

## What Have We Learned, and What Will the World Look Like?

Published as: 2020 'Women xuedao le shenme, shijie jiang hui zenyang (What Have We Learned, and What Will the World Look Like?)' *Guangming ribao*, 12 May.  
[https://news.gmw.cn/2020-05/12/content\\_33821736.htm](https://news.gmw.cn/2020-05/12/content_33821736.htm).

I would like to ask two questions. First, what have we already learned from the experience of the pandemic? Second, what might the future hold, after the pandemic subsides?

### 1. What have we already learned?

#### *a) China has stepped into the centre of the world stage*

Simply put, everyone around the world is talking about China on a daily basis. As one would expect, some of this discussion is unjustifiably negative from places one would expect, but most is positive, especially from the developing world and from scientific specialists. Whatever the perspective, the reality shows that China really has become central to world affairs.

The result is an even deeper examination around the world of the 'China Model'. How is it that China's socialist system – of economics, governance, society and culture – has been able to mobilise so effectively to achieve what has not been achieved before in human history? That is, to contain an epidemic before a vaccine is available.

To be sure, the process of China's centrality to global affairs has been underway since at least the beginning of the Reform and Opening-Up, but the experience of the pandemic has accelerated this process and brought it to realisation.

#### *b) The global implications of China's rejuvenation*

Further, the experience of the pandemic has already begun to accelerate China's rejuvenation. In the short term and in light of the economic impact of the epidemic, it may seem as though China has taken a step back. But this pause is only temporary and by no means the first time China has faced a profound challenge on its path. History is our guide here: each time China has faced a profound challenge, it has emerged even stronger than before.

More importantly, the process of rejuvenation (or, as the French say, a renaissance) will have increasing global ramifications. Before the epidemic emerged, China already contributed about 20 percent to the global economy (more than the USA). When the epidemic is over, this contribution from China will be even larger.

However, matters of the economic base make up the relatively easy part for thinking in global terms. The more complex issues relate to superstructural matters, such as governance, culture and social values. These superstructural issues will take longer to understand, but it is notable that areas of the world such as Africa, Central Asia, the Pacific and Eurasia (Eastern Europe and Russia) are much more amenable to understanding how China works and what its values are.

*c) China is more than willing to speak openly to the world about problems faced and how to overcome them*

I have begun to note an increasing confidence in China of talking about problems that need to be addressed. This discussion takes place in a global context. For example, some of the early local mistakes in Wuhan have been openly discussed, with a view to improving the system for responding to such crises in the future. In other words, China's socialist system is a self-correcting system, always learning from problems and mistakes and seeking to improve – criticism and self-criticism is a crucial feature of the socialist system. In some parts of the world, this is a very different approach, for in those parts the standard approach is to blame someone else. This is a politicised response. By contrast, in China's socialist system the problem in question is internal to the socialist system itself and thus needs to be corrected.

The fact that China is openly talking about such matters on the world stage is a sign of confidence and strength.

Let me turn to the second question:

**2. After the pandemic subsides, what might the future hold?**

*a) Globalisation with increased sovereignty*

This point deploys contradiction analysis: after the pandemic subsides, I envisage a dual tendency, with both increasing globalisation and an increasing sense of sovereignty. Let me address each in turn and then their connections.

Globalisation is the historical path of humanity – as Marx and Engels already observed. The epidemic is not so much a result of globalisation, but has revealed how much the world's countries and peoples are indeed connected. Some parts of the world thought that such events happened only in 'backward' or 'developing' places, but the shock for them is that they are not immune. A pandemic knows no borders and the message is increasingly clear – especially by medical experts on the ground – that it needs a global, cooperative response. After all, international cooperation and commonality is an old communist value.

At the same time, it has become even clearer that national sovereignty is vital. In formerly colonised or semi-colonised countries, sovereignty means freedom from external interference. This idea of sovereignty is different from the old European idea, and I have noticed that more and more people even in Europe are starting to see the value of this new notion of sovereignty, which they are learning from countries like China and many others that have been subjected to colonialism in the not so distant past.

How are globalisation and sovereignty related to one another, especially in light of contradiction analysis and indeed dialectical analysis? There are two parts to this relationship.

*b) A multi-polar world*

The world has already been moving in this direction, but – once again – the pandemic has accelerated its process. The world is less and less unipolar – dominated by a former post-World War hegemony – and is increasingly multi-polar. Clearly, we are nearing the end of this old model of unipolar hegemony. More and more countries speak their own position clearly, from Russia through Europe, to East Asia – China in particular.

However, this multi-polar world does not mean a retreat into isolation and protectionism, for any country that seeks such a path isolates itself from the rest of the world. Instead, it means a world that must learn to accommodate different voices and positions, for the sake of greater cooperation.

### *c) Win-win instead of hegemony*

However, a multi-polar world will need to understand a different model for global cooperation. This will be a win-win model, instead of an I-win-you-lose (zero-sum) model. The zero-sum model has deep roots in the West, where contradictions are seen predominantly as either-or: either this or that; either me or you. By contrast, a Chinese Marxist approach is both-and, or win-win: both this and that; both me and you.

True, it may take time for some parts of the world to come to terms with this win-win model. But here practice is crucial, for truth arises from facts. The pandemic has provided multiple examples of how this win-win model works. Thus, when a new type of pneumonia was first identified in China – due to previous experience with SARS – in late December of 2019, and when the new virus was identified and the genome sequence isolated in record time in January of 2020, many countries of the world sent assistance to China. After China was able – through arduous effort – to contain the epidemic and when the pandemic was found to be prevalent in other countries, China promptly sent and is continuing to send assistance. As I write, the count is more than 100 countries worldwide.

These acts will not be forgotten and it is my hope that they will provide the foundation for future win-win cooperation.

Finally, these developments will have profound implications for global bodies, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). Notably, the WHO is now at the centre of the fight against COVID-19. It is doing so in a non-politicised manner. Indeed, the basis for win-win cooperation is that it is thoroughly non-politicised – a reality that Marx and Engels already foresaw as one of the bases for the developments of socialism.

I anticipate that this old socialist value, of non-politicised win-win cooperation, will lead to an even greater role for global organisations such as the WHO. True, bodies like the WHO may need to be reformed in some ways, but I anticipate that the reforms will make them even more important in the structures of the world that begin to emerge after the pandemic. After all, it will be the many member countries – sovereign states from Africa to Asia to South America to the Pacific – who will be able to ensure such a development.