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Yang Chen

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact to Global Politics: A View from China



NECMETTİN ERBAKAN
UNIVERSITY
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Global Politics: A View from China.*

Turkish Center for Global and Area Studies

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Yang Chen

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact to Global Politics: A View from China

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact to Global Politics: A View from China

Yang Chen

1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact to Global Politics: A View from China

This year 2020 is destined to be an eventful year. We human-kinds have just busy witnessing history in the past 6 months. On January 3, the United States used drones to eliminate General Qassem Soleimani, triggering a sharp upheaval in the Middle East.¹ On January 8, Iran's military accidentally hit a Ukrainian airplane, causing 176 people to become victims.² On January 31, the United Kingdom officially left the European Union, which will bring great challenge to the integrity of EU.³

However, the most unexpected thing in 2020 is the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, which is the world's largest pandemic since the Spanish Flu Pandemic⁴ in 1918. This year's pandemic caused the largest economic shutdown since the Great Depression in 1929, created the largest drop in oil prices since the establishment of OPEC, and contributed to the world's largest intervention of central bank in history. Even the 89-year-old Warren Buffett has witnessed countless firsts during these months. More importantly, the four characteristics of this pandemic like high transmission, long latency, weak lethality, and intensive nursing have made the defense system of all countries accessible easily, even the most developed country can do nothing but choose the self-isolation.

The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to become a turning point in modern history. Nowadays, there is a saying in international politics that this pandemic will divide the world into the World Before COVID-19 and the World After COVID-19. Henry Kissinger made a judgment that "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order".⁵ His

¹Wang Shichun, "Iran confirms Soleimani's death and vows to retaliate", *Guancha*, January 3, 2020. https://www.guancha.cn/international/2020_01_03_530348.shtml

²Gu Zhixuan, "Iran admits to accidentally shooting down a Ukrainian airliner and apologizes to the Minister of Foreign Affairs", *Guancha*, January 11, 2020. https://www.guancha.cn/international/2020_01_11_531214.shtml

³"The plenary session of the European Parliament voted to pass the UK 'Brexit' agreement, and the UK will leave the European Union on January 31", *Guancha*, January 30, 2020. https://www.guancha.cn/international/2020_01_30_533652.shtml

⁴In fact, the origin of the Spanish flu is not in Spain. Here I use this name just for convenience.

⁵Henry Kissinger, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order", *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>

point of view may be based on the comparison of this pandemic and the WWII, but it should not have so much impact on the international system like the war.

Although Kissinger did not give a detailed description of the global order after the Covid-19 pandemic, he called on the United States to strengthen its efforts to maintain world leadership and dominance, implying that the main target is China's rising influence. There are still many uncertainties in the global order in the post-pandemic era, but it is certain that China's visibility and presence in global politics will continue to increase, and the questioning, criticism, and smearing of China will continue to follow. Besides, the forces and factors that hinder China's rise will also continue to increase. Therefore, it is an urgent task to track and study the global order before and after this pandemic from the perspective of China.

2. China's Fight Against this Pandemic: Responses and Results

As of July 20, 2020, the number of infected people of novel coronavirus in the whole world has reached 14 million, with more than 600,000 deaths in the world, and the number of the United States exclusively has exceeded 3.7 million, and the death toll raised to 140,000, which was a great irony of Donald Trump's slogan "American First".⁶ On the contrary, the situation in Western Europe is getting better, and this pandemic has been temporarily controlled in many countries in Asia. In particular, China, as the country that first discovered the novel coronavirus, has endured tremendous pressure both from international and domestic sides. If we do not introduce and analyze China's responses and effectiveness to fight against this virus, it will become incomprehensible to understand the Western accusations against China and how China views changes in the world order that will be analyzed in this article.

