

On the Four Dimensions of Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights from a Spatiotemporal Viewpoint

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Abstract: *The Chinese perspective is an open and evolving theoretical system. From a spatiotemporal viewpoint, it can be theoretically distilled into such four dimensions as the world dimension, the historical dimension, the practical dimension, and the theoretical dimension, which collectively form a “unified framework of four” of logical construction. The “world” dimension represents the synchronic extension of human rights practices, outwardly touching on the shared values of all humanity guided by relational rationality and the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity. The “historical” dimension reflects the diachronic extension of China’s path of human rights development, encompassing the cultural subjectivity of Chinese civilization and the complex context of modern human rights endeavors. The “practical” dimension serves as the “meta-perspective” of contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, where the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the people-centered approach constitute the fundamental stance for developing the perspectives of human rights and human rights governance. The “theoretical” dimension focuses on the deconstruction and reconstruction of indigenous human rights notions, emphasizing a set of values that are confident, inclusive, equitable, shared, and forward-looking. The “world” dimension of “taking the world as a method”, provides a reference perspective for “taking China as a method” narrative centered on the “historical-practical-theoretical” framework, while the latter injects a human rights methodology grounded in Chinese wisdom into the former. By integrating these four dimensions, a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the value core and normative paradigm of contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights can be achieved.*

Keywords: contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights ♦ spatiotemporal construction ♦ human rights civilization ♦ human rights practice ♦ human rights endeavors

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Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has regarded respecting and protecting human rights as an important task in national governance and political administration, and has summarized and developed the important proposition of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee pointed out, “We must promote education on human rights knowledge among the entire population, especially among the youth, and incorporate education on the Marxist view on human rights and the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights into the national education system.”¹ The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights represents a distinctly Chinese worldview on human rights that has been developed by the CPC in uniting and leading the Chinese people. It integrates the Marxist view on human rights with China’s specific realities and fine traditional culture, grounded in the context of Chinese modernization. This framework provides comprehensive guidance encompassing the path, systems, practices, and theories for advancing human rights in the new era, embodying distinctive Chinese characteristics and approaches. It serves as both scientific guidance and an action plan for promoting China’s human rights development.

At present, the academic community has produced a wealth of research findings on key theoretical issues related to the essence, formative mechanisms, and practical foundations of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. Relevant literature can be broadly categorized into three types: The first type primarily adopts a legal justification approach. Such literature emphasizes the intrinsic connections between the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights and traditional Chinese culture as well as human rights practices. It focuses on the continuity and innovation of Chinese philosophical thought, and seeks to explain the generative logic of the contemporary Chinese human rights perspective through the lens of cultural subjectivity.² The second focuses on value relevance. This body of literature emphasizes the value-oriented function of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, combining it with specific branches of law and individual rights, and exploring the complementary relationship between human rights values and the jurisprudence of human rights.³ The third type centers on constructive analysis. Based on the cultural endogeneity of human rights concepts, this literature begins with the discourse

¹ Xi Jinping, “Resolutely Follow the Path of Human Rights Development with Chinese Characteristics to Better Promote the Progress of Human Rights in Our Country,” *Qiushi* 12 (2022): 8.

² Qi Yanping, “How Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights Have Formed,” *Human Rights* 2 (2022): 19-37.

³ Ge Xianyuan, “The Right to Livelihood Under the Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights,” *Zhejiang Social Sciences* 12 (2023): 56-63.

system of Chinese human rights, and attempts to construct an argumentative model for the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights by leveraging the attributes and normative structures of human rights.⁴ In summary, although existing studies have offered theoretical perspectives and research pathways for interpreting the jurisprudential connotation of contemporary Chinese human rights, their analytical frameworks tend to be fragmented and static, primarily focusing on the direct exposition of human rights values. They fall short of providing a dynamic, systematic spatiotemporal analysis that captures the living narrative of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights.

In light of this, this paper, grounded in the theory of spatiotemporal construction, seeks to summarize and refine the inherent spatiotemporal logic of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, with a particular focus on its global, historical, practical, and theoretical dimensions, thereby constructing a “four-in-one” academic framework. From the perspective of theoretical origins, the logic of space-time can be traced both in traditional Chinese culture and in the Marxist view on human rights. This cosmology that embraces the cosmos and encompasses all under heaven endows the otherwise silent and slow-moving natural space-time with historical and transcendent social meaning. In Marxist human rights theory, there is a dialectical tension between time and space. “Time is in fact the active existence of man; it is not only the measure of human life but also the space of human development.”⁵ From the category of human rights, human rights and space-time are mutually constitutive — space-time constructs humans, and humans in turn reshape space-time. Therefore, examining the internal mechanisms of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights through a broad social spatiotemporal lens allows for a more accurate understanding of the value patterns in the development of China’s human rights cause under the framework of Chinese modernization. The structure and argumentative logic of this paper are as follows: First, starting from the outwardly extending global spatiotemporal context, it examines the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights through the synchronic lens of global human rights civilization, highlighting both their internal connections and essential differences. Second, it focuses on China’s spatiotemporal characteristics, reflecting on the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights from the perspective of China’s human rights civilization. It outlines the historical trajectory of China’s human rights cause development and presents the compelling narrative of human rights practices in the new era. Third, it elevates human rights practice to the level of human rights theory, exploring how Marxist principles on human rights integrate with indigenous cultural resources and how they contribute to the reshaping of

⁴ Lu Guangjin, “Historical, Concrete, Realistic: The Triple Construction Logic of Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights,” *Human Rights Law Studies* 3 (2023): 1-23.

⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, 2nd edition, vol. 37 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2019), 161.

cultural confidence in Chinese human rights amid the tide of globalization. Finally, by integrating the global, historical, practical, and theoretical dimensions, the paper reveals the contemporary value of China's human rights vision and provides a legal justification for affirming the concrete universality and legitimacy of China's human rights cause development.

I. The Global Dimension: The Spatiotemporal Convergence of Human Rights Civilization in Humanity

As a prominent hallmark of human civilization, human rights civilization emerges from localized and diverse human rights cultures, encompassing a wealth of human rights thought, norms, institutions, and practices. With the rise of information technology, the development of human rights has increasingly exhibited a trend toward globalization. Under spatiotemporal conditions, this is manifested as heterogeneous human rights civilizations emerging from specific times and spaces, extending, permeating, and integrating into other social systems in a radiating manner. Although regional conceptions of human rights are rooted in distinct natural-geographical environments and socio-ethical traditions, the reduction of spatiotemporal distances has created opportunities and facilitated their outward extension.⁶ In the face of the extension and clashes of diverse civilizations, the Chinese-style view on human rights has emerged at the intersection of indigenous experience and multicultural interaction. From the standpoints of research paradigms, value orientation, and institutional carriers, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights contributes a Chinese solution — one imbued with both national wisdom and contemporary relevance — to the mutual learning and exchange of global human rights civilizations.

A. The crisis of modernity of human rights justification paradigms

Many of the problems facing contemporary human society are closely related to the unchecked and disordered expansion of modernity. Although modernity possesses a dual character of “opportunity and crisis,” the social risks brought about by industrial production and the rupture of tradition caused by the separation of space-time are particularly worthy of reflection in today's society.⁷ Since the Enlightenment, human rights theory has undergone successive shifts and debates between various paradigms, including theological and human paradigms, objectivist and subjectivist paradigms, subject-object and intersubjective paradigms, as well as foundationalist and constructivist paradigms. Yet, due to differing understandings of the subject of human rights, these paradigms have never reached a true consensus.⁸ The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights does not fall into the trap of a singular line

⁶ Liu Zhiqiang, “On Two Pairs of Human Rights Categories Under Spatiotemporal Construction,” *Law Review* 1 (2017): 46-52.

⁷ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, translated by Tian He (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2011), 6.

⁸ Chang Jian and Yin Haozhe, “The Competition and Transformation of Theoretical Paradigms in Human Rights Research,” *Chinese Journal of Human Rights* 1 (2020): 10-25.

of reasoning. Instead, it aims to maximize the respect for and protection of human rights by seeking a breakthrough in balancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of human rights.

From the perspective of spatiotemporal evolution, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights addresses the crisis of human rights legitimacy through the lens of relational subjectivity. Human rights originated from the rationalist enthusiasm embedded in humanist thought. Descartes' proposition "I think, therefore I am" brought the "self" into prominence, separating it from the natural world and prompting modern philosophy to turn toward the analysis of the subject-object dichotomy.⁹ The rationalist declaration that "man is an end" further amplified the intrinsic value of the individual, with human dignity being established as the foundation of human rights legitimacy in Kant's moral philosophy.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the principle of individual-centered subjectivity, shaped by binary modes of thinking, has in practice led to instrumental rationality. This shift has triggered a legitimacy crisis in democratic and rule-of-law states, eroding public trust and prompting skepticism toward human rights norms.¹¹ In response, an intersubjective perspective — emphasizing equal interaction, deliberative communication, and consensus-building through compromise among differing interests — has been introduced into international human rights discourse. Applied to Chinese society, which is fundamentally relational in nature, this view integrates the intrinsic value of the subject with interactive relationships with others, thereby deepening the collective understanding of human rights. First, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights inherits and affirms the recognition of "inherent human dignity" found in the system of the International Bill of Human Rights. It also incorporates socialist democratic procedures to deliberate and review major public interest issues related to people's well-being, evaluating the progression from moral rights to legal rights and actualized rights within a relational philosophical framework of mutual subjectivity. Second, it integrates interpersonal harmony derived from indigenous cultural traditions, treating human rights as both a precondition and a universal consensus for inter-civilizational exchange and mutual learning. Therefore, the relational perspective compensates for the limitations of the subjectivist paradigm and expands the practical applicability of the intersubjective paradigm.

From the spatiotemporal context, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights addresses the crisis of effectiveness through conceptual integration. The effectiveness of human rights refers to how the universal claims of human

⁹ Xiong Wanpeng, *The Philosophical Foundation of Human Rights* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013), 67-68.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Miao Litian (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2012), 42.

