

The Global South and China's Vision of Shared Destiny: Between Promise and Pragmatism

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Abstract:

This study critically examines China's concept of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) as a normative vision for global governance, focusing on its implications for the Global South. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist methodology grounded in Global IR and Constructivist theory, the study analyzes key Chinese official speeches, policy documents, and scholarly interpretations. It also engages Confucian ethics and civilizational discourse to explore the cultural underpinnings of CSFM.

The study is structured in three parts: the conceptual and philosophical foundations of CSFM; the development and governance opportunities it offers to Global South states; and the tools used to implement it, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative. A comparative analysis with the Western liberal order highlights differences in norms, sovereignty principles, and power dynamics.

The study concludes that CSFM offers a potentially inclusive alternative for Global South engagement, though its success depends on China's ability to address debt, governance, and strategic asymmetry. Three future scenarios and strategic recommendations are proposed for Global South policymakers.

Keywords: community of shared future; Belt and Road Initiative; Global South; global governance; China foreign policy; South-South cooperation

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل مفهوم مجتمع المصير المشترك للبشرية (CSFM) الذي تطرحه الصين كتصور معياري بديل لنظام الحوكمة العالمية، مع التركيز على انعكاساته على دول الجنوب العالمي، تتبنى الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً تفسيرياً يستند إلى نظريات العلاقات الدولية العالمية (Global IR) والمقاربة البنائية، وتعتمد على تحليل بعض نصوص الخطب الرسمية الصينية، والوثائق السياسية، والدراسات الأكاديمية، إلى جانب توظيف الأخلاقيات الكونفوشية والخطاب الحضاري لفهم الأسس الثقافية للمفهوم.

تنقسم الدراسة إلى ثلاثة محاور: الجذور النظرية والفلسفية لمفهوم CSFM ؛ الفرص التي يوفرها للدول النامية في مجالات التمويل التنموي، والأمن وإصلاح الحوكمة؛ والآليات التي تستخدمها الصين لتحقيق هذه الرؤية، مثل مبادرة الحزام والطريق ومبادرة التنمية العالمية، كما تُجري الدراسة مقارنة بين CSFM والنموذج الليبرالي الغربي من حيث السيادة، والمعايير، وبُنى القوة.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن CSFM يمثل إطاراً واعدًا وشاملاً لدول الجنوب، بشرط معالجة تحديات الديون والحوكمة وعدم التوازن الاستراتيجي، وتُختتم الدراسة بثلاثة سيناريوهات مستقبلية، إلى جانب توصيات استراتيجية لصناع القرار في الجنوب العالمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

مجتمع المصير المشترك؛ مبادرة الحزام والطريق؛ الجنوب العالمي؛ الحوكمة العالمية؛ السياسة الخارجية الصينية؛ تعاون الجنوب- الجنوب.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the “community of shared future of humankind” is one of the most important concepts of Chinese President Xi Jinping's worldview. It has also become a cornerstone of China's current foreign policy, the idea of ‘community of shared future’ can be understood as a world defined by mutual cooperation, a new type of international relations based on win-win cooperation, mutual respect for development paths; promoting the common development of all countries, maintaining the unity and stability of all countries and peoples of the world, the need to hold together in difficult times, sharing rights and assuming obligations, and promoting the common interests of mankind.

The concept of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) has emerged as one of the most significant pillars of China's contemporary foreign policy under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Positioned as a vision for a more inclusive, cooperative, and multipolar world order, CSFM reflects China's broader efforts to reshape global governance and offer alternative development pathways, particularly for the Global South. Unlike traditional international frameworks often dominated by Western liberal norms, CSFM emphasizes mutual respect for sovereignty, diversified development models, win-win cooperation, and shared responsibility for global challenges.

For countries in the Global South, long marginalized within the structures of global governance, China's promotion of CSFM presents both tangible opportunities and complex dilemmas. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), and China's pandemic assistance mechanisms have been positioned as practical expressions of the CSFM vision, aimed at enhancing connectivity, development financing, and regional integration. At the same time, debates persist regarding the long-term implications of Chinese partnerships, particularly concerning issues of strategic dependency, debt sustainability, and governance standards.

This study critically examines the relationship between the Community of Shared Future and Global South development, with a focus on the mechanisms China employs and the opportunities that arise for developing states. It interrogates how CSFM is constructed as a normative global governance vision, how it aligns with or diverges from Western models of international cooperation, and how it shapes new spaces for development, autonomy, and South–South solidarity. By unpacking both the ideological foundations and practical applications of CSFM, this research contributes to understanding how emerging Chinese frameworks intersect with the aspirations and challenges of the Global South in a shifting world order.

Research Problem

In an era of shifting global power, the Western liberal international order faces increasing contestation from emerging governance models. China's **Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM)**, championed by President Xi Jinping, proposes an alternative rooted in cooperative sovereignty, development equity, and South–South solidarity. Despite its prominence in Chinese diplomacy, academic analysis of CSFM's practical implications, especially for the Global South, remains underdeveloped. This research addresses the knowledge gap by critically assessing the mechanisms, opportunities, and limitations of CSFM in advancing Global South development, sovereignty, and international influence.

