

Human Rights and Development: China's Contributions Based on a Larger Concept of Human Rights

WU Wenyang*

Abstract: *The Western liberal view of global governance can no longer effectively address the challenges facing the world today or respond to the demands of developing countries in the fields of human rights and development. Meanwhile, the United Nations human rights and development agenda also has its limitations. Against such a backdrop, China's path of human rights development has avoided the trap of human rights confrontation and the clash of civilizations. It has set an example of complementarity and positive interaction between human rights and development by unifying collective human rights with individual human rights and integrating the universality and particularity of human rights. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, delivered a speech at the 37th group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on China's Path of Human Rights Development. This elevated China's human rights development to a new historical height. Practice has proved that China's concept and path of human rights in the new era have not only effectively promoted the development of its human rights cause, but also contributed Chinese wisdom to the global cause of human rights and development with a larger concept of human rights. Under the framework of the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Global Development Initiative, China has contributed to enhancing the discourse power of developing countries in human rights and building a fairer, more just, more reasonable and more inclusive system for global human rights governance.*

Keywords: human rights and development ♦ a larger concept of human rights ♦ global human rights governance ♦ China's path of human rights development

The intention of the human rights and development agenda, including the

* WU Wenyang (武文扬), Lecturer at the Institution for Human Rights at China University of Political Science and Law. Doctor of Laws. Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (24CXTD01).

right to development, is to promote the simultaneous advancement of human rights and development, facing up to and addressing the development demands of all countries, especially those of developing countries. The ultimate goal is to improve the well-being of all peoples and individuals through development. However, some countries still take development as being distinct from human rights, regard the people's right to development as a provocation to individual human rights, label proposals different from the mainstream Western view of human rights as contrary to universal values, and consider any discourse or practice that favors development as an erosion of the existing human rights system.

In this context, China's path of human rights development and the concepts and initiatives it has put forward to the world reflect a larger concept of human rights. This larger concept of human rights is consistent with the goals and spirit of the United Nations, namely, "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" as stated in the preamble to the *United Nations Charter*. This shows that for the United Nations, promoting development and improving people's livelihood, along with the right to development and economic and social rights, should not be marginalized or inferior to civil and political rights. This larger concept of human rights also embodies China's prominent cultural nature of inclusiveness and mutual learning and integrates China's accumulated development experience based on its national conditions. It is destined to be different from the understanding of human rights and development paths of some Western countries. It is not a challenge to the United Nations and its existing human rights system, nor is it an assimilation of other countries' human rights concepts or paths, but rather an expression of the demands of diverse civilizations and developing countries. This diversity is exactly what is needed for the healthy development of the global human rights cause.

This larger concept of human rights conveys the following core ideas: First, human rights and development can promote each other rather than oppose each other, and inclusive and sustainable development plays a significant role in promoting and protecting human rights; Second, the right to development, which takes individuals and peoples as the subjects, is interdependent and inseparable from other types of human rights and should be given equal attention; Third, there is no unified human rights development model applicable to all civilizations and peoples, and each country has the right to choose a human rights development path that suits its national conditions and development stage. These ideas will further enrich the human rights and development agenda so that developing countries and their people can develop adequately and independently and become equal participants and beneficiaries of global development, rather than being looked down upon, preached to, and transformed.

I. The International “Human Rights and Development” Agenda and Its Limitations

Human rights and development are the two pillars of the United Nations, and their relationship has been recognized by the international community. In the 1980s and 1990s, developing countries vigorously promoted the right to development to become a part of international human rights rules, and human rights and development gradually constituted an indivisible agenda in the United Nations. However, after this wave, bottlenecks in the relationship between human rights and development began to emerge under the influence of the dominant Western human rights discourse, and the connotation and actual value of the right to development remained to be demonstrated. The human rights and development challenges facing humanity in the post-pandemic and post-2030 Agenda era are in dire need of more effective solutions. The “human rights-based approach to development” proposed by the United Nations attempts to place development under the framework of international human rights law, but it cannot provide a universal answer for all countries, especially developing countries. Therefore, the human rights and development agenda requires more participation from developing countries, more diverse, innovative, and expansive breakthroughs, and practical solutions. China's larger concept of human rights will add new voices and vitality to this field starting from the needs and perspective of a developing country and from the wisdom and experience of an ancient civilization with a long history.

A. The formation of the international “human rights and development” agenda

In the 1950s and 1960s, the human rights and development agenda gradually took shape at the United Nations. With the emergence of a large number of newly independent countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the calls from developing countries for national independence, sovereign equality, economic development, and opposition to outside interference in internal affairs grew louder louder, and the demand for establishing a new international political and economic order increased. The United Nations development agenda was vigorously advanced under such circumstances. The period from 1961 to 1970 became the first “Development Decade” of the United Nations, which laid the foundation for strengthening the relationship between development and human rights and promoting the formation of the right to development. The relationship between human rights and development was formally recognized at the 1968 International Conference on Human Rights held in Teheran, Iran.¹ The resolution on “Economic Development and Human

¹ Surya P. Subedi, “Declaration on the Right to Development,” *United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law*, 2021, page 2, https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ha/drd/drd_e.pdf.

Rights” adopted at the conference recognized that “there is a profound inter-connection between the realization of human rights and economic development.”² In the late 1980s, the third generation of human rights represented by the right to development began to receive more attention under the advocacy and promotion of developing countries. However, in the ideological confrontation during the Cold War, Western countries were clearly biased towards the first generation of human rights, namely civil and political rights, which they believed originated from the constitutional documents of Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and France, rather than the second generation of human rights, namely economic, social, and cultural rights, which were aimed at addressing social and economic inequality. They were also generally wary and skeptical of the third generation of human rights. The West used the first generation of human rights as a way to counter the so-called threat posed by communist countries. Western scholars even believe that the third generation of human rights would have a negative impact on the existing international human rights protection system.³ Nevertheless, the right to development came into being with the rise of the Global South.

As some scholars have pointed out, the third generation of human rights is what the people of the Global South need and what the times require.⁴ On December 4, 1986, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the groundbreaking *Declaration on the Right to Development*, recognizing that “the right to development is an inalienable human right.” Since then, the relationship between human rights and development has been elaborated and affirmed at many important international conferences. At the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, representatives from 171 countries adopted the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, emphasizing that the right to development is an integral part of fundamental human rights and recognizing that “democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.” This relationship was also recognized by the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, the 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit, and the 2005 and 2010 World Summits. The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* adopted by the United Nations in 2015 further demonstrates the vision of various countries on human rights and development in the post-Millennium Development Goals era. This document is based on international

² “Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights,” *United Nations Publication*, 1968, page 14.

³ Spasimir Domaradzki, Margaryta Khvostova and David Pupovac, “Karel Vasak’s Generations of Rights and the Contemporary Human Rights Discourse,” *Human Rights Review* 20 (2019): 427.

⁴ Farooq Hassan, “Solidarity Rights: Progressive Evolution of International Human Rights Law,” *New York Law School Journal of Human Rights Annual* 1 (1983): 72.

human rights treaties and declarations as well as the outcome documents of World Summits and refers to instruments such as the *Declaration on the Right to Development*. It establishes 17 major goals for sustainable development in three aspects, namely economic, social, and environmental fields, with the aim of creating “a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity.”⁵ In 2019, the 42nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted the resolution on the right to development jointly proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement and China. The resolution proposes to continue to “lead to raising the right to development to the same level and on a par with all other human rights and fundamental freedoms” and to promote the development of “a draft legally binding instrument on the right to development” in accordance with the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*.⁶ This resolution has received extensive support from developing countries.

