

Safeguarding the Right to Development of the Chinese People: Promoting the Development of Human Rights

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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee pointed out that development is an enduring theme of human society, the master key to solving all problems, and the crucial means to ensuring the people's well-being. The right to development is an inalienable human right. Only by focusing on development can we create a solid material foundation for the realization of all basic rights, tackle the challenges in human rights protection, and advance the cause of human rights, thus continuously meeting the people's aspiration for a better life.

At present, the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation, and global governance stands at a new crossroads. In order to maintain its hegemonic position, the U.S. has been wantonly threatening and provoking China in the fields of security, economy and trade, science and technology, and ideology, including arbitrarily suppressing and containing China under the pretext of "human rights." At this critical period for our endeavor to build a great country and move toward national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization, it is all the more important for us to gain a correct understanding of the root causes of the China-U.S. contest over the right to development, to strengthen our confidence and resolve in safeguarding the Chinese people's right to development, and to promote the comprehensive development of human rights.

I. Theoretical Evolution and China's Practices on the Right to Development

A. Theoretical evolution of the right to development

For a long period in history, "development" and "human rights" were regarded as two separate domains. The Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolutions in modern times propelled human rights from philosophical reflection into political practice, turning them into an ideological weapon against feudalism and autocracy, with an emphasis on safeguarding citizens' freedoms from infringement. After World War II, the establishment of the United Nations system marked the institutionalization of human rights at the

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international level. The rise of socialist thought, national independence movements, and anti-colonial struggles, together with the adoption of a series of international human rights instruments, expanded the connotation of human rights to encompass economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as collective rights such as environmental rights and the right to peace.

After the end of the Cold War, human rights entered the context of global governance. As globalization and multipolarization accelerated, human rights became deeply intertwined with global issues such as development, security, environment, climate, and digital technologies. Human rights governance has thus become a key arena in the restructuring of international order and in the competition over global governance rules, featuring a complex landscape of diverse actors and intersecting agendas.

In comparison, the concept of “development” emerged relatively late. After the Industrial Revolution, terms such as “industrialization” and “modernization” were mainly used to describe social processes within European countries and later became excuses used by colonial powers to justify their aggression and expansion. During the Cold War, “development” entered the international arena as a clearly defined global policy discourse and geopolitical tool directed at “underdeveloped” countries and regions. Since the 1960s, amid the wave of decolonization and the collective rise of Third World countries, the subject of development has gradually shifted toward a structural critique of the international economic order. Third World countries called for reforming the unjust global economic structure and pursued economic independence and social progress. Driven by these demands and after prolonged political bargaining and negotiation within the international community, “development” and “human rights” began to converge.

Third World countries’ reflections on the unfair international order gave rise to the concept of the “right to development,” which holds that individuals are entitled not only to freedom from oppression but also to freedom from poverty, and that states should not only respect individual freedom but also bear the responsibility to promote common development. Beginning in the 1980s, the “right to development” was gradually incorporated in the framework of international law as a recognized human right. From the 1981 *African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights* to the 1986 *Declaration on the Right to Development*, and later to the 1993 *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, “development” and “human rights,” two originally separate concepts, gradually became integrated. The right to development became widely recognized as a fundamental right essential for realizing the dignity and shared future of humanity.

In the 21st century, the right to development has become deeply integrated into global agendas such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. With theoretical innovations in

human rights and the emergence of new challenges such as climate change, digital technologies, and public health, the scope of the right to development has expanded from the economic domain to the broader notion of people's all-around development. As Marxism emphasizes, human rights should be understood from economic, historical, class-based, and systemic perspectives and methodologies. For the elimination of private property and the establishment of a communist society, it stresses that "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." This is the most classic exposition of the intrinsic relationship between "development" and "human rights," and the highest ideal in human rights development. At present, the United Nations is actively advancing the drafting of an *International Convention on the Right to Development*. Once adopted and brought into force, the convention will mark the transformation of the right to development from a political declaration and shared vision into a legally binding international norm.

B. China's practices to ensure the right to development of its people

The "human rights" concept originated in Europe, but from the perspective of its development history, it is by no means exclusive to the West. The fine traditional Chinese culture, with its sagacious outlooks on the universe, the world, society, and morality, provides the historical and cultural foundation for China's contemporary view on human rights. After the Opium War, China gradually descended into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal status, in which hunger, poverty, backwardness, and foreign aggression constituted the true depiction of its human rights conditions in modern times.

