

Preface for “**China's Historical Choice**”, by He Yafei

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In today's tribe of internationalists, my good friend He Yafei is no ordinary pundit. Having spent part of his career in the engine room of various multilateral diplomatic postings, he knows how the system works. Having also served as a deck officer, assessing the force and the direction of the economic and political winds and currents of globalisation, he knows how the system should work. This is a rare combination of qualities.

Hence the value, importance, and novelty of his plea for his country, China, to devise its own global governance strategy. "Global governance is the path China has to traverse to become a truly global power", as he puts it. His diagnostic, i.e. that global governance is too weak to properly address the new cooperation challenges stemming from globalisation, is not necessarily new. But he argues it convincingly, and highlights many of the shortcomings and pitfalls of the present international institutional hardware.

But hardware problems are not the greatest of the challenges to be faced, even if adjusting the existing bodies to the significant and ongoing global rebalancing-- as epitomized by the rise of China-- is slow and painful. The real problems lie elsewhere because, as He Yafei puts it rightly, "global governance is mutual governance". In this sense, improving global governance is mostly a software, and not a hardware issue. It has to do with values.

As we all know, the present software of the international system is of Western origin. Western ideology. Western philosophy. Is this sufficient reason to reject it out of hand? Certainly not. But nor can it be taken for granted-- not least because American and European ethics differ in more than just nuances. Hence the necessity to submit a new, modern international cooperation software to the scrutiny of different wisdom, belonging to different cultures and traditions.

This is where He Yafei breaks new ground in sketching how China's values, such as harmony, can help to build new concepts underpinning an improved global governance for the future. Let's hope that this attempt will attract the attention it deserves, and trigger new conversations between established and new powers. Preserving world peace in the next decades will necessitate some sort of re-embedding of geoeconomics and geopolitics, to use Polanyi's words. He Yafei opens such a possibility. Credit to him.