

# **An Overview of Seminars on “Populism” held by PKUIAS<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Generally speaking, it is believed that the Narodnik (People) movement in Russia and the People’s Party in the US, both of which arose in the latter half of 19th century, are the earliest examples of the use of the term “populism.” Ever since then, the term populism has been used to describe movements in many countries in Europe and America as well as in parts of Asia and Africa. Populism is an intermittent movement recurring in different historical periods. The most recognizable is during the 1930s and 1940s, and the latest started at the end of the 20th century, continuing until now. Populism often brings about significant changes, like shifts of governments and institutional reform, as well as conflicts and wars of varying degrees.

During the more than 100 years since the appearance of the term populism, academics in various disciplines like politics, history, philosophy, law, international relations, public policy and media studies have conducted many discussions on theoretical, practical and individual cases of populism. Nevertheless, in terms of a phenomenon that has existed all across the world with direct political and social consequences, it is very hard to clearly understand it from the perspective of a single subject or an individual case. For example, while studying current “right-wing” populism in the US, (although notably some people think that Trump belongs to neither left nor right in the traditional political spectrum,) it is difficult to see its historic roots if only analyzing it from a political perspective. It is also hard to find the nature of populism if only analyzing it on the level of public policy. When we study right-wing populism in Italy, it is hard to see the whole picture without comparing it with populism in France, Spain and Germany. Furthermore, it is even more difficult to accurately understand the universality and heterogeneity of populism if we do not

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS), has held 19 academic seminars of various forms in the eight months since its establishment on April 12, 2018. This includes two “All Under Heaven Forum,” 16 “Broadyard workshops” and one “New Buds Salon.” These 19 academic seminars involved many fields and many countries around the world. Although with different themes, many of them have covered the topic of “populism.” This topic and its related issues are receiving a lot of attention globally, making “populism” a key word in studies of PKUIAS in 2018, and to some extent, a weather vane for area studies at home and abroad. This article is written mainly in light of presentations and discussions by more than 50 domestic and foreign scholars at these academic activities. Please forgive and correct us if there is any omission.

compare it with left-wing populism in Latin America. And if we ask a scholar to conduct comprehensive studies, he might lack the interdisciplinary background to do it.

This makes the comprehensiveness and professionalism of area studies an effective way to approach the complexity of defining and understanding populism. At the unveiling ceremony of PKUIAS on April 12, 2018, Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of PKUIAS, stated that area studies aims to break disciplinary boundaries, integrate advantages of different subjects, and study politics, economics, society, culture and so on in all countries and regions around the world. By focusing on key countries, regions and significant issues, it constructs an all-around knowledge system for us to understand the world. Area studies have a combined feature of comprehensiveness and professionalism, which is based on interdisciplinary knowledge. This forms the basis for professional research, thus forming an overall and deep understanding of a certain phenomenon or issue. From the perspective of area studies, this article tries to review seminars about the latest upsurge of populism held since the foundation of PKUIAS, providing a preliminary but all-round understanding of the new round of populism.

### I. What is “populism”?

For more than 100 years, the most controversial problem in populism studies has been defining the term. There has been no consensus in the academic world to date. In the Chinese academic world, the first divergence is whether “populism” should be translated into *mincui*-ism or *minzhong*-ism.

Generally, in the seminars hosted by PKUIAS, scholars studying Europe and the US use *mincui*-ism. Scholars researching Latin America employed the term *minzhong*-ism over a long period of time, and only in recent years started to also use *mincui*-ism. According to Xu Shicheng, an honorary member of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the main reason for this is *mincui*-ism is a negative word in Chinese, which is more suitable for populism in Europe and the US but not for all situations in Latin America. For example, Shen Jian, president of the Chinese Society of French Historical Studies, points out that populism is often considered as a negative word in

French, equal to demagogue in ancient Greece. French people often classify negative movements as populism, including Boulangism and the Poujade movement, but not the French Revolution. Han Qi, a professor at Nankai University's School of History, states that there are differences between *minzhong*-ism and *mincui*-ism in terms of the date of their origins, leading socio-economic classes, the theoretical basis, the political goals and especially their influences. "*Mincui*-ism" often traffics in fantasy or generates negative effects, while "*minzhong*-ism" in Latin America plays some kind of positive role in the historical course, which is the reason why scholars in the Latin American academic world tend to use *minzhong*-ism.

