

# Observing the era from perspective of world political science

## POLITICAL SCIENCE

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The term “era” carries significant meaning and holds an important position within the framework of Marxist discourse. Understanding and positioning the nature of the “era” determines the formulation of a nation’s strategy. The ongoing debate surrounding whether world politics is presently in a “retrogressive era” or gradually entering a “progressive era” necessitates a departure from traditional international relations theories focused on nation-states. Instead, a thorough examination through the lens of “era” is essential for a comprehensive understanding of world politics, as it encapsulates the fundamental nature and trajectory of global affairs.

### Entering a retrogressive era

The academic community is in general agreement that the world is at a crossroads, having lost its sense of direction. Some scholars even argue that global politics is entering a “retrogressive era,” citing the waning influence of globalization, increasing uncertainty, and intensifying technological competition as evidence. In abstract terms, these phenomena appear to signify a form of ‘regression’ when compared to the tumultuous wave of globalization in the decades after the Cold War, the ‘peace under U.S. unipolar hegemony,’ and global cooperation in governance. This is particularly true for the United States, whose previous leadership in globalization, including “democratization,” had been steadily progressing, seemingly unaffected by threats from technological competition.

Meanwhile, the retrogressive theory is also associated with the realist international relations theory that focuses on major power relations. The international relations theories, especially the realist theories, that are “tailored for the United States” have shaped power politics centered around it, and any loss it experiences is considered a significant retrogression. Some argue that Westerners only possess an ‘international perspective’ while lacking the Chinese “world perspective.” The so-called “international perspective” considers nation-states as behavioral units, emphasizing power politics where one side wins and the other loses, ultimately pursuing imperial dominance. Faced with the reality of the dissolution of imperial-style unipolar hegemony, according to the logic of realist international relations theory and the Western international perspective, world politics is naturally regressive, or in other words, anything deviating from Western logic is considered regressive and erroneous.

### World politics from perspective of “era”

Shift our viewpoint and we will



Some scholars argue that global politics is entering a “retrogressive era,” citing the waning influence of globalization, increasing uncertainty, and intensifying technological competition as evidence. Photo: TUCHONG

see that the West not only considers its own interests and positions but also looks at issues from the standpoint of non-Western interests, adopting a “world perspective.” In this global political view, the phenomena of declining globalization, increasing uncertainty, and intensifying technological competition might lead to entirely different conclusions.

On one hand, the ebbing of globalization is not the most significant political phenomenon of this era. Undoubtedly, the most crucial event of this era is the rise of China and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which carries an impact comparable to the Industrial Revolution. Failing to recognize this makes it challenging to understand the true significance of the most unprecedented source of global upheaval in the past century. Over the past 300 to 500 years, the ebbs and flows of the globalizing tide have been intermittent, with periods of regression lasting even longer than periods of advancement. One should not consider a temporary ebbing as a monumental event, especially considering the existence of another force driving the globalization process – the “Belt and Road Initiative,” which integrates countries on the “periphery” into the world. The rise of China has emerged as a transformative event reshaping the global system by challenging the 300-year dominance of the West since the Industrial Revolution. It reaffirms the positions of Eastern civilizations and the socialist system in the history of human civilization. China’s rise injects new and positive energy into world politics, serving as a corrective force against the unequal global political system. Amid the seemingly chaotic realm of world politics, China steadfastly promotes a direction towards peace and justice. In this sense, world politics has navigated beyond the crossroads and is charting its path forward.

On the other hand, the issue related to the China’s rejuvenation lies in its certainty. For the United States, uncertainty in the world arises due to regional wars and turmoil, but even more so from the unprecedented sense of crisis resulting from

China’s ascent. However, China consistently positions itself within the broader currents of human development and the grand pattern of global development. It engages with the world in a mutually beneficial manner, fostering collective development rather than seeking self-enlargement through war, plunder, or colonialism. This implies that while external conditions are crucial to China’s development, changes in the external environment are unlikely to fundamentally alter China itself. What can change China is China itself, or in other words, China’s certainty emanates from within. This, certain sudden events in world politics will likely impact China much less than the US. Moreover, such events have not hindered China’s pace in advancing global progress, as evidenced in initiatives such as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, outlining a new form of human civilization. This showcases China’s confidence in navigating beyond the “crossroads” of world politics and serves as a symbol of leaving the “no-man’s-land.”

