

## Modernization and the Diversity of Human Rights Among Civilizations

— Review of the 2023 China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights

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**Abstract:** *Human rights are an achievement of humanity and a symbol of progress. Respect for and protection of human rights are basic principles of modern civilization. Around the world, countries and regions have chosen different paths to modernization, which are rooted in their unique civilizations. To promote exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, facilitate human rights exchanges and cooperation between different countries, and advance the global development of human rights, on September 20, 2023, the 2023 China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights was held in Rome, the capital of Italy. Under the theme of “Modernization and the Diversity of Human Rights Among Civilizations,” the seminar focused on discussing topics such as exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and the development of modern human rights philosophy, modernization and the free and well-rounded development of every person, sustainable development in the process of modernization, and the evolution of the civilization of human rights in the digital age. Participants reached the following consensuses at the event: First, the participants from various countries spoke highly of the great achievements that China has made in human rights cause and fully recognized China’s contributions in promoting the development and progress of the global human rights cause; Second, the participants from all countries agreed that it is necessary to discard the concept of “Western-centrism,” transcend the mindset of “cultural superiority,” promote human rights exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations on the basis of equality and mutual respect, and inject new impetus into the diversity of human rights among civilizations; Third, participants reaffirmed that human rights represent an open concept, and that we should discuss the development of human rights with an open mind and jointly promote the progress of human rights in the world.*

**Keywords:** China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights ♦ modernization ♦ diversity of human rights among civilizations ♦ sustainable development ♦ digital human rights

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Modernization is the common pursuit of the people of all countries in the world. Each country has its distinctive historical heritage, cultural traditions, and national conditions, and their paths and models of modernization vary. Human rights are an achievement of humanity and a symbol of progress. Respect for and protection of human rights is a basic principle of modern civilization. However, different civilizations hold different understandings of the connotation of values, given the different histories, cultures, systems, and development stages of various countries. In this context, it is necessary to build a bridge for human rights exchanges and cooperation to promote mutual learning among civilizations.

The China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights, launched in 2015, is an institutionalized academic platform for human rights exchanges and cooperation between China and Europe. The 2023 China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights marked the eighth edition of the event. (It was suspended once due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.) Thanks to the joint efforts of all sectors in China and Europe, the China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights has evolved into a major platform for the two sides to conduct exchanges and cooperation in the field of human rights, as well as an important carrier for them to promote mutual understanding and cultural exchanges and mutual learning. It plays a significant role in forming consensus on human rights between China and Europe and building a bridge of common prosperity between Chinese and European civilizations. On September 20, 2023, the 2023 China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights was held in Rome, the capital of Italy. The event was co-hosted by the China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS) and the Faculty of Law at the Sapienza University of Rome and co-organized by the Human Rights Institute at Southwest University of Political Science & Law (SWUPL) and the China-Italy Economic and Cultural Exchange Center. Under the theme of “Modernization and the Diversity of Human Rights Among Civilizations,” the seminar focused on topics such as “exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and the development of modern human rights philosophy,” “modernization and the free and well-rounded development of every person,” “sustainable development in the process of modernization” and “the evolution of the civilization of human rights in the digital age.” More than 130 human rights experts, scholars, government officials, members of parliament, and representatives from political parties and social organizations from 15 countries, including Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States conducted extensive and in-depth discussions and reached a series of consensus at the event held in an online-offline hybrid format.

### **I. Distinguished Guests Highly Acclaimed China’s Human Rights Concepts, Achievements and Contributions at the Seminar**

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, has pointed out that human rights are concrete, rooted in history, and based on current realities, and we cannot mouth empty words on human rights regardless of the social and political conditions and the historical and cultural traditions of a

country.<sup>1</sup> China has constantly strengthened its protection of human rights and promoted the free and well-rounded development of every person in the process of Chinese modernization, making historical achievements in human rights development. In his address at the seminar, Baimachilin, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the 13<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress and president of the CSHRS, pointed out that at present, China is advancing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization. In the process of advancing Chinese modernization, China has formed a people-centered approach to human rights protection. Upholding the leadership of the CPC, China regards the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights, promotes human rights through development, and ensures everyone enjoys human rights equally. It is also strengthening its rule of law for human rights, advancing the well-rounded development of all human rights in a coordinated manner, and taking an active part in the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. By doing so, China has embarked on a new path of human rights development based on its national conditions that aligns with the trend of the times, and made notable achievements in human rights protection. Chinese Ambassador to Italy Jia Guide noted that the CPC and the Chinese government have always upheld the people-centered human rights concepts, adapted the universal principles of human rights to China's realities, considered the rights to subsistence and development the primary and basic human rights, and protected citizens' political, economic, social and other rights in a coordinated manner, leading the Chinese people onto a path of human rights development catering to China's national conditions and making world-astonishing achievements in the modernization and diversity of human rights.

