provides institutional guarantee for the smooth power transition in the two countries.

Secondly, Niyazov and Karimov's successful use of power left no room for the existence of other forces that could challenge the power of the state. First of all, Niyazov had always maintained the priority of political and social stability and attached great importance to domestic control during his term. Niyazov had a monopoly on power,²² and took many measures to restrict possible opposition forces, for instance, weakening the influences of other tribes in the government; restricting the development of domestic civil society groups; frequently changing the officials in the key national departments to prevent them from growing their own power; arresting and expelling potential opponents. As the political elites of other tribes and civil society groups had very limited access to resources, their power basis was very shaky. Therefore, there were no political forces that could really challenge Niyazov's Administration in Turkmenistan. Moreover, the neutral foreign policy pursued by Niyazov has won Turkmenistan a more relaxed international environment and greatly reduced the influence of great powers on its domestic politics.

Thirdly, while prioritizing the political stability, Niyazov also attached great importance to the development of economy and the improvement of people's livelihood. Niyazov introduced gradual economic reform, which enabled Turkmenistan to shift toward market economy in stages on the basis of its abundant oil and gas resources (mostly natural gas), and yielded fruitful results. The economy of Turkmenistan had been developing steadily since 1998, with its GDP growing by more than 10% in 1995, 2005 and 2006.²³ Moreover, Niyazov put emphasis on improving the people's

livelihood and poured huge fiscal input in social welfare resulting in remarkable achievements in improving the living standard of the people. The sustained and steady development of economy and the improvement of people's livelihood had not only enabled Niyazov's Administration to win the general public, but also made the potential opposition forces have no chance to gain a wide range of mass support.

Niyazov's authoritarian had limited the development of opposition forces, and the neutral foreign policy pursued by him had kept the country immune from possible intervention of big powers during the power transition of Turkmenistan. After the death of Niyazov, potential opposition forces were unable to compete for power with the political elites who championed Niyazov. On this basis, the political elites who supported Niyazov reached a compromise out of their similar interests, and the Speaker of the Parliament Atayev who was supposed to be the legitimate successor to the presidency got arrested on the day following the death of Niyazov. The power transition ended successfully with the acting President Berdymukhamedov elected as the President of Turkmenistan in the subsequent general election. To sum up, Niyazov's successful use of the "justice tempered with mercy" policy provided a stable domestic and international environment for power transition; the smart strategy adopted by the political elites during the power transition was the direct cause of the smooth power transition in Turkmenistan.

As far as Uzbekistan is concerned, Karimov's grip on the country was also harsh and his policies focused on domestic stability as well. The student movement in opposition to the authorities that occurred in Uzbekistan in 1992, the civil war in Tajikistan and the Color Revolution gave a warning to Karimov. In order to consolidate his rule, Karimov launched a repression against the political opposition. Moreover, his eldest daughter, Karimova, disappeared from public view after she fell out of favor in 2014. In the meanwhile, he put media, civil society groups, NGOs and economic development in Uzbekistan under his tight control. Karimov's power politics deprived opposition forces of effective channels to challenge the legitimacy of the existing regime.²⁴ In

addition, although Uzbekistan allowed the U.S. to garrison the military airport at Khanabad after the September 11 Attacks, Karimov was firmly opposed to the foreign interference in domestic politics,²⁵ which, to a large extent, eliminated the possibility that big powers would intervene in the power transition.

While exerting tight control over Uzbekistan, Karimov also implemented gradual reforms in the fields of politics, economy and society. Politically, Karimov set out to push forward the transition from presidential system to parliamentary system and amended the Fundamental Law to expand the powers of the parliament moderately and reduce the powers of the President. Uzbekistan started to carry out the building of political parties according to the democratic procedures and the presidential elections were held as scheduled. Meanwhile, to avoid excessive concentration of power, Karimov appointed the political elites from the Tashkent tribe and the Samarkand tribe to the key posts, which effectively balanced the interests of the main tribes. Economically, Karimov kept pushing forward the reform of private ownership, gradually reduced the intervention of the state in the market and adhered to the parallel development of emerging industries and traditional industries, such as agriculture. Since Uzbekistan got out of negative economic growth in 1996, its GDP growth rate has kept growing year by year and maintained a high growth rate of 8% even during the 2008 global financial crisis.²⁶ Along with rapid economic development, Karimov stepped up his commitment to social security and the number of poor people decreased year by year; for instance, between 2012 and 2013, the proportion of the population living in poverty fell from 15% to 14.1%.²⁷ Socially, Karimov adopted more liberal policies: taking a more tolerant attitude toward non-Islam religions and non-native languages than before, widening the openness of the domestic media to a certain extent, and allowing NGOs to develop within certain limits. The social atmosphere was relaxed gradually, the people's living standard was improved day after day, and the discontent with the Karimov Administration decreased step by step. Since there was no strong domestic opposition forces and no foreign interventions by great powers, and the political elites who

