

The EU's Global Governance Versus China's Harmonious World (ARI)

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Theme: The EU's 'Global Governance' and China's 'Harmonious World' seem to be competing to be the dominant idea on international relations in the new century.

Summary: : After looking at the background and essence of the two theories, this paper argues that although they bear some similarities, the differences between them are substantial. The two ideas diverge on aspects such as universal values, sovereignty and the function of the nation-state. The paper then puts forward some relevant policy suggestions for both sides to get to know each other better. Finally, it suggests that it is not easy for either of them to become the single dominant theory guiding a dramatically changing world. The paper aims to focus attention and encourage debate on questions such as the possibility of the EU implementing its 'Global Governance' strategy –given the wide gap between developed and developing countries– and whether China's 'Harmonious World' policy is a practical idea that can be accepted by the Western World?

Analysis: The first 10 years of the new century have witnessed the failure of neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus, leading the international community to seek new theories to guide international relations. The EU's 'Global Governance' strategy appears to be the most likely to catch on, although China's 'Harmonious World' concept is increasingly gaining understanding and popularity around the world.

However, the two theories are somewhat antagonistic. In China it is argued that the EU's 'Global Governance' is just an updated version of Western centralism, aimed at ensuring that the West continues to lead the world in the new century while ignoring the fact that a world power shift is under way. It is even regarded as the usual ploy to intervene in the internal affairs of others in the name of global governance.

In the EU, China's 'Harmonious World' is seen as a kind of phantom Utopia as well as a soft-power strategy: it is another form of ideological propaganda, aimed at mitigating the worry about whether China's rise will be peaceful or not. It is also widely believed to be purposely designed to improve China's national image, enhancing its overall influence in world affairs as an emerging country.

Confused by these mutually hostile opinions, it is difficult to estimate which could be the dominant theory in the new era. Before reaching any conclusions it is necessary and important to compare the two theories to determine what they are, why they are being put forward and what are the real differences and similarities between them.

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What Are They and Why Are They Being Put Forward?

Although the concept of global governance came into being more than a decade ago, its definition is still a matter of controversy among academics. Nevertheless, scholars have reached a common understanding that it is a concept that cannot be defined in any concrete way and that it is convenient to describe it broadly in order to avoid disputes over details. Martin Ortega believes that global governance can be generally defined as ‘the management of global problems and the pursuit of global objectives through the concerted efforts of state and other international actors’.¹ In his view, there are five key elements in global governance: (1) management; (2) global problems; (3) global objectives; (4) concerted efforts; and (5) states and other international actors. There are probably other definitions of the concept, but this simple outline reflects the essence of global governance.

According to most Western scholars, the pursuit of global governance is obviously the result of many factors. First, globalisation is a major driving force; secondly, the rise of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and of a global civil society is to some extent changing the world’s governing structure; third, it is the result of the failure of previous ideas on international relations, mainly represented by neo-liberalism; and fourth, the existing system is proving to be unsuccessful and disappointing and its efficiency needs to be urgently improved.

According to the Chinese government, its ‘Harmonious World’ is based on lasting peace and common prosperity and consists of five elements: (1) a ‘win-win’ strategy; (2) peaceful development; (3) the respect for diversity; (4) cooperation and coordination; and (5) peaceful coexistence. Its essence can be summarised as follows: differences can be resolved through dialogue; tension can be defused through consultation; common development can be reached through economic cooperation; and cultures can be enriched through exchanges.

As regards its background, China holds that the state of the world today is far removed from harmony, as local conflicts and flashpoints keep emerging, giving rise to disputes as to how best to deal with these challenges. Those who advocate power politics argue that international relations are a kind of ‘zero-sum’ game, in which ‘one’s gain only results from another’s equivalent loss’. There is no choice but force, sanctions and the ‘stick’ to solve problems.

However, China has an alternative based on the Chinese idea of harmony, which is the very essence of its traditional culture (Confucianism). It calls for a harmonious relationship between peoples, between man and nature, between people and society and between nations and the world. Heartfelt benevolence (*ren*) is the key word in Confucianism: ‘never doing unto others what one would not want others to do to oneself’ and ‘seeking common ground while setting aside differences’ are its two guiding principles. It is the fact of this philosophy of harmony dominating Chinese culture that is one of the factors why only China’s civilisation among the four oldest has survived and endured for 5,000 years.

