

# On Common Values in the Community of a Shared Future

-- A Case Study of *The Merchant of Venice*

Xinwen Xu, Chi Huang \*

School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu University of Information Technology, Chengdu, Sichuan,  
610225, China

\* Corresponding Author: Chi Huang

**Abstract.** This study employs a multimodal analytical framework combining textual analysis of dramatic literature, cross-examination of primary and secondary sources, and the theoretical framework of the “community with a shared future for mankind” concept. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the research aims to excavate the inherent values and philosophical implications within literary texts. Taking Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as a case study, the investigation first establishes the socio-historical context of the Renaissance drama. Subsequently, it conducts an in-depth exploration of the "community with a shared future" paradigm, systematically analyzing its theoretical dimensions while establishing substantive connections with the play's narrative architecture. The conceptual correlation not only validates the contemporary relevance of this humanistic philosophy but also reveals its interpretative potential for classical texts. The study culminates in proposing actionable recommendations for fostering harmonious development in contemporary global society, thereby bridging literary scholarship with practical socio-political discourse.

**Keywords:** *The Merchant of Venice*; Community with a Shared Future for Mankind; Social Values; Conflicts; Coexistence.

## 1. Introduction to *The Merchant of Venice*

*The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare was set in 16th - century Venice. Merchant Antonio, known for generosity, helps his friend Bassanio, who wants to court rich heiress Portia. Antonio tries to borrow from Jewish moneylender Shylock, who is often faced with Christian scorn. Shylock agrees to lend the money on condition that if it is not repaid on time, he can take a pound of Antonio's flesh.

In the era of rapid globalization, the concept of a human community with a shared future is crucial for global order and international cooperation. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, set in a specific historical context with complex character relationships, offers rich material for exploring this concept. This study analyzes the play and uncovers elements related to a shared - future community. It examines the links between character conflicts, plot development, and the community concept. The play, chosen for reflecting conflicts and convergences among diverse groups in a particular epoch, has a diverse cast. Portia, a strong and intelligent woman, is key to resolving the central conflict. Jessica, Shylock's daughter, rebels against her father and elopes with a Christian, intensifying the play's complex relationships and religious - social tensions. Such exploration helps understand real - world issues like cultural diversity, interest conflicts, and cooperation from a literary perspective and promotes building a human community with a shared future.

## 2. The Social Context

The play is set in a time when Venice was a major center of trade and commerce. The city's prosperity was built on its maritime trade and the complex web of economic relationships that existed within it. However, beneath the surface of this economic success lay deep-seated religious and ethnic divisions. The Christian majority held significant power and often marginalized the Jewish community. Shylock's position as a moneylender was both a result of the restrictions placed on Jews in other occupations and a source of resentment from the Christians, who saw usury as immoral

despite their own reliance on credit. This social context sets the stage for the conflicts and moral dilemmas in the play.

## 2.1 Hedonistic Christians

In the society of the 16th century Europe presented in *The Merchant of Venice*, the ways for Christians to earn a living were rich and diverse. In the financial and banking sector, families such as the Medici gained profits from financial services; in the handicraft and manufacturing areas, some people were involved in relevant work; noble landlords depended on land assets to collect rent; and those in occupations related to the church acquired resources through allowances and donations. Nevertheless, commercial trade was the principal method. For example, the Christians in Venice utilized their geographical advantage to conduct maritime trade and deal with various commodities. Antonio, for example, supported his life and amassed wealth through the operation of merchant ships.

The means of livelihood of Christians reflected the social and economic structure and class differentiation of that time. Nevertheless, *The Merchant of Venice* also criticized some Christians for being hedonistic and hypocritical. While enjoying wealth, they discriminated against and oppressed Jews, which violated the values of equality, justice, and inclusiveness advocated by the community with a shared future for mankind.

## 2.2 Jews in Dilemma

Jews, due to survival pressure and social restrictions, were mostly engaged in specific industries. For example, in the handicraft field, they were involved in dyeing, silk weaving, metal forging, etc., and in the financial lending auxiliary industries such as currency exchange and financial management, providing indirect services for commercial activities.

The usury industry was the most common among Jews. Due to social restrictions, they were prohibited from owning land and other properties and excluded from many industries, so they could only engage in usury. Although this was considered immoral in Christian teachings, it was a helpless choice for Jews. Through this, they managed to survive, but it deepened the prejudice of Christians that they were greedy for profit and masked their helplessness.

