

## Pioneering a New Realm of Human Rights Civilization in the Chinese Path to Modernization

— *An Overview of the Symposium on “The Chinese Path to Modernization and the Promotion of Free and Comprehensive Human Development”*

WANG Xinyi\* & HUANG Anjie\*\*

**Abstract:** *On October 14, 2023, a symposium themed “The Chinese Path to Modernization and the Promotion of Free and Comprehensive Human Development” was held in Changchun, Jilin Province, China. More than fifty experts, scholars, and researchers from national institutions and universities engaged in discussions and exchanges on human rights on the Chinese path to modernization, including the path, practice, knowledge systems, and civilization forms of human rights. This symposium played a significant role in advancing the construction of the disciplinary system, academic system, and discourse system of human rights in China.*

**Keywords:** Chinese path to modernization ♦ Chinese human rights civilization ♦ China’s indigenous human rights knowledge system ♦ free and comprehensive human development

Realizing free and comprehensive human development is the ideal realm and the supreme state of the Marxist human rights view. The Chinese path to modernization has created conditions for promoting the free and comprehensive human development, and has enriched the diversity of human rights civilizations. In order to thoroughly implement General Secretary Xi Jinping’s discourses on respecting and protecting human rights and the guiding principles of the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and to explore in depth the connotations and logic of the Chinese path to modernization for the free and comprehensive human development, a symposium themed “The Chinese Path to Modernization and the Promotion of Free and Comprehensive Human Development” was held in Changchun, Jilin Province, on October 14, 2023, under the guidance of the China Society for Human Rights Studies. Jointly hosted by the Human Rights Research Center of Jilin University and the Law School of Jilin University, the event was attended by more than 50 experts and scholars from the China Society for Human Rights Studies, the Party School of the CPC Central Committee, China International Communications Group, Jilin University, Nankai University, Beijing Institute of Technology, Huazhong University of Science

\* WANG Xinyi (王新怡), Doctoral candidate of the School of Law, Jilin University.

\*\*HUANG Anjie (黄安杰), Doctoral candidate of the School of Law, Jilin University.

and Technology, Central South University, Southwest University of Political Science and Law and other relevant institutions and institutes of higher learning.

Professor Cai Lidong, executive vice-president of Jilin University, said in his opening speech that China has always put the people in the first place, adhered to the path of human rights development suited to the trend of the times, and continuously enhanced human rights protection and comprehensive human development in promoting the Chinese path to modernization. The Chinese path to modernization, based on a community with a shared future for mankind, has contributed a Chinese solution to strengthening global human rights governance, provided new ideas for other countries to achieve modernization, and created a new form of free and comprehensive human development.

### **I. The Path of Human Rights Development in the Chinese Path to Modernization**

The leadership of the CPC is the fundamental guarantee for the development of the human rights cause in China; and respecting and protecting human rights is the unremitting pursuit of the Chinese Communists. Mao Junxiang, executive director of the Human Rights Studies Center of Central South University, said that General Secretary Xi Jinping's discourses on respecting and protecting human rights contains important political logic and includes five aspects, namely political tradition, political belief, political leadership, political foundation, and political vision. Qi Yanping, chair professor of Beijing Institute of Technology, held that in developing human rights, contemporary China had upheld the path of "one axis, multiple lines, and the entire domain," in which the Communist Party of China has exercised comprehensive leadership of the human rights cause, and the state has coordinated multiple human rights action lines to promote the development and progress of human rights in various fields. Zheng Ruohan, from the Human Rights Institute of Southwest University of Political Science and Law, believes that the political party is the key to understanding the Chinese path to modernization. As the ruling party with the ability to represent interests and integrate society, the Communist Party of China constitutes the core competitiveness of China's path to human rights development.

The Chinese path to modernization has promoted the comprehensive development of China's human rights cause and has enhanced the protection of all human rights. Professor Han Dayuan, director of the Human Rights Center at Renmin University of China, said that China has to shoulder the responsibility of global human rights governance and continually improve human rights protection in China, to furnish more Chinese human rights concepts and human rights ideas to the world, so as to eventually realize the supreme value of human rights, namely free and comprehensive human development. Professor Chang Jian, director of the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Nankai University, said that the Chinese path to modernization embodies China's judgment of the pros and cons and value choice of human development in modernization, and that its determination of the goals and contents of modernization and the constraints on the mode of development will have a profound impact on human development, and propose corresponding binding requirements on the goals,

contents and methods of human rights protection. Zhou Li, associate professor of the Human Rights Institute at the Southwest University of Political Science and Law, held that we must regard the three categories of “people,” “needs,” and “development” as the foundation and take the main contradiction in Chinese society as the concern to form the underlying logic of the contemporary Chinese view of human rights — the unity of human needs and development. Zhang Ying, a doctoral student at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, believes that the Chinese path to modernization has gone beyond the existing path of “human rights-based development” in the international community and has fundamentally shifted to the “development-based human rights path,” bringing new vitality to the right to development in the new era with free, comprehensive and high-quality development.

