

**Toward a More Beautiful China and Cleaner World:  
Understanding Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization**

National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency  
The Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization



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## Preface

So beautiful is our Planet Earth which is yet so fragile in equal measure! In centuries of industrialization, the human race, while creating enormous material wealth, has accelerated the plundering of natural resources and broken the equilibrium of the ecosystems on Earth, resulting in increasing deep-rooted conflicts between humanity and nature. As we speak, the world is standing at a crossroads—whether we should seek some transient economic growth at the expense of our environment or embark on the path of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature has become the big question of the times facing the whole world.

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in his profound remarks: "We need to take up our lofty responsibility for the entire human civilization and we need to respect Nature, follow its laws and protect it. We need to find a way for man and Nature to live in harmony, balance and coordinate economic development and ecological protection, and work together to build a prosperous, clean and beautiful world."<sup>①</sup> Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the country has taken the promotion of ecological progress as a fundamental plan for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. It has energetically pushed forward innovations in ecological theories, practices, and systems and has worked to bring about a historic, transformative, and all-around change in ecological conservation and environmental protection by taking big strides in building a Beautiful China.

Great thoughts guide great practices. Since the dawn of the new era, China as the world's largest developing country has brought about achievements in its ecological advancement efforts that attract worldwide attention. The key lies in the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core and in the scientifically sound guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization. This important thought, which contains a profound love for the people, culture, and the world, combines theory with practice and connects the past with present-day realities. It is a profound exposition of the relationships between man and nature, conservation and development, the environment and people's livelihoods, and between China and the world. It is a crystallization of in-depth pondering on the development path of human civilization and the construction of a clean and beautiful world, providing a powerful ideological tool for building a beautiful China that features harmonious symbiosis between humanity and nature and the joint construction of a community of life for them.

The power of thought knows no bounds; the tree of truth is forever green.

This report presents in graphic terms the great achievements in China's ecological progress guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, from China's actions in green and low-carbon transition, its determination in the prevention and control of environmental pollution, and the China miracles in ecological conservation and

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping's Speech at the United Nations Biodiversity Summit (full text), Xinhua, September 30, 2020

restoration to China's prevailing trend in advocating green life, among others. It expounds in depth on the contemporary background, core meaning, profound implication, and global contribution of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization.

## Chapter One Historical Background and Profound Meaning of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization

**We have continuously deepened our understanding of the laws of ecological civilization construction to form the socialist ideology of ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics for the new era, thus achieving a major transformation from exploration through practice to science-based theoretical guidance.<sup>①</sup>**

**—Xi Jinping**

A new era breeds new ideas which, in turn, guide new practice.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has taken the advancement of ecological civilization as a fundamental strategy vital to the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. It has been promoting in an integrated manner the Five-Sphere Integrated Plan and the Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy and vigorously promoting theoretical, practical, and institutional innovations in ecological civilization, creatively setting forth a series of new concepts, ideas, and strategies that form Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization.

Viewed from the logic of the innovative theoretical development of the Communist Party of China, this important idea originated from the CPC's unrelenting exploration of the theory and practice of eco-civilization construction and is a major achievement in combining the cardinal tenets of Marxism with the practice of ecological advancement in China and with the fine traditional ecological culture of China. It is Marxism in its contemporary Chinese form in the 21st century that leads China and influences the world. It is the shared treasure of thoughts that contributes to human society's endeavor to achieve sustainable development.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has always attached great importance to ecological conservation and environmental protection and has always treated the building of eco-civilization as an important task. As early as more than 40 years ago, during his work at Zhengding, Hebei Province, he had emphasized that one would rather not have money than pollution and he strictly prevented pollution resulting from relocation or moving to the countryside. While working in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, Xi Jinping began to carry out systematic exploration through practice and theoretical thinking on ecological conservation and environmental protection. He made forward-looking statements such as "a civilization may thrive if its natural surroundings thrive" and "lucid waters

<sup>①</sup> Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee (compilation): *Selected Important Literature Since the Twentieth CPC National Congress (Vol. 1)*, Central Literature Publishing House, p.505, August 2024 edition

and lush mountains are invaluable assets". He led the comprehensive treatment of Yundang Lake, the creation of Zhejiang as an ecological province with the creation of "Green Zhejiang", and the in-depth promotion of the Green Rural Revival Program. Since the beginning of the new era, General Secretary Xi Jinping has led the Chinese people to step up the building of ecological civilization across the board with unprecedented determination, strength, and results. Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is the latest theoretical achievement in advancing the adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of our times. As an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization provides a fundamental guide for action in China's development of ecological civilization in the new era.

## **1.1 The Historical Background of the Formation of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization**

Formed against a profound background of the times, Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization has distinctive historical characteristics. It is a science-based answer to the questions of our times, the world, and the people about the development of ecological civilization under the historical conditions of complex and profound changes in the world, in countries, and in societies.

The call of the times: the demand for global eco-environmental governance has become more urgent than ever before. Since the human race entered the era of industrial civilization, it has accelerated the seizure of natural resources while creating enormous material wealth, which has left in its wake global ecological disorders, environmental pollution, resource scarcity, and erratic climate changes, resulting in ecological disasters that endanger the survival and development of humankind. To solve this problem, the international community has been making arduous efforts for decades, with difficulties every step of the way. It is saddening that the appearance on the world stage of unilateralism, which is characterized by "deglobalization in ecological governance", has added further to the already difficult situation facing the global eco-environmental governance endeavor. Against this backdrop, General Secretary Xi Jinping, standing on the height of sustainable development for the human race, expounded in depth on the significance of protecting the eco-environment and building ecological civilization; he has made unremitting efforts to achieve a modernization featuring harmonious coexistence between humankind and nature, build a community of life on earth, and push for joint efforts for a clean and beautiful world. This demonstrates the mission commitment and breadth of mind of a large developing country.

A historic choice: The building of ecological civilization has a bearing on the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. Since socialism with Chinese characteristics entered the new era, China is closer to reaching the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than at any other time in history. From a historical perspective, "For the



survival of the Chinese nation, the ecological environment must be guaranteed."<sup>①</sup> China has limited environmental capacity and fragile ecosystems. The prevailing structural and root-based pressures on ecological conservation and environmental protection have yet to be fundamentally alleviated. It is still going through a critical period of multiplying pressures and heavy loads in its effort for ecological progress. Hence, it needs precisely a new philosophy to guide the advancement of ecological civilization and promote the achievement of modernization for the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. Standing on the height of safeguarding national ecological security and the sustainable development of the Chinese nation and with a sense of responsibility for human civilization, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to place ecological advancement in a prominent position in the overall modernization drive, leading the Chinese people to unswervingly march along the path of civilization development with growing production, affluent living, and ecological well-being and leave to future generations a beautiful home with a blue sky, green land, and pristine water.

The people's will: an important strategic breakthrough in addressing the major social dichotomies of the new era. As the building of socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the main social contradiction has changed into one between the people's growing need for a better life and unbalanced, inadequate development; the weight of the eco-environment in the people's well-being index has been increasing. In the past, people's expectations focused on "the basic needs for food and clothing", but now they are "expecting better environmental protection" and "sound ecology", and hoping to live in a beautiful China with ever-present lush green mountains, constant flows of water, and fresh air. Accelerating ecological progress and breaking through the current dilemma between economic development and environmental protection with building overall harmony among humanity, nature, and society as the value orientation has become an important strategic breakthrough in dealing with the major social contradiction of the new era. Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization has been further enriched and developed in the course of practicing in-depth the people-centered development philosophy, correctly handling the relationship between the environment and people's livelihoods, and continuously meeting the people's growing need for a beautiful eco-environment.