The world is a colorful tapestry woven with diverse cultures, and the appeal of human civilization lies in its diversity. Each civilization is unique and embodies the distinctive wisdom and vision of a country or nation. Tang Xianwen, secretary-general of the CSHRS, stressed that Chinese civilization is the only uninterrupted civilization in the world. The people-centered philosophy has persisted throughout China's political history, and influenced the country's civilizational development and modernization process. The Chinese path to modernization is a road towards common development and prosperity. The CPC is committed to realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, promoting human progress, and building a harmonious world. In his keynote speech at the seminar, Thore Vestby, former mayor of Froggn, and member of the Conservative Party in Norway, and founder of the Ichi Foundation, analyzed the differences in the understanding of human rights between Chinese and Western people from the cultural perspective. He noted that Chinese culture is rooted in the family structure, and the Confucian idea of filial piety is deeply embedded in the cultural gene of Chinese people, which considers collectives more important than individuals. Moreover, he pointed out that the names of many Chinese cities contain the Chinese character "An", which means "peace in the family". The character is comprised of two parts: the upper part represents the "roof," and the lower part means "women." This character conveys Chinese people's aspirations for a peaceful home.

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1. Xi Jinping, "Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights," *Qiushi* 12 (2022).

China puts the human rights of the people at the top of its agenda. Massimiliano Ay, general secretary of the Communist Party of Switzerland, noted that the best way to develop human rights is lifting millions out of poverty, in which China has a lot of valuable experiences and practices that other countries can learn from. Fabio Marcelli, former director of the Institute for International Legal Studies under Italy's National Research Council, pointed out that eliminating poverty is a shared ideal and mission for humanity, and China has eliminated absolute poverty, a historic achievement in poverty reduction.

China has comprehensively promoted law-based governance, with the ultimate goal of safeguarding the people's rights and interests according to the law. Oliviero Diliberto, former Italian Minister of Justice and dean of the Faculty of Law at the Sapienza University of Rome, held that promoting law-based governance and running the state through the rule of law have been a fundamental strategy of China. It is a major innovation for the *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China* to list the system of personality rights as an individual chapter.

## **II. Human Rights Shouldn't Be Used as Political Weapons to Attack, Contain and Smear Other Countries**

General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that each country is entitled to choose its own approach to promoting human rights, and different civilizations and countries should operate on the basis of mutual respect, inclusiveness, exchange, and mutual learning in this regard.<sup>2</sup> Protecting human rights is a shared mission for countries around the world, and promoting global human rights governance requires close collaboration and joint efforts of all nations. All countries should conduct exchanges on human rights on the basis of equality and mutual respect, so as to achieve mutual learning and common development. Unfortunately, Western countries represented by the U.S. use human rights as political weapons to contain other countries.

Human rights should be neither tools for political constraints nor excuses for interfering in other countries' internal affairs. Lord Neil Forbes Davidson, member of the House of Lords from the Labor Party of the UK, noted that mutual respect is a necessary prerequisite for human rights development. At a time of tension in international relations, it is apparent that there are various efforts being made to weaponize the human rights debate. This is seen in the claims that there is a failure on one party to uphold human rights, sometimes to justify sanctions and generally to attack the standing or the legitimacy of party criticized. Fabio Marcelli pointed out that the politicization and instrumentalization of human rights issues is a major challenge in today's multipolar world, as they have been used by some countries as tools to contain others.

West-centrism is the core of Western human rights concepts. Marek Traczyk, president of the Polish Media Association and chairman of the Warsaw Chamber of Commerce, noted that the governments in some places told their citizens the Western system should be the only acceptable state governance system, rejecting all other governance systems. Whatever they wear and eat, people around the world share the same

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2. Ibid.

aspiration: they all pursue happiness for themselves and their families and friends.