At the same time, the “mainstreaming of human rights” advocated by the United Nations system since 1997 has enabled the “human rights-based approach to development” to take shape, making the relationship between human rights and development clearer and closer. The understanding of development has also shifted from “economic development” to a broader and more comprehensive sense, namely the “sustainable development of mankind.” Under the initiative of mainstreaming human rights, some UN agencies began to incorporate human rights into their agendas and activities, and reached a lot of consensus in 2003 on cooperation for the human rights-based approach to development. This consensus proposes that all development cooperation, policies, and technical support shall further promote the implementation of the rights enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and other international human rights documents.⁷ In 2005, Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary General, called in a report for mainstreaming human rights to be adequately reflected in key policy and resource decisions and stressed that development, security, and human rights are inseparable and mutually reinforcing.⁸ In response to the initiative of mainstreaming human rights, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposed in 1998 to integrate human rights with sustainable human development.⁹ Its *Human*

⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” September 25, 2015, paragraph 8.

⁶ UN Doc, *The Rights to Development*, A/HRC/RES/42/23, September 27, 2019.

⁷ “The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies,” September 2003, United Nations Development Group: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/human-rights-based-approach-development-cooperation-towards-common-understanding-among-un>.

⁸ UN Doc, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, A/59/2005, March 21, 2005, paragraphs 16 and 144.

⁹ United Nations Development Programme, *Integrating Human Rights with Sustainable Human Development: A UNDP Policy Document*, UNDP, 1998, page 17-18.

Development Report 2000 is even regarded as an important node for UN agencies to integrate human rights with development and make a discourse shift. The report points out that human rights and human development share a common vision and a common purpose — to secure the freedom, well-being, and dignity of all people everywhere. Enhancing human development and respecting human rights calls for a clear understanding of the mutually reinforcing links between the two and pursuing a human rights approach to development.¹⁰ Generally speaking, this approach requires ensuring the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and principles and operationally directed to promoting human rights, including the right to development.¹¹

B. The limitations of the existing international “human rights and development” agenda

Although the relationship between human rights and development has been recognized internationally, the existing discussions and actual results on this agenda have not effectively promoted the progress of both since the world faces conventional and non-conventional security threats such as armed conflicts, food shortages, and climate change. Instead, there has been a regression in some areas, exacerbating the global North-South gap and development imbalance. Affected by COVID-19, the global extreme poverty rate has increased instead of decreased, and progress in eliminating multidimensional poverty is expected to regress by eight to ten years.¹² Under the influence of the Russia — Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions against Russia, developing countries are facing difficulties such as rising energy and food prices and intensified inflation. The superposition of multiple crises has made it more urgent for developing countries to recover their economy, promote development, and enhance their capability to protect human rights. This also makes it increasingly difficult to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals as scheduled. The Western-dominated human rights order and global governance obviously cannot provide a panacea for effectively resolving human rights and development issues. The right to development, which allows developing countries to eliminate obstacles to development and address hunger, poverty, and inequality among countries in a fairer international order and a more favorable economic environment, remains neglected. The conditions and demands of developing countries have not been

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2000*, Oxford University Press, 2000, page 1 and 43.

¹¹ UNSDG Human Rights Working Group, *Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Programming-Note Prepared by UNDG/DOCO*, October 2012, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/information_note_5-human_rights-based_approach.pdf.

¹² “COVID-19 has led to the first rise in extreme poverty in a generation,” 2021, United Nations Statistics Division: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/goal-01/>.

taken seriously, and they are often in a passive position where they can only accept the export of human rights before development.

First, the theory and practice of the right to development have not received due attention and promotion. Although the right to development has been included in a number of important international and regional human rights documents with the efforts of developing countries, which has become a model for integrating human rights into development and pursuing equal development opportunities between the North and the South, the *Declaration on the Right to Development* has not yet been transformed into a legally binding international convention. Some countries and international organizations, including the European Union, the United States, and Japan, still oppose transforming the right to development into an international legal system. Western academia has also raised many doubts and denials about the connotation and implementation of the right to development, as well as the nature of collective human rights.¹³ On October 12, 2023, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the right to development and decided to submit the draft international covenant on the right to development annexed to the resolution to the General Assembly for consideration, negotiation, and subsequent adoption.¹⁴ The draft clearly states that “development is a human right that is indivisible from and interrelated and interdependent with all other human rights” and that “development contributes to the enjoyment of all other human rights.” The resolution received 29 votes in favor (including all African and Asia-Pacific member states), 13 votes against (all Eastern European and Western European member states and the United States), and five abstentions.¹⁵ It can be seen that there is still a clear division within the international community on this issue.

One reason for such division is that the differences caused by the right to development have long gone beyond the discussion of legal rights to represent the demands of developing countries for a new international economic and political order that is more equitable and reasonable. Therefore, the early discussions on the right to development did not serve to increase understanding of the relationship between human rights and development but rather have been polarized along North-South lines with Western and non-Western countries taking opposing positions.¹⁶ Western countries, advantaged and unwilling to

¹³ Liu Huawen, “On the Essentials of the Thoughts on Human Rights in Contemporary China: A Documentary Review of Xi Jinping Speech on Human Rights,” *Journal of Comparative Law* 4 (2022): 10; Arjun Sengupta, “On the Theory and Practice of the Right to Development,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2002): 841-846.

¹⁴ UN Doc, *The Rights to Development*, A/HRC/RES/54/18, October 13, 2023.

¹⁵ The 47 Member States of the United Nations Human Rights Council are elected by the General Assembly, with 13 seats allocated to African states, 13 to Asia-Pacific states, 8 to Latin American and Caribbean states, 7 to Western European and other states, and 6 to Eastern European states.

¹⁶ Bonny Ibhawoh, “The Right to Development: The Politics and Problems of Power and Resistance,”

redistribute resources and technology, argue that the right to development is merely a moral obligation rather than a legal one. They claim it is simply a combination of existing rights and does not create new legal obligations, citing reasons such as economic freedom and the avoidance of jurisdictional conflicts in trade.¹⁷ However, unlike the United States, most of the European member states of the Human Rights Council voted in favor of “right to development” resolutions in the five years from 2010 to 2014.¹⁸ Although all European member states except Russia have since switched to the opposition camp, this still reveals that the attitude towards the right to development within the West and developed countries has not been consistent from the beginning to the end, nor has it been consistently opposed.

Another reason is that the right to development breaks the boundaries between individuals and the country and has become a collective right claimed by the people to the country, or even by one country to another. This poses a huge challenge to the Western liberal concept of human rights. The *Declaration on the Right to Development* does not appeal to Western developed countries, as it requires them to “formulate international development policies,” carry out “effective international co-operation in providing developing countries with appropriate means and facilities to foster their comprehensive development,” and make efforts to establish a “new international economic order” when fulfilling their obligations. Developed countries are even anxious that the right to development could be seen as a “right to everything” — allowing states or individuals to sue rich nations for fulfillment.¹⁹ In such context, the right to development, which is a relatively vague concept and lacks the political support of Western countries, has not received the same status and attention as other human rights, either when it was created or now. Only if developing countries continue to enrich the theory and practice of this right and break the political and academic monopoly of developed countries on human rights discourse can the right to development be implemented and advanced in the future.

Second, history shows that the “human rights-based approach to

Human Rights Quarterly, vol. 33, no. 1 (2011): 77.

¹⁷ Stephen Marks, “The Human Right to Development: Between Rhetoric and Reality,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 17 (2004): 144.; Karin Arts and Tamo Atabongawung, “The Right to Development in International Law: New Momentum Thirty Years Down the Line?” translated by Xu Yunxia, edited by He Tiantian, *Chinese Review of International Law* 1 (2017): 36.