## 1.2 The Core Meaning of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization

Representing the understanding and summary of the laws governing ecological progress, Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization constitutes a comprehensive theoret-

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<sup>①</sup> *Jinping Emphasizes in a Voluntary Tree-Planting Activity in the Capital City the Need to Firmly Establish the Idea that Lucid Waters and Lush Mountains Are Invaluable Assets and Creation of a Beautiful China with Ever-present Lush Mountains, Flowing Water and Fresh Air, with Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji, Han Zheng, and Wang Qishan Present, Xinhua News Agency, April 3, 2020*

ical system integrating multiple disciplines including philosophy, history, economics, political science, sociology, and culturology. This important thought contains a systematic exposition and interpretation of the relationships between humanity and nature, protection and development, the environment and people's livelihoods, and domestic and international relations. It encompasses such basic issues as fundamental guarantees, historical basis, basic tenets, core concepts, purposes and requirements, strategic paths, system concepts, institutional safeguards, social forces, and global initiatives for advancing ecological civilization in the new era. They find their main reflections concentrated in the "Ten Principles of Upholdings and Persistences", namely, upholding the overall leadership of the Party in ecological advancement, upholding the idea that a civilization thrives only with a thriving ecology, upholding the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, upholding the belief that lucid waters and green mountains are invaluable assets, upholding the idea that a good eco-environment is the most inclusive benefit for people's livelihoods, upholding the belief that green development is a profound revolution in the concept of development; persisting with the integrated and systemic management of mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands, and deserts, persisting with the most stringent system and strictest rule of law for protecting the eco-environment, persisting with turning the drive to build a Beautiful China into a conscious action of the entire people, and persisting in pursuing a common path for global ecological progress.<sup>①</sup>

The Ten Principles form a corpus of the worldview and related methodologies. They answer collectively the following theoretical and practical questions: Why build an ecological civilization? What kind of ecological civilization to build? And how to build an ecological civilization?<sup>②</sup> Hence, these principles need to be comprehended and understood within the entire scientific system.

At the value level: providing an in-depth answer as to why an ecological civilization should be built. The construction of an ecological civilization is a historical trend in the development of human civilization. Viewed historically, a thriving ecology contributes to a thriving civilization and a declining ecology leads to a declining civilization. The ecological environment is the foundation of human survival and development as changes in it have a direct impact on the rise and fall of a civilization. Realistically, ecological civilization is also an important political issue that relates to the mission and purpose of the Communist Party of China. When ecological and environmental issues are addressed properly, the people's sense of gain, happiness, and security will be more substantial, guaranteed, and sustainable and the Party's ruling foundation will be more solid. Building eco-civilization is for the continuation of civilization and for meeting the present and future needs of the people for a good ecological environment. In the

<sup>①</sup> Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Ecology and Environment (compilation): *Study Outline on Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, pp.2-3, July 2022 edition

<sup>②</sup> Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Ecology and Environment (compilation): *Study Outline on Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, p.5, July 2022 edition

main body and the timeline of the narrative, this is in line and in sync with the fundamental view of the sustainable development concept, which is "the development that can meet the needs of the present without endangering the ability of the next generation to meet its needs",<sup>①</sup> in terms of the main body and the timeline of the narratives.

At the cognitive level: providing a profound answer to the question of what kind of ecological civilization should be built. Ecological civilization is a product of the development of industrial civilization up to a certain stage; it is a new form of society in which human beings respect, adapt to and protect nature, achieve their own development through the rational use of nature, and attain the vision of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, with such characteristics as greenness, coordination, and fairness. The ecological civilization pursued by China is first and foremost in the natural realm of "the unity of heaven and mankind", a state of harmony in which "all things are brought into life by their harmony and all things are nourished by their own nourishment".<sup>②</sup> Ecological civilization is a civilization of human progress which is not only embodied in ecological friendliness, but also in great material and spiritual richness. It is a civilization that can meet the needs of all aspects of economic, social, political, and cultural development. As global ecological and environmental problems transcend national boundaries, the ecological civilization we want to build is not limited to one thing at a time, one place, or one region, but is a community with a shared future that requires joint global efforts to achieve. It can only be truly realized through global action, response, and cooperation.

At the practice level: providing an in-depth answer to the question of how to build ecological civilization. Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization is both an epistemology and a methodology. The advancement of ecological civilization is, first and foremost, an ecological and environmental issue. But it is also an economic, political, social, and cultural issue as well as a systemic issue that one change affects the whole body in its entirety and thus requires exploration for a pragmatic and effective path that involves multiple measures. As General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "Ecology itself is economy",<sup>③</sup> and "good ecology itself contains an infinite economic value."<sup>④</sup> By opening up the transformation channel between the lucid waters and lush mountains, on the one hand, and mountains of gold and silver, on the other, we can create an incessant flow of combined benefits. Promoting a comprehensive green transformation of economic and social development is a logical requirement for the advancement of eco-civilization, which not only determines the quality of development, but also provides a fundamental solution to ecological and environmental problems. These paths and methods

<sup>①</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development (compilation): *Our Common Future*, Jilin Publishing House, 1987 edition

<sup>②</sup> *Treatise on Heaven*, Xunzi

<sup>③</sup> *People's Daily Overseas Edition* (compilation): *Xi Jinping's Stories of Poverty Alleviation*, Commercial Press, August 2020 edition

<sup>④</sup> Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee: *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Questions and Answer*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, February 2021 edition

are well-proven practical experience formed by the Communist Party of China in its exploratory efforts for ecological progress. In its continuous advancement, the Party's all-around leadership must be constantly strengthened so as to better leverage the CPC's advantage in overseeing the overall situation and coordinating all sectors in the field of ecological progress.

Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization is an open and inclusive system of thinking that is constantly enriched and improved as practice progresses further in depth. At the National Conference on Eco-environmental Protection in 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping set out in clear terms the "Four Major Changes"—the development of China's ecological civilization in the new era has achieved major transformations from focusing on remediation to systemic governance, from reactive response to proactive action, from being a participant in global environmental governance to a leader, and from practical exploration to scientific theoretical guidance. He also outlined Five Major Relationships—in continuing to make ecological advancement in the new journey, it is imperative to handle well the relationships between high-quality development and high-level protection, between focusing on breakthroughs and coordinated governance, between natural recovery and human restoration, between external constraints and intrinsic motivation, and between the "dual-carbon targets" to reaching carbon peaking/carbon neutrality and independent actions. Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs). The Four Major Transformations, Five Major Relationships, and Ten Commitments constitute an interconnected and organically unified whole, further encapsulating the essence, rich elements, and practice requirements of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization as a brand-new chapter in the innovative development of his thought on ecological civilization.

### **1.3 Distinctive Features of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization**

Based on the past and the present, Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization is oriented toward the world and the future. It advocates mutual learning among civilizations, harmonious coexistence, people-centeredness, green prosperity, systematic governance, and pragmatic cooperation; it contains a systemic exposition and sound arrangements for the strategic positioning, goals and tasks, overall thinking, and major principles that pertain to ecological progress; it is a crystallization of the sagacious thinking about, profound insights into, sound planning for the development of human civilization, the building of a Beautiful China, and the shaping of a clean and better world.

Mutual learning among civilizations shows an open and inclusive mindset. The world has diverse civilizations; different civilizations should tolerate each other in coexistence and learn from each other through exchanges. The ecological civilization advocated by China is a new form of modern civilization. It brings together in a united whole "civilization" and "ecology"—concepts that are regarded as unrelated by many

Western countries. It is a new form of organization for production, life, and ecology rather than an ideological concept. It is not an imposition of one's own values and model on others. China's concept of ecological civilization is a continuation of China's fine traditional ecological culture; yet, it is not a self-contained, self-referential concept. Instead, it is a result of drawing on the fine cultural nutrients of other countries regarding, *inter alia*, nature, protection, and development on the basis of respect for others. In its goal and path, this concept is largely compatible and in line with the world's advanced concepts of ecological conservation and environmental protection, particularly the concept of global sustainable development. It embodies the relationships of equality, mutual appreciation, dialogue, and inclusivity among different civilizations and cultures. In today's world where the future and destiny of all countries are in line and in fusion with each other, this is of great importance to advancing the modernization process of human society and the world's thriving garden of civilizations.

