

Article

A Sustainable Community of Shared Future for Mankind: Origin, Evolution and Philosophical Foundation

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Abstract: The Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) concept is a comprehensive Chinese proposal for a better future of mankind. In this article, we provide a comprehensive analysis of this concept by focusing on its origin, evolution and philosophical foundation. We show that the concept originated during the presidency of Hu Jintao, who initially used it for the domestic affairs of China. However, the usage of the concept was later extended from domestic to international affairs. Though Hu Jintao conceived the CSFM concept, it is president Xi Jinping who became its greatest advocate. We explore the CSFM concept's development and evolution into one of the most influential, diverse and dominant concepts of international relations under president Xi. We argue that although CSFM concept is seen as a 21st century Chinese idea, the roots of the concept can be traced back to much earlier time in history. The concept is based on three major philosophical thoughts: Marxism, Confucianism and the philosophy of Mencius. We show that the CSFM concept is greatly influenced by Marx's ideas such as the transformation of the world, the free association of producers, historical materialism and dialectics. We also point to a number of Confucian principles that are adopted by the CSFM concept. The CSFM concept not only adopts Confucian principles but also extends their scope from the individual level to international relations. Similarly, we also highlight that the CSFM concept is influenced by Mencius' concepts such as universal brotherhood, responsibility towards the betterment of the world, humane governance, free trade, equal sharing of wealth and the conservation of natural resources.

Keywords: community of shared future for mankind; sustainable development; origin; evolution; philosophical foundation; Marxism; Confucianism; Mencius



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1. Introduction

Human history, for the large part, is the history of wars, miseries, economic instability, poverty and sociopolitical turmoil. Nevertheless, mankind has always been in search of the best possible arrangement that can serve as a panacea for the problems of humanity. Throughout human history, proposals have been put forward with the promise that these will ensure the happiness and prosperity of the world. The latest of such proposals is the concept of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM), which is strongly advocated on all the major national and international forums by the president of China, Xi Jinping (Hereafter, the Community of Shared Future for Mankind will be referred to as CSFM.). The CSFM concept has four major aspects: economy, politics, culture and security. On the economic front, the CSFM concept proposes a world community where the economic relations among nations should be based on the principle of win-win cooperation, which guarantees shared, just and equitable development and prosperity for all. In the sphere of world politics, the CSFM concept opposes the Cold War doctrine of a zero-sum game where the winner takes all. Rather, it advocates that all countries are equal irrespective of their wealth, strength and size and that no country has the right to dominate

other countries through strength, interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries or impose its will on others by force or threat of force. The concept emphasizes the need that all countries should work together, respect the sovereignty of other countries, solve the problems through dialogue and consultation and mutually share the fruits of development. On the cultural aspect, the CSFM concept stands for cultural exchange and respect for diversity of civilizations. The world is a home to multiple cultures, and every culture should respect and learn from other cultures in the world, which will lead to the peaceful coexistence of cultures. Finally, in terms of security, the CSFM concept proposes that each and every country of the world should share the responsibility as well as benefits of comprehensive and sustainable security in order to build a safe and beautiful world free from terrorism and threat of conventional as well unconventional wars.

The CSFM concept is understood as the Chinese vision for a better world in which China intends to play a larger and important role. Yang [1] p. 67, argues that the CSFM concept is a “Chinese strategy for human future and the CCP’s new understanding and development in the 21st century”. Similarly, Tobin [2] p. 155, rejects the CSFM concept’s understanding as a “vague or empty propaganda” and argues that it is, in fact, “Xi’s vision for transforming global governance”. Li [3] p. 12, understands the concept as “an overarching goal of great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in new era”. Wang [4], suggests that the CSFM concept “organically integrate new values, thoughts and strategies and thus form a structurally comprehensive, multilayer, scientific and logically rigorous theoretical system”. Liu [5], on the other hand, argues that the concept has “already evolved into a comprehensive international strategic thought system”. Some scholars such as Zhang, Shou and Zhao tend to relate the CSFM concept with traditional Chinese culture. Zhang [6], suggests that the CSFM concept is a modern expression of the traditional Chinese values such as “World harmony” (天下大同) and “knowledge and action are one” (知行合一). Similarly, Shou [7], argues that the concept has originated from the traditional Chinese value of “harmony in diversity” (和而不同). Likewise, Zhao [8] p. 56 understands that Chinese cultural thought is the source of this new thinking of global governance and therefore provides “a unique oriental wisdom to maintain world peace”.