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, translated by Liu Beicheng and Cao Weidong (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2009), 76-77.

rights are treated and how such claims can be interpreted and justified.¹² In modern Western human rights theory, the debate between the naturalistic view and the political view of human rights runs through the construction and development of the international human rights discourse system. The former focuses on the moral characteristics of human beings, asserting that individuals possess human rights by virtue of their humanity. In this view, human rights are logically pre-institutional, temporally eternal, and substantively broad rights premised on a universal conception of human nature. However, the latter emphasizes post-World War II international human rights practice, arguing that human rights norms originate from contingent, diverse, and existing local cultures; thus, human rights should be seen as claims made by individuals against the state.¹³ While the political view attempts to extract “thin” norms that transcend regional cultures to increase the acceptability of universal human rights concepts, the essence of the debate remains the tension between universalism and cultural relativism. It is noteworthy that the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights does not fall into the quagmire of discourse paradigm disputes. On the contrary, it consistently maintains that dialogue and negotiation between divergent paradigms are possible, and that the “overlapping consensus” on rights lists should not be obscured by geopolitical contestations. The principle of universality in human rights, as recognized by the contemporary Chinese perspective, affirms that human existence possesses a world-historical dimension — world history and national history are two sides of the same coin, coexisting and flourishing together.¹⁴

In summary, the crisis of modernity experienced by paradigms of human rights justification constitutes an epochal challenge to the meta-ethics of human rights. In addressing the legitimacy of human rights, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights begins with human dignity and interprets human rights through intersubjective relations grounded in mutual respect and dialogic engagement. In addressing the effectiveness of human rights, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights actively embraces and interprets global theories of human rights governance, stripping away excessive political rhetoric and turning toward the excavation and revitalization of indigenous human rights resources.

B. A critical reflection on the value of the “universalist” view of human rights

Center and periphery constitute a crucial pair of concepts in the field of spatiotemporal studies, and China’s development process is inevitably

¹² Benjamin Gregg, *Human Rights as Social Construction: From Utopia to Human Emancipation*, translated by Li Xianfei (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2020), 31.

¹³ Yan Hailiang, “Toward a Dignity-Based Functional Theory of Human Rights: The Evolution and Analysis of Contemporary Human Rights Perspectives,” *Global Law Review* 4 (2015): 83-108.

¹⁴ Liu Zhiqiang and Yan Naixin, “On the Three Dimensions of ‘Human Existence’ from a Human Rights Perspective,” *Human Rights* 6 (2023): 32-54.

confronted with the challenge of Western centrism.¹⁵ The universal values advocated by Western societies position their spatiotemporal framework at the center of the world, relegating the vast number of developing countries and regions to the periphery or margins. This superior and condescending value perspective neither addresses the real issues faced by heterogeneous civilizations nor resolves the crises of belief caused by the rupture of traditional ties and social relationships. On the contrary, it has provoked skepticism from other civilizations regarding the universality of human rights. The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights constructs human rights based on “non-coercive consensus,” and promotes a common-value paradigm rooted in consultation, shared benefits, and joint construction. It seeks to integrate diverse human rights civilizations through a minimum moral threshold and the greatest common denominator of common values.

Western centrism, represented by the so-called universal values, carries inherent genes of confrontation and conquest. Its unchecked global expansion disrupts the spatiotemporal system. In terms of relational structure, “universal values” and Western centrism can be understood as surface and substance, respectively. The theory of “universalism” in values is rooted in modern Western centrism, combining the spiritual doctrines of Christianity with the abstract notion of human nature in classical philosophy to form a particular value system.¹⁶ It exalts uniformity and unilateralism while rejecting plurality and multilateralism, spreading its influence through the economic hegemony and military power of modern capitalist states. As an ideology that suppresses non-Western societies, the “universalist” view on human rights binds the so-called civilizational superiority and modernization of the West to its framework, packaging individualism, multi-party systems, and private ownership as universal values such as democracy, freedom, and justice, in an attempt to legitimize the dominance of Western capitalist nations.¹⁷ With respect to universal human rights, the blind expansion of the “universalist” view on human rights has squeezed the living spatiotemporal space of diverse human rights values. Globalization does not equate to homogenization, and modernization does not equate to Westernization. “Universal human rights” invert the moral postulation of human dignity, reducing the status and worth of the individual to mere political tools. From the perspective of differentiation, the liberal view of human rights is embedded in a specific spatiotemporal context. The spatiotemporal extension of this singular value system neglects the concrete and distinctive nature of diverse communities, and the ideological barriers it

¹⁵ Jing Tiankui, He Jian, Deng Wanchun and Gu Jintu, *Spatiotemporal Sociology: Theory and Methodology*, (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, 2012), 57-58.

¹⁶ Wang Lisheng, “The Historical Logic, Contemporary Manifestations and Inherent Problems of Western Centrism,” *Frontiers* 2 (2022): 14-20.

¹⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 2010), 161-162.

establishes run counter to the vision of globalization. The human rights discourse system represented by so-called universal values pursues intellectual monism and, in practice, adopts a double-standard approach.

The common values of all mankind represent the greatest common denominator of global human rights concepts and the extension and deepening of Chinese-style human rights civilization within a global dimension. The common values of “peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom,” as advocated by China, are distinct from both the “universalist” and “particularist” value paradigms. They embody a value consensus that integrates commonality and individuality, universality and national specificity, and they are intrinsically linked to the theories of universal human rights, general human rights, and specific human rights.¹⁸ First, at the international level, the common values of all mankind shift the paradigm from monologic discourse hegemony to resonant discourse interaction.¹⁹ As the concept of a “global village” begins to take shape through increasing worldwide exchanges, the value ideal of shared presence, equal dialogue, and multilateral engagement represents the specific realities of international cooperation. Grounded in the jurisprudential notion of “human dignity” and premised on respect for the diversity of human civilizations, it aspires toward the long-term goal of the free and all-round development of every individual, fostering a collective future for humanity through equal, reciprocal, pluralistic, and sincere dialogue. Second, at the domestic level, the common values of all mankind, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, and the core socialist values together form a complete and coherent logical framework.²⁰ At the structural level, both the core values and common values encompass three dimensions — those of the state, society, and the individual. However, the former tends to guide the value orientation of China’s human rights cause development, while the latter more fully reflects value demands that concern all of humanity, highlighting China’s earnest commitment to the advancement of global civilization. As a mediating bridge between the two, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights facilitates the convergence of Chinese and international discourses, linking China’s human rights civilization with global human rights civilization at the level of value logic.

In brief, the “universalist” view on human rights, with its religiously tinged vision of a world ideal, fails to resolve the human rights paradox arising from civilizational conflicts. It is the universal consensus shaped by the common

¹⁸ Liu Zhiqiang and Li Yuekai, “On the Three Jurisprudential Dimensions of Common Values in Human Rights,” *Academics* 1 (2023): 126-141.

¹⁹ Han Sheng and Kong Yanli, “The Intersubjective Transformation of Value Paradigms in Contemporary Global Governance,” *Social Sciences in Chinese Higher Education Institutions* 6 (2023): 100-108.

²⁰ Shen Xiangping, “On the New Form of Human Civilization and the Common Values of Humanity: A Perspective Based on the Relationship Between Particularity and Universality,” *Philosophical Research* 4 (2022): 5-14.

values of all mankind that more closely aligns with a vision of human rights characterized by achieving harmony in diversity and mutual appreciation. Critically reflecting on the hypocrisy and hollowness of “universal values,” and upholding the shared value principles of peaceful coexistence, consultation, and cooperation, is the only path forward for constructing the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights and creating a better world.

C. The mission and responsibility of a community with a shared future for mankind

The spatiotemporal extension of human rights values requires the support of a human rights community, and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind provides a material foundation for both the common values of all mankind and the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. In moving from a “community of interests” to a “community of shared destiny,” the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights inherits the spiritual traditions of ancient Chinese thought, such as the ideals of *he* (harmony) and the worldview of *tianxia* (all under heaven), and integrates Marx’s vision of an “association of free individuals” into the pulse of an era in which humanity’s fortunes are interlinked. The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind embodies both the global consciousness of the Chinese people community and the aspirations of every “real individual” for a happy life.

The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind is in direct continuity with the Marxist view on human rights, and the idea of the association of free individuals is deeply embedded in the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. Marx identified three stages of human social development: the stage of personal dependence, the stage of material dependence, and the stage of free and comprehensive human development. The realization of free and comprehensive development for all individuals refers specifically to a communist society framed by the “association of free individuals.”²¹ What makes a genuine community surpass an illusory one is “the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being.”²² The transition from “living individuals” to “human emancipation” envisions the association of free individuals as a social community in which interpersonal harmony and social prosperity coexist, and as a human community where the full development of human essence and unprecedented flourishing of human civilization can be achieved. If the association of free individuals is considered the ultimate goal of human social development, then a community with a shared future for mankind is a transitional and concrete form of community that reflects a contemporary transformation of the laws governing human society. First, the realization of the

²¹ Marx clearly stated that communist society is “a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 5 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 683.

²² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 185.

association of free individuals cannot happen overnight; real-world disagreements and frictions cannot be ignored. A community with a shared future for mankind does not aim at ideological, institutional, or religious uniformity. Rather, it emphasizes cooperation and mutual benefit in the pursuit of a shared vision of a better life. Second, the universality and global nature of civilizational interaction are unprecedented in history. “Capitalist globalization has created a universal interaction among humanity, but it has not equitably enhanced the common interests of all humankind.”²³ A community with a shared future for mankind focuses on the overall and core interests of humanity today. It strives to dissolve hegemonism, power politics, the law of the jungle, and zero-sum thinking, while eliminating the unjust, dependency-based international order of the past.

Specifically, a community with a shared future for mankind represents a convergence of the Marxist view on human rights and the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, encompassing both internalization and external extension. The idea of the association of free individuals is continually enriched and practiced within the framework of a community with a shared future for mankind. The Chinese national community, in turn, blossoms in the global garden of civilizations through this broader concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. All three are integrated within the spatiotemporal context of Chinese modernization.