Harmonious coexistence guides the path toward sustainable human development. The Chinese people have always respected and loved nature, advocating the idea that "heaven and earth live together with me; all things are at one with me"<sup>①</sup> in the belief that man and nature should form an integrated whole. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: Nature is the mother of life. People are alive because of nature. Humanity and nature are a community of life<sup>②</sup>. Dialectically, when the human race has rational use and friendly protection of nature, the latter's return is often generous; when the human race has disorderly development and ruthless plundering of nature, nature's punishment is bound to be merciless. This is an irresistible law. Harmonious coexistence between the human race and nature is the common pursuit of mankind. In the course of handling the relationship between man and nature, countries around the world have long recognized that "nature's backlash against mankind is a retaliation for mankind's attempts to control nature". In setting forth this concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, China is neither crawling under nature nor overriding it. Rather, it shows the self-discipline and self-awareness that guide the synergistic promotion of the protection of nature and the all-round development of mankind. The moving story of the home-bound wild elephants in Yunnan from the North in 2021 vividly demonstrates a new scene of harmonious coexistence between humans and animals. China persists in respecting, following, and protecting nature, working hard to avoid the old path of "polluting first and cleaning up later". This provides a new choice of modernization path for starting a new journey of quality human development and achieving sustainable development for the human race.

Putting people first highlights the value orientation of ecological civilization. The people's aspiration for a better life is the goal of the Communist Party of China. A good eco-environment is the fairest public product, the most universal benefit for peo-

① Zhuangzi □ *The Inner Chapters* □ *The Adjustment of Controversies*

② Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee: *Study Outline on Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, April 2023 edition

ple's livelihoods. Letting the people share the beauty of nature, life, and living amidst lucid waters and lush mountains is the purpose and requirement of ecological progress. As people's living standards and perceptions continue to rise, there is an urgent need for the right to enjoy a beautiful eco-environment, be informed about, and to participate in a beautiful eco-environment. Solving the outstanding environmental problems that the people feel strongly about is both a pressing need to improve the environment affecting people's livelihoods and a matter of urgency to bolster ecological progress. Meanwhile, it is imperative to address urgent problems on people's doorsteps, including noise, smoke, and odor and positively respond to people's concerns. Since the advent of the new era, Beijing has delivered an excellent score sheet in air pollution control, having achieved the "APEC Blue", "Parade Blue", "Winter Olympics Blue" and then "Normal Blue", winning unanimous acclaim of the general public. This achievement has been hailed as the "Beijing Miracle" by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

China is a country that keeps at heart the well-being of its people and the future of mankind. As General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, the ecological environment has a bearing on the well-being of all peoples. We must fully take into account the aspirations of all peoples for a better life, their expectations for a sound environment, and their responsibilities to future generations. We must explore synergies among environmental protection and economic development, job creation, and poverty eradication and strive to achieve social justice in the process of green transformation so as to increase all peoples' sense of gains, happiness, and security.<sup>①</sup>

Green prosperity creates major opportunities for economic development. Green is the defining color of nature and determines the color of development. Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets; protecting the eco-environment is protecting productive forces; improving the eco-environment is developing productive forces. China will stay the course in its green and low-carbon high-quality development and will abandon the short-sighted approach of sacrificing the environment for temporary development. It is committed to following the general direction of the contemporary scientific and technological revolution and industrial change, seizing the huge development opportunities brought about by green transformation, and promoting a good eco-environment as a support for China's and, for that matter, the world's sustainable socio-economic development. At present, the promotion of green and low-carbon development is the general international trend and the green economy has become the commanding height of global industrial competition. Globally, countries are developing and implementing comprehensive green transformation strategies. They widely recognize that economic development should not be achieved at the expense of the environment and that a win-win result should be sought between economic growth and environmental protection. China is committed to high-quality development in which greenness has become a

<sup>①</sup> Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China: *Study Outline on Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, p.158, August 2021 edition

universal norm. Its green and low-carbon development concept has become a consensus on development, injecting strong momentum into the global green transition.

Systems thinking promotes comprehensive ecological and environmental management. Building ecological civilization is a complex systemic endeavor which requires greater attention to comprehensive, systemic, and source-based governance. In leading the process of promoting China's ecological progress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has always called for persistence in systems thinking and overall planning<sup>①</sup>, seizing the main issues and their main aspects, and constantly making all our work more systematic, holistic, and synergistic. On the one hand, as ecological civilization is closely linked to the development of other aspects of the economy and society, comprehensive and systematic means and measures covering the economy, rule of law, policy, market, etc. should be taken to carry out governance with precision and in a scientific manner. On the other hand, as mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts are inseparable ecosystems forming an interdependent, interlocked organic chain, new ways of governance should be sought from a holistic and systemic perspective in accordance with the inherent laws of ecosystems. We can no longer treat just symptoms rather than get to the root of the problem. Instead, we must take holistic, coordinated, integrated, and multi-pronged steps throughout the entire process of promoting ecological progress across the board. General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed on many international occasions that all elements of natural ecology should be considered in an integrated manner in keeping with the intrinsic laws of ecosystems before we can achieve the goal of enhancing the cycling capacity of ecosystems and maintaining ecological balance.<sup>②</sup> In this regard, he has provided a strategy of wisdom and a methodological path for global environmental governance.

Joining hands in pragmatic cooperation to build a clean and beautiful world. The advancement of ecological civilization bears on the future of mankind as the Earth is the one and only home on which mankind depends for survival. In the face of global ecological and environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution, the human race is a community with a shared future—it thrives or loses together. No country can do it alone, nor can any one country solve the problem if it wants to fight singlehandedly. General Secretary Xi Jinping advocated that we should stand on the vantage point of responsibility for human civilization and work together to build a community of life between mankind and nature and build a clean and beautiful world.<sup>③</sup> On many occasions, he proposed that we should uphold the principles of multilateralism and common but differentiated responsibilities<sup>④</sup>, and strive to ad-

① *A Tutorial Reader on the Report of the Twentieth Party Congress*, People's Publishing House, October 2022 edition

② Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (compilation): *Study Outline on Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy*, People's Publishing House & Xuexi Publishing House, August 2021 edition

③ Xi Jinping's Congratulatory Letter to the 25th Anniversary of the International Bamboo and Rattan Association and the 2nd World Bamboo and Rattan Conference, Xinhua News Agency, November 7, 2022

④ Xi Jinping's Speech at the Leaders' Climate Summit (full text), Xinhua News Agency, April 22, 2021

vance the construction of a fair, reasonable, cooperative, and win-win global environmental governance system. The United Nations agenda entitled Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes it clear by "recognizing that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that 'Mother Earth' is a common expression in many countries and regions"<sup>①</sup>. It calls for "the broadest international cooperation to accelerate progress in the reduction of global greenhouse gas emission and adaptation to address the adverse effects of climate change"<sup>②</sup>. Only by marching shoulder to shoulder, strengthening our actions, deepening partnerships, and elevating the level of cooperation can we enable the concept of green development to take root in people's hearts and travel steadily and far on the path of global ecological civilization.

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① Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 13, 2016, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ziliao\\_674904/zt\\_674979/dnzt\\_674981/qtzt/2030kcxzfzyc\\_686343/zw/201601/t20160113\\_9279987.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/dnzt_674981/qtzt/2030kcxzfzyc_686343/zw/201601/t20160113_9279987.shtml).

② Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 13, 2016, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ziliao\\_674904/zt\\_674979/dnzt\\_674981/qtzt/2030kcxzfzyc\\_686343/zw/201601/t20160113\\_9279987.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/dnzt_674981/qtzt/2030kcxzfzyc_686343/zw/201601/t20160113_9279987.shtml).



## Chapter Two China's Practice in Advancing Ecological Civilization

China is committed to sustainable development and to the principles of prioritizing resource conservation and environmental protection and letting nature restore itself. We will protect nature and the environment like we protect our eyes. We will continue to pursue a model of sound development featuring improved production, higher living standards, and healthy ecosystems to ensure the sustainable development of the Chinese nation.<sup>①</sup>

— Xi Jinping

Scientific theories lead the way forward.

