

Chinese Modernization Gives Rise to a New Form of Human Rights Civilization

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Abstract: *Respecting and protecting human rights is the fundamental spirit of modern civilization and an important component of modernization. In advancing and expanding the great cause of Chinese modernization, the CPC Central Committee with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core has integrated Marxist views on human rights with China's realities and fine traditional Chinese culture, drawn on the fine achievements of the world's human rights civilization, and summarized the successful experience of uniting and leading the people in respecting and protecting human rights. It has thus forged a path of human rights development that conforms to the trend of the times and suits China's national conditions, and creatively constructed a new form of human rights civilization. The new form of human rights civilization generated by Chinese modernization is people-centered, institutionally guaranteed, development-driven, universal in spirit, and inclusive in essence. It represents an innovative development of human rights civilization. Epitomizing the finest achievements of the world's human rights civilization, this new form stands in marked contrast to the Western liberal human rights model and presents a new vision for the development of human rights civilization. It has not only enriched the modern connotations of Chinese civilization, but also contributed to the diversity of the world's human rights civilization.*

Keywords: Chinese modernization ♦ put the people first ♦ new form of human rights civilization ♦ “two integrations” ♦ free and well-rounded development of the people

I. Introduction

Civilization is a concentrated expression of the development and progress of human society and can be understood as the sum of the various achievements created by humankind in the course of its development. Civilization is both historical and dynamic, constantly advancing over time. Civilization constitutes the profound foundation, the source of strength, and a marker of progress for the development of any country or nation. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has pointed out that “human rights are a symbol of the progress of human civilization,”¹ and has advocated “strengthening exchanges and

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¹ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Sends Congratulatory Letter to the 2021 South-South Human Rights Forum,” *People's*

mutual learning among civilizations, building consensus through dialogue, and jointly promoting the development and progress of human rights civilization.”² By examining human rights within the broader framework of human civilization, General Secretary Xi Jinping has introduced the important concept of “human rights civilization,”³ thereby advancing the Marxist view of human rights. This represents a new elevation in the understanding of human rights by the CPC in the new era and injects fresh intellectual impetus into strengthening the narrative capacity of Chinese modernization in the field of human rights.

Modernization represents the direction of progress of human civilization and has been a shared aspiration and unremitting pursuit of peoples around the world. Human beings stand at the center of modernization, and respect for and protection of human rights constitute both the fundamental spirit of modern civilization and an essential component of modernization. Chinese modernization is an important part of global modernization. General Secretary Xi Jinping has observed: “Chinese modernization is deeply rooted in China’s fine traditional culture, embodies the advanced nature of scientific socialism, draws upon and absorbs all outstanding achievements of human civilization, represents the direction of progress of human civilization, and presents a new vision distinct from the Western model of modernization. It is an entirely new form of human civilization.”⁴ Chinese modernization enables the ancient Chinese civilization to continually renew its vitality and dynamism and to generate many new achievements in civilizational practice. It is precisely in the great practice of advancing and expanding Chinese modernization that the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has remained committed to integrating the Marxist view of human rights with China’s specific realities and with China’s fine traditional culture, drawing upon the outstanding achievements of global human rights civilization, and summarizing the successful experience gained in uniting and leading the people to respect and protect human rights. Through this process, a new form of human rights civilization has been creatively constructed, enriching and developing the diversity of human rights civilization worldwide.

What constitutes human rights civilization? Different conclusions may be drawn depending on differing value orientations and analytical frameworks. As understood in this paper, human rights civilization refers to the sum of human rights concepts, institutions, policies, and actions through which human dignity is respected, human survival is secured, and human development is realized. Any given form of human rights civilization is closely bound up with particular economic and social conditions, historical and cultural traditions, and value orientations. The people-centered new form of human rights civilization emerging from Chinese modernization is an inevitable requirement of China’s contemporary national conditions, developmental reality, and human rights needs. The five defining characteristics of Chinese

Daily, December 9, 2021, 1.

² Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping Sends Congratulatory Letter to the Global Forum on Human Rights Governance,” *People’s Daily*, June 15, 2023, 1.

³ State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *The Communist Party of China and Human Rights Protection — A 100-Year Quest* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2021), 1.

⁴ Xi Jinping, “Correctly Understanding and Vigorously Advancing Chinese Modernization,” *People’s Daily*, February 8, 2023, 1.

modernization — namely, the modernization of a vast population, of common prosperity for all, of coordinated material and cultural-ethical progress, of harmony between humanity and nature, and of peaceful development — embody the fundamental spirit and core values of human rights civilization and are richly imbued with its significance. Fundamentally, Chinese modernization aims to enhance the well-being of the people, enabling all people to share continuously in the increasingly abundant fruits of modernization and promoting their free and all-around development. However, it must be emphasized that the relationship between Chinese modernization and human rights civilization is not self-evident. This paper seeks to analyze this new form of human rights civilization generated from five dimensions — people-centeredness, institutional character, developmental nature, shared benefits, and inclusiveness — to further deepen the understanding of the relationship between Chinese modernization and human rights civilization and provide academic and theoretical support for strengthening contemporary China’s human rights narrative capacity.

II. Chinese Modernization Gives Rise to a People-Centered Human Rights Civilization

Based on the political nature of the CPC and the essential characteristics of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Chinese modernization adheres to a people-centered approach and upholds a people-centered conception of human rights. In this regard, General Secretary Xi Jinping has noted: “The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.”⁵ “The people are the creators of history and are the strongest bedrock and force in advancing modernization. The ultimate goal of modernization is people’s free and well-rounded development. For a modernization path to work and work well, it must put the people first.”⁶ “‘For the people’ is the distinguishing feature of the Chinese path of human rights protection.”⁷ It can therefore be maintained that being people-centered constitutes the essential attribute of the human rights civilization in Chinese modernization.

A people-centered human rights civilization respects the principal status of the people. General Secretary Xi Jinping has clearly stated: “Chinese modernization is an undertaking of hundreds of millions of people. The people are the subjects of Chinese modernization. We must rely closely on the people, respect their pioneering spirit, and pool the wisdom and strength of all the people in order to continuously push Chinese modernization forward.”⁸ This can be understood through the following three aspects: First, upholding the principle of putting the people first. Regarding the direction of

⁵ Xi Jinping, “Upholding the People as the Highest Priority,” *Qiushi* 7 (2024): 13.

⁶ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2023), 296.

⁷ Xi Jinping, “Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights,” *Qiushi* 12 (2022): 7.

⁸ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 61.

Chinese modernization, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed: “We must uphold the people-first principle and highlight the people-centered orientation of modernization.”⁹ In advancing and expanding Chinese modernization, all activities of the CPC and the Chinese state revolve around the will, demands, and interests of the people — placing people’s interests above all else, taking the pursuit of people’s happiness as the original aspiration and founding mission, and protecting and cherishing human life. Chinese modernization fully mobilizes the enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity of the broad masses, striving to ensure that the people are the primary participants, promoters, and beneficiaries of the development of the human rights cause. Second, ensuring that the people are masters of the country. China’s *Constitution* stipulates that all power in the People’s Republic of China belongs to the people. By ensuring the principal status of the people as masters of the country and developing whole-process people’s democracy, Chinese modernization has constructed the logic for realizing the people’s political rights. This includes democratic elections, consultation, decision-making, management, and oversight in accordance with the law, ensuring that the people manage state, economic, cultural, and social affairs through various channels and forms. It also encompasses the people’s right to vote and be elected, and their rights to know, participate, express, and oversee state and social affairs, as well as the right to criticize and make suggestions to any state organ or their staff. Third, adhering to the principle that development is for the people, relies on the people, and that its fruits are shared by the people. Chinese modernization regards development as the fundamental principle, striving to address unbalanced and inadequate development through the new development philosophy. By promoting high-quality development, it aims to benefit all people with more abundant fruits of progress, continuously enhancing their sense of gain, happiness, and security, allowing everyone to contribute their best and find their place, ultimately achieving common prosperity and shared development.

