Brexit: Why Did It Happen

It has been three years since the Brexit referendum, yet the United Kingdom has not successfully left or stayed in the European Union. At a time when the deadline for “No-Deal Brexit” was getting closer, government still failed to negotiate between interest groups in the domestic with the European Union. According to a Nobel prize winner, this whole event (Brexit) is a complete political meltdown for the United Kingdom. Prime Ministers Cameron and Theresa have stepped down because they are unable to fulfill the promise of 'letting Britain leave the EU.' Political crisis immediately raised social problems such as xenophobia and racial discrimination. As a country that has a significant position in Europe, the crisis in the UK is bound to have an impact on the surrounding area. In order to understand the real reasons behind the Brexit and speculate on how other European countries will react after the Brexit event, research on Brexit is imminent. In this essay, I shall research on the three major factors, which are immigration, sovereignty and national interest, that have significant influence on the Brexit event.

What is EU?

After the second World War, several European countries decided to create an organization that promotes political and economic. In 1957, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany created the European Economic Community (EEC) by the treaty of Rome. The EEC is the predecessor of the European Union. It has remarkable significance since it not only promotes none tariff barrier within the region and thus promotes regional trade. It also works as an authoritative regional organization which helps settle disputes and ensuring peace in the region. In 1973, joined the EEC to bolster its economy. In 1992, the European Union (EU) was officially established by the treaty of Maastricht. The regional cooperation within the European countries has expanded.

Why did Brexit happen?

The former Prime Minister Cameron held the 2016 Brexit referendum for two reasons. Firstly, in order to draw votes from other parties which are close to his own political standpoint, Cameron said in his campaign speech that if he is elected successfully, he will launch a referendum on whether to leave the European Union. Secondly, after Cameron’s successful election as prime minister, some small parties which support the Brexit, such as the UKIP, pressured Cameron to fulfill his original promise. Cameron mistakenly estimated the attitude of the domestic people towards the EU and held a referendum in a blind and optimistic manner. The final result was beyond his expectation that the UK would soon withdraw from the EU. For Cameron and people, a silent but clear majority, who wants to leave the EU, was noticed for the first time.

In the past three years, the UK and the EU have not reached an agreement that both parties have met for the following reasons. For the UK, The government wants to leave the EU's jurisdiction and hopes that it will still preserve the benefits that it was originally enjoyed as a member of the European Union, such as preferential customs policies and abundant aid funds. For the EU, economic preferential policies can be guaranteed because it benefits the common economic interests of the entire European region. But the EU hopes that Britain will make some

compromises on sovereignty issues. The EU requires Britain to set up a hard border on the border of Northern Ireland. It is not hard to conclude the major factors drives the UK towards Brexit. This is undoubtedly a great challenge to sovereignty. Hard border means that Northern Ireland can no longer freely communicate with Ireland, which may even lead to a complete break between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In order to maintain the unity of the country and to prevent local wars that may occur, government cannot agree to this requirement of the EU. The Brexit issue is therefore fundamentally unresolvable and remains on hold.

It is not hard to conclude that national economic interests and sovereignty are the two main reasons for Brexit. But behind these two factors, it is the national interest and exceptionalism that really determines Brexit.

Exceptionalism is the deep historical and cultural root of Brexit.

Exceptionalism is also another contributing factor to explain why decides to leave the European Union. Through constructivism, we can understand that Exceptionalism is of great significance to the UK.

According to, exceptionalism is a believe that a country, individual or society consider itself as exceptional. This believe normally have historical basis. As the constructivism theory demonstrates, it is the social norms, which are historically and culturally constructed, that determines how states behave. In this Brexit referendum, people chose to leave Europe since they believe they do not belong to the European community. European countries have a strong cultural identity and a sense of unity because of their similar cultural origin and similar language. However, compared to these European countries, the UK has a longer tradition of “excluding itself outside Europe”. As what I believe, there are two main reasons for the rise of exceptionalism in the UK: island characteristic and outsider identity.

Although Britain belongs to Europe, it does not border the main European continent. Historically, Britain has been subjected to aggression and colonization by multiple races and countries. However, because of its characteristics as an island country, the UK has not continued to be affected by the European continent (Chamberlain, 1930). culture has gradually separated from European culture in its independent development. On the contrary, the origin of European culture appears to be relatively simple. France, Italy and Germany, the three main countries in Europe, originated from the Charlemagne empire that split in 843 by the Verdun Treaty. Therefore, European countries have similarities in religion, language and other forms of cultures. In conclusion, culture and European culture are not the same culture at all, and thus the UK naturally sees itself as a group independent from Europe.

The outsider’s theory believes that is sitting ‘on the sidelines’ of European integration (Gowland, Turner, & Wright, 2009). This trait of the United Kingdom is mainly reflected in the liberal tradition in economic policy, the sovereign supremacy caused by unique parliamentary democracy, and the role of being an independent international actor. In the parliamentary debate before Union joined the European Community, the opponents proposed three core arguments. The first is to oppose the high price of agricultural products caused by the Community's agricultural protection policy and the huge burden that the UK bears for this. It advocates a liberal economic tradition and guarantees the right to purchase agricultural products at low prices in the world market. The second is to protect Britain's unique international role from the EC. For the people who are against the EC, joining the European Community does

not mean the expansion of international vision, but the contraction; the United Kingdom should independently cultivate relations with developing countries, rather than joining the European Community and being bound by it. Third, the ability to avoid autonomy is at risk, that is, damage to sovereignty. The most representative objection is that 'after joining the community, Parliament needs the Council of Ministers, or the approval of the European Commission, the European Parliament, whenever and where to make decisions... We should be able to guarantee that our resolutions are not Affected by any institution outside the UK'.