

## **Yannan Roundtable (IX)**

### **Welcome to ‘Political Hindu Republic’: Relationship between politics and religion and the establishment of right-wing leadership in modern India**

**March 11, 2022**

The ninth session of Yannan Roundtable, presided over by Chen Yifeng, associate professor at Peking University Law School, invited Zhang Minyu, assistant professor at School of Foreign Languages, Peking University to make a keynote speech. Zhang Minyu pointed out in his speech that the Hindu right wing, when expanding its influence, managed to forge out a partnership with judicial elites by leveraging the populist shift of the judiciary, which has the authority to intervene in religious affairs and takes an independent and elitist stance, as well as its own advantages in mass mobilization to win judicial endorsement for its actions. The legislative and executive powers that the Hindu right wing has secured through elections as well as its strong influence in civil society reflect the fact that the cooperation with the judiciary effectively helped the right wing rise to leadership in India’s religious and secular life to establish a “political Hinduism” system.

#### **Religious authority of the judiciary in India-style secularism**

Zhang Minyu used a famous judgment to introduce the theme of the Roundtable. In November 2019, the Supreme Court

of India declared its verdict on the Ayodhya dispute, ordering the disputed land to be handed over to Hindus and a trust to be created by the government of India to build a Ram temple, for which Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone on August 5, 2020. The verdict reflects an important shift in India's political landscape. Twenty-seven years ago, the Hindu right wing demolished the Babri Masjid, for which it was severely criticized by all sectors of society. The then Indian government banned the activities of certain right-wing groups, including Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), and promised to rebuild the Babri Masjid. The verdict shows that after nearly 30 years of efforts, the Hindu right wing finally had its demand satisfied and won endorsement from state apparatus for its core proposition.

To trace the origin of the issue, Zhang Minyu reviewed the relationship between politics and religion under the framework of Indian secularism established in the 1950s. Although the British-ruled Indian Empire was divided into two autonomous dominions with Hindus and Muslims as their respective majority population, India has never set Hinduism as its state religion. The Constitution of India also provides for religious freedom and related rights of religious minorities. In 1967, the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution officially incorporated "secular" into the Constitution as one of its basic state attributes. The judgement of the Supreme Court of India in the case of

Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (the “Bharati case”) in 1973 also made it clear that “secularism” is a basic constitutional feature that the Parliament has no right to amend.

However, the secularism in India is not exactly the same as that in Western countries. The state-religion relationship in India after its independence is more than a simple replicate of the “separation of church and state” in Europe and the US, as the State does not shy away from intervention into religious affairs, instead, it spearheads religious reforms and dominates the relationship between the State and religion. Thanks to its mandate from the Constitution, the Indian judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, plays a key role in state intervention in religious affairs. Article 32 of the Constitution expressly provides the Supreme Court with the authority to safeguard fundamental rights conferred by the Constitution, with which the Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional when it conflicts with fundamental rights, and prohibit individuals from making deals with their fundamental rights. In addition, by making fundamental rights the “basic structure of the Constitution” that the Parliament has no power to amend, the Supreme Court ensures that its own power is not to be weakened. The fully empowered Indian judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, which calls itself the “protector and guarantor of fundamental rights,” has thus become arguably the de facto supreme religious authority.

The concept and practice of religious arbitration by judicial departments date back to the time when there was only a fine line between religion and justice in India. Whether under the rule of a Hindu dynasty or a Muslim dynasty, Brahmins or Ulama who received professional legal training were the core personnel to assist kings to run the country's judicial system. However, unlike in the West where Catholic Church stood side by side with secular monarchs, Indian monarchs, who enjoyed the highest power, in most cases, had the highest arbitration authority over religious affairs. The East India Company also attempted to use public authority to intervene in religious life. For example, in the first half of the 19th century, the East India Company promoted the abolition of the Sati system (a practice where a widowed woman, either voluntarily or by force, immolates herself on her deceased husband's pyre). However, unlike the missionaries who regarded Hinduism as a "backward" religion, modern Hindu reformers believe that contemporary Hinduism becomes "backward and superstitious" simply because Hindus have departed from the classics represented by the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. Therefore, modern Hindu reforms often have revivalist and modernist tendencies at the same time.

