

The Form, Essential Characteristics, and Intrinsic Value of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

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As an integral part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind is the overarching objective for Chinese foreign policy in the new era. As the “proletariat era,” the advanced stage of the world history envisioned in the Marxist theory, has not yet arrived, the building of a community with a shared future for mankind is also an objective for Chinese Communists to integrate the liberation of the proletariat with the development of all human beings and achieve further historical progress.¹ Similar to “a real community” envisaged by Marx and Engels as the objective of the advanced stage of the world history, a community with a shared future for mankind is distinctive. Therefore, its characteristics and intrinsic value should be explored to clarify the direction of future efforts.

The Form of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

In a broad sense, a community is a collective group formed by people under common conditions.² Strictly speaking, a community is the unity of

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1 Liu Jianfei, “The Community with a Shared Future for Mankind and the Relationship between Socialist and Capitalist Countries in the Course of World History,” *Contemporary World and Socialism*, No.2, 2019, pp.148-156.

2 Institute of Linguistics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*; Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2002, p.687. According to *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, community is defined as “a unified body of individuals” with seven forms: (a) state or commonwealth; (b) the people with common interests living in a particular area, broadly the area itself; (c) an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location; (d) a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society; (e) a group linked by a common policy; (f) a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests; and (g) a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society. See *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1980, p.226.

the subjective and the objective. The relevance of a community lies in the common identity shared by its members, a sense of identity which further strengthens the community. In different levels, areas and scopes of human life, any collective group of individuals can serve as a community. Therefore, a community is basically a collective group of individuals featuring the unity of their individuality and a sense of their togetherness. There are three types of communities in which the relationship between the individual and the collective group may be considered. The first type has both organizational structure and the power of coercion, which usually constitutes part of a broader community and has a formal name. For example, as a community of people of a certain nationality, the nation-state has a complete organizational structure and a certain amount of coercive power, and serves as the prevailing actor in the international community. The second type, despite having some form of organization, lacks power and therefore possesses limited restraining forces on their members, which is represented by the European Economic Community and the Community of Democracies made up by around 130 constitutional democracies. The third type is neither formally organized nor with any coercive power, which is the community in a narrow sense. Examples include the “real community” envisaged by Marx and the community with a shared future for mankind.

In terms of scope, there have been diverse communities in both history and reality. Some are formed in certain geographical areas, such as the Asian community of shared future and the community of the Chinese nation. Some are defined by certain issue areas, such as a security community, an economic community, a political community, or an ecological community. NATO, for example, is a security community, the European Economic Community is an economic one, while the Community of Democracies is of a political nature. The community with a shared future for mankind is the most advanced and broadest community in human society. It focuses on the future of mankind and the fundamental and common interests of all people, instead of focusing on a certain area or single issues of importance to mankind.

In terms of ideological origin, since the inception of the modern era, there have been two influential ideologies focused on a “community” for mankind. The first is the Marxist community for mankind, and the other is the “human community” in the Western sense. By criticizing and negating the “delusional community” of bourgeois states, Marx proposed that a community of free men, i.e., a real community, will be realized in human society³ when states ultimately wither away. The “human community” as envisioned by Western scholars implies that mankind’s future will be “the eventual establishment of a world-wide cosmopolitanism” on the basis of sovereign nation-states. This theory and its so-called “cosmopolitanism,” however, are Eurocentric. “The cosmopolitanism of the future will surely bear a Western imprint,” William McNeill writes, “At least in its initial stages, any world state will be an empire of the West. This would be the case even if non-Westerners should happen to hold the supreme controls of world-wide political-military authority, for they could only do so by utilizing such originally Western traits as industrialism, science, and the public palliation of power through advocacy of one or other of the democratic political faiths.”⁴

The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind draws on the merits of the “human community” while abandoning its Eurocentrism. It is premised on the fact that the international community is anarchic and consists of sovereign states while acknowledging that nations have become even more interdependent because of economic globalization. As Chinese President Xi Jinping stated, “A community with a shared future for mankind means that the destiny and future of each and every nation and country are interlocked. So we should stick together through thick and thin and endeavor to build this planet of ours into a harmonious big

3 Wang Gonglong, “The Innovation and Reconstruction of the Idea of Community with a Shared Future for Mankind on Marx’s Community Thought,” *Journal of Shanghai Administration Institute*, No.9, 2017, pp. 5-6; Ma Junfeng, *Research on Marxist Social Community Theory*, China Social Sciences Press, 2011.