supported Karimov with vested interests tended to maintain the status quo after the death of Karimov, which created a favorable environment for the power transition.

To put it briefly, Karimov, who served as a national leader during the Soviet Union era, had rich experience and ability in governance. After Uzbekistan's independence, he has taken the fostering of a power bloc as a focus. Over the years, Karimov has persevered with the cultivation of a political elite and power center to ensure the stability of the state power. Especially in recent years, he replaced a group of senior, mediocre or even corrupt officials from the Soviet Union era who were eager to cultivate personal power, and promoted a number of officials who were young and embraced his political ideas. It actually offered conditions for power transition to the successor. It is highly possible that Karimov will make the final decision on the successor. It was reported that Karimov held a private meeting prior to his death, making arrangements for the balance of interests of power centers, and Mirziyoyev played a role of "glue" in such balance.²⁸ Later on, the following arrangements were in full compliance with the last wishes of Karimov. The first was about the President's state funeral arrangement, of which the Funeral Committee was chaired by Mirziyoyev. Uzbekistan has an oriental tradition, and this role represented legitimacy with "paternity". At the funeral, Mirziyoyev said that Karimov "taught me like a father"; the second is the exceptional arrangement for the acting President. In accordance with the Uzbekistan Constitution, the Chairman of the Senate should serve as the acting President; however, at the joint meeting of the Senate and Legislative Chamber held on September 8, Mirziyoyev was appointed the acting president. It showed that if the Chairman of the Senate Nigmatilla Yuldashev was appointed the acting president, there would be two power centers in the government of Uzbekistan, under which the leader in name would be Yuldashev while the de facto leader would be Mirziyoyev, and it will be very detrimental to the stability of the government and society of Uzbekistan. In view of the above, people have good reasons to believe that these arrangements were likely to be a plan rather than an immediate reaction.

IV. THOUGHTS ON THE FORMS OF POWER TRANSITION IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

Through analysis of the power transition in Central Asia, it can be learned that three forms of power transition have emerged in Central Asian countries, namely, violent street revolution, parliamentary election, and power transition among political elites. Below is a brief review on the three forms.

The violent street revolution is the worst among the three forms of power transition.

Firstly, the violent street revolution. It is the least ideal form of power transition apart from war, and it is also a manifestation of total failure of the soft authoritarian system in Kyrgyzstan. For instance, following the 2005 “Tulip Revolution”, some scholars argued that Kyrgyzstan had the least democratic and stable political system among the countries²⁹. As discussed previously, such a form of power transition that emerged in Kyrgyzstan is characterized by violence and tribalism; both violence and inter-tribe struggle for power are not conducive to the stability and the development of the country. Therefore, the violent street revolution is the least ideal form among the three.

Secondly, parliamentary election. This form of power transition was not only a “compelling choice” adopted to adapt to the new situation after the two Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, but also a rational choice made by the political elites in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of many factors at home and abroad. This form of power transition featured non-violence and high-level legitimacy, which guaranteed peaceful and legitimate power transition in Kyrgyzstan. At least for the time being, it was a big step forward from the first form of power transition. However, there were still some drawbacks with this form, such as, the strong commercialization of power transition and the phenomena of tribal elitism and privatization. It brings uncertainty to future power transition in Kyrgyzstan. The inter-party competition in the parliament of Kyrgyzstan remains a fragmented one among the groups or individuals based on consanguinity and geography rather than the competition of

ideas, rules and laws. The less institutionalized political parties and the political elite's short-sighted election strategy have eroded Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary system and political pluralism, and the existing political system in Kyrgyzstan is in essence a hollow parliamentary democracy.³⁰ In other words, the likelihood of future violent revolutions in Kyrgyzstan has dwindled, but not disappeared.

