Analysis of the Basic Causes and Main Effects of Britain's Exit from the EU
Based on the Specific Agenda of Brexit

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ABSTRACT

After more than four years, Britain will finally exit the European Union in December 2020, which is called a world political earthquake. Britain's exit from the EU is not a coincidence, but has deep political and cultural roots behind it. Combing the history before and after Britain's exit from the EU, we can find that Britain's Eurosceptic tradition and pragmatic philosophy are the cultural reasons for its exit, while the EU legitimacy crisis and political manipulation of British parties are the real reasons for Britain's exit from the EU. In fact, Britain's exit from the EU is far from the end, and the political forces and political influence lurking behind the referendum on Brexit will continue to tear apart British society internally and affect the future of Europe and the international political landscape.

Keywords: Brexit; specific agenda; basic causes; main effects; Euroscepticism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The result of the 2016 British referendum on Brexit both surpassed the expectations of many Britons and European countries and shocked the world. The completion of the formal Brexit four years later also exceeded the predictions of many scholars. The reasons for Britain's exit from the European Union are worth reflecting on, both at the political and cultural areas as well as at the practical aspect. This paper attempts to explore the reasons behind the Brexit on the basis of the historical development of British-European relations after World War II, and accordingly to explore the possible effects of this event on the internal British society, the direction of the EU, and the order of international relations.

2. THE SPECIFIC AGENDA OF BREXIT

Between 2010 and 2020, the UK went further and further down the road of leaving the EU, eventually going outside the common market altogether:

a. In 2010, Cameron take office and tensions between the UK and the EU were renewed. At the critical moment of the European debt crisis, the British government still vetoed the Lisbon Treaty because it had not obtained the EU's guarantee of the UK's financial market status,

forcing 25 other countries to adopt a "fiscal compact" outside the framework of the treaty to jointly tackle the debt crisis.

b. In 2012, the UK was reluctant to join the EU banking union, but sought special protections for the UK financial sector and threatened a "veto if not satisfied". The EU eventually proposed a compromise "double majority voting system". Within the Conservative Party, Euroscepticism is growing, with a number of polls in 2012 showing that as many as 68% of the Conservatives were calling for an exit from the EU. [1]

c. In January 2013, Cameron made a speech on the relationship between the UK and the EU. In the speech he proposed the idea of "reforming" the EU and negotiating with EU on the basis of which British citizens could choose whether to leave the EU in a referendum based on the outcome of the negotiations.

d. On June 23, 2016, after David Cameron's re-election as Prime Minister, a referendum on Britain's exit from the European Union was held. It was also in this referendum that the Leave camp narrowly prevailed and decided to leave the European Union. Subsequently, Cameron, who was the leader of the Remainers, announced his resignation in a speech, saying "the British people have chosen another path, so they need a new prime minister." [2] Theresa May then came to power as

the new Prime Minister and continued the process of Brexit negotiations with the EU.

e. On March 29, 2017, the "Brexit" process was officially launched.

f. In November 2018, the "Brexit" agreement was formally adopted.

g. On March 13, 2019, the House of Commons of the British Parliament voted against the power of "no-deal Brexit" under any circumstances. Since then, the House of Commons and the European Commission have been working hard to reach a new agreement on tariffs and trade, immigration and labor mobility, and the legality of relevant rules. [3]

h. On January 31, 2020, the new agreement was adopted and the UK officially left the EU, followed by an 11-month transition period for both sides.

i. On December 24, 2020, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that the UK and the EU had finally reached an agreement on post-Brexit trade, marking the finalization of the UK's exit from the EU.

