

Changes Unseen in A Century: Changes in Concepts of Governance and China's Responses

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Abstract

Today's world is in a situation of "Changes Unseen in A Century". Wu Yujin's holistic view of world history reveals the overall development law of world history, and provides ideas for the study of changes in the concept of global governance. In the face of the "Changes", China should, on the one hand, actively participate in global governance, continuously promote the building of a community of human destiny, respect the consensus of the international community, and enhance its ability to participate in and formulate the rules of global governance; and on the other hand, emphasize the shaping of its soft power to enhance its own governance capacity.

Keywords: Changes Unseen in A Century, holistic view of world history, global governance

1. Introduction

Today's world is undergoing profound changes, and the international situation brings unprecedented opportunities and challenges to all countries. At the 2018 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, President Xi Jinping put forward the thesis of "Changes Unseen in A Century". Since then, President Xi has once again proclaimed this important theme in several international conferences. Over the past 100 years, the external environment facing China has changed dramatically. How to cope with the "Changes", how to deal with the interaction with the rest of the world, and how to grasp the period of strategic opportunity in the new era, so as to better deepen reforms, expand opening up, and promote the structural transformation of China's politics and economy have become the important contents to be explored at the present time.

2. Historical Development in the Context of the Holistic View of World History

2.1 Wu Yujin's Holistic View of World History

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the overall development of world history, Mr. Wu Yujin put forward the theory of "vertical and horizontal development of world history", i.e., the holistic view of world history, which laid the foundation of the discipline of world history in China and became the theoretical basis for the study of world history. In Mr. Wu's view, no matter how well the geographical knowledge is mastered, the western study of world history does not have a comprehensive view of the world. The study of world history should exclude regional or racial prejudices and be comprehensive as fieldwork. ¹World history as a whole should transcend the constraints of countries and regions and provide a macroscopic answer to the "holistic" historical development.

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In the holistic view of world history, world history moves in a continuous process of vertical and horizontal

¹ Yujin Wu, (1964). Times and World History — On the Different Views about the Center of World History in Different Eras. *Journal of Jiangnan*, (7).

² Zhiqiang Chen, (2013). Discussion on Wu Yujin's "Holistic View of World History". *World History*, (2).

development. Vertical development refers to the evolution of social formations from lower to higher levels, and the change of social formations caused by the evolution of the production mode. Horizontal development, on the other hand, refers to the progress of productive forces, as human societies move from being scattered and closed to being closely connected and gradually opening up, becoming more and more closely linked, and eventually becoming a whole. In the process of historical development, vertical development and horizontal development are mutually reinforcing and mutually conditional. On the one hand, the closeness of human ties is constrained by the level of social production, and the material basis is the key to determining the level of social modernization; on the other hand, social interaction in the economic and cultural spheres promotes the socialization and specialization of production, and the upgrading of the level of material production.

2.2 *Changes Unseen in A Century in the Holistic View of World History*

The “Changes Unseen in A Century” is a comprehensive judgment made by President Xi Jinping after comparing the world’s development over the past century.¹ When conducting academic research, one should apply the holistic view of world history to make an objective and comprehensive understanding of “Changes Unseen in a Century”.

Literally, “A Century” does not refer to an exact hundred years, but is a kind of vague expression, using long-term quantitative changes as an accumulation, indicating a long period of time in which great changes have occurred in the past.² In terms of specific connotation, the core of “Changes Unseen in A Century” is the shift of the center of the world stage.³ Specifically, whether it was the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, the European triangular trade and colonial expansion, or the bipolar pattern brought about by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, all the way to the uni-multipolarity model after revolutions of 1989 and dissolution of the Soviet Union, all of them had the West as the center of the world, and developed countries as the world’s dominant players. Developing countries were weak and lacked voice in the international struggle for hegemony. Since the 21st century, as the world moves towards multi-polarization, the world has changed in terms of power contrasts, and developing countries have gradually emerged on the world political stage, and their economic aggregates are about to catch up with those of developed countries, and the center of global strategy has shifted from the West to the East, so that the international political and economic landscape dominated by developed countries is undergoing a fundamental change. At the same time, the partnership of the Global South, in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, centers around the establishment of a new type of partnership, opening a new era of South-South cooperation. Taken together, the overall trend of the “Changes Unseen in a Century” is characterized by the rise of the East and the fall of the West, and the rise of the South and the stagnation of the North; in other words, the overall strength of developing countries is on the rise, and the overall strength of developed countries is on the decline.