A people-centered human rights civilization regards the people’s rights to subsistence and development as the primary basic human rights. General Secretary Xi Jinping’s important human rights proposition that “the rights to subsistence and development are the primary basic human rights”¹⁰ represents a significant independent theoretical innovation by Chinese Communists in the course of advancing and expanding Chinese modernization, as well as a new development of the Marxist view of human rights in contemporary China. Marxism emphasizes the primacy of matter and underscores the importance of the production of material goods for human survival. Subsistence is the foundation for the enjoyment of all human rights, while development is the condition for their realization. The proposition that “the rights to subsistence and development are the primary basic human rights” effectively integrates the protection and development of human rights with the people’s immediate and long-term interests. In terms of immediate interests,

⁹ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 296.

¹⁰ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2021), 21.

prioritizing the rights to subsistence and development is most conducive to addressing the urgent and concrete problems in people's daily lives, closely linking human rights protection to each individual's real-world survival and development. In terms of long-term interests, this prioritization accords with the foundational and comprehensive role of these rights within the spectrum of human rights; only by continuously safeguarding the people's rights to subsistence and development can conditions be steadily created for the people to enjoy fuller human rights. Of course, designating subsistence and development as the primary basic human rights does not negate or diminish the importance of other rights; rather, it uses the realization of these two rights as a focal point to drive the advancement of all other human rights. By placing the protection of the people's subsistence and development at the forefront and treating the rights to subsistence and development as the primary basic human rights, Chinese modernization has identified the best practice and optimal solution for continuously raising the level of protection of all fundamental rights for all people.

A people-centered human rights civilization regards the people's happy life as the greatest human right. Chinese modernization is socialist modernization under the leadership of the CPC. Seeking happiness for the people is the Party's original aspiration and founding mission, and achieving common prosperity for all is a fundamental requirement of socialism. Values such as freedom, equality, peace, development, and security constitute the core values of human rights, and their most concrete and realistic expression lies in the realization of a happy life for the people. In the history of human rights thought, although there have been references to a "right to happiness" and theories — such as utilitarianism — linking happiness with the realization of human value, contemporary China is the first to explicitly link the happiness of the people with their actual lives and identify it as the greatest human right. As a theory of the people's revolution, Marxism attaches great importance to the realization of the people's right to happiness, emphasizing that happiness represents the unity of material and spiritual life: human beings not only create through labor the conditions for material enjoyment, but should also enjoy a rich spiritual life after acquiring the fruits of their labor. Chinese modernization is a modernization that coordinates material and cultural-spiritual advancement — one in which material wealth is continuously enriched and spiritual life is increasingly fulfilled — with the overarching aim of continually enhancing the people's happiness. Therefore, General Secretary Xi Jinping's proposition that "a happy life for the people is the greatest human right" best embodies the essence of the human rights civilization of Chinese modernization. The proposition of "a happy life for the people is the greatest human right"¹¹ constitutes a major innovation in the construction of human rights concepts and represents a new expression of the Marxist view of human rights adapted to the Chinese context and the needs of the times, imbuing human rights civilization with new connotations: First, regarding the people's happy life as the greatest human right reflects a respect for the people. For living individuals, in a sense, there is no dignity without happiness, and no human rights without dignity; the right to dignity is the

¹¹ Xi Jinping, "Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights," *Qiushi* 12 (2022): 7.

deepest logic of human rights. Second, this identification connects human rights more closely with the people's everyday lives. Human rights are not "castles in the air" but concrete and real existences; they are embedded in the lived experience of the people and can be tangibly felt. Third, it implies that the pursuit of human rights is a long-term historical process. As the quest for happiness is boundless and its forms of realization are diverse, pursuing a higher-level and more multifaceted happy life is an inevitable requirement for the development of human rights civilization. It can be said that in the course of Chinese modernization, happiness represents the most fundamental, realistic, and concrete expression of human rights values.

A people-centered human rights civilization regards the people's satisfaction as the most important standard for evaluating the state of human rights. With respect to the standards for assessing human rights, different forms of civilization have historically produced both abstract metaphysical standards and so-called "universal" standards of human rights. A people-centered human rights civilization maintains that human rights are concrete, realistic, and genuine, and regards whether the people's actual needs are met — especially whether their aspiration for a better life is fulfilled — as an important evaluative standard for judging human rights conditions. When discussing the people-centered standard for the modernization path and the criteria for evaluating human rights, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "The aspirations of the people to live a better life must always be the focus of our efforts."¹² "The yardstick for moderate prosperity lies with rural areas, and particularly whether or not those that are poor are able to exit poverty."¹³ "The effectiveness of all our work must ultimately be judged by whether the people have truly benefited, whether their lives have genuinely improved, and whether their rights and interests have been effectively protected."¹⁴ "How a country is doing on human rights is essentially gauged by whether the interests of its people are upheld, and whether they enjoy a growing sense of fulfillment, happiness and security."¹⁵

Chinese modernization proceeds from China's specific national conditions and the practical needs of the people, forming a new concept of a people-centered human rights civilization that integrates the people as subjects, the people's subsistence, the people's development, the people's happiness, and a people-centered standard into a unified framework. In doing so, it brings human rights genuinely among the people and represents an overall transcendence of Western human rights theories such as "natural rights" and "innate rights." Unlike Western doctrines of "natural rights" or "innate rights" — which emphasize that human rights are granted by a "Creator," a people-centered human rights civilization transforms human rights from an abstract, metaphysical concept into a concrete and real existence, directly linking and unifying

¹² Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping's Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 82.

¹³ "Xi Jinping Meets with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet," *People's Daily*, May 26, 2022, 1.

¹⁴ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights*, 31.

¹⁵ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Xi Jinping on Respecting and Protecting Human Rights*, 52-53.

human rights with the dignity of the people, their subsistence and development, and their happiness. It is precisely in this sense that the core of the contemporary Chinese conception of human rights should be understood as “people’s human rights.”¹⁶

III. Chinese Modernization Gives Rise to an Institutional Form of Human Rights Civilization

Institutions possess a fundamental, stable, and enduring character, and the development of any undertaking must be supported by corresponding institutional arrangements. Human rights institutions play a decisive role in the development of human rights civilization: the nature of human rights institutions largely determines the nature of human rights civilization. General Secretary Xi Jinping has observed that “institutional advantages are the greatest advantages of a country,” and that “over the 70 years since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the fundamental reason the Chinese nation has ushered in a great transformation from standing up to growing prosperous and strong is that the Party has led the people in establishing and improving the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, forming and developing institutional arrangements in Party leadership and in the economic, political, cultural, social, ecological, military, and foreign affairs domains, and continuously strengthening and improving national governance.”¹⁷ In advancing and expanding Chinese modernization, China has established a new institutional framework of human rights civilization that integrates the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the socialist system, and the respect for and protection of human rights.¹⁸

An institutional human rights civilization is characterized by the leadership of the Communist Party of China as its most essential feature and is grounded in the socialist system as its fundamental foundation. The *Constitution* is the fundamental law of the state. Article 1 of Chapter I of the *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* stipulates that “The socialist system is the fundamental system of the People’s Republic of China. Leadership by the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.” General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that “the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and the greatest advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China. Upholding and improving the Party’s leadership is the foundation and lifeline of the Party and the state, and it represents the interests and well-being of the people of all ethnic groups.”¹⁹ Chinese modernization is

¹⁶ Lu Guangjin, “People’s Human Rights: The Core Essence of the Contemporary Chinese Concept of Human Rights,” *Jilin University Journal of Social Sciences* 2 (2025).

¹⁷ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 47-48.

¹⁸ State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *The Communist Party of China and Human Rights Protection — A 100-Year Quest* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2021), 53.

¹⁹ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 41.

modernization under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and a form of socialist modernization. The leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system serve as the fundamental guarantee of Chinese modernization and the greatest institutional advantage for advancing China's human rights cause. When discussing the relationship between Party leadership, the socialist system, and the respect for and protection of human rights, General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly stated that "the leadership of the Communist Party of China and our socialist system determine the socialist nature of China's human rights cause and ensure that the people are masters of the country, that human rights are shared on an equal basis, that human rights development is advanced through systematic planning, and that all categories of human rights are comprehensively promoted, thereby continuously realizing, safeguarding, and developing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people."²⁰ The historic achievements of China's human rights development demonstrate that, in a developing country with a population of more than 1.4 billion, the advancement of human rights can only be achieved under the strong and effective leadership of the Communist Party of China, which unites and mobilizes the collective strength of people of all ethnic groups, advances national development and rejuvenation, and continuously raises the level of protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens.