3. THE BASIC CAUSES

3.1. The Spread of Nationalism and Euroscepticism

In the process of Britain's gradual move toward Brexit, Britain's Eurosceptic tradition and great power plot are arguably the biggest drivers behind it:

From the perspective of Euroscepticism, geographically, Britain is an island nation, isolated from the European continent by the Sea and the English Channel. This special geographical position has created a unique "island mentality" in British society - the core expression is insecurity, which is expressed in the relationship with the European continent as the fear and distrust of the European continent. This cultural psychology is manifested in the policies of "equalization diplomacy" and "glorious isolation". For sure, this psychological disconnection from the European continent caused by the geographical division was reinforced by the historical memory of the population about the European continent. Britain has always believed that an overly powerful state apparatus would jeopardize human freedom, so it has always been wary of the powers of the European continent. The British were terrified when their lives were subject to the domination of a huge group of nations across the Channel[4]. Disapproval of their political system is also directly reflected in the British people's Euroscepticism.

From the perspective of great power perception, Britain established its position as the world's hegemon after the Industrial Revolution, which made the English people have a great pride and a profound great power

complex for the nation. After the Industrial Revolution, it established its position as a world leader. The combination of institutional, technological, colonial and economic advantages gave the English nation great national self-confidence.

Until the Second World War, more than two hundred years of history, the pride of the nation and the control of the situation in Europe even the world have made the feeling of a great and powerful country deeply rooted in the hearts of every British people. Identification with the national system and the rejection of European mechanisms undoubtedly become particularly prominent.

3.2. Social polarization and the rise of populism in the process of global integration

As the process of globalization unfolds, the free movement of finance, capital and labor has exacerbated social injustice, making more wealth and possibilities available to the elite, the more educated and professional. Conversely, it has increased the dissatisfaction of the lower and middle classes with political parties and European integration. In response, Finlayson(2016) notes that the more people feel they have benefited culturally and economically from globalization, the more likely they are to vote to stay in the EU, while those who feel they have failed in these areas tend to vote to leave. However, there are also those who, while they feel they have benefited culturally and economically from globalization, yet also feel they could have benefited more. For them, the EU has been a stumbling block to progress. They are inclined to vote to leave. [5]

It is the group that has been the key role to the outcome of this departure from the European Union. The result of this referendum shows a clear social division in terms of wealth gap, class gap, education level, age, and geography: people with lower education level, more vulnerable position in the labor market, and generally preferred to leave the EU due to concerns about multiculturalism, European immigration. While the winners in integration - elites, highly educated professionals, and young people - are overwhelmingly in favor of staying in the EU. In terms of educational attainment, for example, 28 of the 30 regions with the lowest percentage of people with a university degree or higher chose to leave the EU, while 29 of the 30 regions with the highest percentage of people with a university degree or higher chose to stay in the EU. For example, in London, 68% of people chose to remain in the EU due to their generally high level of education.[6] The results of the Brexit referendum painted a picture of a deeply divided country, not only in terms of class, education and generations, but also in terms of geography [7]. People in London and Scotland were mostly in favor of Remain, while people in England and Northern Ireland were more likely to support Leave.

3.3. Political party competition and speculation

The Brexit referendum is also closely related to the game of party politics. Unlike other European countries, in British politics, "Europe has always been an issue,"[8] and attitudes toward Europe have long been at the heart of partisan battles over interests. Because of their different political positions, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, and even within their internals, are sharply divided over whether to leave the European Union. In the ruling Conservative Party, the then party leader David Cameron called for staying in the EU in many speeches. However, due to the growing Euroscepticism within the party and various of voices on European integration[9], the problem of party division came up. In order to maintain the integrity of the party and more significant, according to Cameron's group's prediction of the chance of leaving the EU in the referendum which was only one percent, the issue was finally resorted to a referendum with great uncertainty.

There is a serious element of speculation in this move, through which Cameron's group tries to kill three birds with one stone: one is to appease the Eurosceptics and the Leave faction in the Conservative Party, to keep the party united and to prepare for the 2015 general election; Secondly, it also responds to the Eurosceptic sentiment of the British public, to gain support for the purpose of political necessity; Thirdly, it is to put pressure on the EU by withdrawing from the EU, to obtain a change in the EU's liberalization of British autonomy. But even so, this is still an extremely irresponsible behavior to British politics and the British public.