Research Objectives

1. To unpack the philosophical, normative, and policy foundations of the **Community of Shared Future for Mankind**, situating it within Chinese foreign policy and Global International Relations (IR) discourse.
2. To identify and analyze the specific mechanisms through which CSFM is operationalized, including the **Belt and Road Initiative**, **Global Development Initiative**, and pandemic assistance.

3. To critically assess the potential opportunities CSFM offers for the Global South, in areas such as inclusive development, security, and global governance reform.
4. To compare CSFM's governance model with the liberal, interdependence-driven Western order, highlighting key differences in norms, instruments, and power dynamics.
5. To present future scenarios for CSFM's global evolution and offer strategic recommendations for Global South states to engage with China while safeguarding national autonomy.

Research Question

Primary Question:

- How does China's "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" reshape global governance, and what realistic opportunities and challenges does it present for the Global South?

Sub-Questions:

1. What philosophical and normative principles underpin CSFM, and how do they contrast with liberal global governance models?
2. Through what practical mechanisms does China aim to implement CSFM, particularly concerning development finance, security, and South–South cooperation?
3. To what extent can CSFM enhance policy space, resources, and agency for Global South countries?
4. What risks are related to debt sustainability, strategic asymmetry, or governance standards accompany CSFM engagement?
5. What are plausible future trajectories for CSFM's role in global governance, and how can Global South actors strategically navigate them?

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist methodology grounded in Global International Relations (Global IR) theory and Constructivist approaches within the discipline of International Relations. The analysis seeks to understand how China constructs and promotes the *Community of Shared Future for Mankind* (CSFM) as a normative vision for global governance, particularly in relation to the Global South. Drawing on Constructivist assumptions, the research examines how ideas, identities, and discourses shape international interactions, focusing on the role of Chinese narratives, official documents, and policy instruments in advancing CSFM as an alternative to the Western-dominated liberal order.

In addition to Constructivist IR tools, the study engages with Chinese philosophical traditions, specifically Confucian ethics and broader civilizational discourses, to unpack the cultural and ideological foundations underpinning CSFM. This cultural lens is essential for understanding how China frames its vision as rooted in historical, moral, and civilizational continuity rather than solely material or geopolitical calculations. A qualitative textual analysis of key speeches by Chinese leaders, policy white papers, official Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) documents, and academic interpretations from both Chinese and Global South scholars forms the empirical base for this analysis.

Furthermore, the study employs a comparative framework to contrast CSFM principles, mechanisms, and global governance propositions with those of the Western liberal international order. This comparison emphasizes three primary dimensions: sovereignty and state autonomy, approaches to inclusive development, and the underlying power structures shaping global governance. By systematically contrasting CSFM with Western liberal norms, the research elucidates both the opportunities and structural tensions CSFM presents for Global South states navigating an increasingly multipolar international environment.

Answering previous questions and achieving objectives ,the paper is divided in several parts, the first part is the conceptual framework of the concept of community shared future, the second one is about the opportunities the idea provides to the global south, and the third one is about the Chinese tools to make this idea into realistic vision with acceptable tools, with some recommendations and scenarios for the concept in the future.

First Part: Conceptualizing the Community of Shared Future for Mankind.

Against the backdrop of galloping global developments in new transnational arena in which epidemics, climate change, terrorism etc destabilize the roots of the nation-state, a ‘Community of Shared Future for Mankind’ (CSFM) was conceived by Friedrich Kratochwil et al. as a novel way of developing the coopetition to break up the walls of nationalisms. This first section analyses the CSFM origins, definition, philosophical underpinnings, and wider foreign policy tint.

Origins and Definition: Xi Jinping's Vision

Chinese President Xi Jinping has formally articulated the CSFM since 2013 and prominently presented it to the UN General Assembly in 2015 encapsulating a vision of global partnership and interdependence, trying to move beyond Western-centric hegemonic models (Xi, 2017). Not only as China's preferred blueprint for the international system, but also as a reaction to perceived imbalances in existing global governance mechanisms, it is introduced. This positioning enables China to offer conceptual alternatives that side with multilateralism and, the case may be, mitigate Western dominance (Zhang, Y., 2018).

President Xi Jinping described the CSFM as acknowledging the deep connection between the futures and destinies of all peoples and nations. Xi stressed the need of collective work through common joys and hardships to turn the Earth into a harmonious home in order to realize the human dream of a better life (Xi, 2017). So, the vision of this is to go beyond national

borders and ideological boundaries to cultivate equality, sustainability, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence (Xi, 2017; Zhao, 2020). This refers to the need for nations to put the well-being of others before self interest, to promote inclusive global partnerships and to work together to resolve global challenges that are common (Callahan, 2020). Chinese officials have consistently pushed for this vision since 2012, if not for its institutionalization (Wang, 2021; Zhang, 2018).

Philosophical Underpinnings: Confucianism and Chinese Tradition

Its roots run deep into Chinese devices of thought, especially Confucianism which stresses social peace (和 , héxié), ethical behaviour to relations, and human being with nature (天人合一, tiān rén hé yī). In comparison with Western liberalism's individualism and competition, this cultural perspective is very different. China constructs the CSFM as a contemporary manifestation of immutable principles by drawing on maxims such as "all things grow without harming other things and move without conflict" (Zhang, 2018) and the belief that "when the Way prevails entire world belongs to all" (天下为公, tiān xià wèi gōng; Xi, 2017; Zhao, 2020).

