

The 36th New Buds Salon
The Bloody January of Kazakhstan
January 25, 2022

In early January 2022, mass riots broke out in Kazakhstan and caused enormous casualties and property losses. Why did the riots occur? How should we view the post-riot situation in and out of Kazakhstan? Seven doctoral students from the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University held interdisciplinary discussions on this subject.

Shanchuan Zhizi delivered a presentation titled “Why is the Oil and Gas Power Short of Oil and Gas?” Kazakhstan is rich in energy resources. Oil and gas price subsidies serve as an important form of government welfare. Since COVID-19 broke out, lives of Kazakhstan people have been greatly impacted. On November 11, 2021, the government lifted price caps on liquefied gas, and soon the price saw a sharp increase, resulting in mass protests and nationwide unrest in early 2022. Why did the government cancel the welfare when people endure hardships?

Shanchuan Zhizi pointed out that although Kazakhstan is abundant in oil and gas, the prices of oil and gas were lower than production costs for a long time due to the government’s price controls. This price inversion resulted in long-term losses for domestic energy enterprises. Because the enterprises lacked funds to upgrade equipment and increase production capacity, domestic oil and gas supply is in fact not sufficient. At the same time, population growth in Kazakhstan has driven domestic

energy demand, aggravating tension between energy supply and demand. In addition, energy exports are the main source of the country's foreign exchange. The Kazakh government had planned to use energy exports to accumulate funds for economic transformation, so as to break dependence on energy exports. Therefore, in the context of limited energy supply, Kazakhstan's energy export plans are bound to contradict its domestic energy welfare. After the COVID-19 outbreak, high fiscal expenditures further enhanced Kazakhstan's dependence on energy exports. For authorities, lifting price controls and increasing energy exports are important means for increasing fiscal revenue.

In addition, due to the squeeze between low domestic energy prices and high international energy prices, many enterprises and individuals began to engage in smuggling. Although the government enacted a lot of bans, the smuggling did not stop, which further reduced domestic energy supplies and badly affected national fiscal revenues. Therefore, combatting smuggling was one of the important contributing factors in the government's decision to lift energy price controls.

Since the price cap was removed, the liquefied gas price in Kazakhstan has risen from 60 tenge (about 0.8 yuan) to 120 tenge, but compared with other countries, this number is still quite low. With a per capita GDP of nearly US\$10,000, why were Kazakhstan people so sensitive to price increases? Shanchuan Zhizi considered this to be a result of the disparity between rich and poor. Only a few elites enjoyed the dividends of energy exports, and the general public has long been

dissatisfied with domestic wealth polarization. The usage rate of natural gas in Kazakhstan is low, and liquefied gas is still the main source of heating for people in the winter. When COVID-19 pushed up the unemployment and poverty rates, more than half of the Kazakh people earned less than 50,000 tenge (about 700 yuan) every month, so the rise in price was more than the common people could take. For this reason, the increase in price intensified long-standing problems in the country, and triggered riots.

Wang Kaihua gave a presentation titled “The Organization and Operation of Jas Otan in Kazakhstan.” Jas Otan is a youth organization led by the Nur Otan Party, the ruling party of Kazakhstan. The country has a large young population, but as the largest youth organization in Kazakhstan, Jas Otan in early 2022 did not actually prevent or curb riots, in which young people were the main force.

Jas Otan shares the same political platform as the Nur Otan Party, and its core concept is to give the president’s leadership their full backing. The organization structure of Jas Otan comprises four levels: central council, state, city and regional branch. The supreme governing body of Jas Otan is the All-Kazakh Congress and its central council. The central council is composed of the presidium and the branch chairmen of seventeen states across Kazakhstan, and is responsible for overall planning and management at central level. The president of Jas Otan must be a member of Nur Otan Party. At the regional level, the organization of Jas Otan is composed of conferences of regional branches and councils of branches elected by them,

and the lower organization must obey the leadership and management of the higher levels. In terms of membership, Jas Otan stipulates that all young citizens of Kazakhstan over the age of 16 who agree with its mission and goals and actively participate in its projects and activities can apply to join the organization. Members of Jas Otan are entitled to vote and to be elected, to participate in decision making and to express themselves freely, to be informed, and to withdraw from the party. However, obligations such as abiding by discipline and maintaining the unity of the organization should also be fulfilled.

Wang Kaihua believes that the leadership mechanism can be subdivided into two forms: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal leadership means that the organizations of Jas Otan at all levels are led by the Nur Otan party branches at the same level. Vertical leadership refers to the top-down bureaucratic organization system of Jas Otan, through which Nur Otan Party leads Jas Otan at all levels. In terms of political relations, Jas Otan is an extension and expansion of the Nur Otan Party among the youth in Kazakhstan, and serves as a peripheral organization of the party's political public relations and political mobilization efforts targeting youth groups. In terms of personnel relations, Jas Otan is known as the youth reserve of the Nur Otan Party, the main source of young party members, and also a vital platform for the party to cultivate and train its young cadres.

Wang believes that Jas Otan has certain similarities with the Soviet Communist Youth League in terms of organization,

structure and functions, but there are also significant differences between the two in ideology, scale, and funding. Therefore, Jas Otan should not simply be equated to the contemporary Kazakh counterpart of the Communist Youth League. The reason for the failure of Jas Otan in preventing and curbing the youth unrest in early 2022 is related to the imbalanced positioning of the organization's own political role and its insufficient social role. For Jas Otan, political goals always have a priority over social goals, so it is likely to neglect or fail to address the real social concerns of young people. A hierarchical organization system and didactic and exhortative working manner also make it difficult for Jas Otan to become popular among contemporary Kazakhstan youth groups. For this reason, it cannot play the role of guiding and educating youth.