However, Lin Beidian, the former director of the Center of Latin America Studies at PKU, suggests that the current situation in Latin America is different from before. Thus, we shouldn't exclude the possibility of using *mincui*-ism to describe current populist movements there. Zhang Sengen, professor of the Institute of Latin America under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), states that the Chinese academic world of Latin America studies has discussed the translation of "populism" recently, and they tend to use *mincui*-ism, including both moderate and radical dimensions, of which *minzhong*-ism is classified into the moderate part. However, this result is not completely accepted as it is based on the dimension of populism's influence, but not analyzed from populism's own characteristics. Tan Daoming, an associate research fellow at the Institute of Latin America, CASS, insists that populism should be translated into *mincui*-ism in that *mincui*-ism involves forces of both elites and the public, which more accords with its nature, while *minzhong*-ism only covers the force of the public.

Then, what is the nature of populism? In 1967, the London School of Economics hosted an international academic conference about populism. The aim was to construct a common concept of populism, which turned out to be unfeasible. In a series of populism seminars hosted by PKUIAS in 2018, academics from home and abroad were still trying to answer the question proposed in 1967<sup>2</sup>. It seems that the

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<sup>2</sup> "Whether populism can be considered an ideology, a recurring mentality brought about by similar conditions, a political psychology, an anti phenomenon (anti-capitalist, anti-urban, anti-Semitic), a pro-people phenomenon, or

academics have reached two critical consensuses, although the answers are not consistent.

The first consensus focuses on what is populism and what is not. According to Ma Hualing, a research fellow of East China Normal University, there are four significant definitions for populism in the Western academic world: populism as an ideology (represented by Cas Mudde); populism as a political discourse (represented by Ernesto Laclau); populism as a political strategy (represented by Kurt Weyland); and populism as a kind of social culture (represented by Pierre Ostiguy). Therefore, populism can be considered as one of the four definitions above or a combination of some or all of them. However, this line of thinking also means that populism is nothing but a broad and empty concept. For example, Zhang Baoyu, a research fellow in the Institute of Latin America, CASS, tends to believe that populism is a political strategy, political style and political behavior. Elites utilize populism to rule the people in order to realize the elites' ambitions, while the public expresses dissatisfaction by means of populism. Prof. Dong Guohui from the School of History, Nankai University, states that populism starts out as a kind of strategy and movement, and will have its own theories when the movement develops to a certain stage. Tan Daoming says that populism is not simply a movement, ideology or a policy but all of these things together. Prof. Dong Jingsheng from PKU's Department of History believes that populism is nothing but an analytical paradigm. As for this point, scholars tend to agree with British scholar Paul Taggart, who said that the term populism has no core value and it applies to all kinds of political positions. "In the absence of an objective definition, 'populist' seems to be nothing more than a hollow term of abuse." This account explains how populism is both everything and nothing.

The second consensus focuses on the common features of populism. Although scholars have to use the word "hollow" to describe populism since they couldn't come up with a substantial definition of the term, they can summarize the common features among populist movements. From seminars hosted by PKUIAS, scholars from home

and abroad generally accept that all kinds of populism separate the society into two opposing camps: “pure people” and the “corrupt elite.” Thus, there comes a common phenomenon that pure people criticize the corrupt elite and object to the existing system. Nevertheless, the range of these features seems too broad, allowing people to paint opposition parties in a democratic system, the people the parties represent and their aspirations as populist. It also makes people easily consider some revolutions as populism, which thus makes the efforts of summarizing populism’s common features in vain. On this key point, Prof. Jan-Werner Müller from Princeton University gave a more detailed analysis. Müller’s presentation at the conference held by PKUIAS is mainly based on content in his book *What is Populism?*