An institutional human rights civilization is marked by the leadership of the Communist Party of China in guiding the people to respect, protect, and develop human rights. Drawing on the realities of developing a socialist market economy and the essential requirements of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, Chinese modernization follows the laws governing human rights development. It respects and protects both collective and individual human rights, striving to achieve their coordination and unity so as to realize the common development of the people as a whole and of every individual. In the course of Chinese modernization, the Party and the state, on the one hand, respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people and safeguard citizens' civil and political rights; on the other hand, as the principal duty-bearers in human rights protection, the Party and the state assume primary responsibility, playing a leading and decisive role by creating favorable conditions to promote and guarantee human rights. Moreover, throughout this process, the Party and the state actively mobilize the initiative and creativity of individuals, social organizations, enterprises, and other social actors, enabling them to play coordinating, supportive, and complementary roles in advancing the cause of human rights. As the ruling party, the Communist Party of China has incorporated the principle of "respecting and protecting human rights" into its Party Constitution and has consistently treated the respect for and protection of human rights as an important aspect of governance, continuously leading the people in advancing China's human rights cause. Under the Party's leadership, China achieved the First Centenary Goal and built a moderately prosperous society in all respects, historically resolving the problem of absolute poverty and laying a solid foundation for the development of

²⁰ Xi Jinping, "Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights," *Qiushi* 12 (2022): 6-7.

human rights in China. The Party has led the people in continuously developing whole-process people's democracy, enabling them to enjoy broader, fuller, and more comprehensive democratic rights. It has advanced the building of a safe China and a law-based China, strengthened legal protections for human rights, upheld social fairness and justice, effectively protected the lives and property of the people, and maintained long-term social stability. It has also promoted fuller and higher-quality employment, established the world's largest social security system, and substantially improved the quality of the living environment. Furthermore, the Party upholds policies of ethnic equality, solidarity, and freedom of religious belief, actively promoting economic, political, social, and cultural development in ethnic minority regions and working to safeguard the fundamental rights of people of all ethnic groups.

An institutional human rights civilization upholds the unity between the socialist system and the respect for and protection of human rights. In advancing and expanding Chinese modernization, the socialist system has been continuously consolidated and developed, including its political, economic, social, cultural, and legal institutions. In terms of political institutions, these include the system of people's congresses as the fundamental political system, as well as the system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the system of regional ethnic autonomy, and the system of grassroots self-governance. The institutional system of socialism with Chinese characteristics provides a solid institutional foundation for ensuring that all people enjoy equal rights to participation and development for all the people and, on that basis, share in the fruits of development. Particularly through the practice of whole-process people's democracy, China has established an institutional framework, participatory procedures, and practical mechanisms for whole-process people's democracy, thereby safeguarding the people's democratic rights at the institutional level and enriching their democratic life. In terms of economic institutions, China has established a socialist market economy characterized by the dominance of public ownership alongside the common development of diverse forms of ownership, and by distribution according to work as the primary form alongside multiple distribution methods. In particular, to safeguard the basic rights of private economic entities, the state has enacted the *Private Economy Promotion Law*, creating the necessary conditions and a favorable social environment for the high-quality development of the private economy. Meanwhile, socialist cultural and social institutions have also been continuously developed and improved. These developments have not only created conditions for realizing the people's economic, social, and cultural rights, but have also opened broad prospects for all people to enjoy fuller human rights.

An institutional human rights civilization establishes an institutional system for safeguarding human rights in accordance with the rule of law. Respect for and protection of human rights constitute the very essence of the modern rule of law. Chinese modernization adheres to the organic unity of the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the people's position as masters of the country, and the rule of law, striving to foster a modern political civilization in which rule-of-law

civilization and human rights civilization are mutually reinforcing and develop in tandem. “The rule of law is the most effective guarantee for human rights.”²¹ Strengthening rule-of-law safeguards for human rights and ensuring that the people enjoy extensive rights and freedoms in accordance with the law constitute essential requirements of Chinese modernization in the field of legal development. Chinese modernization upholds equality before the law and integrates respect for and protection of human rights into every stage of legislation, law enforcement, adjudication, and law observance. It accelerates the improvement of legal systems embodying fairness in rights, opportunities, and rules; safeguards citizens’ personal, property, and personality rights; protects citizens’ fundamental political rights; and guarantees their economic, social, and cultural rights — striving to safeguard human rights through sound laws and effective governance and continuously enhance rule-of-law-based protection of human rights. Since the reform and opening up, and especially since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the development of a law-based China has advanced under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law. Integrated progress in building a law-based country, a law-based government, and a law-based society has continuously achieved new results, providing a solid legal foundation for respecting and protecting human rights. China has now established a socialist legal system centered on the *Constitution* and comprising more than 300 laws and over 600 administrative regulations.²² The state adheres to strict law enforcement, continuously strengthens law-based administration, promotes the statutory delineation of governmental powers, strictly regulates administrative law enforcement, and reinforces constraints and supervision over administrative authority, treating the effective respect for and protection of human rights as an important benchmark for evaluating government performance. The state upholds impartial justice and strives to ensure that the people experience fairness and justice in every legal system, every law enforcement decision, and every judicial case, thereby providing strong judicial guarantees for human rights. In addition, through nationwide legal education and public awareness campaigns, the state endeavors to enhance society-wide awareness of the rule of law and human rights, thereby consolidating the social foundation for rule-of-law protection of human rights.

An institutional human rights civilization continuously strengthens top-level institutional design and consistently incorporates the respect for and protection of human rights into national development strategies, plans, and policy arrangements. In the course of Chinese modernization, human rights are regarded as a major cause. When formulating development plans and policies across various sectors, the state places particular emphasis on promoting the overall development of the human rights cause through systematic institutional arrangements implemented in a planned and step-by-step manner. First, the development of human rights is advanced through overarching national development strategies. The Party and the state leverage the

²¹ Xi Jinping, “Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights,” *Qiushi* 12 (2022): 6-7.

²² The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, accessed January 10, 2026, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/xzfgk/home_5.htm.

advantages of the socialist system by coordinating the advancement of the human rights cause with the country's overall development strategies and with policies governing economic, social, and cultural development. Whether in the strategies for building a moderately prosperous society, building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects; in the grand modernization strategies of the "three-step" and "two-step" approaches; or in advancing the "Five-Sphere Integrated Plan" and the coordinated "Four Comprehensives" strategic framework, the Party and the state have formulated national economic and social development proposals and plans, and issued various guidelines, policy opinions, and action plans covering multiple fields of development, thereby making policy designs and institutional arrangements to safeguard the people's fundamental rights. Second, efforts to safeguard the human rights of special groups have been continuously strengthened. Given China's large population and the considerable size of its special groups, the state provides special protection for the rights of ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Through the formulation of five-year or 10-year development outlines and development agendas, the state has steadily enhanced the overall level of rights protection for specific groups through the formulation of five-year or 10-year development programs and action agendas. Third, targeted initiatives have been implemented to improve human rights protection for disadvantaged groups. In the process of advancing human rights protection, China has continuously deepened institutional innovation and introduced a series of effective measures — including targeted poverty alleviation, rural revitalization, social assistance, employment stabilization, and livelihood protection — to better safeguard the people's economic and social rights. Fourth, China has formulated and implemented the National Human Rights Action Plans. Since 2009, China has successively issued four phases of the National Human Rights Action Plans to promote the development of the human rights cause in a goal-oriented manner, making it one of the few countries in the world to have formulated four such plans. The National Human Rights Action Plans align human rights protection with the overall planning of national economic and social development, striving to continuously enhance the level of human rights protection on the basis of sound and sustained economic and social development.

