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Empowering Global Human Rights Governance with Chinese Discourse: A Review of Professor Sun Pinghua's *The Study of China's Voice in the International Discourse of Human Rights*

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of evolving global human rights governance and intensifying discourse competition, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to break the Western-centric hegemony in human rights discourse and build a human rights discourse system with Chinese characteristics. Guided by the vision of building a community with shared future for mankind, Professor Sun Pinghua's new work *The Study of China's Voice in the International Discourse of Human Rights* systematically reviews the historical context, core connotations and practical paths of China's international human rights discourse. It profoundly elaborates the original contributions of pioneers including Zhang Pengchun to the international human rights cause, reveals the linguistic and colonial roots of Western hegemony in human rights discourse, and puts forward China's responses and practical solutions, thus conveying a strong voice from Chinese scholars in international human rights governance. Adopting a research framework of "theory before practice and deconstruction before construction", the book integrates historical review, interdisciplinary analysis and case studies. With both theoretical depth and realistic pertinence, it fully demonstrates China's historical contribution and contemporary value in the international human rights discourse system, and provides solid academic support for diversifying global human rights governance and enhancing China's international discourse power on human rights.

Keywords : Sun Pinghua; *The Study of China's Voice in the International Discourse of Human Rights*; Chinese discourse; Global human rights governance; Chinese voice

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摘要：在全球人权治理变革与话语竞争加剧的背景下，打破西方中心主义人权话语霸权、构建中国特色人权话语体系具有重要的理论价值与现实意义。孙平华教授新著《国际人权话语中的中国声音研究》以人类命运共同体理念为指引，系统梳理中国国际人权话语的历史脉络、核心内涵与实践路径，深刻阐释张彭春等先贤对国际人权事业的原创性贡献，揭示西方人权话语霸权的语言与殖民根源，并提出中国应对策略与实践方案，发出中国学者在国际人权治理中的有力声音。该书采用“先理论后实践、先破后立”的研究框架，融合历史梳理、跨学科分析与案例研究，兼具理论深度与现实针对性，全面展现中国在国际人权话语体系中的历史贡献与时代价值，为推动全球人权治理多元化、提升中国人权国际话语权提供了扎实学术支撑。

关键词：孙平华；《国际人权话语中的中国声音研究》；中国话语；全球人权治理；中国声音

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Amidst the profound transformation of the global human rights governance system and increasingly intense discourse competition, Western-centric human rights discourse has long dominated, often neglecting and distorting the human rights claims of developing countries. As a crucial practitioner and promoter of the international human rights cause, China faces the important task of constructing a human rights discourse system with Chinese characteristics, style, and ethos, and clearly conveying the Chinese voice, showcasing Chinese practices, and expanding influence on the international stage in the new era. Professor Sun Pinghua of China University of Political Science and Law, who has long been engaged in human rights research with profound academic accumulation and practical insights, combined with his solid English language skills, in his book *The Study of China's Voice in the International Discourse of Human Rights* (published by Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press in December 2025), systematically sorts out the historical origins and context, core content, basic principles, specific measures for enhancing discourse power, and educational practices of the formation of China's international human rights discourse from a grand international perspective, solid theoretical foundation, profound historical heritage, and a grasp and understanding of China's long-term efforts to enhance its international human rights protection discourse. Based on the theory of global human rights governance under the guidance of the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, he profoundly analyzes the status, influence, and historical contributions of the Chinese

voice in the international human rights discourse system, providing important academic support and practical guidance for promoting the Chinese human rights discourse to the world and improving global human rights governance. He has provided us with an excellent work in the field of international human rights law that combines theoretical depth, practical value, and contemporary significance, taking a very important step in “empowering global human rights governance with Chinese discourse”.