He states that the important thing to grasp about populism is not some vague “anti-establishment sentiment.” Criticisms of elites may or may not be justified, but it is not automatically some dangerous form of populism. Rather, what matters is populists’ anti-pluralism. They always exclude (or, put differently, adopt a monist stance) at two levels: at the level of party politics, where they are the only legitimate representatives of the people and hence all others are at least morally excluded; and less obviously, at the level of the people themselves, where those who do not conform to the populists’ symbolic construction of the “real people” are also shut out.

Populism is often connected with “strongman politics” and lead by charismatic leaders who claim to represent the “real people.” Sometimes they use unconventional approaches for mobilization. For example, Trump uses Twitter frequently, and he illustrates that populists don’t mind whether what they say is true or not, but only care whether it can instigate the masses. In addition, populist leaders blame all faults on others, as others are not “the people.”

## II .The Origins of Populism

To some extent, the reason why the concept of populism is hard to identify traces back to its various roots. There are different roots for populism in different historic periods and in different regions. Different origins and root causes determine with which ideas, ideologies or historical forces will combine to form populism, a “hollow” doctrine capable of meaning many things. The combination of these factors will

determine the characteristics and development path of any particular strain of populism.

Although the academic world basically recognizes that the roots of populism lie in a crisis of society, its economy and its politics, there is not much practical use in the recognition because it is just a universally admitted premise. The academic world also basically acknowledges that the rise of “the people” in political discourse is a common origin of populism. But that is just an instrumental cause which can either be utilized or not in describing populism.

Prof. Lin Beidian said that populism in different places shows up at the same time, as if there is someone orchestrated the various movements, giving orders that everyone follows. Therefore, this apparent force behind the scenes should be further examined. Yet we need to analyze specific root causes for different types of populism before generating a common conclusion.

The reason why right-wing populism in Europe appears involves two dimensions. First: Why do right and far-right forces in Europe rise? Second: Why are far-right forces associated with populism? These two questions can share the same explanation. Prof. Li Qiang, director of Center for European Studies, PKU, states that a profound reform has happened in political ideas and principles in modern times. Interest politics of different classes or hierarchies, based on individual interests, has shifted to identity politics, which are based on individual identification. Right now, left-wing forces are fading and the interest politics and slogans which they rely on have failed. Instead, right-wing forces are rising day by day because identity politics promotes the resurgence of right-wing ideology such as nationalism, racism and religious extremism. In addition, right-wing ideology, which is based on identity politics, can resist the cultural shocks brought about by globalization and protect a country's own institutions and culture at a time when the European project is short of economic and mental impetus.

Thus, right wing ideology has become an effective discourse for social mobilization. For this reason, far-right-wing forces can appeal to people of the middle and lower classes who have a strong sense of being deprived amid globalization and

are dissatisfied with the elites in power and existing institutions. Consequently, far-right-wing forces have combined with populism and then risen in Europe.

Actually, the reasons above point to a deeper contradiction, which is the contradiction between national sovereignty on the one hand and globalization and European integration on the other hand. Prof. Jürgen Gebhardt from the Department of Political Science, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, provided a detailed introduction in his presentation in terms of this point. He states that people underestimate the “nationalism” dimension in populism, which is more important than the “direct democracy” that populists request. This is because the demands for “direct democracy” appear not only in EU countries but also in other countries, and are part of the appeal of both populist parties and mainstream parties. However, “nationalism” is the foundation of modern countries, but the EU, which is just a group of countries, has no such foundation.