In summary, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is characterized by an intersubjective paradigm of deliberative engagement in terms of its justification framework, is guided by the common values of all mankind in its ideological orientation, and is supported by a community with a shared future for mankind as its institutional vehicle. In terms of spatiotemporal positioning, the relational view of human rights is embedded within the common values of all mankind and a community with a shared future for mankind. It synthesizes international human rights theory with Chinese indigenous philosophy, thereby elevating the focus of Chinese human rights scholarship to the broader domain of human rights civilization. In terms of spatiotemporal scope, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights possesses both global and local dimensions. It draws upon and incorporates the outstanding achievements of other world civilizations, while simultaneously serving as a vital component of human rights civilization that extends, expands, and converges within global space-time. Therefore, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights enriches the broader landscape of human rights civilization and serves as a communication platform for telling China’s story, amplifying China’s voice, and shaping China’s image on the world stage.

II. The Historical Dimension: The Spatiotemporal Trajectory of

²³ Chen Shuguang, “How a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind Changes the World,” *Studies on Marxism* 2 (2023): 49-60.

Human Rights Development in China

Human rights are inherently spatiotemporal, and engaging in an interactive dialogue with one's historical self is a primary means by which the present spatiotemporal reality is continuously constructed.²⁴ General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "Only by fully and deeply understanding the history of Chinese civilization can we more effectively promote the creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional Chinese culture."²⁵ Although the term "human rights" is an imported concept, the concept, as it has evolved today, encapsulates the essence of Western modern political civilization and resonates with the profound and enduring legacy of Chinese civilization. From the perspective of spatiotemporal construction in historical reality, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is both a major achievement of modern Chinese civilization and a concentrated expression of fine traditional Chinese culture in the domain of human rights. It also facilitates the "second integration" of the Marxist view on human rights with China's human rights civilization. Compared with other human rights civilizations that developed under more favorable spatiotemporal conditions, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights exhibits a sense of continuity in its diachronic development and a sense of compression in its synchronic expression. On this basis, making the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights more engaging, appealing, and influential requires a return to both ancient and modern phases of Chinese civilization, thereby forging a modern human rights civilization within the spatiotemporal trajectory of China's human rights cause development.

A. The enduring inheritance of the cultural subjectivity of the Chinese nation

Cultural confidence stems from cultural identity. From the perspective of cultural typology, China possesses the fundamental attributes of a cultural identity-based state, characterized by the promotion of modern nation-building objectives through cultural identification.²⁶ Chinese civilization is the only continuous cultural lineage among all existing human civilizations. Although ancient China did not explicitly articulate the term "human rights", the conceptual elements of human rights were never absent from the speculative philosophy of traditional Chinese thought. On the contrary, in terms of spatiotemporal distribution, the autonomous cultural tradition and unified state structure gave rise to a uniquely distinctive conception of human rights.

Chinese civilization contains a culturally endogenous subjectivity rooted in indigenous traditions, which enriches the historical connotation of a collectivist

²⁴ Liu Zhiqiang, "On Two Pairs of Human Rights Categories Under Spatiotemporal Construction," *Law Review* 1 (2017): 46-52.

²⁵ Xi Jinping, "Speech at the Symposium on Cultural Inheritance and Development," *Qiushi* 17 (2023).

²⁶ Fu Caiwu, "Cultural Identity-Based National Attributes and the Framework of National Cultural Strategy," *People's Tribune* 4 (2021): 101-103.

view on human rights. From a concrete spatiotemporal perspective, the continuity of Chinese thought is reflected not only in the doctrines of ancient sages and philosophers, but also in the reasoning strategies employed by early thinkers to articulate their ideas, namely, a consistent mode of argumentation maintained across successive schools of thought throughout history.²⁷

For example, ancient Chinese thought on human rights often employed the concepts of *min* (the people) and *qun* (the collective) to articulate the normative and necessary dimensions of human rights protection. First, the principle of people-based thinking permeated historical governance. From “the people are the foundation of a state; when the foundation is solid, the state is stable”²⁸ to “the people are most important, the state comes next, and the ruler is the least important,”²⁹ the core of this thought consistently emphasized the protection of the people’s livelihood. Rulers implemented a series of institutional experiments based on the principles of “respecting the people,” “caring for the people,” and “protecting the people.” Second, the idea of *qun*-centeredness was rooted in the isomorphic structure of family and state in ancient society. The mode of production in a small-scale agrarian economy determined the interdependent relationship between the individual, the family, and the clan. Individuals had to rely on the collective to strengthen their capacity to resist external risks. Community networks, marked by kinship and geographical proximity, connected and encompassed scattered individuals, whose social position could only be determined within the ethical framework of collective primacy.³⁰ This deeply ingrained ethic of human relations was continually reinforced throughout history, making social collectives the underlying logic of traditional Chinese culture.

Chinese civilization is closely intertwined with the formation of the Chinese nation and the centralized state, embodying a profound spirit of unity and a strong sense of national consciousness. A symbiotic and mutually prosperous ethnic structure, along with a highly unified state form, provided a stable spatiotemporal context for the accumulation of human rights thought. First, the construction and reproduction of national memory strengthened the centripetal force among members. As the concrete symbol of “China,” the Chinese nation had already formed a pluralistic yet integrated distribution pattern when it was “a nation in itself.” Centered around the Han ethnic group, it

²⁷ Li Wei, “Spatiotemporal Distribution: A Chinese Perspective on Universality,” *Philosophical Research* 12 (2023): 80-90.

²⁸ *The Four Books and Five Classics (vol. 1)*, collated and punctuated by Chen Wuguo (Changsha: Yuelu Press, 2014), 227.

²⁹ *Mencius: Annotated Translation*, annotated and translated by Yang Bojun (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2012), 364.

³⁰ Wang Hongbo, “The Deductive Logic of Collective-Oriented Thought Under Confucian Cultural Dominance: From Cultural ‘Enclosure’ to Institutional ‘Rites’,” *Journal of Hebei University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 6 (2016): 128-132.

extended, connected, and integrated with surrounding ethnicities.³¹ The collective memory of the Chinese nation, as shaped within the historical narrative of Chinese civilization, became the foundation for identity affirmation and emotional belonging among the Chinese people, thereby enhancing the cohesion of the Chinese national community.³² Second, the establishment and consolidation of territorial consciousness enhanced cultural identity. Chinese culture originated on Chinese soil, and the primary living space of the Chinese nation has long been located in the East Asian continental region, with populations concentrated in the plains and highland areas along the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers. Although the geographical boundaries of “China” have shifted over time, the territory where the Huaxia (Chinese) people are active has remained relatively stable, giving rise to a holistic and relational mode of thinking. Finally, the stable spatiotemporal structure of traditional Chinese culture produced a concept of human rights distinct from Western thought centered on individual freedom. The Chinese pursuit of universality lies in constructing a shared communal consciousness “based on categories,” which values sameness, wholeness, and interconnectedness. Chinese human rights thought tends to understand humanity from a transcendent worldview, in which the state plays the most crucial role in social construction and the joint formation of belief systems.

In summary, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is a historical continuation of ancient Chinese human rights thought, embodying the rich and profound legacy of fine traditional Chinese culture. The ideas of putting the “people” and the “collective” first, supported by coherent logical reasoning and abundant historical writings, are embedded in the dialectical analysis of individual and collective rights today. The ethnic structure and state formation developed over historical time have, through collective memory and territorial consolidation, shaped a shared consciousness of the Chinese national community, wherein the cooperative relationship among the state, society, and individuals is elaborated within a cultural gene of unity and wholeness. The endogenous cultural subjectivity and stable spatiotemporal structure of Chinese civilization have forged the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights that is people-oriented, harmonious between the individual and the collective, and characterized by pluralistic unity.

B. The modern and contemporary exploration of China’s path to human rights development

The modern and contemporary history of human rights in China is a history of enlightenment and national salvation, debate and reform, which adds experiential vitality to the theoretical discourse of the contemporary Chinese

³¹ Fei Xiaotong, *The Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation* (Revised Edition) (Beijing: Minzu University of China Press, 2018), 21-23.

³² Zhang Shujuan and Wang Shuo, “The Integrative Logic of Collective Memory from the Perspective on Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation,” *Academics* 12 (2023): 82-95.

perspective on human rights. Constrained by external pressures and the collapse of existing orders, the development of human rights in modern China exhibits a clear feature of spatiotemporal compression. Compared with the conscious emergence and widespread dissemination of Western human rights theories, human rights thought in 21st-century China appeared somewhat constrained due to the lack of an ample spatiotemporal environment. Tradition and modernity were forced to converge within a limited spatiotemporal framework, producing a complex interweaving of continuity and discontinuity.

First, during the process of modern and contemporary development, tradition, modernity, and post-modernity coexisted, generating unprecedented convergence, collision, and synthesis. During the New Democratic Revolution (1919-1949), the entanglement among imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, as well as the influx of ideologies such as nationalism, statism, anarchism, and socialism, made the “Eastern transmission of Western learning” a critical path in the pursuit of national salvation. At the beginning of the socialist construction period (after 1949), agriculture, handicrafts, and capitalist industry and commerce were transformed simultaneously, and modernization, industrialization, and urbanization advanced in parallel. Thus, the generational and progressive model of human rights development typical of Western countries manifested in China as a temporally compressed and synchronous coexistence. This special historical context nurtured a unique path of development. Through the trials of history, the CPC made the unwavering choice of Marxism and led the Chinese people to accomplish the most extensive and profound social transformation in the nation’s history, paving the way for socialism with Chinese characteristics. From a spatial perspective, the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics represents an optimal integration of tradition, modernity, and post-modernity, realized through high levels of institutional and systemic innovation based on practical considerations. From a temporal perspective, spatiotemporal compression means that social processes and contradictions from different historical periods must be integrated within a much shorter timeframe. The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which combines the basic principles of Marxism with the specific realities of China, has effectively addressed the fundamental relationships and major contradictions across historical phases, laying a solid foundation for the realization of national prosperity, rejuvenation, and the well-being of the people.

Second, in the ideological contest over human rights, continuity and discontinuity are entangled and mutually illuminating. At the end of the 19th century, the term “human rights” was introduced to China through Japanese translation. While the use of the term demonstrated a discontinuity in value understanding, its core interpretation reflected a continuity with traditional Chinese human rights thought. First, for a modern China that had repeatedly suffered setbacks and defeats, the collapse of past beliefs and the pressures of present suffering led Chinese scholars to attempt a clean break with traditional notions of human rights, seeking Western-style alternatives for national success.