In the 16th-century European society reflected in *The Merchant of Venice*, Jews were regarded as "treacherous", which was a product of religious prejudice and social discrimination and was unjust and one-sided. In fact, they sought survival in hardship but suffered unjust treatment, reflecting the unreasonableness of society and the ugliness of human nature at that time.

## 2.3 The Origin and Manifestation of Conflicts between Christians and Jews

The root causes of the conflict between Christians and Jews are complex and are reflected in *The Merchant of Venice*. In terms of religious doctrines, Christianity originated from Judaism, but there are great differences in the interpretation of doctrines and the understanding of the Messiah. Christianity regards Jesus as the Messiah who has already come, while Judaism firmly believes that the true Messiah has not yet arrived. The differences in doctrines are potential incentives for their conflicts.

Under the Roman Empire's rule, Jews, like other conquered peoples, were subjects, not citizens. In 212 AD, Emperor Caracalla issued a decree granting Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants, including Jews. However, with the onset of the Middle Ages, Germanic customary law replaced Roman law. Germanic law classified foreigners as sojourners, who had to seek protection from indigenous lords and were denied the rights of the lordly society. After the Germanic tribes conquered the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, this practice spread to Western Europe, making former Roman inhabitants sojourners in barbarian kingdoms. For most, this status was temporary as Germanic people converted to Christianity and merged with non - Germanic populations. But Jews, refusing Christianity and seeing life outside the "Promised Land" as temporary, were permanently excluded from the Christian community. Thus, they were always seen as foreigners in Western Europe, labeled "eternal foreigners" or "perpetual vagrants".

After the 11th century, as Christian power grew, most Western Europeans were Christianized, leaving Jews, who clung to Judaism, as nearly the only non - Christians. From the 12th century, large-scale anti-Jewish acts emerged. Despite complex social, political, and economic factors, religious pretexts were commonly used. The Crusades marked the start of major religious persecutions. Jews, seen as "more opposed to God" by Christians, were massacred; Crusader soldiers even shouted, "Kill a Jew to save your soul." Fabrications like "host desecration" and "blood libel" were used to persecute Jews. Using religion to exclude and persecute Jews was the main feature of medieval Western European anti - Jewish acts. In most such incidents, Christian lords forced Jews to choose between conversion, expulsion, or death.

Historical events have exacerbated the contradiction. For example, after Jesus was judged by the Jewish Sanhedrin and crucified, Christians regarded Jews as the persecutors of the prophet and harbored hatred. After Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, its power grew, and the Roman rulers used it to persecute Judaism, including suppression, torture, and massacre, in an attempt to force Jews to convert.

## **2.4 The Possibility of Coexistence**

Despite conflicts, coexistence between the two sides is possible in theory and practice.

Through background of the times, the concept evolution in this period is linked to European cities' functional shift. Some cities became production-and-trade- centered commodity market hubs, spawning novel commercial-cultural phenomena. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, commercial culture directly eroded theocracy and monarchy power, establishing the era's conceptual basis. M. L. Kaplan noted about *The Merchant of Venice* that its historical context offers more insights into Shakespeare's themes. Written around the mid to late 1590s, during Queen Elizabeth's final reign years, Venice's prosperity came not from conquest or a sacred status but from astute business, like Phoenicia.

Economically, the two sides are interdependent in commerce. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Christian merchants' trade funding needs were partly met by Jewish moneylenders, despite risks, indicating economic cooperation potential. In the broader economy, Jewish merchants contributed to local prosperity through handicrafts and trade, forming complex business networks with Christian counterparts. Shedding prejudice, economic interdependence can underpin coexistence.

Culturally, Christianity and Judaism, both part of the Abrahamic faith family, share a cultural origin. They have ethical, moral, and traditional similarities, such as valuing honesty, kindness, and justice. Despite doctrinal and ritual differences, these commonalities enable cultural dialogue. Strengthening exchanges based on these shared aspects and fostering mutual respect can ease tensions and facilitate coexistence.

