

AN APPRAISAL OF CHINA'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY WHITE PAPERS

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ABSTRACT: *This write-up is an appraisal of four White Papers issued by the China's State Council Information Office on the occasion of the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. It examines qualitatively the content and structure, then the nature and purpose of the four documents namely: i) "Equality, Participation and Sharing: 70 Years of Protecting the Rights and Interests of Persons with Disabilities in the PRC", ii) "Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China", iii) "Equality, Development and Sharing: Progress of Women's Cause in 70 Years Since New China's Founding", and iv) "China and the World in the New Era". It is hoped that this appraisal will not only draw more attention to the 70th anniversary White Papers but will also offer background insights into understanding China's stance on the various areas of public life covered in the papers and the country's development prospects under President Xi Jinping's guiding ideology of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.*

KEYWORDS: China's White Papers; 70th Anniversary White Papers; Xi Jinping; State Council Information Office of China; Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

October 1, 2019 marked the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. As the country's most important and high profile event of the year, and since 1999, every decade has been characterized by large scale commemorative activities including grand celebrations with mass rallies and military parades and, a highly awaited speech from the country's leader. Prominent among highlights of the 70th anniversary commemoration this year was the issuing between July and September 2019 of four white papers which are labeled here as 70th anniversary White Papers and which are going to be reviewed in this write-up. The White Papers include: i) "Equality, Participation and Sharing: 70 Years of Protecting the Rights and Interests of Persons with Disabilities in the PRC", ii) "Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China", iii) "Equality, Development and Sharing: Progress of Women's Cause in 70 Years Since New China's Founding", and iv) "China and the World in the New Era". A careful reading of the papers will draw more attention to these important policy documents and offer background insights into understanding China's stance on the various areas of public life covered in the papers, as well as development prospects under President Xi Jinping's guiding ideology of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

A survey of literature reveals that since its establishment, in 1991, as the chief information office of the Chinese government, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (SCIO) has published over a hundred White Papers covering several areas of China public life. However, very few significant analyses have so far been carried out on these publications. Arpi (2010) analyzed China's 2008 White Paper on national defense and drew the conclusion the paper was indicative about the Chinese government's seriousness about

modernizing its armed forces, despite the overall feeling that important issues had been kept under the wrap of secrecy. Arguing that China's defense White Papers – seven in all at the time – needed to be given more attention than they received, Zhang (2012) on his part critically and comprehensively examined the making of the White Papers, their assigned functions as well as their content and structure, contrasting them with their counterparts in western countries. He concluded that the White Papers were a window opener into China's evolving strategic outlook and military strategy and an important channel in shaping public opinion and generating public support for the military and the Party's defense policy internally. Recent analyses of China's defense White Papers include Mallick (2019) and Chaudhary (2019). Away from defense White Papers, which actually seem to have attracted more attention than other categories, Pisano (2018) presented China's official stance on human rights based on an overall in-depth analysis of about twelve White Papers issued between 1991 and 2018, two additional national action plans and three national reports, all dealing specifically with human rights and the Chinese progress at domestic level. His conclusions were that, while further improvements were still needed with regards to the human rights situation in China, one thing that had really changed was the Chinese attitude that moved from being 'defensive' to being 'offensive', specifically concerning human rights. This write-up, which comes at the heels of the above mentioned works, is another review of Chinese White Papers with the peculiarity that the White Papers considered here are commemorative White Papers marking the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. It is further different from previous analysis because it offers background insights into understanding China's stance not only on one, but on several areas of China's public life including the rights and interests of persons with disabilities, human rights, progress of women's cause, China and the world in the new era, as well as China's development prospects.

APPRAISAL OF CHINA'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY WHITE PAPERS

Equality, Participation and Sharing: 70 Years of Protecting the Rights and Interests of Persons with Disabilities in the PRC

China is home to eighty five million disabled people, more than any other countries in the world. In 70 years of the PRC, the government has worked towards improving the wellbeing and livelihood of those with disabilities. Initiatives have ranged from issuing relieve for recipients to forming a body that helps them engage in activities.