After independence, with the support of India's first Prime Minister Nehru and others who wanted to unite Hindus by reforming Hinduism, a special committee headed by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, chairman of the Drafting Committee of the

Constitution, reviewed the draft of the Hindu Code Bill, which was later passed into law as several acts governing marriage, inheritance and other issues of Hindus. Ambedkar, born to a family from the bottommost rung of the Indian caste system, was critical of Hinduism and emphasized the need to reform Hinduism. However, most political elites in the early days after independence were high-rung Hindus whose religious views were similar to those of modern Hindu reformers who, while acknowledging the need to reform Hinduism, also firmly believed that Hinduism was a rational and inclusive religion. This formed the foundation for the later cooperation between the Hindu right wing and the judiciary: on the one hand, the judiciary, as an effective religious authority, is of great value for the Hindu right wing to realize its ideals; on the other hand, the judiciary shares certain understanding of Hinduism with the Hindu right wing, who is also influenced by the modern Hindu reform movement.

### **The transformation of the judiciary and the emerging ‘state-religion cooperation’ model**

Despite the important power it possesses, the judicial branch was relatively weak in the legislative-executive-judicial balance. In political practice, India’s legislative and executive branches could appoint judges. Meanwhile, the Indian Constitution does not forbid retired judges from obtaining executive appointments, which allows the government to

provide “post-retirement quid pro quo” for judges who ruled in favor of the government while in office, making legislative and executive branches conveniently placed to interfere with the operation of judicial departments.

During the Indira Gandhi government, the contradiction between legislative -executive branches and judicial branch became increasingly intense. In 1973, after the retirement of Chief Justice S.M. Sikri, the Indira Gandhi government went against the seniority principle and appointed Justice Ajit Nath Ray, who held pro-government views in the Kesavananda Bharati case, as Chief Justice of India, superseding three other judges with higher seniority. Cabinet Minister Kumaramangalam even claimed that judges’ personal “political philosophy” was an important criterion for their appointment. During the Emergency between 1975 and 1977, the Supreme Court struggled to strike a balance between ensuring its own survival and maintaining popular trust. The Supreme Court compromised its stance in the trial of the Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Shri Raj Narain case, which concerns the eligibility of Indira Gandhi to remain in office and the constitutionality of the 39th Amendment to the Constitution, with a judgment against the 39th Amendment but in favor of Indira Gandhi. In the A.D.M Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla case in 1976, the five-judge bench, which includes Chief Justice A.N. Ray, not only ruled in favor of the government by 4:1, but even complimented the Emergency

in its judgment. Such pro-Indira government actions landed the Supreme Court in fierce public criticism.

The judiciary realized from its experience in the Emergency that it was not in a position to stand up to the powerful executive branch alone, and that it could not win enough public respect and support for its own survival unless ordinary people were convinced that it was to champion rights on their behalf. In the post-Emergency era, the Supreme Court shifted to “judicial populism” to cast off the negative impact of the pro-Indira Gandhi government verdicts. It was during this period that the BJP began to enter the political arena and moved from the fringes of Indian politics to center stage over time through massive mobilization of religious nationalism. On one side of the political landscape by the time was an elite judiciary that had lingering fears about the powerful Indian National Congress (INC) and was seeking popular support, while on the other side was a populist opposition party that was good at grassroots mobilization and was seeking the much-needed recognition from the judicial elites. The political reality thus created favorable conditions for the two sides to forge out a “partnership” in the future.

In 1996, the Supreme Court made seven rulings, known as the “Hindutva Judgments,” in a series of Hindutva-related cases, in which the plaintiffs sued several BJP and Shiv Sena politicians for violating the Representation of the People Act,

which prohibits inciting voters with religious appeals. In the most far-reaching case of *Dr. Ramesh Yeshwant Prabhoo v. Shri Prabhakar Kashinath Kunte* (the “Kunte case”), the judgment, drafted by Justice Verma, objected to equating “Hindutva” with “narrow fundamentalist Hindu religious bigotry,” and ruled that mere use of the word “Hindutva” in an election speech does not violate the Representation of the People Act. In discussing his own understanding of Hindutva, Justice Verma cited a source which said “Ordinarily, Hindutva is understood as a way of life or a state of mind and it is not to be equated with, or understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism.” Although no evidence has been found to suggest any direct political deal between right-wing parties and the judiciary, the Hindutva judgments did start a cooperation of some kind between the two: the judiciary receives compliment and support from the Hindu right wing and its supporters, and the Hindu right wing secures endorsement from the judiciary, which helps remove the obstacles that secularists set up to prevent the Hindu right wing from political participation and governance.