3. **Changes in the Concept of Governance Since the Twentieth Century**

For a long time, based on the important position of developed countries in the international landscape, global governance has been regarded as another synonym for “Western governance” and “great power governance”. With the changes in the power game between countries and the emergence of new international patterns, the traditional governance model has been gradually broken in changes unseen in a century, peaceful development has become the theme of era, and new governance concepts advocating global synergy and common governance have emerged. Thus, global governance can be interpreted into three phrases as follows: “state governance” before World War II, “international governance” after the end of World War II, and “global governance” after the end of the Cold War, especially since the 21st century.

3.1 *Before World War II: State Governance*

The world at the beginning of modern world history was a time of war and revolution. Since Columbus’s discovery of America, capitalism has embarked on centuries of colonial expansion, developing its own country by plundering others and aiming to achieve its dominant position in the world. During this period, exchanges between countries were mostly limited to trade, and the governance concept of each country generally showed a state governance model that aimed at realizing the hegemonic rule of the country and pursued its own interests to the neglect of other countries. In the early twentieth century, capitalism entered the stage of imperialism, and the imperialist countries continued to invade other countries in order to pursue development and attempted to expand their own colonies and increase the sphere of influence; the latter imperialist countries also wished to redistribute the world. The later imperialist countries also wished to redistribute the world and competed with the

¹ Xiajian Wang, Yuanyuan Gao, (2022). Create a New Situation of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind in the Momentous Changes Unseen in a Century. *Journal of Xihua University (Philosophy & Social Sciences)*, (1).

² Yunling Zhang, (2019). *Changes in A Century —The World and China*. Party School of the Central.

³ Kejin Zhao, (2019). How to Understand China’s Role in “Changes Unseen in A Century”. *Exploration and Free Views*, (1).

old imperialist countries. The fundamental contradictions in the world were intensified as never before, triggering two world wars, inspiring proletarian revolutions and national liberation movements, and semi-colonial countries striving for independence and liberation, as well as serious socio-economic devastation.¹ During this period, world history entered a stage of holistic development in which the world's anti-fascist countries broke down the barriers of social form and social system to cooperate and establish a united front against fascism, and on the basis of the concept of state governance, inter-State cooperation reached an unprecedented level of depth and breadth, laying the foundation for post-war peace and development on a world scale.

3.2 After World War II: International Governance

After the end of the Second World War, peace and development became the unanimous aspiration of all countries in the world, and they changed the old development model of plundering and turned to pursue a new situation of peaceful and stable self-development, with international cooperation being put on the agenda.

In order to seek a peaceful and stable international environment, Western countries led by the United States led the construction of a new post-war world political and economic order, with the United Nations as the main institution specializing in international affairs and the maintenance of international security, and the Bretton Woods system as the world's main system of economic governance, thus breaking the traditional mode of state governance, and beginning to try international cooperation to establish a basic system of international governance. In other words, the formation of the new international order borrowed in many ways from the concepts and experiences of governance within the West, transplanted a large number of Western ideologies and modes of governance, was significantly influenced by developed countries, and, while realizing the goal of international peace and stability, had the main characteristic of safeguarding Western values and concepts and the interests of developed countries.

Under this framework of "international governance", Western countries have dominated the construction of the world's political and economic landscape, and their mainstream values have had a significant impact on the operation and maintenance of the international order. For example, at this time, the international community is in favor of the liberal democratic system and open market economy advocated by the Western countries. In addition, most of the existing international systems and rules are also established and operated under the domination of Western countries, and the process of formulating and operating these rules is also implicitly tilted in favor of Western countries, resulting in the phenomenon of "rule externalization" from Western countries.² For example, the conditionality of international assistance is linked to the voting position of the assisted country on international platforms. Because of the "non-neutrality" of these institutional conditions, they are intentionally or unintentionally tilted in favor of Western countries, promoting the "internationalization of domestic rules".