Since the beginning of the new era, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, China has upheld the concept that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets. We have firmly prioritized the eco-environment and pursued green development, ensuring stronger ecological conservation and environmental protection across the board, in all regions, and at all times. We have taken firm steps in green and low-carbon development and improved the ecological and environmental quality visibly. This has resulted in globally recognized ecological and green development miracles, demonstrating vividly the power of truth and practice of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization.

China is pushing energetically for synergetic control of environmental pollution and reduction of carbon emissions for multiplied effect, the sustained adjustment of the industrial structure for optimization, acceleration of the clean and efficient use of energy, and promotion of green transformation in sectors such as transportation and construction. The "green quotient" of economic development has significantly increased. Through sustained and in-depth efforts to win the battle of pollution prevention and control by persisting in a targeted, lawful, and science-based way to protect the blue sky, clear waters, and clean land with higher standards, we have consistently increased the public's satisfaction with the eco-environment and improved the real quality of the ecological environment.

Green has become a salient feature of China in the new era and green development, a hallmark of Chinese modernization. China's practice in building ecological civilization has added more "Chinese Green" to the Earth and expanded the global green map, benefiting not only China, but also the world.

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping, *Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects*, *Qishi*, Issue 21, 2022

## 2.1 China's Actions in Green and Low-Carbon Transition

High-quality development is the primary task in building a modern socialist country in all respects, with go-green being a prevailing mode. Promoting green and low-carbon economic and social development is a crucial step in achieving quality development.

From 2012 to 2023, China supported an average annual economic growth rate of over 6% with an average annual increase of 3% in energy consumption. The energy intensity fell by 26.4 percent accumulatively, making China one of the countries in the world with the fastest reduction in energy intensity.

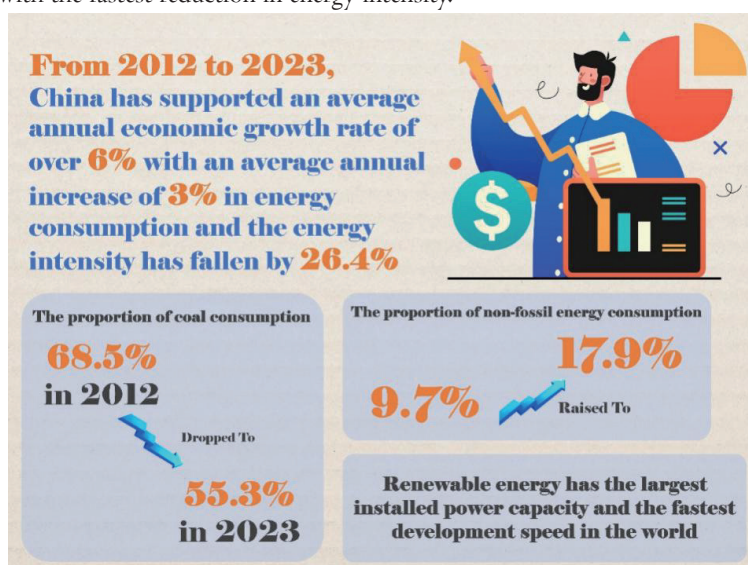


Figure I. Results of China's Green Development

In balancing high-quality development with high-level protection in a relationship of dialectical unity, China has consistently promoted a green, low-carbon transition of its economy and society. In pursuing development, we must plan from the vantage point of harmony between humanity and nature, taking the resource and environmental carrying capacities as a premise and basis. We must change the traditional economic model characterized by massive production, consumption, and emissions and effectively promote effective qualitative improvement and rational quantitative increase of development in the process of green transformation. Emphasizing protection is not to bind one's hands and feet and refrain from development, but to foster, through high-level protection, new momentum and advantages for growth, significantly improve the green level of the economy, effectively reduce the resource and environment cost in development, and increase the potential for and stamina of development in a sustained manner.

## — China Continues to Optimize and Adjust Its Industrial Structure.

Adhering to the new development philosophy, China fosters innovation-led new growth drivers and new advantages for its economic development, propels deep adjustments in the industrial structure with stringent resource and environmental constraints, and continues to optimize the spatial distribution of industries through sectorial coordination. On the one hand, the accelerating application of emerging technologies such as AI, big data, blockchain, and quantum communication has nurtured new products and new business forms such as intelligent terminals, telemedicine, and online education, playing an increasing role in leading economic development. On the other hand, active efforts are made to build a sound production system that features green, low-carbon, and circular development, encourage green factories and industrial parks in the industrial area, and reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture to increase the eco-friendliness of traditional industries across the board.

The Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and the six neighboring provinces and cities cover only 7.2 percent of China's territory and once consumed 33 percent of the nation's coal. With a high concentration of high-energy-consuming and high-emitting industries such as steel, cement, and plate glass, the emission intensity per unit area of the national territory was approximately four times the national average. The entire region suffered from frequent bouts of air pollution in autumn and winter and problems such as an unbalanced industrial mix and economic bottlenecks. Through the short-term pains of industrial restructuring, the region has built up its might with emerging industries while bringing about a major overhaul of its traditional industries with scientific and technological empowerment, marching toward high-end, smart, and green sectors.

In recent years, various regions have taken measures in light of local conditions to expedite the development of new quality productive forces, vigorously develop strategic emerging industries, guide resource-based industries in an orderly development, optimize the regional industrial layout, and promote the green transition of traditional industries in a sustained effort to highlight the green foundation of high-quality development.

## — China Leads in Building the Green Development High Ground with Major Regional Strategies.

China is fully leveraging its upgrading and leading role in major regional strategies to advance the implementation of those strategies with the green development concept. The Yangtze River, the mother river of the Chinese nation, was once "sick". Starting in 2016, Xi Jinping prescribed the approach of "promoting well-coordinated environmental conservation and avoiding excessive development"<sup>①</sup> and convened four symposia, which helped lead the Yangtze River Economic Belt onto a path of ecological prioritiza-

<sup>①</sup> Publicity Department of CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Ecology and Environment (compilation): *Study Outline on Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, p. 66, July 2022 edition

tion and green development. Eleven provinces and cities along the river have introduced reforms and innovations and developed new growth drivers while reducing outdated production capacity, accelerated the industrial transformation and upgrading, and focused on shaping a corridor with a high concentration of international competitive modern industries. Areas like Yichang of Hubei have energetically worked on tackling the problem of "the river besieged by chemical factories" by guiding chemical enterprises in closure, conversion, relocation, and transformation while promoting the creation of new momentum for high-quality growth through their transformation. Today, the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt is steadily improving in quality, trending better with every single day.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, President Xi has convened three forums to discuss the major national strategy on the ecological conservation and high-quality development of the Yellow River Basin, mapping a far-reaching plan for the future of the Yellow River—China's "Mother River". The ecological environment in the Yellow River Basin has experienced a steady qualitative improvement, the capacity for guaranteed water security has continued to grow, and the foundation for energy and food security has been constantly reinforced, placing the ecological conservation and high-quality development in the basin at a new and higher starting point.

Promoting the lead by the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region in breakthroughs in ecological conservation rating through synergetic development and leveraging the exemplary role of the Yangtze River Delta in green development and building a beautiful Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area... Committed to ecological prioritization and green development, China focuses on building the first echelon in green development to lead the overall uplifting of the country's green economic and social development.

### **— China is driving its green and low-carbon transition with a "dual carbon reduction" goal.**

In September 2020, China announced to the world its commitment to "peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060", ushering China's ecological conservation efforts into a new phase with "carbon emission reduction" as a major strategic direction. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, pushing ahead with the implementation of the "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" goal represents a major strategic decision made by the CPC Central Committee after thorough deliberations. It is China's solemn commitment to the international community and is in alignment with the intrinsic requirement for promoting the transformation and upgrading of its economic structure and fostering a competitive advantage in green and low-carbon industries to achieve quality development.<sup>①</sup>

As China is still a developing country going through the industrialization and urbanization stage, it requires extensive infrastructure development and consequently a bigger

<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping: *Advancing Ecological Conservation Requires Managing Properly Several Major Relationships*, *Qiushi*, Issue 22, 2023

share of energy-intensive raw material industries. Overall, the total energy demand will continue to grow for some time to come and its carbon dioxide emissions also follow a gradual upward trajectory.