### **Development of the ‘State-Religion Cooperation’ Model in the Modi Era**

In 2014, the Modi-led BJP became the majority in the parliament in the general election, while the INC was marginalized, bringing back the “one-party dominant” system in India. It means that, after several decades, the judiciary has to



face powerful legislative and executive branches once again. However, different from the early days after independence, the Supreme Court has now established, through the “Three Judges Cases” in the 1980s and 1990s, a system in which the Advisory Committee led by the Chief Justice decides the appointments of judges, regaining appointment power from legislative and executive branches. Since the BJP came to power in 2014, it has not shown any intent to challenge the judicial control of appointment of judges against public opinion. There are four possible reasons: first, the judiciary, which turned to populism after the Emergency, enjoys a higher reputation among the people than it was under Indira Gandhi; second, since the BJP and its predecessors have been criticizing the INC for undermining judicial independence, it will damage its own image if it provokes a conflict between legislative-executive and judicial branches; third, as mentioned above, thanks to long-term ideological infiltration, judicial elites, whose religious views have increasingly converged with that of Hindu nationalists, may endorse the BJP’s propositions on religious issues even without the BJP’s direct interference with appointments of judges; fourth, an important technical reason is that the ruling party may have realized that key judges could be more effectively influenced by means such as “post-retirement compensation.”

Since the BJP rose to power in 2014, seven chief justices of

India have been appointed, including the most controversial Justice Dipak Misra and Justice Ranjan Gogoi. In 2018, a bench headed by Chief Justice Misra dismissed a public interest lawsuit, removing a major obstacle to the political career of the then BJP Chairman Amit Shah. Four judges, including Justice Gogoi, criticized Misra for violating conventions in organizing the bench and called for his resignation, sparking a rare political crisis. After Misra retired, Gogoi succeeded him as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. In November 2019, the bench headed by Chief Justice Gogoi handed down the final verdict in favor of the Hindu right wing in the Ayodhya dispute.

Ironically, Justice Gogoi, who once criticized Justice Misra for undermining judicial independence, accepted the BJP's nomination as a member of the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the bicameral Parliament of India) after his retirement, casting doubt on whether the verdicts he made during his tenure, especially the Ayodhya verdict, were truly objective and neutral.

It can be seen that, the Hindu right wing and the judiciary have brought the initial cooperation model formed during the "Hindutva judgment" period in the 1990s to the next level since 2014: first, the BJP, which controls the legislative and executive powers, respects the core interest of the judiciary, especially the power of appointment; second, the ruling party may provide retired senior judges with the opportunity to continue to participate in political affairs in exchange for the cooperation by

incumbent judges; third, the judiciary continues to proactively participate in religious affairs and tends to make verdicts in favor of the majority, either driven by increasingly converging religious views between judges and Hindu nationalists or the need to win support from the public majority since its shift to popularism. This judiciary has thus changed from one that was given high hopes by the fathers of India's constitution to one that endorses important appeals, such as rebuilding the Ram Temple.

Eventually, the judiciary, which once claimed to be a "vigilant sentinel" safeguarding the basic rights of Indian citizens, not only fails to effectively protect the basic rights of minorities guaranteed by the Constitution, but even becomes an important driving force that pushes India, by utilizing its authority, further down the path toward majority politics. Given Hindu nationalists' firm grip on legislative and executive powers, the shift in the judiciary means the fall of the last line of defense against the Hindu right-wing majority politics.

### **Impact of 'Political Hinduism' Fundamentalism on Sino-Indian Relations**

Zhang Minyu shared some further thoughts in addition to the presentation. He pointed out that as legislative, executive and judicial branches of the "political Hindu Republic" have all shifted to Hindu nationalism, the UK, India's former ruling nation, or other Western democracies would no longer provide

the best reference for the Indian polity, instead, the Islamic Republic of Iran would be a meaningful comparable with its experience in transforming modern political system and in dealing with internal and foreign affairs. That being said, we should not, and need not, demonize the “political Hindu Republic” of India as Western countries did to the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that the Republic of India today has a different dominant ideology from the one we were more familiar with in the past few decades. With the INC mired in the discourse of “identity politics,” as a neighboring country that still has major territorial disputes with India, China must face up to this fundamental change in India. So, what does such a major political shift in a neighboring country of this size mean to us?