Therefore, people turn to their own countries for protection when EU reaches a crisis, which is the reason why populist parties succeed. In addition, Gebhardt believes Central and East European countries that joined the EU after leaving the Soviet Union tend to affirm their national sovereignty, creating the centrifugal national forces in the EU. Kong Tianping, a research fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the CASS, says that currently, both Poland and Hungary emphasize country, nation, family and patriotism, while opposing communism, internationalism and the EU’s excessive interference with its members’ domestic affairs.

A number of young scholars have analyzed the reasons for the rise of right-wing populism in Europe from the popular perspectives of interpretive theory, cultural conflicts and election data, and have come to the same conclusions.

Why has right-wing populism risen in the US? To some extent, there are similarities in root causes for the rise of right-wing forces in Europe and in the US, such as the shift from interest politics to identity politics and the return to traditional culture. However, these roots have unique characteristics in the US. Liu Yu, an assistant professor in Department of Political Science, Tsinghua University, believes

that inequality and globalization cannot explain the rise of right-wing populism, because the American people don't universally hold resentment toward globalization. Although the gap between rich and poor is widening, American people's dissatisfaction with the gap is decreasing. Rather, the main cause lies with the 1960s "rights revolution," during which the main body of rights expanded from white men to ethnic minorities, females, children, immigrants and even animals. The scope of rights also extended from political rights to economic rights and the right of receiving higher education. The rights revolution led to consecutive victories of liberalism, left-wing forces and the Democratic Party. Thus, conservatism, right-wing forces and the Republican Party suffered a feeling of being under siege. White males represented by Trump feel that they have become strangers within mainstream culture and Republicans even have a feeling of "nostalgia" – they desire to return to a society dominated by white males, which has led to the rise of right-wing populism. Consequently, the rise of the right-wing populism leading to Trump taking power is a rebound to the constant long-term rise of American left-wing liberalism in history. Accordingly, Prof. Wang Lixin from PKU's Department of History, points out that from a diplomatic perspective, the failure and setbacks suffered by liberal internationalism, which long dominated American diplomatic policies, provided conditions for right-wing populism represented by Trump. Nevertheless, some scholars propose different opinions. Prof. Zhu Wenli from PKU's School of International Studies illustrates that it is difficult to define Trump in terms of traditional left or right politics. Perhaps we can call it "pluto-populism." However, this is "fake populism" generated by Trump and his brand, which suppresses real populism.

The reason why populism in the US is on the rise, according to Prof. Qian Chengdan, might be related to the fading of opposition to capitalism after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Serious inequality of wealth has forced people to seek for a new approach, and they found "pluto-populism" in the rough course of their search.

Why has left-wing populism risen in Latin America? Latin America has long



been a region where populism, especially left-wing populism, is active. Yet there are some signs of a decrease of left-wing forces and the rise of right-wing forces in recent years. In Latin America, why do left-wing forces take the lead and why do they combine with populism? The factors most scholars recognize include:

(1) Economic inequality or poverty is the most prominent problem in Latin America. This provides a broader space for left-wing forces, which stress social equality and reasonable wealth distribution. Tan Daoming said one of the reasons that populism in Latin America veers left while populism in the US veers right is that these two societies have different principal contradictions. The US has not dealt with the race issue properly, while in Latin America, contradictions lie in conflicts between different classes. The contradiction in the US is on the political level while in Latin America is on the economic level.

(2) Prof. Xia Li'an from the School of Law, Zhejiang University, states that right-wing forces have long dominated Latin American politics since the independence of the region, which is the political origin for the rise of left-wing populism.

(3) During the modernization of Latin America, groups like farmers, immigrants, workers and so on, who are in disadvantaged economic positions and have no right to be involved in politics, have become the base of populists. Dong Guohui particularly focuses on immigrants without political rights when he talks about early modernization and populism in Argentina.

(4) Zhang Sengen states that Latin America never properly dealt with the relationship between economic development and equality and justice, which, Lin Beidian believes, is a channel for populism's constant utilization.