The form of institutional human rights civilization generated by Chinese modernization constitutes a new institutional system for human rights protection, in which the fundamental rights of all the people are continuously and effectively safeguarded. Its most distinctive feature and advantage lies in its capacity to create favorable foundational conditions for protecting the fundamental rights of the vast majority of the population, thereby enabling every individual as well as society as a whole to enjoy more fully realized human rights. This new institutional system represents an active model of human rights protection, in which the state fully assumes its responsibilities as the primary duty-bearer, fundamentally differing from the passive models of human rights protection characteristic of Western capitalist countries. While respecting the basic rights and freedoms of every individual, it places greater emphasis on state obligations — namely, the duties to respect, protect, and

fulfill human rights — and thus accords with the foundational principle affirmed by the United Nations that “States have the primary responsibility and duty to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.”²³

IV. Chinese Modernization and the Emergence of a Development-Oriented Human Rights Civilization

Development is an enduring theme of human society, a key to realizing the people’s well-being, and of decisive significance for the realization of human rights. Chinese modernization follows the general laws governing the development of human society and maintains that the production of material means of subsistence always takes priority: “the fundamental cause behind all historical events lies in the degree of material abundance, and the mode of material life determines the general process of social, political, and spiritual life.”²⁴ Chinese modernization holds that development is of fundamental importance. It strives to promote human rights through development as the primary driving force, to advance all human rights through the realization of the right to development, and, at the same time, approaches development in light of the people’s actual needs, seeking to enhance development capacity on the basis of improving the level of human rights protection. In this way, it gives rise to new characteristics of a development-oriented human rights civilization.

A development-oriented human rights civilization is grounded in the foundational Marxist proposition that human rights are historical. In the view of classical Marxist writers, “human rights are not innate, but are historically produced.”²⁵ Marxism underscores that human rights are historical, emphasizing that they are not natural or inborn, as Enlightenment thinkers maintained, but rather the outcome of human historical activity. As Marx observed, “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby.”²⁶ In discussing China’s path of human rights development, General Secretary Xi Jinping has observed: “Human rights are concrete, rooted in history, and based on current realities. We cannot mouth empty words on human rights regardless of the social and political conditions and the historical and cultural traditions of a country.”²⁷ Chinese modernization holds that the development of the human rights cause must proceed from a country’s actual conditions and the needs of its people, and that each country is entitled to choose its own approach to promoting human rights.

²³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Human Rights Instruments*, vol. 1, part 2, 2002, page 455.

²⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 591.

²⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Complete Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1972), 146.

²⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 3 (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1995), 305.

²⁷ Xi Jinping, “Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights,” *Qiushi* 12 (2022).

That human rights are historical means, first, that the concept of human rights is the product of specific historical conditions, such that different historical periods give rise to different conceptions and claims of human rights; and second, that the practice of human rights develops continuously over time, with its scope varying across historical periods. To understand human rights as historical is to adopt a scientific historical view of human rights — one that reveals the basic law of human rights development: “there is no best level of human rights protection, only an ever-improving one.”²⁸ That human rights are historical also explains both why human rights exhibit different developmental characteristics across stages of human history and across countries, and why the progression from insufficient protection to relatively sufficient protection and then to more fully realized protection constitutes a long-term historical process.

A development-oriented human rights civilization constitutes the unity of development and human rights. How to understand the relationship between development and human rights is a fundamental question in human rights theory. Chinese modernization neither reduces human rights to development nor reduces development to human rights. Rather, it understands human rights in light of development and development from a human rights perspective, thereby achieving their unity. On the one hand, Chinese modernization approaches human rights in light of development and seeks to promote human rights through development. In the early period of reform and opening up, China established the guiding principle of focusing on economic development, placing development as the top priority and taking the improvement of the people’s living standards as a key entry point. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, in response to new circumstances, new development patterns, and new tasks, General Secretary Xi Jinping has advanced the new development philosophy and emphasized high-quality development as the driving force of modernization, noting that “development holds the key to resolving all problems”²⁹ and that “only through development can we safeguard the basic rights of the people and meet the ardent hopes of people for a better future.”³⁰ Chinese modernization thus promotes human rights through development, focusing on addressing the most practical problems that are of the greatest and most direct concern to the people, so as to continuously raise the level of protection of their fundamental rights. On the other hand, Chinese modernization proceeds from the people’s human rights needs and approaches development from a human rights perspective, striving to enhance the people’s sense of gain, happiness, and security. In the course of Chinese modernization, in addressing first the contradiction between the people’s growing material and cultural needs and backward social production, and later the contradiction between the people’s aspiration for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development, the Party and the government have formulated modernization strategies, development plans, policies, and measures

²⁸ Xi Jinping, “Congratulatory Letter to the 2015 Beijing Forum on Human Rights,” *People’s Daily*, September 16, 2015, 1.

²⁹ Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 511-512.

³⁰ Xi Jinping, “Towards a Mutually Beneficial Partnership for Sustainable Development — Speech at the UN Sustainable Development Summit,” *People’s Daily*, September 27, 2015, 2.

on the basis of improving the protection of the people's fundamental rights. From a human rights perspective, the underlying rationale for addressing these "two principal contradictions" at different stages of development lies in the respect for, protection of, and advancement of human rights, reflecting an approach that understands development through human rights. The practice of Chinese modernization demonstrates that development and human rights are unified, mutually dependent, and mutually reinforcing: development is the fundamental driving force for the realization of human rights, while human rights constitute the primary value objective of development. As some studies have noted, "human development is essential to the realization of human rights, and human rights are equally essential to the full development of human beings."³¹

A development-oriented human rights civilization has forged a new "development-oriented" pathway to human rights. First, this pathway is embodied in the unity between development and the right to subsistence. Development constitutes the foundation and precondition for subsistence; without development, subsistence cannot be sustained, nor can it be improved. Without the guarantees for human dignity and subsistence that development provides, a higher level of human rights protection would be difficult to achieve. A development-oriented human rights civilization thus establishes the intrinsic unity between development and subsistence. Second, this pathway is expressed in the unity between development and the right to development. Development and human rights are not only externally related but also internally integrated; they co-evolve into a distinct right — the right to development. Development is the source of human rights: without it, the right to development cannot be attained; only through development can this right be realized, and only in this way can the overall level of human rights protection be enhanced. Third, this pathway is further reflected in the inseparable relationship between the right to development and all other human rights. In terms of its content, the right to development is a comprehensive human right that is integrated with economic, social, cultural, political, and sustainable development. Without its realization, no other human right can be more fully advanced. As the *United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development* states, "The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized."³² Recognizing the importance of the right to development within the broader spectrum of human rights, the Declaration further affirms that "States have the right and the duty to formulate appropriate national development policies that aim at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair

³¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2000: Human Rights and Human Development* (Beijing: China Financial and Economic Publishing House, 2001), 2.

³² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Human Rights Instruments*, vol. 1, part 1, 2002, page 432.

distribution of the benefits resulting therefrom.”³³ The “development-oriented” pathway to human rights forged by Chinese modernization fully accords with the fundamental spirit of the *United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development*.

By safeguarding subsistence through development, enhancing the level of protection for the right to development through development, and promoting the comprehensive advancement of all human rights through the realization of the right to development, Chinese modernization has generated the basic logic underpinning human rights development and protection — one that is driven by development and that protects and promotes human rights in the course of development. China upholds the protection and promotion of human rights through development, emphasizing the interactive relationship between development and human rights. It both follows the general laws governing the development of human society and highlights the universal principles of human rights protection. In doing so, it transcends the binary opposition characteristic of traditional Western approaches to the relationship between human rights and development — approaches that reduce human rights to an abstract discourse, neglect the role of development in advancing human rights, and even deny the existence of the right to development. China has demonstrated, through its own successful development practice, the role of development in promoting human rights and the human rights value of the right to development. According to the *Human Development Report* published by the United Nations Development Programme, China’s Human Development Index (HDI) — which comprises three basic indicators, namely life expectancy, education level, and standard of life — rose from 0.491 in 1990 to 0.797 in 2024,³⁴ recording a steady increase over many years. This trajectory represents two historic leaps: from the low human development category to the medium category, and then from the medium to the high category. China is now moving toward the very high human development category (above 0.800). (see Figure 1³⁵)

³³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Human Rights Instruments*, vol. 1, part 1, 2002, page 433.