From a comprehensive point of view, during this period, peace and development became an undeniable world theme, and countries around the world began to realize the importance of cooperation and started to try to build a worldwide political and economic pattern. At the same time, it should not be overlooked that, under the concept of "international governance", international rules show obvious "Western-centrism", which does not realize the substantive equality and common development of countries, and the Western developed countries occupy a dominant position in international governance.

3.3 Since the Twenty-First Century: Global Governance

In the twenty-first century, the main theme of world politics is no longer limited to the struggles of nation-States against each other but is more about exploring global issues and seeking solutions for the long-term development of humankind. The rapid development of globalization has brought the world into a brand new era: the ratio of power between countries has changed, and China has become the second largest economy in the world, directly approaching the United States in terms of total economic output; the fourth scientific and technological revolution has reshaped the structure of global innovation, and the application of big data and blockchain has not only made the world more connected, but also promoted the transformation of production methods and changed many industrial models; global common problems have come to the fore. In addition, new types of problems such as global commons governance, cybersecurity, and increased trade barriers have emerged in practice, and the countries of the world are facing many problems and challenges, which urgently require the countries of the world to work together and deal with them jointly, and in order to deal with the global systemic crisis, the

¹ Research Institute of World History in the 15th-18th century at Wuhan University, (2014). *Research on Wu Yujin's Academic Thinking*. People's Publishing House.

² Lan Xue, Ting Guan, (2021). Global Governance towards Multiple National Governance Mode: Ideal and Reality. *CASS Journal of Political Science*, (3).

concept of global governance has emerged.

3.3.1 Rethinking the Concept of Global Governance

Global governance exists in contrast to national and international governance and emphasizes dialogue on an equal footing and the reconciliation of conflicting interests, unlike the coercive management of the past. Definitionally, global governance refers to the combination of self-implemented mechanisms set up by different countries, international organizations and other multifaceted power centers to deal with global issues, eliminate the tragedy of the commons, and base on the overall development of the world, and it is characterized by multifaceted, multilayered and collaborative governance¹. Specifically, in terms of participating subjects, global governance adopts polycentric governance, re-emphasizing the role of non-state actors in addition to the nation state; in terms of realization, the means of global governance is more flexible, through the formulation of mandatory rules or non-mandatory soft law and other diversified paths to achieve the effect of governance; in terms of the pursuit of value, global governance abandons the effect of the sum total of the interests of all countries pursued by the international governance, and turns to take into account the aspirations of the whole of humanity, and seeks the well-being of the whole of mankind. It seeks the well-being of all mankind.

Characteristically, unlike the traditional governance model, the concept of global governance is no longer dominated by Western developed countries, but advocates the joint governance of multiple subjects in the field of international issues, and encourages different countries, especially the developing countries and the third world countries, to grasp more voice and speak out bravely; in addition, the balance of the concept of global governance is no longer tilted towards the West, but takes equality, cooperation and win-win situation as the value objectives, emphasizing the equal status and equal rights between different subjects. In addition, the concept of global governance is no longer tilted in favor of the West, but is based on the values of equality, cooperation and win-win, emphasizing the equal status and equal rights of different subjects; once again, the form of coordinated global governance is flexible, emphasizing the collaboration and complementarity of subjects at all levels; finally, global governance attaches great importance to the construction and soundness of the governance mechanism, and the establishment of a highly efficient and normative governance structure to deal with the increasingly complex international issues and emerging governance problems.

3.3.2 The Real Dilemma of Global Governance: Lagging and Malfunctioning

Although the concept of global governance has become an effective means of responding to changes in the international landscape, with the increase in externalities brought about by globalization, the growing number of global problems, the increasing speed of renewal and the rapid reshaping of the world's political and economic structure by emerging issues, the concept of global governance is facing structural deficiencies that cannot be ignored.