## **II. The Approach to Human Rights Practice in the Chinese Path to Modernization**

Democracy is the common value of all human beings, and China’s whole-process people’s democracy is an important way for the Chinese people to realize their political rights. Professor Zhang Yonghe, executive director of the Human Rights Institute at Southwest University of Political Science and Law, said that whole-process people’s democracy has embedded democracy in a modern country and achieved cultural balance and economic development, adding that it is truly China’s original human rights practice and discourse. Professor Hu Yuhong, director of the Human Rights Institute at East China University of Political Science and Law, said that the comprehensively promoted Chinese path to modernization and the continuously improved whole-process people’s democracy calls for more in-depth theoretical discussions on the “five rights of democracy” to turn them into a legal right in the true sense, so as to improve the legal protection of human rights. Wang Liwan, associate professor of the Institution for Human Rights at China University of Political Science and Law, held that seen from a historical perspective, the image of people created by China’s constitution has shifted from “organized people” in the early days of the founding of the People’s Republic of China to “organized free people” after the launch of reform and opening up; from a practical perspective, the constitution safeguards and promotes free and comprehensive human development. Also, it provides a stable and powerful organizational form for the union of free people. Zhu Shanshan, associate researcher at the School of Law at Southeast University, believes that China has upheld the leadership of the Party as the core, the rule of law as the guarantee, and the people’s congress system as the carrier, realizing the coexistence of democracy and human rights.

The Chinese path to modernization adheres to the common development of “all individuals” and “all the people,” and strives to ensure that no one is left behind, so that all people can enjoy the fruits of modernization. Tan Peiqiong, from the Human Rights Institute of Southwest University of Political Science and Law, holds that China has cherished and actively promoted the development of women’s causes in pursuing the Chinese path to modernization, and that women can more widely and fully enjoy economic, political, educational, health, and social security rights. Professor Zhang Jianjiang, director of the School of Law at Xinjiang University, said that the

practice of Xinjiang's human rights cause from protecting the right to subsistence and promoting the right to ensuring the people's right to pursue a happy life has proved that leading the human rights cause in Xinjiang with the Chinese path to modernization is feasible. Shen Taixia, associate professor of Jinan University Law School, believes that the development path of China's human rights and the concept of sustainable development are compatible, and that, in practice, it is closely integrated with the principle of sustainable development. Kuang Hong, a doctoral student of the School of Law at Jilin University, argued that the third distribution is not only an important means to achieve common prosperity, but also a vivid practice of contemporary China's concept of human rights, adding that it is of great significance to the realization of human rights.

### **III. The Human Rights Knowledge System of the Chinese Path to Modernization**

Regarding the construction of human rights knowledge system, Professor Wang Lifeng of the Political and Legal Teaching and Research Office of the Party School of the CPC Central Committee said that the subject of human rights is universal and free. He added that in terms of the object of rights, human rights include basic rights to clothing, food, housing, and transportation and incubate pluralistic rights on this basis, thus, the pluralistic nature of human rights has been proven. Professor Liu Zhiqiang of the Institute for Human Rights at Guangzhou University said that the theory of spatio-temporal construction should be used to address the issue of the universality and particularity of human rights, and that the development path of China's human rights should be viewed with the theory from the historical, value, practical and theoretical dimensions. Xu Shuang, associate professor of the Institute for Human Rights at China University of Political Science and Law, held that China's human rights concept had been deeply influenced by its traditional excellent culture — with “specific individuals” as concerns and “groups” as the ontology of human rights, so that the “abstract individuals” in the context of international law evolve into concrete “people” in the Chinese context. Zhang Han, from the Law Teaching and Research Office of the Party School of the Chongqing Municipal CPC Committee, believed that China's struggle for human rights is different from that of the West, and that the long course of development of the Chinese nation and Chinese civilization should become an important stand, viewpoint, and method for understanding and protecting human rights.

