

Opening New Horizons in Human Rights Research in the Process of Chinese Modernization

— *Speech at the Symposium on “Chinese Modernization and
Human Rights Protection”*

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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, delivered an important speech at the Commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-1945) and the World Anti-Fascist War. Through a grand military parade, we joined people around the world in commemorating this great historic day, proclaiming that the mighty force of human justice, light, and progress is irresistible. Eighty years ago, the Chinese people’s fourteen-years of struggle constituted not only an arduous and bloody resistance, but also a war to defend human rights and civilization — a life-and-death struggle against anti-human and anti-civilizational forces. The great victory of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression not only changed the destiny of China and powerfully safeguarded the Chinese people’s rights to life and development, but also made indelible contributions to world peace and development.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that the strategic overall situation of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the momentous changes, of a like not seen in a century across the world, constitute the fundamental starting point for planning our work. In recent years, the China Society for Human Rights Studies has closely aligned itself with the overall work of the Party and the state, intensively publicized and systematically interpreted General Secretary Xi Jinping’s important discourses on respecting and protecting human rights, and endeavored to build a theoretical and discourse system of human rights with Chinese characteristics for the new era. At the same time, the Society has extensively carried out international exchanges and cooperation in the field of human rights, actively and proactively participated in shaping human rights public opinion, and played an

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important role in promoting the development of China's human rights cause and enhancing China's voice in human rights.

Human rights research in China has thrived in the new era, fundamentally because it has adhered to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as its scientific theoretical guidance and accelerated the building of China's autonomous knowledge system of human rights. We, the Society, have promoted the establishment of major research projects under the Marxist Theory Research and Discipline Construction Project, carrying out focused research that has clarified the theoretical framework and rich connotations of the contemporary Chinese perspective on human rights. Grounded in the great practice of Chinese modernization, we have deeply explored human rights ideas embedded in fine traditional Chinese culture, enabling human rights theory to take deep root across China. We have keenly identified and thoroughly explored frontier issues arising from the technological revolution and global challenges. Relying on China's leading strengths in digital technologies and digital industries, we have produced a series of theoretical articles and academic achievements. We have organized a series of international human rights seminars, striving to achieve leadership in agenda-setting and concept shaping in the international human rights arena, and promoting a transformation of China's human rights research from passive response to proactive construction. In particular, this year we have taken the lead in releasing a number of consensus documents, including the *Asian Consensus on Human Rights*, the *Consensus Document on "Human Rights in the Context of the Digital-Intelligent Era"*, the *São Paulo Consensus on China-Latin American and Caribbean States Human Rights Communication and Cooperation*, and the *Addis Ababa Consensus on the China-Africa Right to Development*. These efforts have formed a human rights consensus framework that both responds to shared concerns and reflects Chinese characteristics, generating a positive response in the international human rights field.

These achievements have not come easily. They embody the hard work and intellectual contributions of everyone present. On behalf of the China Society for Human Rights Studies, I would like to extend my sincere respect and appreciation to you all.

Distinguished experts, the saying "to uphold a great and righteous spirit, and pursue learning without limits" embodies not only the moral and scholarly

ideals of personal conduct and academic inquiry, but also the fundamental principles of human rights research. In light of the theme of today's symposium, I would like to share three observations.

First, we should gain insight into the evolving international landscape.

At present, transformations of the world, the times, and history are unfolding in depth. The old international order is undergoing rapid adjustment, while a new order has yet to solidify. The trend toward multipolarity in the international configuration is becoming increasingly evident. Amid intertwined change and turbulence, the international human rights landscape is likewise experiencing major realignments, deep divisions, and structural reconfiguration.

This is manifested first in the restructuring of value paradigms. The overarching dominance of Western values has markedly declined, while countries of the Global South are moving from collective "emergence" to collective "awakening." The international community's understanding of human rights is shifting from a "single" and purportedly "universal" model toward one characterized by "pluralism" and "consensus." The "second-generation"¹ and "third-generation"² human rights advocated by the Global South are increasingly entering the core agenda of international human rights discussions, continuously challenging the long-standing dominance of the "first-generation rights"³ and the "meta-narrative" under the Western liberal view of human rights. As a result, the definition and interpretation of human rights have become a central arena of cognitive and value competition among nations.

At the same time, divergences in future visions are becoming increasingly apparent. In the field of international human rights governance, the United States tends to maintain its hegemonic position in norm-setting and moral judgment through a zero-sum mindset, while Europe seeks to preserve its influence and rule-based advantages within existing institutional frameworks. At the core of both approaches lies an effort to perpetuate Western dominance over the human rights discourse. In sharp contrast, countries of the Global South are actively promoting the construction of a more equitable, just, reasonable, and inclusive human rights governance order. They call for replacing bloc confrontation with global cooperation and jointly addressing

¹ Economic, social and cultural rights.

² The right to development, the right to peace, the right to environment, the right to social inclusion, the right to international solidarity, etc.