Wang Chenhaozhi gave a presentation titled "Russia-Kazakhstan Higher Education Cooperation: Current Situation and Future." Wang Chenhaozhi pointed out that Central Asian countries mainly rely on sending students abroad and attracting overseas branch campuses to promote their internationalization of higher education. According to statistics from Russia and Kazakhstan, Russia is the largest destination country to study abroad for students in Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstan is also the most important source of international students for Russia. In the arena of international higher education, Russian universities do not have distinct advantages. Although there are many Kazakh students studying in Russia, they are not necessarily attracted by the teaching and research level of Russian universities, but because they have no other

choices. Provided with sufficient financial support and opportunities, top students in Kazakhstan tend to choose universities in the UK or US, which inevitably leads a loss of top students in Russian universities.

For Kazakhstan, a large number of young people studying abroad has caused an outflow of human resources. According to statistics, more than 40,000 people left Kazakhstan in 2018, of which about 70 percent were 18-45 years old. About 60 percent of those who left were with higher education. Most who left Kazakhstan were for studying or working abroad. Another survey shows that among Kazakh students studying in Russia at the end of 2019, less than one-fifth were ready to return and work in Kazakhstan after graduation. The outflow of young and middle-aged human resources has hampered Kazakhstan's economic development.

Currently, there are four branches of Russian universities in Kazakhstan: the Voskhod branch of the Moscow Aviation Institute; the Almaty branch of the St. Petersburg Humanities University of Trade Unions; the Kazakhstan branch of the Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov and the Kostanay branch of the Chelyabinsk State University. The four has been in stable operation for more than 20 years. According to data released by them, the employment rate of graduates from the four has basically stabilized at about 80 percent in the past three years, higher than the average employment rate of graduates from local universities in Kazakhstan. However, Russia's overseas branch campuses in Kazakhstan also face competition from overseas educational

institutions in the UK, the US, Germany, Turkey and other countries. In 1991, Turkey established Yasa Wei Kazakh Turkish International University in Kazakhstan, in which Turkey invested the most money and effort among all Turkish joint universities in Central Asia. The university is a model for the Turkish overseas cultural development strategy in Central Asian and a strong competitor to the branch campuses of Russian universities.

In the view of Wang Chenhaozhi, Russia-Kazakhstan higher education cooperation tends to develop in two directions: Russia and technology. In the future, Kazakhstan may encourage more top students to study in technical universities in Russia by adjusting excellence scholarships such as the Bolashak Scholarship. Unrest in early 2022 may further accelerate both trends. Kazakh President Tokayev has noted that the development of higher education in Kazakhstan should give priority to technical majors and cultivate a new generation of engineers and industrialists. Meanwhile, two more overseas branches of top Russian universities are to be established in western Kazakhstan to improve the regional balance of education development in the country. With higher education in Kazakhstan turning to a focus on technical training, Russia, which is willing to export technology and training systems related to technology, will become Kazakhstan's preferred partner.

Aiheliman Aihemaiti gave a presentation titled "Effectiveness of Security Functions of Regional International Organizations, a Case Study of the Unrest in Kazakhstan."

Based on relevant theories on the functions of regional international organizations, Aiheliman believes that the internal motivation for Central Asian countries to participate in regional international organizations is to obtain assistance from such organizations for security and development needs. Their external motivation is to influence and expand their diplomatic space through the decision-making of the international organizations. On this basis, Aiheliman compared the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) under Russian leadership, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) driven by China, and the Organization of Turkic States led by Turkey and studied their functional performance, security objectives, and security means and mechanism.

CSTO focuses on military cooperation, and its functions are relatively specific. The scope of cooperation initiated by the SCO and the Organization of Turkic States covers security, politics, economics, culture and so on, with more varied functions than CSTO. From the perspective of the starting point of institutionalization, the scope of activities and the level of institutional authority, the institutional density is higher for CSTO, and lower for SCO and the Organization of Turkic States. In terms of security objectives, all three organizations emphasize to fight against terrorism and cross-border crime, but CSTO is more professional in collective defense. Thanks to the institutional density and professionalism, CSTO has adopted effective means and mechanisms to maintain regional security, such as establishing regional clusters including collective rapid reaction forces, peacekeeping forces, and collective security

forces. SCO and the Organization of Turkic States are not able to play the same role as CSTO does in maintaining regional security.

Aiheliman crystallized Oran R. Young's definition of the effectiveness of international mechanisms: "problem solving effectiveness," the extent to which mechanisms succeed in solving the problems that led to their establishment; "implementation effectiveness," the performance of the member States of a certain mechanism in compliance with the implementation of its treaties; and "Goal attainment effectiveness," a mechanism's contribution to achieving a specific goal. On this basis, Aiheliman analyzed the effectiveness of the security functions of the CSTO, the SCO, and the Organization of Turkic States during the unrest in Kazakhstan in early 2022. The CSTO has strong legitimacy to act, fast execution time, high decision-making efficiency and strong problem-solving effectiveness, while the SCO and the Organization of Turkic States have not chosen or been able to take substantive steps. The reasons for the differences in the performance and capabilities of the three parties are related to the adaptability of their respective needs, attitudes and stances.

The CSTO's capabilities were better suited to the demands of President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev during the unrest. The SCO was limited by the principle of non-interference and consensus, which made it difficult for the organization to play a practical role in the unrest. During the unrest, Tokayev seized power by completely replacing Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was once a keen advocate of co-operation

between Turkic-speaking States. It has led to a subtle change in Kazakhstan's attitude toward the Organization of Turkic States. In addition, the duality of Turkish and Kazakh power structures within the Organization of Turkic States has made it difficult for the Organization of Turkic States to act effectively during the unrest.

