**Prof. Liu Zhongmin: Turkiye’s Dilemma of Wandering between East and West Identity; between Secular and Islam Identity**

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The modern state has strong subject-constructive characteristics because it is not composed of natural ties of blood or geography, but modern state is based on specific institutional arrangements, integrating the people in a certain region into a unified community that shares common institutional arrangements. National identity is not only the basis and premise for the construction of a modern country, but also the guarantee for the maintenance and prosperity of a modern country. Specific to Turkey, although Kemal and his successors tried their best to construct an identity and political discourse system with secularism, nationalism and Westernization as the core.

 Kemal and his successors were caught in the identity politics dilemma of the long-term collision and competition between religious and secular, Eastern and Western identities, which is what Liang Qichao called the fate of "wanting to hatch into a different body, but not being able to do so".

 The reason for this phenomenon is that the Turkish nation has been in a state of crisis.

The reason for this phenomenon is the disconnect between history and reality in the establishment of the Turkish nation-state, which often faces a path-dependent crisis of legitimacy.

**Religious-secular conflicts and the dilemma of identity politics in Turkey**

The Ottoman Empire was an autocratic monarchy that combined politics and religion.

The empire's administrative institutions were divided into two major systems: religious and secular.

The Sultan-Caliphate system of Ottoman empire combined secular and religious powers.

While Islam had the status of the state religion, the state implemented the "millet" system, which allowed the coexistence of multiple religious and secular groups.

 The "Millet" system was a religious and ethnic autonomy system for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.

"Millet" system consisted of non-Muslim religious groups or clans (i.e., millets) which had their specific religious, cultural, and educational institutions.

These groups maintained their own languages and scripts, and enjoyed full internal autonomy, without harming the interests of the empire and paid taxes.

Its content was that non-Muslim religious groups or clans (i.e., "Millets") had special rights and interests on the basis of not harming the interests of the empire and bearing taxes. Religious, cultural and educational institutions could maintain their own spoken and written languages ​​and fully enjoy internal autonomy.

The implementation of the Millet system was conducive to the stability of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire, and was also conducive to easing religious and ethnic class conflicts and promoting social and economic development.

**A series of reforms in the late Ottoman Empire widened the identity rift between Muslims and non-Muslims, and also created conflicts and disputes between religion and secularity.** With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the proportion of the Muslim population in the remaining territories of the empire continued to increase. After Turkey and Greece completed the population exchange in 1920s, 98% of the population in Turkey were Muslims, objectively forming a realistic national situation in which the Muslim population dominated.

**In the process from the "disintegration" of the Ottoman Empire to the "rebirth" of the Turkish Republic, how to deal with the relationship between religious belief and secular culture has become a major historical proposition facing Turkey.** Mustafa Kemal and the elites which Kemal led argued that religion was the main obstacle to progress, rationality and modern civilization. They completely equated modernity with Westernization (Europeanization) and advocated cutting off ties with the Ottoman Empire and traditional religion in the country.

**Kemal's Reforms**

During Kemal's reforms, Turkey abolished the caliphate system, implemented a series of secular reforms in the fields of law, education, culture, social customs, and economy, deleted the constitutional provisions that "Islam is the state religion of Turkey." And Turkey established the political system of separation of politics and religion. However, these radical secularization reforms ignored **the** people's history and religious sentiments, destroyed the traditional authority and social bonding role of Islam, and created a gap between the center of society (secularists) and the periphery (Islamists).

**The struggle between secular forces was seen throughout the whole development process of the Turkish Republic.**

Mustafa Kemal essentially continued the instrumentalist and reformist approach to Islam of the Young Turks in the late Ottoman Empire, aiming to achieve state control over religion rather than completely separating the two. **With the beginning of the political democratization process, Islamic identity has gradually returned to Turkish society.** In 1960s Necmettin Erbakan led the "National Order Movement" in an attempt to restore Islam's decisive role in Turkish society and regard Islam as Turkey's national concept or national identity, making it a spiritual bond that unites Turks.The continuous rise of people's Islamic sentiments has promoted the politicization of Islam. The birth of the National Order movement and its political Party marked the entry of Islamist forces on the Turkish political stage. At the same time, the escalating rivalry between religious and secular forces within Turkish society led to social unrest and conflict, and three military coups took place in succession in 1960, 1970 and 1981, resulting in a special historical period in which military groups intervened in and returned to power.