There are no unified standards for human rights, let alone Western standards being the only standards. Jan Campbell, chairman of the Institute of the Czech Left, said that China's discussions on human rights have emerged and developed in a unique way. This indicates that the concept of human rights is a fruit of the development of history, which is intimately related to certain social, political and economic conditions and a country's history, culture and values. Therefore, we shouldn't consider the human rights standards and modes of some countries are the only ones that all other countries should follow. Massimiliano Ay stressed that human rights refer not only to political rights for individuals, but also to the right of residence, the right to education, the right to health, and other rights, and Western countries shouldn't use human rights as tools to propagandize their modes and stigmatize governments that don't follow the so-called "liberal modes".

### **III. Exchanges and Mutual Learning among Civilizations Drive the Progress of Modern Human Rights Civilizations**

General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that China advocates for strengthening exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and promoting human rights exchanges and cooperation between different countries, so as to ensure healthier human rights development in all countries around the world.<sup>3</sup> Like other types of civilizations, human rights civilizations are also diverse. Promoting mutual respect and harmonious coexistence between different civilizations is the cornerstone of global human rights development. Implementing the Global Civilization Initiative and strengthening exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations provide new approaches for enriching the diversity of human rights among civilizations and improving global human rights governance. Therefore, the relationship between exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and the progress of modern human rights civilizations became the third major topic discussed at the seminar.

#### **A. Promote cultural exchanges to build consensus on human rights**

The exchanges and mutual learning among different cultures provide significant driving forces for fostering consensus on human rights and promoting the progress of human rights civilizations. Mattéo Carbonelli, editor-in-chief of the Italy-based journal *Human Rights*, noted that we live in a society where modernity and tradition are intertwined, and countries are built according to different views of human rights, so we need to integrate all kinds of cultural resources at different levels, realize exchanges and mutual learning between cultures, and build deeper international consensus on human rights. Domenico Urs from the Sapienza University of Rome, held that we can reach a minimum consensus on human rights by holding academic meetings and promoting cross-border cultural exchanges, so as to better achieve mutual learning between human rights civilizations. In his speech at the closing ceremony of the seminar,

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3. Xi Jinping, "Congratulatory Letter to the 2015 Beijing Forum on Human Rights" (September 16, 2015), *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights*, compiled by the Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2021), 164.

Professor Zhang Yonghe, executive dean of the Human Rights Institute at SWUPL, pointed out that human rights are an open concept, and human rights civilizations must progress, just like human civilization. Different human rights civilizations should reach a new consensus in the course of exchanges and mutual learning. Professor Zhao Shukun from Human Rights Institute at SWUPL noted that in the process of the development of human rights, it is necessary to trace and discover the ontology of human beings, and people's needs should be emphasized, and their emotional nature should be underscored. We need to rediscover the emotional dimension of the modern concept of human rights, and remobilize the inner sympathy of everyone's emotions to establish a broader consensus. Professor Peter Herrmann, member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, stressed that understanding the diversity of modernity is a prerequisite for reaching a consensus on human rights.

### **B. Advance human rights development through equal dialogue**

We should promote exchanges and mutual learning among human rights civilizations through equal communication and dialogue. Oliviero Diliberto stressed that different civilizations should build bridges to facilitate communication, instead of erecting barriers, and expressed the hope that China and Europe will find shared goals of cooperation in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences. Professor Chang Jian, director of the Research Center for Human Rights at Nankai University, pointed out that both Chinese and European traditional cultures contain abundant potential human rights resources. In the process of modernization, China's excellent traditional culture has offered inspiration to the West, playing a certain enlightening role in Europe and helping establish the European theory of human rights. In turn, the European theory of human rights has also stimulated the human rights resources in China's excellent traditional culture to achieve self-transcendence and germinate its own concept of human rights. Marek Traczyk noted that in the face of today's crises, it has become more important to establish dialogue platforms based on mutual understanding and put forward various initiatives. Such collective actions can help mankind better understand itself and build a civilized society featuring free and well-rounded development. Professor Wang Bin from the Research Center for Human Rights at Nankai University held that the implicit alignment between China and the West on the right relative concealment shows that the opposition between universalism and particularism in the concept of human rights should be abandoned, and a consensus on human rights in a multicultural world should be realized through dialogue based on common human values. Professor Wang Wen, executive dean of the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China, pointed out that China has conducted debates on an equal footing with Western countries and the international community in fields such as ideology and the concept of freedom to remove their misunderstandings, and China has also interpreted with greater confidence the significant contributions it has made in human rights to world development, which is also an indispensable path for mutual learning among human rights civilizations.