On July 25, 2019, China issued a White Paper on the country's efforts to protect rights and interests of persons with disabilities over the past seven decades. The White Paper, titled "Equality, Participation and Sharing: 70 Years of Protecting the Rights and Interests of Persons with Disabilities in the PRC", was released by the State Council Information Office. It is a thirty-two page document, in its English version, which introduces the development of the cause of persons with disabilities over the past seventy years and its progress in mechanisms for protecting the rights and interests of persons with disabilities, and progress in the field of rehabilitation, education, employment, life and social security, accessible environment, personal freedom, social environment, and international exchanges and cooperation of the disabled. Besides a preamble and a conclusion, the White Paper is structured in ten parts: "Development of the Cause of Persons with Disabilities", "Mechanisms for the Protection of Rights and Interests of Persons with Disabilities", "Health and Rehabilitation", "Special Education and Inclusive Education", "Employment and Entrepreneurship", "Basic Life and Social Security", "Creating an Accessible Environment and Enabling Mobility", "Personal

Freedom and Non-Discrimination”, “Creating a Good Social Environment”, and “International Exchanges and Cooperation.”

According to the White Paper, China now has a population of 85 million persons with disabilities. Over the 70 years since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government have always put the people first and provided care for the group with special difficulties, making them participants in, contributors to, and beneficiaries of the country’s social and economic development, the paper notes. It further notes that, the development of the programs for persons with disabilities is still unbalanced and inadequate and there is still a big gap between the lives these people lead and lives to which they aspire. Therefore, China will continue to improve the mechanisms for ensuring their rights and interests, including: eliminating discrimination, fully respecting and guaranteeing their human rights, improving their wellbeing, enhancing their ability to better their own situation, and ensuring that they are able to participate in the country’s development process and to share the ensuing gains as equals.

The document reveals that, by April 2018, more than 80 laws and 50 administrative regulations had been passed concerning the protection of the rights and interests of persons with disabilities. The China Disabled Persons’ Federation (CDPF), as a legitimate organization approved by the State Council, represents and safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of persons with disabilities and by 2018, a total of 42,000 disabled persons’ federations had been set up across the nation. It further reveals that there are associations for persons with specific disabilities, such as visual, hearing and physical disabilities led by the CDPF and that by 2018, a total of 16,000 branches of these associations at provincial, prefectural (municipal) and county levels were established. The White Paper further states, with statistical details, that the programs for persons with disabilities have received increasing financial support in the past decades and that disabled persons’ federations across the nation spent 57.36 billion RMB (\$8.35 billion) on their programs during the 11th Five-Year Plan period (2006-2010) and the figure increased to 145.12 billion RMB during the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2011-2015), an increase of 153%. It also states that investment stood at 41.67 billion RMB in 2016, the first year of the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020), representing an increase of 24.5 billion, or 138%, compared to the first year (2011) during the 12th Five-Year Plan period. From 2013 to 2017, the fiscal allocations from all levels of the government for persons with disabilities added up to over 180 billion RMB, up by 123% over the previous five years, the paper says.

Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China

Almost immediately after the start of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, human rights were put on the agenda. First, the government ensured that all ethnic groups were freed from the oppression of slave owners and landlords, guaranteeing the right to live and work for all. To further protect the interests of different groups, five special autonomous regions were established. Finally a framework for a social security system was initiated in the 1950’s. In 1978, after the reform and opening up policy was implemented, China’s economic capacities started to rise, taking living conditions up with it. Over the next forty years, the government solidified the social security system, adding targeted policies for specific groups, including the disabled, the elderly, the women and children. To help further, minimum wage, minimum subsistence allowances guaranteed education, and career training were introduced. To improve governance, the election system, government transparency, the judicial system, and protection of intellectual property rights were improved.

Today, China's human rights conditions are largely based on the principles raised at the 18th national congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012 marked by the advent of a new era for socialism with Chinese characteristics and guided by President Xi Jinping's thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. In order to build a better society, people's economic, political, cultural, social, and environmental rights must be coordinated. This is in line with china's human rights target which seeks to balance every aspect of the basic rights of China's citizens. The government and civil society are always in constant discussion with the international community concerning cooperation and human rights and the betterment of china and the world.

