

Enhance Human Rights Studies and Construct China's Autonomous Knowledge System of Human Rights

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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, stressed that we should adhere to the “two integrations” (namely, integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and fine traditional culture), root ourselves in Chinese soil, carry forward the Chinese cultural heritage, and strengthen the academic foundation. We should accelerate the building of an independent knowledge system for Chinese philosophy and social sciences, and formulate original concepts and develop systems of academic discipline, research and discourse, drawing on China's rich experience of advancing human rights. In the face of changes of a magnitude not seen in a century, in the historic process of advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through Chinese modernization, we should and must strengthen our theoretical self-consciousness and confidence in the path of Chinese modernization. We need to enhance human rights research, develop the human rights theoretical system and paradigm that are based on Chinese realities and express Chinese voice, and an independent Chinese knowledge system for human rights.

I. General Secretary Xi Jinping's Important Discourses on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights Provide the Fundamental Guidelines for Building China's Independent Knowledge System for Human Rights

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, General Secretary Xi Jinping has put forward a series of important discourses on respecting and safeguarding human rights. These discourses, characterized by their profound vision, rich connotations, and deep insights, represent the latest achievements in adapting Marxist views on human rights to the Chinese context, the most significant original theoretical outcomes on human rights research, and a shining gem in the global treasury of human rights thoughts. To build China's independent knowledge system of human rights, the primary and most crucial task is to thoroughly study and elucidate General Secretary Xi Jinping's important discourses on human rights.

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Guided by these discourses, we must earnestly advance the building of China's human rights academic system.

We need to focus on theoretical interpretation, academic articulation, and systemic building to systematically analyze and deeply interpret the new concepts, ideas, and propositions regarding human rights put forward by General Secretary Xi Jinping. It is essential to achieve the academic transformation of political discourse. We need to convert the principled outcomes in General Secretary Xi Jinping's important discourses on human rights into knowledge discourse, research paradigms, and academic theories, thereby promoting their dissemination across society and the world. Theoretical interpretation requires us to transcend superficial "annotative research" but to theoretically refine important propositions and concepts such as "people-centeredness," "people's happiness is the ultimate human right," "the rights to subsistence and development are the primary and basic human rights," "whole-process people's democracy," and "a community with a shared future for mankind." Such conceptual crystallization aims to cultivate academic growth points with global significance. Academic articulation must prevent "advocacy research." This requires academic recreation and discourse transformation of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important speeches, directives, and talks on human rights, so as to enhance the explanatory power, penetration, and influence of relevant theories. Systematic building necessitates the abandonment of "fragmented research." We need to adhere to systematic concepts and holistic methodologies to systematically organize relevant concepts, categories, judgments, and propositions. These elements shall be contextualized within the theoretical architecture of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, enabling integrated interpretation and panoramic examination. Only in this way can we comprehensively understand the theoretical origins, essential characteristics, and inherent requirements of General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on human rights, thereby forming a theoretical and knowledge system with internal consistency.

In recent years, the China Society for Human Rights Studies has organized various research institutions and experts to focus on General Secretary Xi Jinping's important discourses on respecting and protecting human rights, producing a large number of research outcomes in the form of research projects, papers, and monographs. Among these, a collection of dozens of high-quality academic papers centered on the generative logic, core essence, value implications, international dissemination, and specific content of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important discourses on respecting and protecting human rights will be published soon. *The Journal of Human Rights* has introduced a permanent column called "Learning and Implementing Xi Jinping's Important Discourses on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights," publishing a number of excellent papers and playing a significant guiding role. The human rights academia should prioritize the study and interpretation of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important discourses on human

rights, and continue the efforts to enhance theoretical depth, connotation, and breath, while consistently creating a series of substantial academic research outcomes to continuously strengthen the theoretical and academic depth of human rights in China. It is essential to effectively utilize existing platforms and channels and actively explore new ones to provide more opportunities and incentives for publication of research outcomes in this field, thereby fostering a favorable academic atmosphere.

II. The Contemporary Chinese Outlook on Human Rights is the Main Part in the Building of China's Independent Knowledge System of Human Rights

Rooted in the CPC's century-long struggle and shaped by the great changes since the new era, the contemporary Chinese outlook on human rights not only provides scientific guidance and action guidelines for the development of China's human rights cause, but also provides Chinese wisdom, solutions, and strength for promoting global human rights governance. In recent years, experts and scholars have written and published a large number of academic papers from multiple perspectives such as the rich connotations, practical achievements, global contributions, and development momentum of contemporary Chinese outlook on human rights, and "research on contemporary Chinese outlook on human rights" is progressing as a major research project with high-standard outcomes.