³⁴ China | Data Futures Exchange-UNDP, accessed January 10, 2026, <https://data.undp.org/countries-and-territories/CHN>.

³⁵ China | Data Futures Exchange-UNDP, accessed January 10, 2026, <https://data.undp.org/countries-and-territories/CHN>.

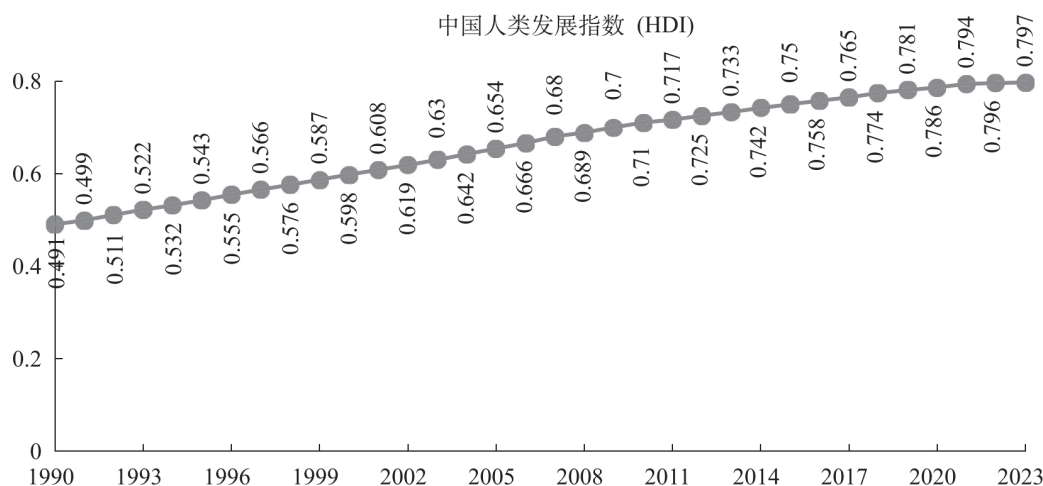


Figure 1 China's Human Development Index (HDI)

V. Chinese Modernization Gives Rise to a Human Rights Civilization with Shared Benefits

“Human rights are not special privileges bestowed on some people or a small minority but universal rights to be enjoyed by all the people.”³⁶ The greatness of the concept of human rights, and its status as a universal aspiration of human society, derives to a large extent from its inclusive character. Shared benefits are the fundamental spirit of human rights civilization, for only when benefits are universally shared can all people partake in the achievements of human rights development, and only then can fairness and justice in rights protection be truly realized. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that “we take the people’s aspiration for a better life as our goal, adhere to a people-centered development philosophy, make sustained efforts to safeguard and improve people’s livelihoods, focus on resolving the most pressing difficulties of high concern to the people, and ensure that the fruits of Chinese modernization are shared by all people more equitably and extensively.”³⁷ Chinese modernization is the modernization of common prosperity for all. It takes the realization of inclusive human rights as its value objective, striving to ensure that the fruits of development are shared equitably by all members of society, leaving no one behind.

A human rights civilization with shared benefits regards poverty alleviation as a key measure for respecting and protecting human rights. Poverty is the gravest threat to survival and the greatest obstacle to the realization of human rights. In an important sense, eliminating poverty constitutes the most fundamental guarantee of the right to subsistence, as well as the first and most critical step in realizing human rights — the most direct manifestation of the inclusive nature of human rights. In advancing and

³⁶ Xi Jinping, “Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights,” *Qiushi* 12 (2022).

³⁷ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 61.

expanding modernization, the largest, most intensive, and longest-running campaign China has undertaken has been the fight against poverty, which also constitutes a landmark project in human rights protection. From 1978 to the end of 2020, 770 million rural residents in China were lifted out of poverty. According to the World Bank's international poverty line, China's poverty reduction accounted for more than 70 percent of the global total over the same period.³⁸ On July 1, 2021, in his address at the ceremony marking the centenary of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping solemnly declared that "through the continued efforts of the whole Party and the entire nation, we have realized the first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. This means that we have brought about a historic resolution to the problem of absolute poverty in China."³⁹ China's complete elimination of absolute poverty is not only a landmark event in the history of the Chinese nation, but also a major event in the history of global poverty reduction and human development, making a significant contribution to the global cause of poverty alleviation. By historically resolving the problem of absolute poverty, China fulfilled the poverty reduction target of the United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* 10 years ahead of schedule. Following this victory, the state has prioritized consolidating and expanding the achievements of poverty alleviation and preventing a return to poverty in certain regions. At the same time, through the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy and related measures, China continues to improve agricultural and rural development in a comprehensive manner, thereby strengthening the protection of farmers' rights to subsistence and development.

A human rights civilization with shared benefits progressively establishes social security and social assistance systems covering the entire population. Building a widely covering social security and social assistance system is a foundational institutional task in advancing universally beneficial human rights, and provides a clear demonstration of the institutional advantages of the socialist system in ensuring that human rights are enjoyed by all. The state has continuously improved its multi-tiered social security system, making the "safety net" for the people's lives increasingly robust and resilient. Efforts have been accelerated to develop a multi-tiered system that covers the entire population, coordinates urban and rural areas, and is fair, unified, secure, well-regulated, and sustainable. In practice, the state has strengthened its last-resort protection function, improved unemployment, medical, and pension insurance systems, expanded coverage, and enhanced both standards and targeting precision. By establishing a dynamic protection mechanism that integrates prevention and assistance, the state effectively mitigates the risks faced by citizens in situations such as unemployment, illness, and old age, thereby reducing uncertainties that may hinder individual development. After years of sustained effort, China has

³⁸ State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *A Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects: Another Milestone Achieved in China's Human Rights Cause* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2021), 10-11.

³⁹ Xi Jinping, "Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China," *People's Daily*, July 2, 2021, 1.

established the world’s largest social security system in terms of population coverage. It primarily comprises the urban employee pension insurance system, maternity insurance system, work-related injury insurance system, urban employee basic medical insurance system, the new rural cooperative medical system, and the basic pension system for urban and rural residents. By the end of 2024, basic pension insurance covered 1.07 billion people and basic medical insurance covered 1.33 billion people, while participants in unemployment and work-related injury insurance reached 216 million and 244 million, respectively.⁴⁰ Notably, 328 million people receive monthly pension payments, effectively mitigating the risk of “elderly poverty” commonly observed in some countries.⁴¹ In the field of social assistance, China has established a comprehensive system centered on the minimum living standard guarantee, assistance and support for persons in extreme difficulty, disaster relief, and assistance in the areas of medical care, education, housing, and employment, supplemented by the participation of social actors, ensuring that all those in need are fully covered (see Figure 2⁴²). By the end of 2024, 6.25 million people received urban minimum living standard guarantees, 33.62 million received rural minimum living standard guarantees, and 4.39 million rural residents in extreme difficulty received assistance and support.⁴³

Number of participants in the three social insurance programs over the past five years