The topic of the presentation by Wang Yaozheng was "Regional International Organizations and Political Stability -- A Case Study of the Actions of CSTO in Kazakhstan." The CSTO is an intergovernmental cooperation organization of protective integration. Its purpose is to strengthen and consolidate the sovereignty of each country. In addition to its military function, the greater role the CSTO is playing is to foster a culture of interaction between states, establish regular ties, consolidate the collective political unity among its members, and to maintain the stability of their member States' governments.

Wang believes that there were three reasons why the CSTO could quickly intervene in the unrest in Kazakhstan in early 2022:

The first reason is the narrative by Kazakh officials facing the riot. Kazakh officials initially dismissed the protests as "peaceful demonstrations" and responded to demands by limiting gas price increases and dissolving the then-government. However, there was an evident change in the official discourse on January 5, when the protest turned into violent attacks on government buildings and the airport in Almaty and beheading of police officers. President Tokayev called the protesters "terrorists" and said the unrest was the result of a concerted

effort by forces inside and outside Kazakhstan, with many “international terrorists” involved. The official narrative on “terrorism” provided the public opinion basis for the rapid intervention of the CSTO.

The second reason is the legal basis of the international organizations. On January 5, President Tokayev formally applied to CSTO for a peacekeeping force to help Kazakhstan deal with “terrorism.” The CSTO treaty states that “if a member State is subjected to an aggression against its security, stability and territorial sovereignty, the member State shall regard it as an aggression against all the members of this treaty, and all the other member States shall, upon the request of the invaded member State, immediately offer necessary assistance, including military aid.” In addition, the CSTO claimed that the United Nations Security Council did not take necessary measures to stabilize the situation in Kazakhstan. According to provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations: “Before the Security Council takes necessary measures to maintain international peace and security, any provision of this charter shall not damage the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense of any United Nations member State.” This means the CSTO can help stabilize Kazakhstan by exercising the right of collective self-defense. President Tokayev’s application as well as the relevant provisions of the CSTO treaty and the UN Charter provided a legal basis for the CSTO to intervene in the unrest in Kazakhstan.

The third is the efficiency and organizational cohesion within the CSTO. The CSTO established its rapid reaction force

and the joint crisis center in 2009 and 2010 respectively, providing institutional guarantees to improve the organization's operational efficiency. The day after President Tokayev's application, other CSTO member States all adopted draft measures to calm the situation in Kazakhstan and immediately sent troops to the country, which showed the cohesion within the organization. Operational efficiency and organizational cohesion guaranteed that the CSTO could quickly intervene in the unrest in Kazakhstan.

Following the operation, the CSTO helped stabilize the situation in Kazakhstan in four major ways:

First, providing military assistance. The CSTO sent about 2,500 peacekeepers and hundreds of pieces of equipment to Kazakhstan to protect important facilities, and ensure the supply of military materials and smooth transportation, so as to help Kazakhstan be free to rely on its own capabilities to deal with the unrest. Second, providing moral support. The CSTO's swift action shifted Western criticism from the Kazakh government to Russia and the organization itself, alleviating the pressure on Kazakhstan brought by international public opinion and helping the country regain its international reputation.

Third, providing external legitimacy. The quick action of the CSTO provided President Tokayev with strong external support for his legitimacy, enabling him to quickly resolve the contradictions within the Kazakh elites and consolidate his power. Fourth, preventing external interference. The CSTO's military deployment in Kazakhstan sent a clear signal to the rest of the world that Russia and other CSTO member states were

willing and able to support Kazakhstan in resolving the crisis, and external forces were not allowed to interfere or meddle in the internal affairs of CSTO member states.

According to the above case of the CSTO's involvement in the riot in Kazakhstan, Wang Yaozheng believes that the basis for international organizations to contribute troops can be analyzed from three aspects: discourse construction, legal basis and internal efficiency and cohesion of the international organizations. The ways in which international organizations help member countries stabilize a situation can be analyzed from four aspects: military aid, moral support, legitimacy construction and external interference prevention.

The topic of the presentation by Qin Yanyang was “The Prospect of Economic Cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan, A Case Study of the Turmoil in Kazakhstan.”

Kazakhstan is an important diplomatic partner of Turkey. In the 1990s, influenced by the diplomatic ideas of “pan-Turkism” and “Look East,” Turkey took the lead in establishing diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. In 2012, the Turkey-Kazakhstan High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council was established. In 2021, diplomatic relations between Turkey and Kazakhstan were further strengthened due to the geopolitical changes in the Transcaucasian region brought about by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the upgrading of the Organization of Turkic States from the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States.

Since Turkey and Kazakhstan are not adjacent and there are competitions between their products, Kazakhstan is not an

important trading partner of Turkey. Trade between the two countries was about \$3 billion in 2020, less than 1 percent of Turkey's total foreign trade volume. However, investment cooperation between the two countries has been thriving. Turkey is an important source of investment for Kazakhstan. In 2020, as many as 2,800 Turkish companies invested in Kazakhstan, mainly in infrastructure construction, logistics and transportation. Kazakhstan's ambassador to Turkey said that one out of every eight foreign companies in Kazakhstan is Turkish. Engineering contracting is a key industry where Turkish enterprises invest abroad. With the development of Kazakhstan's economy, Turkish engineering enterprises have rapidly entered the Kazakh market. By 2021, Kazakhstan has become the fourth largest market for Turkish engineering enterprises to invest in.

