HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN CHINA:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE RAOUL WALLENBERG
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The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World
Conference on Human Rights in 1993 emphasized that human rights education plays
“an important role in the promotion and respect of human rights with regard to all
individuals”1 and called upon all States to strengthen human rights education.
Pursuant to this suggestion, the General Assembly of the United Nations, in its
Resolution 49/184 of 23 December 1994, proclaimed the United Nations Decade for
Human Rights Education beginning on 1 January 1995. Almost in the same period,
the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (the RWI)
at Lund University in Sweden, led by Professor Göran Melander, the then Director
of the Institute, started its educational activities focusing on human rights in China.
Ever since then, the RWI has committed to the promotion of human rights education
and research in China. Therefore, it seems very proper to contribute an article
regarding human rights education and research in China and the RWI’s contribution
thereeto to the Festschrift for Professor Göran Melander.

In accordance with relevant provisions in some major international human
rights instruments,2 and for the purpose of the Decade for Human Rights Education,
the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights defined human rights
education as “training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building
of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills

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para. 33; see also Part II: Human rights education.
2 According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, those provisions
are: Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 13 of the International
Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Article 29 of the Convention on the
Rights of the Child; Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women; Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms
of Racial Discrimination; paras. 33 and 34 of the Vienna Declaration and paragraphs 78 to 82
Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of the Plan of Action for the United
Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, Appendix, Plan of Action for the United
for life, para. 1.
and the moulding of attitudes" and “lessons for life”. However, the term ‘human rights education’ in the present article is used in a much narrower sense, which mainly refers to the intra-curricular human rights teaching at university level and within the academic field. Human rights education in this sense has been one of the most important focuses of RWI activities in China. There are a number of reasons why this approach has been followed. Firstly, this choice was determined on appraisal of the comparative advantage of the RWI. As an academic institution, the RWI is more capable of conducting various types of academic activities, such as research, training and education, than being involved in direct human rights protection and promotion like that of many human rights non-governmental organizations. Secondly, under the political and social circumstances of the mid-1990s in China, it was more advisable to engage human rights with an academic approach than to directly address human rights problems. Thirdly, the main cooperating partners of the RWI in its human rights activities in China are universities, research institutions and scholars. According to Henry Steiner, “given the [international human rights] movement’s global significance to individuals, states, and international relations, it is critical that universities foster the study and teaching of human rights”. Even though the cooperation and other activities have been mostly limited within ‘academic area’, the effect and influence are far more beyond academic circle. Both Chinese academic institutions and scholars have been playing extremely active roles in building up rule of law in China, including the drafting of law, the consultation to the government, and the dissemination of legal awareness and so on. The cooperation with Chinese academia, therefore, is an indirect, yet very efficient, way to facilitate the legal reform and human rights protection in China. Fourthly, and maybe most importantly, many Chinese academics participating in various programmes carried out by the RWI are teachers at law faculties and law departments in universities. If they may incorporate human rights knowledge and approaches into their lectures, their students, who will become judges, prosecutors, governmental officials, lawyers or pursue other law-related jobs, may well incorporate these knowledge and approaches into their work and thus have far-reaching influence upon the establishment of rule of law and building of human rights in China.

This focus on academic cooperation does not mean that the RWI has solely engaged academia in China. As a matter of fact, there have been two parallel tracks

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3 Ibid., para. 2; and Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004) and public information activities in the field of human rights, Addendum, Guidelines for national plans of action for human rights education, para. 11.