This historical heritage appeal has a variety of functions. Thus, the CSFM serves to position the CSFM not as a reactive policy but as the continuation of a rich civilizational legacy. It offers a moral and harmonious normative foundation, unlike what is perceived as the Western models of conflict and self interest. At the same time, it bestows symbolic legitimacy to China's desire for global leadership based on the narrative of universal human values and civilizational contribution (Callahan, 2020; Huang, Y. 2016). These philosophical elements have been made into contemporary institutional forms and global initiatives, and some scholars have referred to them as a distinct 'Chinese theory of international relations' (Qin, 2018).

CSFM in Practice: Responding to Global Crises

CSFM principles were given a big test case in the application of COVID-19 pandemic. Guided by this concept, China provided substantial assistance to the world, including face masks, medical supplies and expert teams. It was a response that sought to promote international collaboration, mutual aid, and solidarity in the face of this shared threat, which rendered the border irrelevant (Zhao, 2020). This commitment to joint responsibility and global unity was evidenced in China's support for developing nations, such as those in Africa, through such means as debt relief and financial aid (Callahan, 2020; Wang, 2021). Xi Jinping's commitment to mutual assistance, particularly in crises, was already borne out in his 2015 UN address (Xi, 2017). The pandemic thus provided a practical dimension of the narrative of the CSFM, highlighting the interconnections among the 'global village' and the demand for collective action for the shared prosperity and well-being (Zhang, 2018).

Connecting CSFM to China's Broader Foreign Policy and Global Role

Much of China's contemporary foreign policy and its evolving role in the international system rests on the CSFM. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a practical act which physically and economically connects countries based on the large infrastructure networks, making corresponding practice for China's vision of worldwide cooperation, common development, and turning national opportunities into global opportunities (Summers, 2016; Liu & Dunford, 2016). Other examples of such concepts include "empathy and sincerity diplomacy" (Wang, 2021; Zhang, 2018) which further show how the Chinese national development goals are connected to the aspirations of partner states under the CSFM umbrella.

In this sense, this approach is connected to the broader discussion on China's rise. In support of such view, proponents argue that it mirrors a 'peaceful rise' or 'peaceful awakening', which

itself is cooperative and contribute from the view of great power expansionist behavior in the past (Zheng, 2005). The evidence of China's commitment to a stable global system is its engagement with international institutions and norms (Qin, 2018; Wang, 2021). Key diplomatic objectives related to the CSFM are framed by this:

- **Shaping Perceptions:** Countering narratives of a "China threat" by projecting an image of a responsible and cooperative major power.
- **Promoting Economic Partnership:** Highlighting the Chinese economy's strength and reliability to encourage investment and collaboration.
- **Contributing to Global Stability:** Positioning China as a constructive partner in maintaining international peace and resolving conflicts.

The CSFM also lends itself to the long-standing China bilateral and regional relationships, including those with the Arab region where BRI projects are embedded in regional development plans consistent with the concept's use in specific bilateral and regional contexts (Sun, 2021). Wang Yizhou and Qin Yaqing suggest that these relational and institutional models based on Chinese strategic culture, provide a new kind of cooperative leadership, not disruption to global order (Qin, 2018; Wang, 2021).

Second Part: Opportunities For the Global South Via CSFM

By leveraging a CSFM framework strategically, it forms several potential opportunities for nations in the Global South that seek to manage the complexity of the contemporary international order and promote equitable development. The opportunities in these various areas, extended security concepts, expanded development financing and enhanced multilateralism represent something quite new.

An Alternative Participatory Global Model

A unique conceptual framework of international relations based on cooperation rather than conflict, the CSFM may be an

additional factor for the gradual transition from a unipolar or Western centric system to a multipolar world order. Because of the CSFM narrative, developing countries marginalized in traditional global institutions have a vision for a more inclusive and participatory alternative. These issues include championing joint development opportunities (often through funding mechanisms and partnerships wherein the nature of the conditionality is perceived to be less than in typical Western aid structures). In this respect, the CSFM discourse creates the space for reimagining the Western understandings of sovereignty, globalisation, and international justice (Mahbubani, 2020).

Support for Inclusive Development Finance and Capacity Building

One major appeal of the CSFM for the Global South is the fact that it could help bridge the well-noted North-South development gap. This forms the basis of Chinese efforts to secure investment in key infrastructure and technology transfer, as well as clean energy projects. It is crucial however that it frequently serves as an alternative to the economic and political conditionalities normally central to Western led international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. According to China, it supports a development model of mutual respect and non interference in internal affairs (Liu & Chen, 2024). This approach is illustrated by such instruments as BRI and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which can serve as material resources for the solution of long-term challenges of uneven development, notably in infrastructure, in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In addition, China actively pushes for technology transfer, digitalization, as well as renewable energy projects through its CSFM aligned partnerships. Countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have examples such as the affirmation of 'smart industrial zones,' 'digital corridors,' and solar energy projects (Zhou, 2024). Such projects seek not only to spur short term economic development, but to raise the long term productive capabilities of partner nations in the hope that they will require less single commodity or rentier

economies. Engagement with BRI projects is related to better infrastructure and growth indicators in participating countries (Callahan, 2024). Through providing financial and technical support that is often deemed as free of political strings, China can potentially give Global South states more developmental sovereignty and autonomy in their policy choices.