Following the unrest in Kazakhstan in early 2022, Turkey, under the framework of the Organization of Turkic States, expressed support for President Tokayev's efforts to quell the unrest and reform the social welfare system. In solidarity with the government of Kazakhstan, statements by the Turkish president and foreign minister and resolutions adopted by the Turkish Parliament stressed the Organization of Turkic States would fully play a role. Turkey wants to create a crisis resolution mechanism within Turkic-speaking countries when dealing with Kazakhstan and Central Asian affairs, in order to increase Turkey's influence over Central Asian affairs. But the influence of Turkey and the Organization of Turkic States is very limited compared with that of Russia and the CSTO.

According to Qin Yanyang, the unrest in Kazakhstan in

early 2022 will have three major impacts on economic cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan:

The first is that Turkey will pay more attention to the security of its investments in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan turned to Russia rather than Turkey for security assistance when the riots happened. This suggests that Turkey's military influence in Kazakhstan is still far less than Russia's and it cannot fully protect Turkish companies. Therefore, after the riots, both Turkish official and private capital need to further consider the security of investment in Kazakhstan.

Second, Turkey will adjust its cooperation with Kazakhstan in investment and trade, and the service and transportation industries will become new growth points. Since the 1990s, Turkey's investment in Kazakhstan has been asset-based and heavily dependent on the investment channels provided by the Nazarbayev government. As the elite power structure of the Nazarbayev era was shaken by the unrest, the direction of Turkish investment will also be affected. In addition, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway linking Turkey with the Caspian Sea region was opened in 2017, facilitating the trade links between Turkey and Kazakhstan. Governments and companies on both sides are optimistic about the business opportunities created by the railway.

Third, Turkey and Kazakhstan will deepen cooperation in emerging economic sectors. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the rapid growth of Turkey's real estate market attracted many Kazakh investors and home buyers, boosting people-to-people economic and trade ties between the two

countries. Turkey also hopes to strengthen cooperation with Kazakhstan in space technology. The Turkic World Vision 2040, adopted by the Organization of Turkic States in 2021, stresses that member States should strengthen cooperation in satellite technology and enhance technological capabilities for the peaceful use of space. Space technology cooperation will be a new area of economic and trade cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan.

Zhao Xinyu gave a presentation titled “Prospect of Cooperation between Turkic Countries, Viewed from Turkish Public Opinion on Kazakhstan.” When riots broke out in Kazakhstan in early 2022, Turkish authorities responded immediately. “Turkey has been closely following the situation in Kazakhstan, attaches importance to the stability of Kazakhstan, a friendly nation, and hopes that our brotherly Kazakh people can enjoy peace and tranquility,” said Turkish President Erdogan. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, “Turkey hopes Kazakhstan will achieve stability and peace as soon as possible. To this end, Turkey and the Organization of Turkic States will provide all kinds of support.” Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar later said, “Kazakhstan is an important ally of Turkey and we hope to stabilize the situation and ensure law and order in the country as soon as possible. No matter what Kazakhstan asks Ankara for, we will always meet their demands.” Both the speaker of Turkey’s parliament and a spokesman for the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) reiterated similar positions.

Compared with their previous stance of staunch support for

Azerbaijan in the Nagorak-Karabakh conflict, Turkish officials have been more cautious and neutral about the unrest in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has also turned to the CSTO for security support, rather than to the Organization of Turkic States. Although the discussion on whether the Organization of Turkic States can be involved in Kazakhstan's security affairs has been going on in Turkey, the Organization of Turkic States has neither provided any kind of collective security defense mechanism, nor established any peacekeeping forces like the CSTO for its member states. It only has some elusive statements about cooperation and mutual help among members when dealing with domestic and international challenges. In addition, Turkey has not signed any document such as memorandum of military cooperation with Kazakhstan, so there is no legal basis for Turkey to send military forces to Kazakhstan. Outsiders say that Turkey's influence in Central Asia is far less than Russia's, although Azerbaijan's victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has bolstered its ambitions. Russia's active involvement in the unrest in Kazakhstan through the CSTO serves as a warning to both Turkey and the Organization of Turkic States that Russia will not share any parity with Turkey in Central Asia, even temporarily.

As a result, Turkish opposition figures, the media, former government officials and retired generals have expressed their dissatisfaction with the cautious, neutral stance of Turkish officials. They have also made many radical statements. Meral Aksener, a Turkish opposition leader, said her party (iYi Parti) was closely following the developments in Turkey's brotherly

state Kazakhstan, and indirectly expressed displeasure at the CSTO's involvement in the country. Former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said on Twitter that it was worrisome that the Kazakh leadership had asked for help from the CSTO, whose rotating chairmanship was in the hands of Armenia.

Retired Turkish generals such as Cem Gurdeniz claimed that the unrest in Kazakhstan stemmed from an “imperialist conspiracy.” They believe that imperialists have been flexing their muscles since the founding of the Organization of Turkic States, and a Turkish-led “Turan army” should be established to solve security problems in Turkic-speaking countries. Turkey's opposition media also trumpeted that Turkey should play a more “active” role in the unrest in Kazakhstan, creating a “Turkic-Islamic” army to counter the Russian “threat.”

The difference between official and civilian statements about the unrest in Kazakhstan suggests that Turkey has not yet have a strong political or military presence in Central Asia. However, thanks to the historical and cultural ties between Turkey and Central Asian countries, Turkey's influence on Central Asia is still significant. Attending an emergency meeting of heads of Turkic-speaking States following the unrest in Kazakhstan, Erdogan said Turkey would take steps to increase military cooperation with Central Asian countries in the future. According to Russian scholar Bocharov, “The events in Kazakhstan have not so much exposed the limits of Turkish capabilities as become the driving force for future Turkish activities in Central Asia. It is true that military cooperation will be more effective, but the level of military-government

integration will not reach the same level as the CSTO.”