### **C. Strengthen international cooperation to promote human rights progress**

We should strengthen international development cooperation and promote human rights progress. Francesca Staiano, director of the Center on China Studies of the International Relations Institute at the National University of La Plata in Argentina, pointed out that in the development of human rights, China mainly relies on a law-based approach to protect human rights, which should take into account the integration of domestic and international laws, and achieve a dialogue-based and interactive human rights progress in the interaction and evolution of domestic and international legal cultures. Professor Wang Lifeng, deputy director of the Human Rights Research Center of the Party School of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, noted that human rights should not be used as tools of confrontation in foreign relations, but as a moral platform for cooperation and mutual learning between countries and a link for building a community with a shared future for mankind. The vision of a community with a shared future for mankind is not only to build a community of values that pursues universal human rights, but also a community of interests that resolves conflicts of interest and pursues common interests. The people of all countries should uphold the idea of “taking the world as one family” and jointly contribute to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

## **IV. Modernization Promotes the Free and Well-rounded Development of Human Beings**

General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out, “The ultimate goal of modernization is people’s free and well-rounded development.”<sup>4</sup> The goal of pursuing liberation and realizing free and well-rounded development has been upheld throughout human history. To achieve people’s free and well-rounded development, different countries have walked on different paths to modernization. Therefore, the fourth key topic discussed at the seminar was the relationship between modernization and people’s free and well-rounded development.

### **A. Chinese modernization enriches and develops the diversity of human rights among civilizations**

The CPC has successfully advanced and expanded Chinese modernization and created a new form of human civilization. Lu Guangjin, vice-president of the CSHRS and professor at the Jilin University Human Rights Institute, pointed out that modernization is the general trend of human civilization progress and the common pursuit for people of all countries. Respecting and protecting human rights is a fundamental spirit of modern civilization and an integral part of modernization. It is in the process of advancing and expanding Chinese modernization and building a modern civilization of the Chinese nation that China has embarked on a path of human rights development that conforms to the trend of the times and suits its own national conditions, created a new pattern of human rights civilization, and enriched and developed the diversity of human rights among civilizations around the world. Professor Yao Lu from the School

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4. Xi Jinping, “Walking the Path to Modernization Side by Side: Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting,” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2023.

of Law at Jilin University pointed out that the concept of “Chinese modernization” mentions the people many times, and its core is to realize “people’s modernization” and emphasize “people’s well-rounded development.” Following the “people-oriented” and “people-centered” principles, it replaces the conventional modernization paths that are “capital-centered” and “material-based,” thus transforming the foundation of modern human rights protection from the perspective of the underlying logic and enriching and developing modern human rights concepts from the perspective of “people’s human rights.” Professor Su Faxiang from the Human Rights Research Center of the Minzu University of China held that the human rights concept of mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual appreciation, and mutual learning, which has been formed on the basis of traditional Chinese culture, plays an important role as inspiration and reference for the development of human rights in China and the world at large.

### **B. Chinese modernization is blazing a new trail for the development of human civilization**

In the process of advancing and expanding Chinese modernization, focusing on all-round social progress and all-round human development is the practical basis for creating a new form of human civilization. Zhou Lulu, vice-president and distinguished researcher at Guangzhou University Institute for Human Rights, pointed out that on the path to modernization, China has adopted a people-centered approach to ensure the subjectivity of workers; protect the rights and interests of workers and enhance their sense of happiness; stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of workers through institutional innovation; and optimize the social security system and relieve the worries of workers. Wang Huiru, assistant researcher at the Institute of International Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, noted that whole-process people’s democracy, which is based on the century-long history of China’s political development under the leadership of the CPC, has achieved theoretical innovation and practical transcendence compared to Western democracy. It has developed the form of socialist democratic politics, enriched the new forms of human political civilization, and promoted the democratization of international relations. Dr. Da Lu from the Human Rights Institute at SWUPL pointed out that the standards for measuring a modern country should cover six aspects, including economic, social, cultural, political, ecological, and people’s modernization, and according to the standards, China has made tremendous achievements in modernization, which, on the other hand, testifies to the considerable progress China has made in human rights development.