(5) The reform of neoliberalism since the 1980s has created blowback. Xu Shicheng points out that when Rafael Correa Delgado came into power in Ecuador, he announced publicly that the long night of neoliberalism should come to an end. Prof. Wang Ping at the School of History, Nankai University, also states that populism in Bolivia opposes neoliberalism. Dong Jingsheng states that one of the features of Latin American populism in the 21st century is its attacks toward neoliberalism.

He also points out that the rise of Latin American populism in 21th century also results from people's anti-globalization sentiment, because populism usually tends to construct a concept of "the people" from a perspective of nations. The rise is also a consequence of mainstream political parties' convergence in ideology. In terms of why populism movements break out at the same time, he believes that, from the angle of mass psychology and mass media, populism by its nature tends to attract imitation. Xia Li'an, taking Peronism in Argentina as an example, puts forward two ideological roots of left-wing populism, which is Catholicism's beliefs about social governance and the idea of the French jurist Léon Duguit, who believed it is a mistake to believe that property rights are sacred and inviolable, and believed that property ownership comes with social obligations. The influence of law on society is not less than that of politics and economy on society.

### III .The relationship between populism and democracy

The current wave of populism, mostly occurring in representative democracies, is considered to be a result of the crisis of representative democracy, or a threat to democracy. The significance of studying the relationship between populism and democracy not only rests on trying to find solutions to this threat, but also rests on the entanglement of populism and democracy in concepts and systems. This is directly related to the ideology and system design of democracy itself, and its relationship with human society. Seen from a series of seminars held by PKUIAS, there are two general kinds of opinions among scholars. One is that democracy and populism are essentially the same, and the other is that democracy and populism are different things. The divergence results from the different perspective and methodology that scholars take to study democracy.

Prof. Li Qiang, director of the Center for European Studies at PKU, says that both as a political system and a political idea, democracy originates in ancient Greece. The meaning of democracy is rule of, or by the *demos*. Modern "democracy" is a regime which both inherits the classical idea of democracy and combines some important non-democratic and even anti-democratic elements, including elitism, liberalism, and constitutionalism. In terms of its concept, however, in political theories, at least

starting from Tocqueville, American system has been interpreted as democracy. Particularly after the Second World War, a fundamentalist understanding of democracy has becoming dominant in political thinking. This idea highlights the mass participation of people in democracies, advocates the democratic transition of the non-democratic states, and results in a kind of democratic fundamentalism. Such fundamentalist idea of democracy has been more or less responsible for the failure of many newly established democracies. It is also related to the emergency of populism in the Western democracies. The nature of populism is to pursue pure democracy by rejecting the elitist, liberal, and constitutional elements as existed in modern democracy. In other words, if modern democracy containing non-democratic factors is simplified as democratic fundamentalism, this makes democracy look no different from populism. Therefore, we may need to rethink democratic theory and its institutional structure, recognize democracy as the core value of modern politics, prevent it from slipping into fundamentalism, and face the challenges encountered by democracy by bringing forth new ideas about the theoretical basis of democracy.

If we treat the democratic system as representative liberal democracy that incorporates non-democratic elements – a widespread system in practice – we will draw the conclusion that democracy and populism are different. For example, based on his analysis of populism, Jan-Werner Müller does not think that populism is democracy because populists believe that only they can represent the “real people,” while democracy embraces pluralism. Prof. Dario Castiglione of the political science department from Exeter University also points out that it was only after the World War II that the idea of representative democracy became mainstream among today’s Western democracies. This idea’s legitimacy depends on the combination of three principles: popular sovereignty, limited government and rule by law. The power of representatives comes from the people and the people transfer their power to representatives, the only unclear points being what and how much to transfer. In contrast, populists demand direct democracy.

On the subject of representative liberal democracy, Ma Hualing lists five differences between populism and democracy. First, inside a democracy, different

interest groups have a competitive relationship, but in populism, there is a hostile relationship between the people and their enemies. Second, democracy is in favor of pluralism while populism is opposed to it. Third, populism usually asks for direct democracy or an alternative indirect democracy, and democracy insists on indirect democracy. Fourth, populism is against liberalism whereas democracy supports it. Fifth, populism is against procedural justice which democracy supports.