On the one hand, the decision-making of global governance is based on the ever-changing international situation, which determines the complexity of the decision-making process of the concept of global governance and the necessity of keeping abreast of the times. In practice, due to the differentiated national interests of different subjects, they always seek to maximize their own interests and make international cooperation difficult², so that the construction of rules has a time lag³ and cannot catch up with the changes in the actual situation, and there is a lack of institutional norms and a vacuum of rules in new problem areas. On the other hand, with the deepening of globalization, the phenomenon of "anti-globalization" has come to the fore, highlighted by Brexit and the United States' withdrawal from the group, as well as the emergence of protectionism, unilateralism and hegemony in some countries, which have largely thwarted the momentum of economic globalization and impacted the progress of global governance. Meanwhile, the failure of domestic governance in various countries has produced significant negative externalities, and the global economy has further declined.

4. Proposals for China's Response in Changes

The transformation of the concept of governance involves not only international relations, but also international political factors, and in the process of formulating international rules and agreements, it is necessary for all countries in the world to reach consensus on the relevant issues. As a large developing country facing enormous pressure on resources, the environment and development space, China has specific policy orientations and

¹ Chenxia Shi, (2016). Analysis of the Transformation of Global Governance Model: From State-centered Governance to Multiple Level Collaborative Governance. *Northeast Asia Forum*, (4).

² Jian Wang, Yan Zhao, (2021). Innovation and Prospect of China's Global Governance Concept in New Era. *Journal of Jiangnan University(Social Science Edition)*, (38).

³ Yaqing Qin, (2013). Global Governance Failure and Ideational Reconstruction for a Sustainable World Order. *World Economics and Politics*, (4).

interests in participating in relevant international consultations and negotiations, and therefore not only needs to pay attention to international collaboration and common development, but also to demonstrate China's firm attitude, make China's voice heard, and present China's answer sheet for the world on the basis of researching national policies and strategic needs.

4.1 Strategic Suggestions for China's Participation in Global Governance

4.1.1 Actively Participate in Global Governance and Continuously Promote Building a Community with a Shared Future

Global governance has a bearing on the common well-being of humankind, and the outcome of global governance affects the formation of a new international political and economic order. Therefore, China should take a clear stance in international exchanges, respect the consensus of the international community and actively participate in global governance.

In terms of conceptual framework, to cope with increasingly serious global problems and expand the common interests of mankind, China should persist in advocating the concept of building a community with a shared future as a program for active participation in global governance in international meetings. In the face of global problems and international challenges, no country can stand alone. In the face of the unprecedented changes of the past century, China should emphasize the conceptual recognition of the common destiny of all mankind, stress that the destiny of all mankind is closely related to each other and adopt a partnership mode of thinking to dissolve political and cultural conflicts between countries and promote the formation of common values of mankind.

In terms of the form of discussion, it is advocated that global issues be discussed in an issue-based manner and sectoral consultations be conducted on the basis of consultation and democracy, so as to solve the problem of inefficiency in global governance. In global conferences, the model of "sectoral dialogues" can be adopted, whereby countries of similar or identical sectors take the lead in internal communication and reach a consensus, and then coordinate on cross-sectoral disagreements, so as to reduce the cost of communication and enhance the efficiency of multilateral communication.

4.1.2 Respect the Consensus of the International Community and Enhance the Capacity to Participate in and Formulate Rules of Global Governance

Fundamental differences in the interests of countries have intensified the conflict between the demands of various parties, which is an important reason for the stagnation of rule-making. Common values are the basis for the implementation of global governance, but differences in concepts lead to differences in cooperation, creating a plurality of choices of positions and increasing the difficulty of formulating new rules. Therefore, seeking common interests among differentiated national interests and building a basis for cooperation among different countries is the key to resolving conflicts.