### **C. China’s law-based modernization has made remarkable contributions to the progress of global rule of law**

China’s law-based modernization path deeply reflects the glorious history of the CPC exploring the rule of law, which is helping to create a new paradigm for a rule of law civilization. It has not only fundamentally changed China, but also deeply affected world history. Professor Fu Zitang, vice-president of the CSHRS and then president of SWUPL, believes that at the heart of Chinese modernization is people’s modernization, and the essential goal of China’s law-based modernization is to meet people’s



aspirations for a better life and promote people's well-rounded development, its basic components include promoting the modernization of China's legislation, law enforcement, judicial practices, the spread of law knowledge, and publicity of the rule of law, and its global implications involving values, goals, historical narratives, discourse expression, etc.

#### **D. The Global Development Initiative demonstrates the global value of Chinese modernization**

The Global Development Initiative summarizes and refines the valuable experience of Chinese modernization, which is an important contribution of Chinese modernization to the world. According to Robert Walker, fellow of the British Royal Society of Arts and the Academy of Social Sciences and member of the European Council of Social Sciences, China's philosophy of development and global governance is consistent with the goals and objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the achievements of Chinese modernization and development benefit every country and individual directly and fairly. The China-proposed Global Development Initiative calls for more inclusive global governance, more effective multilateral mechanisms and more active regional cooperation. Dr. Liao Yuhua from the Human Rights Institute at SWUPL pointed out that the Global Development Initiative introduced in 2021 aims to promote an equitable and balanced global development structure, and advocates for a people-oriented approach to promote human rights through development. At the same time, the initiative stresses the importance of cultural diversity and believes that in order to achieve peace and development, the world should embrace all forms of civilizations.

#### **E. The essential objective of Chinese modernization is to achieve people's modernization**

Chinese modernization is the only way to realize women's free and well-rounded development, and modernization is inseparable from women's contributions. Dr. Xiong Yunxuan from the School of Humanities and Law, Nanchang Hangkong University, discussed the choice of the path for women's liberation and development in the process of Chinese modernization, and held that Chinese modernization condenses new ideas different from the Western modernization model and provides a new perspective for the progress and development of human society in multiple realms. Young people are the future of a country or nation, and they are the main force for comprehensively promoting the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese modernization. Dr. Tan Chunxu from the Human Rights Institute at SWUPL, pointed out that as witnesses, pioneers, and builders of Chinese modernization, young people in the new era should actively participate in China's efforts to promote modernization and inject strong youthful impetus into Chinese modernization. Chinese youth are willing to work with young people from all over the world to contribute wisdom and strength to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind and a better world.

## V. Sustainable Development is an Inevitable Path to Modernization

General Secretary Xi Jinping has stated, “We must uphold fundamental principles and break new ground and ensure the continuity of the modernization process.”<sup>5</sup> Mankind has only one home, and protecting the eco-environment and promoting sustainable development is the shared responsibility of all countries. The serious consequences arising from the failure of some countries to properly manage the relationship between production and ecology warn us that mankind must follow the path of modernization for sustainable development. The modernization of sustainable development is the trend and commonality of world development. Therefore, the fifth key topic discussed at the seminar was sustainable development in the process of modernization.

### A. Chinese modernization injects new ideas into sustainable development

Chinese modernization upholds sustainable development. Professor Wang Dezhi from the School of Law at Shandong University pointed out that the Chinese path to modernization calls for the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature and thus provides Chinese wisdom and solutions for global modernization, and that Chinese modernization entails the coordination of material and cultural-ethical advancements through sustainable development. Meanwhile, under the guidance of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, the path of peaceful development provides a necessary external environment for sustainable development. Jiang Jiani, an associate professor at the Human Rights Research Center of the Minzu University of China, noted that China’s experience shows that the governance model of “ecological symbiosis” can promote China and even the world to respond to climate change, and provide a feasible plan for promoting the development of global human rights civilizations. Professor Li Wanlin, dean of the Law School of Kunming University of Science and Technology, analyzed the relationship between ecological governance modernization and human rights protection from the perspectives of legislation, law enforcement, judicial practices, and abiding by the law. She pointed out that the environmental rights in the new era aim to meet people’s growing needs for a better ecological environment, demonstrate China’s new stance on the development of new-generation human rights and the construction of an ecological civilization, and are considered a kind of emerging rights that are endogenous to the practice of rule of law in environmental conservation.

### B. Path choice for sustainable development in the process of modernization

China is actively and steadily working to realize its carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, and comprehensively promoting green transformation of economic and social development. Tang Yingxia, an associate professor and deputy director of the Research Center for Human Rights at Nankai University, pointed out that to achieve the carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, the Chinese government implemented a series of proactive measures in 2022 to address climate change, involving

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5. Xi Jinping, “Walking the Path to Modernization Side by Side: Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting,” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2023.

industries and sectors such as emission reduction, climate mitigation, market regulation, and finance. Meanwhile, local governments have formulated and enacted regional policies to advance the realization of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, making new progress in guaranteeing people's environmental rights.