4 William McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

family and realize mankind's longing for a better life.”⁵ From the perspective of ideological system and concern for the future of humanity, the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind is in line with the Marxist concept of community for mankind. They both take into account the people's future and are based on the fundamental theory of historical materialism. The ideology of a community with a shared future for mankind develops and transforms the Marxist community for mankind by incorporating the underlying trend of the times and of socialist movements.

Essential Characteristics of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

Despite the consistency between a community with a shared future for mankind and the Marxist “real community” in terms of form, primary goals, and contribution to the course of world history, the former is still distinctive in the following ways.

The unity of “what is” and “what ought to be”

The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind can be understood in terms of the dichotomy between “what is” and “what ought to be.” From the perspective of “what is,” we can see that the destiny and future of all human beings have been interconnected in the present era. As President Xi stated, “Nowadays, people are living in a world with different cultures, races, colors, religions and social systems.” However, “In this world, countries are now increasingly interconnected and interdependent, and people are living in the same global village, where history and reality meet. We increasingly find ourselves in a community of shared future where each has something of another.”⁶ In international relations, in particular, “‘Coexistence’ or a lower level of ‘cooperation’ can barely summarize the

5 Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Build a Better World: Keynote Speech at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting,” *People's Daily*, December 1, 2017.

6 Xi Jinping: *The Governance of China*, Foreign Languages Press, 2014, pp.261&272.

features of interstate relationships. All sovereign states, connected by common interests and values, have become part of a global community, which marks a new stage of development for the international community.”⁷ From the perspective of “what ought to be,” the current form of the community with a shared future for mankind is still weak with a flimsy basis, subject to conflicts between different groups of people or between states, and even prone to be disrupted. The reason for this weakness is that members of the community have yet to be sufficiently conscious of the shared future of mankind, and that some countries, nations, and political forces place their own interests above the common interests of mankind. In this connection, it still counts on the joint efforts of mankind to consolidate and strengthen the current community of shared future.

Sovereign states as basic actors

There are many actors in the community with a shared future for mankind, and any entity that is active in human society is a component of the community. However, as we are still in a stage where sovereign states are the predominant form of social organization, the status and role of states remains indispensable. Without the participation of states and cooperation between them, it will be impossible to build a community with a shared future for mankind. It was in front of senior political figures from different countries that President Xi proposed the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind. And it was in the foreign affairs section of the report of the 19th CPC National Congress that he elaborated on the community’s promotion and construction. He stressed that “countries are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent” when he characterized the community as a “global village.” He also juxtaposes “building a community with a shared future for mankind” to “fostering a new type of international relations” on multiple occasions. This shows that the interstate relationship is a critical factor in building a community with a shared future for mankind.

7 Zhang Hui, “A Community with a Shared Future for Mankind — The Contemporary Development of the Social Foundations Theory of International Law,” *Social Sciences in China*, No.5, 2018, p.44.

To building such a community and realize an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity, concerted efforts are needed in the multiple areas of politics, security, development, civilization, and ecology, among which the political realm is of fundamental importance because it deals with interstate relations. Without good international relations, it will be impossible for human society to smoothly achieve cooperation in all other aspects. Therefore, building a community with a shared future for mankind should go hand in hand with fostering a new type of international relations. To some degree, a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation is the fundamental basis for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Acknowledging the long-term existence of private ownership

The “real community,” as envisaged by Marx and Engels, will bring an end to private ownership, but this is based on particular preconditions. As Marx stated, “No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society.”⁸ This important thought has “profoundly inspired people to correctly understand the historical reforms of human society, especially the history of how socialism supplants capitalism.”⁹ In light of the “second stage” of world history, which has lasted a century,¹⁰ it will be a long time before public ownership completely replaces private ownership, and this will be accompanied by complex changes in the

8 Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, *Marx & Engels Collected Works* (Vol.2), People’s Publishing House, 2009, p.592.

9 Qin Gang. “Marx’s Scientific Argument on Socialism,” *Journal of Central Party School*, No.5, 2018, p.60.

10 According to the Marxist worldview, the world history can be divided into three stages. The “epoch of the bourgeoisie,” as proposed by Marx and Engels, is the first. This era spans from Britain’s Industrial Revolution to Russia’s October Revolution. The “epoch of the proletariat” is the third stage which can be further divided into socialism and communism. The second stage is in the middle of the two stages, when the capitalist and socialist systems coexist and compete.

relationship between the two. The CPC defines the primary stage of socialism as “an inevitable historical stage for us to achieve socialist modernization in the economically and culturally backward China, which takes more than a century,” and has enshrined it in its constitution.¹¹ This shows that the CPC clearly understands the long-term existence of private ownership.