However, to highlight a spirit of resistance and accommodate the transformation of national character, modern Chinese intellectuals often conflated “human rights” (*renquan*) with “civil rights” (*minquan*) in their translations, and the meaning attributed to “human rights” diverged significantly from the original concept rooted in natural law.³³ Furthermore, early studies of human rights in modern China were often driven by practical incidents and reactive commentary rather than systematic theoretical exploration.³⁴ Few scholars undertook comprehensive studies of foundational human rights theory; most wrote critical or reflective pieces in response to specific events, leading to intermittent and episodic research output. Second, although Chinese thinkers borrowed Western vocabulary, their mode of assimilation remained inherently Chinese.³⁵ When translating foreign human rights theories, Chinese intellectuals “unconsciously encountered their pre-existing collective awareness and subconscious rooted in collectivist traditions.”³⁶ The Enlightenment ideas originally constructed by the West were not adopted wholesale in China. Instead, the Chinese people drew connections between traditional people-oriented doctrines and human rights discourse, embedding observations and perspectives with Chinese characteristics within the political demands for human rights. This approach allowed human rights principles to be utilized for examining, reflecting upon, and addressing China’s specific issues. Meanwhile, the dissemination and subsequent reevaluation of modern human rights theories have brought the value and essence of traditional Chinese human rights culture into sharper focus.

In summary, the Marxist view on human rights has become the guiding ideology of China’s human rights cause due to its alignment with Chinese realities and its compatibility with traditional Chinese culture. The difficult exploration and ideological contestations in the modern and contemporary history of human rights, as a paradigmatic case of development under conditions of “compression,” offer profound insight and reflection for the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights.

C. The complex context of China’s human rights cause in the new era

The “Two Overall Situations,” i.e., the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the profound changes unseen in a century, represent General Secretary Xi Jinping’s precise assessment of global and domestic conditions at the historical intersection of the “Two Centenary Goals,” and constitute the spatiotemporal context for the development of China’s human rights cause in the new era. These “Two Overall Situations” define the historical positioning and spatiotemporal dynamics of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, demonstrating the strategic determination behind China’s human rights

³³ Sun Xiaoxia, “The Chinese Term ‘Renquan’ (Human Rights) and Its First Three Decades After Introduction,” *Law Science* 3 (2022): 8-10.

³⁴ Liu Zhiqiang, “An Investigation of Human Rights Research During the Republican China Period,” *Legal Science (Journal of Northwest University of Political Science and Law)* 5 (2015): 44-55.

³⁵ Wang Renbo, *The Chinese Character of Law* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2014), 48.

³⁶ Li Zehou, *On Modern Chinese Intellectual History* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 6.

cause development.

From Chinese perspective on the world, the “Two Overall Situations” clarify the spatiotemporal orientation and trajectory of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. A coordinate serves as an approach to understanding phenomena. While the “Two Overall Situations” may be interpreted multi-dimensionally from the shifting coordinates of the individual, China, Asia, and the world, the Chinese coordinate remains central to comprehending this concept.³⁷ Therefore, in the field of human rights, the dual evolution of change and the overarching situation elevate the importance and urgency of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. In terms of spatial scope, “the world” and “China” constitute two closely linked discursive spheres for human rights. The reform of the global human rights governance system transcends regional and geographical boundaries. The current international human rights order is facing an application dilemma, as the original discourse system teeters; double standards and interventionist practices have proliferated amid globalization, and the overextension of fundamental rights lists has blurred the moral core and boundaries of human rights. In terms of temporal scale, “century” and “rejuvenation” imply both a defined historical period and an aspirational vision for the future, providing direction for the development of China’s human rights path. Taking “rejuvenation” as a reference against the “century” benchmark, the Chinese people’s demands for spiritual fulfillment and environmental quality are rising, while urban-rural, regional, and income disparities are widening. First-, second-, and third-generation human rights, i.e., civil liberties, social rights, and collective rights, are evolving in parallel. In terms of strategic positioning, responding to the “unprecedented” with a “strategic” mindset highlights China’s confidence and resolve in respecting and protecting human rights. Only by maintaining political resolve and firm confidence in human rights from a strategic perspective can China respond effectively to the profound adjustment of international power structures and the accelerated evolution of the human rights cause. In summary, the breadth, depth, and height of the “Two Overall Situations” have given rise to the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, which shapes confidence in China’s human rights path, theory, system, and culture from a deep ideological foundation, forming a distinct Chinese worldview.

Speaking for China in this era, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights accurately grasps and coordinates the domestic and international dimensions of the “Two Overall Situations.” From a dynamic perspective, both dimensions of the “Two Overall Situations” contain variable factors. The deepening rivalry among major powers and the rapid advancement of science and technology are intensifying global uncertainty and instability. From a static

³⁷ Ren Jiantao, “Shifting Coordinates: A Multi-dimensional Interpretation of ‘Profound Changes Unseen in a Century’,” *Journal of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 2 (2023): 97-111.

perspective, the “Two Overall Situations” also contain constant elements. The overarching theme of peace and development, the leadership of the CPC, and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics remain unchanged. A thriving China has become an anchor of stability for global peace and development. This crisscrossed spatiotemporal landscape endows the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights with a philosophical character that is adaptable to the times and responsive to trends — a dialectical unity of purposiveness and regularity.³⁸ On one hand, it carefully assesses the timing and momentum of domestic and international human rights dynamics.³⁹ The embeddedness of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights within the “Two Overall Situations” allows it to accurately discern the valuable opportunities and potential risks in China’s human rights cause development, thereby transforming crises into opportunities and forging new pathways. On the other hand, it seizes the moment to shape a discourse environment favorable to China.⁴⁰ Human rights are a grand concept and a crucial field for enhancing discursive momentum. Through constructing thematic linkages, incorporating collective expression, and adapting to authoritative platforms, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights builds discursive momentum and promotes the domestic popularization of human rights ideas, thereby occupying the moral high ground in the global human rights discourse. In other words, to take the overall picture into account, respond to evolving circumstances, and strive for strategic success, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights must offer precise assessments of the times and shape a discourse.

In short, “The world today is undergoing changes unseen in a century, but time and momentum are on our side. This is the source of our composure and confidence, as well as our resolve and conviction.”⁴¹ The judgment of the changing times and broader global landscape drives the continued evolution of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. In turn, this evolving perspective provides intellectual impetus for strengthening the quality advantage of China’s human rights discourse, fostering a stable transition in current affairs, and advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

In summary, the historical dimension of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights encompasses the fine traditional Chinese culture, the history of modern Chinese thought, and the modern civilization of the

³⁸ Xu Keqian, “The Concept of ‘Shi’ (Being) in Chinese Philosophy and Its Correlations with Reality, Affairs, History, Time, and Momentum,” *Journal of Nanjing Normal University (Social Science Edition)* 5 (2007): 29-33.

³⁹ Qi Weiping, “The Temporal and Momentum Dimensions of Coordinating ‘Two Overall Situations’,” *Frontiers* 15 (2021): 14-21.

⁴⁰ Chen Zheng, “The Construction of ‘Discursive Momentum’ and the Shaping of International Discourse,” *Social Sciences in China* 12 (2023): 156-174.

⁴¹ Xi Jinping, “Thoroughly Study and Resolutely Implement the Guiding Principles of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee to Ensure a Good Start in Building a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” *People’s Daily*, January 12, 2021, First Edition.

Chinese nation. It is rooted in the cultural subjectivity inherent in ancient Chinese thought, draws lessons from the modern pursuit of “learning from the West to resist the West,” and is driven by the transformation of the times marked by the “Two Overall Situations” in the new era. It carries a deep cultural heritage, a strong sense of national identity, and a profound sentiment for the country. Vertically, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights represents continuity with the long-standing Chinese cultural tradition. Horizontally, ancient, modern, and contemporary civilizations each display characteristics of cultural, spatiotemporal, and historical momentum compression. The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights integrates the essence of human rights civilization, the contest of human rights thought, and the development of human rights practices into a unified whole. It is an organic fusion and innovative continuation of the Marxist view on human rights and the roots of fine traditional Chinese culture.

III. Practical Dimension: The Spatiotemporal Evolution of Contemporary Human Rights Narratives

The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is historical, concrete, and practical. Marx once asserted that the fundamental form of all existence is space-time⁴² and that time is the space for human development.⁴³ In his view, through practical labor, humans can redefine and transcend natural space-time, transforming life time and leisure time into a social space for the free and all-around development of every individual.⁴⁴ The process of summarizing, adjusting, and reshaping practical activity propels the current spatial-temporal structure to evolve in line with the historical laws of human society. China’s human rights vision has grown and deepened through the “progressive and iterative” advancement of human rights practices. While supporting and accumulating human rights discourse, these practices also generate and energize human rights theory.⁴⁵ The historical achievements of contemporary Chinese human rights narratives can be understood on three levels: Political stance, key pathways, and functional guarantees. These correspond to three distinct value perspectives — the people-centered view, the development-oriented view, and the governance-based view of human rights.

A. Political standpoint: Grounded in the people-centered perspective

The people-centeredness is the most distinctive feature of the China’s

⁴² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 9 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 56.

⁴³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 3 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 70.

⁴⁴ Hu Liu and Zhu Liping, “From ‘Natural Time-Space’ to ‘Socio-Historical Time-Space’: Marx’s Practical Transformation of Traditional Spatiotemporal Conceptions and Its Contemporary Significance,” *Academic Research* 6 (2012): 17-22.

⁴⁵ He Zhipeng, “On China’s Human Rights: The Coordinated Evolution of ‘Practice-Theory-Discourse’,” *Contemporary Law Review* 6 (2022): 22-41.

human rights cause, and the central position of the people is the core principle of China's human rights jurisprudence. The people-centered approach to human rights answers fundamental questions such as who modernization in China is for and who it relies on, reflecting the value orientation of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. The CPC and the Chinese people, within a broad spatiotemporal framework, have shaped and reinforced the concept of the principal status of the people. The people-centered approach drives China's human rights cause development toward safeguarding life, respecting rights, and preserving dignity.