¹⁸ In the five years from 2010 to 2014, the European and other states (a total of 13 seats, including six for Eastern European states and seven for Western European and other states) voted in favor of the Human Rights Council’s “right to development” resolutions in the numbers of 12, 12, 12, 12, and 10. However, at the turning point in 2015, only Russia of the 13 voted in favor, while 10 of the remaining European states voted against and two abstained from voting. UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/15/25; A/HRC/RES/18/26; A/HRC/RES/21/32; A/HRC/RES/24/4; A/HRC/RES/27/2.

¹⁹ Felix Kirchmeier, “The Right to Development — Where Do We Stand?” *Occasional Papers, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, N°23, July 2006, page 12-13.

development” proposed by the United Nations was deeply influenced by Western developed countries. It was initially put forward mainly for development assistance, namely the “human rights-based approach to development assistance.” This approach advocates placing international development cooperation and official development assistance under the framework of international human rights law. The report *The Rights Way to Development — A Human Rights Approach to Development Assistance* released by an Australian organization in 1995 is considered an early initiative of this approach.²⁰ Although UN documents such as the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* underline the inseparability and positive interaction between human rights and development, the concepts and practices of some Western countries or organizations are obviously politically motivated or entirely based on inherent human rights biases and preferences. In essence, they still separate human rights from development or put the two in opposition to each other, and highlight assistance based on the human rights obligations of recipient countries. This is completely different from developing countries’ demand for collective development assistance under the agenda of the right to development. In such context, the assisted developing countries and regions are usually considered to have issues concerning human rights, democratization, liberalization, etc., and need human rights assistance and transformation. For some Western organizations, only by first promoting campaigns related to civil and political rights, such as holding elections, can the economic and social development of the recipient countries be boosted, such as solving poverty and other issues.²¹ This is not only a view that reflects inherent Western thinking and prejudices, but also a means of human rights diplomacy by the West to interfere in other countries’ politics and development paths.

In contrast, China’s larger concept of human rights fully recognizes the importance of the right to development and the demands of developing countries it represents. However, the realization of the right to development is not just for the people of developing countries, but for all mankind. Unequal and unbalanced global development is unsustainable, and no country can remain immune when other countries and regions face challenges such as poverty, conflicts, and refugee crises. As “right to development” resolutions have pointed out, the international community should foster effective international cooperation and global development partnerships, and South-South cooperation is a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, North-South cooperation. The consensus and cooperation among developing countries in this field is not intended to reduce or compromise North-South cooperation or

²⁰ Human Rights Council of Australia, *The Right Way to Development: A Human Rights Approach to Development Assistance* (2nd edition), 1996.

²¹ H.-O. Sano, “Development and Human Rights: The Necessary, but Partial Integration of Human Rights and Development,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2000): 743.

to provoke confrontation between developing and developed countries. In addition, the core ideas of China's larger concept of human rights are rooted in UN documents and human rights instruments, especially the *United Nations Charter*, as well as existing international human rights consensus such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Declaration on the Right to Development*. It is not a negation of the "human rights-based approach to development" or a denial of the universality of human rights, but rather emphasizes the right of countries to independently decide their own human rights development path and priorities based on their needs and culture in accordance with international human rights rules and principles. This respects not only the sovereignty of all countries but also the right to development and self-determination of all peoples.

II. The Prominent Features and Advantages of China's Human Rights Development Path

After reaching a climax with the *Declaration on the Right to Development* and the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, the human rights and development agenda needs to break through the limitations of human rights concepts and paths dominated by Western developed countries if it wants to make breakthroughs and play a more active role in the post-2030 Agenda era.

The United States, Australia, and other countries always explain their opposition to the United Nations resolutions on the right to development by saying that the right to development "is not a universal right held and enjoyed by individuals," that it is inappropriate to "overstate the relationship between the concept of a right to development and the SDGs", and that it cannot support the inclusion of the phrase "to expand and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation" and "people-centered development" that is promoted by a single Member State (China) and does not have an internationally understood definition.²² This stance not only reflects a narrow understanding that human rights can only be personal, universal, and Western, but also reveals the limitations that human rights (even the right to development) and development are mutually exclusive and the process of achieving sustainable development goals can only be based on human rights and cannot be "overdeveloped."

China's human rights development path does not stick to a universal "international template," but combines the spirit of putting people first, being benevolent and tolerant, and pursuing great harmony and justice as put forward in Chinese traditional culture with China's development practice,

²² "Explanation of Vote on a Third Committee Resolution on the Right to Development," 2022, United States Mission to the United Nations: <https://usun.usmission.gov/explanation-of-vote-on-a-third-committee-resolution-on-the-right-to-development/>; "Explanation of Vote: Resolution on the Right to Development," 2020, Australian Government: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/hrc-statements/45th-session-human-rights-council/explanation-vote-resolution-right-development>.

demonstrating the possibility of a virtuous interaction between human rights and development. Upholding the vision and pattern of a larger concept of human rights, China adheres to unifying collective human rights with individual human rights and integrating the universality and particularity of human rights. While regarding the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights, it promotes the all-round development of all human rights. This has not only settled the dispute between collective and individual human rights and the inter-generational dispute over human rights but also the dispute over superior and inferior human rights civilizations. This view of human rights, which is not limited to a certain right, group, or civilization, has injected new ideas and practices into the human rights and development agenda and demonstrated China's wisdom and cultural confidence as a major country.

A. Respect the principal position of the people to settle the dispute between collective and individual human rights

China's human rights development path emphasizes the people's principal position and comprehensively promotes and protects the rights and interests of the general public, including specific groups, so that they can all participate in and benefit from development. This feature breaks the limitations of individualism in liberalism on the issue of human rights subjects, free from the opposition between collective and individual human rights. It also affirms that viewing "the people" as the subject should not be an obstacle to the right to development and the entire human rights and development agenda.

First, it highlights the people-oriented nature. The debate on collective and individual human rights still exists although international and regional human rights documents have provisions for collective human rights such as the right to development, the right to national self-determination, and the right to enjoy and utilize natural wealth and resources. Some Western countries and scholars still resist and are skeptical of collective human rights, insisting that "only individuals can have human rights."²³ In contrast, China's human rights development path upholds the people as subjects and pursues a people-centered human rights concept. Such "people-oriented nature" feature affirms the value of collective human rights and the importance of unifying collective and individual human rights and helps to fully satisfy the needs of all people, especially ethnic minorities, women, children, the physically challenged, and the elderly.

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, pointed out at the 37th group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee: "The most salient feature of human rights in China is the people-oriented nature. Human rights are not special

²³ Michael Freeman, "Are There Collective Human Rights?" *Political Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1995): 31.

privileges bestowed on some people or a small minority but universal rights to be enjoyed by all the people.”²⁴ This people-oriented nature is determined by the nature of the CPC and also reflects its inheritance and enrichment of Marxism in this regard. Marx and Engels pointed out in *The Communist Manifesto* that the communists “have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole” and that “the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.” As a Marxist party, the CPC has always taken serving the people wholeheartedly as its fundamental purpose since its founding. “Throughout its century-long history, the Party has united the people and led them in a tireless effort to fight for and to respect, protect, and advance human rights.”²⁵ Although the extension of the people-oriented nature in the CPC’s human rights concept has varied in different historical periods, in general, the scope of “people” as the subject of rights has been continuously expanded. Class is no longer the main criterion for distinguishing between people and non-people, and the basic human rights universally and equally enjoyed by citizens are constantly being enriched.²⁶ This also indicates that collective and individual human rights can complement each other.

