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Xi Jinping's Community of Shared Future and China's Behaviour: A View from Indonesia

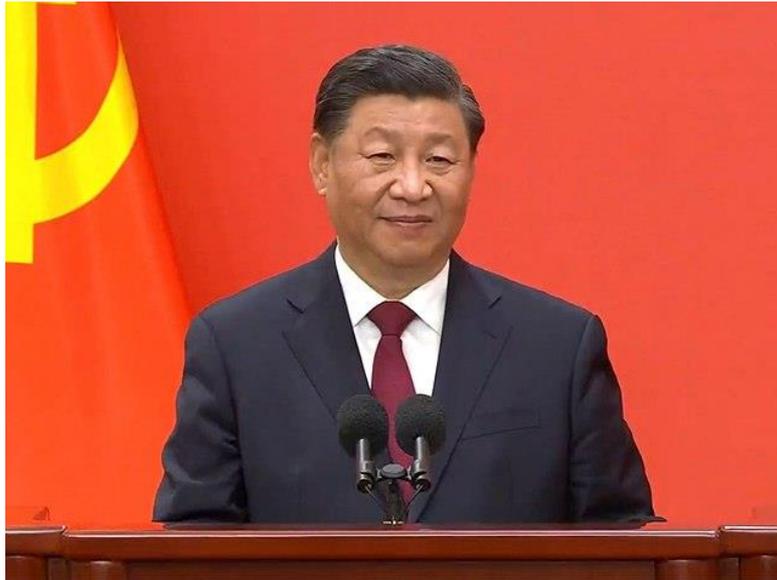
Klaus Heinrich Raditio

SYNOPSIS

*China's president, Xi Jinping, professes to be committed to building a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (CSFM). In examining the thoughts underpinning this vision, **KLAUS HEINRICH RADITIO** firstly evaluates the contradictory principles within the CSFM, which espouses the principle of upholding international law and equality among nations on one hand while promoting political and dialogue consultation as the sole mechanism for resolving disputes on the other, and secondly highlights China's behaviour over the South China Sea disputes as contradictory to the said CSFM principles.*

COMMENTARY

President Xi Jinping concluded his 2024 New Year message by reiterating China's commitment to peace and cooperation by "building a community with a shared future for mankind and making the world a better place for all." The Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) has been Xi's vision for the future world order. Xi believes that the said order is already in the making and China is leading the process. This paper aims to discuss the thoughts underpinning the CSFM, based on the official document of the Chinese State Council titled [A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions](#) (*China's Proposals and Actions*, for short), and contrast them with China's strategic behaviour.



Although Chinese President Xi Jinping's has articulated his vision for China to shape the future world order based on the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM), China's strategic policies and behaviour have not necessarily been consistent with the principles of CSFM. The country will have to do more for CSFM to enjoy wider global acceptance. *Image from Wikimedia Commons.*

Anti-Hegemony/Asymmetrical Relations

Using the Marxist framework, *China's Proposals and Actions* document portrays today's global system as a hegemonic one characterised by asymmetrical rivalry among nations, in which powerful states can impose their will on weaker states in the economic, political, military, diplomatic, and cultural realms.

[Immanuel Wallerstein](#), a neo-Marxist scholar, argues that a hegemon is a party that imposes global liberalism and the free market system. A hegemonic state also interferes in other states' internal affairs to further its own national interest. Moreover, the hegemonic system operates according to capitalist principles in which the world is divided into core states, semi-periphery, and periphery states.

The core states are those that own technology, capital-intensive industries, and the means of wealth accumulation. In contrast, the periphery states are those that own labour-intensive industries and supply natural resources to the core states. Wallerstein contends that in this system, added values continually flow to the core states, leaving the periphery states perennially at the bottom of the global supply chain.

The Marxist analysis of these asymmetrical relations resonates in the *China's Proposals and Actions* document's criticism of the global injustice caused by the hegemonic system. In general, CSFM proposes a new system that dethrones Western hegemonic power.

The Theory of Contradiction

In 1937 Mao Zedong published his essay titled *On Contradiction* (矛盾论). This work was meant to apply Marxism according to the Chinese context. [In his essay](#), Mao argues that the law of contradiction is the essence of every material object. It is the foundation of societal development, and it occurs in a specific context.

In its 75-year history, the People's Republic of China has theorised [three main contradictions](#) which are based on people's needs and the production supply. The contradictions are summarised in the table below.

Table 1. Three Main Contradictions in the History of the People's Republic of China

Events	The Theorised Contradictions
The 8th Party Congress (1956)	The need for building the industrial state versus the reality of an underdeveloped agrarian state; the people's need for economic and cultural development versus the failure of economic production
The 6th Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee (1981)	The backward social production versus the people's need for material and cultural production
The 19th Party Congress (2017)	The uneven and insufficient development versus the people's need for a decent life in terms of material, cultural, political, and environmental qualities

The contradiction in the CSFM occurs between the global hegemonic system characterised by multidimensional crises versus human needs for an interdependent global community that upholds inclusivity, equality, justice, harmony, pluralism, and cooperation.

Xi's vision of the world as a community has its roots in the Chinese traditional thought of 大同 (*datong*, the great harmony/the great union). *China's Proposals and Actions* mentions harmony as the key concept of Chinese culture, which pursues solidarity, mutual progress in diversity, and global harmony (天下大同). *China's Proposals and Actions* also states that the Chinese believe the human race is one global community. In this era, the will of mankind is directed towards one family. CSFM is proposed precisely amid the human need for a vision of unity that accommodates the course of history. The next section discusses the aspects of *datong* that profoundly impact the CSFM.