The leadership of the CPC, the socialist system, and the people's role as masters of the country are inherently aligned. The CPC is the advocate, supporter, and practitioner of the people-centered concept. The CPC's century-long history is a history of revolution, construction, and reform in pursuit of, respect for, protection of, and advancement of human rights. At the macro level, key spatiotemporal milestones and stage-specific tasks provide the CPC with a basis for action. Spatiotemporal narrative is a way for the CPC to summarize historical experience. It skillfully uses the framework of "ancient and modern, China and the world" to explore the logic of the times, and grasps history and reality, domestic and international affairs, theory and practice through the dimensions of space-time.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the CPC aligns human rights action plans with national development strategies, reinforcing a sense of ceremony and responsibility for the stage of time. At the meso level, China's socialist democratic political system effectively ensures that all people enjoy the most genuine and broad-based rights and freedoms. In terms of the rights continuum, the CPC has achieved a unity of governance and leadership.⁴⁷ Through institutional arrangements such as the people's congress system, whole-process people's democracy, and grassroots self-governance, the CPC elevates the people's will into the CPC's will, expresses it through the Constitution and laws, and thereby realizes people's sovereignty and people's democracy. At the micro level, the respect for and protection of human rights is embedded in every aspect of the CPC's governance. The CPC is the backbone of China's human rights cause development. It plays a central role in overall coordination and leadership, guiding the people in pioneering, advancing, and expanding Chinese modernization with strong integrative capacity. In essence, spatiotemporal dynamics, democratic politics, and governance are deeply integrated and function in an orderly manner under the leadership of the CPC.

The concepts of person, people, and human rights overlap in meaning; the Chinese people are the participants in, promoters of, and beneficiaries of the principle of popular sovereignty. Though the meaning of "the people" is debated

⁴⁶ Kong Xiangzhong, "Spatiotemporal Narrative: The Logical Framework of the CPC's Historical Experience Summarization," *Journal of Fujian Provincial Committee Party School of CPC (Fujian Academy of Governance)* 2 (2023): 73-83.

⁴⁷ Cheng Guangyun, "On the Continuum of Rights," *Social Science Journal* 6 (2023): 41-47.

across disciplinary perspectives, practical contexts, and political messaging, it is undeniable that the modern usage of the term is shifting toward collectiveness, inclusiveness, and broad extension.⁴⁸ The integration of the people and human rights requires attention not only to individual expectations but also to the political structure of society as an organic whole. It represents a demystification of the abstract, fragmented, and elusive notion of “person.” The people-centered approach to human rights places the people at the core, taking public well-being as the standard for judging justice across space-time. First, with regard to temporal justice, the principle of popular sovereignty calls for starting from the people’s interests and aiming at the free and all-round development of every individual as the goal of human rights protection. The government ensures that all people share in the fruits of development by improving public services such as education, healthcare, employment, housing, elderly care, and child welfare, enabling them to enjoy ample leisure time for self-improvement and a fulfilling life. Second, in terms of spatial justice, the principle of popular sovereignty promotes a systematic approach to building human rights, ensuring that everyone enjoys rights that are broad, substantive, concrete, and effective. Respecting the people’s principal status is not only reflected in the lawful enjoyment of political, economic, social, and cultural rights by citizens, but also in the legal protection of the rights of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Therefore, whether people’s sense of gain, happiness, and security is truly enhanced depends on whether their freedom of space-time for development is genuinely safeguarded.

In short, the people’s position is the fundamental political stance of the CPC. The human rights proposition of “putting people first” not only provides China’s human rights path with a clear strategic orientation, but also integrates human rights thought with the common values embedded in the daily lives of the people, thereby expanding the subject connotation of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights.

B. Key path: Based on the development-oriented view of human rights

Protecting and promoting human rights through development is both a practical requirement of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights and a key path toward their full realization. In the course of modernization, China has gradually explored a human rights development path characterized by “protecting human rights through security, promoting human rights through development, and advancing human rights through cooperation.”⁴⁹ The resulting developmentalist view of human rights has charted a course and mapped out a trajectory for the advancement of China’s human rights cause.

History has proven that respecting and protecting human rights requires

⁴⁸ Li Chaoqun, “Why ‘People-centered Approach’ Qualifies as Human Rights Subject Discourse? A Justification Based on the Concept of ‘People’ in Marxist Context,” *Human Rights* 1 (2021): 49-71.

⁴⁹ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Sends a Congratulatory Letter to the Forum on Global Human Rights Governance,” *People’s Daily*, June 15, 2023, First Edition.

integrating universality with particularity, and pursuing a path of human rights development that aligns with national realities and public will. On one hand, development must be rooted in local realities. The interaction between time and space is recursive; the evolving spatiotemporal landscape cannot be fully replicated elsewhere. Therefore, there is no universally applicable model for human rights development. Blind transplantation and superficial imitation often conceal a misreading or disregard for the spatiotemporal dimensions of human rights. On the other hand, real-world problems require development-oriented solutions. Unlike cyclical or linear theories of history, China's human rights practice embodies an organic integration of structural and sequential narratives, giving rise to a development-based view of human rights that aims to improve people's livelihoods.⁵⁰ From a structural perspective, objective spatiotemporal forms are constituted by the combination of different social times and spaces, marked by a complex interplay of accumulation, diversity, domination, and contradiction. Ideological conflicts in global public discourse, as well as the gap between people's aspirations for a better life and the hardships they face, are essentially expressions of spatiotemporal competition among different social systems. From a sequential perspective, social development is regarded as a force that sustains equilibrium within a given spatiotemporal framework and adjusts the transformation of overarching governing principles. High-quality development, driven by new quality productive forces, has emerged as a new engine for economic growth, aiming to establish a development pattern that is more efficient, equitable, sustainable, and secure. In short, the coupling of structural and temporal narratives enables the weaker elements within the spatiotemporal structure to transform into stronger ones through the cultivation of new quality productive forces, thereby maintaining a dynamic equilibrium within the societal time-space system.

The prioritization of the right to subsistence and the right to development as fundamental human rights, along with the pursuit of a happy life for the people as the highest human right, forms the value of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. In terms of categorical features, the right to development can be understood both as a means and as an end. The former takes human survival as a prerequisite, while the latter aims at the realization of a better life characterized by free and all-round development.⁵¹ In terms of hierarchical structure, the rights to subsistence, development, and a happy life collectively constitute the framework of the human rights value system. This framework is grounded in the rights to subsistence and development, and guided by the ultimate goal of human happiness, it seeks to harmonize and advance the economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental rights of all people,

⁵⁰ Zhao Dingxin, "Time, Temporality and Wisdom: The Essence of Historical Sociology," *Sociological Review of China* 1 (2019): 3-17.

⁵¹ Ma Yuan and Chang Jian, "Research on the Virtuous Cycle Between the Right to Survival and the Right to Development," *Human Rights* 3 (2021): 24-37.

thereby promoting the comprehensive development of the human rights cause. In terms of rhetorical imagery, these three rights serve as spatiotemporal metaphors for the development-based view of human rights and must be interpreted through experiences of space-time.⁵² The metaphorical expression of rights hierarchy is constrained by specific socio-historical contexts, reflecting the “spatiotemporal character” of the development-based view of human rights. First, on the epistemological level, the relationship between human rights and development, as in the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, transcends the traditional dichotomy of positive and negative rights in classical constitutional theory. The meanings of the rights to subsistence and development lie in cultivating socially engaged citizens with endogenous developmental capacity, thereby affirming and defending the people’s status and dignity as masters of their own country, distinct from the welfare state theories of the West.⁵³ Second, on the methodological level, the emphasis on promoting human rights through development highlights both the interdependence and complementarity of development rights.⁵⁴ From solving the problem of basic subsistence for a vast population, to achieving a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and further to pursuing common prosperity through rural revitalization, the principles and thinking of development have permeated the construction of human rights within the framework of Chinese modernization. The openness of the development concept has also created space for the generation of new rights. Therefore, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is enriched through the experiential narratives of the rights to subsistence, development, and a happy life.

In summary, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights adheres to the principle of proceeding from China’s realities, promoting and protecting human rights through development. The coupling of structural narrative and sequential narrative has given rise to a development-based view of human rights that aligns closely with the experiences and sentiments of the Chinese people. The value system built upon the rights to subsistence, development, and a happy life reveals the spatiotemporal metaphors of the development-oriented human rights perspective, and expands the spatiotemporal dimensions of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights from both epistemological and methodological standpoints.

C. Functional safeguards: Based on a human rights governance perspective

There is no best human rights protection, but a better one. The concept of human rights governance emerges from the governance practices of the

⁵² Chen Huiben, “On the Spatialization of Historical Time and Its Relationship with Metaphor and Narrative,” *Journal of Historical Science* 4 (2019): 111-121.

⁵³ Liu Han, “A Systematic Interpretation of Social Rights in China’s Constitution,” *Social Sciences in China* 3 (2023): 168-186.

⁵⁴ Ye Chuanxing, “Conceptual Analysis of the Right to Development: Between Politics and Law,” *Dongyue Tribune* 12 (2019): 156-164.

contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, advocating the integration of human rights principles into both national and global governance frameworks. With the ongoing advancement of digitalization and networking, the traditional, homogeneous notions of space-time are rapidly disintegrating, giving way to a new spatiotemporal order that is gradually unfolding. In the face of such transformations in the practical realm, the world must adjust its will and capabilities to reconstruct the spatiotemporal order of the real world.⁵⁵ Therefore, the human rights governance perspective, centered on the modernization of the individual, ultimately seeks to ensure the steady advancement of the human rights cause through rational institutional arrangements and functional design.