Second, it features extensive participation and results sharing. From the perspective of human rights and development, the importance of respecting the people’s principal position and unifying collective and individual human rights lies in that the people not only fully participate in the development process, but also share the fruits of development. “Rights sharing” is the most important feature of collective human rights.²⁷ In his keynote speech “A New Starting Point for China’s Development, A New Blueprint for Global Growth”, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “Development is for the people; it should be pursued by the people and its outcomes should be shared by the people. This is what China’s reform, opening-up and socialist modernization drive are all about.”²⁸ First of all, participation in the development process is reflected in whole-process people’s democracy. The report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC pointed out that “whole-process people’s democracy is the defining feature of socialist democracy; it is democracy in its broadest, most genuine, and most effective form” and that it is necessary to “ensure the principal

²⁴ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Stresses Firm Adherence to China’s Path of Human Rights Development,” *Qiu Shi* 12 (2022): 4-10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Chang Jian, “Literature Interpretation of the Political and Social Dimensions in the Development of the Human Rights Concept of the Communist Party of China,” *Chinese Journal of Human Rights* 2 (2021): 47.

²⁷ Mo Jihong, “The Core Human Rights Concepts of Xi Jinping’s Discourse on National Respect for and Protection of Human Rights,” *Seeking Truth* 2 (2022): 19.

²⁸ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, *Xi Jinping on the Belt and Road Initiative* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2018), 119.

position of the people, so as to give full expression to their will, protect their rights and interests, and spark their creativity.” The people exercise their democratic rights through democratic elections, consultations, decision-making, management, and oversight and participate in democracy and in the development process in a comprehensive and sustained manner. The *Report on the Work of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress* at the first session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) pointed out that “a total of 2.77 million deputies to people's congresses of all levels have been chosen through democratic elections in accordance with the law. This fully demonstrates the people-centric, broad, and authentic nature of socialist democracy” and that deputies must “attend to all public concerns.”²⁹

Sharing the fruits of development is mainly reflected in improving the well-being of all people, including specific groups. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that safeguarding the people's democratic rights means “in advancing human rights, the people are the main contributors, promoters, and beneficiaries. We have made concrete efforts to promote the well-rounded development of the individual and to achieve substantial progress in common prosperity.”³⁰ Following this concept and path, China vigorously promotes and ensures that everyone can enjoy the fruits of development and improves people's quality of life and general sense of happiness. China has achieved its goals and completed its tasks of fighting against poverty in the new era as scheduled, with overall regional poverty being eliminated; it has established the world's largest social security system including pension, medical insurance, social assistance, etc.; free compulsory education has been fully realized in both urban and rural areas, and the availability of compulsory education has reached the average level of high-income countries in the world; the average life expectancy of Chinese residents has increased, maternal and infant mortality rates have decreased, and major health indicators generally outperform the average level of middle- and high-income countries.

While the general public is enjoying advancement in human rights, the needs of specific groups have also received greater attention. China's 55 ethnic minorities all have their own deputies in the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Among the 14th NPC deputies, 442 are from ethnic minorities, accounting for 14.85 percent of the total number of deputies. All ethnic minority areas have enforced nine-year compulsory education from primary school to junior high school. In the Xizang autonomous region and southern Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, students

²⁹ “Report on the Work of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (Authorized Release by the Two Sessions),” March 16, 2023, Xinhua News Agency official website: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2023lh/2023-03/16/c_1129437364.htm.

³⁰ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Stresses Firm Adherence to China's Path of Human Rights Development,” *Qiu Shi* 12 (2022): 4–10.

enjoy 15 years of free education from preschool to senior high school.³¹ China has established a legal system consisting of more than 100 laws and regulations to comprehensively protect the rights and interests of women and children. The newly amended *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women* came into effect on January 1, 2023. It strengthens the state's responsibility to protect women's human rights and further ensures that women are free from intersectional discrimination and can enjoy all-round development.³² Outstanding achievements have been made in protecting the human rights of the physically challenged. During the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2021) period, an additional 1.808 million people with disabilities were employed in urban and rural areas; the coverage rate of basic rehabilitation services and the adaptation rate of assistive devices for people with disabilities both exceeded 80 percent.³³ The mechanism for protecting the rights and interests of the elderly has been gradually improved, with basic medical insurance covering 1.36 billion people and the insurance rate remaining stable at above 95 percent; the total number of elderly care service institutions and facilities nationwide has reached 360,000.³⁴ Development that can be enjoyed by all people, including those who are old, weak, ill, or disabled, is real development. China has earnestly honored the commitment of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* that "no one will be left behind."

B. Regard the rights to subsistence and development as the primary human rights to settle the dispute between the universality and particularity of human rights

Based on its national conditions, China proposes to regard the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights while promoting and protecting the all-round development of all other human rights. First, China's human rights concept and path have enriched the research and practice of the rights to subsistence and development. This reflects the combination of the universality of human rights with China's reality, including China's development conditions. It also demonstrates the necessity of adapting the human rights and development agenda to local conditions. Second, as

³¹ Xinhua News Agency, "Deputies to 14th NPC broadly representative," February 25, 2023, Official website of the Government of the People's Republic of China, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2023-02/25/content_5743255.htm; The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *Moderate Prosperity in All Respects: Another Milestone Achieved in China's Human Rights*, August 2021.

³² Liu Xiaonan, "New Concepts and New Mechanisms for Protecting Women's Human Rights in China," November 23, 2022, *China Women's News*, Section A5.

³³ China Disabled Persons' Federation, "A Vivid Demonstration of the Comprehensive Development and Progress of China's Human Rights Cause," June 16, 2022, cited from the *Qiu Shi*, no. 12, 2022, qstheory.cn, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-06/16/c_1128739268.htm.

³⁴ Xinhua News Agency, "The Total Number of Elderly Care Service Institutions and Facilities in China Has Reached 360,000," September 20, 2022, Official website of the Government of the People's Republic of China, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-09/20/content_5710806.htm.

China continues to develop, to meet the ever-growing expectation of the people for a better life and effectively enhance their sense of fulfillment, happiness, and security, China comprehensively promotes and protects all kinds of human rights. This transcends the inter-generational dispute over human rights and shows the world a prospect for a larger concept of human rights in which human rights of all generations and of all kinds are jointly promoted and comprehensively advanced.

First, the rights to subsistence and development are regarded as the primary human rights. General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed at the 37th group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, “focusing on basic human rights, primarily the rights to subsistence and development. Subsistence is the foundation of all human rights. Living a life of contentment is the ultimate human right.” For developing countries, meeting basic living needs and eliminating extreme poverty is an issue they must face and a serious obstacle to the development of human rights. This determines that the development needs and human rights demands of developing countries are different from those of developed countries in the field of human rights and development. China's human rights development path has provided inspiration for developing countries to choose their own path of human rights development based on their historical background and development stage without interference from other countries. As General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out: “We are not developing human rights based on the standards set by the West. No matter which stage of development we reach, our human rights cause must progress in accordance with our national conditions and the demands of our people. It is good as long as we have achieved the goals and levels we have set. We do not need to align ourselves with the West or be judged by them.”³⁵

The right to subsistence is proposed based on China's historical experience and national conditions. Both its international and domestic dimensions reflect China's own needs.³⁶ Subsistence, as the foundation for enjoying other human rights and dignity, has long troubled the suffering Chinese people and is also a long-term and urgent task for the Chinese government. After the CPC successfully led the people to shatter the three mountains of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism, the People's Republic of China stood before the world with a new look, but it also faced severe challenges of suffering from domestic strife and foreign aggression and

³⁵ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2021), 13.