The paramount significance of the CSFM concept is revealed by the fact that it is incorporated into both the PRC’s and the CCP’s constitutions. On the other hand, the “Belt and Road Initiative” is incorporated into the constitution of the CCP only, whereas the “New Type of Great Power Relations” is neither incorporated into the CCP’s constitution nor into the PRC’s constitution. The CSFM concept has also been incorporated into a number of UN documents, including reports of the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, the UN Commission for Social Development and the UN Human Rights Council. Another indication of the immense significance of the CSFM concept is the large number of Chinese academic articles published about this concept since its strong advocacy by president Xi in 2013. From 2013 to 2019, more than 2180 Chinese articles are published with CSFM in the title (CNKI’s database. Available at <https://www.cnki.net>. Accessed on 14 October 2020).

In English academic literature, however, unlike the concepts of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and the “New Type of Great Power Relations”, the CSFM concept has generated very few academic studies. The scarcity of English research studies about the CSFM concept mainly owes to the lack of sufficient understanding of the concept by English language scholars [9] p. 113. There is an awareness of the CSFM concept among English language scholars. However, the level of awareness that exists is superficial and is limited to its association with Chinese diplomacy and CPP policies. CSFM’s popularity comes at a time when China’s economy has been on the rise and the country has been aggressively expanding its global ambitions [10] p. 3. China has struggled with its image on the global scene and has often been projected as seeking to become the new world hegemon [11] p. 60. Its policy direction has therefore been viewed with skepticism, and often interpreted as superficial. Such views and interpretations of the CSFM are a product of a lack of understanding of the roots and the basic concepts of the CSFM. The world is becoming increasingly complex,

and the challenges that it is facing are on the rise. A better understanding of the CSFM can reveal that its concepts are not mere diplomacy tools but are rather an embodiment of timeless knowledge rooted in past philosophical thoughts which have stood the test of time. Furthermore, a conceptual application of the CSFM concept provides a framework for dealing with the challenges that the world is currently facing. The integration of CSFM into the world governance system has the potential of advancing humanity and addressing today's challenges. Thus, it is imperative to disambiguate the concept for the English language scholars in order to stimulate an increase in the English language research studies about the concept. The present article is one of such attempts. This article attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of the CSFM concept by focusing on its origin, evolution and philosophical foundation. Section 2 of the article deals with the origin and evolution of the CSFM concept during the presidency of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. In this section, we would explore the CSFM concept's development and evolution into one of the most influential, diverse and dominant concepts of international relations under president Xi. However, we would also show that the concept actually originated during the time of Xi's immediate predecessor, Hu Jintao. Section 3 of the article explores the philosophical foundation of the CSFM concept. It was in the 21st century that the CSFM concept appeared in the political discourse of China as an expression of its vision for the future of the world. However, we would see that the roots of the concept can be traced back to three major philosophical thoughts namely Marxism, Confucianism and Menciusism. Section 3, therefore, would highlight the influence of these three philosophical thoughts on the CSFM concept. Finally, we would conclude our argument in Section 4.

2. Origin and Evolution of the CSFM Concept

2.1. Hu Jintao and CSFM

There is no doubt that president Xi is the key advocate of the CSFM concept. However, he did not coin it. The origin of the concept can be traced back to Xi's immediate predecessor Hu Jintao. In his 17th Party Congress report in 2007, Hu put forward the concept of (命运共同体), which was, at that time, translated into English as "Community of Common Destiny". According to Hu [12]:

"Here we would like to make a solemn appeal: On the basis of the one-China principle, let us discuss a formal end to the state of hostility between the two sides, reach a peace agreement, construct a framework for peaceful development of cross-Straits relations, and thus usher in a new phase of peaceful development. The 1.3 billion people on the mainland and the 23 million people in Taiwan are of the same blood and **share a common destiny**."