The rule of law is the most effective means of human rights governance, and advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity must adhere to the principle of protecting human rights in accordance with the law. Human rights and the rule of law share a constitutive relationship. The human rights governance perspective incorporates human rights into the philosophy, institutions, and practices of national governance, treating human rights as both a priority value and a core component of governance, and using human rights thinking to foster a society governed by sound laws and good governance.⁵⁶ The integration of human rights and the rule of law reflects both the “common features” of legal modernization across nations and the “contemporary characteristics” of China’s path to human rights development.⁵⁷ First, on the jurisprudential level: Upholding “human dignity” is a value consensus enshrined in international human rights charters and a universal legal principle of human rights law. Enshrining “respecting and protecting human rights” in the Constitution and affirming the state’s duty to uphold human rights in the form of fundamental law represent a constitutional narrative that legitimizes state power through the principles of human rights law. Second, on the legal level: The state guarantees citizens’ rights to personal security, property, personality, and environment through various branches of law. Incorporating human rights principles into a wide range of legal documents reflects the process of concretizing and codifying human rights jurisprudence. Third, in the realm of the rule of law: China’s progress in building the rule of law goes hand in hand with the advancement of human rights. Respecting and protecting human rights is embedded throughout the full process and all stages of legislation, law enforcement, judicial proceedings, and legal compliance. In essence, the descriptive dimension of the human rights governance perspective regards the protection of human rights as the ultimate goal of national governance, while its normative dimension is integrated into every aspect of comprehensively advancing law-based governance.

⁵⁵ Chen Huiping, “Re-examination of Two Foundational Concepts in Spatial Theory,” *Study & Exploration* 8 (2014): 18-23.

⁵⁶ Hou Jian, “A Study on Human Rights Governance,” *Academics* 10 (2020): 101-108.

⁵⁷ Zhang Wenxian, “The ‘Common Features’ and ‘Chinese Characteristics’ of Rule of Law Modernization,” *Political Science and Law* 2 (2024): 2-15.

Active participation in global human rights governance is both a practical requirement for fulfilling the responsibilities of a major country and a manifestation of major country commitment; it is also an inherent imperative of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. From the perspective of the era's themes, the trends of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit remain robust. The so-called Thucydides Trap, which interprets major country relations purely in terms of conquest and oppression, fundamentally distorts the inherent resilience of the spatiotemporal system, overlooking the possibility of sincere, mutually beneficial interactions among international actors. In terms of spatiotemporal expression, developing countries need space-time to voice concerns and criticisms, yet the existing international order has not provided them with adequate environments conducive to free expression. China's participation in global governance is not only aimed at preserving and expanding its developmental spatiotemporal capacity but also at creating a more equitable and just global spatiotemporal structure. In practical terms, China is deeply engaged in United Nations human rights affairs, widely conducts international human rights cooperation, and effectively promotes the development of the international human rights cause. China has ratified or acceded to more than 30 international human rights documents, including six core United Nations human rights treaties; it has provided assistance to 166 countries and international organizations, participated multiple times in the UN Security Council peacekeeping operations, and jointly built the Belt and Road Initiative with neighboring countries, proactively sharing its poverty reduction experiences with the international community. China's concept of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind has been incorporated multiple times into United Nations Human Rights Council resolutions. Resolutions such as "The Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights" and "Promoting the International Human Rights Cause through Win-Win Cooperation" have been adopted.⁵⁸ It is thus evident that the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is committed to expanding the stock of spatiotemporal resources and advancing global human rights governance toward greater fairness, justice, rationality, and inclusiveness.

In short, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights seeks to advance human modernization by shaping a spatiotemporal order of fairness and justice through both national and global governance. The focus of national human rights governance lies in the legal protection of human rights, integrating human rights concepts into the interaction of jurisprudence, legislation, and the rule of law. The goal of global human rights governance is to create a discursive space that promotes fairness and justice, addressing the "governance deficit" in

⁵⁸ China Foundation for Human Rights Development and Xinhua News Agency National High-end Think Tank, "For the People's Happiness: The Practice and Theoretical Exploration of Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights" (December 5, 2022), accessed May 29, 2024, http://www.news.cn/politics/2022-12/05/c_1129183945.htm

international human rights, and establishing China as a builder of world peace and a contributor to global development.

In summary, the practical dimension of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is reflected in the concepts of popular sovereignty, development-based human rights, and human rights governance. These three aspects relate to the political stance, key pathways, and functional safeguards of China's human rights cause development, together demonstrating the rationality and normative validity of this view. On one hand, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is deemed rational due to China's specific context, experiences, and cultural traditions. The formation of the three-pronged practical perspective has accompanied the spatiotemporal evolution of China's human rights efforts, deeply influenced by Chinese historical culture and social structures. It draws on habitual reflective capacities to inform human rights practice. On the other hand, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights gains collective recognition through social practice, thereby integrating into the national legal system in its diverse forms.⁵⁹ This triadic practical perspective incorporates human rights consensus into the fundamental rules of social interaction, aligning human rights concepts with the normative order of communities, and thus elucidating the internal normativity of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. Therefore, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights offers a vivid interpretation of the integration between the universality of human rights principles and China's specific realities. It represents a unity of theory and practice, as well as of values and norms.

IV. Theoretical Dimension: The Spatiotemporal Reshaping of a Constructive View of Human Rights

Theoretical thinking in knowledge production requires summarizing new practical experiences and reflecting on existing academic theories, viewpoints, and propositions — infusing them with new intellectual, temporal, and civilizational connotations to construct a new academic framework.⁶⁰ In the case of the constructive view of human rights, transforming the valuable experiences of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights into a theoretically grounded Chinese theory hinges on the integration of theoretical thinking with the development of human rights. From a conceptual perspective, human rights and space-time are mutually constitutive — space-time constructs humans, and humans in turn reshape space-time. From a temporal standpoint, human existence is being redefined by science and technology; absolute truths and

⁵⁹ Brian Z. Tamanaha, *Legal Pluralism Explained: History, Theory, Consequences*, translated by Zhao Yingnan (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2023), 17-20.

⁶⁰ Sun Zhengyu, "How to Elevate China's Experience into China's Theory? Theoretical Thinking in Knowledge Production," *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 6 (2023): 5-11.

authorities are being repeatedly questioned, giving rise to a pluralistic, multidimensional, and polycentric way of thinking.⁶¹ From a cultural perspective, Chinese human rights discourse does not reject modern human rights civilization but constitutes an integral part of a pluralistic global civilization. China should not be merely an object to be portrayed or observed, but an autonomous and coequal interlocutor among cultural entities, rightfully contributing a set of values, positions, and methodologies that are both global in relevance and rooted in local context.⁶² In short, in the face of a complex and evolving spatiotemporal reality, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights must reconstruct human rights theory from the dimensions of cognition, subjectivity, and methodology, thereby avoiding the discursive pitfalls of both “Western-centrism” and “self-orientalization.”

A. Cognitive reconstruction: an open view of human rights

Maintaining cognitive openness is necessary for enriching the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights and strengthening cultural confidence in China’s human rights philosophy. The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is a forward-looking and continuously evolving theoretical system, drawing inexhaustible nourishment from the essence of fine traditional Chinese culture and the achievements of global human rights civilization.

As an attitude, an open view of human rights is characterized by confidence and inclusiveness. From the perspective on how diplomatic image is formed, the construction of a sovereign state’s international image can be analyzed through a three-dimensional framework of “strength-identity-discourse.” Within this framework, diplomatic strength and great-country identity point to a form of diplomatic influence and international image characterized by peace and tolerance, while discourse dissemination aims to bridge the gap between self-representation and external portrayal, and to transcend polarized thinking in order to gain narrative initiative.⁶³ From the causal logic of the spatiotemporal system, cognitive openness encompasses both historical confidence and spatial inclusiveness. On one hand, cultural confidence in human rights is the foundation of an open view of human rights. Under the guidance of the Marxist view on human rights, this cultural confidence is structured like a tower: rooted in the profound richness of traditional Chinese culture, supported by modern revolutionary culture and historical debates on human rights, and crowned by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, particularly his important discourse on respecting and protecting human rights.

⁶¹ Yu Xingzhong, “Jurisprudence of Our Time: The World and China,” *Zhejiang Social Sciences* 1 (2016): 45-52.

⁶² Wang Liwan, “The Human Rights Discourse System Using China as a Methodology,” *Chinese Journal of Human Rights* 1 (2021): 52-61.

⁶³ Ye Shulan, “On Soft Diplomacy: A Tridimensional ‘Strength-Identity-Discourse’ Model for Constructing China’s Diplomatic Image,” *International Review* 4 (2023): 25-49.

These three layers together generate a synergistic effect.⁶⁴ On the other hand, polylinear spatiotemporal narratives are a hallmark of an open view of human rights. A look back at human history shows that the diversity of human civilization has never been replaced by singularity. The so-called end of history thesis, which claims that world history will inevitably culminate in liberal democracy, is underpinned by a rigid and radical linear view of space-time. Yet, the course of human modernization has proven that modernity does not result in a convergence of social structures. On the contrary, the future world will be a pluralistic society where multiple civilizations — including Western modernity — coexist in mutual flourishing.⁶⁵ Therefore, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights must embrace openness as it engages with the broader human rights civilization, transcending notions of civilizational superiority through civilizational coexistence, and working collectively to meet the global challenges of our time.

In modern society, where temporal flexibility is increasing and spatial constraints are diminishing, the openness of human rights cognition reflects four dynamic relationships between time and space. First, the relationship between the universality of human rights and cultural particularity. In moral discourse, value systems rooted in specific contexts tend to be more robust than thinner, abstract ones, yet they are also more difficult to reconcile. To advance toward a universal consensus on human rights that are not yet “incommensurate,” different groups must recognize and respect each other’s normative capacities and engage in broad, sincere dialogue.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, to enhance the effectiveness of consensus-building in the face of deep-seated value disagreements, all parties should adapt their strategic approaches, foundational justifications, and guiding concepts in light of the specific context.⁶⁷ Second, the relationship between globalization and localization. The coupling of spatiotemporal universality with other spatial realities allows locally rooted human rights concepts — shaped by history, culture, and custom — to gradually extend outward, contributing to the globalization of human rights. However, human rights must ultimately address local concerns. Beyond articulating norms and standards, human rights discourse must serve as an actionable resource and a means of empowerment.⁶⁸ In other words, the persuasiveness and explanatory

⁶⁴ Xiang Jiuyu, “New Development Philosophy and Cultural Confidence,” *Social Sciences in China* 6 (2018): 4-25.