As an ideology, Hindu nationalism in its most fundamentalist form has two core themes. The first is to pursue absolute national security. This view and practice, instead of being a heritage of the Hindu tradition, are a direct product of British colonial imperialism. As early as in the 19th century, Britain tended to pursue absolute security in India. This view has partially penetrated into the nationalism ideology in India over time, to the extent that even the right-wing ideology, which advertises “anti-Western modernity” to a certain extent, has come under the influence of the British colonial tradition. And it resonates deeply with the civil service, military and police

systems, which were a colonial heritage themselves.

Influenced by such an “absolute security” view, nationalist India holds distrust and even hostility to its neighboring countries due to its “internal anxiety”. The Pan-Asianism ideology in history, which called for solidarity among Asian countries, has no roots in India today and is only occasionally remembered for bits and pieces. In this sense, it is unlikely to use Pan-Asianism to call for India and China to join hands in creating a better world order.

The second core theme is anti-Western modernity, which stems from the profound political and ideological memories of the colonial period, and which calls for sweeping rejection of Western modernity as India was subjected to its suppression on a full scale. Anti-modernity movement played a positive role in the pursuit of national independence during the struggle against colonialism. Today, in China-India relations, anti-modernity in India is manifested as anti-market reform tendency and hostility to China in trade. One typical example is RCEP, an agreement on which governments had reached consensus. It was the right-wing economic organizations that eventually united against the right-wing ruling party and forced the latter to break its promise and withdraw from RCEP at the last minute.

The possibility for a worst situation cannot be ruled out, that is, when right-wing fundamentalism is fully activated, any form of Sino-Indian political, economic and trade cooperation

may fall victim to political correctness of “anti-economic liberalization” and “protecting absolute security of national (economic) sovereignty.” One can imagine the difficulty of reconstructing the context for “China-India cooperation” in the absence of practical interests and common discourse. That said, this is only an assumption of an extreme case.

## **Q&A**

During the Q&A session, Zan Tao, associate professor from the Department of History of Peking University, pointed out through the example of Turkey that one should not only rely on reasoning at the ideological level to take stock of a country, but should pay more attention to concrete and practical measures taken to govern the country, especially the thoughts and actions of middle-class elites, who are the backbone of a society. If we had only relied on Western media and Erdogan’s propaganda, we would have believed that Turkey had been declining and falling into the abyss of Islamization over the past two decades. However, in fact, Turkey’s political structure, or its Kemalist secular state structure, has not changed. As for Iran, it is neither a strictly theocratic nor a populist country, but one that relies on political elites to run the country. If it were to become a country like Iran in the future, India would not necessarily be religionized even if it were “Iranized.” To understand India’s political future, the more central question to figure out is what India’s middle-level officials are doing. Middle-level officials,

no matter in which country, are generally practical-minded officials who do not blindly follow ideology, but manage their country in a technocratic way. The Germans who studied the Ottoman Empire during WWI thought that the Ottoman Empire with a caliph would be of great use to them, believing the call of a caliph, the leader of all Muslims, to resist the international order dominated by the Allied Powers would definitely be answered. However, this did not happen. The Germans made a serious misjudgment by relying on the theoretical reasoning of Oriental scholars who were well versed in the Koran. Later, the American-style social-scientific oriental studies emerged. In addition to reading texts, this research approach delves into detailed studies of society, elite class and political structures to overcome the shortcomings of pure theoretical inference.

Other questions raised in the Q&A session include the judicial appointment system in India, resistance that Hindu nationalists face in advancing national integration, and similarities between India under Modi and Indonesia under Haji Mohammad Suharto. Participants believe that India's political development and its influence on China are worthy of attention and should be studied from interdisciplinary perspectives. They also believe that Zhang Minyu's research on the relationship between politics and religion in India is a groundbreaking and inspiring study that has both academic value and practical significance.

## **Yannan Roundtable (X)**

### **Turkey as a Method?**

**April 15, 2022**

The 10th session of Yannan Roundtable, presided over by Zhang Yongle, associate professor at Peking University Law School, invited Zan Tao, associate professor at the History Department of Peking University to make a keynote speech. Introducing to his topic with Mizoguchi Yuzo's *China as a Method* and Sun Ge's *Japan as a Method*, Prof. Zan Tao pointed out that Turkey could also "serve as a method." He presented his views from three perspectives, including Turkey as a method by other countries, by its own people and by China, and argued that Turkey could be regarded as an independent subject in the studies by Chinese scholars and be used "as a method" to see the world.

#### **I Origin: China as a method and Japan as a method**

Zan Tao's view of taking Turkey as a method is inspired by Japanese sinologist Mizoguchi Yuzo and Chinese scholar Sun Ge, who published their works *China as a Method* in the 1980s and *Japan as a Method*, Sun Ge's review of Mizoguchi Yuzo's book, in 1995.