In line with the stage set above, China, on Sept 22, 2019 published a White Paper on its progress in the field of human rights over the past 70 years. The White Paper, titled "Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China," was released by the State Council Information Office. It is a forty-one page document in its English version, with a preamble, eight parts, and a conclusion. The parts include: "Splendid History of China's Human Rights Protection"; "People-Centered Approach in Human Rights Protection"; "Continuing to Improve People's Living Standards"; "Effectively Ensuring that People Enjoy their Rights"; "Protecting the Rights of Special Groups"; "Strengthening the Rule of Law for Human Rights"; "Full Participation in Global Governance of Human Rights"; and "Advancing the International Cause of Human Rights".

On the living conditions of the Chinese people, the document states that, as "Living a happy life is the primary human right," China has, for the past seventy years, continued to improve its people's living standards and that, considering the rights to subsistence and development as the primary and basic human rights the country has been striving to enhance people's wellbeing through development to better protect their human rights. It lists an array of achievements, including effectively guaranteeing the right to food, the elimination of absolute poverty, markedly improved living standards safe drinking water improved housing conditions, more convenient public transport, better health for the people, improved social assistance, as well as enhanced postal and telecommunication services.

As far as Chinese people's rights are concerned, the White Paper states that China effectively ensures that its people enjoy their rights. According to the White Paper, since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country has strived to preserve personal rights and dignity, to fully safeguard workers' rights, to establish a social security system that covers the largest population in the world. Universal education has expanded remarkable and public cultural services benefit more people. It further states that Chinese people enjoy real democracy and their rights to know, to participate, to express, and to supervise are protected. They equally enjoy protected freedom of religious belief and environmental rights.

Concerning the rights of special groups in China, the White Paper states that these rights have been well protected over the past seventy years. It reveals that, since the founding of the PRC, targeted measures have been taken to effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic minority groups, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disability, ensuring their equal status and giving them the equal opportunity to participate in social life. Also, the rights of ethnic minority groups have been effectively guaranteed in administering state affairs and the ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas have been enabled to leapfrog in social and

economic development, as well as in education. Their freedom to use and to develop their own spoken and written languages is fully guaranteed and their cultural heritage and relics are effectively protected, same as their religious freedom. For women, children, the elderly and the disabled, the document states that China has improved the protection of women and children's rights to health, and women's rights to participate in the administration of public affairs and social and economic development. The mechanism for protecting the rights and interest of the elderly is improving and China has also improved the social security system for people with disability, made rehabilitation universally available for them, ensured their right to employment and given strong support to creating an accessible environment and providing assistive appliances.

On strengthening the rule of law for human rights, China, in the White Paper, claims remarkable progress in its legal protection of human rights over the past seven decades, noting that social mechanisms and the CPC both played a major. It states that efforts have been made to deepen the openness of the justice system. It notes how the country has strengthened the disclosure of court proceedings, judgment documents and enforcement information. The website for trial procedure information disclosure had published 370 million items by the end of February 2019. China has also been working to ensure CPC's justice which can effectively remedy and correct wrongful judgments. The White Paper also says quality and convenience has improved in public law services. In five years (2013-2018) China was active in building and improving the legal aid system. More than seven million cases were handled by national legal aid institutions. China has intensified its efforts to fight corruption with the purpose of safeguarding people's interests.

Finally, regarding China's full participation in global governance of human rights, the White Paper notes that China has been active in UN human rights undertakings, fulfilling its international human rights obligations, conducting extensive international cooperation on human rights, actively offering Chinese wisdom and solutions for global governance of human rights, and advancing through concrete actions the global human rights governance in a fairer, more rational and inclusive direction. It states that, over the past seven decades, in addition to advancing the human rights of its people, China has earnestly supported the just cause of other developing countries to break free from colonial rules, to achieve national independence and eradicate racial segregation. It has also helped developing countries to build up their capacity for development and provided the countries with development assistance and humanitarian relief, thereby making a great contribution to safeguarding world peace and development and furthering the international cause of human rights.