In the course of practice, China should communicate with all participants politically, enhance mutual trust, eliminate political misunderstanding, oppose protectionism and advocate an inclusive view of governance; at the same time, it should play the role of a great power, seize the opportunity to express its demands during international conferences, actively exercise its rights, display its attitude, clearly oppose the phenomenon of anti-globalization that overly emphasizes the priority of its own national interests, and safeguard the basic principles of international law and the general tone of peaceful development. The basic principles of international law and the general tone of peaceful development should be upheld. In addition, China should pay close attention to the progress of international conferences, keep abreast of their development trends, and form teams of professional scholars to maintain in-depth research on hot issues of negotiation, so as to enhance its ability to participate in and formulate rules. In the field of economic construction, China should continue to push forward the construction of "Belt and Road", seek reform and innovation on the basis of sustainable economic development, and keep exporting Chinese concepts and programs to create a systematic project to enhance China's soft power. In terms of concrete implementation, China should take the G20 summit as an important platform for international economic cooperation, promote the construction of a new international economic order, and contribute Chinese wisdom to global economic governance; it should also emphasize cooperation among BRICS countries, and explore win-win ways for national interests and group interests.

4.2 China's Vision of Ways to Enhance Its Own Governance Capacity

As a responsible power, China's handling of international issues is of broad strategic significance to nation-building. In addition to expressing China's voice and demonstrating its attitude in international conferences and collaborations, China should also emphasize the enhancement of its soft power.

Theoretically, compared with the ever-changing international situation, China's current laws on import and export management and trade protection are not sufficient to meet the challenges of internationalization. With

regard to the fields of economy, science and technology, which are developing faster and have more variables, we should focus on the study of the response of domestic laws to international shocks, strengthen the ability to create rules and systems to cope with the next stage of economic sanctions and trade protectionism, and at the same time build a domestic system that is in line with the international situation, draft special laws in various fields in a timely manner that have international standards and are also in line with the protection of the domestic industry, and speed up the construction of a sound sectoral legal framework that is in line with the international standard, and put the domestic legislation in line with the international standard. The construction of sectoral legal framework is accelerated, and domestic legislation is harmonized with the international system to improve the legal protection system of emerging industries in China.

In the field of scientific research, the optimization and application of governance concepts require the joint efforts of the government and scientific researchers. The government can set up a special international situation policy research department, which is responsible for cross-regional situation research, and cooperate and link with economic, scientific and technological departments and other professional fields, so as to maintain the professionalism of policy making while integrating the overall situation. At the same time, the State should pay attention to the training of international legal talents and specialized research teams, set up a special fund, and increase investment in basic research in the humanities and social sciences, so as to make a good reserve of talents and intelligence for the construction of an emerging international order.

5. Conclusion

Changes unseen in a century are changes between the traditional international order and governance pattern, and it's also a game of old and new powers, a shift of world power, and a reorganization of global governance order. The change in the concept of governance is an important aspect of the change. With the progress of the mode of production and the increasingly close ties between human beings, the concept of governance has been transformed from state governance to international governance, and finally, with the enhancement of the degree of globalization, the concept of global governance has come onto the world stage. Although global governance has achieved relatively remarkable results, it still faces the impact of anti-globalization and lagging and inefficiency, and urgently needs to be explored and improved by all countries.

As a large developing country, China has always attached great importance to the conceptualization of global governance. Regarding the profound changes in the external environment, China should calmly analyze the various driving factors and examine the historical and practical logic behind the changes. It should not only start from the fundamental interests of the country, but also maintain a firm attitude towards issues of national interest and put forward response plans conducive to the strategic interests of the region. China should also consider the common interests of the international community, tailor its proposals to meet the different needs of different countries, pay attention to the overall issues of the international community, oppose anti-globalization behaviors, raise reasonable concerns about countries that are relatively lagging in development, and adhere to building a community with a shared future. At the same time, China should also improve its policy-making ability in terms of legal system research and scientific practice investigation, adhere to the socialist path with Chinese characteristics, follow the trend in the midst of the changes, maintain its strength in specific strategies, seize the important strategic opportunity to enhance both hard and soft power, demonstrate China's voice in the international community, and promote the establishment of a new international political and economic order.

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