Nonetheless, as a responsible major nation, China has made its commitment to the international community to achieve carbon peaking and carbon neutrality and has made effective efforts to this end. The "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" goal has been integrated into the general plan for ecological conservation and the overarching road map for socio-economic development; the synergetic promotion of carbon emissions and pollution reduction, green development expansion, and economic growth stimulation has produced remarkable results. The CPC Central Committee and the State Council have issued the Working Guidance for Carbon Dioxide Peaking and Carbon Neutrality in Full and Faithful Implementation of the New Development Philosophy and the Action Plan for Carbon Dioxide Peaking Before 2030.

Government departments have rolled out implementation strategies for key sectors and industries. All 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities have developed their respective carbon-peaking action plans.... The "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" and "I+N" policy frameworks have been established to make top-level design for the "dual-carbon reduction" goal with a well-defined timetable, roadmap, and construction plan for the "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality" endeavor.

China's transition to a green and low-carbon energy mix is making steady progress. Given its energy resource condition of being coal-rich but oil-poor and gas-scarce, China has persisted in overall planning and upheld the principle of establishing the new before abolishing the old by accelerating the development of a new energy system on the basis of continuing to increase its capacity for ensuring energy supply security. The proportion of coal in energy consumption decreased from 68.5% in 2012 to 55.3% in 2023 while the share of non-fossil energy consumption increased from 9.7% to 17.9%. China now leads the world in both the scale and growth rate of renewable energy installed capacity, with renewables taking up the bulk of its newly added power generation capacity. As of the end of July 2024, China's combined installed capacity for wind and solar power reached 1.206 billion kilowatts, reaching, about six and a half years ahead of schedule, the goal of "bringing its total installed capacity of wind and solar power to 1.2 billion kilowatts" as promised at the UN Climate Ambition Summit.

The carbon market is a pivotal initiative that uses market mechanisms to control and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to realize the goal of "carbon peaking and carbon neutrality". It is also a widely adopted policy tool in international climate governance. In July 2021 and January 2024, China launched its national carbon emissions trading market and the national voluntary greenhouse gas emission reduction trading market respectively. Together, the two markets form the national carbon market system, marking significant progress and results in the establishment of China's carbon market architecture.

## —Turn Lucid Waters and Lush Mountains into a Continuing Source of Invaluable Assets

The improvement of the ecological product value-realization mechanism as called for by the 20th CPC Central Committee at its third plenary session is an important institutional effort to translate into reality the concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" by creating pathways for their conversion. At a symposium on promoting the in-depth development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt in April 2018, President Xi Jinping pointed to the need to actively explore and promote ways to turn lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets by selecting regions able to do so to pilot the ecological product value-realization mechanism with the aim of exploring sustainable government-led and market-driven pathways for the value realization of ecological products—pathways that involve participation by businesses and society. In 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued the Opinions on Establishing and Improving the Mechanism for Realizing the Value of Ecological Products which sets the top-level design for this mechanism.

From ecological products to eco-tourism, from transregional ecological compensation to the paid use of resources such as the trading of water and energy permits ... relevant government departments have launched in collaboration with their local counterparts various pilot projects to explore in-depth pathways to realize the value of ecological products by focusing on the trading of natural resource assets property rights, ecological compensation, eco-industry development, and voluntary greenhouse gas emission reduction trading. As a result, there has emerged a range of practice models that others can draw on.

## 2.2 China's Resolve in Preventing and Controlling Environmental Pollution

A good ecological environment is the foundation for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation and the most inclusive form of public well-being. In the past, northern China often had to endure heavy smog during autumn and winter, and the water of certain rivers and lakes was severely polluted, significantly diminishing the people's sense of eco-environmental gain. Ecological and environmental issues became major and immediate public concerns affecting people's livelihoods. President Xi Jinping pointed out: "The general public is yearning for a rapid improvement in the quality of the eco-environment. We must respond to the people's views, hopes, and concerns by vigorously pushing ahead with ecological progress and providing more quality eco-products to continue meeting the people's growing need for a sound eco-environment."<sup>①</sup>

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Party, which identifies pollution

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping Emphasizes at the National Conference on Environmental Protection: Resolutely Win the Battle Against Pollution and Advance Ecological Conservation to a New Stage, with Li Keqiang and Han Zheng Making Speeches and Wang Yang, Wang Huning, and Zhao Leji Present, Xinhua News Agency, May 19, 2018

prevention and control as one of the three crucial battles in the decisive war to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects, adds green impetus to the drive for this goal. The years 2018 and 2021 saw the successive issuance of the Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Strengthening Ecological and Environmental Protection in an All-Round Way and Firmly Fighting the Battle of Pollution Prevention and Control and the Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Further Deepening the Battle of Pollution Prevention and Control. Under the leadership of the Party Central Committee, China took addressing outstanding eco-environmental problems as a priority in improving people's lives. It resolutely launched an unprecedented large-scale battle against pollution during which targeted, well-conceived, and law-based methods and experiences for pollution control were developed, with marked improvement made in eco-environmental quality.

### — Keeping the Sky Blue

Improving air quality is the top priority in China's tough battle against pollution. The lopsided industrial structure, coal-dominated energy mix, and road-dependent transportation system, among others, led to the long-term, complex, and arduous nature of China's air quality problems. With the issuance of the Air Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan in 2013, the Three-Year Action Plan to Fight Air Pollution in 2018, and the Action Plan for Continuous Improvement of Air Quality in 2023, China rolled out three successive action plans in a short span of ten years, each outlining ten major provisions on tackling air pollution in a sustained effort with lasting effect.

To ensure that its people can once again see white clouds against a blue sky during the day and bright stars in a clear sky at night, China has made arduous efforts. Since the beginning of the new era, the country has altogether phased out 1 billion tons of outdated coal production capacity, 300 million tons of steel production capacity, and 400 million tons of cement production capacity. Over 95% of coal-fired power units and 45% of crude steel production capacity have completed ultra-low emission transformation, which led to the establishment of the world's largest clean power supply system and clean steel production system.

The number of coal-fired boilers has decreased from nearly 500,000 to fewer than 100,000. In North China, the clean heating transformation project has been proceeding in an orderly manner, with individual use of coal heating for 39 million households rectified. More than 40 million high-emission vehicles have been phased out and the share of buses running on new energy has surged from less than 20% a decade ago to over 70% by 2023. The use of cleaner transportation methods for bulk freight has risen in a sustained manner.





Figure 2. Improvements in China's Air Quality

In 2023, the average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration in major cities across China was 30 micrograms per cubic meter, representing a 54% reduction compared with that of a decade ago. The number of days with heavy pollution dropped by 83% and the proportion of days with good air quality remained above 86% for four consecutive years. China has become the world's fastest-improving country in air quality. China has continued to move ahead with the prevention and control of noise pollution to address the environmental pollution problems around the people. The Ministry of Ecology and Environment, together with 15 departments, issued the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan of Action for Noise Pollution Prevention and Control -the first action plan in this field. It has pushed for the construction of more than 4,000 automatic monitoring stations in 338 cities at the prefecture level and above, with 280,000 industrial enterprises incorporating noise into their discharge permit management. There was supervised handling of more than 1,000 noise cases which the public felt strongly about, benefiting hundreds of thousands of people. In 2023, the nation's acoustic environment functional zones had an 87% nighttime compliance rate, an increase of 15 percentage points compared with the rate of ten years earlier.