According to Mizoguchi Yuzo, Japanese sinology in his time had two problems. One was that Japanese sinology was a traditional sinology that did not take China as its subject. For



example, Japanese scholars could read *Records of the Grand Historian* as an independent classic literature, without having to know anything about China's history or have any knowledge of China. In addition, those who studied modern and contemporary China, or Chinese history, did not do their research from a Chinese perspective, instead, they took a "European perspective." Whether they made it clear or not, their concepts, methods, theories and concerns about China were all based on a Western perspective. Although they might claim to view China or Japan from a world's perspective, the "world" they really meant was the West, especially Europe.

To address the two problems, Mizoguchi Yuzo proposed the so-called "China as a method," which starts with an important premise, that is, to regard the West as only one of the elements in a pluralistic world, rather than as a norm, or in Zan Tao's words, to reduce the West from being a universal standard to a local one. Mizoguchi Yuzo wrote in his book that "emphasizing advancing together, that is, shifting from a successive and longitudinal principle to a parallel and horizontal principle." The longitudinal principle means that there are both advanced and underdeveloped countries. The reason people took the West as a standard was that it represented the future of the world and therefore could serve as a model of modernization, while other countries and regions were regarded as underdeveloped. To turn the longitudinal principle into a horizontal one means that

people should see all countries as equals, or in Sun Ge's words, "looking for the path to the world in China." She argued that Mizoguchi Yuzo's "China as a method" is grammatically incorrect, and that a more accurate way to put it would be "looking for the path to the world in China."

In light of historical reality, Zan Tao thinks the rise of Asia is one of the important developments that contributed to such thought. In the last century, the rise of Asia gave scholars in East Asia (especially Japan) a sense of confidence similar to pluralistic modernity, with which people even proposed theories including Asian values, Confucian capitalism, Asian spirit, Confucian spirit and capitalism, among others. Though they were still responses to Western issues, these propositions had a different starting point and stance in that they intended to use China as a method to see the world and even to use China's standards to take stock of Europe. It would certainly work the other way around as long as on equal footing, but countries should not be ranked as advanced or backward, instead, they should be viewed as equals.

Conversely, Chinese scholars also face similar problems when studying Japan. Sun Ge believed that in a rational sense, Japan studies by Chinese scholar were "China-centered." She therefore asked a question: How can Chinese scholars reach Japan? --- reaching in a spiritual sense, not in the sense of entering the physical territory of Japan. As Chinese scholars

followed a Western way in viewing Japan, Sun Ge believed that “the problem is not how important it is to study Japan or whether Japan can provide us with useful experience,” which should not be the point of using Japan as a method, but that Chinese scholars should see the two hidden mindsets which prevented them from taking Japan as an independent existence in academic discussions: one was our unconditional worship of the West, and the other was our contempt against Japan.

These two mindsets are both monistic in cognitive structure and cultural mentality, in that neither of them encourages Mizoguchi Yuzo’s sense of equality. Therefore, if we are to adopt Mizoguchi Yuzo’s methodology, we should study Japan within its own cultural framework and recognize that Japan has its own cultural logic. In this sense, Japan, as well as Europe and the US, should also recognize China as a method.

In this sense, Sun Ge believed that more independent cultures will come into our sight. In other words, we can take South Korea, or North Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, and Turkey as a method as well.

## **II Turkey used as a method by others**

### **(1) Medieval Europe**

In medieval Europe, “Turks” was not an ethnic concept but a synonym for “Muslims,” just as “Franks” meant “Europeans” instead of “people from France” to Arabs, Turks, Persians or Indians at the time. In this sense, “Turks” was an

imagery resulting from fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and the rise of the Islamic civilization, a result that was catalyzed by the frequent interactions during the Crusades as well as a number of other exchanges between cultures and civilizations, as the Muslim world reached a height in civilization history and had a great influence over Europe during and after the Abbasid Empire.

At the same time, a historical narrative about Muslims began to emerge, which depicted Muslims, an undeniably powerful force of the time, as evil and unjust, or an incarnation of the devil. Eventually, such narrative was applied to Turks, making “Turks” a byword for immorality. In fact, the existence of such a narrative is understandable. When confronted by a powerful adversary, besides growing stronger by oneself, it is also important to develop an ideology to defeat the rival in a moral sense. From a methodological point of view, taking Turk as a method is in effect related to religious conflicts in Islamic or Abrahamic monotheistic religions.