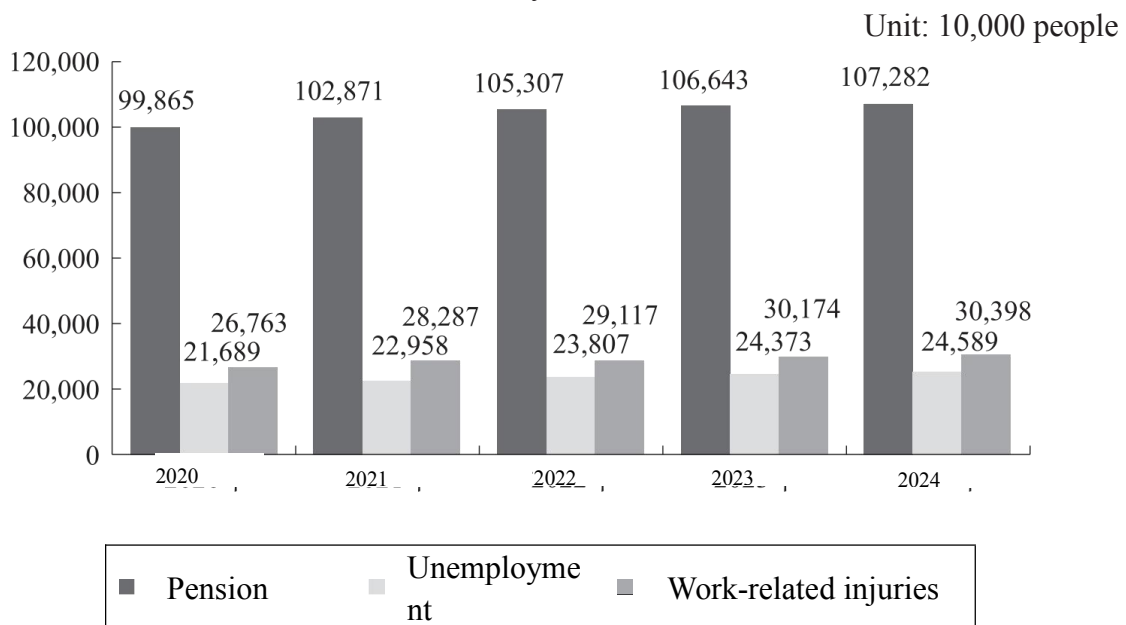


Figure 2

⁴⁰ National Bureau of Statistics of China, “Statistical Communiqué on the 2024 National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China,” *People’s Daily*, March 1, 2025, 5 and 7.

⁴¹ Zhong Caiwen, “China as a Model of Global Inclusive Development,” *People’s Daily*, October 5, 2025, 2.

⁴² Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, *Statistical Communiqué on the Development of Human Resources and Social Security in 2024*, 3.

⁴³ National Bureau of Statistics of China, “Statistical Communiqué on the 2024 National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China,” *People’s Daily*, March 1, 2025, 5 and 7.

A human rights civilization with shared benefits focuses on safeguarding and improving people's livelihoods across multiple dimensions. First, it safeguards the people's right to employment. Employment is the cornerstone of people's livelihoods and the key to ensuring the rights to subsistence and development. The state pursues a proactive employment policy aimed at achieving full, decent, and harmonious employment, thereby maintaining overall stability in the employment landscape. These proactive policies have led to sustained growth in per capita disposable income and rising consumption levels nationwide. Second, it safeguards the people's right to an adequate standard of living. With regard to the right to food, China feeds more than 17 percent of the world's population using about 6.6 percent of global freshwater resources and 9 percent of arable land, not only fundamentally eliminating hunger but also steadily improving nutritional standards. Regarding the right to water, the state has continuously advanced urban and rural water supply infrastructure, steadily improving water supply security. During the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), China cumulatively consolidated and improved water supply security for 270 million rural residents and resolved drinking water safety issues for 17.1 million people living in poverty, fundamentally transforming the long-standing difficulties faced by rural communities in accessing water.⁴⁴ With respect to the right to housing, the state has comprehensively advanced urban housing system reform, steadily promoting the commercialization and socialization of housing. The housing security system has been continuously improved, its capacity enhanced, and the basic housing conditions of both urban and rural residents significantly improved. Third, it safeguards the people's right to health. The state has comprehensively advanced the Healthy China initiative, formulated and improved relevant laws and policies, and established a relatively well-developed public health service system. Universal health coverage has continued to expand, while the accessibility, equity, and affordability of basic healthcare services have steadily improved. The system for preventing major infectious diseases has been continuously strengthened, with efforts to provide comprehensive, life-cycle health services. Health indicators have steadily improved, overall population health levels have continued to rise, and average life expectancy reached 79 years in 2024, ranking fourth among 53 upper-middle- and high-income countries.⁴⁵ Fourth, it safeguards the people's rights to education and culture. Focusing on compulsory education and taking educational equity as a fundamental objective, the state has enacted laws, regulations, and policy programs to safeguard the right to education, and implemented corresponding measures to continuously improve educational attainment. After years of sustained effort, China has achieved remarkable progress in preschool, compulsory, higher, and vocational education, and has established the world's largest higher education system. By the end of 2024, the retention rate for nine-year compulsory education and the gross enrollment rate for senior secondary education reached 95.9 percent and 92 percent, respectively, both

⁴⁴ Party Leadership Group of the Ministry of Water Resources, "Providing Water Conservancy Support for Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects," *Qiushi* 12 (2021).

⁴⁵ Ministry of Civil Affairs and Office of the National Working Commission on Aging, *National Report on the Development of the Aging Undertaking 2024*, 1.

increasing by 0.2 percentage points compared with the previous year.⁴⁶ China has made significant progress in developing public cultural service infrastructure. The supply of cultural products has been substantially enriched, while the standardization and equalization of basic public cultural services have advanced steadily. Digital cultural services have been continuously upgraded, and cultural and sports sectors have flourished. Fifth, it safeguards the rights of special groups. Special groups — also considered vulnerable groups — include ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The extent to which their rights are protected is an important indicator of a country’s level of human rights civilization. The state has established firm institutional and policy safeguards for protecting the rights of these groups through legislation, adjudication, and policy measures. The state has also formulated and implemented development programs and action plans to make concrete arrangements for advancing the protection of the rights of special and vulnerable groups (see Figure 3⁴⁷). Taking the protection of women’s rights and interests as an example, the state actively implements the basic national policy of gender equality, incorporates women’s development into all aspects of Chinese modernization, and has established a comprehensive legal framework — comprising more than 100 laws and regulations — to safeguard women’s rights and interests. Women’s living and development conditions have continued to improve, with globally leading achievements in poverty alleviation, science education, and health, and women’s average life expectancy has exceeded 80 years.

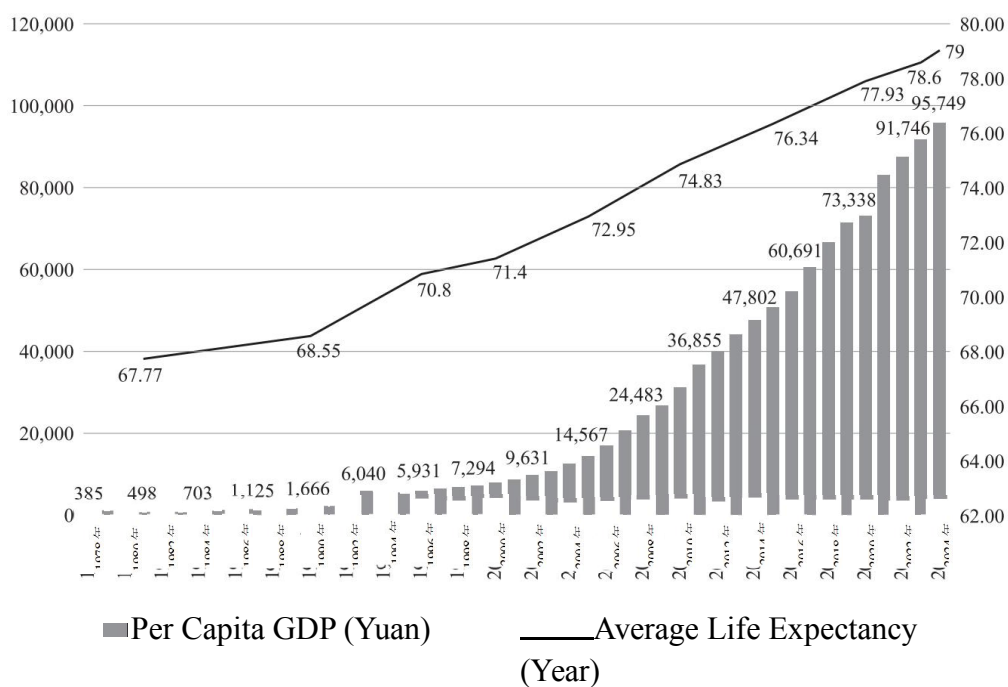


Figure 3 Trends in China’s Per Capita GDP and Average Life Expectancy, 1978-2024

⁴⁶ National Bureau of Statistics of China, “Statistical Communiqué on the 2024 National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China,” *People’s Daily*, March 1, 2025, 5 and 7.