³⁶ The explanation of the dual dimensions. Wei Xiaoxu, “The Chinese Expression of the Right to Subsistence: The Progressive Disclosure of the Dual Dimensions,” *Human Rights* 3 (2021). The international dimension aims to be able to stand in the international community with dignity and possess good conditions and environments at home and abroad for the people to exercise and protect their rights. The domestic dimension is achieved by satisfying the underlying needs for people's subsistence.

being economically impoverished and culturally backward. In November 1991, China released its first white paper on human rights, *Human Rights in China*. It clearly stated that “the right to subsistence is the most important of all human rights” and “to eat their fill and dress warmly were the fundamental demand of the Chinese people who had long suffered cold and hunger.” It also pointed out that “a country’s human rights situation should not be judged in total disregard of its history and national conditions.” This white paper affirms the importance of the right to subsistence, breaks the situation where human rights are regarded as a forbidden zone, opens up the construction of Chinese human rights discourse, and symbolizes the exploration of a new form of Chinese-style human rights civilization.³⁷

The right to development reflects China’s continuous efforts to maximize social development and human rights progress. The white paper *The Progress of Human Rights in China* issued in 1995 proposed to “give priority to the people’s right to existence and development”. As an advocate, practitioner, and promoter of the right to development, China has made positive contributions to the theoretical exploration and practical accumulation of the right to development. First of all, China’s understanding of the right to development unifies collective and individual human rights, that is, “The right to development is a human right owned by each individual as well as by the country, the nation and the entire population. The right to development can be maximized only in the unity of individuals and collective.”³⁸ Second, the right to development pursues substantive equality. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “we will leave no one behind as we pursue moderate prosperity in all respects. Socialism calls for development, and development must be committed to common prosperity.”³⁹ This represents not only the right of individuals in a collective to development but also the concern and help for specific groups. Scholars point out that the equal right to development should give special protection to those with lower development levels, fewer development opportunities, and weak development capabilities. It should focus on the poor, farmers and migrant workers, the physically challenged, ethnic minorities, women, and children.⁴⁰

Second, the comprehensive development of the human rights cause is promoted and safeguarded. China regards the rights to subsistence and development as the primary human rights, but this does not mean ignoring

³⁷ Lu Guangjin, “On the New Shape of Chinese-Style Human Rights Civilization,” *Jilin University Journal Social Sciences Edition* 3 (2022): 10.

³⁸ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *White Paper — The Right to Development: China’s Philosophy, Practice and Contribution*, December 2016.

³⁹ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2021), 57.

⁴⁰ Wang Xigen, *Study on the Legal Protection System of the Equal Right to Development* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2018), 34.

other human rights, and it will not lead to a situation where collective human rights erode individual human rights as some Western scholars believe. In the first place, China insists that all human rights are interdependent and indivisible and that different generations of human rights are equally important. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that it is necessary to “protect citizens’ personal rights, property rights, and right to dignity, their basic political rights to participate in democratic elections, consultations, decision-making, management, and oversight, and their economic, cultural, social, environmental, and other rights.”⁴¹ Therefore, whether it is to ensure people’s right to vote and participate in political life by promoting whole-process democracy, or to guarantee people’s right to an adequate standard of living by strengthening infrastructure and industrial development in poverty-stricken areas, it is a sign that China takes all human rights seriously and responds to the actual needs of its people and to changing human rights challenges. In the second place, China continues to expand the breadth and depth of the human rights agenda to promote the comprehensive development of the human rights cause. The Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games again showed the public the needs of the physically challenged to participate in sports activities and achieve self-development. In the same year, China issued the white paper *China’s Parasports: Progress and the Protection of Rights*. The newly amended *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Physical Culture and Sports*, which came into effect on January 1, 2023, protects the rights of the physically challenged to participate in sports activities through a number of provisions. *The Barrier-free Environment Creation Law of the People’s Republic of China*, which came into effect on September 1, 2023, further promotes “the sharing of economic and social development achievements by all members of society” including the physically challenged and building a barrier-free environment “fitting the level of economic and social development.” This shows that development is dynamic and the realization of the right to development has no end and needs to keep pace with the times based on national conditions.

C. Carry forward the essence of Chinese traditional culture with an inclusive attitude to settle the dispute over superior and inferior human rights civilizations

No choice of human rights path and interpretation of rights can be separated from specific cultural, historical, religious, and social backgrounds. Although Western natural law and religious philosophy are influential, they are not and should not be the only correct answer to human rights, nor a reason to exclude other human rights civilizations. PengChun Chang introduced

⁴¹ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Stresses Firm Adherence to China’s Path of Human Rights Development,” *Qiu Shi* 12 (2022): 4-10.

Confucianism into the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. He once reminded other representatives during its drafting process that there are not only Western philosophical ideas in the world, and that not everyone follows the ethical and moral traditions of Western Christianity.⁴² The denial of any human rights discourse and concepts proposed by China by the United States and other countries, as well as their opposition to resolutions on the right to development on such basis, will only further exclude and marginalize non-Western human rights concepts and suppress diverse voices in the field of human rights and development.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has said that: “Each civilization represents the unique vision and contribution of its people, and no civilization is superior to others. Different civilizations should have dialogue and exchanges instead of trying to exclude or replace each other.”⁴³ The existence of different civilizations does not necessarily mean a dispute over the superiority of civilizations or conflicts over human rights. Most civilizations integrate and evolve through interaction and have a common respect and care for people.⁴⁴ This is why, despite cultural differences, the international community has made great efforts to reach a consensus in the field of human rights. China has also participated in the discussion and drafting of many international human rights conventions and documents.⁴⁵ China has provided oriental wisdom for international human rights rules and mechanisms. While proactively fulfilling its international human rights obligations, it has been exploring and shaping a Chinese-style human rights civilization based on its own cultural heritage, demonstrating the mutual promotion between diverse civilizations and global human rights governance.

China’s human rights development path keeps pace with the times, integrating the wisdom and humanitarian spirit of traditional Chinese culture into contemporary Chinese human rights concepts and the positive interaction between human rights and development. This shows the world a human rights path choice that transcends cultural differences and disputes between civilizations. Among them, ideas such as putting people first, group consciousness, and being kind and tolerant, as well as the concepts and virtues originating from them (such as respecting the elderly and taking care of the

⁴² Hua Guoyu, “Do Human Rights Need a Unified Foundation? — Religious and Philosophical Controversy During the Drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *Tribune of Political Science and Law* 5 (2020): 11.

⁴³ Xi Jinping, *On Building a Human Community with a Shared Future* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2018), 256.

⁴⁴ Yang Bochao, “‘Clash of Civilizations’ or ‘Pluralistic Coexistence’: The Reconstruction of Human Rights Concept from the Perspective of the New Form of Human Civilization,” *Theoretical Investigation* 3 (2022): 81.

⁴⁵ Luo Yanhua, “The UN Construction of International Human Rights Protecting Mechanism and China’s Participation,” *The Journal of International Studies* 6 (2015): 113.

young, taking pleasure in helping others, and supporting the weak and the poor), are rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people and different from the Western characteristics of individualism, encouragement of confrontation and competition, and either-or binary opposition. They embody a larger concept of human rights featuring “great common wealth” and the concept that “the world belongs to all.”