Regarding the construction of human rights disciplines, Professor Chen Youwu, director of the School of Law at Guangdong University of Technology, said that the Chinese path to modernization has not only pointed out the direction, clarified the thinking, and furnished the impetus for the contemporary development of human rights disciplines in China, but also enriched their practice forms and extended their basic scope. Wang Jian, associate professor of the School of Political Science and Law at Northeast Normal University, believed that there are three sets of dialectical relationships between human rights education and the Chinese path to modernization in higher education. Specifically, human rights education in colleges and universities is one of the inherent requirements for the comprehensive human development in the

Chinese path to modernization. The Chinese path to modernization is the external condition for human rights education in colleges and universities, and human rights education in colleges and universities and the Chinese path to modernization are mutually reinforcing and promoting.

Regarding the construction of the human rights discourse, Professor Ma Changshan, director of the Institute of Digital Rule of Law at East China University of Political Science and Law, said that human beings have shifted from a biological subsistence to a digital mode of production, and in this scenario, digital human rights have been born. Digital human rights are an iterative concept, an inevitable trend, and an essential part of the Chinese path to modernization, and thus must be clarified. Yan Naixin, a doctoral student at Southwest University of Political Science and Law, held that digital human rights should be used as a human rights discourse, and its strength should be enhanced to continuously condense China's achievements in human rights protection in the digital field. Professor Lu Haina, executive director of Human Rights Center at Renmin University of China, said that there are four goals in building China's independent knowledge system of international human rights law: the first is to improve China's voice in the international human rights field, the second is to promote equal dialogue in international human rights, the third is to promote the alignment of Chinese law with international human rights law, and the fourth is to promote the globalization of China's human rights theory and practice. Wei Xiaoxu of the School of Law at Jilin University believes that the discourse summarization and systematic expression of the right to subsistence in China's human rights practice needs to be improved. The right to subsistence includes two levels, namely "basic solution" and "real solution", and only by addressing the "basic subsistence" and "improved life" can the right to subsistence be truly satisfied.

#### **IV. The New Form of Human Rights Civilization in the Chinese Path to Modernization**

The Chinese path to modernization has created a new form of human rights civilization and enriched the diversity of human rights civilization. Professor Lu Guangjin, vice-president of the China Society for Human Rights Studies and professor of the School of Law at Jilin University, said that human rights civilization is a historical objective existence, and that its development includes but is not limited to the four connotations of respecting people, liberating people, protecting people, and developing people. The construction of a new form of human rights civilization in the Chinese path to modernization has opened up a new path for human rights protection in countries with a huge population, developing countries, and socialist countries, in the progress of mankind toward the future. It has also helped global human rights governance to develop in a fairer, just, reasonable, and inclusive direction. Professor Qian Jinyu of the Human Rights Center at Northwest University of Political Science and Law believes that in practice, the Chinese human rights civilization takes the pluralism of human rights civilization as the context and "people-centeredness" as the core concept to construct a socialist path of human rights development with Chinese characteristics, contributing Chinese wisdom to the development of human rights in developing coun-

tries, the modernization of global human rights governance, and the enrichment of the new connotations of human rights civilization.

China has upheld its path of human rights development, promoting the progress of its own human rights cause, actively participating in global human rights governance, and contributing its wisdom to the world human rights cause. Sun Ming, vice-president of the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies at China International Communications Group, said that in the vivid practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind, China has actively played its role as a responsible major country, actively maintained world peace and security, consolidated the development foundation of global human rights protection, promoted human rights exchanges and cooperation, and contributed to the global human rights cause. Xiao Wu, associate professor of the Human Rights Institute at Southwest University of Political Science and Law, believes that in enhancing and improving the international dissemination of human rights, the most important thing is to uphold the basic stance, embrace moral principles, and unswervingly follow the path of China's human rights development. Shen Tianjiao, a postdoctoral fellow of the School of Law at Jilin University, held that the "Three Global Initiatives" are not only China's practices, but also new public goods provided by China to the international community. They have provided a development-oriented, secure, and civilized approach to global human rights governance, demonstrating China's influence and wisdom.

Professor Chang Jian, director of the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Nankai University, and Professor He Zhipeng, director of the Law School at Jilin University and executive director of its Human Rights Research Center, made academic summaries of the seminar. Professor Chang Jian pointed out that in the past, China learned from the world, but now China has rich practice and successful experience in the field of human rights, and can engage in equal dialogues with the world. Professor He Zhipeng said that this symposium was a very enlightening "brainstorming" event, but some basic concepts need further clarification. For example, what are the commonalities between Western modernization and the Chinese path to modernization, if any? For another example, "Were there human rights in ancient China?" in ancient China, there was indeed no concept of "human rights" on the one hand, but there was some content that could be "transformed" into human rights on the other. Still, when talking about the core content of "human rights," we must reach a consensus on the essential content of human rights.

(Translated by *QIAN chuijun*)