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that the theoretical leap "ultimately needs to be reflected in addressing issues and leading development in the course of practice." The theory and practice of human rights complement and reinforce each other. We must delve into the social and historical context, thoroughly understand the realities of contemporary China, and promote the theoretical formulation of human rights practice and the systematization of human rights theory, articulating the stories of human rights governance in China through academic discourse. We should clarify the contemporary Chinese outlook on human rights through systematic academic principles, focus on the generative logic, practical orientation, and new developments of the Marxist view on human rights in contemporary China, and trace the original intent of humanity's pursuit of democracy, freedom, and human rights while endowing it with new connotations for the era. The objective is to expand the international community's understanding and recognition of China's system and human rights development path and amplify China's core values and concepts of human rights. We should summarize the successful experiences of the CPC in rallying and leading the people to respect and safeguard human rights through systematic academic principles, theoretically encapsulate the historic achievements of human rights development in China, and clarify that the leadership of the CPC is the fundamental safeguard for advancing human rights development in China and for ensuring that the Chinese people fully enjoy human rights. We should interpret the implications of Chinese

modernization on human rights development through systematic academic principles and focus on “practical problems” and “practical needs” in social reality to actively engage in and respond to the immediate needs and propositions of our times. The 300-plus reform measures proposed at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee involve various aspects such as economy, politics, culture, society, and ecological conservation, serving as both a comprehensive blueprint for advancing national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization and an action manifesto for the comprehensive development of the human rights cause. They fully demonstrate the timeliness, originality, and superiority of the Chinese path of human rights development and provide rich materials for our theoretical studies on human rights. The China Society for Human Rights Studies will continue to organize experts and scholars to conduct research on the contemporary Chinese outlook on human rights through various means such as launching research projects and hosting theoretical discussions, striving to produce high-level academic achievements.

III. China’s Millennia-old History of Human Rights Provides Abundant Resources for Building China’s Independent Knowledge System of Human Rights

Although the concept of human rights originated in Europe during the 14th century, the ideas regarding human rights have long been contained and reflected in the earlier development processes of major civilizations, including Chinese civilization. In a recent speech, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated that the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* embodies the collective wisdom of multiple cultures and histories, including the values of interdependence, cooperation, and collective responsibility held by African peoples, the emphasis on human dignity and mutual love shared in Islam, the traditional spirit of harmony among Asian peoples, and the insistence of many Latin Americans on the universality and indivisibility of human rights, among others. In September 2024, a delegation from the China Society for Human Rights Studies visited Mexico, Chile, and Brazil, where Chinese experts and their counterparts from the three countries discussed the influence of traditional human rights concepts on contemporary human rights thoughts and pathways. During an academic seminar co-hosted by the Chinese and Chilean sides at Andrés Bello University in Chile, the moderator of the event, Mr. Mata, specifically mentioned that a seminar themed “What Did Socrates and Confucius Bring us in the 21st Century?” was held in the same conference room in 2014, which aimed to discuss the nourishment and inspiration provided by the thoughts of these two sages for contemporary society.

China’s independent knowledge system of human rights is rooted in the 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization. China’s traditional human rights intellectual resources, as well as the unique values embedded in them, have intrinsically

propelled the development of contemporary Chinese human rights cause, embodying a profound “path consciousness.” It is crucial to earnestly carry out the major research project “Studies on the Chinese History of Human Rights (Origins of Chinese Civilization — 1921).” In November 2024, the China Society for Human Rights Studies held an international academic seminar themed “Human Rights Concepts in Chinese Classics” at Yuelu Academy of Hunan University, with over 200 guests from various sectors participating in discussions and nearly 140 papers spanning ancient and modern times and integrating Chinese and Western perspectives. The seminar marked the first large-scale gathering of thinkers from both home and abroad to expound on the human rights concepts embedded in Chinese civilization, resulting in fruitful outcomes. Participants reached a consensus that Chinese culture has always emphasized respect and care for people; although the modern concept of “human rights” did not emerge in ancient China, Chinese culture is still rich in people-centered philosophy, values of benevolence, and governance wisdom. These traditional Chinese ideas of human rights have made significant contributions to enriching the thoughts and values of world human rights civilization.