## — Keeping the Waters Clear

Protecting rivers and lakes has a bearing on the well-being of the people and the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. In recent years, China has been steadfast in its efforts to keep waters clear by taking decisive and forceful actions to reduce pollution, bringing about a fundamental change to the conservation of the aquatic eco-environment. The concept of water management has moved beyond a singular focus on water control to the integrated management of water resources, aquatic ecology, and aquatic environment. In water environment governance, the inspection and rectification of pollutant discharge outlets into rivers is taken as the key which in turn drives the control and management of various sources of pollution on land. Meanwhile, the ecological conservation and restoration efforts have continued to move ahead and the provision of eco-friendly use of water has been consistently further ensured. China has persisted in relying on strong institutions to protect its clear waters. It has pushed for the promulgation of the Yangtze River Protection Law and the Yellow River Protection Law, the establishment of ecological oversight agencies for seven major river basins, and the localization of such measures as ecological compensation mechanisms for cross-provincial water basins.

In 2023, the surface water quality in 89.4% of the cross-sections examined in China met excellent water quality standards, an increase of 25.3% percentage points over that of a decade earlier. The water quality of the main streams of the Yangtze and Yellow rivers stayed at the Grade II level for four and two consecutive years, respectively. The Yangtze finless porpoise, often called the "smiling angel", is seen frequently along the Yangtze River. Shanxi's Jinci Spring, a millennium-old spring in an ancestral shrine in the Yellow River basin, started to gush out with water again for the first time in 30 years.

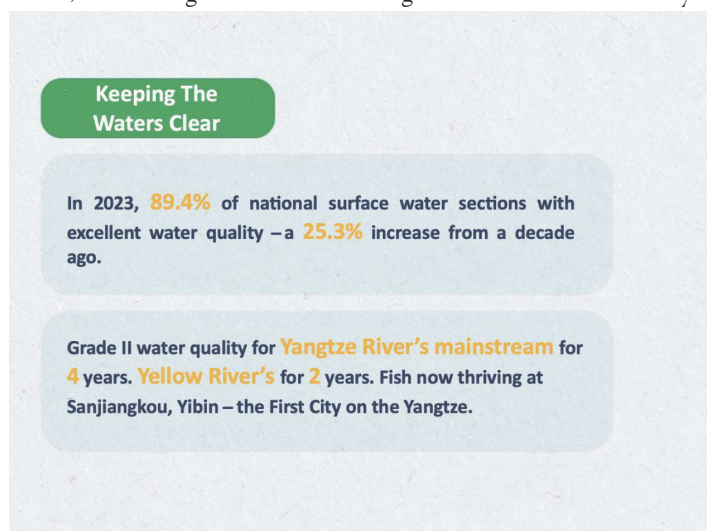


Figure 3. Improvements in China's Water Environment Quality

China has been intensifying its efforts to protect marine ecosystems and has seen a continuous improvement in nearshore ecological conditions. It has paid close attention to strategic nearshore confluence areas like the Bohai Sea, the Yangtze River Estuary – Hangzhou Bay, and the Pearl River Estuary with coordinated rectification and treatment of land and waters, bringing about a big change in the ecological environment quality from stabilization to significant improvement. According to statistics, by 2023, 85% of the country's nearshore waters met the excellent quality standard—a record high, marking an increase of 13.7% percentage points from 2018. Since 2021, 24 typical marine ecosystems have fully recovered from their unhealthy status. There have emerged 20 excellent beautiful bays that show wonderful scenes of "pristine water with clean beaches, fish and gulls soaring, and people living in harmony with the sea".

### **—Keeping the Lands Clean**

Soil is the material foundation on which human beings depend for their survival. Tightly focused on "eating and living with peace of mind", China promulgated the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Soil Pollution to establish a regulatory framework for the prevention and control of soil pollution. By formulating the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Soil Pollution at the Source, it aims to control the source, prevent new additions, and emphasize supervision and regulation so as to comprehensively control the risks of soil pollution. China has carried out investigations into causes of arable land soil pollution, strengthened the accurate traceability as well as the disconnection of pollution source, promoted the implementation of major engineering projects for soil pollution source control, and eliminated a number of hidden pollution hazards. It has also pushed for the classified management of agricultural land, carried out strict administration of access to construction land, and strengthened the supervision of illegal development and use, thus effectively guaranteeing safe use of land. It has delineated major areas for the prevention and control of groundwater pollution and implemented sub-regional, differentiated, and precise environmental management. The country has also promoted the safe use of "the right land for the right planting", implemented land-use and land-recuperation measures for black soil, and carried out integrated use and eco-environmental protection of saline and alkaline land with a view to guaranteeing food security through ecological safety.

Rural areas are like back gardens of cities, with their environment having a direct impact on the supply of grains, vegetables, and water in cities. China has adopted a two-pronged approach targeting agricultural production and rural living conditions to build ecologically friendly and livable rural communities. The Green Rural Revival Program in Zhejiang Province was awarded the UN Champion of the Earth Award.



Figure 4: China's Battle for Clean Lands

Key initiatives include adjusting the agricultural input structure, reducing chemical fertilizer and pesticide use, increasing the share of organic fertilizer use, and improving the recycling system of used agricultural plastic film. An operation to rectify the rural living environment has been carried out in a sustained manner. Since the launch of China's 14th Five-year Plan, 67,000 additional villages have completed environmental upgrading, the rural sewage treatment (control) rate has exceeded 45%, the fertilizer and pesticide utilization rates have surpassed 41%, and livestock and poultry waste recycling rates have reached 78%.

Solid waste management is an important part of the pollution prevention and control battle. China has fully banned the import of waste, launched "waste-free city" initiatives, and strengthened hazardous waste supervision, achieving notable steady progress in addressing solid waste pollution. Since the implementation of the foreign waste import ban on January 1, 2018, China reached ahead of schedule, thanks to its unremitting efforts, the target of eliminating solid waste imports by the end of 2020, a milestone widely recognized domestically and internationally. Through "waste-free city" projects, China has guided participating cities and regions to focus efforts on specific projects such as for the reduction, resource utilization, and harmless disposal of solid waste so as to effectively tackle at the source the practical solid waste problems in the fields spanning industry, domestic life, construction, and agriculture at the source.

## 2.3 The China Miracle in Ecological Conservation and Restoration

The human race and nature form a community of life. President Xi Jinping empha-

sized: The lifeline of the people comes from the farmland, that of the farmland comes from water, that of water comes from the mountain, that of the mountain comes from the earth, and that of the earth comes from the tree. This community of life is the material basis of human survival and development.<sup>①</sup> Since then, along with people's deepening awareness, the concept of the community of life that encompasses mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts has further developed in depth and width.

President Xi Jinping pointed to the need to integrate natural restoration and human rectification as well as to tailor strategies to local conditions and specific circumstances by regions and categories in an effort to find optimal solutions for ecological protection and restoration.<sup>②</sup> Since the start of the new era, China has followed a systems concept and adopted a holistic approach to ecological preservation to push ahead with the integrated protection and restoration of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts. Ecological protection and restoration of the national spatial space has been progressing from focusing on individual elements to systemic management, from engineering projects as the mainstay to nature-based restoration, from end-of-pipe treatment to full-chain management, and from sole reliance on government finance to diverse inputs. The blueprint for ecological protection and restoration has largely taken shape, extending from mountaintops to the sea, from plateaus to plains, and from the national to local levels.

Respecting nature, following its laws, and protecting it in an active effort to promote natural restoration. China prioritizes natural restoration by fully respecting and aligning with nature. This means abiding by the natural evolution of ecosystems, giving nature enough time and space to heal, and relying on natural forces to restore ecological balance.

By drawing eco-protection red lines based on science, China has included areas with critical ecological functions, extreme fragility, or significant potential ecological value, including integrating optimized nature reserves and creating a unified red line to protect important ecological spaces. The total land area under ecological red-line protection accounts for over 30% of the country's landmass. By setting these boundaries for ecological protection with the red lines and developing ecological restoration plans, China has reinforced its ecological security framework that encompasses the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau Ecological Barrier, the Yellow River Key Ecological Zone (including the Loess Plateau Ecological Barrier), the Yangtze River Key Ecological Zone (including the Sichuan-Yunnan Ecological Barrier), the Northeast Forest Belt, the Northern Sand Control Belt, the hilly and mountainous regions in southern China, and coastal areas.

