

China: Development Is an Inalienable Right

by William Jones

Dec. 3—On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, China's State Council Information Office on Dec. 1 issued a white paper on the right to development,¹ detailing the country's philosophy, practice, and contribution with respect to this principle.

While the world has already been astonished by China's success in raising 700 million people out of poverty, the white paper presents extraordinary details of its development over the last three decades, and firmly asserts that this is not something that can be peculiar to China, but must become a paradigm for the entire world.

The white paper begins with a clear statement: "Development is a universal human theme, providing for people's basic needs and giving them hope of a better life. The right to development is an inalienable human right, symbolizing dignity and honor. Only through development can we address global challenges; only through development can we protect basic civil rights of the people; only through development can we promote the progress of human society."

The report refers to the oft-forgotten history of China before the "hundred years of humiliation" when



wikipedia/Alex Needham

Complex traffic exchange in Puxi, the historic center of Shanghai.

China lived under the colonialist boot. "In ancient times, China was for long the world leader in agriculture, and contributed to human progress with extraordinary development achievements," the report states. "Studies reveal that until the mid-19th century, China's GDP and per capita GDP were the world's highest. Before the 16th century, China contributed 173 of the world's top 300 innovations and discoveries."

And then came the age when the imperial powers ran roughshod over China. "Repeated invasions by foreign powers, particularly from the West, from 1840 to 1949, and China's corrupt ruling class and backward social system reduced China to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. There was constant warfare, an unstable society, economic depression, no security of livelihood, and extreme poverty."

1. "The Right to Development: China's Philosophy, Practice and Contribution," issued by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, December 1, 2016. The full text: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-12/01/c_135873721.htm

Rising Living Standards

With the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, China started on the road to assuming its rightful place as a major power on the world stage. During the current period of "reform and opening up," China has lifted 700 million people out of poverty, a figure that accounts for more than 70% of the global reduction in poverty. The number of people still living in poverty in China represents 5.7% of the total population, making China the first nation to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals in poverty reduction. In March 2016, China announced that it intends to eliminate poverty entirely among the rural poor by 2020.

The report notes that China feeds more than 20% of the world's population with less than 10% of the world's arable land. It has established the largest social security system in the world, and average life expectancy had grown from 35 years of age in 1949 to 76.3 years in 2015. China has instituted a unified, basic old-age insurance system for urban and rural residents throughout the country. By the end of 2015, China had established a medical insurance system covering nearly all its citizens. The basic medical insurance for urban workers and residents, and the new rural cooperative medical insurance, cover 1.3 billion people, keeping the percentage of those insured above 95%.

Living standards have significantly improved. From 1978 to 2015, the annual gross domestic product (GDP) increased from 368 billion RMB² to 68,550 billion RMB, and per capita GDP increased from \$200 in 1978 to \$8,000 in 2015. The Engel coefficient, the percentage of household income spent on food, in 1978 was 57% for urban households and 68% for rural households. In 2015 those figures were 30% and 33%, respectively.

From 2011 to 2015, more than 5.5 million unemployed urban people found jobs every year, while an annual average of almost 1.8 million people who had difficulty in securing jobs, found employment. While the downturn in the export market has had its discernible effect on employment, the Chinese government is now working to have many migrant workers go back to their home towns to set up local businesses. The expansion of the Internet to rural areas has increased the ability of rural households to reach out to more distant consumers.



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Rising Literacy and Culture

China has instituted a system of compulsory education. In 1949, 80% of the national population was illiterate, and the enrollment rate of school children was only 20%. In 2015, the net enrollment rate of primary school-age children was 99.8%; in nine-year compulsory education, 93%; in high school, 87%. The enrollment rate for higher education has reached a level approaching that of medium-developed countries.

In the area of culture more broadly, the Chinese government has sought to raise the intellectual level of the general population. By the end of 2015, China had 2,037 art troupes, 3,139 public libraries, 3,315 cultural centers, 2,981 museums, 40 provincial digital libraries, and 479 municipal and prefectural digital libraries.