The situation of the British Labour Party reflects a common dilemma faced by almost all left-wing parties in Europe: which way to go in the future? The failure of the authorities to play the referendum and their fundamental error of judgment have led to a series of political, economic and social crises in the UK: anti-Brexit marches, political infighting and internal party divisions, demands for independence from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the further intensification of populist forces will affect the UK's political situation for a long time, laying a deep threat to its social stability.

4. THE MAIN IMPACT

4.1. Fragmentation of party politics within UK

After the announcement of the Brexit result, the extreme right-wing party, the UK Independence Party, became the biggest winner, and the conflict between the mainstream parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, intensified. Although Cameron said afterwards that the purpose of the referendum was to put pressure on the EU and push forward the reform process, as well as to fight for more autonomy and policy space, increased competitiveness and vitality for the UK, so that the UK could stay in the EU "wholeheartedly". [10]However, the position of criticizing the EU and catering to the Remainers in order to bridge the differences within the Conservative Party, gain more support and block the Independence Party in the early stage of the government has made his bad role of emphasizing the negative effects of Brexit in the referendum mobilization seriously unconvincing.

Theresa May came to power after Cameron resigned over the referendum result, only to plunge the Conservative Party into an even greater status of division. In 2018 alone, 20 ministers resigned one after another because they disagreed with Theresa May's attitude towards Brexit. The British House of Commons even initiated a vote of no confidence in Theresa May on December 12, 2018. Although Theresa May narrowly passed the vote, only 200 of the 317 Conservative members expressed their support for her, showing a serious split within the party.

The intertwined conflicts of the mainstream political parties in the UK triggered by the Brexit issue have caused serious divisions and chaos in the domestic political order. According to reports, the UK has even restarted the Cold War-era transfer plan to protect the Queen in order to cope with the social unrest that could be triggered by the UK's hard Brexit status.

4.2. Damage to the EU's image and internal power imbalance

With the end of the EU referendum negotiations, the UK has officially left the EU. On a practical aspect, this has greatly damaged the EU's strength and triggered an imbalance of its internal power. The UK has always been at the center of the EU with its strong economic, political and military power. Politically, the UK, as one of the Western powers, is a counterweight to Germany, balancing the concerns of other member states about Germany's increasingly dominant role. At the material aspect, under the liberal economy advocated by the UK, its own economy ranks fifth in the world (total GDP of 2.708 trillion, 2020)[12] and second in the EU, contributing up to 1/6 of the EU's GDP.

The UK's withdrawal is likely to trigger an imbalance of protectionist forces in the economic policies of southern European countries such as France, posing a challenge to growth of the EU in the future. In the military field, based on the special nature of the EU and its degree of development, the abilities of security, defense and diplomacy is more restricted. The UK and France, which hold the veto power of the UN Security Council and large-scale expeditionary forces and nuclear weapons, undoubtedly have important soft and hard power in the EU. The withdrawal of Britain will be a major loss of military power for the EU.

Moreover, the reshuffling of political parties as a result of Brexit has injected a new populism into British politics and further destabilized the EU. For the EU, which is already consumed by the complicated exit procedures, the regrouping of resources, the threat of populist parties in Europe, the widespread discontent among member states caused by the EU's legitimacy crisis, and the resulting "domino effect" of Brexit have also become urgent issues to be faced. But the good thing is that with the finalization of the negotiation results, the pressure on the EU in terms of resource allocation can be reduced.

5. CONCLUSION

The occurrence of the event of Britain leaving the European Union is deeply rooted in its unique historical background with political and cultural psychology. The special geographical location, human history and political system have created the unique political ideology and political psychology of the British people. That is why Britain's exit from the EU was largely influenced by the political culture. However, the reason why Brexit has been called a world political earthquake is that most experts and scholars have failed to correctly predict this major political event beforehand. This was true even for the British government. At another perspective, this is further evidence of the importance of political culture psychology in predicting major national political events. Moreover, according to the author's observation, the role of political culture behind the more important political events is often greater. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the political culture behind the event and add this perspective to the exploration of political events.

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