

Literature Review of Wilsonianism

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Abstract: Woodrow Wilson served as president of the United States for two consecutive terms before and after the first World War. As for Wilson's international political thought, the academic circles of international relations generally believe that it is the reflection of the realistic interests and expansion objectives of the United States, but some scholars emphasize that Wilson's diplomacy can not be simply equated with the realistic policy of the United States. It is undoubtedly necessary to study the formation and personality characteristics of Wilson's international political thought for a correct understanding of Wilson's doctrine and diplomacy in this period. This paper combs and evaluates the views of scholars at home and abroad by reading the relevant research on Wilsonianism.

Keywords: Wilsonianism; Idealism; Realism

1. Brief review

Generally speaking, foreign scholars began to study Wilsonianism earlier than Chinese scholars. Until the founding of new China, Chinese scholars' understanding of Wilson and American diplomacy during Wilson's period was still preliminary, and there was no serious academic research. After the birth of new China, with the establishment of the discipline of world history, China's teaching and research team of world history began to be established, and the research on American diplomacy in Wilson's period began to start. Since the reform and opening up, especially since the 1990s, the academic community has deepened the exploration and research on Wilson government's foreign policy, and the research on Wilson's "idealistic" foreign policy theory has also begun. During this period, the academic research team continued to grow, the research field expanded rapidly, and the research results emerged one after another.

2. Definition of Wilsonianism

Woodrow Wilson is the only American president with the title of doctor of philosophy. His term of office began in 1913 and ended in 1921. He was the most important decision-maker of American diplomacy in this period. His unique thought and personality made American diplomacy in this period have a strong idealistic color. A school of thought, idealism and realism are called the two mainstream schools of western international relations theory. As the founder of this school, Wilson's idealism has always had a far-reaching impact in the field of international relations. It is generally believed that Wilson's idealism is Wilson's ideas and beliefs on international relations and foreign policy. Strictly speaking, it is not a logical theoretical system, but some wishes, beliefs and standards, as well as the plan to rebuild the international order. It was embodied in Wilson's speech on the "14 point plan" delivered in the U.S. Congress on January 8, 1918, which mainly emphasized the realization of the following objectives: Open diplomacy, freedom of navigation on the high seas, freedom of trade, comprehensive disarmament, fair handling of colonial disputes, national self-determination, restoration of Belgium, withdrawal from Russian territory, and the establishment of an international alliance. After that, Wilson supplemented the "14 point principles" and put forward four principles of American Diplomacy: the United States has no intention to seize the territory of other countries; The main means of American diplomacy is peaceful negotiation rather than military conquest; The United States does not recognize any foreign government that obtains power through violence; The United States will

abide by its promises and morality in international relations, and improve its vision of lasting peace.

3. Different views on Wilsonianism

However, historians generally believe that Wilson's foreign policy is the same as that of other European powers. His diplomatic thought is the reflection of the realistic national interests and expansion objectives of the United States. Wilson's foreign policy is the same as that of other European powers. Wang Xiaode wrote in one of his papers: "the so-called ideal consideration has value and effectiveness only when it is in line with the national interests of the United States. Once this consideration exceeds the limits of national interests, Wilson will certainly not hesitate to choose the latter, ignore the 'ideal', or even abandon it as my own."^[1] Wang Xiaode also said in his works: "Wilson is by no means an idealist full of fantasy." "The ideal he preaches is only a means to realize the interests of the United States."^[2] Guan Xunxia and Wang Xiaode have similar views. In his article, Guan Xunxia criticizes that the foreign policy of the Wilson government "is inseparable from its religion, so that American imperialism can dominate the world"; According to Wilson's "14 point principles", it is revealed that each principle is just a beautiful coat woven for the realization of America's own interests.^[3] In "to the murdered people of all countries", Roman Roland pointedly pointed out: "once the war is carried out, the process of squeezing money begins; when the blood flows out and the money flows in, no one is busy to stop this kind of communication,... for the despicable motive of making money, he can make use of the best and worst instincts of mankind."^[4] This is the "neutrality" of the Wilson government. Under the cover of Wilson's "neutrality", the American monopoly bourgeoisie, which has the "worst instinct" of mercenary, wants to boast that "only Americans are peaceful" and acts as an ordering and usurer of arms on the side of the belligerent countries.^[5] Carl also pointed out in the 20-year crisis (1919-1939): introduction to the study of international relations that the idealist's argument logic is that the best interests of the world are the best interests of his own country, and then interpreted this view in turn, that "the best interests of his own country are the best interests of the world".^[6] Arthur link also pointed out that Wilson was a realist.^[7]