This novel coronavirus is an unknown virus and the scientists' knowledge about it is still insufficient even half of a year passed. Then it is understandable that when this pandemic first broke out in China, the local government's efficiency of response may not be very timely. For example, many patients were late to be treated, some doctors were infected, and the medical facilities were not sufficient. And it was the Spring Festival at that time, and large-scale population movement caused the spread of this pandemic. Based on this, Chinese government decided to close the Wuhan City, a city of tens of millions of people, which should be the first time in Chinese history. Subsequently, China's actions became

⁶"Over 14 million diagnosed globally, Britain suspends the release of daily novel coronavirus death data", People.cn, July 20, 2020. <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0720/c1002-31789770.html>

more decisive and effective under the principle of “early detection, early reporting, early isolation, early diagnosis, and early treatment” so as to achieve “All people receivable should be collected, all should be treated, and no one should be missed” .⁷

First, the Central Steering Group led by the deputy prime minister supervised Wuhan and Hubei Province throughout the entire process and replaced some major leaders of local governments. From January 27 to April 27, Vice Premier Sun Chunlan stayed there for 3 months.⁸

Second, counterpart support model. The provinces where the pandemic is not serious support Hubei and Wuhan, for example medical teams, medical equipment, food, money, and even the army etc. All the people, including policeman, delivery clerks, community staff, and volunteers are all on the front line of fighting the pandemic to guarantee the supply of water, electricity, heating, food, etc.⁹ Third, Chinese people showed the solidarity and self-discipline in this tough period. They would rather change the custom of visiting the friends and relatives during the Spring Festival for thousands of years, staying at home to ensure their own safety and the safety of others. Everyone has a belief that staying at home is to contribute to society and the country. It has also become a common sense to wear face masks when necessary.¹⁰

Fourth, the country is very powerful. The medical expenses of each sick person are borne by the state. In fact, the treatment fee is very expensive, and the cost of some serious patients may be as high as 700,000 RMB (almost 120,000 US dollars).¹¹ For a country with a per capita GDP of only 10,000 US dollars, if there is no financial support from the state, the death toll will increase greatly for sure.¹²

⁷“The Central Steering Group to Hubei: Receiving everyone that should be received, no delay”, Xinhuanet, February 8, 2020. http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2020-02/08/content_5476274.htm

⁸“Sun Chunlan led the Central Steering Group to Hubei Province to carry out guidance on the prevention and control of pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus infection”, CCTV.com, January 27, 2020. <http://tv.cctv.com/2020/01/27/VIDE-1Uo43Yoad9XEmAQnHPes200127.shtml>

⁹“16 provinces support Hubei: the war against the epidemic requires a national chess game”, Xinhuanet, February 10, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-02/10/c_1125551494.htm

¹⁰“Protecting yourself is also protecting others: you must know these common senses when you wear a mask correctly”, The Paper, January 26, 2020. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_5645888

¹¹“A Dialectical Interpretation of ‘Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia’”, People.cn, July 2, 2020. <http://bbs1.people.com.cn/post/1/1/2/176248530.html>

¹²“Li Keqiang details this year’s ‘big account’ for people’s livelihood”, The official website of Chinese Government, May 29, 2020. http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-05/29/content_5516003.htm

Until now, there are three typical anti-pandemic models in countries and regions around the world. One is the shock treatment model of China to take the strictest policy of isolation, the second is the laissez-faire model of herd immunity in the United Kingdom, and the third is the model between the two, with East Asian four little dragons (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore) as example.¹³ At present, China has achieved very obvious results to control the pandemic, but with a very high cost and sacrifices.

However, one point needed to clarify is that the different measures taken by China and other countries, especially Western countries in response to the virus, are not a dispute over the political system, but only show the different governance models adopted by different countries according to their own national conditions. For example, Singapore and South Korea have also performed outstandingly in the fight against this pandemic. Therefore, China's success does not mean that the Western system is not good. The pandemic has a huge impact in the West just because of its neglect to pay due attention to this virus. Once the problem is recognized, the West countries will correct errors in a fast speed. With technological advantages, many companies have made new inventions in response to Covid-19.

Since April 2020, there have been several good news in China. First, on April 8, Wuhan was unblocked after 76 days since January 23. Second, on April 26, the number of new confirmed cases, new death toll, existing confirmed cases, cases of serious conditions, new suspected cases, and existing suspected cases were all become 0. Third, on April 29, China decided to convene the national "two sessions" postponed for two months. This means that thousands of representatives will go to Beijing for the most important annual political meeting of China, and it is likely to be the world's largest offline conference. This also shows that the pandemic has been basically controlled in China.