³ Civil and political rights.

global challenges. In essence, this represents a contest between an inclusive vision that advocates building a community with a shared future for humanity and an exclusive vision rooted in bloc division — one that will shape the future direction of the global human rights order.

Additionally, this is reflected in innovations in practical approaches. The Western liberal human rights model places disproportionate emphasis on antagonism and checks and balances between the “individual” and the “state.” In practice, this approach has not only generated internal dysfunctions and fueled populist backlashes, but has also increasingly degenerated into a tool for a small number of countries to exercise hegemony and interfere in the internal affairs of others. It neither aligns with the shared development needs arising from globalization nor effectively addresses transnational human rights risks and compound crises. By contrast, the majority of countries worldwide — particularly developing ones — are no longer mechanically replicating Western models. Instead, grounded in their own modernization processes and development realities, they emphasize integrating the universality of human rights with practical imperatives such as economic development, social stability, and ecological protection, and are exploring diverse pathways that combine local adaptability with practical effectiveness.

Second, we should follow the trend of the times.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that the process of realizing the Chinese Dream of great national rejuvenation is, in essence, a process of achieving social fairness and justice and continuously advancing the cause of human rights. At present, China stands at a critical juncture, marking the conclusion of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and the formulation of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030). From strategic planning at the macro level to concrete implementation in specific areas, the great practice of advancing Chinese modernization will lay a more solid material foundation for the comprehensive development of human rights, create more favorable social conditions, and unfold a brighter future prospect for the human rights cause.

The path of human rights development suited to China’s national conditions continues broadening. Since the beginning of the new era, General Secretary Xi Jinping has delivered a series of important discourses on respecting and protecting human rights, offering a scientific summary of the formative logic and key characteristics of China’s path of human rights development, and greatly deepening our Party’s understanding of the

underlying laws governing the advancement of human rights. China's path of human rights development is neither an imposed model nor an imported product. Rather, it is an independent exploration deeply rooted in China's land, carrying forward Chinese civilization, reflecting the will of the people, and continuously adapting to China's development realities and the progress of the times. The new form of human civilization created through Chinese modernization, together with the new vision of modernization it presents, fully demonstrates that China's path of human rights development is not only correct and viable, but also steady and effective.

In the course of international human rights exchanges, many foreign political leaders and scholars have expressed to us that China's path of human rights development has achieved remarkable results; it has not only provided a "Chinese model" for the global human rights cause, but has also offered valuable experience for developing countries seeking human rights development paths suited to their own national conditions. For example, when I led a delegation of the China Society for Human Rights Studies to Hungary in June, 2025, Gyula Thurmer, president of the Hungarian Workers' Party, delivered remarks at the Symposium on "Consensus on International Human Rights." He cited the "six key principles" defining the main features of China's path of human rights development as articulated by General Secretary Xi Jinping, noting that since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, human rights have increasingly become central to China's policy. He also stated that China's experience in human rights development holds significant reference value for Hungary.

China's rich and vivid achievements in human rights practice have become increasingly tangible and accessible. In the great process of Chinese modernization, hundreds of millions of people share development opportunities and the fruits of reform, with all rights enjoying unprecedented protection and advancement. People's sense of happiness, security, and gain has continued growing. We have advanced whole-process people's democracy, ensuring that the right of the people to be masters of the country is implemented across all aspects of political and social life. We have integrated respect for and protection of human rights throughout legislation, law enforcement, judicial adjudication, and law observance, comprehensively strengthening the protection of citizens' personal rights, property rights, and personality rights. We have accelerated the establishment of a high-standard socialist market

economy system, enabling development outcomes to benefit all people in a broader and more equitable manner. We eradicated extreme poverty, creating a miracle in the history of global poverty reduction and helping reduce the global poverty rate from 44 percent to 9 percent. We have built the world's largest education system, social security system, and healthcare system, raising average life expectancy from 35 years at the founding of the People's Republic of China to 79 years in 2024. We attach great importance to safeguarding the rights and interests of specific groups, with care and service systems for women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities continuously improving.

China's human rights theory, characterized by both upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground, has gained growing international resonance. Since the beginning of the new era, General Secretary Xi Jinping, systematically distilling China's experience in human rights development and directly addressing challenges in global human rights governance, has put forward a series of original new concepts, ideas, and propositions, forming a coherent and scientifically grounded theoretical system on human rights. His emphasis that "living a happy life is the primary human right" vividly reflects a people-centered approach to human rights, grounding human rights values in respect for life, the safeguarding of human dignity, and the promotion of human development. General Secretary Xi has proposed the Chinese approach of "safeguarding human rights through security, promoting them through development, and advancing them through cooperation," which has received broad endorsement from the international community. The book *Xi Jinping On Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* has been translated into 14 languages and distributed worldwide, with its appeal and influence continually expanding.