The establishment of a nature reserve system centering around national parks. China

<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping: Explanation on the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform, Xinhua News Agency, November 9, 2013

<sup>②</sup> Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee (compilation): *Selected Important Literature Since the Twentieth CPC National Congress (Vol. 1)*, Central Literature Publishing House, August 2024 edition

has officially established the first batch of national parks including those named after Sanjiaguyan (Source of Three Rivers), the Giant Panda, Northeast Tiger and Leopard, Hainan Tropical Rainforest, and Wuyishan, achieving overall protection of the headwaters of the Yangtze, Yellow, and Lancang rivers, providing protection for over 70% of wild giant panda habitats, creating ecological corridors that link 13 local panda populations, and resulting in a marked increase in the flagship species populations within the parks. By now, China has selected 49 potential areas for national parks (including 5 officially established national parks), with a total area of approximately 1.1 million square kilometers. As specified in the national park spatial layout plan, by 2035 China will have essentially completed the task of building the national park spatial layout and hence the establishment of the largest national park system in the world.

Enhancing the ecological conservation and integrated management of major rivers, lakes, wetlands, and coastal areas and coordinating the integrated protection and systematic management of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and desert ecosystems to improve the quality and stability of ecosystems. As of the end of 2021, nearly 10,000 nature reserves at various levels had been established, covering more than 17% of the nation's land area. This effort has effectively preserved 90% of the country's terrestrial natural ecosystem types and 74% of the wildlife and plant species under special national protection.

Upholding the systems concept by implementing big projects for the protection and restoration of important vital ecosystems. In instances of severe ecosystem harm or destruction done to an ecosystem, sole reliance on natural forces for restoration often falls short. It is necessary to have integrated employment of both natural recovery and human restoration to bring the ecosystem back to a state of dynamic equilibrium. Given China's vast expanse and complex natural conditions, eco-protection and restoration efforts need to encompass considerations such as ecosystem integrity, the continuity of natural geographic units, the complexity of environmental elements, and the sustainability of economic and social development. Grounded in the laws and inherent mechanisms governing natural ecosystem succession, strategies should be customized to specific locations and times, coupled with a regional and categorized approach.

Surveys and assessments of the national ecological situation are conducted regularly to obtain firsthand data and information in a systematic and comprehensive manner to form the basis for studying and determining ecological changes. The results of the surveys and assessments have shown a steady improvement in the country's overall ecological conditions, a stable ecosystem pattern as a whole, continuing improvement in the quality of the ecosystem, growing service functions of the ecosystem, and a progressive rise in the level of biodiversity protection. Efforts are made to implement major projects for the conservation and restoration of important ecosystems to fortify the national ecological security shield. Since entering the new era, China has placed importance on bolstering ecological protection and restoration efforts in important green ecological defenses such as the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, Sanjiangyuan region, and the Inner

Mongolia Plateau, preserving the eco-environment of ecological security barriers like the Qinling, Qilian, and Helan mountains. The Shan-Shui Initiative in China was selected as one of the United Nations' first 10 flagship initiatives for ecosystem restoration. To date, 52 ecological protection and restoration projects under the Shan-Shui Initiative have produced remarkable improvements.

Executing large-scale national land greening initiatives guided by evidence-based scientific practices. China has implemented a series of ecological protection and treatment projects with great impacts like the "Three-North" Shelterbelt Program, the protection and restoration of natural forests, and initiatives to convert farmlands back to forests and grasslands. These efforts have effectively propelled the continuous expansion of forests, grasslands, wetlands, rivers, and lakes, put an initial stop to the degradation of grasslands, reduced land desertification, and mitigated the risks of wind-sand disasters.

For more than three decades, China has maintained a consistent "dual growth" trajectory in forest coverage and forest stock volume, establishing the country as the global leader in forest resource growth and afforestation. Internationally, China led the world in achieving "zero growth" in land degradation, with reductions in both desertified and sandy regions, playing a positive role in reaching the global objective of zero net land degradation by 2030. Since 2000, China has remained a significant player in global greening efforts, contributing approximately one-fourth of the world's additional greened areas.



Figure 5. China's Endeavor in Ecological Conservation and Restoration  
Saihanba Mechanical Forest Farm in Hebei Province has fought tirelessly for de-



cares, converting wilderness into vast forests for decades—a remarkable feat of human achievement. It established a green barrier for quality development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, becoming an exemplary model for desertification control in China and worldwide. The farm was honored with the United Nations Champions of the Earth Award in 2017.

## 2.4 China's Trend of Advocating Living Green

Ecological civilization is an undertaking of the people, by the people, and for the people. Every individual is a guardian, builder, and beneficiary of the ecological environment. Since China entered the new era, General Secretary Xi Jinping has extensively and comprehensively articulated the concept of green lifestyles on various occasions from multiple perspectives, actively encouraging the public to practice green lifestyles.

President Xi Jinping has written letters to commend volunteers actively engaged in environmental conservation initiatives. He commended volunteers in Jiaxinglu Subdistrict, Shanghai who worked on garbage sorting, encouraging them to be dedicated to its advocacy, promoting garbage sorting as a new fashionable style of low-carbon living. He also encouraged the environmental volunteers in the Danjiangkou Reservoir area of Shiyan, Hubei Province, to champion the ethos of volunteerism and lead more people in taking the initiative to conserve, safeguard, and save water resources, contributing to a modernization that features harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

President Xi Jinping pays great attention to garbage sorting and resource utilization and has issued important instructions on multiple occasions. He stressed that garbage sorting and resource utilization represent a comprehensive system of endeavors<sup>①</sup> which call for coordinated actions, precise strategies, sustained commitment, and the active participation and proactive efforts of urban and rural residents at large. Garbage sorting is evolving into a new fashion of green and low-carbon lifestyles. At present, garbage sorting covers 92.6% of residential communities in cities at or above the prefecture level nationwide. Forty-six key cities have taken the lead in establishing fairly comprehensive waste sorting systems encompassing separate disposal, collection, transportation, and processing.

From the "Clear Your Plate" campaign to nationwide voluntary tree planting, from voluntary waste sorting to the rejection of "white pollution", from embracing new energy vehicles and starting a trend of jogging and cycling, and from advocating the sharing economy and to engaging in second-hand transactions.... Since entering the new era, China has actively promoted the value concept of ecological civilization, and encouraged the whole nation to continuously enhance their awareness of the importance of conservation, environmental protection, and ecological preservation. Chinese citizens are encouraged to proactively adopt a lifestyle that is moderate, green, and low-carbon

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping's Reply Letter to Volunteers Helping with Garbage Sorting in Jiaxinglu Subdistrict, Shanghai, Xinhua News Agency, May 21, 2023

and reject extravagance, waste, and irrational consumption. The green lifestyle revolution will in turn force the green transformation of the way of work and disseminate green living and "zero waste" principles to every facet of daily life, from clothing and food to housing, transportation, and travel, fostering a sound environment of the whole society's push for green development.



## Chapter Three Institutional Guarantees for Building a Beautiful China

**We must have the strictest possible institutions and legislation in place in order to guarantee ecological progress.**<sup>①</sup>

— Xi Jinping

Since the beginning of the new era, China has been directly addressing prominent environmental challenges. It has advanced institutional reform for ecological progress, reshaped its institutional system for ecological conservation, strengthened legal safeguards for ecological advancement, and improved environmental management mechanisms and governance systems through top-level design, institutional innovation, the promotion of the rule of law, etc. The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization, adopted at the 3rd Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee clearly sets out as an important part of the effort the need to focus on building a Beautiful China and promoting harmony between man and nature as an important part of the overarching goal of further deepening the reform in a comprehensive manner. The document outlines key tasks and major initiatives for deepening institutional reform for ecological progress to provide the institutional framework to ensure the comprehensive drive for a modernization featuring harmonious coexistence between man and nature through the advancement of the Beautiful China Initiative.