It is also necessary to admit that the pandemic may be repeated. On June 13, the novel coronavirus has been found in the environment and the employees of Xinfadi Agricultural Product Wholesale Market of Beijing,¹⁴ and the record of no new confirmed cases reported for more than 50 consecutive days was broken, which aroused the concerns of the possibility of another round of the pandemic. Even some scientists have predicted that the virus is likely to exist with human beings for a long time.

¹³Xu Jilin, "Comparison of Anti-epidemic Models in Various Countries and the Globalized 2.0 Era", *Sohu.com*, April 17, 2020. https://www.sohu.com/a/388920414_215308

¹⁴"Beijing announced details of 8 newly confirmed cases related to Xinfadi market", *Xinhuanet*, June 14, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-06/14/c_1126113372.htm

3. China's interaction with the world under the Covid-19 pandemic

Since the outbreak of this pandemic, China's interaction with the world has continued to increase. There are countless stories of warmth and mutual help, but also accompanied with *schadenfreude*, xenophobia and racism against China and the Chinese people. In general, from the emergence of the epidemic to the present, the relationship between China and the world has roughly gone through the following four stages:

The first phase was from January 23 when Wuhan was closed to March 9. During this period of time, China is the "epi-center" of the global pandemic. The Chinese people work together to fight against this virus, and all friendly countries provide necessary assistance and support to China, while the United States is an exception. For example, U.S. Secretary of Trade Wilbur Louis Ross stated that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic will hurt the Chinese economy and help jobs and manufacturing industry return to the United States.¹⁵ Moreover, as the spokesperson said, the U.S. government has not provided any substantive assistance to China, but is the first to withdraw its consulate personnel from Wuhan, the first to withdraw some of its embassy personnel, and the first to announce comprehensive restrictions on the entry of Chinese citizens, creating and spreading panic among the world.¹⁶ Of course, this is not to deny the generous assistance of the American people and some civil organizations to China.

The second phase was from the Chinese leaders' inspection of Wuhan on March 10 to April 7. During this period of time, the pandemic was basically under control in China, but it has spread rapidly throughout the world. China has also begun to fully support countries in fighting against the pandemic to return their previous goodwill. In contrast, the US federal government started to "rob" for purchasing faces masks and ventilators around the world whether it was its allies or local governments controlled by the Democratic Party.¹⁷

The third phase was from the unblocking of Wuhan on April 8 to April 26. On April 8, Wuhan was reopened, and China's

¹⁵"The U.S. Secretary of Commerce said that the epidemic in China will help the manufacturing industry return to the United States", EET, February 1, 2020. <https://www.eet-china.com/news/202002011440.html>

¹⁶"On February 3, 2020, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying presided over a regular online press conference", The official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, February 3, 2020. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/t1739521.shtml

¹⁷"The United States robs allies' masks frantically! Canada and Germany explode: We used to love each other so much", Ifeng.com, April 5, 2020. <http://news.ifeng.com/c/7vQIN46RgTD>

war against the Covid-19 won a substantial victory. From this time on, China began its second round of assistance to the international community and at the same time began to export large amounts of medical supplies to the United States. While during this period, the United States started to target the World Health Organization, criticizing that it helped China to cover up data, and has always praised China's achievements in fighting the pandemic and its contribution to the world. However, the allies of the United States have expressed their firm support for the WHO. For example, after the video conference of G7 leaders held on April 16, the White House stated that the meeting focused on "the World Health Organization's lack of transparency and long-term mismanagement, and the G7 leaders demanded a comprehensive reform of the World Health Organization". However, the other 6 countries participating in the meeting opposed Trump's rejection of the WHO, but expressed strong support for the WHO.¹⁸

