

My Personal View on the Great Changes Unseen in a Century

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In the preface of *Strategic and Security Review (2019/2020)* published by China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), this author quoted the saying, “cold rain comes in the morning, while wind blows in the evening” to depict the 2019 international situation. Sudden, perplexing changes in early 2020 indicate a worrisome year has begun. Devastating wildfires in Australia, the US-Iran conflict, Donald Trump’s impeachment, the change of Russian prime minister, Britain’s formal exit from the EU, the outbreak of COVID-19 and economic uncertainty had roiled domestic and international politics, traditional and non-traditional security before the month of March was well begun.

This may be seen as the epitome of the great changes unseen in a century. Making sense of what this means prompts deep discussion. As different stands, positions, visions and knowledge bases come into play, careful observation must stop short of firm predictions as evolution of apparent trends is uncertain.

The historical period, for discussion purposes, can relate to the term “century,” but Chinese have different interpretations. As the term “century” coincides with a hundred years of humiliation suffered by the Chinese nation, some assume that the century refers to 1919 to 2019, or from the May 4th Movement to the present, which fits well with modern China’s history. However, when the Chinese leader used the term century, he referred to great changes of the world unseen in a century. As the word world is used, the changes referred to are not confined to China. If the hundred years started from the May 4th Movement, the great changes unseen in a

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century should have ended by 2019, which is contrary to the reality. From a global perspective, 1919 is not a relevant year for defining changes unseen in a century. Strategic thinkers, including former US diplomats Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, have used 500, 400 or 300 years as time frames, perhaps starting their account from the onset of globalization (or the age of exploration), or from the establishment of West-dominated international relations with the Westphalia system. On the whole, these are Western-centric. While scholars argue about the definition of the term century, we see an essential attribute involves contests between the Western and the non-Western world, between Western dominance and collective non-Western countries' rise, and between global capitalism and its institutional crisis. In my view, we are now going through changes unseen in centuries, but also coinciding with the grand rejuvenation of the Chinese nation after 100 years of humiliation. This is a strong political expression rather than a general academic one.

In the expression "great changes of the world unseen in a century," there is the word, unseen. Some argue the changes we now undergo are less than the First and Second World Wars; less profound than the collapse of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union's disintegration. Then, how are they unseen in a hundred years? The changes occur while no hot or cold war is going on globally. All of a sudden, people have found that the world is really changed. Precisely what changes are never experienced before? For instance, in the process of getting engaged in, rather than disengaged from, economic globalization, developing countries represented by China have achieved peaceful rise independently without benefiting from colonial expansion and waging foreign wars, which is epoch-making. In this manner, China has achieved its rise, while the West finds it rather hard to cope with. It would probably come to no avail whether the US takes a hot war or cold war tactic to respond to China's rise, while it is almost impossible for China to achieve national rejuvenation outside the US-dominant system. It is in such great changes unseen in a century that the concepts of win-win cooperation and a human community with a shared future have emerged to address the situation.

How to interpret the word great in "great changes"? The reasons why

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involve how economic globalization, political multi-polarization, IT application, cultural diversification and threat diversification are resonating in a mutual-enhancing manner; the domestic and international situations as well as development and security are reciprocal in causation; the third science and technology revolution is going on, while the fourth science and technology revolution is coming ahead of time; the networked age, the digital age and the social media age have impact that contradicts inertial thinking, established patterns and hysteretic management; the established international system is collapsing, while the new world order is yet to emerge. China is approaching political center stage, while its national governance system and governance capacity fall short of adapting.

Great changes call for grand vision. China is presently in the best period of its modern history. The closer we are to rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the more hardships, impediments, risks and challenges we are to meet. In strategic measures, we must link the great changes of the world unseen in a century with our overall strategy of national rejuvenation. Anti-corruption, shedding poverty, in-depth reform, the Belt and Road, and the modernization of national governance are necessary to respond to the great changes unseen in a century. Although their overall implementation will lead to temporary difficulties for resource allocation, they are necessary for the big picture. In strategic assurance, we must perceive the political and institutional advantages in pursuing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and in having the leadership of the Communist Party of China from the perspective of the great changes unseen in a century. In this way, we can understand the political nature behind the trend, “the East is rising and the West is falling, the South is ascending and the North is descending.” We must maintain strategic confidence and willpower, be deft at mobilization and adjustment, and give full play to our potential so as to lay a solid political foundation for realizing the grand two centenary goals.