## **3. Introduction to the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind**

### **3.1 The Origin and Development**

A community with a shared future for mankind pursues the legitimate concerns of other countries while seeking its own interests and promotes the common development of all countries in the process of seeking its own development. Given that humans live together on one earth and in one world, it is necessary to advocate the awareness of "a community with a shared future for mankind". This is the "Chinese Initiative" put forward by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core for the future development of humanity. Its global values cover the concepts of interdependent international power, common interests, sustainable development, and global governance.

This concept was first put forward as a way to address global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and international conflicts. The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind has emerged in response to the increasing globalization and connection of the world. In an era where technological advancements have made the world a smaller place, it has become evident that the

actions of one nation or group can have far-reaching consequences for others. It emphasizes the need for countries and peoples to work together, transcending national boundaries and differences in ideology and culture.

### **3.2 The Key Principles and Implications**

According to some relevant research, the core principles of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind encompass mutual respect, equality, cooperation, and win-win results. As many scholars have pointed out, this concept advocates that all countries respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries and deeply recognize the common interests and challenges that bind them together. In the context of globalization, this interconnection is becoming increasingly closer, which means that no country can handle global affairs alone. Taking the fight against climate change as an example, numerous international studies have shown that the impact of climate change is global in nature and not restricted by national boundaries. Developed countries, with their advanced technology and economic strength, should assume the responsibility of assisting developing countries in the process of combating climate change, helping them adopt sustainable technologies to reduce carbon emissions, thus achieving a joint response and sustainable development on a global scale. This not only embodies the practical application of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind but also highlights the crucial role of international cooperation in solving global problems.

The concept also implies a shift in the way we view international relations. Instead of a zero-sum game, it promotes the idea of cooperation for mutual benefit. This requires building trust and understanding between different cultures and societies, and finding common ground on which to base collective action.

## **4. The Connection and Dialectical Relationship in *The Merchant of Venice***

### **4.1 The Relation of Characters and the Global Community**

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the fates of the characters are intricately intertwined. Antonio's decision to help Bassanio sets off a chain of events that involves Shylock, Portia, and many others. This is like the way in which countries in the global community are interconnected. For instance, a financial crisis in one major economy can quickly spread to other countries through trade and financial linkages. Just as Antonio's business fortunes affect those around him, the economic policies and actions of one nation can have a significant impact on the global economic system.

Moreover, the relationships between the characters are not only economic but also social and emotional. Bassanio's pursuit of Portia is not just a personal matter but also has implications for his friendship with Antonio and his standing in Venetian society. Similarly, in the global community, the actions of a country in areas such as human rights or international diplomacy can affect its relationships with other countries and its standing in the international community.

### **4.2 The Theme of Justice and the Quest for a Just Global Order**

*The Merchant of Venice* delves into justice in a complex, multi-faceted manner.

The conflict-coexistence theme is notable. Shylock's pound-of-flesh demand, based on a contract, is his perception of justice, yet Christian characters deem it cruel. The commercial conflict between Shylock and Antonio indeed encompasses religious and racial discrimination. The "pound of flesh" contract, climaxing the conflict, also reveals their economic connection, paralleling the interest conflicts among countries in the human community with a shared future concept. Despite such conflicts, mutual dependence is inevitable due to common development needs.

Justice and tolerance are prominent themes. Portia's courtroom maneuvers uphold justice. Her handling of the contract not only displays legal acumen but also prompts reflection on justice. Given historical religious and ethnic divides, like medieval Western European anti-Jewish discrimination, justice must incorporate mercy and the community's good. Portia's tolerance towards Shylock aligns with the shared-future community's principles of equality, justice, inclusivity, and mutual learning.

In a diverse world with conflicting interests, as in Venice's Christian - Jewish co - existence, pursuing justice requires tolerating different cultures and interests for common development.

Portia's courtroom action is a microcosm, highlighting the justice - tolerance relationship. It raises the question of whether justice in a diverse society should transcend literal law - reading to embrace mercy and the collective good, echoing the shared - future community ideals. In the global pursuit of justice within a human community with a shared future, international law and institutions aim for fairness. But, as in the play, justice perception and implementation vary. Resource distribution and international dispute resolution need to balance individual countries' rights and the global common good. The play shows that achieving justice is complex, demanding consideration of multiple factors, just as in the global context.

