



Opinion

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

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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 and contain the pandemic and to sustain and bolster the world economy. Containing the global 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 major epidemic control, prevention and public health emergency management.

Apropos 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 as the pandemic has burst into planetary consciousness, it demonstrates viscerally the global criticality of "shared future" thinking.

The challenge for China 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.

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 tops-of-trees 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 invective 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 thereby 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 China 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 behooves 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)**

The screenshot shows the South China Morning Post website interface. At the top left is the logo and name "South China Morning Post". To the right are navigation links for "SIGN IN/UP", a search icon, and a menu icon. Below the logo are category links: "News", "Comment", "Lifestyle", and "More +". On the right side, there is an "Edition: International" dropdown menu. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Coronavirus updates:** A blue banner with the text "What you need to know" and a right-pointing arrow.
- LIVE:** A section with a dropdown arrow.
- Markets:** A sub-section with the headline "Asian markets mixed after US fails to pass US\$2 trillion stimulus" and a timestamp of "9 minutes ago".
- News & Trends:** A sub-section with the headline "Why you should be excited about Tod's latest capsule collaboration" and a timestamp of "12 minutes ago".
- Opinion:** A sub-section with the headline "Can India ever leapfrog China to become a global manufacturing powerhouse?" and a timestamp of "12 minutes ago".
- Southeast Asia:** A sub-section with the headline "Coronavirus reshapes travel" and a timestamp of "2 minutes ago".

The central focus is a large video player showing a live broadcast of a panel discussion. The panelist in the center is wearing a light-colored shirt and glasses. The video title below it is "Exclusive | Founder says Huawei 'working round the clock' amid virus pandemic". Below the video are two bullet points:

- Huawei was on the front foot before the coronavirus crisis gripped China because of pressure from the US government
- Pandemic has not slowed Ren's commitment to develop own technology and remain world's largest telco equipment supplier

At the bottom right of the video player, it says "2 minutes ago". To the right of the video player are three opinion articles:

- Opinion | How coronavirus has reinforced ties between Japan and China** by Elliot Silverberg, published "2 hours ago".
- Opinion | Coronavirus: how to get life back to normal in 28 days** by Ho Lok Sang, published "1 hour ago".
- Opinion | How China can realise vision of a shared future, in a pandemic world** by Robert Lawrence Kuhn.

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3076770/how-china-can-end-us-rivalry-and-realise-its-vision-shared-future>