Here, it is obvious that the reference is made to describe the relationship between the Mainland China and Taiwan. The concept was used by Hu to signify that people of Taiwan and Mainland China belong to one family. As Beijing considers Taiwan a part of China, it can be said that the use of this concept was restricted to China's domestic affairs at that time. However, only four years later, the usage of the concept changed from domestic relations to international relations. This change took place in China's White Paper on peaceful development in 2011. According to the White Paper [13]:

"Countries of different systems and different types and at various development stages are in a state of mutual dependence, with their interests intertwined. This has turned the world into a **community of common destiny** in which the members are closely interconnected. The international community should reject the zero-sum game which was a product of the old international relations, the dangerous cold and hot war mentality, and all those beaten tracks which repeatedly led mankind to confrontation and war. It should find new perspectives from the angle of the community of common destiny—sharing weal and woe and pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation, exploring new ways to enhance exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations, identifying new dimensions

in the common interests and values of mankind, and looking for new ways to handle multiple challenges through cooperation among countries and realize inclusive development.”

This was the first time that the concept was used to signify the relationship among the countries of the world. The focus clearly shifted from domestic to international relations, and the world was treated as one family.

Most interestingly, we can see that the two different usages of the CSFM concept coexist in the 18th Party Congress report presented by Hu Jintao in 2012. Section X of the report states that “the compatriots on both sides belong to the same Chinese nation and form a **community of common destiny** bound by blood ties; and we have every reason to care about and trust each other, jointly advance cross-Straits relations, and share in the fruits of development” [14]. In this section, the concept was used to highlight the relationship between Mainland China and Taiwan. It is obviously the same usage of the concept as that of Hu’s 17th Party Congress report of 2007. However, Section XI of the same report states, “in promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, we should raise awareness about **human beings sharing a community of common destiny**. A country should accommodate the legitimate concerns of others when pursuing its own interests; and it should promote common development of all countries when advancing its own development” [14]. It is clear that this section provides the same usage of the concept as that of China’s White of 2011. Here, the concept refers to the international community as one family. Actually, it was the earliest full expression of today’s developed form of the CSFM concept.

2.2. Xi Jinping and CSFM

The evolution and enrichment of the CSFM concept achieved great impetus after Xi Jinping became the president of China in 2012. President Xi strongly advocated and actively promoted the concept at major international forums including the G20 Summit, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the Boao Forum and the UN General Assembly. In September 2015, Xi introduced and explained the concept to the world community for the first time in his speech titled “Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” during the 70th session of the UN General Assembly. In the speech, Xi [15] put forward five major ways in which the CSFM concept should be realized: one, building a partnership in which countries treat each other as equals, mutually consult each other and mutually understand each other; two, creating a security mechanism characterized by justice, fairness, joint contribution and shared benefits; three, promoting inclusive, innovative and open development that equally benefits all the countries; four, promoting cultural exchange characterized by inclusiveness, harmony and respect for differences; five, building an ecosystem where green development and care for Mother Nature should be the priority. According to Zhao [8], CSFM advocates for partnership in the world as opposed to Hegemon, and therefore, CSFM should be viewed as a global outlook and not as a subjective concept.

An interesting aspect of the evolution of the CSFM concept under Xi is the changing official English translation of the Chinese name of the concept. There has been three official English translations of the concept *renlei mingyun gongtongti*: one, community of common destiny for mankind; two, community of shared destiny for mankind; three, community of shared future for mankind. Among these, the original and most popular official translation was “community of common destiny for mankind”. However, a number of Chinese analysts and scholars pointed out that the term “common destiny” carries a negative connotation as it refers to death, which is the inevitable fate of all human beings. Therefore, the term “common destiny” was eventually replaced by “shared future”, which carries much more positive connotations [16]. Building a shared future forms the core principle of CSFM, making it an ideal framework for addressing challenges that include security and justice [17].

Rao and Lin [18], argue that, under Xi, the CSFM concept evolved from “community” to “community of common destiny” then to “community of shared future for mankind”. They identify three stages of the development of the CSFM concept under Xi. According to them, the first stage took place in 2012, which involved an explanation of the relationship between the CSFM concept and peaceful development. The second stage commenced in 2013 and involved the promotion and propagation of the ideas and values of the CSFM concept to the international community. In the third stage, the CSFM concept was linked to the shared values of human society. In their ultimate analysis, they arrive at the conclusion that the CSFM concept has become mature. They base their conclusion on two signs. First, the foundational values of the CSFM concept are formed by linking it with the shared values of human society such as freedom, justice, fairness, democracy, development and peace. Second, the CSFM concept proposes concrete plans and realistic approach for the realization of the community of shared future for mankind. CSFM offers an alternative system of relationships and a working framework that has the potential to bridge the existing global challenges. Liang & Zhang [17], identifies the fact that CSFM has an end goal of fostering equity, securing the world, creating political harmony and using amicable solutions to conflicts across the globe.