The fourth phase started from April 27, when the U.S. Democrats Party launched an investigation into the Trump administration's withdrawal from WHO. At the same time, the Chinese government has criticized the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for four consecutive days starting from April 27. He had made four major mistakes: first, threaten to withdraw from the WHO and hinder the global fight against the pandemic; second, shift the blame to China and deliberately incite hatred and confrontation; third, exert "maximum pressure" on Iran, Cuba and other countries, leading to greater humanitarian disasters; fourth, stand idly by and disregarding the lives of the people in domestic pandemic prevention and control.¹⁹ After that, on May 4, the Covid-19 Global Pledge Conference was held online. The conference was co-hosted by the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway and Saudi Arabia. The European Union invested 1 billion euros. EU member states contribute 3 billion euros. Mr. Zhang Ming, head of the Chinese Mission to the European Union, also attended the meeting and delivered a speech as a representative of the Chinese government.²⁰ On May 18, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a promise at the opening ceremony of the 73rd World Health Assembly video conference, "After the research and development of China's novel coronavirus vaccine is completed and put into use, it will serve as a global public product to achieve accessibility and affordability in developing countries."²¹ In contrast, the United States did not participate in this conference and on July 6, the US government announced its formal withdrawal from the World Health Organization.

¹⁸"Can 'USG7' come true? Expert: Old allies want to 'draw a clear line' with the US", *China Youth Daily*, July 14, 2020. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1672179432056995006&wfr=spider&for=pc>

¹⁹"Rare! Pompeo appeared on 'CCTV News' for three consecutive days in this way", *Beijing Youth Daily*, April 30, 2020. <http://news.ifeng.com/c/7w4pVZpMm4V>

²⁰"Representatives of the Chinese Government Attend the International Pledge Conference for Response to the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Pandemic", *Xinhua News Agency*, May 4, 2020. <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0505/c1002-31697054.html>

²¹Xi Jinping, "Unite and cooperate to defeat the epidemic and jointly build a human health community", *People.cn*, May 19, 2020. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0519/c64094-31713992.html>

4. Western accusations against China

In April, I published a comment in the media with the title "United, we can win the battle against Covid-19"²². Although it is about uniting to fight the pandemic, this short essay has received some different feedbacks, which helps me to realize that cooperation seems to be common sense, but in fact what we have observed is that a small group of politicians used the internet and the media to try to politicize the pandemic in order to divert their own responsibilities and internal conflicts, and blame China for whatever it has done for the world. Since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, China has not only fallen into a medical war, an economic war, and a diplomatic war, but also a war of public opinion. Some Western countries and politicians led by the United States have repeatedly launched media offensives, outrageously throwing out six major theories like "China concealment theory", "China misleading theory", "China responsibility theory", "China compensation theory", "inferior product export theory", and "mask diplomacy theory".²³ Although these theories are all distortions of facts, they have had a very serious impact and have also greatly harmed China's international image.

The first is "China's concealment theory". They claimed that China deliberately concealed the number of novel coronavirus infections and deaths in the country, and even claimed that China had sent "misinformation" that caused the other countries to underestimate the extent of the pandemic and delayed to respond. A more representative statement is from US President Donald Trump, "We have lost nobody to coronavirus in the United States". But even the American media disagrees with Trump's statement. For example, on May 24, the US "National Interest" published an article "Don't Listen to the 'China Covered Up the Coronavirus' Narrative", saying that US President Trump has been trying to turn China into a scapegoat. China's measures are more effective than most countries, and the so-called "concealment theory" is inaccurate.²⁴

The second is "China misleading theory". Some politicians and medias in the United States kept referring to the novel coronavirus as "Wuhan virus" or "China virus", accusing the WHO of being partial to China and attributing its own unfavorable response to the

²²Yang Chen, "United, we can win the battle against COVID-19", *United World International*, April 12, 2020. <https://uwidata.com/9842-united-we-can-win-the-battle-against-covid-19/>

²³Wang Wen et al., "Resolutely fight back against the six types of international fallacies of 'blaming China'", *Global Times*, April 17, 2020. <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/3xtmTJsClKI?qq-pf-to=pcqq.group>

²⁴"Claims of China "covering up" coronavirus inaccurate: U.S. media", *Xinhua*, May 28, 2020. http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2020-05/28/content_76101011.htm

pandemic to China. A typical evidence is that a memo sent by the Republican National Committee of Senators to the campaign team, in which it recommended candidates to “actively attack China” in response to the Covid-19 crisis. This kind of hooliganism tries to use China as a scapegoat so as to wash away its own guilt and deceive the American people, hoping to profit from the next general election but in turn leading to an increasing number of illnesses and deaths.²⁵

The third is the “China responsibility theory”. Some Western countries have always shirked their responsibilities for ineffectively fighting the pandemic. Some British and American officials have always claimed that “if China had told us earlier, if they did not lie, we would respond in time.” This is essentially a kind of “theory of shirk responsibility”.