Strengthening international environmental cooperation is an important means to achieve global sustainable development. Li Xiade, director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Vienna in Austria, believes that human civilization is currently facing multiple risks such as climate change and ecological degradation, and that mankind should strive to build a "global community facing the future together." Sustainable development cannot be separated from "global responsibilities" based on sincere and in-depth international cooperation, and shouldn't merely focus on the rights of individuals.

Security and peace are the basic prerequisite and important guarantee for sustainable development. Michela Arricale, co-chair of the Italian Center for Democratic Research and Development, pointed out that sustainable development is a very important issue in today's world, and that we should guarantee security and peace in the context of sustainable development because there can be no development without peace, and security will be at stake without development.

We should actively promote the construction of a new humanistic spirit and advance the sustainable development of all mankind. Hu Yajuan, director of the Press Release Research Center of the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies under China International Communications Group, noted that against the backdrop of accelerated changes of the world, the times and history, the international community needs to stick to the strategic goal of maintaining the common interests of all mankind, practice the new humanistic spirit, guide and standardize human activities, and actively formulate feasible plans to address global risks, so as to achieve the goal of sustainable development of the entire humanity.

Diverse actors play an important role in the protection of environmental rights. Guo Miao, an associate professor at the Research Center for Human Rights of Northwest University of Political Science and Law, emphasized that the environmental governance pattern jointly built, shared and governed by multiple actors such as governments, media, non-governmental organizations, and individuals is a useful experience of China to protect environmental rights.

## **VI. Challenges for Human Rights Protection in the Digital Era and Countermeasures**

With the rapid development and wide application of the new-generation information technologies represented by the internet, cloud computing, big data, blockchain and artificial intelligence, human beings have entered a digital society characterized by artificial intelligence, informatization and networking. The advent of the digital era has not only substantially changed the way people produce and live and the means of social governance, but also brought unprecedented threats and challenges to human rights. Therefore, it is of great importance to promote human rights protection in the

digital era. The sixth key topic discussed at the seminar was the evolution of human rights civilizations in the digital era.

### **A. Improve human rights protection in the digital era**

In the digital era, science and technology can better help protect human rights. Professor Liu Huawen, deputy director of the Institute of International Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, pointed out that science and technology have had a profound impact on economic development, social progress, legal reform, and human rights protection. In this context, science and technology can empower the realization of all human rights, facilitate human rights supervision, and greatly enhance human rights governance. Vencherenzo Comey, president of the Rome Bar Federation, said that in the process of practicing law, he felt the convenience brought by digital technologies. Professor Qi Yanping, executive director of the CSHRS and director of the Academic Committee of the Center for Sci&Tech Human Rights Studies at Beijing Institute of Technology, pointed out that in the judicial field, China has invented unique methods and programs for judicial protection of human rights, exploring a new path for modern judicial civilization and judicial protection of human rights.

### **B. Challenges to human rights in the digital era**

With the advent of the digital era, people's ways of living, working and communication are changing, and the advancement and development of digital technologies have brought unprecedented threats to human rights development. María Luis Francisco, adviser to the President of the International Observatory for Human Rights in Portugal, pointed out that human rights violations through digital means are more common than one might think. Gradimir Banković, member of the City Committee of the Serbian Progressive Party in Novi Sad and deputy director of the Solidarity Fund of the Republic of Serbia, pointed out that in the digital era, we all face the challenge of setting clear boundaries about what is and is not allowed on the internet, and to what extent human freedom should be extended. Peng Yixuan, a Ph.D. student at the Institute for Human Rights Law at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, pointed out that according to an OECD report, internet platforms pose potential threats to at least the following human rights: the right to life and personal safety, the right to privacy, freedom of speech and expression, the right to participate in government and political affairs, and the right to work.