Similar to Rao and Lin, Chen [19] also suggests three stages of the development of the CSFM concept. During the first stage, according to [19], the CSFM concept was put forward and raised to the height of Chinese diplomatic affairs in 2012. At this stage, the scope of the CSFM concept was limited to the idea of a “win-win” situation for all. The concept was vague, and nobody clearly knew what CSFM was and how it should be implemented. Chen argues that, in the second stage, President Xi provided answers to these two questions and elaborated the CSFM concept at various international platforms. The CSFM concept was refined through Xi’s efforts for the practical implementation of the concept by putting forward a “community of shared future for China and Latin America”, a “community of shared future for China and Arab world” and a “community of shared future for China and Africa”. Chen suggests that the CSFM concept entered the third stage when President Xi explained it at the UN in 2015. Xi’s remarks at the UN in 2015 integrated China’s key diplomatic concepts into a single system. Unlike Rao and Lin, Chen is of the opinion that the CSFM concept still requires further enrichment and improvement.

Syed Akbaruddin [20], a senior diplomat who was India’s permanent representative to the UN when President Xi explained the CSFM concept in the UN General Assembly in 2015, comments that the concept “appeared vague” and “not many paid attention” at that time but that “things have changed since”. After the introduction of the concept in UN in 2015, Xi tirelessly continued to explain and disambiguate the concept through his writings, remarks and speeches. A tremendous expansion in the scope of the CSFM concept has been witnessed. The CSFM concept and its derivatives have been used by President Xi in order to refer to a variety of topics ranging from regions (such as the Arab world, Latin America, Asia and Africa), organizations (such as ASEAN, the G20 and Shanghai Cooperation Organization), bilateral relations (such as China–Vietnam, China–Pakistan, China–Kazakhstan, China–Uzbekistan and China–Belarus), domestic relations (such as Taiwan and Mainland China relations), to global issues (such as nuclear security and cyberspace). The adoption of the CSFM concept and its derivatives by Chinese government and corporate sectors is a clear indication of the immense diversification of the concept. The Yunnan Wenshan Bureau of China Tobacco, a Chinese state-owned enterprise, proposed the concept of “community of shared future for industry, business and retails” [21]. It is an initiative for the improved coordination and shared prosperity of the three stakeholders of the tobacco industry (i.e., industrial enterprises, commercial enterprises and retail customers). Likewise, the Fujian Federation of Industry and Commerce, the Fujian Higher People’s Court, the Fujian Banking Insurance Bureau, the Fujian Financial Work Office and the Fujian Provincial Public Security Department announced their plans to build a “community of shared future for Fujian’s banks, insurance and business enterprises” [22]. It is a proposal to build a strong productive relationship among insurance companies,

business enterprises and banks so that an effective “financial ecosystem” can be created and the “problem of financial resource allocation can be systematically resolved”. It is obvious that all these varied usages of the CSFM concept revolve around the central idea that all the stakeholders should work together in order to attain shared prosperity. Paulo [23], identifies that the global development will only be accomplished through international cooperation. This tenet is shared by CSFM, making it a critical tool for global cooperation and prosperity.

3. Philosophical Foundation of the CSFM Concept

The CSFM concept became a dominant part of the Chinese state policy in the 21st century and the world at large has come to know about it over the last decade. However, the roots of the CSFM concept can be traced back to three major philosophical thoughts: Marxism, Confucianism and the philosophical teachings of Mencius.

3.1. *Marxism and CSFM*

Marxism refers to the doctrine put forward by the 19th century German philosopher Karl Marx and, to a lesser extent, by Friedrich Engels [24]. In its original form, Marxism consists of three major interrelated ideas: a theory of history, a philosophical anthropology and a political and economic program. It provides a materialistic interpretation of the development of history, commonly known as historical materialism, in order to explain social conflict and the relationship between classes [25]. Moreover, it views social transformation from the perspective of dialectics. With the passage of time, Marxism has been developed into a number of variant schools of thought such as Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, Trotskyism, Structural Marxism, Neo-Marxism, etc.