The fourth is the “China compensation theory”. On March 13, a Florida law firm announced that it initiated a collective lawsuit against the Chinese government, demanding billions of dollars in compensation.²⁶ Then politicians in Australia and India demanded compensation from China too. Faced with this question, the former chairman of the UN Security Council and a senior Singaporean politician, Mr. Kishore Mahbubani, directly questioned the United States that the United States caused great harm to the world during the financial crisis, and does anyone propose to compensate from the United States.²⁷ In addition, starting from April 7, the journal Nature apologized for three consecutive days for the stigmatization of the pandemic.²⁸

The fifth is the “inferior product export theory”. In the context of a market economy and different standards of certification for anti-pandemic materials, some companies and businessmen may export some low-quality products for profit reasons, and similar things happened from foreign companies when the Covid-19 just broke out in China. These are all extremes cases. But some foreign media and foreign officials of have always been committed to the “inferior product export theory”, so the purpose is to try to discredit the Chinese manufacturing products and to provoke the contradic-

²⁵“GOP memo urges anti-China assault over coronavirus”, *Politico*, April 24, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/gop-memo-anti-china-coronavirus-207244>

²⁶Shao Yijia, “One U.S. law firms sued China for the epidemic”, *Shanghai Observer*, March 16, 2020. <https://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=224866>

²⁷Kishore Mahbubani, “Someone proposed to claim compensation from China Kishore Mahbubani: Did the world claim compensation from the United States in 2008?”, *Guancha*, April 19, 2020. <https://video.sina.com.cn/p/news/2020-04-19/detail-iirczymi7146313.d.html>

²⁸“Why did this world's top academic journal apologize to China for three consecutive days?”, *Cankaoxiaoxi*, April 10, 2020. <http://ihl.cankaoxiaoxi.com/2020/0410/2407237.shtml>

tion between China and the recipient country.

The sixth is the “mask diplomacy theory”. On May 24, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at a press conference that since the beginning of Covid-19, China has provided emergency assistance to 150 countries and 4 international organizations, and dispatched 26 medical experts to 24 countries in urgent need. China exported 56.8 billion face masks and 250 million protective suits to the world.²⁹ It has also provided convenience and support for the US to purchase medical supplies in China. China has exported more than 12 billion face masks to the US, which is equivalent to providing nearly 40 masks for every American.³⁰ However, some Western politicians and media have described China’s foreign aid for pandemic prevention materials as “mask diplomacy” to compete for geopolitical influence. After careful consideration, this is still a continuation of the “theory of China threat theory” in recent years.

A lie is repeated thousands of times, and it may not become the truth, but can disturb the public opinion of the world. It is very interesting to see that just in this June, Trump criticized former Secretary of State Powell to tell a lie and start the Iraq war, but in fact Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction.³¹ As WHO Secretary-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, in the global fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, we need facts not fear, sciences not rumor, and unity not stigma.³²

5. The challenge of Covid-19 for global politics

At present, domestic and foreign experts have launched heated discussions on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global politics, mainly focusing on the following questions: Is the Covid-19 pandemic the last straw to crush globalization? Will the Covid-19 pandemic completely overturn the existing world order? Will the Covid-19 pandemic end the “American Century”? Or does this pandemic mean that the West is declining, and the

²⁹Wang Yi, “China has exported 56.8 billion masks and 250 million protective clothing to the world”, China.com, May 24, 2020. http://news.china.com.cn/txt/2020-05/24/content_76084221.htm

³⁰Wang Yi, “China has exported more than 12 billion masks to the United States”, Ifeng.com, May 24, 2020. <http://news.ifeng.com/c/7wjgrUISWeG>

³¹Wang Shichun, “Trump and former Secretary of State Powell: Where are the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?”, Guanacha, June 8, 2020. https://www.guanacha.cn/internation/2020_06_08_553273.shtml

³²“Why does Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insist on praising China?”, Jiemian, February 24, 2020. <https://www.jiemian.com/article/4020418.html>