Equality, Development and Sharing: Progress of Women's Cause in 70 Years Since New China's Founding

Women play an increasingly prominent role in Chinese society, with the female workforce doubling from 170 million in 1978 to 340 million in 2017. On Sept 19, 2019, the White Paper, titled "Equality, Development and Sharing: Progress of Women's Cause in 70 Years Since New China's Founding," was released by the State Council Information Office. Besides the preface and conclusion, the thirty-eight pages White Paper is structured in nine parts: "Women's Cause Remains High Priority and is Actively Promoted in China"; The Legal System for Protection of Women Rights Constantly Improved"; Women's Role in Economic and Social Development Becoming Increasingly Prominent"; Women's Political Status has Grown Significantly"; Women's Education Level has Risen Significantly"; "Women's Health Condition has Improved

Dramatically”; “Social Security for Women Continues to Improve”; Women Play Unique Role in Cultivation of Family Virtues”; and “Women Taking Part in Extensive International Exchanges and Cooperation Activities”.

According to the White Paper, the founding of the PRC in 1949 ushered in a new era for women in China, changing their social status from an oppressed and enslaved group in the past thousands of years to masters of their own fate. As the Chinese nation is rising and growing richer and stronger, Chinese women's social status has undergone enormous changes, the White Paper underscores. It further underscores that promoting gender equality and women's overall development at a higher level not only meets opportunities but also has a long way to go as China's development has entered a new era, and that, under the guidance of President Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era, China will always adhere to safeguarding and improving women's livelihoods, promoting women's all-round development, and leading hundreds of millions of women in working for national rejuvenation.

Regarding Chinese women's role in economic and social development, the White Paper states that China has promulgated laws and regulations to fully protect women's economic rights and interests, especially the right to equal employment, ensuring equal pay to men and women for equal work and eliminating gender discrimination in employment. Statistics in the paper reveal that women now account for 40 percent of the labor force in China. The same statistics indicate that in 2017, there were 340 million working women, doubling the figure in 1978 and that women's job options have greatly expanded. They further indicate throughout the process of socialist modernization, women's productivity has been continuously unleashed and their employment options also broadened. As an example in 2010, 46.8% of women worked in the secondary and tertiary sectors, up from 24.8% in 1982.

In the area of politics, the White Paper claims that women's political status has grown significantly, as China has drawn up and implemented laws to guarantee that women share equal rights with men to vote, to be elected, and to participate in the administration of state affairs, adding that over the past four decades since the reform and opening-up, new opportunities and channels have been opened to women to participate in politics. In 2017 for instance, women accounted for 52.4 percent of public servants newly-recruited by the central government organs and their affiliates, and the proportion was 44 percent among local governments. Furthermore, the ratio of women deputies to the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) was 24.9 percent, 12.9% higher than that of the first NPC in 1954.

As far as education is concerned, and according to the White Paper, Chinese women's education level has been dramatically lifted over the past seventy years. The illiteracy rate among females aged 15 and above witnessed a historic change, dropping from 90% before the founding of the PRC to 7.3% in 2017. The White Paper states that the gender gap in the nine-year compulsory education has been basically eliminated and that in 2017, the net primary school enrollment rates of boys and girls were both 99.9% while the proportions of girls in primary schools and junior high schools stood at 46.5% and 46.4% respectively, 18.5% and 20.8% higher than those in 1951 respectively. It further indicates that in 2017, the gross high school enrollment rate was 88.3%, with girls accounting for 47.7% of all students in high schools. Meanwhile, women accounted for 52.5% of students in regular institutions of higher education, 28.4% higher than in 1978, 32.7% higher than in 1949.

Finally, in the health sector, the White Paper on women's progress over the past seven decades holds that women's health has further improved in China. Women's average life expectancy grew to 79.4 years in 2015, an increase of 10.1 years over 1981 and 42.7 years over 1949. It states that maternal mortality rate has fallen 79.4% from 88.8 per 100.000 in 1990 to 18.3 per 100.000 in 2018, meaning that China has achieved the United Nations health sector Millennium Development Goals ahead of time.