Prominent scholars, particularly Chinese scholars of Marxism [1,26–28], are of the opinion that the CSFM concept inherits and develops Marxist philosophical thought. It is obvious that the CSFM concept is greatly influenced by Marx’s concept of “free association of the producers”. The CSFM concept sees the conflicts among nations as the biggest hurdle in the way of social development. It urges the world community to settle their conflicts through peaceful means and entirely focus on the improvement of the living conditions of the people [8]. Under the influence of the Marxist spirit, the CSFM concept highlights that the goal of prosperity can only be achieved if mankind unites as free and equal members of the community of a shared future. Another important element of Marxism that can be traced in the CSFM concept is Marx’s theory of world history. As it is evident from the speeches of President Xi, as in Marxism, the CSFM concept is also based on materialistic interpretation of history. The materialistic nature of man as identified by Marx is the source of contradictions and problems that man faces today [25]. In addition to historical materialism, the CSFM concept and Marx’s theory of world history share the idea of national equality, anti-Eurocentrism and a holistic view of things [28]. Application of the CSFM is therefore an application of the Marxist rhetoric of placing humanity at the center of man’s exploits, as opposed to having materialism as the focus of the human exploitation.

The cornerstone of Marx’s writings is his critique of philosophy, particularly that of the idealist philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel [29]. Marx’s critique of philosophy, however, should not be misunderstood as the denial of philosophy. Rather, he is of the opinion that philosophy should become reality. Instead of merely interpreting the world, we should seek to transform the world, which involves not only the transformation of the world itself but also that of the human consciousness [30]. The spirit of Marx’s idea of transformation of the world is the major driving force behind the CSFM concept. Currently, mankind is facing serious problems such as poverty, hunger, oppression, war, pollution and a lack of cybersecurity. We have been interpreting and analyzing these problems for a long time, but we are still far away from finding a solution to them. The CSFM concept proposes the solution to the problems of mankind through transformation. It urges for a transformation from a zero-sum game to win-win cooperation, from confrontation to peaceful coexistence,

from alienation to inclusiveness and from poverty, hunger and miseries to shared prosperity and development.

Dialectics is an important element of Marx's philosophical thought. Marx [31] p. 108; Marx & Engels [32] p. 133; Crocker [33] p. 558, argues that "what constitutes dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category". Contradiction is the most essential aspect of Marx's dialectics. It sees everything as a unity of mutually exclusive opposites or contradictions. The world can be seen as a unity of contradictions. It is composed of different countries, and these countries are at the same time dependent on and opposed to one another. Thus, among countries, there is a cooperation in competition and competition in cooperation. Similarly, the people of the world have varied civilizations, cultures and histories that lead to numerous conflicts and contradictions. As Marxism understands the contradictions as a driving force of development, the CSFM concept does not see the contradictions among nations as a threat to their cooperation for the achievement of a prosperous world. Under the influence of Marxist spirit, President Xi [34] p. 544, argues that "there is no superior or inferior civilization, only distinctive features and different regions. Differences among civilizations should not be a source of conflict, but a driving force for the progress of human civilization". The CSFM concept, therefore, seeks harmony and progress in diversity. Since mankind shares a common future, the CSFM concept urges all the countries of the world to address their mutual conflicts, promote cultural exchange and integration, share diverse experiences and understandings with one another and make collective efforts for global economic development and prosperity.

The interconnectedness of all things is another important aspect of Marx's dialectics. In addition to the negation of abstract affirmations, Marx opposes the analysis of phenomena in isolation. Contrary to past philosophies, Marx's dialectics sees nature as a connected whole. Instead of treating phenomena as isolated parts, he sees their interconnectedness. It then follows that to understand even one part we must understand the whole and the way in which the various parts connect with each other. Therefore, Marx, "instead of making abstract affirmations about a whole group of problems", analyzes "each problem in its dynamic relation to others and, above all, tries to relate them to historical, social, political, and economic realities" [29]. The CSFM concept follows the Marxist concept of the interconnectedness of things. The concept suggests three kinds of interconnectedness. One, it proposes the interconnectedness between the Earth and mankind. According to this concept, Earth is the only inhabitable place for mankind, and the fate of the mankind is interconnected with that of the Earth. The destruction of Earth is the destruction of mankind. Therefore, the concept urges the world community to care for the Mother Earth, "build a sound global eco-environment", and "firmly pursue green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable development" [15]. Two, the CSFM concept stands for the interconnectedness among nations. It proposes that, in the present age of globalization, all the nations of the world are linked and thereby affect one another. No country in the world can achieve actual and long-lasting prosperity, peace and security if another country is facing poverty, war and terrorism. Therefore, the world community should join hands and work together to achieve shared global peace, prosperity and development [15]. Three, the CSFM concept suggests that economy, politics, environment, culture and security are interconnected. That is why it lays down a holistic scheme for the ultimate prosperity of mankind. It does not focus on a single factor but encompasses all the major factors relevant to mankind, namely economy, politics, environment, culture and security.