Martin Luther often mentioned Turks in his discussions in the 16th century when the Ottoman Empire was at its height. As he took it as his mission to fight the corrupt Catholic Church, Martin Luther developed complicated views on Turks. On one hand, he sought to use Turks as a warning message to the Christian world; on the other hand, he was critical of Islam and Turks. Therefore, if viewed from the perspective of civilization

theories of the medieval Europe or the Mediterranean, Turks were an important other party.

## (2) The ‘portrait’ of Turkey in the Age of Enlightenment

In the Age of Enlightenment, the “portrait” of Turks underwent a significant change during the time of Montesquieu, a change brought about by the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and marked by the introduction of Oriental despotism. Instead of depicting a true picture of reality, this new political rhetoric created by the Europeans reflected a change in political philosophy, spiritual pursuit and consciousness in Europe at the time. As a result, during the Enlightenment, one of the major trends for Europeans to describe Turkey was to present it as typical Oriental despotism. Therefore, for Europeans in both the Middle Ages and the Age of Enlightenment, “Turkey” was in effect a method they used, in other words, the image of Turkey changed significantly as the Europeans themselves changed.

## (3) Classical modernization theory

Classical modernization theory has two important narratives about Turkey, one of which holds Turkey up as a model for the Middle East, especially for Arabs. Though the theory itself only became prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, an experiment mainly aimed at studying the Middle East was conducted in as early as the late 1940s, when some social scientists and historians were tasked to find out successful experiences of the Ottoman Empire or the Republic of Turkey

and whether such experiences would be replicable in the Arab region to meet the needs of social science theorists for grand narratives on modernization. Turkey was indeed an important method at the time when the US implemented its third world policy in the Middle East.

The second narrative is that Turkey is the only non-Western country after Japan that has successfully modernized. According to *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey*, an important work on comparative political theory in the 1960s, which many people regarded as outdated but in effect contains essential reviews of classical modernization theory, Turkey is the only non-Western country after Japan that has successfully modernized, and is still promoted by many classical modernization theorists as a role model after Japan.

#### (4) The 'Turkey' model

The so-called "Turkey model," proposed by Westerners instead of Turkish people, is a continuation of classical modernization theory. After the Cold War, Western discourse involving Turkey as a method went through two important stages. One was what Turkey would mean to the Turkic-speaking nations in Central Asia and the Caucasus after collapse of the former Soviet Union. In practice, Turkey could serve as a model of integrating market economy and democracy, or in the words of Turkish people themselves, a model of integrating market economy, technology rationality and

democracy. In either case, Turkey has become an important method to study other countries, especially Muslim countries in the Turkic-speaking world.

The second stage came in 2003 when the US just finished the second Gulf War and when the “Turkish model” was most widely discussed for the success of a Muslim country in establishing secularism and the Western-style democracy, which was a classic definition of the “Turkish model” around 2005. The definition was copied as a template around the world, especially as a role model in promoting the Greater Middle East Initiative championed by the George W. Bush administration. In this sense, Turkey has been a method for many years, if not centuries, in non-Western areas outside China or outside East Asia, especially in the vast areas west to China and east to Europe.

By the time of neo-Ottomanism, the West argued that when Turkey serves as a model, it becomes a country that not only appeals to Westerners, but also one that would reassert itself and be likely to re-establish itself as an existence as powerful as the previous Ottoman Empire. Turkey would not admit to neo-Ottomanism, though some of its deeds are similar to or fall into the category of neo-Ottomanism.

Neo-Ottomanism is arguably the most discussed topic about Turkey among Arabs and Westerners, who definitely hold different views. Given their bitter memory about the Ottoman

Empire as part of their ethnic history, Arabs are, more often than not, vigilant about neo-Ottomanism, whereas Westerners are not so much on alert as having a mixed feeling, as it was they who defeated the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Westerners can recall the poignant memories with certain ease, while Arabs cannot.

### **III Turkey used as a method by itself**

Turkish people taking themselves as a method means they develop methods based on their own subject-consciousness, which they did not establish for the most part of their modern history, as the Turkish modernization narrative is consistent with classical modernization theory in believing that they were governed by others and should follow Western civilization, where they do believe they have been the most successful and which has long been a mainstream belief in Turkey. However, things were different before and after the establishment of such belief. For example, before this belief took root, there was an important stage when Turkish people used themselves as a method to see others.