In short, the ‘Harmonious World’ policy argues that international relations are not a ‘zero-sum’ but a ‘win-win’ game. The Chinese government strongly believes that its new theory is a common-sense approach and that a common effort by the international community should lead to more harmonious relations among all.

¹ Martin Ortega (2007), ‘The EU’s Contribution to Global Governance’, *Chaillot Paper*, April.

The Two Ideas Compared

There only appear to be two points of convergence between the 'Global Governance' and 'Harmonious World' theories: (1) both defend multilateralism and are contrary to unilateralism, which prefers 'hegemonic stability', and consider that the latter can only lead to confrontation, antagonism and a rift in the international community, as shown by events during the Bush Administration in the US; and (2) both defend sustainable development.

Owing to its geopolitics and its current strength, the EU is highly active and responsive to multilateral structures and institutions, that is to say, it prefers the cooperation of power rather than a balance of power. The EU endeavours to advocate multilateralism, aiming to build a rule-based world order by way of multilateral treaties and agreements: 'the EU has no choice but to develop the strategy of effective multilateralism, that means, the EU must choose cooperative policies as a response to key global challenges such as the environment, energy and social issues'.²

'Harmonious World' favours the establishment of a multi-polar world, which it considers conducive to global stability. Compared to unilateralism, multilateralism is the effective and practical way to deal with international affairs in a globalised world. Multilateralism is also an updated way of promoting world trade and economic growth. As regards security, multilateralism is necessary to achieve common objectives.

Guided by its 'Harmonious World' idea, China –whose priority had previously been bilateralism– changed its cautious and sceptical attitude towards multilateralism. China has now become more actively engaged in multilateral organisations, such as the WTO, SCO, G20, ASEAN Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three and BRICs, both at the regional and international levels. It is worth mentioning that the smooth development of SCO makes China feel more confident in participating in multilateral cooperation initiatives as an active player in international affairs.

On the second point of convergence, the defence of sustainable development, the EU regards it as one of its fundamental goals and has issued several special papers to illustrate its specific policies. The EU is fully aware of the challenges posed by the global development model, which is unfortunately based on unsustainable practices. In order to ensure a better quality of life for the present generation and the survival of future generations, the EU has taken action both internally and externally, advocating a global response to sustainable development and emphasising the need to cooperate with the emerging countries on environmental problems.

Sustainable development is an important part of China's 'Harmonious World' idea. Its economy has experienced rapid growth in the past few years, but its development model is a rough and ready one implemented at the expense of environmental destruction and a widening gap between rich and poor. The model featuring investment- and export-led growth is unsustainable. In some parts of China, ecological and environmental conditions have become seriously degraded, leading the government to realise the importance of sustainable development. It is now speeding up the transformation of its pattern of growth and restructuring its economy, focusing on social development and environmental protection while maintaining rapid economic growth.

² Uwe Wissenbach (2007), 'The EU's Effective Multilateralism—but With Whom? Functional Multilateralism and the Rise of China', Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, May.

Conversely, the two theories essentially diverge in three main aspects: (1) the acceptance of core values; (2) the function of the nation-state; and (3) the ceding of sovereignty.

First, on whether the acceptance of core values is a prerequisite, the EU considers that governance should be based on the condition that every country with different cultural, political and religious backgrounds must accept a set of core values such as democracy and human rights, which should be underpinned at all levels. Only after accepting essential values can diversity be talked about. Without the foundation of sharing universal values, there will be no good world governance.

In China the notion of a 'Harmonious World' does not deny basic values, but they are not regarded as a precondition for building an orderly and peaceful world. There are no international standard definitions of democracy or human rights. In other words, the rights of these basic values are in the hands of the Western countries. Clashes in the contemporary world lie in the West's ignorance of the differences between the various civilisations. The West endeavours to spread its values as universally-accepted standards. Unfortunately, this only leads to them being boycotted and resisted by the developing countries. In China's view, every country is equal and there are no so-called 'failed states' or 'rogue countries'.

Hence, 'Harmonious World' does not put the acceptance of so-called universal values as its top priority. On the contrary, it emphasises the importance of respecting diversity, accepting different political systems, development models, religious beliefs and cultural traditions.

Secondly, has the function of the nation-state gradually eroded? In the EU the nation-state, based on institutionalisation and centralisation, is no longer the leading player. It has played the dominant role over the past three centuries, but its golden age has past. The world is entering a 'post-Westphalia' era, of 'governance without government'. The nation-state is no longer as powerful as before and is now only one of many actors, no more important than NGOs, transnational companies and civil society in terms of maintaining good governance in the world.