Since its founding, the CPC has held high the banner of "striving for democracy and human rights," making clear its commitment to saving the nation and the people and to securing their human rights. Its struggles over the past century and more record its history of uniting and leading the people in striving for, respecting, protecting, and developing human rights. Under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese people embarked on a new journey of building an affluent and strong country and achieving national rejuvenation and the people's well-being.

In 1991, China issued its first white paper on human rights — *Human Rights in China*; in 1997, the report to the 15th CPC National Congress included the principle of "respecting and protecting human rights"; in 2004, the Second Session of the Tenth National People's Congress incorporated the provision "The State respects and protects human rights" into the Constitution; and in 2007, the 17th CPC National Congress included "respecting and protecting human rights" in the *Constitution of the CPC*.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has attached great importance to the development of human rights. Integrating the principle of the universality of

human rights with China's specific realities, it has successfully blazed a path of human rights development with Chinese characteristics, making continuous progress in guaranteeing Chinese people's rights to subsistence and development, as well as other fundamental rights.

At the theoretical level, General Secretary Xi Jinping's series of important statements have provided strong intellectual guidance for safeguarding Chinese people's right to development. General Secretary Xi Jinping has sent congratulatory messages to forums and conferences on human rights seven times. On February 25, 2022, while presiding over the 37th group study session of the Political Bureau of the 19th CPC Central Committee, he delivered an important address, in which he emphasized that the rights to subsistence and development are the primary and fundamental human rights, and systematically elaborated the philosophy and thinking underpinning China's efforts to safeguard the people's right to development. General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that China always upholds the principle that a happy life for the people is the greatest of human rights, and that development is for the people and by the people, and its fruits are shared by the people. China strives to resolve the most practical problems that are of the greatest and most direct concern to the people, focused on addressing unbalanced and inadequate development, so as to ensure that the people's sense of gain, happiness, and security becomes more substantial, more secure, and more sustainable through development.

General Secretary Xi Jinping's remarks on the right to development represent the essence of socialist human rights theories with Chinese characteristics. They stand as an original theoretical achievement, adapting to the context of the times of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and as an action guide for advancing China's human rights cause.

At the practical level, General Secretary Xi Jinping has led China in achieving historic accomplishments in safeguarding the people's right to development. China is the only major country in the world to have consecutively formulated and implemented four phases of the National Human Rights Action Plan. China has achieved the First Centenary Goal, historically eradicating absolute poverty and building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, thus laying a more solid material foundation for the development of human rights. This view of human rights, grounded in material conditions, breaks through the cognitive framework of Western centrism, aligns with the Marxist theory on human emancipation, and meets developing countries' practical needs of pursuing modernization.

According to the *Human Development Report* published by the United Nations Development Programme, China is the only country that has advanced from the low Human Development Index (HDI) group to the high HDI group. Its HDI, comprising three fundamental indicators — life expectancy, education level, and quality of life — rose from 0.491 in 1990 to 0.797 in 2023,

achieving two leaps — from the low group to the medium group and from the medium group to the high group. It is now progressing toward the very high HDI group (0.800 and above).¹

At the level of global governance, China has made significant contributions and offered its solutions to the development of human rights worldwide. “Building a community with a shared future for mankind,” “promoting human rights through development,” and “advancing win-win cooperation in the field of human rights” — these important ideas and initiatives proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping have been incorporated into relevant United Nations resolutions, becoming an integral part of international human rights discourse and a widely shared global consensus.

Through its own achievements in poverty reduction, China has directly contributed to the global poverty alleviation cause. At the same time, it has actively fulfilled its international responsibilities on this front, providing various forms of assistance to more than 160 countries over the past 70 years, becoming a strong force advancing the global poverty reduction agenda. In recent years, China has worked harder to align the Belt and Road Initiative with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is expected to help lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty and 32 million people from moderate poverty.²

China has also established multiple international platforms for human rights exchanges and cooperation, including the Beijing Forum on Human Rights, the China-Europe Seminar on Human Rights, and the South–South Human Rights Forum, continuously offering Chinese wisdom to global human rights governance.

II. The China-U.S. Contest in the Right to Development — Four Dimensions

China’s achievements in safeguarding the right to development have captured widespread international attention and become a focal point in great power competition, particularly that between China and the U.S. General Secretary Xi Jinping has underscored the importance of resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and development interests. During his meeting with the then U.S. President Joe Biden in November 2024, General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly outlined China’s four bottom lines — the Taiwan question, human rights and democracy, path and institutional system, and the right to development.

