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A MARXIST-CONFUCIAN INTERPRETATION OF “COMMUNITY OF SHARED FUTURE”:
THEORIZATION AND PRAXIS

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ABSTRACT

Since its first appearance in 2012, the idea of building a “community of shared future” has become a core element of China’s foreign policy discourse and has been continuously theorized and practiced. The combination of philosophical social sciences with Marxism as an open theoretical system and the heritage of Confucianism provides an interpretative entry to this Chinese concept. The concept of “Benevolence” and “The Middle Way” in traditional Confucianism has been transformed into the ontology and epistemology in modern Confucianism. The “Dialectics” in Marxism and “The Middle Way” of Confucianism share common values in that they both emphasize seeking common ground while preserving differences, and strive for common path of development. The present paper elaborates on the theorization and praxis of the concept of a “community of shared future” through Marxist-Confucian approach, to probe into the transculturality, pragmatic universalism and generative potential in the theoretical architectonics and discursive praxis of this Chinese concept.

Keywords: “community of shared future”; Marxist-Confucian approach; “Belt and Road Initiative”; transculturality; pragmatic universalism;

I. Introduction

Since its first appearance in 2012, the idea of building a “community of shared future” has become a core element in China’s foreign policy discourse and has been continuously theorized and practiced. It was seen as contribution of China’s engagement with the rest of the world in pursuit of common security, cultural prosperity, win-win result between nations and harmony between man and nature. This concept also underpins the launch of the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” in the Euro-Asia Economic Forum in Xi’an. Since then, the “Belt and Road Initiative” has become the praxis for the idea of building a “community of shared future”.

At a series of summits on the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations in 2015, Chinese President Xi put forward five important initiatives to form the general path for building this idea. On January 18, 2017, in the keynote speech at the United Nations Office at Geneva “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”, President Xi systematically elaborated this idea and advocated building a world of lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness, inclusiveness, cleanliness and beauty. The idea of “community of shared future” has been extended and applied in many fields such as culture, ecology, Internet governance

and more. On February 10, 2017, the 55th session of the UN Commission for Social Development incorporated this Chinese concept into its resolution on “Social Dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development”, signifying the universal recognition by UN members of the concept. On March 17, the UN Security Council adopted 2344 resolution on Afghanistan, stressing that regional cooperation should be promoted in a spirit of win-win cooperation in order to promote security, stability and development in Afghanistan and build a “community of shared future”. In the same year, this concept has also been included in such international documents as the UN Human Rights Council’s resolutions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Right to Food on March 23, the UN General Assembly’s resolutions on Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space and No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space on November 2. These inclusions testify to the widespread recognition of this Chinese concept among the international community. (Qiushi, 2021)

The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 has further highlighted the significance of building a “community of shared future”. By the end of 2021, China “has offered material aid for combating the pandemic to over 150 countries and international organizations, exported anti-virus supplies to over 200 countries and regions, provided over 320 billion masks, 3.9 billion units of protective gear and 5.6 billion testing kits abroad. ... By providing over 1.6 billion doses of vaccines to more than 100 countries and international organizations around the world, China has made an important contribution to global vaccination and the building of a global immunity barrier.” (Qiushi, 2021) The ongoing theorization and practice of building a “community of shared future” vividly illustrates that the future of the world is forged by the joint effort of people around the globe, people who wish for peace, development, and prosperity.

The present paper elaborates on the theorization and praxis of the concept of a “community of shared future” through Marxist-Confucian approach. The combination of philosophical social sciences with Marxism as an open theoretical system and the heritage of Confucianism provides an interpretative entry to the idea of building a “community of shared future”. The concept of “Benevolence” and “The Middle Way” in traditional Confucianism has been transformed into the ontology and epistemology in modern Confucianism. The “Dialectics” in Marxism and “The Middle Way” of Confucianism share common values in that they both emphasize seeking common ground while preserving differences, and strive for common path of development. Probing into the common goals and values of Marxism and Confucianism, this paper illustrates the architectonics of Marxist-Confucian approach which introduces the perspective of transculturality and pragmatic universalism to tap the transcultural and generative potential in the theorization and praxis of building a “community of shared future”.

II. Literature review of the research on a “community of shared future”

1. The research in China:

i. Theoretical relationship between the concept of a “community of shared future” and Marxist theory.

From the Marxist idea of “Community”, Lu Deyou (2014) and other scholars (2016) provide theoretical resources for the concept of a “community of shared future”. According to Lu, the concept is theoretically compatible with Marxism’s “Freeman Association Society” through safeguarding human interests, coordinating the inherent conflicts of social development, and paying attention to the living conditions of individuals.

ii. The concept of a “community of shared future” as the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese thoughts and culture.