3.2. *Confucianism and CSFM*

Confucianism is the philosophical thought proposed by Confucius, famous Chinese thinker, philosopher and politician, in 5th–6th century BC [35]. Confucianism is understood as a way of life, a scholarly tradition, a worldview, a political ideology and a social ethic that greatly influenced not only China but also other countries such as Japan, Vietnam and Korea for more than 2000 years [36]. Confucius sought to revitalize the past in the present

and future. His fascination for the past was based on “his strong desire to understand why certain life forms and institutions, such as reverence for ancestors, human-centered religious practices, and mourning ceremonies, had survived for centuries” [37]. During the inquiry, he traced its roots to the basic human need for communication and belongingness. Confucius viewed himself “as a conservationist responsible for the continuity of the cultural values and the social norms that had worked so well for the idealized civilization of the Western Zhou dynasty” [37].

The CSFM concept clearly manifests the influence of Confucianism. According to Confucius, “the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others” [38] p. 72. In the context of CSFM concept, this is one of the important Confucian principles. This principle suggests that a virtuous individual would not care for the well-being and prosperity of himself only but would rather seek to extend his prosperity and well-being to others. The CSFM concept adopts this principle and extends its scope to the national and international levels. The concept proposes that a country should not contend itself with its own development and prosperity but should rather seek to share its prosperity with other nations [15]. In fact, the CSFM concept represents China’s wish to share the fruits of its recent steady progress with other nations in general and with the developing nations in particular.

Confucius suggests that you should not “do to others as you would not wish done to yourself” [38] p. 188. This is another Confucian principle that is relevant to the CSFM concept. In the CSFM concept, the scope of this principle is also extended to international level. Throughout the human history, the zero-sum game has been the dominant trend. Powerful nations have been colonizing, subjugating and exploiting the weak nations. The CSFM concept can be seen as a reaction to the zero-sum game mentality, which is based on the law of jungle [39]. Since no country wishes to be colonized, exploited or subjected to injustice, it should not colonize, exploit or subject other countries to injustice. The CSFM concept proposes to build a world community in which every country respect the sovereignty of every other country, no country interfere in domestic affairs of other country, all countries are treated as equal partners no matter their size or strength, the relationship among countries is based on justice and mutual cooperation and the fruits as well as responsibilities of development and security are mutually shared [15].

Another Confucian principle which can be traced in the CSFM concept is that “harmony is to be prized and diversity is valued” [38] (pp. 8, 159). In the context of international relations, this Confucian principle emphasizes inclusiveness and friendship. As mentioned earlier, the CSFM concept acknowledges and appreciates the diverse nature of the world. The concept understands that the diversity of the world makes the world colorful. Rather than a source of discord, the CSFM concept sees the diverse nature of world as a contributing factor towards the richness and prosperity of the world. The concept urges the nations to respect the civilizations of other nations, promote cultural exchange and learn from other nations [15]. In the CSFM concept, therefore, this Confucian principle translates in the form of harmony in diversity, mutual respect and pursuing shared future for mankind [40].

3.3. Mencius and CSFM

Mencius was the orthodox Confucius Chinese philosopher of the fourth century BC. He belonged to the fourth generation of the disciples of Confucius [41]. He is often referred to as the “Second Sage”, that is, second only to Confucius, for his importance and great contribution to the development, interpretation and dissemination of Confucian thought. The major themes Mencius dealt with included the goodness of human nature, theodicy, government and governance, virtue and self-cultivation [42]. Based on the known year of his birth and death, he was a contemporary of some of the greatest philosophers such as Plato, Zhuangzi, Xunzi and Gaozi.