In China the nation-state still retains the leading role in international governance. China admits that many actors are now playing an important role in international affairs and that their influence is indeed rising. Nevertheless, they are as yet of subsidiary importance, as the nation-state is still powerful enough to have the last word in decision-making. The nation-state has not retreated to act in a supporting role. Since the world still consists of separate nation-states with their own interests at heart, the nation-state is still of prime importance instead of simply being one of many actors, and it should not be undervalued and must be always be in a position of primacy.

Third, should sovereignty be ceded? In the EU, globalisation makes world affairs ignore national borders. It is no longer practical or effective to stick to the principle of sovereignty to address global issues, which means that sovereignty must be ceded to world organisations for the purpose of good global governance (or at least it should be deeply re-defined). Sovereignty is no longer something holy that cannot be touched. According to Richard N. Haass, 'globalization implies that sovereignty is not only becoming weaker in

reality, but that it needs to become weaker. States would be wise to weaken sovereignty in order to protect themselves. Sovereignty is no longer a sanctuary'.³

In China the 'Harmonious World' concept is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, which have mutual respect for sovereignty as a priority. Even in the new century, sovereignty is still supreme and absolute, as globalisation is not an excuse to weaken it. Since the world order is not just and fair, world economic development is unbalanced, power politics and hegemony are still paramount and small and poor countries remain marginalised as globalisation progresses. Globalisation requires cooperation in the international community, but it does not necessarily mean that nation-states should give up their sovereignty. Successful global cooperation can only be carried out by respecting each other's sovereignty. Otherwise, Western countries will always intervene in other countries' internal affairs under the pretext of global governance. In this context, sovereignty is unconditional and must be respected without brooking any compromise. Only on the basis of respecting sovereignty can a harmonious world be achieved.

Finally, a case study can illustrate the two different understanding of sovereignty.

At the recent Copenhagen conference, although China set a very high emissions level, it failed to satisfy the EU. China was asked to be transparent in the process of achieving its emission goals, ie, it was asked to accept a monitoring mechanism. However, China believes this to be an issue of sovereignty and considers that other countries should not use global governance to interfere in its internal affairs. Hence, the differences in understanding sovereignty explain why China and the EU had different attitudes at the Copenhagen Conference. The EU considers the conference a failure and that China was an obstacle to its success, while China feels misunderstood and considers that the conference was not only not a failure but a new starting point.

Policy Suggestions

First, China should reevaluate the functions of NGOs. China should find the will to trust NGOs, despite some of them being financially supported by Western countries to intervene in China's internal affairs. NGOs should not be seen as competitors to governments, rather they should be considered strong allies.

Secondly, scholars on both sides should engage in more second-track dialogue on the two ideas in order to understand their deeper meaning and promote understanding. It is especially necessary for scholars from the EU, who are often confused by the Chinese concepts of 'harmonious society' and 'Harmonious World': the former applies at the national level and focuses on achieving a balance between China's economic growth and social development and its efforts to narrow the wealth gap, while the latter applies at the international level.

Third, the EU should make a greater effort to take into account the role and interests of the developing countries. In the EU's 'Global Governance' concept the role of developing countries is undervalued, while Western leadership is overemphasised. A lesson should be drawn from the unsuccessful theories of the past which marginalised developing

³ Richard N. Haass (2006), 'Sovereignty and Globalization', Op-Ed, Project Syndicate, http://www.cfr.org/publication/9903/sovereignty_and_globalisation.html.

countries in international affairs. Any new theory should avoid Western centralism. Hence, equal participation in global governance should be highlighted.

Conclusions: Both the ‘Global Governance’ and ‘Harmonious World’ concepts pursue the interests of respectively the EU and China and serve pragmatic purposes. Both are problem-solving theories and both are trying to be more persuasive and convincing.

The convergence of the two concepts is laying the foundations for practical cooperation, and their differences are not a barrier to their coexistence. Rather, they provide opportunities and the driving force for mutual learning and exchanges to complement and promote each other.

Both ideas are facing many challenges at the theoretical and practical levels. It is obviously not easy –or convenient– for either of them to be the single dominant theory guiding a dramatically changing world, and it is even more difficult for them to achieve their goals without helping the world to know them better. Furthermore, the US, the only current superpower, is unlikely to sit back and do nothing, watching the EU and China taking centre stage. There is a long way to go for either ‘Global Governance’ or ‘Harmonious World’ to be accepted by the international community as a whole.

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