Thirdly, power transition among political elites. This form of power transition is a combination of the political system of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and the successful authoritarian rule of Niyazov and Karimov, which is characterized by smoothness. On the basis of continuing the gradual reform, the adoption of this form of power transition can largely guarantee a smooth power transition of future state political power in the two countries. However, the future development of the two countries faces some challenges. In Turkmenistan, there is an obvious tendency of centralization, for instance, changing the presidency from five to seven years. In Uzbekistan, whether the newly elected President Mirziyoyev will be able to successfully use the "justice tempered with mercy" policy to maintain the stability and development of the country like Karimov is yet to be seen. It should be noted that power transition among political elites not only occurs in Central Asia, but also commonly in authoritarian states. As far as Central Asia is concerned, this form of power transition has some features as below: 1) there is a stable leadership group centered on the leader; 2) the leadership group, especially the leader, has good governance capabilities and their governance is effective; 3) there is no opposition force that is able to pose challenges; 4) the public shows a high acceptance of the leader and the leadership group; 5) there is less or no external intervention in the process of power transition.

To date, among Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have not gone through the power transition. As far as Kazakhstan is concerned, the most important of all is that its authoritarian system is relatively stable.³¹ The "Radiant Fatherland" dominated the pattern of party politics and controlled all aspects of the country effectively, which weakened the threat of opposition forces to the political stability of Kazakhstan greatly. Secondly,

under the administration of President Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan preceded the other Central Asian countries in terms of military ability, economic development and people's living standards, and Nazarbayev himself enjoyed a considerable popularity in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Nazarbayev has started to adjust the power structure, for instance, he replaced the governors of Karaganda, Aqmola, North Kazakhstan and Mangistau on March 14, 2017³². In the future power transition, the political elites who espouse Nazarbayev will be far more likely to hold power than the opposition forces. Hence, it is possible to expect a power transition among political elites in Kazakhstan, which is similar to those of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

As for Tajikistan, the authoritarian system is very fragile.³³ In terms of party building, the Islamic Revival Party has long been at odds with the ruling party, People's Democratic Party, and the Islamic Revival Party has begun to split partially and radicalize. In terms of the building of state security institutions, as Tajikistan has a weak mandatory capacity, and the internal division of national security institutions is serious after the civil war,³⁴ the country lacks the organizational power of authoritarianism.³⁵ In terms of economy, Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in Central Asia, and the proportion of population living in poverty has been more than 30% of the total.³⁶ In addition, Tajikistan's President Rakhmon has been trying to seek family rule. For instance, Rustam Emomali, the eldest son of Rakhmon, was appointed Director of the Anti-smuggle Bureau of the Customs at the age of 23, head of the anti-terrorism organization at 29, and mayor of Dushanbe at the age of 31; Rakhmon's eldest daughter and son-in-law also served as the Vice Foreign Minister and the Deputy Finance Minister, respectively. Moreover, the Rakhmon family controlled many important enterprises in Tajikistan, for instance, there are about 60 cotton plants in Tajikistan, 40 of which are controlled by the Rakhmon family.³⁷ Based on the current situation of Tajikistan, its future power transition may be accompanied by a certain degree of instability, and is also likely to be the fourth form of power transition in Central Asia: family power transition. Rakhmon is striving to secure his family, so as to further ensure the

stability of his regime and prepare for possible succession within the family. Some experts have predicted that “if Rustam doesn’t act excessively, he may take over the Tajikistani presidency after 2026”.³⁸ Some people also presume that similar situation may emerge in Turkmenistan, and Serdar Berdymukhamedov, the son of Berdymukhamedov, will become the successor to the presidency.³⁹

The form and result of power transition is one of the signs that manifest the maturity of the establishment of a state power. In essence, the family power transition is an extreme form of power transition within the elite group—the family is the core of the elite group. This kind of power transition is not rare in the world. There are precedents in the former Soviet Union countries. On February 21, 2017, Mehriban Aliyeva, the wife of the President of Azerbaijan, became the First Vice President, which provides a real case for such kind of power transition. For the situation in Tajikistan, we should conduct more researches and analysis to identify whether the fourth form of power transition would occur and how it would emerge. Similarly, more observations and studies are necessary for the above mentioned four forms of power transition.

