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CHINA'S VISION OF THE COMMUNITY FOR SHARED FUTURE FOR MANKIND---AN INTERESTING CONCEPT



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The United Nations' Organization was established in the wake of the Second World War which "brought untold sorrow to mankind"¹. The UN Charter² was framed by the victor partners of the War, i.e. the Allies which included Soviet Union, USA, UK, France and imperial China³.



The purported and projected objects of the UN Charter were to prohibit aggression as a means of resolution of international disputes and ensure national independence and integrity through the system of collective security.⁴

The UN Charter had anticipated that in future if disputes and violence at international level were to be prevented, a just system of global Governance would have to be put in place on permanent basis⁵. However, the Charter's attempt to make provisions for an effective system of Global Governance remained inchoate and was further curtailed by the power of veto given under the Charter to the permanent members of the Security Council—the Allies.⁶ The

¹ UN Charter, the Preamble

² <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>

³ The Socialist China which came into being in 1949 was denied membership of the UN and its place as permanent member of the Security Council till 1971.

⁴ Article 2 (4) and Chapter VII of the UN Charter

⁵ Preamble of UN Charter

⁶ Article 27 (3) of the UN Charter



power of veto enabled the great powers to block several initiatives by UN members States to realize objectives of an organization avowedly based on the principle of “sovereign equality” of nations and seeking to bring about peaceful, friendly and cooperative relations among its members. The later history of the United Nations proved that structure of international peace, prosperity and cooperation could not have been raised on the edifice of hegemony and exploitation on which the UN was made to stand.

The western World Order as rolled out by the establishment of the UN has visibly resulted in a deep global crisis as reflected in the dire threats currently being faced by humanity, which include climate change, global warming, ecological disasters, global arms race, international terrorism, religious extremism, and sharp differences in the prosperity of Global North and Global South which threatens world peace. In this alarming situation, China has come forward with a visionary program of hope called “*Community for Shared Future for Mankind*” (the *CSFM*)⁷. In March 2013⁸ President Xi of China in his speech before Moscow State Institute of International Relations described this vision as under:

⁷ President Xi first broached the concept in 2012. Xi used the slogan in an international arena at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in March 2013, and again in a speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2017. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi used the phrase at the 2020 Munich Security Conference. The term is frequently used in conjunction with diplomatic initiatives and is also associated with the Belt and Road Initiative.

⁸ Xi Jinping Calls for the Building of New Type of International Relations with Win-Win Cooperation at the Core in a Speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China,” March 23, 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpcf1_665694/t1024781.shtml.



“As a great number of emerging markets and developing countries begin to steer their economies into the fast lane, the world has become inter-connected and interdependent to an unprecedented degree. However, humanity still faces many challenges.The world community should jointly push for the building of a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at the core, and people of all nations should combine their efforts to safeguard world peace and promote common development.[H]umanity has never been so better equipped to approach the goal of peace and development, and win-win cooperation is the realistic and feasible way to achieve this goal

President Xi has envisaged a five-pronged approach in order to fulfill this vision. In his report to the 19th CPC National Congress, he called for the establishment of *“a community with a shared future for mankind, [. . .] an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.”*⁹



The vision for the CFSM is not merely a utopian fantasm but is dovetailed and undergirded by

another Chinese initiative called Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁰ BRI was launched in 2013. BRI is also known by the names of One Belt-One Road and

⁹ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.



the New Silk Road. The initiative is an ambitious infrastructure development strategy which aims to improve trade, connectivity, and communication across Asia, Africa, and Europe.¹¹ BRI currently boasts the membership of 155 countries out of which about 50 are Muslim countries. The member countries belong to all regions of the world representing every major civilization and religion. The BRI is a counter model to World Trade Organization. BRI promotes shared prosperity, whereas the World Trade Organization eschews equitable trade opportunities and economic survival of weak nations.

The goals of the BRI were officially presented for the first time in a 2015 document- *the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Belt and Road*¹². BRI is not only an infrastructure development



program but it also aims at shared and sustainable economic growth for all the member states. It seeks to serve the purpose of improving regional integration and trade. Since BRI is financed by China, it offers important economic benefits and opportunities to the developing countries which include increase in foreign

¹⁰ http://en.iwep.org.cn/publications/publications_books/202111/W020211118587815611608.pdf

¹¹ <https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Paper-BRI-March-2024.pdf>

¹² <http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2017/0410/c22-45.html>



direct investment, increased trade linkages, increased employment and poverty alleviation.

Fast-paced agenda of industrial and economic exploitation of natural resources pursued by the European and North American countries in their past has played havoc with the ecological and environmental balance and posed grave risks to the security of earth as a shared global habitat. In order to ensure a secure and viable future for upcoming generations it is imperative to strictly implement the agenda of “sustainable growth” as propounded by the UN and international civil society. Luckily, we find concepts similar to “sustainable growth” and “ecological balance and environment protection” in major civilizations, cultural traditions and religions of mankind.¹³ What is required is to coordinate and consolidate efforts being made in different directions and at different levels in order to prevent permanent and irretrievable harm to ecology, environment and natural resources of earth. The future survival of mankind as joint tenants of earth depends on preventing the depletion of natural resources and devising strategies and means for their preservation and sustainable use.