### **4.3 Discrimination and the Struggle for Inclusiveness**

The discrimination against Shylock in the play is a blatant example of the negative consequences of prejudice. The Christian characters' treatment of Shylock is based on his religion, and they deny him the basic respect and rights afforded to others. This is in stark contrast to the principle of inclusiveness in a community with a shared future for mankind. In the global context, discrimination based on race, religion, gender, or nationality still exists and is a major obstacle to building a harmonious and cooperative world.

The play shows how Shylock's marginalization leads to his bitterness and his extreme actions. This serves as a cautionary tale for the global community, highlighting the importance of combating discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Only by embracing diversity and treating all people equally can we hope to build a truly global community where everyone can contribute and thrive.

### **4.4 The Role of Mercy and Forgiveness in Building a Global Community**

Portia's plea for mercy towards Shylock, although not fully heeded in the play, is an important moment that reflects the power of mercy and forgiveness. In a community with a shared future for mankind, these qualities are essential for healing wounds and resolving conflicts. International relations are often fraught with tensions and disputes, and the ability to show mercy and forgive past wrongs can help to break the cycle of revenge and animosity.

For example, in the aftermath of wars or conflicts, the process of reconciliation requires both sides to show mercy and be willing to forgive. The play shows that without mercy, the pursuit of justice can become a means of perpetuating hatred and division. In the global community, we need to find a balance between justice and mercy to build a more peaceful and stable world.

### **4.5 The Balance between Individual and Collective Interests**

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the characters' choices often reflect the complex conflict between individual interests and the interests of the community as a whole. Shylock's persistent pursuit of revenge vividly demonstrates how individualistic demands can pose a serious threat to the stability of the community. For example, in modern society, similar behavior of putting individual interests first may be manifested as some enterprises ignoring environmental protection in pursuit of their own economic interests, causing damage to the local community and even the global ecosystem. In sharp contrast, Antonio's willingness to help Bassanio at great personal risk deeply illustrates his appreciation of friendship and understanding of the common good. In the real world, this consideration of the common good is embodied in the mutual assistance among countries in global public health events, sharing medical resources and anti - epidemic experience, and jointly coping with crises to maintain global public health security and contribute to the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

In the context of a community with a shared future for mankind, finding the right balance between individual and collective interests is crucial. Each country has its own national interests, but these must be pursued in a way that is compatible with the well-being of the global community. For example,

in the area of trade, countries need to consider the impact of their trade policies on other countries and work towards a more equitable and sustainable global trading system.

## **5. Venetian Merchant's Deviation from the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind**

### **5.1 The Prevailing Prejudice and Discrimination**

The play vividly depicts the rampant prejudice and discrimination against the Jews in Venetian society. Shylock, as a Jewish moneylender, is constantly subjected to scorn and mistreatment by the Christian characters. He is not only denied equal social status but also faces restrictions on his livelihood and personal freedom. For instance, he is forced to live in a segregated area and wear a distinctive mark to identify his Jewish identity. This blatant discrimination is in direct opposition to the principle of equality and inclusiveness advocated by the community with a shared future for mankind. In the modern global context, such discrimination based on ethnicity or religion is considered unjust and counterproductive to the building of a harmonious and cooperative community.

### **5.2 The Pursuit of Vengeance over Reconciliation**

Shylock's unwavering pursuit of vengeance against Antonio, driven by his long - endured humiliation and the loss of his daughter, represents a failure to embrace the values of mercy and forgiveness. Instead of seeking a peaceful resolution or attempting to understand the other side, he is consumed by his desire for revenge, which ultimately leads to his own downfall. This narrow - minded focus on retribution contrasts sharply with the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation required in a community with a shared future for mankind. In the global arena, conflicts between nations or groups often require a willingness to forgive past grievances and work towards mutual understanding and cooperation for the greater good.

### **5.3 The Inability to Transcend Self - Interest**

Many of the characters in the play are primarily motivated by their individual self - interests, often at the expense of the well - being of the larger community. Shylock's insistence on exacting his pound of flesh, despite the potential harm it would cause to Antonio and the community at large, exemplifies this kind of self - centeredness. Similarly, some of the Christian characters' actions are driven by their own economic and social ambitions, without due consideration for the consequences on others. This lack of a broader perspective and the failure to balance individual and collective interests run counter to the principles of a community with a shared future for mankind, which emphasizes the need for countries and individuals to act in ways that benefit the whole.