First, it puts people first and sets “the monarch” for the people. In the first place, the people are the foundation of a country, and the monarch should “love the people” and safeguard their lives and safety. This is also an important part of Chinese traditional political culture. *Songs of the Five Sons* in *The Book of History* states: “The people are the root of a country; The root firm, the country is tranquil.” Zi Gong asked The Master (Confucius) about government, and he replied “The requisites of government are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler.”⁴⁶ In the second place, the monarch can maintain his rule only by winning the hearts of the people and practicing benevolent governance. Mencius said: “If its ruler will put in practice a benevolent government, no power will be able to prevent his becoming sovereign” and “The people are the most important element in a nation; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the sovereign is the lightest.”⁴⁷ Xunzi pointed out: “The ruler is the boat and the people are the water. Water can carry the boat but can also overturn it.”⁴⁸ The thoughts of “benevolent governance” and “putting people first” in Chinese traditional political culture can be seen from these statements. In addition to Confucianism, other schools of thought also regard “people” as the foundation of their theories and validate from different angles the importance of people’s will to regime consolidation and national stability.⁴⁹

Second, it underlines the group consciousness of the family, the country, and the world. In Confucian culture, individuals are usually placed within a group. They are individuals in the family, society, country, and even the world, and they need to properly handle their relationships with others and the collective. The Master said: “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good.”⁵⁰ This kind of “love” encourages everyone to be kind to others and consider the group. According to *The Book of Rites: The Conveyance of Rites*: “Therefore when it is said that (the ruler being) a sage can look on all under the sky as one family,

⁴⁶ *The Analects: Yan Yuan.*

⁴⁷ *Mengzi: Gong Sun Chou I; Mengzi: Jin Xin II.*

⁴⁸ *Xunzi: Ai Gong.*

⁴⁹ Liu Hainian, “Natural Law and the Idea of Human Rights in Chinese Traditional Culture with Its Influence,” *Chinese Journal of Human Rights* 2 (2020): 8.

⁵⁰ *The Analects: Xue Er.*

and on all in the Middle states as one man, this does not mean that he will do so on premeditation and purpose. He must know men's feelings, lay open to them what they consider right, show clearly to them what is advantageous, and comprehend what are their calamities. Being so furnished, he is then able to effect the thing." All these statements show a common stance that the idea of "looking on all under the sky as one family" is based on human subsistence and development. The key lies in the fact that a public and common spirit rules all under the sky when men's feelings, what they consider right, what is advantageous, and their calamities are considered to affect all.⁵¹ From the relationship between individuals and their families to the relationship with strangers in society, and then to the relationship with the country and the world, this kind of consciousness and sentiment that cares about the public interest of the community, the country, and the world is destined to be different from the Western liberal understanding of individuals.

Third, it stresses respecting the elderly, taking care of the young, and supporting the weak and the physically challenged. China's traditional culture has always highlighted taking care of the elderly, children, the physically challenged, and other disadvantaged groups, rather than the survival of the fittest of social Darwinism. Mencius proposed: "Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated."⁵² *The Book of Rites: The Conveyance of Rites* states: "When the Grand Course was pursued, a public and common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony. Thus men did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up to the young. They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained. Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. (They accumulated) articles (of value), disliking that they should be thrown away upon the ground, but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification. (They labored) with their strength, disliking that it should not be exerted, but not exerting it (only) with a view to their own advantage. In this way (selfish) schemings were repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves, and hence the outer doors remained open, and were not shut. This was (the period of) what we call

⁵¹ Liu Jiuyong, "Three Aspects of the Confucian Family-State View," *Philosophical Research* 6 (2021): 71.

⁵² Mengzi: *Liang Hui Wang I*.

the Grand Union.” It can be seen that an ideal society under the Grand Course is one in which all disadvantaged groups have someone to rely on and everyone cares for others as they would care for their own family members. As General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out, we must “vigorously promote the traditional virtues of filial piety and respect for the elderly,” and “the Chinese nation is a big family and all of the family members shall live a good life.”⁵³

Fourth, it upholds harmony, kindness, benevolence, and tolerance. “Benevolence” and “harmony” are important concepts in traditional Chinese culture. The ideas contained in them, such as treating others with kindness, putting oneself in others’ shoes, and harmony in diversity, have provided a fertile land for China’s concept and path of human rights development. The philosopher Youzi said: “In practicing the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized.”⁵⁴ *Zuo’s Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals: Year 6 of Duke Yin* also states: “To be benevolent and friendly towards neighboring countries is fundamental policy a country should pursue.” Concord, harmony, and peace are precious and worth promoting whether it is in the family, in society, or between neighboring countries. This harmonious relationship also contains a spirit of putting oneself in others’ shoes and treating each other equally. That is, true harmony is neither forcing others to assimilate nor blindly following others’ views and practices, but mutual respect and harmonious coexistence. “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others”⁵⁵ and “the superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable”⁵⁶ both reflect the inclusiveness of harmony. This inclusiveness has enabled Chinese civilization to absorb and attract neighboring cultures rather than forcibly expand outward. As General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “Since ancient times, Chinese civilization has been known for its openness and inclusiveness, and it has gained new vitality through exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations”; “Only a confident civilization can tolerate, learn from, and absorb various civilizations while maintaining its own national characteristics”⁵⁷.

III. China Injects New Impetus to Global Human Rights and Development

China’s human rights development path reflects the importance China

⁵³ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2021), 126 and 132.

⁵⁴ *The Analects: Xue Er*.

⁵⁵ *The Analects: Wei Ling Gong*.

⁵⁶ *The Analects: Zi Lu*.

⁵⁷ Xi Jinping, “Deepen the Study of Chinese Civilization History and Promote the Historical Consciousness to Build Stronger Cultural Confidence,” July 15, 2022, [qstheory.cn](http://www.qstheory.cn), http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-07/15/c_1128830256.htm, Xi Jinping, *On the Party’s Ideological Promotion Work* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2020), 406.

attaches to the human rights and development agenda, demonstrates the achievements of human rights development in China's modernization process, and injects new impetus for improving global governance. Andrew Hurrell argues that a stable and formally legitimate international community faces three main challenges: capturing shared and common interests, managing unequal power, and mediating cultural diversity and value conflict.⁵⁸ China's human rights concept and path have responded to the above three challenges, demonstrating the possibility for countries and stakeholders to achieve common interests and jointly promote human rights and development on the grounds of the common values of all mankind in an equal and inclusive environment. It can be seen that although this larger concept of human rights comes from China, it can benefit the world, especially by helping developing countries to express their demands, share their experiences, and carry out cooperation and stimulating their potential in the field of human rights and development.

A. Setting a global example for the positive interaction between human rights and development

China is the largest developing country. Its historic achievements in poverty eradication and reduction are the best example of the positive interaction between human rights and development and the greatest contribution to the global human rights cause. China's poverty eradication and reduction efforts have effectively elevated people's standard of living, improved people's living environment in many ways, and better protected people's rights and dignity. General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed to "safeguard and improve people's livelihoods and protect and promote human rights through development" and "continue our work so that the people will have a greater sense of happiness, benefit and security, and achieve well-rounded development."⁵⁹ This approach promotes human rights protection through development and achieves all-round human development and social progress in human rights protection. It not only refutes the view that human rights and development are in opposition, but also provides valuable experience and inspiration for countries facing poverty and hunger, development bottlenecks, and peace and security challenges.

Poverty has always been an obstacle to advancing human rights and addressing global development imbalances. Poverty, especially extreme poverty, not only undermines people's right to life and an adequate standard of

⁵⁸ Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society*, translated by Lin Xi (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2018), 335.

⁵⁹ "Bolstering Confidence and Jointly Overcoming Difficulties to Build a Better World — Statement at the General Debate of the 76th Session of The United Nations General Assembly," September 21, 2021, Official website of the Government of the People's Republic of China, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2021/content_5641338.htm.

living, but also affects the enjoyment of a series of human rights such as the rights to health, work, and social security, hindering the development of individuals and society. This is why eradicating poverty and hunger is not only a UN Millennium Development Goal but also one of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As stated in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.⁶⁰ Therefore, China's long-term poverty eradication and reduction practices, especially the fight against poverty since the 18th CPC National Congress, not only advance and protect the rights to subsistence and development, but also promote various human rights and global sustainable development goals.