Renowned Muslim scholar, Syed Hossein Nasar, is of the view that present day crisis of ecological and environmental imbalance is a “crisis of values”¹⁴. Since religion is one of the primary sources of values in any culture and society,

¹³ <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment-programme/faith-earth-initiative/religions-and-environmental-protection;> [https://iefworld.org/unepgc21.htm;](https://iefworld.org/unepgc21.htm)
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_and_environmentalism

¹⁴ http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx?article-title=Religion_and_the_Environmental_Crisis_by_Seyyed_Hossein_Nasr.pdf



therefore religion can play a positive and persuasive role in determining the attitudes of people regarding environmental and ecological protection. The publication of “Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature¹⁵” in 2005 testifies to the fact that the teachings of world religions have a lot to do with ecological and environmental protection. The establishment of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture¹⁶ in 2006 and publishing of the quarterly Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture¹⁷ in 2007 are steps in the same direction.

This brings us to the doctrine of mankind as the *co-trustees of earth* as articulated by various cultural traditions and religious precepts over a period of thousands of years. This doctrine is based on equality of each member of mankind inter se. This gives rise to a further principle requiring equitable and sustainable use of earth resources without endangering the future survival of mankind and jeopardizing ecological and environmental health of the earth. This calls for a brief survey of the traditions relating to “trust/shared resources” and “ecological and environmental protection” as propounded by different religions/traditions: Abrahamic (Judaism, Christianity & Islam) and Asian (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Chinese traditions).

According to Abrahamic religions of which only Judaism, Christianity and Islam are under discussion, the creation of the Earth, the Universe and everything

¹⁵ Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature 1st Edition by Bron Raymond Taylor (Editor), Bloomsbury Academic, UK

¹⁶ <https://www.issrnc.org/>

¹⁷ <https://journal.equinoxpub.com/JSRNC>

animate or inanimate in-between are declared to be as a result of the “Divine act or decree” and therefore they have a special and sacred status as such. Human beings in the Abrahamic religions are considered to be Creator’s “Deputies on Earth”¹⁸ The necessary implication of being a deputy on Earth is that earth and its resources are neither owned by any specific race or State of the earth nor by any specific generation.

The mankind holds the earth and its natural resources as a trust from God. This entails that natural resources of earth



are for equitable use of all---- as all mankind is equal in status, being the creation of the same Divinity. Each generation is therefore responsible for not only sharing natural resources with each other equitably but also leaving them in a condition so that each successive generation may have its proper share therein.

The responsibility of mankind for maintaining ecological and environmental balance also stems from their being a trustee of God. A trustee is liable to

¹⁸ And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." (Quran: 2:30)

In the Jewish and Christian Bible (Old Testament), the office of deputy on earth is depicted by “creation of man in God’s image”: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”. (Genesis: 1:27)



maintain the trust according to the directions of the author of trust. A trustee further is liable not only to protect and preserve the trust property for all classes of beneficiaries but also to refrain from doing any act which harms the trust property in a way that future beneficiaries are deprived from the fruits of trust as meant for and allocated to them by the author of trust.

In 1990, in consultation with all Jain communities internationally, preparation of “Jain Declaration on Nature” was initiated. It defines the essential Jain values, and the concepts of nature, ecology and the environment based on the principles of “non-violence” and “All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence”.¹⁹ Similar views are also found in Hinduism and Buddhism through their religious/philosophical concept of “re-incarnation” which recognizes the unity and interdependence of animate and inanimate things in Nature. Two philosophical cum religious Chinese traditions are Taoism and Confucianism. Taoism promotes many principles that are supportive of ecological and environmental protection, such as wu wei (creative inaction), moderation, compassion and Taoist animism. According to Confucianism concept of “Qi” universe is a living and interdependent whole. The concept of *qi* embraces both matter and energy. Qi therefore is a matrix containing both material and spiritual life from the smallest inanimate particle to the largest living reality.²⁰

¹⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20180610110156/http://www.jainology.org/publications/jain-declaration-on-nature/>

²⁰ <https://books.openedition.org/obp/12992?lang=en>



The above account of religious and traditional concepts regarding mankind as “joint tenants” of earth as “co-trustees”, is clearly attuned with and complementary to the Chinese initiative of “Community of Shared Future for Mankind”. Both visions believe in equality of mankind and nations and their responsibility for a shared and sustainable use of natural resources which is compatible with ecological and environmental protection.

Conclusion

It needs to be pointed out that when the 75th anniversary of the United Nations was celebrated in June 2020, President Xi utilized the occasion to elaborate in his speech on the CSFM. Six countries i.e. the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and India however, refused to accept the phrase “shared vision of a common future” to be included in the draft of Declaration. The six countries’ contention was based on the objection that the phrase had been associated with the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese President Xi’s global ambitions. Due to the objection, the phrase “shared vision of a common future” was excluded from the Declaration eventually.

Notwithstanding, the prospects of future of mankind remain bleak as UN has failed to deliver according to the legitimate expectations of the smaller countries which form the overwhelming majority in the UN. UN charter could be amended just three times since it entered into force in 1945. All attempts to bring meaningful reform in the UN have ended in stalemate as any democratic reform that would dilute or eliminate the veto power of the five permanent members was immediately spurned. Reform in the UN which takes care of the aspirations of



third world countries remains as elusive as it was when UN was established eighty years ago.

It may however be clarified that the international normative framework as framed through UN and its subordinate agencies in the matters of international economic and trade rules, environmental protection, anti-terrorism and international security aligns with the vision of CSFM. The sticking point is the effective implementation of the joint agenda through the aegis of the UN where the existence of the veto powers becomes a stumbling block.

In the above scenario, considering the fact that 155 countries including 50 Muslim countries have embraced the CSFM and become member of the BRI, the CSFM offers a viable additional framework alongside UN. Further, Chinese initiative is considerably compatible with the religious and traditional civilizational values of the world. It is therefore highly likely that the Chinese initiative of Community for Shared Future for Mankind will gain more traction and receive more international support in future.