**Turkish secularism gradually underwent a paradigm shift under the AKP.**

 As a political party that identifies itself with conservative democracy, the AKP relied on the narrative discourse of "joining the EU and promoting democracy" and used a series of constitutional revision practices to weaken the power of the Turkish military, which was solid supporter of Kemalist secularism, and in this way consolidated its dominance. AKP leader Erdogan declared: "The AKP is trying to shape the relationship between religion and democracy, tradition and modernity, state and society in a healthy way." **Compared with the Kemalists' political control of religion and active secularism, the AKP's emphasis on freedom of religious belief is a passive secularism which provides greater living space for religious activities.** Under this influence, the Islamic revival in Turkish society has gradually become stronger.

**The identity battle between Islamism and secularism largely revolves around lifestyle.**

**The debate over the headscarf ban was one of the most heated issues.** The AKP tried to lift the headscarf ban when it first came to power, but was rejected by the Constitutional Court as violating the principle of secularism. After that, the AKP government made continuous efforts to abolish the headscarf ban in all national systems, including the education system, the national civil service system, and the military-police system, and strengthened the Islamist traditional family values and traditional gender values.**The education system and schools are another important field of ​​the game struggles between religious and secular forces.**

Erdogan put forward the vision of "cultivating a pious generation", and AKP promulgated an education reform bill, expanded the scale of religious schools, and added religious courses into the cirriculum. In addition, the AKP government has also taken measures such as large-scale construction of mosques, strengthening the propaganda of Islamic ideology, implementing strict alcohol prohibition, and turning the (Diyanet) Religious Affairs Committee into a political tool. These changes were objectively conducive to the "Islamization" of Turkey, greatly challenging the secularist establishment and exacerbating social divisions and tensions.

**In terms of foreign policy, the AKP government has gradually deviated from the traditional secularist stance in foreign policy and turned to intervene in the affairs of the Middle East and began to support Islamist forces in the Middle East.** For example, The AKP government actively intervenes in regional affairs such as the Egyptian revolution, the Palestinian-Israeli issue, the Syrian civil war, and the Qatar crisis. AKP government actively supports the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, allowing them to hold meetings in Turkiye, create activity centers, and international liaison offices and stations. Secularists argue that Erdogan and the AKP are deviating from the principles of secularism in the Turkiye constitution and are fiercely fighting against this.

**Taksim Gezi Park incident**

 In 2013, the Taksim Gezi Park incident in Turkey was a manifestation of the game struggle of identity politics around religion and secularity. What is more, an attempted military coup broke out in Turkey in 2016, and the struggle between secular forces and religious forces reached a new stage of peak. To sum up, the principle of secularism has always been the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. **The AKP's Islamist movement Rather than denying Kemal's secularist principles outright or directly, seeks to redefine Turkish version of secularism.** The current Islamic revival promoted by the AKP has failed to fundamentally change Turkey’s church-state relations, but its erosion of state power and the public sphere has shown an increasing trend. And this Islamic revival movement has even negatively affected the country’s development vision and strategic direction, profoundly reflecting Turkey’s difficulty in getting rid of the political identity dilemma and political identity game struggles between religious and secular forces. The conflict between secular and religious forces has also exacerbated the "fragmentation" of Turkey's political landscape. fragmentation" of Turkey's political landscape. The game struggle of identity politics between religious and secular forces also has obvious spillover effects, often rising to differences in human rights issues, values ​​and even civilization understanding. All these complicate and cause difficulties in Turkey’s relations with Western countries such as Europe and the United States, and also negatively affect stability of its relations with countries in the Middle East. On March 9, 2022 local time, in Ankara, Turkey, Turkish President Erdogan met with visiting Israeli President Herzog. The two sides expressed their hope to restart political dialogue, reduce differences, and strengthen cooperation.