Nevertheless, some scholars have questioned these views. They believe that Wilson's diplomacy can not be simply equated with power politics in American realism. For example, Dai Bing, a Chinese scholar, believes that Wilson's international political thought highly values the public will and emphasizes the role of democratic system in ensuring peace, which reflects the basic principles of liberal political theory. It holds that Wilson doctrine meets the modernity requirements of historical development and is internationalism under the new historical conditions. It continues the direction of American diplomacy saying goodbye to isolation since the late 19th World.^[8] In his article, Fang Qiang, a Chinese scholar, by analyzing various historical evidences of Wilson's China policy, came to the conclusion that Wilson undoubtedly had a distinctive idealistic color compared with the European powers at that time in the way of pursuing his own national interests. He believes that the difference is related to Wilson's own Christian belief, his academic background and lack of political experience.^[9] Cai changzhuo believes that "American foreign relations have always been changing and developing in the contradiction and unity of idealism and national realistic interests. It is the foundation of the United States". Foreign scholars said that Wilson united the people of all countries to participate in a great struggle for people all over the world to enjoy freedom, justice and peace.^[10] He is the leader of the world's moral force and is revered by the European people.^[11] "When the European war was going on, Wilson tried his best to keep the United States from getting involved in the war. But later, he had to fight for humanity and justice. He was worthy of being a world leader."^[12] Wilson was "the representative of peace loving people all over the world".^[13] Chinese scholar Yang Chunlong pointed out that domestic and international relations theorists generally learn from the framework of the Western realist school, regard "idealism" as the opposite of "realism", and regard Wilson's idealism as an ideological form divorced from the needs of national realistic interests to a certain extent. Some scholars unconsciously regard idealism as an empty sermon. In fact, they explain American foreign policy completely from the theory of realism.^[14] Ni Shixiong believes that, "Although after two world wars, the school of idealism has been hit hard and its influence has begun to weaken. Although the idealism theory has eclipsed under the offensive of Carl and Morgenthau's realism theory, idealism, as an ideological trend, has not completely retreated, 'it still exists', and it is still in the fields of disarmament, the law of war, peacekeeping, global ecology and The United Nations and other issues."^[15] Zhou Jianming pointed out: for countries that pursue and maintain hegemony like the United States, in addition to explaining their

behavior from the perspective of power, other factors such as values and ideology will also affect their foreign policy. Wilson's idealism has a very important impact on American foreign policy. Without this, it is not easy to fully understand American foreign policy.^[16] Zhou Qi believes that as a member of western countries, the foreign policy of the United States is more idealistic and has a sense of mission than most European countries.^[17]

On the formation of Wilson's international political thought, Han Li and Yang Biao analyzed Wilson's social political view and historical view and their influence;^[18] Regarding the origin of Wilson International Alliance thought, Han Li holds that Wilson's thought of the League of nations came from the mediation diplomacy of the United States after the outbreak of the first World War. The contradictions and inevitable failures of mediation diplomacy led Wilson to find the League of nations plan, while the collective security clause of Pan American Treaty was its basic principle. After the United States gave up neutrality, the thought of the League of nations became the main goal of Wilson's diplomacy;^[19] Ren Liming made a comprehensive analysis of the origin of Wilson's international political thought from the aspects of Wilson's family religious background, his belief in British and American democratic politics, his understanding of American uniqueness and frontier theory, and his influence by domestic progressive thought.^[20]

4. Summary

Looking at the research on Wilson's diplomatic strategy by Chinese and foreign scholars, we can find that most western scholars basically believe that Wilson's foreign policy more or less embodies idealism^[21] or liberalism,^{[22][23]} while domestic scholars almost agree that Wilson's foreign policy during World War I was actually realistic politics. It can be concluded that western scholars do not seem to pay enough attention to the pursuit of American national interests in Wilson's diplomacy, while domestic scholars pay less attention to the idealism in Wilson's diplomacy. Wilson's international political thought is deeply imprinted on his growth process, mixing two ideological orientations of scholars and politicians. As a scholar, he is obsessed with the liberal political concept popular in Europe since the 19th century and pursues the lingering charm of this concept with religious piety and stubbornness. When people approach his international political thought, there is a strong atmosphere of idealism, so that other aspects of his thought are ignored. As a politician, Wilson, like many other American presidents, must size up the situation and make plans. He had to dilute his enthusiasm for scholarly idealism with realistic thoughts. After experiencing the havoc of the first World War, he was sensitive to the problem of modernity in the development of human history, and issued an American prescription to help the world. Wilson's interpretation of history goes beyond his time and cannot be accepted by the American people. It should be pointed out that this advance of Wilson's international political thought is often ignored. At the same time, this advance can not be placed in the category of idealism, because it originated from Wilson's realistic political practice and coincided with the later historical facts. In the view of Americans today, it is this advanced reality in Wilson's international political thought that points out the direction of American foreign policy in the 20th century and establishes Wilson's historical position as the founder of American foreign policy in the 20th century. Wilsonianism is a result oriented diplomacy that takes into account idealism and realism. It can be said that Wilson's diplomatic philosophy will remain one of the pillars of American foreign policy for a long time.

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