Prof. Haig Patapan, director of the Center for Governance and Public Policy at Griffith University, thinks that populism is not democracy and populism is derived from the weakness of democracy. Contemporary populists usually deploy a distinct and divisive rhetoric to exploit weaknesses in democracy to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the people. But populists are also significantly different from demagogues in two major respects. The first is that modern populists are weaker than demagogues because they face more considerable obstacles to their ambitions in the form of rule of law and constitutionalism. The second is that in other respects populists are more powerful than demagogues because in attempting to limit demagogues – and thereby giving rise to the “populist” – modernity armed populists with new weapons, including new concepts or “ideologies” for manipulation (such as “the people”; “elites”; nation; race; class), and new rhetorical techniques such as propaganda that exploited modern technology and mass media.

It can be said that democracy’s features of liberalism and representative systems are in sharp contrast to populism characterized by anti-pluralism and direct democracy. If the rise of populism is believed to be a result of the weakness of democracy, weakness in this context refers to liberalism and the representative system, a kind of indirect democracy of elites.

Associate Professor Duan Demin from the School of Government, PKU, thus points out that in order to understand populism, especially the difference between democracy and populism, we must highlight the dimension of “politics.” In this dimension, even though both populism and democracy follow popular sovereignty as the fundamental principle, democracy leads to an open and pluralistic political life, while populism leads to a closed political life denying inner differentiation. It is

important to examine modern democracy from the perspective of populism, because representative liberal democracy does not offer solutions to problems such as an identity crisis and the political participation of individuals. Populism is likely to approach politics from a perspective of communitarianism and republicanism, establishing a set of common values and traditions and promoting effective public discussion and dialogue. This statement is not intended to abandon liberalism, but to go beyond individualism and interest-based pluralism.

The world has indeed seen the practice of non-liberal democracy. Kong Tianping points out that Central and Eastern European countries have already started to reflect on democracy after the Fidesz party led by Viktor Orbán came into power in 2010. Prior to his election, Central and Eastern European countries since 1990 considered liberal democracy to be the best system. Kaczynski in Poland and Orbán in Hungary have veered away from liberal democracy by exercising non-liberal democracy. This form of democracy claims that democracy is not necessarily liberal. It does not reject the basic principles of liberalism, but neither does it make liberalism the core of institutions. Associate research fellow Xu Gang from the Institute of Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies of CASS, says that populism in Central and Eastern Europe opposes liberalism, rather than democracy. The rise of new populist parties will not erode democracy. In contrast, the rise suggests that these countries are stepping onto the stage of consolidating democracy.

#### IV .Implications of populism

The ultimate question of studying and understanding populism is what the influence of populism is. As a universal phenomenon around the world with some common features, populism combined with different substantive ideologies or political forces will have some common consequences. In general, once populists come into power or their policies are accepted by establishment elites, this will lead to strongman politics or dramatic reforms or changes of the current system, economic policy, foreign policy and relationship with other nations, ethnicities and countries. However, due to different political, economic and social backgrounds and different historical stages, the impact of the results can be either positive or negative in each

country.

In terms of the influence of right-wing populism in Europe, there are two aspects scholars are mainly concerned about.