After the students delivered their speeches, experts were invited to comment. Wang Suolao, deputy director of PKUIAS, praised the doctoral students’ research and pointed out that people doing area studies should pay attention to the details ignored by theoretical research, and supplement theoretical research through studying details. He also advised doctoral students to pay attention to the reaction of Islamic countries to the unrest in Kazakhstan, and to the connections between Kazakhstan and the Islamic world. Zan Tao, also deputy director of PKUIAS, believes that area studies need to reach a higher theoretical level, thus attention should be paid to its disciplinary and theoretical development.

Therefore, Zan Tao suggested that PhD students combine empirical research with theoretical research on the basis of field research in target countries, so as to improve their ability of theoretical work. Yang Shu, director of the Institute for Central Asian Studies (ICAS) of Lanzhou University, suggested that doctoral students pay more attention to Kazakhstan’s domestic issues such as oil and gas, youth problems, and elite groups when doing area studies. In the field of international relations, he suggested they pay more attention to the diplomatic competition between the CSTO, Russia and Turkey in Central Asia, and the economic and trade cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan.

Zhai Kun, deputy director of PKUIAS, said in his concluding remarks that area studies researchers should produce social academic products for the public. He believes that social

academic products can be divided into three types: talking about facts through fact-studying, talking about theory through fact-studying, and talking about facts through theory-studying.

The first approach, talking about facts through fact-studying, cherishes empirical and detailed research, being able to offer new knowledge. The second approach, talking about theory through fact-studying, upgrades empirical research to theoretical research, focusing on exploring the general law. The third, talking about facts through theory-studying, uses the general law and discipline theories to analyze certain specific problems.

In the end, he expressed his belief that to do a good job in research for area studies, scholars should adhere to a long-term view and pay attention to specific regions or countries over time to accumulate knowledge. Also, students should always catch up with the changing situations by improving their workflow. Last but not least, students should be able to accomplish various tasks by working in their own research field. While doing academic research, they should be able to make suggestions for the country and popularize knowledge for society.

The 37th New Buds Salon
French Election and Sino-European Relations
May 13, 2022

The French presidential election came to an end recently, with Emmanuel Macron's victory over the far-right leader Marine Le Pen in the runoff. However, the election revealed the division and fractures in the French political society and the difficulties Macron still faces. A new-generation European politician, Macron has always been ambitious to revitalize the country as a major power. With the reforms he carried out at home and his advocacy for European strategic autonomy, France has managed to exert an influence disproportionate to its own strength. In particular, with Angela Merkel having left office, Macron emerged as the de facto head of the EU, dubbed "the Last President of Europe." As a pragmatic leader, Maron may make a good counterpart in the conversation with China over the coming five years and bring some stability to the choppy relations between China and Europe.

Presided over by Prof. Zhai Kun, deputy director of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University, the session invited Prof. Wang Shuo from PKU's School of International Studies to give a keynote speech on the French presidential election, the connotation of Macronism, the prospect of Macron's second term as well as the future of Sino-French and Sino-European relations.

Prof. Zhai Kun made a brief introduction to the salon before introducing Prof. Wang Shuo, who is not only fluent in

languages of major European countries, but also has profound insight into Europe-related issues.

Prof. Wang Shuo started his presentation by analyzing the reasons why the French presidential election drew wide attention from Western countries. First, Western countries worried about the possibility of far-right Le Pen becoming the president and the ensuing rise of populism; second, Le Pen is perceived to be vague in her attitude toward Putin to the extent that the West was concerned about having a weak link in their own so-called alliance. Though Macron's re-election is a relief to many, a range of underlying issues are worthy of closer analysis. Prof. Wang Shuo shared his insight in the following aspects: First, analysis of the French presidential election; second, Macron's views and ruling philosophy; third, problems Macron will encounter during his second term and his countermeasures; fourth, possible changes in Sino-French and Sino-European relations.

I. Analysis of the French presidential election

France's semi-presidential framework is a distinctive system in which the president enjoys significant power. For example, in special circumstances, the president can dissolve the parliament at any time or bypass the parliament to pass the bill he or she wants to promote or submit it to a referendum. To some extent, the French president is as powerful as the US president and even comes under weaker parliamentary oversight.

In principle, the president is in charge of foreign affairs and the prime minister domestic affairs. The French foreign ministry

is only responsible for implementing foreign policies, while the president enjoys significant decision-making power in foreign affairs, as important decisions are almost all made by the president. The prime minister, however, is principally in charge of domestic affairs. If the president and the prime minister are from the same faction or party, the latter will be effectively an assistant to the former in implementing the president's decisions. If they are from different factions or parties, a "co-governance" will take place, which will make it hard to advance agendas. It is of note that "co-governance between the Left and the Right" happened in history. For example, during the tenure of François Mitterrand, a Left president, and Jacques Chirac, a Right prime minister, the president sought powers over domestic affairs and the prime minister over foreign affairs, leading to a struggle that ended up with neither achieving what they wanted.

Before 2002, the presidential election was held every seven years and the parliamentary election every five years. Whenever co-governance happens, the two-year gap would see serious internal struggle. Since Chirac cut the presidential term from seven years to five during his second term as president, which made the two elections almost back to back with only two months in between, co-governance has not happened again. After all, if a politician wins the presidential election, the party he or she represents would have a good chance to win the parliamentary election two months later.

The French presidential election normally has two rounds, as no candidate has won a majority during the first round since the Fifth Republic was founded. Generally, the first round is

held in April, followed by the second round in May. This year, both rounds were held in April, with an interval of about two weeks.

