Before considering the general principles [of rights], I would like to point out that the problem of human rights was seldom discussed by Chinese thinkers of the past, at least in the same way as it was in the West. There was no open declaration of human rights in China, either by individual thinkers or by political constitutions, until this conception was introduced from the West. In fact, the early translators of Western political philosophy found it difficult to arrive at a Chinese equivalent for the term "rights".

The term we use to translate "rights" now is two words "Chuan Li", which literally means "Power and Interest" and which, I believe, was first coined by a Japanese writer on Western Public Law in 1868, and later adopted by Chinese writers. This of course does not mean that the Chinese never claimed - human rights or enjoyed the basic rights of man.

In fact, the idea of human rights developed very early in China, and the right of the people to [safeguard] against oppressive rulers was established [very early on].

"Revolution" is not regarded as a dangerous word to use, but a word to which high ideals are attached, and it was constantly used to indicate a justifiable claim by the
people to overthrow bad rulers; the Will of the People is even considered to be the Will of Heaven. In the "Book of History", an old Chinese classic, it is stated,

Heaven sees as our people see; Heaven hears as our people hear. Heaven is compassionate toward the people. What the people desire, Heaven will be found to bring about.

A ruler has a duty to Heaven to take care of the interests of his people. In loving his people, the ruler follows the will of Heaven. So it says in the same book,

Heaven loves the people; and the Sovereign must obey Heaven.

When the ruler no longer rules for the welfare of the people, it is the right of the people to revolt, against him and dethrone him.

When the last ruler Chieh (1818-1766 BC) of the Hsia Dynasty (2205-1766 BC) was cruel and oppressive to his people, and became a tyrant, "Tang" started a revolution and overthrew the Hsia Dynasty. He felt it was his duty to follow the call of Heaven, which meant obeying exactly the Will of the people to dethrone the bad ruler and to establish the new dynasty of Shang (1766-1122 BC).

When the last ruler of this dynasty "Tsou" (1154-112213.0.) became a tyrant and even exceeded in wickedness the last ruler Chieh of the former dynasty, he was executed in a revolution led by King Wu (1122 BC) who founded the Chou Dynasty, which in turn lasted over 800 years (1122-296 BC). The right to revolt was repeatedly expressed in Chinese history, which consisted of a sequence of setting up and overthrowing dynasties.
great Confucian, Mencius (372-289 BC), strongly maintained that a government should work for the Will of the people. He said,

People are of primary importance. The state is of less importance. The sovereign is of least importance.

...The basic ethical concept of Chinese social political relations is the fulfilment of the duty to one’s neighbor, rather than the claiming of rights. The idea of mutual obligations is regarded as the fundamental teaching of Confucianism. The five basic social relations described by Confucius and his followers are the relations between (1) ruler and subjects; (2) parents and children; (3) husband and wife; (4) elder and younger brother, and (5) friend and friend.

Instead of claiming rights, Chinese ethical teaching emphasized the sympathetic attitude of regarding all one’s fellow men as having the same desires, and therefore the same rights, as one would like to enjoy oneself. By the fulfilment of mutual obligations, the infringement of the rights of the individual should be prevented. So far as the relation between -the individual and state is concerned, the moral code is stated thus: "The people are the root of the country. When the root is firm, the country will be at peace."

In the old days, only the ruling class, or people who would be expected to become part of the ruling class, got the classical education; the mass of the people were not taught to claim-their rights.
It was the ruling class, or would-be ruling class, who were constantly taught to look upon the interest of the people as the primary responsibility of the government. The sovereign as well as the officials were taught to regard themselves as the parents or guardians of the people, and to protect their people as they would their own children. If it was not always the practice of actual politics, it was at least the basic principle of Chinese political thought. The weakness of this doctrine is that the welfare of the people depends so much on the goodwill of the ruling class, who are much inclined to fail in their duties and to exploit the people.

This explains the constant revolutions in Chinese history. It is, however, interesting to compare the different approach to the problem of human rights by the Chinese with the theories of human rights developed in the West by thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Let me state now what I regard to be the basic claims, the principles, from which all human rights may be derived for all the people of the Modern World. A declaration on the Rights of Man for the entire world should be brief yet clear, broad yet concise, fundamental yet elastic, so that it may be interpreted to suit the needs of peoples in different circumstances. For this reason, I lay down here only three basic claims, valid for every person in the world, namely: (1) the right to live, (2) the right to self-expression and (3) the right to enjoyment.
(1) The right to live

The right to live seems to be such a natural thing, yet it is neither properly recognized nor universally enjoyed by all the people. The world is big enough for everybody to live in, yet many are deprived of a proper dwelling place. The natural resources of the earth, used according to the scientific knowledge at our disposal, should provide plentifully for all the people to live comfortably, yet natural resources are wasted in many ways and are not made accessible to all those to need them. Each individual should be allowed to have his proper share in society as well as to make his proper contribution to it, and no individual should be allowed to have more than his share or to live idly at the expense of others.

(2) The right to self-expression

We want not only to live, but also to live with the sense of dignity and self-reliance. We are social beings. Each individual naturally considers that he has a proper place in society. In order to contribute fully to the society, each individual should have the fullest degree of self-expression. Social progress depends on each individual’s freedom of expression. The right of national groups to self-determination is also a form of self-expression.
(3) The right to enjoyment

By “enjoyment” I refer to the inner aspect of the life of the individual. Our life should be not only materially adequate and socially free but also inwardly enjoyable. That there is an inner aspect of life is undeniable. "Enjoyments" are of different kinds, but they are all connected with the inner life of the individual. The mental satisfaction of the inner life leads to peace of mind, and the peace of mind of the individual is a necessary condition of the peace of the world.

The elementary right to enjoyment is to a life free from drudgery; it means that each should bare an adequate amount of leisure and also be able to make good use of that leisure. No one should be constantly overweighed either by work or by social activities. He should have the opportunity to refresh himself and enjoy life. Other ferns of enjoyment are aesthetic, intellectual, cultural and religious. Although not everyone can find enjoyment in the mystical experiences of religion, religion is a form of enjoyment for the inner life of many, which should not be repudiated by alleging it to bee mere superstition. There should be religious toleration not only for all religions but also for atheism. Both Should enjoy the right of giving the greatest satisfaction to his emotion and intellect without interfering with what others treasure most in their inner life.

The three basic claims of human rights stated above, namely, the right to live, the right to self-expression and the right to enjoyment, can, I believe, cover all the fundamental rights that a modern man should enjoy. The right to live is on the biological and economic level. The right to self-expression is on the social and political level.
The right to enjoyment is on the aesthetic and spiritual level. When man can enjoy the rights at all levels, he attains a full life.

It is time for all the nations and each individual in the world to be conscious of the following conditions, namely, (1) that the world is an organic whole, so we should work in operation to improve the individual lives of people as a whole; and (2) that each individual is an end in himself, and all social institutions are the means to develop each individual as fully as possible; and (3) that each individual or national group should respect the rights of others to the same degree as we treasure our own; and (4) that each, by making the most of himself, can at the same time contribute best to the world at large.

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