¹ Jiao Yiqiang: “Analysis of tribalism factors affecting political transformation in Kyrgyzstan”, *Russia, Central Asian & Eastern Europe Studies*, Issue 3, 2010, p.21.

² For relevant researches, refer to Deng Hao, “Study of trends in Central Asia from the upheaval in Kyrgyzstan”, *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), Vol.32, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 30-36; Bao Yi, “Political stability and political crisis in the political development process of Central Asian Countries”, *Russia, Central Asian & Eastern Europe Studies*, Issue 1, 2016, p. 94; Jiao Yiqiang, “Causes for the coup in Kyrgyzstan and its implications for the countries in transition”, *Leadership Science*, 2010, pp. 58-60 ; Xu Xiaotian, “Tragedy of the ‘isolated island of democracy’ —analysis of the reasons of political unrest in Kyrgyzstan”, *Peace and Development*, Issue 4, 2010, pp. 25-29; Pan Guang, “Turmoil in Kyrgyzstan: role of Russia, America and Europe and implications for China”, *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), Vol. 31, Issue 4, 2010, pp. 39-44; Xue Fuqi, “The two coups in Kyrgyzstan since its independence and the prospect of its political development”, *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), Vol. 31, Issue 4, 2010, pp. 45-50; Edward Schatz, “The soft authoritarian tool kit: agenda-setting power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol.41, No.2, 2009, pp. 213-217; Yilmaz Bingol, “The colorful revolution of Kyrgyzstan: democratic transition or global competition?” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol.5, No.1&2, 2006, pp. 73-81; Steve Hess, “Protests, parties, and presidential succession: competing theories of color revolutions

in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol.57, No.1, 2010, pp. 28-39, and so on. Since there are plenty of relevant researches, detailed are not fully listed here.

³ [Kyrgyzstan] Kurubayev: “Retrospect and prospect of Kyrgyzstan on its 20th anniversary of independence”, *Contemporary International Relations*, Issue 8, 2011, p. 59.

⁴ Xue Fuqi, “The two coups in Kyrgyzstan since its independence and the prospect of its political development”, *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science), *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), Vol. 31, Issue 4, 2010, p. 46.

⁵ Lucan Way, “The real causes of color revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.19, No.3, 2008, p.62. For more detailed discussions, refer to Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The rise of competitive authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.13, No.2, 2002, pp.51-65; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “International linkage and democratization,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, No.3, 2005, pp.20-34.

⁶ It is possible that Kyrgyzstan’s political development is more vulnerable to its external linkage than other Central Asian countries, but external factors can only function through internal factors. Due to limited space, this paper will not discuss the relationship between the two Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan and their external linkages.

⁷ Wu Hongwei: “Formation and development of the political party system in Central Asian Countries”, *Russia, Central Asian & Eastern Europe Studies*, Issue 4, 2006, pp.31-32.

⁸ U.S. Department of State, “World military expenditures and arms transfers (WMEAT)”, 2005, www.state.gov/t/vci/rls/rpt/wmeat. Quoted from Steve Hess, “*Protests, Parties, and Presidential Succession: Competing Theories of Color Revolutions in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan*,” pp.35-36.

⁹ Data source: the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=KG>, accessed on December 23, 2016.

¹⁰ Data source: the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=KG>, accessed on December 23, 2016.

¹¹ Edward Schatz, “The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol.41, No.2, 2009, pp.206-207.

¹² Henry Hale, “Democracy or autocracy on the march? The color revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, No.39, 2006, p.321.

¹³ Kurtov Adzhar, “Presidential seat or Padishah’s throne? The distinctive features of supreme power in Central Asian states,” *Russian Social Science Review*, Vol.48, No.6, 2007, p.92.