One is the threat populism poses to democracy. Historically, populism once helped put fascists in power, and that catastrophic consequence makes people highly sensitive to populism. The current wave of populism is no exception. It appears that populism can function as a rectification of the disadvantages of modern democracy, but judging by a series of seminars held by PKUIAS, most scholars believe that we should stay highly alert of populism even if the current populism is unlikely to have the consequences of the 1920s and 1930s. Marco Tarchi, professor of political science at the University of Florence, states that it is not appropriate to see populism as identical with the far right, or even to say that combining populism with the far right creates fascism, because populism is different from the far right in the following critical aspects: Populism regards the people as homogeneous and abstract while the far right regards the people as consisting of elites and the public; populism advocates an ideal type of democracy (direct) while the far right stands for a practical one (indirect); populism considers the state to be under the control of the people while the far right values the state above the people and nations; populism thinks society as a relatively autonomous zone where people live while the far right believes that the society should be led by the state, etc. Such distinctions may suggest that the far right and populism are unlikely to flow together since they are inconsistent in the most critical areas. Nonetheless, what is happening now cannot be explained only by a theoretical distinction. Müller on this point states that whether right-wing populism can succeed depends on whether the establishment will collaborate with them. The UK's Independence Party could not propel Brexit without the Conservative Party's support; Trump could not have been elected if he had not joined the Republican Party. Populists' policies are absorbed by major parties in some countries despite their loss in the elections. The stability of European democracy thus rests on right-wing forces, who once merged with populism, totalitarianism and even fascism in the 1920s and 1930s and led to the demise of democracy. Learning these lessons, postwar right-wing

forces stuck to the principles of democracy. Populism at present is not fascism, but still, we should prevent elites from compromising with populists, and imitating their behaviors. Furthermore, perhaps it is more worthwhile to study why and how some right-wingers have changed their positions. If they are not the same as in the 1920s and 1930s, what are today's right-wingers?

The second thing is the impact of populism on the EU. A striking feature of right-wing populism in Europe is its dissatisfaction with the EU, and even a belief that their nations should exit from the EU. This makes European integration, once thought to be able to transcend nation-states, face an uncertain future.

Prof. Qian Chengdan indicates that the EU was originally founded to alleviate the conflict between France and Germany, neither involving the whole Western Europe nor going beyond nation-states. If it recognized entities beyond nation-states, it would have supported Catalonia in its independence referendum, because Catalonia would only leave Spain but still stay in Europe. This means that the EU has publicly recognized Spain as a sovereign and independent nation-state. With that being the case, can we justify the right-wing populists' claims?

Of course, the far-right-wing's demands to reject the EU and return sovereignty to nation-states are not the only thing driving the movement. Research fellow Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, poses the question: Is European populism a solution or political degeneration? Gebhardt believes that populism is not a solution. It will undermine the unity of Europe, threatening Europe's position in the multi-polar world, and if the EU collapses, it will be difficult for a single Western European country to occupy an important position in the world of nation-states. Feng Zhongping, vice president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, points out that the main demand of populism is to strengthen national sovereignty. Since traditional political parties have troubles working out good ways to deal with many of the current problems of the EU, populism does not seem like a flash in the pan. However, being better at discovering problems than solving them, populists will adopt a pragmatic attitude if they come to power, and will not immediately cash in on the idea of leaving

the EU. In this way, the EU may change yet is unlikely to collapse. According to a study by Kong Tianping, there are conflicts in many fundamental principles and interests in the tight relationship between the Central and Eastern European countries and the EU, such as democracy vs rule of law, the response to the refugee problem, and the dispute over the future of the EU, particularly at the level of liberal democracy and non-liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is deemed liberalism and non-liberal democracy is deemed realism. This is the time for a showdown between the two sides. Whatever the outcome is, the future of European integration will be significantly impacted.

In addition, a number of speakers have analyzed the implications of right-wing populism in specific countries. For example, Prof. Wang Yingjin at the School of International Relations at Renmin University of China, studied the course of the Catalan independence referendum and its implications. Assistant research fellow Li Yongqiang from the National Institute of International Strategy, CASS, interprets Poland's foreign strategy as the revival of neoconservatism. GongLianbing, associate professor of political science at Ocean University of China, analyzes the opportunities and challenges brought by Hungarian populist political parties to the construction of the One Belt and One Road initiative. Zhong Zhun, associate professor of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Chongqing University, studies the possible impact of populist political parties on foreign policy from the perspective of the political party system.