## **6. Inspirations and Warnings for the Contemporary World**

### **6.1 The Danger of Prejudice and Discrimination**

The discrimination and prejudice portrayed in *The Merchant of Venice* serve as a stark reminder of the destructive power of such attitudes in the real world. In today's globalized society, where people from diverse backgrounds interact and depend on one another, prejudice based on race, religion, or nationality can lead to social unrest, conflict, and the breakdown of cooperation. It is essential that we actively work to combat all forms of discrimination and promote a culture of acceptance and understanding. This can be achieved through education, awareness - raising campaigns, and the implementation of policies that ensure equal rights and opportunities for all.

### **6.2 The Importance of Reconciliation and Forgiveness**

The play highlights the futility of vengeance and the need for forgiveness and reconciliation in resolving conflicts. In international relations, grudges and past wrongs can linger and poison

relationships between nations. By choosing to forgive and seek peaceful resolutions, countries can break the cycle of hostility and build more stable and cooperative partnerships. This requires a spirit of compromise and a willingness to let go of past grievances for the sake of a better future. International organizations and diplomatic efforts should focus on promoting dialogue and mediation to facilitate reconciliation between conflicting parties.

### 6.3 The Need for a Balanced Interest

The characters' overemphasis on self-interest in the play warns us of the potential negative consequences of a narrow pursuit of individual or national gain. In the global community, countries must recognize that their actions have far-reaching implications and that cooperation and mutual benefit are essential for sustainable development. A more balanced approach that takes into account the interests of others and the common good is needed. This can involve fair trade practices, international cooperation on issues such as climate change and public health, and the sharing of resources and knowledge. By working together, countries can achieve greater prosperity and stability for all.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* emerges as a literary embodiment of semiotic significance for conceptualizing the “community with a shared future for mankind”. Through its intricate character dynamics and polyphonic narrative structure, the play provides an operational framework for examining both historical and contemporary challenges in global community-building. Our interdisciplinary interrogation reveals substantive convergences between the drama's ethical dilemmas and the modern paradigm's core tenets - particularly regarding the dialectics of justice and mercy, individual agency versus collective responsibility, and intercultural negotiation.

The study ultimately posits that the Shakespearean text functions as both a mirror and a catalyst: It reflects persistent barriers to global solidarity while simultaneously illuminating pathways toward inclusive governance. Through this analytical prism, we advocate for the institutionalization of three cardinal principles in contemporary praxis: the deconstruction of essentialist identity politics through intercultural dialogue, the establishment of equity-based legal frameworks transcending particularisms, and the cultivation of cosmopolitan ethics through educational restructuring. These proposals address not only the residual prejudices evident in the play's Venetian society but also offer actionable solutions to modern global challenges such as cultural polarization and identity-based conflicts.

## Acknowledgments

This article is an achievement of the project “The Study of Core Values in Shakespeare’s Plays Based on the Concept of a Community of a Shared Future” (No. 202410621260) supported by “Innovation and Entrepreneurship Project for College Students” in Chengdu University of Information Technology.

## References

- [1] Bloom, H. Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. New York: River head Books. 1998.
- [2] Cecil Rose (CecilRoth); translated by Huang Baowu et al. Brief Jewish national history [M]. Shandong University Press, 1997. Baldick, Chris. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.
- [3] Dollimore, J. (1984). Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries. Brighton: Harvester Press.

- [4] Flood increase flow. The "Green World" in Shakespeare's play [J]. Journal of Sichuan University of Foreign Languages, 1996.
- [5] Lee, Huey-ling. "The Social Meaning of Money in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*". Western Michigan University: Comparative Drama, Volume 49, Number3, Fall 2015, pp. 335-366.
- [6] Li Jiang. *The Merchant of Venice* and the Jewish Question in Medieval Western Europe [J]. Journal of Nanchang University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 2008 (01): 119-123.
- [7] Maus, Katharine Eisaman. *Being and Having in Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- [8] Mahood, M.M., ed. *The Merchant of Venice*. By William Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. The New Cambridge Shakespeare Updated. Print.
- [9] Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Speech Collection (1), [M]. Beijing: Central Academic Press, 2022:2, 276, 440, 307.