⁴⁷ The annual data from the National Bureau of Statistics, *China Statistical Yearbook 2024*, statistical bulletins on the development of China’s health sector over the years, and the official website of the National Health Commission.

A human rights civilization with shared benefits strives to promote harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. Such a civilization places particular emphasis on the subsistence and development of every individual and all people. In the contemporary era, human rights challenges arising from climate change and environmental pollution have become more pronounced than ever before. The United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly adopted landmark resolutions on October 8, 2021, and July 30, 2022, respectively, declaring that “the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a universal human right.”⁴⁸ A new shift is taking place in humanity’s understanding of the relationship between environmental protection, climate change, sustainable development, and human rights protection. As the relationship between climate change, environmental pollution, and human rights protection has extended beyond earlier conceptions and definitions of human rights, the notion of human rights has become more closely linked to the existence and development of individuals, collectives, and communities. The “Two Mountains” concept proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping has provided guiding principles and strategic direction for achieving harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature in Chinese modernization. Chinese modernization is characterized by harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, with particular emphasis on balancing development quality, climate change response, and environmental protection. It actively explores the relationship between modernization and green development, adhering to a modernization pathway driven by green development. To advance green development, China has set clear targets for carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, aiming to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. China’s green development is comprehensive and concrete, closely linked to production, daily life, and broader human activities. For example, the state has adopted sustainable consumption and production patterns, continuously promoted energy conservation and efficiency improvement, and significantly enhanced the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources; it has advanced clean, low-carbon, and efficient energy utilization, promoted the orderly development of a national carbon emissions trading market, and accelerated the establishment of a greenhouse gas statistics and accounting system; it has protected, restored, and promoted the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managed forests, combated desertification, halted and reversed land degradation, and curbed biodiversity loss; it has promoted the development of a water-conserving society, enhanced waste and wastewater treatment capacity, and improved water and environmental sanitation; it has improved urban functions, significantly enhanced living environments, and expanded green and accessible public spaces across society, among other measures. China has become the country with the fastest improvement in air quality globally, with the average PM2.5 concentration in key cities in 2024 declining by about 60 percent compared with 2013; it has also led the world in both the speed and scale of afforestation, contributing one

⁴⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council, *The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment*, Resolution 48/13 (2021), accessed January 10, 2026, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/48/13>].

quarter of the global increase in green coverage; and it has built the world's largest and fastest-growing renewable energy system, as well as the world's largest and most complete new energy industrial chain.⁴⁹

Chinese modernization takes the interests of all the people as its fundamental basis and regards safeguarding the subsistence and development of all the people as the foremost human rights priority, fully embodying the spirit of a human rights civilization with shared benefits. Such a civilization highlights the state's primary responsibility and leading role in respecting and protecting human rights, with the aim of ensuring that the fruits of development benefit all the people more extensively and equitably. A human rights civilization with shared benefits represents a concentrated manifestation of the institutional strengths of socialism with Chinese characteristics and a successful application of the theory of "positive human rights." The spirit of an inclusive human rights civilization upheld by Chinese modernization is, in substance, consistent with the principles advocated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development*, which states that "States should undertake, at the national level, all necessary measures for the realization of the right to development and shall ensure, inter alia, equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income."⁵⁰

VI. Chinese Modernization Gives Rise to an Inclusive Human Rights

Civilization

As a hallmark of human civilizational progress, human rights are distinguished by their inclusiveness. Inclusiveness embodies confidence, resolve, and strength, as well as rationality, humility, and openness. Chinese modernization follows a path of peaceful development, approaching the histories and cultures of all countries with an open and inclusive spirit, respecting the diversity of civilizations, and advocating each country's right to independently choose its own path of development. Chinese modernization upholds inclusiveness and mutual learning among civilizations: it not only actively draws on the outstanding achievements of global human rights civilization to advance its own human rights cause, but also contributes new concepts and approaches to human rights through its own innovative practices, striving to foster a new stage in the development of human rights civilization defined by inclusiveness.

An inclusive human rights civilization upholds the unity of the universality and diversity of human rights. Human rights are universal and belong to all humanity. Article 2 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* explicitly states that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political

⁴⁹ "Accelerating the Modernization of Harmonious Coexistence Between Humanity and Nature," *People's Daily*, August 14, 2025, 1.

⁵⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Human Rights Instruments*, vol. 1, part 1, 2002, page 434.

or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”⁵¹ In today’s world, human rights have become a universally pursued component of good governance, a key criterion for assessing civilized nations and societies, and an indispensable standard for building modern states. For many years, China has regarded human rights as a “great concept” and a universal principle. As early as 1991, the Chinese government clearly stated: “The full enjoyment of human rights has long been an ideal pursued by humanity. Since the term ‘human rights’ was first advanced, peoples of all countries have made unremitting efforts over centuries and achieved significant progress in the pursuit of human rights.”⁵² China has incorporated “respect for and protection of human rights” into both the *Constitution* of the Communist Party of China and the *Constitution* of the state, and has made it an important task in governance, thereby demonstrating its commitment to the universality of human rights. At the same time, human civilization is diverse. The diversity of civilizations gives rise to the diversity of human rights, which take different forms and patterns across distinct contexts. “Humanity is imagined as a meta-community, defined by shared physical and mental capacities and limitations, common responsibilities and needs, and unified by universal values. Yet within particular civilizations, there exist distinct standards of truth, virtue, and proper conduct... often giving rise to a duality between ‘us’ and ‘them’.”⁵³ The historical trajectory of human rights civilization fully demonstrates that human rights are not the exclusive preserve of any single civilization or system, but rather the collective achievement of civilizations shaped by diverse economic, social, and cultural contexts over a long period; diversity is a fundamental dimension of the emergence and development of human rights. The diversity of human rights entails differences and particularities across different civilizational forms. An inclusive human rights civilization emphasizes that “the assessment of whether a country upholds human rights should not be based on the standards of other countries, still less should double standards be applied or human rights be used as a political tool to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations.”⁵⁴ Chinese modernization embraces the inclusiveness of human rights civilization, upholding the universality of human rights while, on the basis of its national conditions and the needs of its people, creating a new form of human rights civilization of its own.

An inclusive human rights civilization actively draws on the outstanding achievements of global human rights civilization. “Diversity spurs interaction among civilizations, which in turn promotes mutual learning and their further development.”⁵⁵ The progress of human society benefits from inclusiveness and

⁵¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Human Rights Instruments*, vol. 1, part 1, 2002, 2.

⁵² State Council Information Office, *Human Rights in China* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1991), 1.

⁵³ Siep Stuurman, *The Invention of Humanity: Equality and Cultural Difference in World History*, translated by Xu Shuangru (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2022), 4.

⁵⁴ Xi Jinping, “Steadfastly Following the Chinese Path to Promote Further Progress in Human Rights,” *Qiushi* 12 (2022).

⁵⁵ Xi Jinping, *On the Party’s Publicity and Ideological Work* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2020), 400.

mutual learning among civilizations. Historical experience shows that from the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, to the entry into force of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and to the adoption of the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, these most representative international human rights instruments embody the collective wisdom of diverse civilizations in their understanding and interpretation of human rights. Civilizational inclusiveness requires a broad-minded openness that embraces diversity, as well as a spirit of harmony in diversity and mutual flourishing. As General Secretary Xi Jinping has noted, “All civilizations are crystallizations of mankind’s hard work and wisdom. Every civilization is unique. Copying other civilizations mechanically or blindly is like cutting one’s toes just to fit his shoes, which is not only impossible but also highly detrimental. All achievements of civilizations deserve our respect and must be treasured.”⁵⁶ Chinese modernization upholds the principle of civilizational inclusiveness and actively draws on outstanding achievements of global human rights civilization with universal significance, including human rights ideas, concepts, and standards — such as general theories of civil and political rights, theories concerning economic, social, and cultural rights, and concepts relating to the rights to subsistence, development, peace, a clean and healthy environment, and sustainable development — which are continuously enriched and developed through the practice of Chinese modernization. Since the launch of reform and opening-up, China has ratified or acceded to 29 international human rights treaties, including six core United Nations human rights conventions. It has faithfully fulfilled its obligations under these treaties and fully leveraged the role of international human rights instruments in promoting and protecting human rights domestically. China has also actively aligned its domestic laws and policies with its treaty obligations, submitted periodic reports in a timely manner, and accepted review by the relevant treaty bodies.