We must continue to advance the integration of human rights development with fine traditional Chinese culture and summarize and leverage local resources that can be absorbed and utilized by contemporary human rights theory and practice to achieve the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional human rights thoughts. For one thing, we should base our efforts on historical facts, strengthening theoretical research on the history of human rights civilization in China. Adhering to an independent approach, we need to establish our own narrative by comprehensively combing through historical materials and focus our research on fundamental human rights issues such as human subsistence and development, human dignity, and value, revealing the historical lineage of human rights evolution in China in a scientific manner, and articulating in-depth historical wisdom and intrinsic motivation behind the development of China's human rights cause. For another, we should focus on historical theory, promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional human rights concepts. The interpretation of the origins and development of Chinese human rights civilization should not be confined to fragmented quotations but should enhance the awareness of refining “historical theory” based on “historical materials” and “historical facts.” We need to further summarize and refine the distinct human rights concepts contained in traditional Chinese philosophy and express them in modern discourse (e.g., translating “people are the foundation of the state” into “people-centeredness” and “coexistence of all in harmony” into “a community with a shared future for mankind”), thereby making them resonate around the world.

IV. Connecting China and the Rest of the World from a Global Perspective is an Important Dimension of Building China's Independent Knowledge System of Human Rights

In today's world, human rights are one of the three pillars of the UN regime and an important global issue. The clash of different standpoints on human rights, the confrontation of various human rights discourses, and the collision of multiple human rights concepts mainly occur in the international arena. Academic research on human rights should not merely follow Western human rights theories, nor should it stick to the beaten track. Adopting an open and inclusive attitude and a broad global perspective, resonating in sync with international human rights research, and seizing the high ground in international human rights theoretical research is a practical necessity and inevitable requirement for building China's independent knowledge system of human rights.

In recent years, China's theoretical research on human rights has been dedicated to providing answers to common issues of humanity and contributing to the advancement of global human rights governance. In terms of the expansion of academic influence, an increasing number of Chinese human rights experts and scholars are publishing articles in international academic journals, articulating Chinese human rights concepts and practices through an academic discourse that bridges Chinese and foreign perspectives. Regarding participation in multilateral mechanisms, the China Society for Human Rights Studies, as a social organization with consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council, regularly organizes delegations to participate in the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly and other multilateral meetings and events, and actively clarifies its stance through various means such as delivering speeches at the Assembly, organizing side events, bilateral meetings, and lectures, and receiving media interviews. In terms of participating in the formulation of international rules, some Chinese scholars have taken on roles as experts or committee members in the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council, the United Nations Committee against Torture, and other international organizations, promoting the incorporation of Chinese views into relevant international human rights norms and standards, thereby continuously enhancing China's discourse in UN human rights institutions.

Currently, the world is undergoing significant turbulence and transformation, presenting immense challenges to global human rights governance. Old and new human rights issues, which are intricate and multifaceted, continue to surface and intertwine with each other. In this context, it is essential to enhance research on the UN multilateral human rights mechanisms. Close attention should be paid to the topics, reports, and latest developments of relevant international mechanisms such as the UN Human Rights Council, focusing not only on traditional issues such as the right to development, the right to work, civil and political rights, and the protection of the rights of specific groups such as women and children, but also on

emerging topics such as digital rights, environmental rights, as well as the relationships between technology and human rights and between business and human rights. Furthermore, it is crucial to strengthen regional and country-specific studies on human rights. A precise understanding of the fundamental trends in China's external environment is necessary, along with an in-depth analysis of the dynamics, trends, and evolution of international human rights situations and continuous studies into the historical, cultural, ethnic, religious, social, and ideological factors of target countries. Only in this way can we produce systematic research outcomes focused on key regions, countries, and major international organizations.

Human rights studies involve the most fundamental and significant issues of humanity, and no single traditional discipline can fully address them alone. Only by employing multidisciplinary theories and methods, forming interdisciplinary research teams, and establishing interdisciplinary research platforms can we shift from a "disciplinary-specific narrative" to a "holistic interdisciplinary narrative" and achieve multidimensional expansion and evolution through intersection, dialogue, and integration. We also need to actively promote the development of human rights as an academic discipline by accelerating the establishment of a professional system, curriculum and teaching materials system, and educational teaching system, expand the fields of human rights studies, and enhance the training quality of human rights research professionals, so as to provide sufficient disciplinary support and high-quality theoretical talent for the building of China's independent knowledge system of human rights.

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "every significant leap in human society and every major development in human civilization is inseparable from the knowledge transformation and intellectual guidance of philosophy and social sciences." Various national human rights education and training bases and human rights research institutions in China must actively assume the role as the main forces in the knowledge transformation and intellectual guidance for human rights development in the country. They should undertake the historic responsibility of "continuing the academic lineage," foster the theoretical consciousness of "exploring academic principles," and play the main role in "establishing academic schools" to continuously promote knowledge, theoretical and methodological innovation. The objective is to establish an independent knowledge system of human rights that belongs to both China and the world. Extending beyond contemporary times, this system draws upon the past and looks into the future, contributing the thoughts and wisdom of Chinese academia to enrich the human rights civilization of mankind.

(Translated by *LIU Haile*)