¹⁴ Shairbek Juraev, “The evolving role of political parties in Kyrgyz politics”, in Marlene Laruelle and Johan Engvalleds, *Kyrgyzstan beyond “Democracy Island” and “Failing State”: Social and Political Changes in a Post-Soviet Society*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, p.29, quoted from Asel Doolotkeldieva and Alexander Wolters, “Uncertainty perpetuated? The pitfalls of a weakly institutionalized party system in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Affairs*, Vol.4, No.1, 2017, p.41.

¹⁵ Asel Doolotkeldieva and Alexander Wolters, “Uncertainty Perpetuated? The Pitfalls of a Weakly Institutionalized Party System in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Affairs*, Vol.4, No.1, 2017, p.41.

¹⁶ Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution: Interview with Roza Otunbayeva,” *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol.13, No.4, 2005, p.487.

¹⁷ J. Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s island of democracy?* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.

¹⁸ Regine A. Spector, “The transformation of Askar Akaev, President of Kyrgyzstan,” Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Working Paper Series, 2004, pp.27-28.

¹⁹ Theodor Tudoroiu, “Rose, orange and tulip: the failed post-Soviet revolutions”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.40, No.3, p.316.

²⁰ Yilmaz Bingol, "The colorful revolution of Kyrgyzstan: Democratic transition or global competition?" *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol.5, No.1&2, 2006, p.75.

²¹ Francis Fukuyama, "Asia's soft authoritarian alternative," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.2, 1992, pp.60-61.

²² Niyazov is both the President and the Prime Minister, and also Leader of the Democratic Party, Chairman of the People's Council, Chairman of the National Security Council and Council on Religious Affairs and the Commander-in-Chief of Turkmenistan's armed forces.

²³ Data source: the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=TM>, accessed on January 16, 2017.

²⁴ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.6-7.

²⁵ Stephen Blank, "A Sino-Uzbek Axis in Central Asia?" *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, Vol.16, 2010, pp.3-5.

²⁶ Data source: the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=UZ>, accessed on December 30, 2016.

²⁷ Data source: the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=UZ>, accessed on December 30, 2016.

²⁸ Шавкат Мирзиёев — кандидатна постпрезидента Узбекистана номердин, 16 сентябрь 2016, <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2016/09/16/shavkat-mirziyoev-kandidat-na-post-prezidenta-uzbekistana-nomer-odin>, accessed on September 23, 2016.

²⁹ Vitali Silitski, "Survival of the Fittest': Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the Former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.43, No.4, 2010, p.340.

³⁰ Asel Doolotkeldieva and Alexander Wolters, "Uncertainty perpetuated? The Pitfalls of a Weakly Institutionalized Party System in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Affairs*, Vol.4, No.1, 2017, pp.26-50.

³¹ Edward Schatz, "The soft authoritarian tool kit: agenda-setting power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Comparative Politics*, Vol.41, No.2, 2009, pp.208-213.

³² Казахстан: Нурсултан Назарбаев за один день сменил руководителей сразу четырёх областей, 14.03.2017, <http://www.fergananews.com/news/26138>, accessed on March 26, 2017.

³³ Lawrence P. Markowitz, "Tajikistan: authoritarian reaction in a postwar state," *Democratization*, Vol.19, No.1, 2012, pp.98-119.

³⁴ Lawrence P. Markowitz, "Unlootable resources and state security institutions in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.44, No.2, 2011, pp.156-183.

³⁵ Lucan Way, "The Real Causes of Color Revolutions," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.19, No.3, 2008, p.60.

³⁶ Data source: the World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?end=2015&locations=TJ&start=2013>, accessed on January 10, 2017.

³⁷ Для семьи президента Таджикистана нет никаких преград, 05.06.2016, <https://www.e-tadjikistan.org/analitika/dlya-semi-prezidenta-tadjikistana-net-nikakix-pregrad.html>, accessed on March 26, 2017.

³⁸ Зафар Абдуллаев: Зачем президент Рахмон снял Убайдуллаева и назначил Эмомали? 14 Марта 2017, <http://catoday.org/centrasia/zafar-abdullaev-zachem-prezident-snyal-sposta>, accessed on March 25, 2017.

³⁹ Андрей Медведев, Туркменистан. Расклады и персоны. <http://kz.expert/archives/2175>, accessed on March 29, 2017.