The book is divided into three major parts with a total of fifteen chapters, plus ten appendices. Each part consists of five chapters, with the specific design as follows: Part I, “Global Governance of Human Rights and Chinese Strategies”, mainly discusses theoretical issues, Mr. Zhang Pengchun’s historical contributions to the social and economic development of the international human rights cause and the core content of his human rights thought—the concept of human dignity, as well as the formation of the *Punta del Este Declaration* with “human dignity” as the main content and China’s response; Part II, “International Human Rights Standards and the Western Discursive Hegemony”, mainly discusses the rights system of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* with cross-cultural origins and the author’s evaluation, the international human rights law protection of the right to life, human trafficking and sexual slavery in the modern world, the analysis of Western human rights discourse hegemony, and China’s wisdom and specific responses to Western human rights discourse hegemony in global human rights governance; and Part III, “Chinese Human Rights Discourse and Human Rights Safeguarding Practices”, mainly discusses China’s human rights discourse in global governance, the basic principles for China to realize international human rights standards, the measures China should take to improve the level of human rights protection, the practice of human rights education in the context of new-era China, and an analysis of Qian Duansheng’s human rights thought. The ten appendices mainly introduce Professor Sun Pinghua’s academic activities and achievements related to the theme of the book, to supplement his unremitting efforts and achievements in disseminating China’s international human rights discourse. From this structural arrangement, it can be seen that the book has a clear logic and distinct layers, forming a complete research system of “conceptual guidance and theoretical foundation—historical tracing and latest development—objective review of international human rights standards, criticism of Western human rights discourse hegemony, and China’s wisdom and response in international human rights discourse under the critical comparison—the core content and basic principles of Chinese human rights discourse, specific measures for discourse dissemination and educational practices, and systematic analysis of the international human rights thoughts and discourses of typical representative figures”. It is based on China’s national conditions, looks at the global pattern, organically combines theoretical interpretation with practical analysis, historical sorting with realistic thinking, avoids pure theoretical empty talk and practical listing, and reflects the author’s rigorous academic logic and distinct problem orientation.

As a pioneer in the study of Zhang Pengchun’s human rights thought, Professor Sun Pinghua does not

rush to start with the earliest specific presentation of China's voice in international human rights protection—Zhang Pengchun's contributions to human rights—in his book. Instead, he first conducts an in-depth analysis of the theoretical basis of international human rights discourse, namely the connotation, implication, and value of global human rights governance under the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, then systematically sorts out and analyzes Zhang Pengchun's contributions to the international human rights cause and his core human rights thought, and analyzes and introduces the *Punta del Este Declaration*, the latest development achievement of this thought. Next, the author deeply analyzes international human rights standards, clarifies the formation background and specific manifestations of Western human rights discourse hegemony and criticizes this discourse hegemony, laying a solid realistic foundation for the subsequent explanation of the necessity and importance of the Chinese voice. This narrative method of “theory first, then practice” and “breaking first, then establishing” not only allows readers to clearly grasp the contemporary theoretical basis of global human rights discourse and the overall situation of the formation and development of Western human rights discourse hegemony, but also highlights the historical contributions and current important role of the Chinese voice in breaking the Western discourse monopoly and promoting the diversification of human rights discourse.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that the sorting from a historical perspective is one of the important features of this work and a key premise for understanding the formation of Chinese human rights discourse: it reminds us that while emphasizing China's current efforts and forge ahead in international human rights protection, we should not forget that in the recognized “international human rights protection standard”—the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*—there are both significant contributions from the Chinese people and specific manifestations of Chinese culture; history should not be severed, and China's voice in international human rights protection has continued from the end of World War II to today without interruption. In his book, Professor Sun Pinghua places the formation and development of Chinese human rights discourse in the multiple contexts of modern and contemporary Chinese history, the development history of New China, and the history of the global human rights movement, systematically sorting out from modern China's exploration of human rights, to the start and development of the human rights cause after the founding of New China, to the continuous improvement of human rights theory and practice since the reform and opening up, and up to China in the new era. This, I think, is the most prominent point among many international human rights protection works, and may also be a point that the author very much wants to tell us in this book.