This year, we, the China Society for Human Rights Studies, have conducted a series of outreach activities in Europe, Latin America, Central Asia, and Africa to introduce General Secretary Xi Jinping's human rights concepts. Wherever we have gone, representatives from host countries have expressed their sincere admiration for his human rights philosophy and their recognition of China's achievements in human rights development, while also expressing a strong desire to further understand and learn from China's experience and practices.

Third, we should expand the horizons of research.

In the face of new missions and evolving circumstances of the times, we must adhere to confidence and self-reliance, uphold fundamental principles and break new ground, and remain problem-oriented. With a broader perspective, more systematic thinking, and a more rigorous academic approach, we should further energize existing research and enhance new contributions in the field of human rights studies.

We should continue deepening foundational research in traditional areas of human rights and consolidate the theoretical underpinnings. Human rights constitute a comprehensive and organically unified whole, in which no single dimension can be neglected. We should consistently prioritize basic research and, under the guidance of the Marxist concept of human rights, integrate China's realities with the essence of fine traditional Chinese culture to build a human rights discourse system and theoretical framework that is rooted in China's practices, responsive to the questions of the times, and reflective of the common values of all humanity. Research institutions should mobilize streamlined and capable teams across universities and disciplines, focusing on major foundational topics such as General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on the rule of law, economic development, culture, diplomacy, ecological civilization, and human rights protection. Through coordinated efforts and long-term, systematic research, they should provide solid theoretical support for human rights policymaking and accumulate deep intellectual resources for international human rights dialogue.

We should place greater emphasis on research into agenda-setting issues to enhance our international discourse power. Within the global human rights governance landscape, we should not only be active participants but also proactive leaders; not only engage in rule discussions but also help shape agendas; not only integrate into governance processes but also contribute to building a more equitable framework. We should strengthen human rights research around General Secretary Xi Jinping's vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity and the four global initiatives. For example, in conjunction with the Global Development Initiative, we should deepen research on the right to development, thoroughly elucidate the internal logic of "promoting human rights through development and consolidating development through human rights," and distill China's practical experience in integrating poverty alleviation, rural revitalization, and common prosperity with human rights protection. In conjunction with the Global Governance Initiative, we

should focus on reforming human rights governance systems, conduct in-depth analyses of the prominent shortcomings in current governance mechanisms, and propose governance solutions that are more equitable, inclusive, and effective, thereby encouraging the international community to abandon confrontational thinking and move toward cooperative and joint governance.

We should actively expand research in frontier and interdisciplinary fields to respond to the defining questions of our times. As global challenges continue to multiply, the scope of human rights is steadily expanding and their connotations are becoming increasingly rich. With keen scholarly insight and a strong problem-oriented mindset, we must respond promptly to emerging issues of common concern to all humanity. Priority should be given to frontier and interdisciplinary fields such as digital human rights, the ethics of artificial intelligence, climate change and environmental rights, rights protection in public health emergencies, and biotechnology and human rights. These areas of research are not abstract “future studies” detached from reality, but urgent issues that bear directly on the destiny of humanity and the realities of global governance. We should encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and promote in-depth dialogue between human rights scholars and experts from diverse sectors, striving to ensure that China’s voice is heard, China’s proposals are advanced, and China’s wisdom is contributed at the formative stage of rule-making in these emerging domains.

We should deepen regional and country-specific studies by building on our own strengths, and enhance our capacity for targeted policy responses. Research institutions — particularly human rights research centers, which serve as core platforms for human rights scholarship and talent development — should fully leverage their unique advantages and treat regional and country-specific studies as a key task to be implemented with rigor and precision. Closely aligned with the overall framework of China’s external engagement, we should cultivate research teams that combine a global perspective with regional expertise, and promote a shift in research outcomes from broad generalizations to precise, in-depth profiling, thereby providing targeted support for “country-specific” and “issue-specific” approaches. Focusing on countries of the Global South, and drawing on human rights dialogue platforms such as those for China-Latin America and China-Africa cooperation that we have established, we should build collaborative research networks on human rights with Latin America and Africa, further amplifying the collective voice of

the Global South in human rights discourse. With regard to neighboring strategic partners, greater emphasis should be placed on analyzing pathways for human rights coordination in regional cooperation, using deeper human rights exchanges as a bond to jointly promote Asian values. For major partners and regions of particular concern, we should promptly monitor and report developments in their human rights policies and public opinion trends, thereby effectively enhancing China's relevance, persuasiveness, and initiative in international human rights exchanges and dialogue.

Human rights research is an endeavor that combines theoretical depth with practical warmth. It carries heavy responsibilities and a glorious mission. By following the great path, one can travel far and wide. Every step we take represents a new advance. Hope that all the human rights theorists, with a high sense of political responsibility and a strong sense of historical mission, will continue producing outstanding achievements of significant academic influence, policy-driving power, and social appeal in the course of Chinese modernization, and make new and greater theoretical contributions to the comprehensive development of China's human rights cause.

(Translated by *CHEN Feng*)