Expanding the Concept of Comprehensive Security

As they advocate for a broader understanding of security and a paradigm that goes beyond merely military and state-centric defence issues, China handles the security problems within the CSFM. The expanded concept includes the dimensions that are not traditionally considered as security dimensions, such as health security, food security, climate security, and digital security (Zhao, 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2024). It arises because threats to the contemporary world are often contingent on borders that do not exist and are not amenable to being resolved by hard power alone. It is a glaring example of the COVID-19 pandemic that has shown the world's vulnerability and spurred calls for more comprehensive approaches that put human and social security, as well as state security, on top.

That is consistent with the notion of common security in the interest of mankind, defined as preventive international cooperation, and rejection of the militarization of international relations on the basis of polarization. China suggests that relations based on transparency, solidarity and sharing of expertise are needed in the face of transnational challenges. Instead, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) along with other BRI complementary initiatives are described as security cooperation platforms based on joint development rather than tools of hegemony (Xi, 2022; Wang, 2024). This multidimensional security approach takes up the causes of instability at their roots: such as poverty, inequalities, environmental degradation, with international mechanisms on the responsibility for crises shared and laying a foundation for a new begins for order beyond polarization but more inclusive governance (Callahan, 2024; WHO-China, 2023).

Promoting Multilateralism and Global Governance Reform

As a counterpoint to perceived US unilateralism, CSFM inherently supports multilateralism and calls for the serious reform of the existing global governance system so as not to overrepresent the use and interests of the inherited global order, this is almost always held by emerging economies and the Global South. This call is an echo to many developing nations and sparks a global discussion of the need for an international system that is more representative and equitable (Wang & Patel, 2024). Continuous efforts are being made by China to reform the UN Security Council and the IMF so developing countries can have more say in global decision-making.

In addition, China promotes a system of global governance based on administrative efficiency and economic efficiency, as demonstrated, in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), for example. Consensual decision making based on shared interests rather than hierarchical structures or ideological alignment is the tendency in China when they promote it on these forums (Ahmed, 2024). In that sense, this commitment towards 'inclusive multilateralism' potentially provides attractive alternative institutional frameworks to global south countries looking for different governance models beyond traditional western one.

Third part: Mechanisms and Instruments for implementing CSFM.

To translate the broad vision of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) into tangible outcomes, China employs a diverse array of strategic mechanisms and instruments. These span economic, developmental, security, diplomatic, and normative domains, collectively aimed at fostering interdependence and promoting China's conception of global order.

3.1 The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Economic Interdependence Platform

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stands as a flagship instrument for realizing the CSFM. Launched to create integrated global infrastructure networks, the BRI promotes economic interdependence and shared development through extensive investments in transport, energy, and communications infrastructure across more than 140 participating countries. By physically and economically linking nations, the BRI embodies China's approach to global cooperation. Studies suggest potential developmental benefits; for instance, the World Bank (2020) estimated the BRI could contribute to significant poverty reduction in some developing nations, reinforcing the initiative's role in operationalizing the CSFM's development dimension (Liu & Zhao, 2024; World Bank, 2020).

3.2 The Global Development Initiative (GDI): Fostering Sustainable Development

Introduced in 2021, the Global Development Initiative (GDI) serves as a key mechanism for advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the context of challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The GDI focuses on bridging global development divides by mobilizing resources and cooperation in critical areas such as poverty reduction, food security, health, climate action, digitalization, and infrastructure. As an extension of the CSFM, the GDI underscores China's commitment to promoting balanced, equitable, and sustainable development globally, a theme President Xi Jinping highlighted at the UN in September 2021 (Chen, 2024; United Nations, 2021).

3.3 The Global Security Initiative (GSI): Towards Collective and Cooperative Security

Complementing the economic and developmental pillars, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) articulates China's vision for international security under the CSFM framework. The GSI

advocates for respecting state sovereignty and territorial integrity, adhering to non-interference in internal affairs, and prioritizing peaceful dispute resolution over confrontation. Proposed amidst growing international tensions, the GSI offers an alternative security paradigm to traditional military alliances, emphasizing common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. It has garnered interest from several Global South countries seeking to enhance their strategic autonomy outside existing security blocs (Zhao, 2023; Rajan & Lee, 2024).

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

China actively utilizes soft power and cultural diplomacy to enhance the appeal and understanding of the CSFM vision globally. Instruments include the network of Confucius Institutes, provision of medical aid (as seen during the pandemic), operating international media outlets like CGTN, and hosting major international sporting and cultural events. These efforts aim to cultivate a positive image of China, foster intercultural understanding, and project a global narrative emphasizing multiculturalism and harmony, potentially countering Western cultural influence within the CSFM framework (Nye, 2021; Fang & Wang, 2025).

Bilateral Investments and South-South Financial Cooperation

Beyond large-scale initiatives, China leverages bilateral partnerships, particularly with Global South nations. This includes financing infrastructure projects and providing concessional loans through institutions like the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Furthermore, China champions South-South cooperation as a core component of the CSFM, aligning with demands from developing countries for a more just and representative global economic system and providing alternative sources of development finance (Singh & Bello, 2025; AIIB Report, 2024).

Leveraging Multilateral Platforms (BRICS, SCO)

China strategically engages with and promotes multilateral organizations such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and new members) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These platforms are viewed as vehicles for shaping international norms and practices consistent with the CSFM, offering alternatives to the established Western-led liberal order. Within these groupings, China advocates for governance models based on consensus, mutual benefit, and cooperation rather than hierarchy or hegemony, thereby constructing a counter-narrative to unilateralism (Kozlova & Ahmed, 2024; BRICS Summit Report, 2025).