Ma Guangli and Fang Hanwen (2017) explore the Chinese wisdom contained in the concept of a “community of shared future” and its inheritance and development of ancient Chinese theory of “Great Harmony”. Ma and Fang point out that there is a deep connection among Confucianism’s idea of “a Common World”, Marxism’s “ideal society”, and Chinese president Xi Jinping’s idea of a “community of shared future”.

iii. The relationship between the concept of a “community of shared future” and the Chinese diplomatic

policy---“Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”.

According to Chen Xiangyang (2016), the idea of a “community of shared future” is the inheritance and development of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, rooted in the ultimate goal of global development. It is the “top-level design” of China’s fifth-generation leadership’s diplomatic and strategic thought system. Huang Siyu and Pan Liuyan (2022) propose that we should build a new type of economic globalization based on the concept of a “community of shared future”, construct a global economic governance mechanism of equal participation, promote mutually beneficial cooperation around the world to achieve economic development and prosperity jointly, and create a mode of economic globalization of inclusiveness and reciprocity to benefit all groups.

iv. The idea of a “community of shared future” from the perspective of intercultural communication

Fei Aihua (2020) discusses the communication goals, strategies and paths of a “community of shared future”, which should be based on resolving differences, enhancing understanding and promoting participation. Peng Fengjiao suggests that the theorization of the concept is faced with cultural dilemmas. The effective ways to solve the dilemmas are to transcend the conflict of civilizations through exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and practice The Belt and Road Initiative to promote intercultural identity. (2021: 13)

v. Further interpretation of the connotation and significance of a “community of shared future”.

Li Aimin (2016) interprets this concept from the perspective of new “Righteousness and Profit”. Wang Fan (2016) elaborates the theoretical significance and impetus of building a “community of shared future”. Zhang Jijiao and Wu Yue (2021) synthesize this Chinese concept as “win-win” hypothesis: recognizing competition and cooperation, and mutual benefits. In the field of education, Wang Mingyi (2019) believes that universities should be the mainstay of building a “community of shared future”. Regarding environmental protection, Tang Daixing (2020) proposes that universities should carry out the mission of environmental education and build an “environmental community”.

2. The research outside China:

Peter Ferdinand (2016) proposes that as one of the ways to realize Chinese dream, the “Belt and Road Initiative” is guided by the concept of a “community of shared future”. UN Secretary General Guterres (2017) thinks that China has become an important pillar of multilateralism in the effort to build a “community of shared future”. Studies on the concept of a “community of shared future” are mostly found in the review of Xi Jinping’s book *The Governance of China*. The American political elites, represented by former U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger, generally believe that the release of the book *The Governance of China* promotes a transparent way for the world to understand the mindset and deep political philosophy of Chinese leaders, and to understand the concept of a “community of shared future”. Andrea Catone (2018) sees the construction of the concept as a broad strategy for world transformation, a compass that can guide the communist parties, workers’ movements, socialists and progressive forces.

Martin Albrow, a British sociologist and member of the Academy of Social Sciences who has been a prominent scholar in the study of globalization, focuses on China’s role in the globe and how the “Belt and Road Initiative” can dissolve differences and promote global cooperation. His book *China’s Role in a Shared Human Future: Towards Theory of Global Leadership* (2018) effectively links the study of Max Weber with the study of Chinese leader’s thinking during the global transformation of the 20th and 21st centuries. Ehsan Masood (2019) points out, with a “win-win” mindset, China works with business partners around the world to build infrastructure and focuses on providing scientific support to low and middle-income countries. Tim Winter (2019) proposes that China should not only be an economic, technological and military power, but also a cultural power, so that it can play a leading role more effectively in the world. The global public health system provides a practical case for further constructing and practicing the concept of building a “community of shared future”. Through comparing two different models of emergency management systems demonstrated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Francesco Maringio (2020) points out that the success of Chinese model has caught the world’s attention and its assistance has been positively evaluated by countries such as Italy.

III. The Architectonics of Marxist-Confucian Approach: Common Goals and Values

As Martin Albrow puts in *China's Role in a Shared Human Future*, "the combination of philosophical social sciences with Marxism as an open theoretical system and the heritage of Chinese thinkers provides an ongoing unifying discursive frame..." (2018: 19). The "Dialectics" in Marxism and "The Middle Way" of Confucianism share common values in that they both emphasize seeking common ground while preserving differences, and strive for common path of mutual development.