After the launch of reform and opening-up, China has taken a series of policies and measures to liberate and develop productivity, with economic development as the center. In 1982, the 12th CPC National Congress for the first time set “moderate prosperity” as the general goal of economic development and proposed to strive to deliver a life of moderate cultural and material prosperity for the people by the end of the 20th century. In the same year, in order to satisfy the basic living needs of people in some of the most poverty-stricken areas, the State Council launched the “*San Xi*” (three western regions) agricultural construction and poverty alleviation program covering the Hexi area and Dingxi area of Gansu and the Xihai area of Ningxia. In 1994, to get more people out of poverty, the State Council promulgated the *Priority Poverty Alleviation Program (1994-2000)*, striving to ensure that “the basic needs of 80 million impoverished rural residents would be met” in seven years. This was the first poverty alleviation and development action program in the history of the People's Republic of China with definite goals, targets, measures, and deadlines.⁶¹ The phrase “aiding the poor” then appeared in the 1995 white paper *The Progress of Human Rights in China*. Since then, the discourse on poverty alleviation has occupied a great length in each year's white paper.⁶² It can be seen that China is constantly adjusting and innovating to explore the best path to promote human rights and development in terms of policies, practices, discourse, and other aspects.

In the 21st century, following a series of progresses such as “respecting and protecting human rights” being included in the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* and the Constitution of CPC and the announcement of the

⁶⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” September 25, 2015, preamble.

⁶¹ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *White Paper — Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution*, April 2021.

⁶² Zhang Han, “The Discourse Practice of White Paper on Human Rights and Its Sociocultural Function: 1991–2021,” *Human Rights* 6 (2021): 168.

first National Human Rights Action Plan, human rights were elevated to an unprecedented height after the 18th CPC National Congress, and the fight against poverty was placed in a prominent position in the governance of China. The 18th CPC National Congress held in 2012 included “human rights should be fully respected and protected” in its report and listed it as one of the important strategic goals for building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and comprehensively deepening reform and opening-up. Shortly thereafter, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core pledged that “no single poor area or single poor person should be left behind”, marking the beginning of the fight against poverty in the new era.⁶³ In November 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping first put forward the important idea of “targeted poverty alleviation” during his inspection of poverty alleviation work in Shibadong Village, Huayuan County, Hunan Province, and has continuously enriched and improved it since then. In 2017, the report to the 19th CPC National Congress made comprehensive arrangements for targeted poverty alleviation as one of the three major battles, proposing to “mobilize the energies of our whole Party, our whole country, and our whole society, and continue to implement targeted poverty reduction and alleviation measures” and promising to “see that poor people and poor areas will enter the moderately prosperous society together with the rest of the country.” It is the efforts to fight against poverty that have made China the country with the largest number of people lifted out of poverty in the world, and the first developing country to achieve the poverty reduction goals of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, contributing over 70 percent to global poverty reduction. In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned at the UN Sustainable Development Summit: “China’s development has not only improved the well-being of the 1.3 billion-plus Chinese people, but also given a strong boost to the global cause.”⁶⁴ At the end of 2020, China completed the goals and tasks of poverty alleviation in the new era as scheduled, eliminated absolute poverty and overall regional poverty, and achieved the relevant poverty reduction goals of the United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* ten years ahead of schedule, becoming a global model for poverty reduction and proving the contribution of development to the enjoyment of human rights.

At the same time, respecting and protecting human rights has been pushed to a new historical height. In December 2021, the Central Party Literature Press published the book *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* and distributed it globally. The book contains nine topics, including “upholding the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights

⁶³ Zhang Qing, “Feel the Weight of Poverty Alleviation from Historical Details,” November 3, 2022, *Guangming Daily*, Section 2.

⁶⁴ Xinhua News Agency, “Xi Jinping’s Speech at the UN Sustainable Development Summit (full text),” September 27, 2015, Belt and Road Portal, <https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/xwzx/xgcdt/68686.htm>.

and gradually realizing common prosperity for all,” and covers more than 160 important documents such as reports, speeches, talks, lectures, congratulatory letters, and instructions by Comrade Xi Jinping from November 15, 2012 to October 30, 2021. These important statements reflect the intensive attention to human rights work paid by the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core and systematically elaborate on the contemporary Chinese concept of human rights and its practice. Among them, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “Since the 18th CPC National Congress, we have made poverty alleviation a top priority, and taken a major measure. We have promoted common prosperity for all by ensuring that all rural residents living below the current poverty line are lifted out of poverty.” “Common prosperity is a fundamental goal of Marxism and has also been a basic pursuit of the Chinese people since ancient times.”⁶⁵ On February 25, 2022, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held its 37th group study session on China's human rights development path. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized when presiding over the study that “we should deeply understand the importance and urgency of doing a good job in human rights, unswervingly following the path of human rights development in China”; “effectively promote the comprehensive development of human beings and the common prosperity of all people to achieve more obvious and substantial progress.”⁶⁶ From insufficient food and clothing to moderate prosperity in all respects, and then to common prosperity, China has made remarkable achievements in human rights and development. It has been proven that China's human rights path is in line with the needs of the people and the trend of the times, fits China's national conditions, keeps pace with the times, and is effective. It is a great contribution to the global human rights and development cause.

B. Actively contributing to global governance in the field of human rights and development

The human rights and development agenda faces a difficult situation and has even regressed in global human rights governance, exposing the limitations of Western liberal dominance. Under its dominance, human rights and development seem to be incompatible and even opposing concepts. The United States has repeatedly stated that the UN resolutions on the “right to development” would elevate the process of development above human rights and undermine the human rights system.⁶⁷ The old question of whether to

⁶⁵ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2021), 54 and 57.

⁶⁶ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Stresses Firm Adherence to China's Path of Human Rights Development,” *Qiu Shi* 12 (2022): 4-10.

⁶⁷ “Explanation of Vote on a Third Committee Resolution on the Right to Development,” November 7, 2023, United States Mission to the United Nations, <https://usun.usmission.gov/explanation-of-vote-on-a-third-committee-resolution-on-the-right-to-development-2/>.

prioritize human rights or development, and whether to prioritize civil and political rights or economic, social, and cultural rights and the right to development, has once again become an obstacle for the international community to reach a consensus on human rights. The friction between the human rights development paths chosen by different regions, countries, and areas (especially developing countries and poverty-stricken areas) based on their own development stages and needs and the mainstream Western human rights concepts has also been dragged into the dispute over the universality and particularity of human rights. Even global development documents like the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* cannot escape criticism for being too focused on development rather than human rights. China's larger concept of human rights and the ideas and initiatives it has put forward to the world have introduced new perspectives and solutions to overcoming this dilemma, helping to break through the Western human rights discourse model and promote global human rights governance in a fairer, more just, more reasonable, and more inclusive direction.

On March 23, 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, in which he clearly put forward the concept of "building a community with a shared future for mankind" for the first time. Over the past decade, this concept has been continuously enriched and improved, demonstrating the breadth of mind and vision of a major country's larger concept of human rights. The "five goals for the world" not only point out the direction for global economic development but also provide answers for the development of all mankind, which makes it possible to break away from the conflicts in human rights views and achieve win-win cooperation among all parties through development. The development China advocates is not merely for some countries and peoples but for all countries and peoples. It requires not only a fairer and more just environment but also a spirit of equality and mutual trust and an inclusive and open mind. This is also the original vision of the human rights and development agenda. In the book *On Building a Human Community with a Shared Future*, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "We need to ensure equitable development for all. All countries should have equal rights as participants in, contributors to, and beneficiaries of global development." "Development is meaningful only when it is inclusive and sustainable. To achieve such development requires openness, mutual assistance and win-win cooperation."⁶⁸

With this concept in mind, when visiting Central Asia and Southeast Asia in September and October of the same year, General Secretary Xi Jinping respectively proposed the initiative of jointly building "The Silk Road

⁶⁸ Xi Jinping, *On Building a Human Community with a Shared Future* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2018), 248, 255 and 256.

Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” with relevant countries. This initiative spans countries with different regions, cultures, religions, social systems, and levels of development. It replaces confrontation and contest with cooperation and assistance without any political conditions or human rights judgments, and substitutes for the “theory of civilizational superiority” and “theory of the clash of civilizations” with mutual learning and equal treatment among civilizations. Over the past decade, China has signed more than 200 cooperation documents on jointly building the Belt and Road with more than 150 countries and 30 international organizations, hosted a series of international economic and trade events, and coordinated the construction of 21 pilot free trade zones and the Hainan Free Trade Port. The livelihood projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, whether it is the bridge construction in the Maldives, the water supply project in Mauritania, or the hospital construction, maintenance, and technical training in South Sudan, have effectively improved the well-being of the people in the partnering countries and shared the model of promoting human rights through development and achieving development through human rights with countries in need. China has actively contributed to global governance in the field of human rights and development. It has been addressing global challenges such as poverty, hunger, and food security through the establishment of the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, the Global Alliance for Poverty Reduction and Development, the International NGOs Network for Poverty Reduction Cooperation, the Global Development Promotion Center, and the World Technical Vocational and Education Training League and other specific measures. It has also carried out project cooperation with international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme, and UN Women. As General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the third Belt and Road (BRI) Forum for International Cooperation in 2023, Belt and Road cooperation is based on the principle of “planning together, building together, and benefiting together.” “It has opened up a new path for exchanges among countries, and established a new framework for international cooperation. Indeed, the BRI represents humanity’s joint pursuit of development for all.”⁶⁹

In 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward a Global Development Initiative in his statement at the General Debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, injecting new impetus into the field of human rights and development as the world enters a new period of turbulence

⁶⁹ Xinhua News Agency, “Building an Open, Inclusive and Interconnected World for Common Development — Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation,” October 18, 2023, Belt and Road Portal, <https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/0PS29GKL.html>.

and change. The six “staying committed to” of this initiative, namely, staying committed to development as a priority, staying committed to a people-centered approach, staying committed to benefits for all, staying committed to innovation-driven development, staying committed to harmony between man and nature, and staying committed to results-oriented actions, not only respond to issues such as economic recovery, food security, the global fight against the pandemic, and climate change, but also emphasize the special needs of developing countries and call for support for vulnerable countries facing particularly difficult situations. On June 14, 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the Forum on Global Human Rights Governance, stressing the need to act on the Global Development Initiative, make development more inclusive, universal, and sustainable, and ensure that people in all countries have fair access to human rights through their unique paths to modernization.⁷⁰ Under China’s promotion, the Global Development Initiative, which advocates giving priority to development, promoting and protecting human rights in the course of development, and addressing global development imbalances, has been more widely integrated into the international human rights system and cooperation, contributing to promoting human rights cooperation among developing countries and raising the voice of developing countries in global human rights governance.

In terms of the international human rights system, China has initiated discussions at the United Nations on promoting human rights through development by pushing forward relevant human rights resolutions. On June 22, 2017, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted for the first time the resolution proposed by China: “The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights.” This resolution confirms that promoting sustainable development is conducive to the overall enjoyment of human rights and calls on all countries to achieve win-win cooperation and common development. It has received support from developing countries.⁷¹ On July 12, 2021, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution of the same name, calling on all countries to realize people-centered development and promote equality of opportunity for development.⁷² The resolution requests the organization of seminars on this topic in the world’s five geographical regions to provide a platform for all parties to participate in discussions and share experiences. Representatives of Venezuela, Pakistan, Cuba, Cameroon, and

⁷⁰ Xinhua News Agency, “Xi Jinping Sends a Congratulatory Letter to the Forum on Global Human Rights Governance,” June 14, 2023, Official website of the Government of the People’s Republic of China, https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202306/content_6886202.htm?jump=true.

⁷¹ United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 35/21, “The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights,” adopted on June 22, 2017.

⁷² United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 47/11, “The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights,” adopted on July 12, 2021.

other countries all appreciated China's submission of this important draft resolution, thanked China for its leading role, and stressed that development is of vital importance to all countries, especially developing countries.⁷³ On July 14, 2023, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution of the same name for the fourth time, with the support from 30 of its 47 member states, including 13 votes in favor from all the African seats, 12 votes in favor from countries in the Asia-Pacific region (except India, which abstained), and five votes in favor from Latin American and Caribbean countries.⁷⁴ This resolution called upon all countries to promote sustainable development to enable better enjoyment of human rights and invites relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms and procedures to incorporate a development perspective into their work.

In terms of international cooperation, China has promoted exchanges and cooperation among developing countries to create synergy for the building a global development community and provide a platform for discussing and resolving the demands of developing countries. On December 7, 2017, the first South-South Human Rights Forum was held in Beijing. Over 300 officials, representatives, experts, and scholars from more than 70 countries and international organizations attended the forum. Developing countries are the most closely related parties to the human rights and development agenda and the key force in promoting the formation and vitality of this agenda at the regional and international levels. However, they have long lacked the right to speak on international human rights and an effective platform for communication and expression. The South-South Human Rights Forum not only provides a platform for developing countries to conduct human rights exchanges and experience sharing and build consensus on the human rights and development agenda, but also increases global attention to this agenda. The theme of the 2021 South-South Human Rights Forum is "Putting People First and Global Human Rights Governance," which demonstrates China's emphasis on enhancing the role of developing countries in global human rights governance. In his congratulatory letter to the 2021 South-South Human Rights Forum, General Secretary Xi Jinping stated that China "is willing to work with all developing countries to carry forward the common values of humanity, practice true multilateralism and contribute wisdom and strength to the sound development of the international human rights cause."⁷⁵ This is exactly China's

⁷³ "Communicating China's Human Rights Concept and Promoting International Human Rights Cooperation," July 15, 2021, *People's Daily*, Section. 3.

⁷⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 53/28, "The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights," adopted on July 14, 2023. The resolution was adopted with 30 votes in favor, 12 votes against, and 5 abstentions. Different from the generally supportive stance of African and Asia-Pacific countries, 12 of the 13 European and other countries (a total of 13 seats including the United States) voted against, with only Georgia abstaining. Five Latin American and Caribbean countries (eight seats in total) voted in favor, and three abstained.

⁷⁵ Xinhua News Agency, "Xi sends congratulatory letter to 2021 South-South Human Rights Forum," December 8, 2021,

commitment to developing countries and its commitment to improving global human rights governance and promoting the development of the international human rights cause.

IV. Conclusion

The world today is undergoing great changes. Developing countries are facing multiple challenges such as unbalanced economic development, the widening North-South divide, and the return of people to poverty. The existing human rights and development agenda and global human rights governance are in urgent need of breaking through the limitations of human rights discourse and paths dominated by Western liberalism and exploring new perspectives, new ideas, and new paths. China's human rights development path is based on China's fine traditional culture. It integrates the Marxist view on human rights with China's actual conditions. With its unique height and span of a larger concept of human rights, it rejects human rights confrontation and conflict and comprehensively promotes the realization of all kinds of human rights and the mutual learning and coexistence of various civilizations. It has contributed to advancing the human rights and development process in China and the world, building a world featuring great principles, righteousness, inclusiveness, and cooperation and a world conducive to the sustainable development of all countries and the realization of happiness for all mankind.

(Translated by *LI Rong*)