Technological Diplomacy and the Digital Silk Road

Technological innovation is increasingly central to China's implementation of the CSFM. Promoting advancements in areas like 5G networks, artificial intelligence (AI), and smart city development, China aims to foster global digital interconnectivity. The Digital Silk Road (DSR) initiative, often considered a technological dimension of the BRI, focuses on providing digital infrastructure and capabilities to partner countries, particularly in the Global South. This is coupled with advocacy for global digital governance systems perceived as fair and unbiased (Tang & Roberts, 2025; Digital Silk Road Forum, 2024).

Normative Diplomacy and Moral Discourse

Finally, China employs normative diplomacy, constructing a moral discourse centered on principles like justice, mutual respect, non-interference, and peaceful development. This narrative positions China as a major developing country advocating for reforms to rectify imbalances in the existing international system, contrasting its approach with perceived power politics or interventionism. This discourse serves to mobilize international support, particularly among Global South nations, and build ideological alignment around the CSFM's core tenets (Buzan, 2025; Li & Ortega, 2024).

Fourth Part: CSFM versus the Liberal International Order: A comparative analysis.

Other places have positioned the CSFM as an alternative to the current Western-led liberal international order. To understand its potential impact, we have to compare both its core tenets, its approaches to governance, its instruments of influence, as well as its orientation towards the Global South with those of the liberal interdependence model.

Foundational Philosophies and Values

There is a fundamental divergence that arises from different philosophies. Western views commonly favour liberal ideas as individual rights, democracy and the free market capitalism, to be often seen as universal values, vital for the international order. From this perspective, multilateralism is often dependent on the liberal norms. In contrast to that, the CSFM is based on the strong collectivist Confucian traditions stressing social harmony, stability, state sovereignty and common development. Such a form of multilateralism explicitly rejects the imposition of a single path to developmental or political modernization and has a special respect for civilizational diversity.

Approaches to Global Governance and Sovereignty

Typically, the Western approach maintains the post World War II liberal order based on institutions, largely created and led by the Western powers. This order is often seen as the easiest route to advocate for one rules based system while perpetuating Western dominance. However, unlike its counterpart, China's CSFM explicitly advocates for reform of the international system to establish a 'fair and reasonable world order' which provides more representation and voice for developing countries and the Global South. This is centred on a very strong emphasis on the principle of non interference in internal affairs and the sovereign equality of states vis-à-vis perceived Western interventionism or conditional engagement predicated on domestic political systems.

Instruments of Influence: Economic vs. Political/Military

Different tools are preferred in shaping the international environment. In fact, western powers typically use a mix of political alliances (e.g., NATO), military power, economic sanctions, and conditional aid offered through international financial institutions (IFIs) where they have strong influence. In its efforts to promote the CSFM, China relies on the most important economic instruments (BRI investments, Global Development initiative (GDI) projects, AIIB financing), development assistance, soft power initiatives (cultural diplomacy, media outreach), and economic statecraft. This divergence in influence patterns may be illustrated as being the dual outcomes for the Western case based on 'hard' political/military or conditional economic power and for the Chinese, more 'soft' economic interdependence, less conditional development partnerships.

Framing the Role of the Global South

The two visions often also envision the role and agency of the Global South quite differently. Global South countries sometimes appeared in the remit of traditional Western frameworks as sites of aid recipients; contest arenas in geopolitical competition; or even as states to be tutored in liberal norms. Such an argument, however, is actively seeking to position the Global South as a key partner and stakeholder, in positioning a multipolar future. The China vision is reflected in many developing nations that feel marginalized in the status quo because it places a greater emphasis on South cooperation and on raising representations in global governance. China puts forward the image of itself as a fellow developing country working with the South to create a more humane and egalitarian system.

Problems from these contrasting approaches are summarized in Table 1, and each presents a different view on important global challenges and preferred pathways for dealing with them, especially with regard to the Global South.

Table 1. representing the difference between Western interdependence and Chinese Common future of mankind

Category	Challenges	Opportunities	The Chinese Vision	Western Vision
Economic Challenges	- Significant economic disparities between developed countries and the Global South.	- Promote economic co-operation among developing countries.	- China advocates a more inclusive global economic model that promotes the sustainable development of developing countries.	- A Western vision that emphasizes the promotion of free markets and fair trade with an emphasis on economic competitiveness.
Social Challenges	- Gaps in education and healthcare.	- Improving education and healthcare in developing countries through international cooperation.	- China focuses on promoting a level playing field through joint development projects and infrastructure in the Global South.	- The Western model assumes promoting human rights through democracy and social policies that support equality.
Political Challenges	- Lack of international consensus on issues such as security and global governance.	- Enhancing international cooperation in addressing global issues such as climate change and security.	- China calls for reforming the global governance system in line with the interests of developing countries and promoting international stability.	- The West advocates democracy and human rights as the basis for global governance while enforcing policies that support the values of freedom and pluralism.
Environmental Opportunities	- Climate change and its impacts on developing regions.	- Strengthening environmental co-operation between countries to promote sustainability and protect the global environment.	- China promotes a green development model and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Global South.	- The West focuses on reducing carbon emissions and clean technology as global solutions, but without any paying or even giving any support or sharing responsibility.