⁶⁵ S. N. Eisenstadt, *Reflections on Modernity*, translated by Kuang Xinnian and Wang Aisong (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2006), 5-7.

⁶⁶ Stephen C. Angle, *Human Rights and Chinese Thought: A Cross-cultural Exploration*, translated by Huang Jinrong and Huang Bin (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2011), 281-283.

⁶⁷ Hong Lewei, “On the Effectiveness of ‘Cross-Cultural Consensus’ in Human Rights: Revisiting Pengchun Chang’s Contribution to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *Human Rights* 6 (2023): 161-185.

⁶⁸ Lyu Yiwei, “The Formation of China’s Human Rights Concepts from a Localization Perspective,” *Modern Law Science* 1 (2023): 106-107.

power of human rights are fully realized only when they support and promote locally defined aspirations for dignity and a better life. Third, the relationship between center and periphery. Compared with the traditional “core-semi-periphery-periphery”⁶⁹ hierarchical model, the modern world system exhibits distinct characteristics of “multi-centered” mobility.⁷⁰ Peripheral spaces are no longer merely the bottom rung of economic power, but rather dynamic crossroads that give rise to new opportunities and challenges. Fourth, the relationship among the past, present, and future. Based on differing temporal flows, time can be categorized into three layers: long-term geographical time, mid-term social time, and short-term event-based time.⁷¹ A panoramic, non-uniform view of time attends to the deep-seated forces that shape and constrain the development of human society. Also, it attends to the cyclical transformations of communities and the documentary fragments of individual lives. The degree of openness in human rights thinking can thus be assessed within the rhythms of this layered spatiotemporal framework.

In short, as an open and evolving theoretical system, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights emphasizes confidence and inclusiveness in its cognitive dimension. It encompasses four sets of spatiotemporal relationships: universal and particular human rights, the globalization and localization of human rights, central and peripheral regions, and linear versus composite conceptions of time. The significance of cognitive reconstruction lies in breaking away from outdated and closed patterns of thought, thereby strengthening cultural foundations and enhancing intellectual resilience.

B. Subjective reconstruction: a cooperative view of human rights

A cooperative view of human rights serves as a primary driving force behind the development of the human rights cause. From the perspective of human rights as a concept, they possess both defensive and cooperative attributes — the latter aligning most closely with China’s theory of human rights under Chinese modernization. From the standpoint of human rights subjects, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights advocates for mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, encouraging dialogue and consultation among diverse subjects based on equality and sharing, thereby promoting and protecting human rights through cooperation.

In a risk society, constructive dialogue and cooperation offer a path for diverse subjects to overcome identity-based fears and secure the freedom to act. Zygmunt Bauman observed that the most prominent feature of modern life is a

⁶⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, translated by Guo Fang, Liu Xincheng and Zhang Wengang (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013), 423-429.

⁷⁰ Yu Jinyao, “The Relativity of ‘Periphery’ and the Diversity of ‘Core’ in World-Systems,” *Exploration and Free Views* 8 (2022): 9-12.

⁷¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, translated by Tang Jialong, Zeng Peigeng, et al. (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013), 8-10.

high degree of uncertainty.⁷² Solidarity among different groups thus forms a kind of “shelter” for facing unknown risks and preserving individual freedom. As a result, the traditional subject-object thinking defined by conquest and transformation is gradually giving way to a cooperative mindset centered on equality and sharing. First, equal cooperation. In the context of social relations, a cooperative view of human rights can be distinguished by two layers of ethical attributes: the universally transcendent “ethics of conviction” and the pragmatically grounded “ethics of responsibility.”⁷³ As a philosophical ontology, the ethics of conviction arises from the original authorization of contractual relations, emphasizing the universal and absolute value of equality. As a moral norm, the ethics of responsibility reflects the re-authorization found in constitutions and laws, emphasizing equality of subjects through unity of form and substance, rights and obligations. Second, shared cooperation. The spirit of sharing reflects the essence of facultative thinking, and the cooperative view of human rights is characterized by inclusivity in both subject and discourse.⁷⁴ From the perspective of intersubjective subjects, sharing refers to the coexistence of multiple and broad-ranging interpreters, such as citizens, nation-states, and corporate entities. From the perspective of intersubjective discourse, sharing refers to the semantic innovation and pragmatic practice of interpretive content, such as facultative statements on specific human rights and hybrid consensus in negotiation strategies. In essence, respecting and protecting human rights requires equal participation and cooperative consultation among all subjects. Also, it requires facultative thinking to jointly engage in the exchange of human rights ideas and to share in the fruits of human rights development.

⁷² Zygmunt Bauman, “Sociological Enlightenment — For Whom, About What?,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 17, no. 2 (2000): 71-82.

⁷³ For the distinction between ethics of responsibility (Verantwortungsethik) and ethics of conviction (Gesinnungsethik), see Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation and Politics as a Vocation*, translated by Qian Yongxiang, et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai Joint Publishing Press, 2019), 271-274. Regarding their egalitarian implications, see Yang Chunshi, “On the Dual Significance of ‘Ren’,” *Journal of Sichuan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 1 (2024): 81-90.

⁷⁴ Facultativity denotes an inclusive, tolerant, and pluralistic mode of co-existence. The distinction between facultative thinking and intersubjective thinking lies in their respective emphases. Facultative thinking underscores the integration of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, where subjectivity forms the foundation of intersubjectivity, influencing and constraining it, while intersubjectivity represents the transcendence of subjectivity, guiding and surpassing it. Intersubjectivity, by contrast, emphasizes the processes of deliberation, communication, and dialogue between subjects — what is philosophically termed the “intersubjectively shared life world.” Consequently, the author maintains that the concept of “facultativity” proves more comprehensive and representative than “intersubjectivity” in this context. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Cao Weidong (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2018), 30. Yang Chunshi, “On the Compound Structure of Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in Literature,” *Social Sciences in Guangdong* 5 (2023): 172-288. Li Jianzhong, “The Facultative Subject and Discourse in Chinese Hermeneutics,” *Social Sciences in China* 2 (2024): 105-125.

The subject reconstruction of the human rights theory under Chinese modernization encompasses three dimensions: international cooperation, social co-governance, and interpersonal harmony. First, the international dimension refers to reciprocal cooperation between countries. Today, international cooperation centered on development is characterized by increasingly diverse subjects, varied objectives, and multilayered institutions. In addition to the “vertical paradigm” of one-way financial transfers and the “horizontal paradigm” of two-way resource exchanges between developed and developing countries and international organizations, a new “interactive paradigm” is emerging — one based on multidirectional knowledge complementarity. As international development grows more interconnected, independent, inclusive, and mutually beneficial cooperation becomes increasingly feasible.⁷⁵ Second, the domestic dimension refers to co-governance between state public power and social public power. On the part of the state, the inherent, inevitable, and enduring vulnerability of human beings is tied to a range of real historical conditions. A more equitable distribution system and a more robust human rights framework call for a proactive and responsible state.⁷⁶ On the part of society, the traditional dichotomy between civil rights and the political state is no longer sufficient to address the rise of private subjects whose powers are factual, public in effect, and dominant. The defensive function of human rights is not limited to restraining state public power from infringing on individual freedoms. It also includes protecting against violations of fundamental rights by social public power.⁷⁷ In other words, human rights cooperation involves not only mutual recognition between citizens and the state, but also a tripartite interaction among individual rights, social public power, and state public power. Finally, the interpersonal dimension refers to coordination and cooperation between individuals. From individual rights to collective rights, a community with a shared future for mankind is grounded in the universal dignity and freedom to which every person is entitled, free from external interference. The realization of human rights depends on the harmonious coexistence of every “real person” in society.

In summary, the subject reconstruction of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights encompasses two key dimensions: equal cooperation and shared cooperation. It can be further delineated into three facets — state-level cooperation, social co-governance, and interpersonal harmony. This approach advocates for facultative thinking that embraces diverse participants, fostering multi-level, cross-sector, and multidimensional

⁷⁵ Zhou Hong, “Diversity and Commonality in International Aid: A Global Perspective,” *Social Sciences in China* 5 (2023): 167-187.

⁷⁶ Martha Albertson Fineman “The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition,” *Journal of Comparative Law* 4 (2013): 147-160.

⁷⁷ Li Haiping, “On the Direct Effect of Fundamental Rights on Subjects of Social Public Power,” *Political Science and Law* 10 (2018): 109-123.

cooperation in the field of human rights.

C. Methodological reconstruction: an appropriateness view of human rights

An appropriate view of human rights refers to a pragmatist perspective on human rights, characterized by a practical foundation and a developmental dimension.⁷⁸ As one scholar has noted, “There has never been a rupture in China’s continuity. The key ontological reason is that China is a civilization based on ‘becoming’ as its methodology, rather than one that clings to the essence of ‘being.’”⁷⁹ In facing the task of Chinese modernization — an “ancient nation with a renewed mandate” — the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights must integrate human rights discourse with the central themes of the times, and construct a theory of human rights that aligns with China’s concrete realities and the people’s aspirations for a better life.

“Being in becoming” is a value orientation rooted in self-renewal and keeping pace with the times. At its core, an appropriateness view of human rights seeks to advance the Sinicization and modernization of the Marxist view on human rights. First, the modernization of the Marxist view on human rights embodies the essence of an appropriate understanding of space-time. In terms of value interpretation, an appropriateness approach balances meaning and expression, prioritizing the creator’s original intent and striving for fidelity in understanding.⁸⁰ Culturally, the people are not only the “actors” of history but also its “authors”.⁸¹ Therefore, in its spatiotemporal sense, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights represents a universal human rights philosophy created by the people. Any application or explanation of this perspective must return to the people’s aspirations for a better life. Second, the Sinicization of the Marxist view on human rights defines the core of an appropriate spatiotemporal perspective. To achieve Sinicization, it is essential to both “use China as a method” — viewing China and the West alike as integral components of the world and understanding China from within its context — and to “use the world as a method” — assessing the extent to which China’s current goals are being realized by referencing global standards and models.