In the first round on April 10, 2022, Macron won 27.84 percent of the vote, followed closely by Le Pen with 23.15 percent of votes. Due to fragmented campaign platforms, candidates other than Jean-Luc Melenchon, Le Pen and Macron each won no more than 10 percent of the vote, with many even below 5 percent. By political spectrum, the far-right Le Pen and Éric Zemmour won 32.28 percent (almost 1/3) in total; the far-left La France Insoumise and PCF together won about 30 percent. Macron, who is in the middle of the spectrum, won less than one third of the vote at 27.85 percent. This shows that two thirds of French voters have moved towards extremes, with half toward the left and half right. Macron won the second round, albeit with a slim margin, because it is less likely, after all, for ordinary people to choose an extreme president, though it would have been a different story if it was Melenchone who had competed Le Pen in the runoff. Overall, the 2022 presidential election reflects the following two trends in the French political landscape.

First, with the two major traditional parties on the wane, France's political landscape is increasingly fragmented. The century-old Socialist Party (Parti socialiste) is on the decline, so is the Gaullist Republicans (Les Républicains), which has not come back to power again since former President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was also from the Republicans, lost his re-election largely due to the 2008 financial crisis and the 2009 debt crisis.

François Hollande, the left-wing Socialist successor of Sarkozy, was not able to secure enough public support with his left-wing social policies, and became the only president of the Fifth Republic who did not seek re-election when in office. The two major traditional parties, the left-wing Socialists and the right-wing Republicans, used to have an equal share of the French political landscape, where there were no centrist parties until 2017 when Macron's victory transformed the En Marche, founded under his leadership, from a movement to a centrist party, La République En Marche (LREM).

Macron had some luck winning the 2017 election, because his closest rival François Fillon quit the race over the “fake jobs” scandal. During the 2022 election, luck was once again on his side, as the Russia-Ukraine conflict helped divert public attention to foreign affairs, his home field where he has the upper hand.

Second, the rise of extreme thoughts and increasingly acute social contradictions. During the first round of election this year, two thirds of voters supported parties on the extremes, in contrast to around 50 percent in 2017. What's more, the turnout decreased to a little over 60 percent, reflecting waning public confidence in the current political system. Although parties on the extremes did not make breakthroughs this time, the trend is increasingly visible, with higher possibility of parties on the extremes winning the 2027 presidential election, making it less of a surprise if a far-left or far-right leader comes to power.

II. Macaron's character and philosophy

Macron is one of the new generations of European

politicians, who is independent from traditional parties and therefore carries no historical burdens. In a country that values tradition as much as France, Macron's success can be attributed to, apart from social and political environment, his own extraordinary qualities. Better knowledge of Macron enables a better understanding of France's current policies. Macron has the following traits.

First, he has a unique personality. Born into a family of doctors, Macron loves literature and drama. He was rebellious and insisted on pursuing his drama teacher, Brigitte Trogneux, who is 24 years his senior. He was mentored by two philosophy masters -- Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Attali, who appreciated his eloquence and insightfulness and backed him in his career. As one who knows his own mind, Macron was dubbed "an old soul with a young face."

Second, he is ambitious. Macron served as a deputy secretary-general and economic adviser to the then President Hollande and was later appointed economy minister, in which post he spearheaded the famous "Macron law," a package of reforms that many of which are still on his agenda. However, since Hollande did not give the resolute support needed to advance the package, the reforms had to stop. To pursue his political ambition, Macron decided to run the presidential election, which he won, with a greater ambition to revive France. It is fair to say that he tied his ambition to the future of the country.

Third, he is self-assured. Macron's strong mind and resilience can be traced to his personal experience. Successes, be

it his marriage to Brigitte, or that as a banker, or the political victory that made him a French president, have been reinforcing his self-confidence, which would naturally make its mark on his ruling philosophy and the reforms to pursue his dream of reviving France.

Besides his personality, Macron has developed well-thought-out and systematic philosophy known as “Macronism,” as summed up by the academia in the following four main pillars.

First, progressivism. Progressivism is a tide of thought that rose as early as during the Renaissance in France. It “promotes change with little regard to results.” Macron hoped to break the boundary between the left and the right and get rid of the fetters of thought in the society. However, his rule has made the society more divided over recent years than it was in 2017, for which his progressive ruling philosophy is arguably to blame.

Second, social liberalism, which is mainly based on former Prime Minister Michel Rocard’s leftist thinking, or the “French socialism” that integrates ideal and reality. It argues for certain extent of support to ensure fairness while promoting efficiency, believing that on the one hand, it is necessary to stimulate enterprise investment, especially to improve the market business environment and create a capital-friendly atmosphere, while on the other hand, demand-side and supply-side reforms should be carried out at the same time to mitigate the problems caused by improper distribution. This type of social liberalism is also, to a large extent, the embodiment of Macron’s philosophy that is neither left nor right, but both left and right.

Third, Europeanism. Jacques Delors, an architect of the euro, had a great influence on Macron. In the view of Europeanists in France, without Europe, France would be only a middle-ranking country. In this sense, France must excel in Europe before it can be recognized as a major international power. At the same time, a better Europe would give France a more distinctive role to play worldwide and Macron greater legitimacy to rule at home.

Fourth, multilateralism. Multilateralism, though not so much Macron's creation as an extension or embodiment of his philosophy, is important because it relates to the strength and status of Europe in the competition among major powers. By advocating "European strategic autonomy," "decline of Western hegemony" and other propositions, Macron argues that France and Europe should establish their own values and rules, and multilateralism is one of his approaches.