(1) Ottomans' travel journals to the West: see *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* by Bernard Lewis for more details

Although Turkish people developed a certain sense of modernization after the French Revolution, partly due to their own decline and partly due to the rise of the West, Turkish evaluation on Western morality and politics before this period as recorded in Ottomans' travel journals about the West was almost



all based on classic Islamic norms, according to Bernard Lewis's *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*. Turkish people at that time could have confidently declared that they had neither Oriental despotism nor modernization.

(2) Ottomans' travel journals about the East: Japanese people have the potential to be good Muslims

In the early 20th century, Turkish people who visited Japan and China compared the two destinations and left behind some records, some of which were edited into books. In their opinion, China totally failed Islamic standards, particularly for being dirty and messy, let alone the food and drink. Given their own unique concept of cleanliness, which is not only in physical but also spiritual sense, they referred to China as "dirty" for many times.

However, when the same group of people visited Japan, they came to a completely different conclusion. They believed that Japanese people were simply Muslims who forgot about their Muslim identity. Although they did not worship, Japanese people were more like true Muslims than Muslims themselves and could behave in the Muslim way at the slightest hint. This is a very self-oriented observation. The group of Turkish people went to Japan on an unplanned trip and drew the conclusion on their mere personal observation. However, as such documents are rare, they have left a deep impression on Chinese scholars.

(3) Islamic modernism and Islamic intellectuals

Standing between Islamic modernism and Islamic intellectuals are Kemalists, who were not able to use themselves as a method to see Turkey, but used the West and Europe as a method.

In the past, intellectuals in the modern sense, such as Ziya Gökalp and Young Ottomans, still had their own subject-consciousness. They viewed Turkey in a Western method, but also viewed Western modern civilization in the perspective of Turkey or Ottoman. What they were looking for was a different kind of modernity, or what we call “Islamic modernism.”

An important trend in contemporary Turkey since the 1980s is the emergence of Islamic intellectuals, who are critical of Kemalism as much as Tayyip Erdogan and even believe in the possibility of Islamic authoritarianism instead of Western authoritarianism. These modernistic intellectuals use Western civilization as a method and vice versa.

In conclusion, there were various stages and possibilities of using Turkey as a method in history.

#### **IV How China took Turkey as a method?**

According to Prof. Zan Tao, Turkey studies by Chinese scholars from late Qing Dynasty to the modern times have not gone beyond what Sun Ge described as “China-centered studies of Japan.” In other words, our studies of Turkey remain China-centered.

(1) From Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao to the revolutionist and bourgeois intellectuals

China-centered studies of Turkey underwent several stages. One of the few propositions that Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, the revolutionists and bourgeois intellectuals put forward was “misery loves company”. The fact that Chinese and Turkish people were called “sick men of East Asia” and “sick men of West Asia” respectively made some intellectuals after Kang and Liang, as well as some Hui minority intellectuals, think that China and Turkey were in the same boat, since they shared the same fate, encountered the same setbacks and were going in similar directions in reforms. They even believed that China could learn lessons from the reform of the Ottoman Empire.

However, the fate of the two countries in East Asia and West Asia began to diverge as they chose different development paths since the early 20th century. While Turkey achieved national independence after the World War I, China, though experienced the Revolution of 1911, did not establish an independent sovereign state with territorial integrity. Therefore, it was typical of Chinese revolutionists and bourgeois intellectuals at that time to believe that China should take Turkey as an example and learn from it. All the talk about Turkey at that time was essentially about China, instead of about Turkey. Except for a few Hui intellectuals, most of the intellectuals at the time were not able to participate directly in

the discussions about Turkey, as they could only discuss in English.

Nonetheless, China-centered studies of Turkey and the discussions about China's modernization path at the time often touched upon Turkey's significance. According to scholars on modern and contemporary Chinese history, Turkey had been frequently brought up in the diaries and speeches of Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek at some point, which was a sign of the times. In the 1930s, Chiang Kai-shek was trying to follow Germany's suit, but he had indeed a very strong desire to emulate Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his hired scholars tried to make him a Chinese Kemal too. In conclusion, from the perspective of China's ideological and intellectual history, Turkey has been our method for a long time.