Fang Hanwen characterizes modern Confucianism as traditional Confucianism combined with Marxism, thus indicating the interlinking relationship between Marxism and Modern Confucianism. The concept of "Benevolence" and "The Middle Way" in traditional Confucianism has been transformed into the ontology and epistemology in modern Confucianism. In his argument, Confucianism is compatible with modernization. The modernization of Confucianism is identical to the inheritance and continuity emphasized by Marxist historical materialism. (2016: 29-32)

Furthermore, both Marxism and Confucianism are theories about social progress, having affinity in their historicist epistemological value and description of the ideal society. Confucianism's "Great Harmony Theory" is similar to Marxism's description of the "ideal society". According to Ma Guangli and Fang Hanwen, the "Great Harmony" proposed by Confucianism is a praise for Chinese ancient society and a criticism on the "ceremony disintegration" of the society, while Marx's social development theory, originated from Utopian Socialism of European tradition, is about an ideal society based on social productive modes (2017: 12-18).

"The Great Harmony Theory" and the "ideal society" put forward by Confucius and Marx respectively facilitate the study and interpretation of building a "community of shared future" proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The architectonics of Marxist-Confucian Approach provides an interpretative entry to this Chinese concept, promoting the integration and innovation of Eastern and Western civilizations. The Marxist-Confucian approach introduces the perspective of transculturality and pragmatic universalism in the study of the idea of a "community of shared future", disentagling the transcultural and generative potential in its theoretical architectonics and discursive praxis.

IV. Towards Transculturality and Pragmatic Universalism: Theorization and Praxis of a "Community of Shared Future"

As the concept suggests, a "community of shared future" implies that "the future of all peoples and all countries in the world are closely linked and that we must stand together through good and bad and work to build a large harmonious global family and to realize humankind's aspiration for a better life" (Qiushi, 2021).

In March 2014, in a speech delivered at the headquarters of UNESCO, Chinese President Xi Jinping talked about encouraging civilizations to communicate and learn from each other: "The world in which we live, is one of different cultures, ethnic groups, skin colors, religions, and social systems, and the people of each country have come to form a community with a shared future in which there's a little part of others in each of us". (Qiushi, 2021) In a speech in October 2015, President Xi explained that the original aim of building a "community of shared future" was to "contribute China's wisdom and strength to promoting world economic growth and improving global governance." He also stated, China "will contribute both China's wisdom and strength to world economic growth and global governance." (Qiushi, 2021)

The communication and understanding between different cultures have been elaborated on many different occasions by President Xi in the further expounding and theorization of building a "community of shared future". Martin Albrow portrays this concept as "a transcultural concept", "belonging to no national culture in particular, but crossing many and shared by all" (2018: 29). The idea of transculturalism was first employed by Cuban social scientist and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1950s in his exploration of the emergence of a new and distinctive musical culture (1951). In the 1980s, Margaret Archer focused on the morphogenetic qualities of culture (1988). In more recent works of anthropologist Yu Shou, the transcultural generativity in China-Europe encounters is discussed in great depths (2015). "Transculturality is a generative process that arises out of the encounter between cultures and results in the creation of new culture, an outcome

that can be transformative for the original cultures". (Albrow, 2018: 29) Therefore, transculturality is characterized by its transformative, liminal and most importantly, generative potential. "Marxism from its beginning and in its development to this day assumed a transcultural character. ... Wherever it took root, open to every culture, belonging to none in particular." (Albrow, 2018: 29) The architectonics of Marxist-Confucian approach is another case in point to illustrate the generativity of culture encounters and it is in turn employed to interpret the generativity of the transcultural concept of a "community of shared future" in its pursuit of common ground while preserving differences, and in its effort to seek common path of mutual development.

In addition, the theoretical idea of a "community of shared future" has been implemented into close alignment with the practical problems facing humankind. "President Xi has mentioned at domestic and foreign events other important initiatives, including building a 'cyberspace community with a shared future,' 'nuclear safety community with a shared future,' 'maritime community with a shared future,' and a 'global health community,' which have clarified specific aspects of the original concept of building a global community with a shared future. China has also introduced a series of pragmatic measures to promote the construction of a community with a shared future and make the concept a reality. From firmly promoting multilateralism, to working with others to tackle climate change, from high-quality joint development of the B&R Initiative, to leadership of global cooperation on reducing poverty — China's practical actions have led the conceptual 'tree' of building a community with a shared future to bear fruit." (Qiushi, 2021)