***Datong* 大同 as Human Community for Common Good**

Datong is the Chinese concept of [the common good](#). It is an ideal version of domestic and global society and is the advanced version of 小康 (*xiaokang*) – a basic level of socialism as coined by Deng Xiaoping.

According to traditional Chinese thought, [xiaokang society](#) still features property ownership by aristocratic families and capitalists from generation to generation, [whereas in datong society](#) there is no spirit of selfish wealth accumulation by certain

groups of clans. All boundaries must be abolished to implement Confucian benevolence (仁, *ren*). Property and professional jobs must be dedicated to public affairs.

[Kang Youwei, a political thinker of the late Qing dynasty period, contended that](#) *ren* must develop and propagate from the familial circle to all humanity and even the whole of creation. Datong, embraced by CSFM, is a community of all nations that promotes common prosperity without hegemony and oppression.

Just like Kang, Li Dazhao, a Chinese intellectual and revolutionary who co-founded the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, positioned China in the global context and elaborates on China's role – as one of the oldest civilisations – in shaping the world's future. [Li contends that](#) the improvement of the global structure is a condition for human liberation.

Therefore, the struggle for emancipation against exploitation must be conducted in the global context. Li urged China [to cooperate with other nations](#) and participate in the global struggle to achieve the international proletariat.

Xi subscribes to Li's elaboration of China's global role. Li believed that China must play the role of supporting the course of history towards socialism. Correspondingly, Xi believes that China must play the key role in building a human community that is fair and anti-hegemonic.

CSFM: Contradicting Principles and Inconsistent Behaviour

In the last part of *China's Proposals and Actions*, China showcases its concrete actions and initiatives to build a community of shared future. In the said document, Beijing condemns hegemony and urges all countries to maintain the world order based on international law. China denounces double standards in international behaviour and selective compliance with international law. However, this principle runs counter to other CSFM principles and China's strategic behaviour.

First, CSFM – as stated in *China's Proposals and Actions* – promotes political dialogue and consultation as the sole mechanism for dispute resolution, pointing to how China apparently wants to avoid international law mechanisms. Unlike international law mechanisms, political dialogue and consultation entail asymmetrical power relations among the participants.

In the case of the South China Sea dispute, for instance, China proposes bilateral negotiations with the other claimant states, which are militarily and economically weaker. Therefore, in bilateral consultations, China and the other claimant states will not be on equal footing. Dialogue and consultation are indeed important in international relations. However, promoting only dialogue and consultation where security issues are concerned and excluding other mechanisms is against the spirit of fairness and equality and weakens the rule-based world order.

Second, China's South China Sea claim itself cannot be reconciled with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which China has in fact ratified. Beijing has ignored the 2016 UNCLOS tribunal ruling that invalidated its claim

and behaviour in the South China Sea. Beijing's continued intransigence on the South China Sea issue underlines that China itself practises double standards and selective compliance with international law.

China's Proposals and Actions upholds the spirit of equality, mutual respect, and mutual learning among different civilisations. It also underlines that no country can claim superiority over others. However, Beijing is keen on profiling itself as one of the world's oldest civilisations and, by that virtue, possesses moral assets to lead the world. In its South China Sea narrative, Beijing claims that the sea has been Chinese domain since "time immemorial". This claim is groundless, according to modern international law. By stressing that its civilisation predates others, China implies superiority over other countries. This attitude seems to contravene the spirit of equality and mutual respect.

Apart from the South China Sea disputes, it remains to be seen as to whether China will uphold its commitment to its CSFM vision and deliver its end of the agreement with Indonesia over the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway (HSR) project. Regarding the project hailed in *China's Proposals and Actions*, Indonesia acknowledges the hard work of both sides in making this project possible. The project has been in commercial operation since 2 October 2023 and has brought benefits to people such as shortening the travel time from three hours to 40 minutes.

However, the project is far from over. Indonesia must deal with a [40-year loan burden](#), with the first 10 years being a grace period. There are fears that this could be a form of ["debt trap"](#). Apart from the debt, the technology transfer promised by China has yet to materialise fully. In these two fields at least – i.e., the debt and technology transfer – Indonesia awaits the realisation of China's CSFM commitment to build an equal and mutually advantageous partnership.

Concluding Thoughts

Marxism and Chinese traditional thought are deeply embedded in the CSFM. The two thoughts serve as Xi Jinping's guides in formulating domestic and foreign policies. On one side, Marxism is the soul and the *raison d'être* of the Chinese Communist Party. On the flip side, upholding Chinese traditional thought has become the source of moral legitimacy for China to claim global leadership.

Whether the CSFM will materialise as the vision of world order depends on Beijing's consistency in its message and behaviour. This paper argues that there are inconsistencies in CSFM. First, promoting political and dialogue consultation as the sole mechanism in resolving dispute is inconsistent with the principles of compliance with international law and anti-hegemonic rhetoric. Second, China's South China Sea claim contravenes international law and demonstrates China's double standard and selective compliance – behaviour that is condemned by CSFM.

This paper anticipates China's more consistent behaviour with its anti-hegemonic rhetoric and principle of mutual benefit, particularly in the Jakarta-Bandung HSR project. Only if China resolves the conflicting principles in the CSFM and stays true to its anti-hegemonic rhetoric, compliance with international law, and the principle of mutual benefit can the CSFM enjoy wider acceptance.

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