The Chinese people’s right to development is neither inherent nor bestowed by external forces; it has been earned through their own arduous struggle and profound sacrifices under the leadership of the CPC. In recent

¹ The United Nations Development Programme: Human Development Index.

² World Bank: *Belt and Road Economics: Opportunities and Risks of Transport Corridors*.

years, however, the Chinese people's right to development has faced severe challenges, arbitrary suppression, and all-around containment by the U.S. government. Washington has continuously launched campaigns of public opinion warfare, information warfare, psychological warfare, and cognitive warfare, as well as successive tariff, trade, technology, and financial wars. At the present and for some time to come, the U.S. government, to maintain its hegemony, has provoked and will continue to provoke China in three areas:

(1) In the economic, trade, and technological fields, it has waged tariff wars in the attempt to contain China by building multiple trade barriers; (2) In geopolitics, it has instigated other countries to take sides and pushed for the so-called "de-Sinicization"; and (3) On the Taiwan question, it has tried to incite conflict in the Taiwan Strait and create new crises. Additionally, in the area of human rights, the U.S. has tried to interfere with China's core interests through a narrative warfare, launching international discourse attacks and large-scale economic sanctions against it.

In sum, the China-U.S. contest, especially over the right to development, comprises four dimensions.

The most direct dimension: The contest over development capabilities. Under the strong leadership of the CPC, China has adhered to its own path and focused on its own affairs, continuously accelerating development. In particular, in the new era, China has established Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and established the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (the "Two Establishes"). China has also upheld Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and upheld the Central Committee's authority and its centralized, unified leadership (the "Two Upholds"). These underlying principles have forged a firm belief and gathered tremendous strengths that enable China to transform its development potential into development capacity and to steadily enhance its development strength.

China's total economic output has risen to nearly 65% of that of the U.S. According to estimates by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, China's share of global manufacturing output jumped from 5% in 1980 to 31.6% in 2024, and is expected to reach 45% by 2030.³ Analysis by Deutsche Bank shows that China accounts for nearly one-third of global manufacturing value added and holds absolute advantages in sectors such as electronics, new energy, and shipbuilding.⁴ According to the *Global Soft Power Index 2025* released by Brand Finance (UK), in the international image

³ UNIDO: *The Future of Industrialization*, published in December 2024.

⁴ Deutsche Bank: *China Eats the World: China's, Not AI's, Sputnik Moment*, published on February 5, 2025.

evaluation of the 193 UN member states, China's ranking has risen significantly in multiple key soft power indicators, achieving an overall second-place position globally.⁵

China has always pursued its development while firmly safeguarding world peace and development, and has promoted it through its own development. However, the U.S. government sees China's development as a challenge to its own interests and has therefore taken all means to suppress China, attempting to keep it perpetually "on the menu."

The essential dimension: The contest over governance efficacy. At present, the world faces four major deficits: in governance, trust, peace, and development. On September 1, 2025, building on the three global initiatives on development, security, and civilization, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the Global Governance Initiative for the first time at the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus" meeting — a timely proposal of profound significance.

Guided by the Two Centenary Goals and the strategic layout of the Five-Sphere Integrated Plan, China is comprehensively building a strong nation and advancing the great cause of national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization. All undertakings are developing at a rapid pace, and the country is going through profound changes day by day. It has sustained its two miracles — rapid economic growth and long-term social stability, continuously enhancing the people's sense of gain, happiness, and security.

By contrast, the U.S. faces intensifying social conflicts. Issues such as racial discrimination, wealth gap, national debt, differences in values, and the rise of populism are deep-rooted systemic problems that are difficult to resolve in the short term. Since the new U.S. administration took office, domestic governance has been marked by disorder. Radical economic policies that far exceed market expectations have triggered strong reactions in capital markets, leading to plummeting consumer confidence, soaring prices for daily necessities, and sharply rising inflation expectations. According to the latest report by Nira Data, the world's largest democracy and social research institute, China's net positive rating has risen to 14% while that of the U.S. has fallen to -5%.⁶

The fundamental dimension: The contest over development path and institutional system. Recently, two American experts on the Chinese economy published a lengthy research report titled *The Real China Model*, exploring the nature and essence of China's economic development model. They concluded that, beyond industrial policy, the core of the China model also consists in