East is rising again?³³

No. 1 Question: the future of globalization

Professor Jiang Shixue, director of the Center for Latin American Studies of Shanghai University, believes that the Covid-19 pandemic will not have a major impact on globalization. Economic globalization will continue after the pandemic, because the current global value chain is only temporarily blocked due to the obstruction of commodity flows. Once the pandemic was eliminated, the globalization process cannot be subjectively blocked by individuals or countries. It will continue as a natural result of technological progress.³⁴

Professor Zheng Yongnian, the former director of the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore, thinks that although globalization will continue to develop, the direction will change. That is, it will become "limited globalization", meaning "economic globalization will continue, but not globalization led by neoliberalism since the 1980s". In the last wave of economic globalization, many countries lost their "economic sovereignty", taxation, employment and etc., a lot of domestic contradictions have occurred, social gaps have widened, and the scale of the middle class has become smaller. These are all the origins of Western populism and protectionism. After the Covid-19 pandemic, every country will keep its production capacity related to national security and people's lives. Therefore, the concept of "globalization" may change in the future.³⁵

Professor Fu Mengzi, vice president of the China Institute of Modern International Relations, argues that the judgment that everything will return to its original state after the pandemic is definitely somewhat arbitrary. And it is also too early to conclude that globalization will be divided, multi-centralized or fragmented after the pandemic. But one thing for sure is that globalization will definitely undergo periodic changes after the pandemic. First, the reconstruction of the global industrial chain is inevitable. Second, some companies may return to its native coun-

³³Jiang Shixue, "Three myths about post-COVID-19 era", CGTN, April 23, 2020. <http://igs.shu.edu.cn/info/1013/2795.htm>

³⁴Jiang Shixue, "Three myths about post-COVID-19 era", CGTN, April 23, 2020. <http://igs.shu.edu.cn/info/1013/2795.htm>

³⁵Zheng Yongnian, "After the epidemic, it will become 'limited globalization'", Nanfang Daily, April 13, 2020. https://www.sohu.com/a/388763311_100191048

try. Third, globalism gives way to regionalism. Fourth, emerging countries such as China will continue to firmly promote globalization.³⁶

Professor Zhang Yuyan, director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, proposes that a two parallel systems led respectively by the developed countries and China is forming. In other words, the United States and China are beginning to form two "heterogeneous" systems, which may become two sources of power for "globalization". The reason is that from the end of the Cold War to 2008, the world gradually formed a division of labor and refined industrial chains, but the distribution of industrial chains was uneven. The longer and more refined of the global industrial chain, it becomes more fragile. It has become a fact now that the global industrial chain has broken due to the impact of Covid-19. The enterprises and factories suspended work and production, a large number of orders have been cancelled, new contracts are unsustainable, and trade and investment between different economies are affected to varying degrees. At the same time, the United States began to subjectively promote the reconfiguration of its own industrial chain, and the tendency of "decoupling" the industrial chain is becoming more apparent.³⁷

No.2 Question: the future of the world order

For Zheng Yongnian, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the disintegration of the world order established after World War II. It has become a commons us that the old order is unsustainable, but the question is: How does the old order disintegrate? What will the new international order look like? How can the new order establish? Who (which countries) will lead the new order? These issues are not only of concern to researchers from various countries, but have also been included on the agenda of foreign policy of many countries.³⁸

Professor Yang Jiemian, director of the Academic Committee of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies and president of the Shanghai Institute of International Relations, argues that al-

³⁶Fu Mengzi, "The Future of Globalization under the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 5, 2020, pp. 8-9.

³⁷An Jiali, "Interview with Zhang Yuyan: The impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the global economy and the evolution of the world structure", *Bank of China*, No. 5, 2020, p.19.