China and the World in the New Era

On Friday, September 27, 2019, just days before the celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the founding the People's Republic of China on October 1, 2019, the Chinese government issued a White Paper, titled "China and the World in the New Era," its timing was no coincidence and its purpose was to respond to the world's questions about China and to help the international community better understand China's development. It is the clearest exposition about what the Chinese government wants the world to know and to think about China. The 18.000 words White Paper has forty-nine pages with four parts, a preface and conclusion in its English version. The four parts include: "China has Found a Development Path Suited to its Actual Conditions"; "China's Development is an Opportunity for the World"; " A Prosperous and Beautiful World is the Common Aspiration of all Peoples"; "China Contributes to a Better World".

The first part tells about China's remarkable development, based on self-reliance and hard work, including a seventy fold increase in GDP per capita at constant prices, more than doubling life expectancy till seventy-seven years and lifting over eight hundred million people out of poverty. The second part focusing on China's development is called an opportunity for the world in contrast to the China threat theory. The third part, amidst the most profound changes in the century, depicts a prosperous and beautiful world that is the common aspiration of all peoples. The last part explains how China contributes to a better world by pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation and common development through a new kind of globalization and global governance. The White Paper is a comprehensive argument for why China's system works well for China and how at the time it benefits the world.

The White Paper states that China has completed a course that took developed countries several hundred years in just a few decades. China has now become the world's second largest economy. The country has taken care of the material needs of its nearly 1.4 billion people and achieved moderate all-round prosperity. The White Paper also highlighted that China's development lies in self-reliance and hard work, the country is developing through interactions with other parts of the world and has injected positive energy into world peace and development. It notes that in the past seven decades, the ultimate reason for China's success is that China has found and will continue on the right path - socialism with Chinese characteristics, under the leadership of the CPC, which is based on China's actual conditions, which prioritizes the people's interests, a path of reform and innovation, of seeking common development through opening up and of law-based governance.

According to the White Paper, China is the main stabilizing force and power source of the world economy and its all-round opening up has created more opportunities for all countries to share the benefits of China's development. The country is providing more public goods to the

international community as well as experience and reference for other developing countries and will never seek hegemony. The White Paper calls for building a community with a shared future for humanity, which offers a new option to the international community. All countries should join forces to build a new model of international relations, promote a new model of economic globalization, uphold the international system with the United Nations at its core, and promote exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. It further underscores that China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world as a whole maintain peace, development, prosperity and stability without China.

The White Paper also states that China continues to place its own development in the coordinated system of human development, while pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation and common development, upholding and advancing economic globalization, developing global partnerships, supporting multilateralism and upholding international equity and justice, as well as taking a lead in reforming and developing the global governance system. It highlights that in this new era, China will not waver in its commitment to forging ahead on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, pursuing mutual learning and mutually beneficial cooperation, and working together with the rest of the world. Finally, the White Paper says that in the future, China will embrace the world in a more open and inclusive manner, engage in more interactions with other countries, and bring more progress and prosperity.

CONCLUSION

Taken as a whole, China's 70th anniversary White Papers are important documents which deserve to be read for their completeness and reliability. They make the case that china's rise, becoming prosperous and strong in the various areas covered by the papers is both a historic achievement for the Chinese people and in the interest of the entire world. The White Papers seek to counter the China threat theory which is caused by its state. Cognitive misunderstandings, deep-rooted prejudice, a psychological imbalance brought about by the prospect of falling power and deliberate distortions by vested interests. The White Papers reflects a kind of collective frustration that even though China is creating opportunity for all countries to share the benefits of its development, there has been paradoxically increasing push backs against China.

In a knot shell, China's success boils down to the Party's leadership. Without centralized, unified and firm leadership, the White Papers state, China would have tended to a division and disintegration and caused widespread chaos beyond its own borders. In contrast, enabled by the CPC, its President Xi Jinping's vision of building a global community of shared future for humanity, the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics fits China's national conditions and is good for world peace and prosperity. The Chinese people are in a consistent pursuit of development and human rights. No matter how the world may change, their desire for a better life will not change; their conviction in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics will not change; and their resolve to uphold national sovereignty, security and development interests will not change. With socialism with Chinese characteristics entering a new era, China will embrace a more robust economy, greater social harmony, a more sound democracy, fuller rule of law and comprehensive improvement of human rights.

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