In terms of innovative viewpoints, many chapters of this book are refreshing. Here, only Chapter 10, “On Western Hegemony on Human Rights Discourse”, is taken as an example. After reading this chapter, it is enlightening and eye-opening. This chapter analyzes the causes of English and Western human rights discourse hegemony from a historical perspective, re-examines the current situation of English and Western

human rights discourse hegemony, and through in-depth research and analysis of the case of the great debate on the “colonial clause” in the historical archives of the United Nations General Assembly, finds that China can successfully break Western human rights discourse hegemony in the international community and further improve the response strategies against Western human rights discourse hegemony. Professor Sun Pinghua uses his professional advantage in English language to interpret the global expansion of Western “human rights discourse hegemony” along with colonial expansion from the global expansion of the “English language” itself. Moreover, he is not satisfied with the descriptive generalization of the phenomenon of English language expansion, but is more committed to constructing a causal mechanism; through the process tracing method, the research clearly shows how British colonialists influenced the results of English global expansion through different paths; this analytical narrative method significantly enhances the explanatory power of the research. This logical thinking and research method are obviously different from the research logic and analytical thinking of scholars with a pure legal academic background, and it highlights a significant feature of interdisciplinary scholars’ research. In fact, “language” is crucial for legal norms, because it is the carrier of norms; any legal norm must be expressed through language, and the degree of global expansion and acceptance of a certain language often determines its influence; the great influence of the most widely accepted languages in the world often helps the widespread dissemination, promotion, and acceptance of the ideologies, legal thoughts, and legal norms associated with that language; and the anarchical nature of the international community itself can amplify the impact of this phenomenon. In fact, language is one of the core elements of cultural identity; it is not only the shell of thinking, nor only the carrier of thought, but also a tool of thinking, which will affect people’s ways of thinking and concepts, and thus influence their ideology. The statement that “accepting a certain language is equivalent to accepting a certain ideology” may be too absolute, but it is undeniable that accepting a certain language will inevitably be influenced by some ideologies conveyed by that language. Therefore, the enlightenment and thinking brought to us by this chapter are: How can China’s human rights discourse exert influence globally through the construction of the “Belt and Road Initiative”? What role does language play in it? If China wants to lead the formulation of international rules, how can it use appropriate language to spread and widely accept China’s concepts and practices with universal values in the world? Professor Sun Pinghua’s analysis in this chapter leaves us with much room for thought.

Of course, there are many other innovative aspects of this book. For example, the author’s arguments and analyses in Chapter 3 on the core content of Zhang Pengchun’s human rights thought—the “concept of human dignity”, in Chapter 7 on the “protection of the right to life by international human rights law”, and in Chapter 11 on “Chinese discourse of human rights in global governance” all have innovative arguments and views. This article only uses his analysis of Western human rights hegemony to illustrate the value and original contribution of this book.

This book is a further refinement and deepening of the research results of the “Post-funded Project of Philosophy and Social Sciences Research of the Ministry of Education” in 2020, which was completed by Professor Sun Pinghua at the end of 2023. At that time, Professor Mo Jihong, a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Dean of the Law School of the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, made the following overall evaluation of the academic innovation and value of his research results: “Its academic innovation and academic value are reflected in the following aspects: First, the original research on international human rights issues in this achievement shows and enriches China’s contributions to the international human rights discourse, and plays an important academic leading role in human rights discourse research. Second, the research method of this achievement is scientific, the academic vision is broad, and the theoretical value is significant. Third, this achievement systematically shows China’s contributions to the international human rights cause for the first time, becoming the Chinese voice in the international human rights discourse, and has important practical significance for carrying out international human rights exchanges and cooperation.” The above three points are accurately expressed, and this article fully agrees and will not elaborate further.

In short, this book is a major achievement of Professor Sun Pinghua’s years of thinking and efforts. Its topic selection has significant academic value, its academic viewpoints are clear and innovative, the logical structure is reasonably arranged, the argumentation is rigorous and in-depth, the writing is standardized, the citations are appropriate, the data is detailed, the sentences are smooth, and the conclusions are convincing. It is a highly worthwhile masterpiece in the field of international human rights law in Chinese.

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