**East-West Contradiction and Türkiye’s Identity Politics Dilemma**

Turkiye's ancient history was obviously more oriental in character, and a series of problems arising from the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire were also known as the famous "Orient issue" in international relations. However, due to the fact that the the civilization and order foundation of the Ottoman Empire have been constantly subjected to western aggression in modern times Ottoman Empire has been in crisis. Both the modernization reforms in the late empire period and the modernization reforms after the establishment of the Turkish Republic regarded Westernization path as the only way to realize their ideal of enriching the country and strengthening the army. Throughout the more than 200 year history of development from the late Ottoman Empire reform period to the present time, Turkey has experienced three stages: First, Türkiye has learned from the western modern military, science and technology from the perspective of instrumentalizm. Secondly, imitated the Western model of political system at the institutional level and insisted on secularization in the ideological field. Thirdly, passed to explore a transformation to a new model of political development which integrates traditional culture and modern concepts. As we all know, during the Kemal period, the basic national policy of "leaving Asia and joining Europe" was established, leading Turkey to embark on the path of overall Westernization.

Mustafa Kemal argued that civilization only meant the modern civilization of the West and could not be anything else. Therefore, Mustafa Kemal and his team vigorously promoted the Westernization of the political system and legal system, and also eradicated the influence of Ottoman history and Islam on Turkish society in terms of ideology, education, culture, and customs, and cut off ties of Turkey with the Islamic world in the Middle East.

**Mustafa Kemal and his followers sought to modernize the country through Westernization and secularization.**

At the same time, because Mustafa Kemal and his followers upheld the international order concept of "domestic tranquility and peace in the world", Turkey before the outbreak of the Cold War was basically isolated internationally. After the outbreak of the Cold War, Turkey chose to join NATO in 1952 due to security pressure from the Soviet Union, chose to establish long-term institutional ties with the West. Later, Turkey applied to join the European Economic Community (now the European Union), and was eager to integrate into the European integration process, ın order to obtain the status of "being member of Western Civilization Circle".

**Turkiye's road of Westernization has been full of ups and downs.**

As far as the domestic situation was concerned, the wholesale Westernization reform under Kemalist regime has caused spatial divisions between inland and coastal areas, urban and rural areas. The wholesale Westernization reform has also caused a separation between the elite and ordinary people (general public) in terms of hierarchy, which objectively led to the "identity tear or crack" in the society and state".  With the rise of the Erbakan’s "national order movement", Westernization policies have encountered strong challenges. This movement fundamentally criticized the history of Westernization in Turkey, demanded the establishment of a national order, and realized a shift from the traditional pro-Western stance to turn eyes to the Islamic world. If we look from the perspective of the external environment, Turkey's Westernization strategy was essentially a following up and band-wagoning strategy, while Western countries such as Europe and the United States used Turkey as a geosecurity barrier, and Turkey's utilization value has changed with changes in the international environment, but still Europe and the United States have always regarded Turkey as the “other”. In view of this, Turkey has tried to bridge the domestic differences between Eastern and Western identities since the Özal era (1983-1993), sought to weaken its dependence on the West and establish an equal foot cooperation mechanism with powerful Western countries, began to re-establish ties with countries in the Middle East, and in foreign policy began to give equal emphasis on East and West. **Turkey's long-term Westernization has had two major goals: first, to make the Turkish people argue that Turkey is part of Europe, and second, to convince the Western public opinion that Westerners and Turks share and enjoy the same culture.** But the reality is that although some Turks have established a Western identity, but the West has always regarded Turkey as a cultural alien (an anomaly). At the beginning of his government administration, Erdogan continued his previous "Look West" policy of actively reforming the country to meet the standards of the European Union. However, Turkey continued to encounter obstacles on the issue of "EU accession". At the same time, the divergence of interests between Turkey and the West on regional issues has become increasingly apparent, and coupled with the rise of domestic Islamist forces has led Turkey to regain its own historical and geographical heritage and has led to revise the civilizational attributes it belongs to.

**The discourse expression of Turkey's quest of "Europeanization" has shifted from "joining contemporary (European) civilization" to "the alliance of (Ottoman and European) civilization".**

Ahmet Davutoglu’s strategic depth theory has been the theoretical guidance that guided Türkiye to make strategic adjustments. Ahmet Davutoglu argued that Turkey’s geopolitical interests cannot be limited to the existing national borders. It should play an active role in surrounding areas such as the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, strive to become a regional center (pivot) country, maintain a balance between East and West diplomacy, and implement multi dimensional, diverse foreign policy.

**Influenced by the strategic depth theory, Turkey has been deeply involved in the affairs of surrounding regions since the changes in the Middle East, hoping to realize its leadership status in the Middle East, in the Islamic world, and Turkic-speaking countries, and then use these changes in the Middle East to realize the reconstruction of the regional system.**  As far as the relationship between domestic affairs and foreign affairs is concerned, the AKP attempts to influence the political identity of Turkiye’s domestic people through the "west to east" adjustment of foreign policy, especially caters the feelings of the conservative Muslim groups to consolidate its ruling foundation.