## (2) Mao Zedong's *On New Democracy*

*On New Democracy* put an end to the discussions over Kemalism and declared the end of Kemalism in China. Although Mao made some corrections when he met with some representatives from the third world in the 1950s, the *On New Democracy* published in 1940 contains extended discussions on Kemalism, which concludes that, although the Chinese bourgeoisie still believed that they could build a Kemalist Turkey in China, it would be absolutely impossible in the context of the World War II and the establishment of socialism in the Soviet Union. Mao concluded in *On New Democracy* that

Turkey represented a path to capitalism that happened by chance in a third world country, which would be impossible to replicate in China. Consequently, China's mainstream intellectuals had not engaged in substantial research or discussion on Kemalism since Mao's time until the reform and opening-up.

### (3) Early years of reform and opening-up

After the reform and opening-up began in 1979, Prof. He Fangchuan from the Department of History at Peking University authored an important article to re-evaluate bourgeois reform movements, including Kemalist reform, as an important part of the overall re-evaluation as well as the re-evaluation of Turkey. Turkey study was also an important part of the study of world modernization processes promoted by Luo Rongqu. However, it basically remained the same as those before *On New Democracy* was published, as it still failed to study Turkey as an independent experience and method, and was still too utilitarian due to its intent to explore Turkey's experience from China's perspective. And modernization study in modern times, in a sense, has been influenced more by the Western classical modernization theory.

### (4) The current status quo

Into the 21st century, another important change that has taken place over the past decade or more overturned all the above developments. Turkey is now typically perceived as "a provincial rooster", a perception that may reflect a

methodological consciousness and implies complicated meanings, such as being provincial and lack of autonomy, and certainly has to do with Mao's denouncement of Turkey as a lackey for the US imperialism in the 1960s. Those who call Turkey "provincial rooster" are not top-level scholars and did not read many classic works. With the newly coined word of "provincial rooster," they simply wanted to express a similar meaning to Mao's. On Turkey's relations with China, they believe Turkey is a tool that the West uses against China, and it remains a lackey. In addition, the spiritual contempt against Turkey in many ways is the same as the spiritual contempt and monism that Sun Ge pointed out.

## **Conclusion**

Prof. Zan Tao believes that Turkey is still not taken as a research subject in Turkey studies in China today, as Turkey studies have not gone any further than taking Turkey as an example to draw lessons from, and are thus still China-centered. To answer the question raised in the part on origin, Turkey should be taken as independent research subject. In addition, Chinese scholars should pay attention to Turkey's own logic. According to Zan Tao, Turkey has a relatively complete modern experience, as it has never been disrupted in the fundamental sense, and its evolution into the era of Erdoganism is still in line with the underlying logic of Kemalism.

Given Turkey's relatively complete modern experience,

should we re-examine Turkey's role as a lens or method to look at the world? For example, we can use Turkey as a method to discuss the situation in the Black Sea, the Russia-Ukraine issue, the post-ISIS changes in the Arab region and certain changes in the EU. It will be of unique significance to look at the world through Turkey or using Turkey as a method, as it has a unique location and an influence that outweighs its own overall national strength. Turkey's disproportionate regional and even international influence to its size is one of the reasons to discuss using Turkey as a method.

At the end of the discussion, Prof. Zan Tao stressed that studying a subject as an independent existence does not mean isolating it from everything else, or setting the West completely aside in the studies, but treating it as an equal subject to the West. Therefore, when discussing modern Japan, China and Turkey, Chinese scholars should consider how to address Western views, instead of totally ignoring them.

## **Q&A**

During the Q&A session, participants shared thoughts and ideas on "what method to use" based on their own research. Xie Kankan, an assistant professor at Peking University's School of Foreign Studies, took Southeast Asia as an example to explain how Indonesian nationalists used Turkey as a method.

According to Xie Kankan, in the early 20th century, Indonesian nationalists used Turkey as a method when

envisaging Indonesia's future. They followed the example of Young Turks and founded many organizations. Xie Kankan also pointed out that Southeast Asia shares many similarities with Turkey in "taking itself as a method."

Xie Kankan mentioned a classic paper in the field of Southeast Asia studies, *On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia*. The fact that many believed Southeast Asia was influenced by Indian, Chinese or Western civilizations seems to underline the relative relationship between Southeast Asia and other major civilizations, but ignores Southeast Asia's own autonomy as a region.

Although this paper calls for independent research on Southeast Asian history, in fact, researchers are still conducting relevant studies from their own perspectives. Subjectivity is indeed a difficult problem to bypass or ignore in academic research. Other issues raised during the discussion included Orientalism, the conflict and boundary between subjectivity and objectivity, and implications of "what to take as a method" for Chinese scholars.