Relationship with the Global South	- Disparities in political and economic power between North and South.	- Strengthening the position of the Global South in the international arena and achieving justice in international relations.	- China calls for "promoting common destiny" and working for greater representation of developing countries in international organizations, that why there is acceptance for the Chinese discourse than the western one.	- The West sometimes sees the Global South through the lens of development aid or support in specific areas such as health and education, but still the idea of the north is more developed than the south, less developed and more exploited.
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Therefore , while the Western liberal order promotes universal liberal values, and existing institutions, conditional engagement, the CSFM articulates an alternative based on civilizational diversity, reformed governance and limited engagement and development focused partnership. The CSFM is purported to be aimed at a more balanced, participatory world order based on peace, development, and respect for one another. Yet debate remains so critical about such a vision being a genuine alternative of great power influence in a different shape to re-shape the new global order to China's advantage.

Challenges and Critical Considerations:

Despite the great opportunity and grand vision of CSFM and its affiliated initiatives, the implementation and reception of the CSFM and its affiliated initiatives presents significant challenges and critical considerations from the Global South and international observers. And it is only the CSFM's transformative potential that turns on how China deals with these problems.

Debt Sustainability and Economic Imbalances

Also, controversial agenda projects like BRI provide badly needed infrastructure financing for the Global South — admittedly — with an abundance of concerns regarding debt sustainability for nations participating in that particular agenda. Some projects come under witherings critics who say that some projects may result in

unsustainable debt burden as to create economic dependency rather than a sense of self sufficiency. The issues of transparency of loan terms, economic viability of some large scale projects and possibilities of worsening the existing economic imbalances in China and its partners have to be managed and constantly monitored (Huang, Y. 2016; World Bank, 2020).

Governance Standards, Transparency, and Local Impacts

There are still questions around governance standards pertaining to CSFM linked projects. Aspects that are concerns regarding transparency in bid process, environmental and social safeguards, labor practices and corruption. For the long term legitimacy and success of the CSFM vision, it is critical to ensure that projects engage in international best practices and that they really benefit local communities and not just external interests or local elites. This is so as to counter embedded narratives of exploitative partnerships (Liu & Zhao, 2024).

Strategic Asymmetry and Sovereignty Concerns

China's economy and political influence are so vast that there is an inherent asymmetry in its relationships with many Global South partners. Despite the equality and mutual respect rhetoric of CSFM, some observers fear greater engagement with China may place the smaller states in greater strategic dependence on China, which could narrow the policy space and autonomy of smaller states. The challenge is to navigate this asymmetry and do so in a manner that partnerships, and the ways in which they deepen the perspectives of both partnerships and the UN, are genuine and demonstrate mutual benefit and recognition of sovereignty beyond mere rhetoric (Mahbubani, 2020).

Normative Ambiguity and Implementation Gaps

As the CSFM endorses cheery values like cooperation, peace and shared development, opponents argue that there is a hole between China's words and deeds in a few sectors. The proclaimed values may be questioned as consistent and applicable to all on a geopolitical level, especially in regions like the South China Sea,

and on a human rights level, in respect to the practices within China itself. In addition, the precise definition and its practical implications as the “shared future” concept may be vague, resulting in divergent understandings and possibly misunderstandings with international partners (Buzan, 2025; Callahan, 2020). Credibility requires consistency of stated principles to consistent practices in a range of domains in foreign policy.

It is important that China proactively and transparently addresses these challenges so as to build broader international trust and realize the potentially inclusive and cooperative vision of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind. These considerations have salience for Global South countries who are left to completely negotiate based on the promise (and lack of fulfillment of the promise) of negotiating from a position of strength with CARICOM. Diligence, due diligence and strategic engagement should be ways to navigate that.

Future Scenarios For CSFM:

The future of the CSFM is still uncertain and will be dependent on several geopolitical, economic, and normative factors. Assessment of the enduring significance of an object may involve thinking about potential future pathways of the object. There are three possible scenarios which make plausible outcomes.

Scenario 1: Transformational Integration – Institutionalization of a New Global Order

In this optimistic scenario, the CSFM goes from being just rhetoric to be widespread global norm that fundamentally changes international relations. BRI, GDI and GSI are not only the main driving forces of tangible results in inclusive development, sustainable peace and collective security, but also the key initiatives of China. The Global South’s interests and voices are incorporated much more explicitly in global governance reforms that are being made. Gradually, the main drivers of global interaction are displaced by the new international consensus around CSFM principles such as mutual respect, non-interference, shared

prosperity and win-win cooperation, including unilateralism and power politics.

Scenario 2: Regional Consolidation – Building Strong South-South Partnerships

Under this scenario, the CSFM gains significant traction primarily at the regional level, particularly within Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This encourages the consolidation of regional blocs with its own cooperative development and mutual benefit principles, based on deepening China's bilateral and multilateral engagements (e.g. BRICS+, SCO, FOCAC). While there will not be a complete global agreement on the CSFM, these regional networks become successful alternative alternatives for partnership, infrastructure development, and integration into the digital world that lead to prosperity independent of the traditional Western, centric system.