³⁸Zheng Yongnian, "China 'takes over the world'", *Lianhe Zaobao*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.zaobao.com/forum/expert/zheng-yong-nian/story20200616-1061502>

though the current world order is approaching a qualitative change, it should not be too optimistic, and it may take several relatively large shocks to achieve it. The United States is less than 300 years old, but considers itself to be the Chosen People, believes in its exceptionalism, has a sense of superiority, and does not feel that it will go downhill. However, the Chinese believe that there will be ups and downs, a lesson learnt from China's long history. The current United States will not accept the fact that it is on the decline, and will prevent others from going up. After all, they are number one in the world in many aspects. But in another 30 years, the United States should accept the facts that they must accept.³⁹

On this question, Jiang Shixue insists that the Covid-19 pandemic will not completely subvert the current world order, because there are two current world orders, one is the multilateral world order and the other is the liberal world order. The multilateral world order is built on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations and multilateralism. It is recognized by most countries in the world and represents the historical trend of world peace and development. Therefore, it will not be destroyed by Covid-19. Besides, the fight against the virus also shows that there is an urgent need for international cooperation and mutual respect, which remain the cornerstone of the multilateral world order. Although the free world order equivalent to the American hegemony is losing its luster, it will not be stopped by the pandemic. First of all, after decades of dominating the world, the free world order has become more and more resilient. Second, despite claims that the West faces the "westlessness" described by the Munich Security Conference, they will continue to support the West as a whole. Finally, the United States remains the only superpower in the world.⁴⁰

No.3 Question: the end of the "American Century"

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, China's international relations scholars were discussing a topic "major changes unseen in a century". This is also a major judgment put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping. An important change discussed by scholars is that the balance of power in the world today is developing from the dominance of the United States to the relative balance between the East and the West. As Yang Jiemian said, compared with the war period, the international structure lasts stable in peacetime, and qualitative

³⁹Yang Jiemian, "The world order is approaching the eve of 'a hundred years of great change'", *Shanghai Observer*, June 24, 2020. <https://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=262019>

⁴⁰Jiang Shixue, "Three myths about post-COVID-19 era", *CGTN*, April 23, 2020. <http://igs.shu.edu.cn/info/1013/2795.htm>

changes often require the impact of major events. Undoubtedly, the occurrence of this pandemic has greatly accelerated the process of qualitative change, and this trend of change was irreversible.⁴¹

Zheng Yongnian has two main points on this question. First, he thinks that the leadership of the United States will definitely decline. This pandemic has hurt the "soft power" of the United States because it has not played its due leadership role in this global crisis, and its sense of international responsibility has weakened. But on the other hand, based on historical experience, the "hard power" of the United States, such as the economy and military, usually increases after each major crisis. Especially in this election year, the United States may try to divert its internal conflicts through hard power. Second, the decline of American leadership does not necessarily mean that Chinese leadership will rise. Although China has controlled the pandemic well in a relatively short period of time, has actively provided assistance to the international community, the West's increasingly prejudice against China has not undergone substantial changes. China should recognize this and be prepared for it.⁴²

Jiang Shixue also believes that attention should be paid to the US military strength. With the rise of China and other emerging economies, the relative strength of the United States is getting weaker, so President Trump hopes to "make the United States great again". However, the United States' response and efforts of fight Covid-19 have almost failed. Although many soldiers on aircraft carriers have been hit hard by the virus, it is undeniable that the US military is still very powerful. Even if the US economy will suffer from a negative growth rate, in fact almost every economy in the world will fall into recession. In other words, the Covid-19 pandemic has weakened the hard power of every major country in the world, and no country can claim to be a winner. Therefore, the balance of power between the East and the West is unlikely to change significantly in the near future.⁴³

Although different people have different opinions on the above-mentioned issues of globalization, world order, and Ameri-

⁴¹Yang Jiemin, "The world order is approaching the eve of 'a hundred years of great change'", *Shanghai Observer*, June 24, 2020. <https://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=262019>

⁴²Zheng Yongnian, "Globalization may return to the 'Era of Economic Sovereignty' due to the impact of the epidemic or the Great Depression, *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, March 30, 2020. http://m.haiwainet.cn/ttc/3541083/2020/0330/content_31755242_1.html

⁴³Jiang Shixue, "Three myths about post-COVID-19 era", *CGTN*, April 23, 2020. <http://igs.shu.edu.cn/info/1013/2795.htm>

can century, without clear conclusion, it can be expected that in the post Covid-19 era, the confrontation between the multilateral world order and the free world order will become more intense.

