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INSIGHT

A shared vision

Robert Lawrence Kuhn says US-China cooperation has never been needed more urgently

I cannot imagine richer nutrients for the novel coronavirus to reproduce and spread, to flourish globally, than the United States and China continuing to descend into unabashed and undisguised rivalry, with escalating accusations each against the other. Nourish the virus with US-China competition. Or starve the virus with US-China cooperation.

Never has such cooperation been needed more urgently – to battle the pandemic and to sustain and bolster the world economy. Containing the pandemic, like bolstering the global economy, depends on US-China collaboration. If climate change is the world's most intractable chronic problem, then Covid-19 is the world's most severe acute problem.

My two favourite countries have a choice: either work together to fight the pandemic, developing drugs and vaccines to kill and stop Covid-19, or suffer an out-of-control global pandemic and a chain-reaction cratering of the global economy. Truly, nations will fight the virus and collectively win, or fight each other and collectively lose.

Although China has well-earned respect for curbing its outbreak, there is room for critique, correction and improvement. President Xi Jinping stresses drawing lessons from the outbreak to improve the country's systems for epidemic control, prevention and public health emergency management.

Appropos of the pandemic, Xi's repeated call to build "a community with a shared future for all humanity" is a grand vision with multiple applications. For seven years, it has driven foreign policy, especially the Belt and Road Initiative, helping to rectify global imbalances.

While fighting disease or controlling pandemics have always been a "shared

future" benefit, it was always tucked within lists of other benefits, such as climate control, preventing terrorism, interdicting drugs, and the like. Few ever imagined that a pandemic could become so grave so fast. But the pandemic demonstrates viscerally the global criticality of "shared future" thinking.

The challenge for Beijing is to elevate Xi's vision above what appears to some as competitive positioning or even as a sprint to assert China's leadership. China's experience in containing the contagion, which many countries now desperately need, provides just such an opportunity.



Containment of the polemic will be more challenging than containment of the coronavirus

By sending "battle-tested" medical teams to countries under siege, China brings to bear experts with contemporary, frontline, epidemic experience. What is not well appreciated in the daily recitations of cases and deaths are China's evolved know-how and the meticulous work of Chinese health care and logistics professionals.

There is a problem, though. Emotions worldwide are frayed, rubbed raw by the pandemic's daily-life disruptions, with economic devastation threatening to exceed that of the 2008 global financial crisis. In this toxic psychological environment, when non-stop news, especially in social media, amplifies fantastical,

scurrilous, unsubstantiated rumours by insensitive officials or block-brained conspiracy theorists, attitudes harden and antagonisms ossify. Indigenous nationalism flares in vicious circles.

It takes no cleverness to inflame feelings with glib rhetoric or political insults. Rational people must work together, not allow fringe inective to erode the capacity to fight a common enemy.

Containment of the polemic will be more challenging than containment of the coronavirus, the latter likely to burn out before the former. If so, Chinese views of America, and American views of China, are only going to deteriorate further, to the detriment of all. Enlightened leadership should temper, not inflame, indigenous nationalism. We cannot allow mutual exhaustion to be our last hope.

China's vision of "a community with a shared future for mankind", exhorting all nations to act for the common good, fits our turbulent times. For this reason, China should resist finding this phrase turned into a cliché or satire, catalysed inadvertently by endless repetition or forced conformity into a single expression or translation.

Why not encourage various expressions, enabling officials and experts to use their own words, thereby enriching the vision, keeping it fresh and timely?

Originally, the English translation was "a community of common destiny for mankind", which is more literal and rather elegant. But then, I was told, "destiny" was deemed to be too passive or fatalistic, not sufficiently proactive and positive, which led to the less literal "shared future". "Shared future" is an evocative phrase, reflecting Chinese tradition and offering hope for a better tomorrow.

Yet with constant repetition, "a community with a shared future for mankind" can begin to sound, paradoxically,

like an exclusive Chinese mantra, and can begin to elicit, in some countries or cultures, negative emotions, instead of conveying positive contributions.

Labels carry messages – and some interpret China's phrase as seeking to get the whole world to march under its national banner. This misreads China, but by triggering resistance, the static phrase undermines China's capacity to help bring about in reality such a community of common destiny or shared future.