Scenario 3: Normative Leadership – China as a Catalyst for Inclusive Multilateralism

The CSFM as a scenario envisions that China would successfully employ the CSFM to establish itself as a key normative leader in the global governance debates. Through its consistent support for development justice, climate equity, South South solidarity and reforming international institutions, China plays a key role in rallying a large number of developing countries around the CSFM as a framework for more equitable globalization. As fairness, justice and mutual benefit featured in international relations, concepts such as President Xi Jinping had highlighted, for example, the principle of 'sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith' espoused for China-Africa relations, justice has become more influential (Xi, 2017). The CSFM becomes a strong discursive tool in this pathway to shape the norms of a post hegemonic, multipolar world order with institutional transformation being at best partial but leading to a more balanced and potentially for a better harmony global environment. This normative influence would stem from the articulation of moral

values along with strategic interests in China–Africa cooperation forums by China.

Policy Recommendations for the Global South:

Governments in the Global South can therefore consider the following policy approaches to effectively capitalize on the opportunities uncovered by China’s CSFM framework and its associated initiatives while at the same time safeguarding national interests and autonomy.

Leverage Economic and Technological Cooperation

Sell the Chinese on their initiatives such as BRI to gain funding to help complete pumps, energy and similar infrastructure projects (transport, energy, digital). Arrive at the Bayes Church and attend Foster partnerships for technology transfer and capacity building in AI, telecommunications and the digital economy to accelerate national development and economic diversification.

Prioritize Sustainable Development Collaboration

Look for ways to actively seek China’s green financing mechanisms and technical support for the environmentally sustainable projects which are aligned with the UN SDGs. Investing in both eco and economic benefits by pursuing joint ventures on preventing the environment from degradation around renewable energy, climate change mitigation and protecting the environment.

Selectively Adapt Governance and Development Models

Selectively adapt elements from China’s experience in economic planning, industrial policy implementation, strategies for reducing poverty, and managing large scale project where appropriate for national context. They should not go for wholesale adoption rather, they should learn context specific.

Enhance Institutional Capacity and Negotiation Skills

To strengthen domestic institutional capacity for the evaluation of projects, debt management, contracting, monitoring of

environmental and social standards associated with Chinese investments. An institution like AIIB can be used strategically to use resources for well vetted development projects.

Invest in Human Capital and Knowledge Exchange

Seize opportunities in Chinese scholarships, training programs, and joint research projects as much as possible in areas essential to sustainable development, technology, and governance. Pursue cooperation between national and Chinese R&D centers to solve common problems such as food security and public health.

Build Strategic Alignment within Multilateral Forums

Vote with China and other Global South partners on the same or similar issues in multilateral platforms such as UN, G77, BRICS+, SCO, G20 to push their shared interests with regard to global governance reform, development finance and climate justice. To improve the collective bargaining power through strengthening regional cooperation networks involving China.

Focus on Social Equity and Inclusivity

Explore ways to engage China on social policy experiences in the area of poverty eradication and improving social equity, drawing useful lessons and applying them in appropriate ways to improve the living conditions of marginalized population and promoting mutually beneficial social development outcomes under bilateral cooperation.

Develop Nuanced Security Cooperation

Practically, work with China on security cooperation when the two sides have common interests, specifically on issues such as terrorism, piracy and organized crime. In order to maintain strategic autonomy and not over rely on one security partner, it is advisable that states diversify their security partnerships.

Foster Mutual Understanding through Cultural Exchange

By actively participating in and supporting the efforts of reciprocal cultural diplomacy initiatives among China and societies

(arts, education, tourism, media) as a wider force of influence than state level interactions to develop deeper societies understanding of each other and foster trust amongst each other.

Advocate Collectively for Global Governance Reform

Work with China and other such countries to forge concrete reforms in global institutions (UN Security Council, International Monetary Fund, World Bank) to enable the Global South to have a bigger share in determining global issues. Through the pursuit of these strategies, the Global South countries can seek to benefit from the potential of China's partnership under the CSFM framework, while minimizing risks and stepping toward their own comprehensive and sustainable development.

Conclusion and Future prospective:

CSFM, advocated by Xi Jinping, is a major Chinese initiative to reorient international relations along the path of interdependence, shared development, comprehensive security and reformed global governance different from Western centered ones. The CSFM is operationalized via BRI, GDI, GSI among others, which present tremendous opportunities for the Global South, including alternative development financing mechanism, South to South solidarity and a voice in multilateral institutions. Nevertheless, there are major challenges to these prospective: related to debt sustainability associated with BRI projects; governance and transparency; strategic power imbalances between China and host countries; and establishing a level of congruency between the rhetoric and actions of China to be taken seriously. Finally, the CSFM's potential trajectory lies between catalyzing a transformational shift in global order, regional consolidation among South-South partners, or being simply a provider of China's international normative role as a significant voice for inclusive multilateralism.

The new pattern of international relations emphasizes the principles of fairness and justice, which represents a prominent

contribution to the development of the rules of interaction between states. Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed the need to achieve a balance between justice and benefit and to enhance cooperation based on mutual gain. He called for adopting an approach based on honesty, sincerity, and amity in dealing with neighboring countries, with a focus on building solid partnerships that promote regional stability and mutual understanding. In this context, during his visit to Africa in 2013, President Xi presented the concept of "sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith" as the basis for relations between China and African countries, stressing that justice should take precedence over material interests in international cooperation. Clarified in his speeches and participation in China-Africa cooperation forums that international relations should be based on moral values alongside strategic interests, which reflects an innovative development in China's understanding of justice and benefit and contributes to strengthening its role as a power supporting fairness and justice on the international stage.