In 2015, China printed more than 43 billion copies of newspapers, 2.9 billion copies of periodicals, and 8.7 billion copies of books. At the end of the 2015, radio coverage reached 98.2%, and television coverage 98.8% of the total population. (This television is not the mind-rot we see in the United States today.) In 2015, China produced 395 TV serials totaling 16,560 episodes, 134,000 minutes of television animation, 686 feature films, and 202 popular science films, documentaries, animation, and special films. China has launched a nationwide "All People Reading" campaign. A 2016 "Literary China" series of activities has benefitted more than 800 million participants, forming a congenial social atmosphere for reading.

2. The current exchange rate is 7 RMB to the dollar.

A great deal of effort has also been spent in promoting the many minority cultures in China. This includes preserving works of literature in the minority languages and publishing them for broader circulation. In 2015 China produced 69 million copies of 9,192 book titles, 196 million copies of newspapers, and 12.4 million copies of periodicals in ethnic minority languages. Nearly 200 radio stations nationwide broadcast in 25 ethnic minority languages and 37 ethnic minority dialects.

Unprecedented Outreach

The success of China's development has become a major part of the country's "going out" policy. The Belt and Road Initiative and collaborative programs and institutions have promoted the development of the neighboring countries. Over the past 60 years, China has provided approximately 400 billion RMB in aid to 166 countries and international organizations. It has trained more than 12 million personnel from developing countries and dispatched more than 600,000 people to aid development abroad.

In the coming five years, China will implement six "One Hundred Programs" targeting developing countries, namely, 100 poverty reduction programs, 100 for

agricultural cooperation, 100 for trade aid, 100 for environmental protection, 100 hospitals and clinics, and 100 schools and vocational training centers. Training opportunities (120,000) and scholarships (150,000) will be made available to developing countries in China, and 500,000 vocational technical personnel will be trained. China will also set up a South-South Cooperation and Development Academy.

The scope of this vast development program—what China has accomplished and what it now envisions—is unlike anything the world has ever seen. But U.S. politicians still look askance at China's achievements and eye with suspicion China's successful efforts to help other nations lift themselves up. While the United States has prided itself as being that "city on the hill" that assists other nations to develop, the most recent decades have seen little but death and devastation wreaked on impoverished nations by the militarily most powerful nation in the world. Now that a newly revived China is standing up to carry its own weight in healing the world's wounds, it behooves our nation's leaders to join in that effort—or at least to applaud China's efforts in doing so—instead of grouching in the corner like a frightened child, plotting devious ways to reassert American "hegemony."

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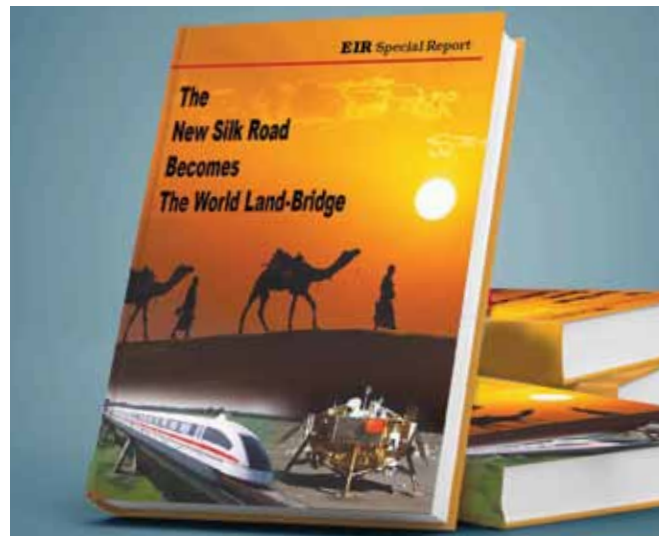
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