China's vision is a universal message shared by many cultures and the country might reach out for similar ideas. China's challenge is to express the vision in language with which other cultures can identify and feel comfortable supporting.

To be clear, read literally and without bias, a "community with a shared future for mankind" is a powerful exhortation that should benefit the world. That is why the phrase should be protected and enriched by also allowing other, diverse English phrases to represent the original Chinese.

The objective is to enable the global community to take collective ownership of the grand vision. Given the global pandemic, the global community must take collective ownership.

Here are three other possible expressions, the first more literal, the second and third taking more explanatory licence: humanity is a community of common destiny (a shared future); humanity's common destiny (shared future) is the guiding principle of our times, and; recognise humanity's common destiny (shared future) to build a global community.

What China seeks is what humanity needs, especially with the pandemic, and it behoves people of goodwill everywhere to work together to transform rhetoric into reality.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn, a public intellectual and international corporate strategist, won the China Reform Friendship Medal (2018)

How to get life back to normal in just 28 days

Ho Lok-sang says we can avert the collapse of the global economy and achieve some semblance of normality if we work together and steer public policies scientifically and confidently

The world is now in the grip of an unprecedented crisis, which could have truly disastrous consequences, including a systemic collapse of the global economy. But these dire consequences can be averted, and the world can look forward to full recovery in a matter of months, if we all work together and steer public policies scientifically and confidently.

To engineer a recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, policymakers will need to do two things: first, effectively contain or control the epidemic within their borders; second, let life return to normal when it is safe to do so, and open up borders to jurisdictions that have brought the pandemic under control.

I disagree with the view that it is too late for the world to contain the coronavirus.

Let us consider the experiences of Wuhan and Hubei. Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, was the epicentre of the epidemic, and there is no doubt the virus was spreading in the city like wildfire months ago.

Wuhan, with a population of 11 million, has recorded more than 50,000 cases of Covid-19. While Italy's caseload has topped 69,000, it has a population of 60 million living over a much larger area.

On the mainland, after about a month of strict quarantine and social distancing measures – and frequent sanitisation – new Covid-19 cases started declining, first in Hubei province excluding Wuhan, and then in Wuhan city itself. Last week, Hubei and Wuhan reported zero new infections for the first time.

This milestone does not mean that the battle against the coronavirus has ended in Hubei or Wuhan. Sporadic local cases may re-emerge. But the strategy has proved quite effective.

Health organisations use the basic reproduction number, R0 (pronounced R-nought), to gauge an outbreak; it denotes the average number of people who will catch a disease from a single infected person. Success in shrinking the epidemic would mean reducing the R0 of Covid-19 to under one, and Wuhan and Hubei seem to be getting there.

If no new local infections emerge within 28 days, we can be confident that Wuhan and Hubei are safe. Life can then return to normal.



The vision of life getting back to normal within weeks will be a strong boost to business sentiment

In Hong Kong, a recent spate of confirmed cases were mostly imported. Among the local infections, most can be traced. Hong Kong is clearly not out of the woods yet, and the most important thing is to thoroughly contain imported infections.

Because home quarantine measures are not fail-safe, dedicated facilities are needed, and people have to be hired to guard these centres so no one can break quarantine. Hotels that are barely occupied now can be used for quarantine purposes. The mainland used hotels as quarantine centres with considerable success.

The vision of life getting back to normal within weeks will be a strong boost to business sentiment, and will complement the government's relief measures for businesses. Government aid notwithstanding, firms that can't see themselves returning to normal over the next few months might prefer to close down.

In the absence of hope, the government's efforts to support business will not be able to prevent an avalanche of failures.

The vision of normalcy within weeks or months will also be a strong incentive for governments and citizens around the world to take quarantine measures and coronavirus containment efforts seriously.

There is no reason we have to wait for the epidemic to disappear altogether before life can return to normal. According to epidemiologists, the incubation period for Covid-19 is between two and 14 days. So, 28 days without local infections should be quite enough for a city to be declared safe.