III. Problems Macron faces and his countermeasures

First and foremost is domestic reform. France was once known as "the time bomb of the euro zone," meaning that although France does not have the most serious problems in Europe, it has to reform, or else, as the public know well, it could land in serious trouble. However, the government is always faced with formidable social resistance and finds it hard to advance reforms, either due to the lack of willingness or courage, making France a time bomb that could explode any time.

On the one hand, France has structural economic problems. France has a mixed economy, where the state does not directly

participate in economic activities, but has far greater influence over its economy than other countries, because many of its “public enterprises” are still subject to state intervention and the government is both a player and a referee. Such mixed economic system relatively benefits large enterprises, such as those in aviation, space, railway, automobile, nuclear power and other industries, where France has an edge, but could stifle small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Unlike in other countries, where SMEs are the main force in creating jobs and introducing technological innovations, France is seriously short of vibrant SMEs. Instead, large enterprises dominate most social resources, leaving SMEs with few opportunities. What’s more, internationalization of large enterprises has led to hollowing-out of industries. According to preliminary statistics, large French enterprises with output of over EUR100 million generate 70 percent of output and hire 80 percent of employees overseas, which exacerbates domestic unemployment and elevates financial deficit and debt. Meanwhile, France does not have a favorable environment for innovation and lacks the means, channels and atmosphere to transform the innovative ideas of its people to productivity.

On the other hand, the French society is increasingly divided in politics. In France, where history and culture have left behind a broad political spectrum, anyone who wants to change the rules and regulations will face strong social controversy and resistance, a situation that is getting worse due to political division. If Macron wants to advance his reforms, he needs a cooperative government and prime minister. According to the

current situation, Macron has a good chance to win the June 12 parliamentary election, but will have a weaker presence in the parliament. In terms of political alliance, the support from small allies may play a critical role in helping him advance reforms in the future, or even create a situation where the minority plays the decisive role. Meanwhile, the far left and the far right may hold him back from entering alliances with their strong presence in the parliament.

Whatever difficulties lie ahead, Macron is set to advance his reforms in the second term. One of the important initiatives is the “France 2030” plan he unveiled before the election, which aims to invest EUR30 billion in some major industries and could promote private investment of as much as EUR300 billion. Macron’s reforms revolve around improving France’s competitiveness, which mostly relies on creating a better business environment. Protests like the “yellow vest” movement and transportation strikes were mostly triggered by corporate tax breaks, greater flexibility for enterprises to dismiss employees and other measures that Macron had taken to improve the business environment to make France a more attractive investment destination.

Second is the building of Europe. Europe is facing an increasingly complex environment due to Brexit, Russia-Ukraine conflict and changes in France-Germany relations, among others. Meanwhile, as the increasingly bureaucratic EU is getting out of touch with the reality without properly addressing the needs of ordinary people, it has seen declining public confidence in European integration. A key issue

is the creation and distribution of integration dividend. What the EU has done so far are of high return and low cost, whereas what is left undone, such as finance, internal affairs, justice and so on, are of low return and high cost and may require member states to forsake more control, which makes it even harder to generate integration dividend in the future. Meanwhile, many Central and Eastern European countries have been increasingly dissatisfied with Western European countries, as they believe, unlike what they had anticipated at the time of joining the EU, they are now subjected to Western control over their capital and industries and are exploited. The core of European integration is to “agree to disagree”, an ideal that is hard to achieve. Such contradictions frequently occur in Europe. If France, under Macron’s leadership, wants to push forward the building of Europe, it cannot bypass the challenge of dividend creation and equitable distribution.

Another problem is the doubt over France’s “egoism”. Macron’s EU policies are often perceived by other EU members as taking advantage of them. Unlike Germany who provided some public benefits, Macron is seen as simply advancing his agenda out of the ambition to establish France as a major power, rather than providing practical benefits as Germany did. Inadequate national strength has become a notable constraint on France’s bid to be a major power, making it hard to convince other member states to cooperate with Macron’s proposals.

Macron’s current plan is to create a “European political community.” Macron once said it might take decades for Ukraine to join the EU, so it would be necessary to square a

circle to create a “European political community,” a relatively loose cooperative framework that would encompass countries such as the UK, Ukraine and countries that are not yet ready for EU membership. This proposed community would offer a solution regarding the relationship between the UK and the EU after Brexit, the difficulty of accepting Ukraine into the EU in the short term, as well as the challenges in furthering European integration due to institutional barriers. However, the proposed community is not equivalent to the EU, nor is its membership a substitute for EU membership. As many member states, including Ukraine, are not interested in the idea, it remains to be seen how the proposal might play itself out in the future.

IV. Possible changes in Sino-French relations and Sino-European relations

Although France “sits in the front row in second-class seats,” it is, after all, a permanent member of the Security Council, a core country of the EU, a nuclear power, and the only country in Europe with a complete defense industrial system capable of manufacturing everything from bullets to aircraft carriers. In addition, France has the second largest overseas military presence in the world, with about one sixth of its army stationed overseas except in Antarctica. In particular, after Merkel left office, Macron has become the EU’s de facto leader and spokesman for foreign affairs. As a traditional great power that considers itself the origin of modern Western culture, France has a natural resistance to American culture and leadership, and takes pride in its own “anti-American sentiment.”

That said, France's power and influence in international affairs should not be overestimated. For example, when Macron visited the US to meet Trump amid the tense EU-US relations as Trump proposed to raise tariffs on European products and withdraw from the Paris Agreement, Trump showed closeness and hospitality to the visiting Macron, but nothing substantive was achieved. The Palace spokesman later told the media that Macron's meeting with Trump itself was the biggest achievement, even without reaching any agreement. After all, the fact that Macron can speak to leaders of all major powers mirrors his influence, although it may not offer a decisive solution.