Mencius lived during the time of Chinese history which is known as “Warring States Period” (475–221 BC). As the name suggests, it was a period of Chinese history during

which seven Chinese states were at war against each other. During this time of chaos and enmity, Mencius visited different princes and advised them to form a humane government by giving preference to the well-being of the people [43]. He emphasized that people should treat “all within the world (four seas) as their brothers” [44] p. 140. He proposed that “the poor should try to help themselves, whereas the successful should help make the world better” [44] p. 236. In addition to this, he advocated for “free trade”, “equal sharing of wealth” and “conservation of natural resources” [43]. Since it was a time of chaos and the princes of the seven warring states were interested in power, they gave no attention to his teachings. However, the CSFM concept appears to be greatly influenced by his principles of humane governance, universal brotherhood, responsibility towards the betterment of the world, free trade, equal sharing of wealth and conservation of natural resources. During the last few decades, China has emerged as one of the most flourishing economies of the world [45]. It has achieved great milestones on the path of progress and development. However, it did not contend itself with its own prosperity and progress. Rather, the CSFM concept manifests its desire to shoulder the responsibility of sharing its prosperity with other nations and making the world a better place. The CSFM concept is based on the idea of universal brotherhood as it sees all people of the world as one community irrespective of their national, religious, political, racial, cultural and lingual affiliations. Likewise, the well-being of the people of the world is the ultimate objective of the CSFM concept, whereas free trade, equal sharing of wealth and conservation of natural resources are the basic principles through which this objective will be achieved [15].

4. Implications and Conclusions

4.1. Research Implications

There is an association between CSFM and philosophical thoughts of Marxism, Confucianism and Mencius as revealed in this research. The grounding of CSFM in timeless philosophical concepts answers the question of the legitimacy of the CSFM concept. It exonerates CSFM from being perceived as a political and propaganda tool of the China in its expansionist ambitions and makes it an objective framework through which the world can construe its future. Our present research views the CSFM concept from a relatively new perspective and, thereby, expands the horizon for possible future research on the concept. It draws the attention of the scholars towards the relatively ignored philosophical aspect of the CSFM concept which has a great potential for further inquiry.

Viewing the CSFM concept as an idea that is the outcome of a fusion of the West and the East sides of the geopolitical divide is also an important area of future research highlighted by our present article. Marxists’ philosophical thought is largely attributed to the West with Karl Marx, who is the father of Marxism and a European protégé [46]. On the other hand, Mencius and Confucianism are predominantly Eastern philosophical thoughts, originating in China and other Asiatic countries [47]. Further, the juxtaposition of Western and Eastern philosophy gives birth to a hybrid of concepts that borrows the best of both hemispheres and embodies them as CSFM.

Current frameworks of global governance have failed to mitigate myriads of challenges that the world is facing. CSFM offers a fresh perspective on the way that the world should address different challenges and aspects that are critical to the future of mankind. Most significant among these perspectives are the concepts of free association, inclusiveness, harmony in diversity, interconnectedness, sharing of prosperity and universality of human need and destiny. These concepts offer meaningful insights that should be applied and explored in the global problem-solving frameworks.

4.2. Conclusions

The CSFM concept is a comprehensive Chinese proposal for a better future of mankind. It is based on the principle of win-win cooperation among nations, negation of the zero-sum game mentality, non-interference in the domestic affairs of nations, respect for other’s sovereignty, equality, inclusiveness, peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange and shared

progress and prosperity. Initially, Chinese president Hu Jintao conceived the concept for domestic use. He used the concept to signify that the people of mainland China and Taiwan belong to one family. However, the usage of the concept was later extended from domestic to international affairs. Although Hu Jintao conceived the CSFM concept, it is president Xi Jinping who became its greatest advocate. Under Xi, the concept evolved into one of most influential, dominant and diverse concepts of international relations.

The CSFM concept is seen as a 21st century Chinese idea for the prosperity of the world. However, the roots of the concept can be traced back to a much earlier time in history. It is based on three major philosophical thoughts: Marxism, Confucianism and the philosophy of Mencius. In the article, we showed that the CSFM concept is greatly influenced by Marx's ideas such as transformation of the world, free association of producers, historical materialism and dialectics. We also pointed a number of Confucius principles that are adopted by the CSFM concept. The CSFM concept not only adopts Confucius principles but also extends their scope from individual to international relations. Similarly, we also saw that the CSFM concept is influenced by Mencius' concepts such as universal brotherhood, responsibility towards the betterment of the world, humane governance, free trade, equal sharing of wealth and conservation of natural resources.

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