### **C. Paths for human rights protection in the digital era**

As people enjoy the convenience brought by digital technologies to daily life, economic development and public wellbeing, human rights are facing new crises, which require high attention and effective countermeasures. Professor Ma Changshan, president of the Institute of Digital Rule of Law at East China University of Political Science and Law, pointed out that digital human rights mainly refer to the rights enjoyed by people based on digital identity and digital life, and represent the fourth generation of human rights. It is necessary to take digital human rights seriously, protect digital human rights, and achieve inclusive and shared digital development, so as

to better improve the global digital order. Professor Liu Zhiqiang from Guangzhou University Institute for Human Rights held that the human rights protection modes in the digital era can be divided into three conceptual types — namely, coordinated, synthetic, and composite models for human rights protection. Regardless of the mode, it needs to be built on a solid theoretical foundation, that is, with human rights as the cornerstone and humanity as the basis, in order to better safeguard human rights in the digital era. We need to safeguard digital human rights with law-based mindsets and approaches. Zhang Xiping, an associate professor of the Central South University Human Rights Center, noted that digital human rights are a new type of rights emerging in the digital era, and it is necessary to emphasize the need to address problems related to the protection of all types of new rights in the digital society through law-based thinking and methods, and promote the modernization of Chinese-style human rights. We need to work together to promote the protection of human rights in the digital era. Gradimir Banković pointed out that human rights protection in the digital era requires the regularized collaboration of juridical organs, media, the public, internet experts, schools, and families.

Particular attention is needed to maintain human dignity and subjectivity in the digital era. Professor Zheng Ge from Koguan School of Law, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, pointed out that human rights in the digital era should ensure that dignity and autonomy are guaranteed in the overall environment of human-computer interaction, which is embodied in the principle of the “human circuit”, the essence of which is to ensure respect for human dignity and subjectivity in the process of automated decision-making. Dr. He Xiaobin from the Center for Human Rights Studies at Shandong University noted that the realization of independent decision-making of digital citizenship through the right to digital existence, the intrinsic independence of digital citizenship through digital personality rights, and the openness of digital citizenship through the right to digital freedom have become the main ways for digital human rights to shape digital citizenship.

## Conclusion

Modernization is essential to human progress and an irreversible trend. Countries can choose their own modernization path. Human rights were born in certain historical conditions, and evolve alongside the development of the latter. However, there are different paths for human rights development. Unfortunately, some countries use human rights as political weapons to attack, contain and smear other countries. Human rights should not be abused as tools like this, but should serve as bridges for promoting international cooperation. All countries should discuss human rights issues on the basis of recognizing each others' values and in the principle of mutual respect. Today, it is opportune for us to gather in Rome to hold this China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights under the theme of “Modernization and the Diversity of Human Rights Among Civilizations.”

Based on the speeches and papers of the representatives of various parties at the seminar, three important points of consensus can be summarized:

First, the participants from various countries spoke highly of the great achievements that China has made in the human rights cause and fully recognized China's contributions in promoting the development and progress of the global human rights cause. Chinese modernization is a type of modernization that fully respects and protects human rights. It upholds the people-centered development philosophy and makes realizing people's aspirations for a better life its starting point and goal, with the ultimate aim of achieving free and well-rounded development of every person. On the Chinese path to modernization, China has created a new form of human civilization as well as a new form of Chinese human rights civilization.

Second, the participants from all countries agreed that it is necessary to discard the concept of "Western-centrism," transcend the mindset of "cultural superiority," promote exchanges and mutual learning among human rights civilizations on the basis of equality and mutual respect, and inject new impetus into the diversity of human rights among civilizations. Human rights civilizations feature diversity, equality, and inclusivity. Considering the differences between Eastern and Western human rights civilizations, countries should get rid of any ideological biases, uphold the concept of "harmony in diversity," fully respect and safeguard the diversity among civilizations, and actively promote harmonious coexistence, exchanges, and mutual learning between different civilizations in the process of communication and interaction. They should also advance exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations in an equal and modest manner, maintain the diversity, equality, and inclusivity of human rights civilizations, and make due contributions to advancing human rights progress and world peace and development.

Third, participants reaffirmed that human rights represent an open concept, and that we should discuss the development of human rights with an open mind and jointly promote the progress of human rights in the world. Human rights dialogue is a major form of international cooperation on human rights. It aims to promote mutual understanding between different countries and advance harmonious development around the world. In terms of both connotation and extension, the concept of human rights is related to certain cultures, and different cultural backgrounds can affect people's understanding of this concept. While recognizing and respecting different civilizations and cultures, we should seek common ground while setting aside differences and find a shared goal for cooperation. There is no universal standard or mode for human rights development in the world, but countries can communicate with and learn from each other to promote global human rights progress.

(Translated by *LIU Haile*)