### China’s contribution

China transforms the world by developing itself, and its certainty stems from within. Ultimately, this is due to a shift in China’s position in the global market. China has altered the world system from “center—semi-center—peripheral zone,” resulting in a “multi-centric” pattern. From 2001 to 2021, the share of developed economies in the global economic total has declined from 78.84% to 59.08%. Within this, the G7’s share has decreased from 64.68% to 44.72%. In stark contrast, the volume of emerging market countries and developing economies, represented by China, has approached that of developed economies.

By 2035, the GDP of developing countries is projected to surpass that of developed economies, and their share in the global economy and investment will approach 60%. This shift signifies an irreversible structural change in both Western and non-Western worlds. This change is bound to lay the foundation for a

“great transformation” in the current world order and fundamentally alter the contemporary world political system, which is rife with hierarchical structures and imperialistic tendencies. This is because GDP share also holds domestic political significance, and control over the world market is a crucial condition for the democratic process in Western countries. The contraction of the world market is therefore bound to exacerbate domestic conflicts.

Some studies argue that the key to changing the hierarchical international system lies in the emergence of heterogeneous entities within the established order. Unlike the Western economic system, China’s rise undoubtedly alters global market patterns and disrupts the economic foundations of the Western-dominated world order. The hegemonic influence wielded by the United States since the mid-20th century has waned, and China has emerged as the most potent force driving the trend towards a multi-centric global market. It is essential to emphasize that the multi-centric trend signifies more than just traditional hegemony being challenged by new contenders; the key aspect is the ‘heterogeneity’ of the new ‘central countries’ in relation to the existing world political system.

The transformation in the world system brought about by China’s rejuvenation cannot be adequately explained by realism-based international political theories that focus on geopolitics and advocate power politics. It requires a new international relations theory, and perhaps even a discipline distinct from Western international relations studies, to provide an explanation. Against this backdrop, the emergence of world political science, which seeks to interpret China’s “global” role, has become apparent. World political science explores the transformations in sovereign state systems triggered by political trends induced by the global market, along with the resulting major power relations and world order. Undoubtedly, world political science integrates several disciplines, including world economy, political theory, comparative politics, and international relations,

but it is not merely a conglomeration of these fields. The central components of world political research are the global market and political trends.

Despite being termed world politics, its basic units are people. Basic human needs encompass both material and spiritual aspects; material needs correspond to the global market, while spiritual needs correspond to political trends. The interplay between the global market and political trends unfolds into world politics or world order. Conflict arising from political trends intensifies tensions between nations, but the global market effectively unites major countries into a community of shared interests. The global market emerged with the formation of Western nation-states and capitalism, and any rupture or decline in the global market will inevitably lead to the downfall of capitalism and, simultaneously, the downfall of nation-states with capitalist attributes. Based on the principles of world political science, despite the apparent global disorder and the formidable challenges confronting China, the country finds itself in a strategically favorable period with manageable risks. The world political landscape appears to be evolving in this direction. This strategic window of opportunity not only implies that China may continue to enjoy a period of peaceful development, but also presents an opening for China to propel global progress.

### Insights for future studies

The innovation in international relations theory does not involve mere adjustments within the framework of Western international relations theory. Instead, it requires a complete departure from the theory that takes nation-states as the unit of analysis towards seeking a theoretical foundation based on “humanity” rather than “region” or “nation” – a foundation rooted in the ethical order of a community. This perspective aligns with the traditional Chinese worldview and Marxist traditions, constituting what is referred to as world political science.

A human-centric ethical order in politics is inherently driven by cultural identity rather than power politics. It pursues a discourse of governance and equality rather than imperial discourse. This implies that the impact of China’s rise on the world is not as forceful due to its gradual nature. Conversely, external changes in the world, even if abrupt, may not directly affect China.

Disciplinary changes in the study of international issues lead to fundamentally different perspectives and methodologies. The understanding of “era” naturally varies accordingly. The concept of “era” is a significant issue concerning strategic direction.

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