Compared with scholars' negative attitudes toward right-wing populism in Europe, left-wing populism in Latin American has not been unanimously criticized by scholars. It has both positive and very negative effects while discussed in the discourse of populism. Scholars of Latin American studies agree that populism is a concomitant of the modernization of Latin America, and it has become an effective way when there is no other way to carry out such transformation. Charismatic leaders are able to achieve institutional and economic reform with radical ideologies and policy by mobilizing the masses of the people and opposing the elite in power. This is particularly reflected in the early practice of populism in Latin America. Prof. Lin



Beidian says that many of the political and economic achievements of Latin America cannot be separated from populism, and that the populist wave of the early 20th century indeed played an important role in building democracy. Despite its positive role in promoting social justice, we should not underestimate the negative impact brought about by the right-wing populism in Latin America. For example, when problems of social justice and efficiency are not effectively settled, economic problems will come to the forefront. Xia Li'an stresses that one of the characteristics of left-wing populism is that it attaches great importance to the redistribution of wealth. Left-wing populists come to power by promising justice and equality for the people, but lose power because seized wealth is redistributed, rather than used for stimulating economic development. The negative effect of populism mainly lies in the economic field. In addition, with the insufficient development of democracy and legal systems in some Latin American countries, populism is likely to infringe on the sound development of a domestic political system. On the whole, the advantages of left-wing populism in Latin America seems to outweigh its disadvantages, but Prof. Qian Chengdan points out that scholars have not fully explored those failed left-wing populisms and their negative effects. As a result, the role of left-wing populism needs further study.

## **Conclusion**

The study of populism in major European countries and the Americas by scholars in various disciplines including history, political science, international relations, law, and other fields enables us to sum up the following understandings of current populism.

The specific reasons for the rise of the current wave of populism in different regions are not entirely the same, but they share common factors, including: the shift from interest politics to identity politics, particularly in Europe and the US; the severe disparity between the rich and the poor, which Latin Americans may be more dissatisfied with; the impact of globalization, culturally in Europe and the US and economically in Latin America; the dissatisfaction with the elite and existing system, a relatively new phenomenon in Europe and the US; the imbalance between left and

the right wing forces; the conflict of ideas between realistic indirect democracy and ideal direct democracy; the ideological convergence of the traditional left-wing and right-wing political parties over the past half century, who both have adopted a neutral position; and other political, economic, social and cultural issues arising from neoliberalism.

What left-wing and right-wing populists have in common is that strongmen and charismatic leaders use radical war cries and special ways of mobilization to trigger and amplify the discontent of the middle and lower classes, criticize and oppose the elite class, the system they control and the policies they formulate, and challenge the existing system. The fundamental difference between the left-wing and the right-wing populists lies in that left-wing populists attribute the problem to the economic level, and they usually put forward policies advocating fairness and wealth redistribution, while right-wing populists attribute problems with society to culture and politics with an acceptance of reasonable economic inequality, often mobilizing people with cultural or political slogans based on nation, religion and race. Therefore, the challenges posed by right-wing populism are more likely to be conflicts between different nations, races, religions, cultures and countries, with an impact going beyond a country's borders, whereas left-wing populism are more likely to create conflicts between the rich and the poor mostly at home. There is a clear line between the traditional left and the right wing forces, but it is possible for the current left and right wing forces to absorb each other's slogans due to their common element of "populism."

This paper's general summary of populism in various regions based on a series of discussions organized by PKUIAS is only a preliminary one. Answers to some of the essential questions remain unclear either from the discussions or from a large number of current studies on populism. Unanswered questions include, What changes have taken place in the social structure of those countries over the past half century where populism is appearing? What kind of political forces are likely to be born out of these countries? Is it possible for these political forces to break through the constraints of the current political and cultural consensus? What indeed is the right wing at present?

What is the difference between it, the far-right wing and populism? What is the relationship among the three? These questions all need our further research.