⁵Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2025, <https://brandfinance.com/insights/nation-brand-value-2025-key-trends-ranking-shifts-and-economic-insights>

⁶The Democracy Perception Index 2025, Nira Data, <https://www.niradata.com/product/dpi>

investments in deep foundational infrastructure — including robust power grids, digital networks, and innovation ecosystems and talent reserves supporting technological leadership. The true goal of China’s industrial development is not rapid growth, but technological self-reliance and advancement. By contrast, the U.S. lacks long-term infrastructure planning, investment, and construction, and relies instead on export controls and scattered industrial policies, which are insufficient to support the development of its industrial system.⁷

Although the authors attempted to identify what the China model is, they failed to explain where it comes from. They did not see that the superiority of this model is essentially rooted in the superiority of China’s political system. Under the leadership of the CPC, China, pressing ahead on the socialist path, is creating a new form of human advancement in an inclusive spirit embracing the past and present and both Chinese and Western elements. This new form of human advancement has demonstrated that modernization does not equal Westernization, nor is human civilization equivalent to Western civilization.

History is showing that socialism, as represented by China, is becoming increasingly vigorous, while capitalism, as represented by the U.S., is facing mounting crises. A U.S. Nobel laureate in economics wrote in the *Financial Times* that in the coming decades, the U.S. will experience a sudden decline for the fundamental reason of the collapse of its institutional system.⁸ *The Hill* bluntly stated that it is widely believed that the U.S. political system has already collapsed.⁹

The contemporary dimension: The contest over the future of humanity. At present, changes unseen in a century are accelerating across the world. Factors of instability and uncertainty, such as security disorder, imbalanced development, and ineffective governance, are becoming increasingly prominent. The international order is experiencing complex and profound transformations, and human society is standing at a crucial crossroads. The choices made by countries, especially major powers, will determine where the world will go and how it will evolve moving forward. China has always stood firmly on the right side of history, on the side of fairness, justice, and human progress. Standing steadfastly as a righteous force safeguarding world peace and a progressive force maintaining international fairness, it is vigorously promoting a multipolar world and economic globalization, leveraging its own stability and certainty to maintain a world characterized by instability and uncertainty.

⁷ Dan Wang and Arthur Kroeber, “The Real China Model: It’s not What You Think It Is,” *Foreign Affairs*.

⁸ Daron Acemoglu, “The Real Threat to American Prosperity,” *Financial Times*, February 8, 2025.

⁹ Myra Adams, “‘Great again?’ American decline today seems as irreversible as it ever was,” *The Hill*, October 10, 2025.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has put forth the great vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, and China is committed to working with countries around the world to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity. This is China's solution, grounded in the common interests of all humanity, to addressing the various challenges facing world peace and development. It is also China's answer to some fundamental questions: "What is happening to the world? Where is humanity heading?" It fully demonstrates that China has assumed significant international responsibilities in safeguarding and improving the existing international order, maintaining the multilateral framework, preventing and curbing a new Cold War, and promoting world peace and development.

By contrast, the U.S. government is attempting to use populism to advance conservatism and isolationism, aiming for a white-dominated America and a U.S.-dominated world. The actions of the new U.S. administration have laid bare its imperialist nature of bullying the weak, annexing territory, plundering resources, monopolizing markets, and colonizing other countries. It is destabilizing the world order and casting a shadow of uncertainty over the future of humanity.

III. Resolutely Safeguarding Chinese People's Right to Development

China has embarked on a new journey of building a modern socialist country in all respects and advancing toward the Second Centenary Goal. Keeping in mind both domestic and international imperatives, we must deeply recognize the importance and urgency of advancing human rights work and place greater emphasis on respecting and protecting human rights for the healthy development of this cause. Guided by the directions and goals set forth by General Secretary Xi Jinping, we must move forward courageously to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests, and firmly defend the Chinese people's right to development.

Upholding the banner and guiding in thought. Why can China succeed in the new era? The fundamental reason lies in General Secretary Xi Jinping's leadership and in the scientific guidance from Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is a broad and profound scientific system, an outstanding and insightful theoretical innovation, a lofty and inspiring spiritual pursuit, and a systematic and scientific methodology of thinking.