An inclusive human rights civilization promotes the common values of all humanity and advances the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. With regard to the global development of human rights, an inclusive human rights civilization has established an integrated framework unifying value foundations, developmental vision, and practical pathways. First, at the level of value foundations, the common values of humanity proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping — peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom — constitute the foundational values of an inclusive human rights civilization. These common values of humanity embody the fundamental principles followed by peoples of different civilizations and countries in their pursuit of a better life, representing a highly distilled expression of humanity’s shared values under new historical conditions. Building upon the value achievements of traditional human rights civilization while incorporating new features of social development, the concept of the common values of humanity brings the two major notions of peace and development into the framework, transcends the limitations of Western-centric human rights narratives, and lays the foundation for a

⁵⁶ Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, ed., *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Chinese Modernization*, 275.

more inclusive human rights discourse. Second, at the level of developmental vision, the major concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping, proceeds from the fundamental interests of the peoples of all countries. It views humanity as an integral whole and the Earth as a shared home, advocating the building of a better world characterized by lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, and a clean and beautiful environment — thus presenting a vision oriented toward the well-being of all humanity. This concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind does not approach the development of human society from the perspective of any single ideology or social system; rather, it proceeds from the notion of a shared human destiny, respects the diversity of human civilizations, and seeks common ground for all humanity on the basis of respecting differences, thereby carrying significant implications for advancing the fuller realization of human rights for all. Finally, at the level of practical pathways, the Belt and Road Initiative, together with the four major initiatives — the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative, and Global Governance Initiative — as well as propositions such as “promoting human rights by ensuring security,” “promoting human rights through development,” and “advancing human rights through cooperation,” provide Chinese solutions for addressing global challenges, including imbalanced and inadequate human rights development, and for promoting global human rights governance in a more fair, just, equitable, and inclusive direction. From the perspective of human rights, the four initiatives advance a development philosophy of innovation, coordination, green development, openness, and shared benefits; a security vision characterized by common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security; a civilizational outlook of equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness; and a governance approach emphasizing sovereign equality, the international rule of law, multilateralism, a people-centered orientation, and action-oriented implementation. All these align closely with human rights values, constituting a concentrated expression of China’s vision and propositions for advancing global human rights governance and playing an important guiding role in promoting the development of the global human rights cause.

An inclusive human rights civilization upholds solidarity and cooperation and actively participates in global human rights governance. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has engaged more actively in United Nations human rights affairs and has assumed an increasingly prominent role. Since the establishment of the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2006, China has been elected as a member of the Council on six occasions, making it one of the countries most frequently elected. This reflects the high level of recognition by the international community of China’s progress in human rights development and the positive role it plays in global human rights governance. China has actively promoted reform of the UN human rights system, with a view to making international human rights mechanisms more fair, objective, and transparent, and has consistently advocated addressing human rights issues through constructive dialogue and cooperation. China has also carried out fruitful cooperation with the Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. As a member of the Human Rights Council, China has conscientiously fulfilled its responsibilities, actively participated in the Council's sessions and related work, and actively participated in the Universal Periodic Review. In 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023, and 2025, China submitted five resolutions to the United Nations Human Rights Council entitled "The Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of All Human Rights." In 2018, 2020, and 2021, China also initiated three resolutions entitled "Promoting Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights," and in 2021 further proposed a resolution entitled "Negative Impact of the Legacies of Colonialism on the Enjoyment of Human Rights." These resolutions received unanimous support from the Global South members of the Human Rights Council and were all adopted by majority vote.

On October 12, 2023, China, together with Bolivia, Egypt, South Africa, and other countries, submitted a resolution entitled "Promoting and Protecting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Within the Context of Addressing Inequalities." More than 80 countries joined as co-sponsors, and the resolution was adopted by consensus. On October 6, 2025, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted by consensus the resolution "Promoting and Protecting Economic and Social Rights Within the Context of Addressing Inequalities," submitted by China on behalf of nearly 70 countries, including Bolivia, Egypt, Pakistan, and South Africa. The series of resolutions advanced and submitted by China at the Human Rights Council fully articulate China's human rights propositions. They have received broad support from developing countries and have also been recognized and commended by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, reflecting the growing influence of China's human rights discourse within the United Nations system.

The inclusive human rights civilization shaped by Chinese modernization upholds the principle of inclusiveness and mutual learning among civilizations and integrates the universality and diversity of human rights. It draws on the outstanding achievements of global human rights civilization to advance human rights in China, while also promoting the development of the global human rights cause through its own progress, thereby fostering a pattern of positive interaction between China and the rest of the world in the field of human rights — grounded in inclusiveness and mutual learning, and realized through exchange and cooperation. An inclusive human rights civilization takes the peoples of all countries as the subjects of human rights and regards the safeguarding of their common interests as its value orientation. It transcends the narrow perception held by certain Western countries that assess human civilization through a single civilizational lens and define global human rights values within a single normative framework. It embodies the broad-mindedness and expansive vision of the new form of human civilization created by Chinese modernization, and offers important insights for guiding the development of human rights in the present era and in the future world.

VII. Conclusion

The “five-in-one” new form of human rights civilization — comprising people-centeredness, institutional guarantee, development orientation, shared benefits, and inclusiveness — has emerged in the course of advancing and expanding Chinese modernization. Taking the people as its subject, the system as its guarantee, development as its driving force, shared benefit as its spirit, and inclusiveness as its defining quality, this new form has enriched both the connotation and extension of global human rights civilization and represents an innovative development in its historical evolution. The most significant achievement of this innovative form of human rights civilization is that China has forged a path of human rights development that aligns with the trends of the times and suits its national conditions, with its human rights cause continuously attaining historic progress.

Evidence shows that the new form of human rights civilization shaped by Chinese modernization most fully embodies the essential nature of human rights civilization. A people-centered human rights civilization upholds a people-first approach, respects the people’s principal status, prioritizes the rights to subsistence and development as the primary basic human rights of the people, takes the people’s happy life as the greatest human right, and aims to promote the free and comprehensive development of human beings. This constitutes the core value underpinning the development of China’s human rights cause. An institutional human rights civilization upholds the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system, ensures the people’s status as the masters of the country, strengthens the rule-of-law protection of human rights, and improves the social security system for human rights, fully reflecting both the guiding role of the ruling party and the leading role of the state. A development-oriented human rights civilization advances the protection and promotion of human rights through development. It approaches human rights through the lens of development and development through the lens of human rights, thereby forming a mutually reinforcing dynamic between development and human rights and opening up a new development-oriented pathway for human rights. A human rights civilization with shared benefits upholds equal participation and equal development, striving to ensure that all people share in the achievements of modernization and continuously enhancing the people’s sense of gain, happiness, and security. An inclusive human rights civilization maintains the unity of universality and diversity of civilizations, accurately situates the relationship between China’s human rights and global human rights. It both draws upon the outstanding achievements of global human rights civilization for its own development and contributes to the advancement of the global human rights cause, thereby fostering a pattern of positive interaction and cooperation between China and the rest of the world.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that “the great social transformations that contemporary China has undergone are not a natural continuation of our country’s historical and cultural traditions, not a mechanical application of the templates designed by authors of Marxist classics, nor a copy of the socialist practice in other countries or foreign models of modernization — no ready-made textbook

exists for it.”⁵⁷ The new form of human rights civilization generated by Chinese modernization is an entirely new and systematic integration of human rights concepts, values, institutions, policies, and practices in the history of human civilization. This new form of human rights civilization is distinctly different from the Western liberal human rights model; it not only enriches the contemporary dimensions of Chinese civilization but also contributes to the diversity of global human rights civilization. This new form of human rights civilization presents a renewed vision of human rights civilization and offers the world an alternative model of human rights civilization for humanity.

(Translated by *CHEN Feng*)

⁵⁷ Xi Jinping, *On the Party's Publicity and Ideological Work* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2020), 232.