Common Destiny: Core Essence of the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

As a phased goal of world history, the community with a shared future for mankind exists on the basis of the international system formed in the “epoch of the bourgeoisie” with sovereign states as basic actors, and naturally there are conflicts of interests between different countries. To build a community with a shared future for mankind on this basis, we must find a common factor that enables different countries to overcome those conflicts and enter into genuine cooperation. This unifying factor is the common destiny for mankind. In the face of this common destiny, conflicts of interests between nations will take a back seat. The common destiny for mankind has emerged with the gradual formation of the integrity of humanity.

Integrity of humanity: cornerstone for common destiny

Community is the unity of common and individual interests, comprising both unity and diversity. However, “from the perspective of philosophy, all communities aspire to this unity.”¹² For those communities with clear organizational forms and possessing the power to coerce, the integrity of the community has been fully demonstrated. If these communities need to be further developed, the main task would be to adjust the power relationship between the individuals and the collective. For those communities without

11 *Collections of Documents at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, People’s Publishing House, 2017, p.69.

12 Zhang Kangzhi and Zhang Qianyou, *The Evolution of Communities*, China Social Sciences Press, 2012, p.10.

formal organization and possessing no powers of coercion, the direction and main task of developing them will be to strengthen the individuals' recognition of the unity and wholeness of the community. Without the ability to exert power, if there is no understanding of the unity of the community and no common identity among its individual members, the community will easily fall apart due to internal conflicts and struggles. We have examples of many countries, political parties, international organizations and other communities with the power to coerce which have disintegrated, and this has also been the case with communities having no such power.

The integrity of humanity has been increasingly recognized, as has the growing globalization and the need for global governance. Before the process of globalization, human beings were scattered in various continents and regions. Although there were exchanges and contacts between nations and countries in Eurasia and Africa, these were isolated from those of America and Oceania, and the unity of the globe had not been recognized as a practical reality. After globalization began, people realized that all human beings, regardless of their places of residence, the color of their skin, their lifestyles, languages, cultures and beliefs, were human beings inhabiting this one Earth and therefore members of a "global village." As human beings, they thus have something in common. Almost everyone today acknowledges the geopolitical system based on sovereign states, follows the market-oriented economic system, adopts similar legal systems, recognizes the same international laws, and accepts the same scientific system.¹³ In fact, human beings have more in common, and at the ideological level, certain basic human values are held as universal. For example, because of the needs of survival and development, people have to continuously improve their instruments of production and their modes of production. This is what we call progress. If progress is regarded as a kind of value, then it is a common value for mankind. In the history of thousands of years of human civilization, some nations have been eliminated because they had

13 Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, translated by Lin Junhong, China CITIC Press, 2014, p.165.

no conception of progress. The survival of many of those still existing civilizations is primarily due to the positive and continuous progress of the people who carry these civilizations along with them.

With the development of human society, the notion of the common interests of mankind has increased, and the sense of human integrity is gradually emerging. Take the case of a nuclear disaster as an example. If the result of conventional war is a zero-sum game of loss and gain, then nuclear war is a negative-sum game of all lose, where even human beings who do not participate in the war can be destroyed as well. Another example is climate change. If the warming of the climate is left unchecked, human beings are likely to suffer a catastrophe. In the face of these disasters which threaten all mankind, the interests of sovereign states shrink in importance and the very notion of sovereignty becomes rather meaningless. In such a world, all of mankind, regardless of nationality or race, will either survive or perish together. Can the eggs remain unbroken when the nest has been ruined? The prominence of the integrity of humanity has laid a solid foundation for the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Interdependence of destinies

With the evolution of globalization, the integrity of humankind has continuously been strengthened, and one of the most important signs has been our growing interdependence. The interdependence brought about by globalization is a process that progresses from a shallow and narrow interdependence to one that is deep and wide. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels analyzed this interdependence in depth in their study of the formation of the world market providing “a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.” “In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations,” they wrote. “And as in material, so also in intellectual production.”¹⁴ However, in their time,

14 K. Marx, F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, People’s Publishing House, 2014, p.31.

interdependence mainly existed in the economic field and to some extent in the cultural field. It was relatively sporadic and shallow, and vulnerable to being disrupted. The occurrence of two world wars proved that economic interdependence alone cannot offset the conflicts of interests in the security, military and strategic areas.