We must uphold this theoretical banner and acquire a deep understanding of the decisive significance of the "Two Establishes." We must be more conscious of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms,

follow the leadership core, and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership. We must stay confident in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. And we must implement the “Two Upholds.” It is important that we use the Party’s innovative theories to guide the people while helping them master those theories, thereby transforming the power of truth into a powerful material force to achieve new successes on the new journey. We must also transform this power of truth into a strong ideological fortress, completely shattering the enemy forces’ long-held illusions of launching a “peaceful evolution” or “color revolutions” against China.

Following the trend of the times and strengthening confidence. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, “China has come to where it is today after overcoming all kinds of difficulties and challenges. China did not collapse as predicted by the ‘China collapse theory,’ nor will it peak as forecast by the ‘China peak theory.’ We will continue to advance high-quality development and Chinese modernization, enable the Chinese people to live a better life, and contribute more to sustainable development in the world. We have the confidence and determination that China’s development has a bright future.”

From a political perspective, China has the leadership of the CPC, the socialist system, the strong consensus of the “Two Establishes,” and the firm will of the “Two Upholds.” From an economic perspective, China benefits from the socialist market economy, the enormous domestic market formed by 1.4 billion people, and the huge international market formed under the Belt and Road Initiative. It also possesses supply advantages underpinned by a well-developed industrial system, and talent advantages in the form of highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs. From a cultural perspective, China has historically stressed respect and care for the people. The integration of the basic tenets of Marxism with China’s fine traditional culture has endowed the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics with a greater historical depth and a broader cultural foundation. With all these factors in place, we have firm confidence in achieving new and greater accomplishments in China’s human rights cause.

Maintaining resolve and focusing on our own work. We must maintain resolve, strengthen confidence, and concentrate on our own work to tackle various risks and challenges. Under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, and guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, we will adhere to our path and focus on running our own affairs well — this represents the fundamental prerequisite and solid foundation for overcoming all difficulties.

On the new journey, we need to adhere to a path of human rights development that aligns with the trend of the times and suits China's national conditions, advocate the correct view of human rights, and continuously meet the people's growing and diversified rights demands to satisfy their expectations for a high-quality and better life. We should better protect human rights across all dimensions through coordinated progress on material, political, cultural, social, and ecological fronts.

Fighting proactively and wisely to ensure stability. The CPC members have always been steadfast in their struggles and daring to secure victories. We must carry forward this fighting spirit, and foster a firmer sense of purpose, fortitude, and self-belief in the whole Party and the Chinese people, so that we cannot be swayed by fallacies, deterred by intimidation, or cowed by pressure. We need to press ahead in the face of difficulties, coordinate development and security, and make all-out efforts to overcome all challenges on the path ahead, striving to open new horizons for the development of our undertakings through tenacious struggle.

In this process, we must act proactively to turn crises into opportunities, seeking overall stability and fostering a cooperative tone in China-U.S. relations, thereby creating a favorable external environment for building a strong China and achieving national rejuvenation. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "The hope of the China-U.S. relationship lies in the people, its foundation is in our societies, its future depends on the youth, and its vitality comes from exchanges at subnational levels." The mutual efforts by Chinese and American people in recent years have demonstrated that the door to bilateral relations is opened by the people themselves. People-to-people exchanges, as an important component of bilateral relations, represent the public support for mutually beneficial cooperation and remain a vital source of strength for the development of bilateral ties. The younger generation is becoming the main force in these exchanges, signaling that the future of China-U.S. relations will be built on the shared concerns of the new generations in both countries.

Supporting the Global South and contributing to humanity. In a congratulatory letter to the Global South Media and Think Tank Forum, General Secretary Xi Jinping stated, "At present, the Global South is growing with a strong momentum and playing an increasingly important role in the cause of human progress. China has always been a member of the Global South and will always belong to the developing world. China is willing to work alongside Global South countries to practice true multilateralism, advocate for an equal and orderly multipolar world and universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, in a joint effort to build a community with a shared future for mankind."

China must earnestly implement the grand vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind and the four global initiatives proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping, firmly safeguard the UN-centered international system, and promote reforms of the global governance system. Through initiatives and platforms such as BRI cooperation, building a community of shared future with neighboring countries, China-ASEAN cooperation, SCO Plus, BRICS Plus, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China aims to serve the country's overall strategic agenda while continuously making new and greater contributions to humanity, striving to empower national rejuvenation and world peace.

(Translated by *XIANG Na*)