6.China's responses in the Post Covid-19 era

After the epidemic, China's global influence has been further improved. The first reason is the rapid recovery of China's economy. Whoever can overcome the pandemic earlier will have the opportunity to win economic recovery. Second, China has not only successfully controlled the spread of the pandemic in China, but also provided experience and support to the international community, establishing an image of responsible for human health. The third is that the measures and efficiency that China has taken and shown in the fight against the pandemic have not only allowed the world to witness China's strength, but also its wisdom. In the future, they will also be more willing to believe in the global governance models and solutions proposed by China. Fourth, the performance of the United States in the fight against the pandemic has exposed some shortcomings of US hegemony. It is estimated that the world will inevitably accelerate De-Americanization Process and the United States will become more isolated. As mentioned above, the decline of the United States does not necessarily mean the power of China is strong enough to replace US. For China, the biggest challenge now is China-US relations. Since the trade war in 2018, China-US relations have worsened seriously. The Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the bilateral relations to freezing point in 40 years. Due to the different responses and the different impacts brought by the Covid-19, the strengths of China and the United States are undergoing major changes, and the United States cannot accept this reality. Judging from the current situation, China-US relations will get worse. The main manifestations are: intensified political confrontation, economic decoupling, deepening of public opinion opposition, more frequent provocations and countermeasures, and a special mixed cold war. But the essence is a game between great powers. The United States believes that China's development has endangered its interests and hegemony, and it cannot accept China's continued development. While China cannot give up the right to continue development. Because of this, China-US relations have begun to drift away and will never go back to the past.

For example, Kissinger commented in early 2019 that "China-US relations will never go back to the past", and Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai also said that "the issue

facing China-US relations now is not to go back to the past, but to open up the future".⁴⁴ Facing these challenges, China needs to do the following things.

First, China is the beneficiary of globalization and the defender of current globalization. Therefore, China needs to open up more firmly and strengthen international cooperation. Also, a balanced external environment is crucial to China's development in the next ten and twenty years.

Second, China will not challenge the dominance of the United States, nor will it be committed to decoupling from the United States economically and technologically. After all, the United States was and is now the world's largest country and has provided many public products to the international community. The United States should play a leadership role in the fight against Covid-19.

Third, the pandemic has brought both historic opportunities and challenges to China's rise. But until now, no matter whether a country is in Europe, Asia, or Latin America, it has not decided to choose sides between the United States and China. However, judging from the current development trend, the United States will suppress China more severely, but the major European countries will not follow US's step of against China with determination. Besides, the cooperation relationship between Russia and China is still strengthening. Therefore, the four-party game and interaction between China, the United States, Europe and Russia will carry on.

Fourth, China will continue to seek the understanding and support of the EU and Russia on the one hand, and to establish deeper relations with the vast number of developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and strive to create a fairer new international political and economic order on the other hand. China and some Western countries have a somewhat different understanding of globalization. For the United States, globalization is a liberal globalization, emphasizing political democratization, economic privatization, and marketization, while China's concept of globalization emphasizes political multi-polarization, economic transnationalization, and cultural diversification. China's concept can also be fully reflected in its fight against Covid-19.

The Covid-19 is a sharpening stone, and after the test of

⁴⁴"Cui Tiankai responded to Kissinger's 'China-US relations will never go back to the past'", *Guancha*, January 22, 2019. https://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019_01_22_487700.shtml

this pandemic, some countries and some nations will become stronger. The Covid-19 is also a monster-revealing mirror. How to deal with this pandemic can also clearly see who is the angel and who is the devil. The biggest challenge China currently faces is the uncertainty of US leaders' policies towards China, but China will not follow the path of "doing what you can do", but instead adhere to the historical tradition and follow the path of "doing what you should do". After all, China still has a lot of internal problems to be solved. China's development is still uneven and unbalanced. China still has 600 million people with an average monthly income of only 1,000 yuan or \$140. The level of technology and industry are still far from the West. China needs to continue to focus on development, but in the face of provocations, China will never show weakness, and will resolutely fight, just as Chairman Mao said, "If we strive for unity through struggle, then the unity can be achieved; if we seek unity through concession, then the unity will gone". China aims to explore a road to peace and development for mankind.



About the Author