**AKP’s Ideology**

In short, in the Erdogan era Turkey has readjusted Turkey’s Eastern and Western identities and adjusted its foreign strategic orientation. **However, not only has Turkey failed to escape the political identity dilemma of Turkiye: neither East nor West, nor East nor West, Turkiye has instead fallen into a situation of "glorious isolation".** **On the one hand, the relationship between Turkey and the West is constantly at odds, and the road to EU membership has been blocked and almost stalled.** European and American accusations of Turkiye and interference in Turkey's internal affairs have caused strong dissatisfaction in Turkey. The two sides have criticized each other, especially over the Kurdish issue and the attempted military coup that broke out in 2016. The West even imposed sanctions on Turkey over Turkey's purchase of Russia's S-400 anti-aircraft missiles and about human rights issues. In 2021, Erdogan also threatened to expel diplomats from 10 Western countries including the United States and Britain. All of the above highlighted the conflict between Turkey and the West which means there is a strong tension between Turkey and the West. **On the other hand, Turkey's “look to the East policy” has also encountered challenges.**

**TURKİYE AND SAUDİ ARABİA CONFLİCT**

The game struggle about the Muslim Brotherhood has intensified the conflicts between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and other countries. The deadlock with Israel on the Palestinian issue is a reflection of the setbacks in Turkey's Eastern diplomacy. Although Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran have made certain progress, the fact that their relations lack a historical basis of mutual trust and have potential conflicts of interest which determines the fragility of their relations. In addition, Türkiye's efforts to promote cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries have had limited results.

In short, caught into the entanglement of identity politics, Turkey's future relations with the West will continue to have a general pattern of both cooperation and struggle, while exploring new developments in its relations with the East, which will be generally characterized by ambivalence and oscillation.

**The Nature of Religious-Secular Contradictions and the Nature of East-West Contradictions**

In short, the relationship between religion and secularity and the relationship between East and West (westernazition) has become a difficult problem which Turkey has never been able to properly solve. If we look to the secularization process, Turkey first pursued the radical stormy reforms of Kemalism which led to disconnection and separation between "tradition" and "modernity". B**ut after the launching of democratization process after 1946s, Turkey’s religious identity was gradually unleashed. And this religious identity inflitrated into party politics (siyasi partiler sistemi) and caused a several divisions.**

**All these later led to the formation of the moderate Islamism of the AKP which developed its concept of "conservative democracy".**

**AKP’s Ideology**

**If we analyze the relationship between East and West (westernazition)**, Turkey has been Westernizing ("de-Asianization") for a more than hundred years by "leaving Asia and entering into Europe". However, after its failure to integrate into the West, especially after failure to join the EU, this failure stimulated the rise of an Eastern identity, and but after Turkiye returned to the Middle East and the Islamic world, this time Turkiye faced a "glorious isolation" within which both its relations with the East and the West was strained with double tensions."  Turkey’s identity politics contradictions on the issue of joining the European Union (the West) and later returning to the East were aptly evaluated by relevant scholars, as follows: **“The AKP has adopted a strong foreign policy and comprehensively promoted the process of becoming an EU member state, and implemented a series of of sweeping liberalization reforms, and finally began the accession negotiation process in 2004. However, the AKP government faced strong resistance from nationalist and statist parties, who tried to derail this EU process by blocking the reforms...... This process is not only related Turkey's internal identity politics issue, but more importantly it is a European issue. Growing cultural and political resistance to Turkey's membership, as well as Cyprus dispute between Turkey and Greece, have has led to a stalemate in the EU process and has gradually caused the AKP government to lose its enthusiasm and turn its attention to non-European regions."**  In essence, the AKP's ideology combines conservative liberalism and moderate Islamism, and AKP still regards Westernization as a strategic option for Turkiye; however, at the level of identity politics this is both opposed by traditional Turkish nationalism and Islamism ideology. Because in the eyes of traditional Turkish nationalism the AKP is no longer traditional Kemalist nationalism; in the eyes of Islamism, the AKP’s Islam is not pure Islam, but AKP’s “so-called Islam” which is dependent on the West.