Key policy recommendations include bolstering national capacity for project evaluation, debt management and negotiation gears, and engaging strategically with CSFM initiatives geared towards national sustainable development goals; broaden the international partner base for policy space and must lobby for more equal global governance. Developing nations are looking to take advantage of the shifting dynamics in the world to advance themselves in the world of growing multipolarity.

The research has successfully achieved its five main objectives through a systematic analysis of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM), examining it within the broader framework of Chinese foreign policy and the evolving discourse of Global International Relations (IR). Firstly, the study unpacked the philosophical, normative, and policy underpinnings of CSFM, highlighting how it reflects China's traditional political thought centered on harmony, partnership, and shared development, in contrast to the Western liberal model rooted in hegemony, individualism, and conditionality. In this way, the first objective—

understanding the conceptual foundations of CSFM—has been fully realized.

Secondly, the research identified and analyzed the concrete mechanisms through which CSFM is operationalized, with particular focus on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), and China's pandemic assistance efforts. These mechanisms reveal China's pragmatic efforts to translate its normative vision into actionable policies, thus fulfilling the second objective.

The third objective, evaluating the potential opportunities CSFM offers to the Global South, has been achieved through a critical assessment of China's promotion of inclusive development, cooperative security, and calls for reforming global governance structures. These dimensions were analyzed as pathways for developing nations to expand their developmental and diplomatic agency beyond the constraints of Western-dominated institutions.

Regarding the fourth objective, the research has clearly outlined the differences between CSFM and the liberal, interdependence-driven Western order. While the Western model often maintains asymmetric relations rooted in structural dependency and conditionality, China's approach prioritizes mutual respect, sovereignty, and pragmatic development cooperation. This comparative analysis highlights the divergence in norms, instruments, and power dynamics between the two models.

Finally, the study addressed the fifth objective by presenting plausible future scenarios for the evolution of CSFM and offering strategic recommendations for Global South states. These recommendations emphasize the importance of engaging pragmatically with China to leverage opportunities while safeguarding national autonomy and avoiding potential risks such as debt dependency.

Answering the main question of the study; China's CSFM offers a new paradigm for reshaping global governance through development-centered, sovereignty-conscious, and multilateral

approaches. This model creates potential opportunities for Global South countries to enhance their autonomy, expand their development space, and diversify partnerships. However, these opportunities are accompanied by challenges linked to asymmetric power relations, debt sustainability, and governance standards.

Regarding the philosophical and normative principles underpin CSFM, and how do they contrast with liberal global governance models, CSFM is rooted in traditional Chinese philosophies of harmony, collective security, and mutual benefit, offering an alternative to the liberal model which prioritizes individualism, hierarchy, and conditionality. While the Western order often reinforces dependency through political and economic mechanisms, China's CSFM emphasizes sovereignty, equality, and pragmatic cooperation, presenting itself as a more inclusive vision of global order. China employs a range of practical tools to operationalize CSFM, including:

- The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an infrastructure and trade connectivity platform.
- The Global Development Initiative (GDI) promotes equitable development.
- Humanitarian and pandemic assistance to enhance soft power and consolidate partnerships.
- Engagement through multilateral organizations to shape global governance norms.

These mechanisms reflect China's comprehensive strategy to translate its normative vision into practical influence. CSFM presents significant opportunities for Global South countries to diversify their development partners, reduce dependency on Western financial institutions, and access new sources of investment and technology. It supports the expansion of South–South cooperation and enhances the agency of developing countries in shaping international norms and policies.

Despite its opportunities, CSFM engagement carries inherent risks:

- Debt sustainability concerns, particularly in infrastructure-heavy projects under BRI.
- Asymmetrical power relations, where China may hold leverage over smaller economies.
- Governance challenges, as Chinese projects may lack the transparency and accountability standards typically demanded by Western institutions.

These risks necessitate cautious, strategic engagement by Global South actors. The research outlines three potential scenarios:

1. Expansion of CSFM into a dominant framework in global governance.
2. CSFM operating alongside Western models in a multipolar balance.
3. Stagnation or retrenchment of China's global ambitions due to internal or external constraints.

For Global South actors, pragmatic engagement, careful risk assessment, and diversified partnerships remain essential strategies to maximize benefits and preserve autonomy within any future trajectory.

This research has shown that China's Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) represents a distinct alternative to the Western liberal model of global governance. Rooted in principles of sovereignty, mutual benefit, and development-centered cooperation, CSFM offers the Global South new opportunities to expand policy space, access resources, and strengthen its agency within international relations. The study highlights how China operationalizes CSFM through practical mechanisms such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), and pandemic-related assistance, positioning itself as a pragmatic development partner rather than a normative hegemon.

While CSFM provides opportunities for inclusive development and South-South cooperation, the research also identifies risks related to debt sustainability, asymmetrical power relations, and

governance standards. Therefore, Global South states must engage with China strategically to benefit from this model while safeguarding their sovereignty.

The study outlines three possible futures for CSFM: global consolidation, coexistence with the Western order, or decline. The research concludes that CSFM signals a growing shift towards a multipolar world and offers Global South alternatives beyond traditional Western dependency structures.

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