⁷⁸ The term “appropriateness” is commonly used in fields such as education, psychology, and economics, where it refers to the degree of fit or coordination between dual structures, such as subject and object, means and ends, intention and context, expression and content. See Yu Xiqiao and Guo Dong, “The Practicalist View of Human Rights: A Theoretical Interpretation of China’s Human Rights Practice,” *Human Rights* 3 (2024): 104-123; Sun Fei, “The Effectiveness of Teaching Contexts and Their Realization,” *Theory and Practice of Education* 35 (2023): 46-49.

⁷⁹ Zhao Tingyang, “China as Methodology,” *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 2 (2016): 5.

⁸⁰ Zhu Haikun, “Methodology or Ontology: A Re-examination of the Hermeneutic Debate Between Leo Strauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *Journal of Sun Yat-sen University (Social Science Edition)* 2 (2024): 96-104.

⁸¹ Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee, *Selected Extracts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Socialist Cultural Construction* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2017), 160.

Both approaches are indispensable and must be pursued in tandem. On one hand, it is necessary for China to “possess a substantial sense of self within one’s space-time,”⁸² abandoning the past psychological tendencies of either inferiority or superiority when looking up to or down upon other human rights traditions. Instead, China should engage with its own human rights civilization on equal footing, acknowledging its inherent, endogenous premodern elements. On the other hand, China must recalibrate the temporality of its social structures, flexibly coordinating the institutional, cultural, historical, and policy-related components of human rights development in accordance with the dialectical movement of social practice and the objective conditions of its mode of production.⁸³ In short, the modernization and Sinicization of human rights theory form the methodological core of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights.

From the perspective of an appropriateness view of human rights, the path toward the localization of human rights involves the spatiotemporal construction of human rights development. In a compressed context, the advancement of China’s human rights cause must focus on two methodological approaches: the macro-level extension of space-time, and the micro-level expansion of governance. First, at the macro level, theoretical extension entails integrating Marxist human rights theory with China’s specific realities and with the essence of fine traditional Chinese culture. Upwardly, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights can draw from the human rights elements within traditional Chinese culture and the valuable experiences of China’s human rights cause development since modern times; outwardly, it can engage with the theories and practices of human rights from other civilizations, including Marxist human rights theory and various models of rights development; and inwardly, it can absorb intellectual nourishment from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. This spatiotemporal extension brings an increase of information to existing spatiotemporal frameworks and lays the foundation for expanding the influence of law-based modernization with Chinese characteristics and for constructing a human rights theory rooted in Chinese modernization. Second, at the micro level, governance expansion focuses on the protection of individual human rights in the era of information and digital networks. In terms of micro time, the contemporary Chinese conception of time reflects a coexistence of temporalities, centered on a Marxist modern view of time, while also accommodating elements of traditional and postmodern temporal perspectives.⁸⁴ In terms of micro space, the folding and virtualization

⁸² Mizoguchi Yūzō, *China as a Method*, translated by Sun Junyue (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2011), 27.

⁸³ Meng Qinglong, “The Civilizational Logic of Marx’s Time Category and Chinese Modernization,” *Philosophical Research* 12 (2022): 15-22.

⁸⁴ Lu Chunlong and Meng Ruixia, “The Formation and Characteristics of Chinese-style Modern Time Perception,” *Journal of Gansu Administration Institute* 5 (2023): 65-66.

of space have blurred the boundaries of the public sphere, with virtual and physical domains increasingly intertwined. Human rights governance must safeguard individuals' fundamental rights within digital spaces and create new environments and opportunities for personal life narratives and expressions of public will. In sum, both theoretical extension and governance expansion help to ease the pressures of compressed space-time, while also opening up new possibilities for the localized application of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights.

In essence, an appropriateness view of human rights is a methodological approach shaped by dynamic space-time, tailored to specific historical and geographical conditions. It is grounded in both Sinicized and contemporary perspectives, focusing on the macro-level extension and micro-level expansion of the spatiotemporal system. Adapting to the flow of time is the wellspring of vitality for China's human rights civilization. Localization of human rights is not about clinging to the past, but about seeking truth from facts and advancing with the times.

To summarize, in elevating China's human rights practice to a theory of human rights under Chinese modernization, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights must uphold cognitive openness, subject-level cooperation, and methodological appropriateness. These elements together help reshape the spatiotemporal context for the development of China's human rights cause. In terms of abstract categories, a human rights theory constructed through space-time embodies three core dimensions: confident and inclusive, equitable and shared, and forward-looking. Cultural confidence in human rights and a broad, tolerant mindset strengthen the theoretical grounding for international dialogue. The values of equality and solidarity enhance the cohesive force of human rights development. The integration of both a temporal and a Chinese perspective infuses the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights with renewed theoretical vitality.

Conclusion: The four-in-one structural framework of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights

In summary, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights serves as the intellectual core of China's human rights civilization. It is the value distillation of development path of China's human rights cause, its human rights undertakings, its practices in protecting human rights, and its human rights theory within the framework of Chinese modernization. Under the spatiotemporal framework, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights can be theoretically summarized into four interconnected dimensions: the global, historical, practical, and theoretical. Together, these constitute a "four-in-one" logical structure. This framework is embodied in several key aspects.

First, "taking the world as a method," the global dimension represents the

synchronic extension of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. It reaches outward to engage with the diverse and pluralistic landscape of human rights civilizations across the world, providing rich intellectual resources for the historical, practical, and theoretical dimensions.

Second, “using China as a method,” the integrated narrative of “history-practice-theory” serves as an inexhaustible source of momentum for the development of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. Among them, the practical dimension serves as the meta-perspective; the historical dimension reflects the diachronic evolution of China’s human rights path; and the theoretical dimension represents the refinement and elevation of China’s human rights practices. These three dimensions reinforce and complement one another.

Third, within the spatiotemporal framework, the global dimension — “taking the world as a method” — provides a reference perspective for the historical, practical, and theoretical dimensions developed through “taking China as a method.” In turn, the latter shapes the paradigm of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights within the broader context of global human rights civilization. The two are in a mutually reinforcing and co-constructive relationship. Thus, through external observation and internal reflection on the spatiotemporal system, these four dimensions together reconstruct the value core and normative paradigm of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights.

The author summarizes the fourfold logic and structural framework of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights within the spatiotemporal perspective in the following table (see Table 1).

Table 1 The Four Dimensions of Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights from a Spatiotemporal Lens

Observation Perspective	Using the World as a Method	Using China as a Method		
	Global Dimension	Historical Dimension	Practical Dimension	Theoretical Dimension
Spatiotemporal Dimensions	Global Dimension	Historical Dimension	Practical Dimension	Theoretical Dimension
Spatiotemporal Construction	Spatiotemporal Extension	Spatiotemporal Compression	Spatiotemporal Transformation	Spatiotemporal Remodeling
Spatiotemporal Characteristics	Synchronic Particularity	Diachronic Universality	Diachronic Particularity	Synchronic Universality
Content Categories	China’s Human Rights	China’s Human Rights Development	China’s Human Rights Cause	China’s Human Rights Cultural Confidence

On the Four Dimensions of Contemporary Chinese Perspective on Human Rights from
a Spatiotemporal Viewpoint

	Civilization	Path		
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As shown in the table, our research findings demonstrate that in terms of concrete construction, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights under spatiotemporal construction can be distilled and encompassed into four pairs of relationships, three levels, and two approaches. These include four spatiotemporal relationships: Universal human rights versus particular human rights, the globalization versus localization of human rights, central regions versus peripheral regions, and linear time versus composite time, as well as three levels of national cooperation, social co-governance, and interpersonal harmony, and two methods of macro extension and micro expansion. Among them, by integrating universality and particularity, globalization and localization, defensive rights and cooperative rights, theoretical extension and governance expansion into the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights, China has outlined an academic blueprint for advancing its human rights development path and constructing an autonomous knowledge system for human rights studies. The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is constructed through composite spatiotemporal dimensions, primarily manifesting in four forms of spatiotemporal movement: Extension, compression, transformation, and remodeling. These respectively exhibit four characteristics: Synchronic particularity, diachronic universality, diachronic particularity, and synchronic universality.

From a content perspective, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights is profound and well-structured. First, as an integral part of global human rights civilization, it advocates, both conceptually and substantively, for the common values of humanity and a community with a shared future for mankind, with relational rationality at its core. Second, as a contemporary transformation of the “Two Integrations,” it integrates the intellectual essence of China’s excellent traditional culture on the diachronic level while integrating the complex context of modern human rights development. On the synchronic level, it profoundly summarizes the valuable experience of the Chinese Communist Party in respecting and protecting human rights over the long term and scientifically generalizes the historic achievements of contemporary Chinese human rights practices. Third, as a crucial link elevating human rights practice to human rights theory, it promotes openness over isolation in cognition, cooperation over confrontation in subjects, and innovation over conservatism in methodology.

From a logical reasoning standpoint, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights strictly adheres to Marx’s cognitive path of “from the concrete to the abstract, and from the abstract to the concrete,” representing a unity of abstract universality and concrete universality.⁸⁵ On one hand, it extracts the

⁸⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 8 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 24-25.

synchronic particularity, historical universality, diachronic particularity, and synchronic universality of spatiotemporal construction from human rights civilization, human rights development paths, human rights cause, and human rights cultural confidence, ultimately crystallizing into the concept of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. This reflects the methodological application of progressing from general particularity to abstract universality and then to concrete universality. On the other hand, in contrast to the singularity, transcendence, and abstraction of universalist human rights perspectives, the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights refers to the human rights values that are confident, inclusive, equitable, shared, and forward-looking. It serves as a vivid demonstration of concrete universality, providing a practical, applicable, and non-homogeneous “overlapping consensus” for a human rights order characterized by differentiated coexistence.

The conclusion of this paper is as follows: The contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights constitutes an open and evolving theoretical system, embodying a human rights worldview with distinctive Chinese characteristics, style, and ethos. In essence, it represents the Sinicization and modernization of the Marxist view on human rights. Through civilizational dialogue, cultural innovation, and practical exploration, the concrete universality of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights continues to be enriched and refined. It has expanded Marxist human rights theory while contributing to the enrichment of global human rights civilization.

(Translated by *JIANG Yu*)