In the second half of the 20th century, with the evolution of globalization, the interdependence between countries has gone far beyond economic and cultural levels. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye tried to explain this situation with their concept of “complex interdependence.” They believe that there is not only economic and cultural interdependence between countries, but also interdependence in the fields of ecology, military security, and political society as well as at the strategic level. Complex interdependence has three main characteristics: first, the sense that “multiple channels connect societies”; second, that “the agenda of interstate relationships consists of multiple issues that are not arranged in a clear or consistent hierarchy,” which means that “military security does not always dominate”; third, the notion that “military force is not used by governments toward other governments within the region, or on major issues, when complex interdependence prevails.”¹⁵ However, this understanding of interdependence is flawed and does not reflect the real degree of interdependence in today’s world. In particular, the authors pointed out that “even for countries whose relations approximate complex interdependence,” “drastic social and political change could cause force again to become an important direct instrument of policy.”¹⁶ In fact, in today’s era, the degree of interdependence among countries has reached the point where force as an “important direct instrument of policy” is no longer feasible, because the degree of interdependence implied by the notion of the integrity of humanity has far exceeded those areas covered by the authors’ concept of “complex interdependence.”

15 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, translated by Men Honghua, Peking University Press, 2012, pp.23-24.

16 *Ibid.*, p.27.

The concept of a community with a shared future, or community of common destiny for mankind, already contains the highest degree of human interdependence required in today's world. The word "destiny" is key, and represents the highest form of interdependence, the interdependence of our common destiny, or "destiny independence." If we say that the interdependence reflected in the theory of "complex interdependence" has not yet linked the destinies of all countries closely, the notion of "common destiny" contained in the community with a shared future for mankind has incorporated interdependence to such a degree that human beings have already become an indivisible big family with you and I sharing weal and woe. "People all over the world live under the same blue sky and own the same homeland and thus they should live like the members of the same family."¹⁷ In this big family, the prospects and destinies of all members are intimately connected. There will be divergences and contradictions among the members, but there should be no zero-sum games, and there is no reason to destroy the whole family because of interest disputes. Just as President Xi said when talking about the China-US relations: "we have a thousand reasons to make the China-US relationship a success, and none whatsoever to wreck it," and "cooperation is the only correct choice for China and the United States."¹⁸ There is no reason for China-US relations to fail, because the two countries not only have a common destiny and have in fact become a community with a shared future, but as the most important countries in the world today, their destinies directly concerns the future of all mankind. The interdependence characterized by our common destiny has elevated the integrity of humanity to a new high. If room still remains in the concept of "complex interdependence" for conflict and confrontation, particularly among major powers, an interdependence which can therefore be reversed, then the interdependence characterized by a community of common destiny, especially among the major powers, will bring the overall space allowed for

17 Xi Jinping, "Jointly Building a Better World: Keynote Speech at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting."

18 *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Vol.2), Foreign Languages Press, 2017, p.488.

conflict and confrontation to zero, and thus make it irreversible.

Conclusion

It is the long-term goal and mission of the Chinese Communists to push forward the development of “world history” and finally realize the “real community” envisioned by Marx and Engels, that is, the communist society. Promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind is a concentrated expression of the world mission of the Chinese Communists on the basis of present historical conditions. Although the community with a shared future for mankind, like the “real community,” takes care of the well-being, development and progress of all mankind, and has no fixed organizational forms or coercive power, it has its own distinct characteristics in terms of foundations and conditions. Different from Marx and Engels’ assumptions of the “community of free men” or the “real community,” in which private ownership has been abolished, and in which class and state have also disappeared, the community with a shared future for mankind exists and is constructed on the basis of the existence of such things as sovereign states, private ownership and class antagonisms in the “epoch of the bourgeoisie.” It is already a reality but needs to be continuously constructed at the same time, which moves in the direction of “an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.” Under the historical conditions in which differences and contradictions between sovereign states are difficult to eliminate, the most important thing in building a community with a shared future for mankind without organizational structure or coercive means is to strengthen the world’s recognition of the integrity of humanity and its common destiny, as well as that “interdependence of destinies” between different human groups. In light of the challenges facing the world community, which are related to the future destiny of mankind, all conflicts of interests between sovereign nation-states must be overcome and resolved. 