So long as we achieve 28 days without local cases, and effectively contain imported cases by strictly enforcing quarantine in suitable facilities, life should be allowed to return to normal within this city, and the community of safe cities.

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The vision of normalcy within weeks will be an incentive for people to take quarantine seriously. Photo: AFP



Beijing must end arbitrary detentions of Taiwanese

Yu-Jie Chen and Jerome A. Cohen say the world needs to be aware of these rights violations

On March 19, 2017, Taiwanese human rights activist Lee Ming-che vanished after entering the mainland. Ten days later, after repeated calls from Taiwan concerning Lee's whereabouts, the central government said Lee had been detained on suspicion of "endangering national security".

Since then, three similar cases have been confirmed. Lee Meng-chu, a volunteer organiser in a small Taiwan township, disappeared in Shenzhen last August, allegedly after distributing photos of military vehicles near the Hong Kong border. Two Taiwanese scholars, Tsai Jin-shu and Shih Cheng-ping, disappeared in 2018 but their detentions were not admitted to until last year.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office claimed that all three were under investigation for national security offences pending trial. Will other cases be confirmed?

Taiwanese accused in the mainland's criminal justice system suffer, not only because the system is rife with serious violations of the most fundamental human rights, but also because Beijing's cut-off of official cross-strait contacts renders detained Taiwanese totally isolated.

When Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016, President Xi Jinping unilaterally suspended implementation of some major cross-strait agreements.

Xi's suspension, designed to increase pressure on Tsai to recognise the 1992 consensus that there is one China, undermined the implementation of the 2009 agreement on mutual judicial assistance. Thus, Beijing failed to notify Taiwan of recent detentions or offer any assistance to facilitate family visits to the detainees, as required by the agreement.

Each time a detention was belatedly acknowledged, Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office broke the news in press conferences, rather than via the official channel.

Beijing's compliance with the notification requirement would have permitted Taiwan to promptly learn about the detentions, obtain further information and register any protests. It would have also enabled family visits.

Taiwanese under criminal investigation on the mainland are easily subject to the feared "residential surveillance at a designated location". While this may sound innocuous, in practice, it is institutionalised disappearance. Individuals are confined incommunicado at an undisclosed location for as long as six months with no opportunity to see family or lawyers.

During this "residential surveillance", they can be interrogated by the police at any time, which often leads to torture and coerced confessions. There is very little that families in Taiwan can do. Even if

detainees are processed in normal detention centres, police can still refuse lawyers' requests for client meetings by claiming it is a national security matter.

Moreover, as shown by Lee Ming-che's case, as well as those involving many Chinese and even third-country nationals, in politically sensitive cases, the central government usually insists on appointing defence lawyers who can be relied upon not to challenge the charges.



China will never achieve its soft power goals when its legal system is plagued by injustice

What can the international community do for those arbitrarily detained in China? Lee Ming-che's courageous wife Lee Ching-yu has done an admirable job in mobilising international human rights experts to express concerns to Beijing, although it turns a deaf ear.

There was a time when Beijing was eager to improve the world's perception of

its human rights record. In the 1980s to 1990s, when Beijing sought entry into the World Trade Organisation, it sometimes released Chinese and foreign political prisoners due to outside pressures. Today, such pressures are brushed aside by an increasingly assertive, nationalistic regime.

Moreover, China seems to be gaining greater influence over United Nations' and other efforts to protect human rights, especially in view of the US withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council.

While awaiting an improvement in cross-strait relations and a moderation of Beijing's repression, perhaps the most that can be done – for all victims of arbitrary detention in China – is to enhance world knowledge of these violations of human rights and international obligations.

China will never achieve its soft power goals when its legal system is plagued by injustice. The protests in Hong Kong are but one example of the importance that people attach to justice.

Certainly, the people of Taiwan will continue to demand that Beijing at least live up to the commitments made in the cross-strait mutual judicial assistance agreement. Will the world settle for less?

Yu-Jie Chen, a Taiwan lawyer, is a Global Academic Fellow at Hong Kong University's Faculty of Law and an affiliated scholar of NYU's US-Asia Law Institute. Jerome A. Cohen, adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, is professor of law at NYU and founding director of its US-Asia Law Institute