Overall, Macron's re-election is positive for the outlook for China-France relations in the next five years. As a stable leader who knows China well, Macron may contribute to the communication between China and France and between China and Europe, as he plays a unique role in Europe. Moreover, as a realistic leader in foreign affairs, he may do "whatever needed" to revive France. To safeguard the interest of France, he will certainly be cautious about his stance between China and the US.

On the front of Sino-EU relations, the most important development is the way the EU defined China in a 2019 report – For the EU, China is a cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival. In fact, the EU did not clearly define the three roles, which are contradictory in themselves as it would be impossible to distinguish competition and cooperation in real practice. China-EU relations have entered a

new break-in period since the release of the report. From the EU's perspective, cooperation and competition with China will be the norm in the future, although with increasing focus on competition. As a leading advocate of the trifecta approach to China within the EU, Macron will have a great impact on the future relations between China and France and between China and the EU.

The EU is a key third party, though perhaps not a decisive one, amid the competition between China and the US. China-EU relations are set to become more complicated in the future. However, after Macron's re-election, more can be done to improve Sino-French relations. France and Macron are important to China in handling its relations with the EU and it serves China's national interest to find a new pattern of relations with the EU to build a relatively stable China-EU relationship, especially one that can ensure continued cooperation between the two sides.

During the Q&A session, Prof. Zhai Kun and participants raised the following questions: First, how will Macron promote the Indo-Pacific strategy in his second term? Does the Indo-Pacific strategy hold any clues about the strategic autonomy of France and the EU? Second, could Prof. Wang Shuo share some experience about his French studies and European studies? Third, how long will the unpleasant situation between China and France and between China and the EU last? When could it be expected to bottom out? Fourth, what does the future hold for the Franco-German relationship? Fifth, what to make of Le Pen's second failure? Sixth, what impact could the

Ukraine crisis have on European strategic autonomy?

Regarding the first question, Prof. Wang Shuo believes that Macron will push forward the Indo-Pacific strategy as his next step, because France considers the Indo-Pacific to be its “territory,” as it is part of its overseas territories and population. For Macron, the Indo-Pacific is a diplomatic stage, a card he could play and an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of a major power, so he would by no means miss this opportunity, although he will not be the protagonist on the stage. Moreover, Macron would be wise enough to pursue France’s goals in the name of Europe. Therefore, he will act in the name of the EU, or even cooperate with other European countries in handling Indo-Pacific affairs.

With regard to the second question, Prof. Wang Shuo shared his own takeaways. He believes that researchers of area studies should, first, have a broad mind, be sensitive to policies and take the right stance. It is also necessary for researchers to be well versed with the particularities of the region or country under study, especially with its society, culture, humanities and social psychology. Third, area studies emphasize continuity and requires long-term research to follow up the developments in a given field. Finally, researchers should have broader vision than the perspective of a specific region or country.

As for the third question, Prof. Wang Shuo shared his own prediction: the fundamental reason why China-EU relations may become complicated in the future is that with the rise of China, the frictions and conflicts of interests between China and the West will only increase. At present, the US-led West are still

taking advantage of the current world order to create institutional dividend. When China's rise impacts their hegemony, conflicts are bound to arise between China and the US-led West, so is the case between China and the EU. Prof. Wang Shuo believes that China and the EU, as they each develop, will see more cooperation, and even more frictions as well.

In response to the fourth question, Prof. Wang Shuo pointed out that as Macron starts his second term, France may further dominate the EU, with many of its policies setting the direction for European integration in the future. In contrast, Germany is playing a declining role due to changes in its own internal politics. With its newly established three-party coalition government working against one another on many issues, and a unified and clear policy approach to either internal or external affairs yet to be formed, Germany is unlikely to lead the integration for a long time in the future. Meanwhile, it may lack the willingness to support Macron. That said, despite the shift of role as leader of the EU between France and Germany again, France on the rise and Germany on the decline, Macron would find it difficult to advance European integration if Germany is not keen or supportive.

For the fifth question, Prof. Wang Shuo believes that Le Pen lost this election largely because of Eric Zemmour, a politician further to her right. In order to take the ruling power, the populist party led by Le Pen faces a major choice, which is to win over centrist voters. However, in this "legalization" process, voters who support extreme positions may switch to the

more extreme Zemmour. It seems that Le Pen did win some new centrist voters, who are nonetheless swinging, at the cost of losing her own voter base, making the game not worth the candle.

For the last question, Prof. Wang Shuo pointed out that the Ukrainian crisis dealt a heavy blow to the EU's strategic autonomy. Contrary to what the EU had expected, the US did not proactively seek a peaceful solution to the Ukrainian conflict. Most of the cost of war fell on the Europeans, while the US itself is caught in elevated inflation due to supply chain tension caused by the war. In addition, the Ukraine crisis has led some EU member states to further rely on NATO for protection. Finland and Sweden both wish to join NATO, while Central and Eastern European countries welcome the US to permanently station its troops or even deploy nuclear weapons, because they do not believe that the EU is able to protect them. This division has taken tolls on unity within the EU and its autonomy. The Ukraine conflict, though a blow to the European strategic autonomy, does remind the Europeans of the importance of strategic autonomy. After all, one cannot afford leaving his own fate in the hands of others.

At the end of the session, Prof. Qian Chengdan made a few comments on Prof. Wang Shuo's speech. He noted that Prof. Wang Shuo provided insightful analysis and conclusion with his in-depth understanding of the mentality of French people in the presidential election. Area studies and research by outstanding experts in area studies, such as Prof. Wang Shuo, can provide an important leverage for developing better judgements about

future trends of China's foreign relations. In the future, the Institute of Area Studies will invite more experts and scholars to discuss issues related to area studies.