According to Albrow, "Belt and Road is the most ambitious project yet to link the peaceful development of China with the prosperity and well-being of the world as a whole." (2018: 18) "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), which is short for "The Silk Road Economic Belt of China and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", has witnessed great achievements since it was initiated in 2013. When Chinese president Xi Jinping first announced the initiative during his visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, the BRI was intended to achieve economic synergies that would allow China and participating countries to achieve mutual gains and strengthen ties with each other. Its master plan is to fully rely on the established regional cooperation platforms and bilateral and multilateral mechanisms between China and the countries concerned. The construction of the BRI will inject new connotations and vitality into the existing cooperation mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union and China-ASEAN. The BRI has five focus areas --- policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people connectivity. The BRI spans along six economic corridors, including (1) the New Eurasian Land Bridge; (2) the China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor; (3) the China-Pakistan Corridor; (4) the Bangladesh-China-Myanmar Corridor; (5) the China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor; and (6) the China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor. In addition, there are maritime corridors that span different continents. (Kuah, Rezaei & Zhang, 2021: 183)

The world is a united whole, and both "The Great Harmony" proposed by Confucianism and the "ideal society" expected by Marxism cannot be achieved without the efforts of each individual. Therefore, the BRI is precisely following the concept of building a "community of shared future", taking into account the common development of countries along the route. The BRI establishes a "community" mindset and builds "a community of interest". As proposed in 2015, the BRI is built from the original "two communities" into a new "three communities", with the addition of "a community of responsibility". These three communities are the praxis of building a "community of shared future", which to a large extent reflects China's deep understanding of the community values.

As President Xi Jinping points out, the BRI has a very deep historical origin, dating back to more than 2100 years ago two missions made by an envoy of the Han Dynasty to Central Asia. He referenced the voyages of Zheng He in the context of the history of exchanges between the two civilizations. Many scholars analyze the BRI in terms of its political and economic value, however, the BRI's enhancement of cultural soft power should not be underestimated. The BRI is dedicated to the exchange of civilizations. "It is the extension of connectivity that encourages the local culture to find its common features with others and to contribute its distinctive qualities to shaping common ventures. ... Culture contact prompts the reformulation of old principles and the rise of new ones, the process of pragmatic universalism" (Albrow, 2018: 34-73).

The BRI has been implemented with “people-to-people connectivity” as one of its key focus. In addition to other forms of Chinese cultural activities, the Confucius Institute, established since 2004, has been prominently promoted along the BRI corridor. As Kuah (2019) expresses that through engagement in business, education, tourism and other cultural activities along and beyond the BRI corridors, this enhanced mobility of people-to-people connectivity will ultimately lead to the formation of collaborative cultural basins.

“The strategic partnership with countries such as Pakistan, India, Turkey, Germany, France and the UK provide an incentive for them to strengthen the role of the state in setting national goals” (Albrow, 2018: 25). Compared with other economic diplomacy strategies, the BRI based on connectivity mechanisms is more inclusive, more balanced and more sustainable. In addition to political, economic and cultural cooperation, the BRI actually provides new ideas for global ecological protection. Liu Xingsheng(2018) points out that the BRI cooperation, under the principle of equality and mutual benefit, meets the satisfaction of people’s needs, meanwhile alleviates the destruction of nature, which is conducive to the protection of the ecological environment. This is in line with the goal of building an “environmental community” as advocated in the idea of building a “community of shared future”.

Over the past eight years more so, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the BRI has demonstrated its strong resilience and vitality. “China has signed more than 200 Belt and Road cooperation agreements with 140 countries and 32 international organizations, and third-party market cooperation deals with 14 countries including Japan and Italy” (Qiushi, 2021) . During the praxis of building a “community of shared future”, “the claims to universality give way to the search for common ground, accommodation between different principles and respect for difference. These are characteristics of pragmatic universalism, the development of codes of conduct, institutional arrangements and principles for cooperation that will meet challenges that confront humankind as a whole” (Albrow, 2018: 74).

V. Conclusion

As exemplified in the theorization and praxis of the Chinese concept of building a “community of shared future”, the coalescence of Western Marxism and Chinese Confucianism has introduced the perspective of transculturality and pragmatic universalism. As Martin Albrow put, “a pragmatic universalistic outlook generates a transcultural space, which some would describe as a global culture. In that space, cultures in dialogue can and often do arrive at common understandings to secure the human future, a global universalism.” (2018: 49)

The Post-pandemic era urges more than ever before the concerted effort around the globe to replace estrangement with exchange and clashes with mutual understanding and learning, which will boost mutual respect, trust and prosperity. The combination of Marxism and Confucianism, the coalescence of Western and Eastern wisdom, most importantly, the theoretical architectonics and discursive praxis of building a “community of shared future” are intended to disentangle the transcultural and generative potential in this “increasingly multipolar, economically globalized, digitized and culturally diversified world” (Xi Jinping, 2017).

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