### 3.1 Confronting Intractable Problems in Eco-environmental Governance

Since the beginning of its reform and opening up, China has completed the journey of industrial development in a short span of three to four decades, a journey that took developed countries several centuries to cover. While China achieved rapid economic and social development, it also faced serious ecological damage and environmental pollution issues. Environmental problems accumulated over years of high growth, such as air pollution, basin-wide water pollution, and localized soil contamination, brook no overnight solution due to their complex, multi-faceted, and difficult nature. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, the prominent problems in China's ecological conservation and environmental protection are largely due to the lack of a sound system, lax rules, loopholes in the rule of law, inadequate enforcement and implementation, and light punishment.<sup>②</sup> Yet, institutional building and improvement is a gradual process. It

<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping: *On Insisting on Harmonious Coexistence between Humanity and Nature*, Central Party Literature Press, p.14, January 2022 edition

<sup>②</sup> Xi Jinping: *Pushing China's Development of an Ecological Civilization to a New Stage*, *Qiushi*, Issue 3, 2019

is imperative to work hard to overcome the institutional and systemic barriers that hinder ecological conservation by following closely the ethos of building a beautiful China and deepening the institutional reform for ecological progress to accelerate the establishment and improvement of a complete system for ecological civilization.<sup>①</sup>

## 3.2 Weaving a Tight Green Net of Eco-protection Systems

Since the advent of the new era, China has given top priority to institution-building in its effort to advance ecological conservation. Through a reshaping of its institutional framework, the foundational framework, graphically described as "four beams and eight columns" in traditional Chinese architecture, has by and large taken shape for the ecological conservation system, along with a system of ecological and environmental laws with Chinese statistics. The restructuring of the ecological governance system is further deepening.

### —Reshaping the Institutional System for Ecological Conservation

Institutions are fundamental to the overall steady and long-term advancement of the cause of the Party and the country. Since the beginning of the new era, the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has incorporated institution-building into every aspect and stage of ecological conservation, persisting in planning across all dimensions, systemic construction, and progress by multiple tiers. The principles that "the Communist Party of China shall lead the people in pursuing socialist ecological conservation" and that it is imperative to "fully understand that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" have been written in the CPC Constitution. Additionally, ecological conservation was enshrined in the national Constitution through a constitutional amendment adopted in March 2018. Thus, a high degree of alignment of the propositions of the Party, the will of the state, and the aspirations of the people is achieved, which fully underlines the important status of ecological conservation in advancing the cause of the Party and the country and demonstrates the firm will and strong resolve of the CPC to bolster ecological conservation.<sup>②</sup>

A layout has been made consistently across all dimensions. China has successively issued for implementation the Opinions on Accelerating the Advancement of Ecological Progress and the Integrated Reform Plan for Promoting Ecological Progress, and dozens of specific reform plans. The establishment of the foundational framework of a "four beams and eight columns" nature for the ecological conservation system has largely been completed. This framework includes the property rights system for natural re-

<sup>①</sup> Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Ecology and Environment (compilation): *Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization: A Study Outline*, Xuexi Publishing House and People's Publishing House, p. 87, July 2022 edition

<sup>②</sup> Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and Ministry of Ecology and Environment (compilers): *Study Outline of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, p.15, July 2022 edition

source assets, system for developing and protecting territorial space, space-planning system, resource management and conservation system, system for payment-based resource use and compensation for ecological conservation, environmental governance system, market system for environmental governance and ecological protection, and system for ecological conservation performance assessment and accountability. A basic institutional framework for ecological conservation that includes strict prevention at the source, rigorous regulation during processes, damage compensation, and severe punishment for consequences has been initially established.

Institutions have been built systematically constructed. In building the ecological conservation system in the new era, emphasis has been put on an integrated system and efficient coordination, covering all aspects of ecological conservation, including natural resource management, eco-environmental oversight, and ecological compensation as priority areas, various types of resources, and environmental factors. Attention has been paid not only to the interrelationships among environmental factors, but also to the coordination and synergy among different institutions.

The institutions have been advanced through multiple tiers. It is imperative to combine advanced pilot programs and coordinated overall advancement by following the unified deployment of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council to proceed from easier tasks to more difficult ones in a phased approach, tackling them one by one as conditions become mature. Regions are encouraged to explore and experiment with tailored solutions. In 2016, the general offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Opinions on Establishing National Pilot Zones for Ecological Conservation under Unified Standards. Subsequently, Fujian, Jiangxi, Guizhou, and Hainan provinces initiated the construction of pilot zones, generating a series of replicable and scalable institutional outcomes. These reform experiences have been expanded from localized trials to broader implementation.

### **— Rule of Law a Strong Guarantee for Building a Beautiful China**

Good laws are a prerequisite for good governance. "If good laws are established under Heaven, then there will be order under Heaven; if good laws are established in a state, then there will be order in that state."<sup>①</sup> Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the building of the rule of law for ecological conservation, guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Conservation and Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law, has entered a period characterized by the most robust legislation, the strictest oversight and enforcement, and the most effective implementation of the legal systems.

The rule of law framework has been tightened. After entering the new era, China has focused on bringing the advancement of ecological conservation into the orbit of the rule of law and institutional governance. It has established a scientifically rigorous comprehensive legal framework for ecological protection, driving the process with legal

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<sup>①</sup> Wang Anshi: *The Duke of Zhou* (Northern Song dynasty)

principles and approaches.<sup>①</sup> The Environmental Protection Law, revised in 2014, codifies the fundamental concepts, principles, and systems that must be followed in ecological conservation and specifies measures for heavier penalties for environmental violations. The law also establishes such systems as consecutive daily fines and public interest environmental litigation. The Civil Code enacted in May 2020 incorporates the green principle as a fundamental guideline for civil activities with a dedicated chapter on liability for environmental pollution and ecological damage and establishes a compensation system for ecological damage. In addition, individual eco-environmental laws for preventing and controlling noise and the pollution and contamination of air, water, and soil and ten ecological protection laws, including the Soil Pollution Prevention and Control Law, Biosecurity Law, Yangtze River Protection Law, and Wetlands Conservation Law, have been successively introduced, filling the legislative gaps in related fields. These laws cover various environmental factors and natural ecosystems, such as mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts, further clarifying and specifying the legal provisions.

Currently, China's ecological protection legal framework in force includes over 30 laws, more than 100 administrative regulations, and over 1,000 local regulations.

In the field of eco-environmental protection, a "1 + N + 4" legal system has been formed, consisting of one foundational and comprehensive environmental protection law, several specialized laws dedicated to addressing specific areas such as the atmosphere, water, solid waste, soil, noise, oceans, wetlands, grasslands, forests, and deserts, as well as four special regional laws, such as the Law on the Protection of the Yangtze River, Law on the Protection of the Yellow River, Law on the Protection of Black Soil, and Law on the Protection of Ecological Protection on the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau.

Law enforcement has been made more effective. Orders must be credible and laws must be enforced. Both the vitality and authority of the law lie in its implementation. At the start of the new era, China has emphasized law-based administration and law enforcement in the eco-environmental sector. The country has promoted the legalization of institutions and their functions, competencies, procedures, and responsibilities, bringing all law enforcement activities onto the rule-of-law track. It has been stepping up law enforcement in the eco-environmental field and consistently taking a tough stance on environmental violations, forming a strong deterrent.

Awareness of the importance of the rule of law in eco-environmental protection has been increasing. Since the revised Environmental Protection Law came into effect, the State Council has reported annually to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the state of the environment and progress made in meeting environmental protection targets. Governments at the county level and above have earnestly implemented the environmental reporting system and complied with legal oversight by the people's congresses. The Ministry of Ecology and Environment issued the Guiding

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<sup>①</sup> Publicity Department of CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Ecology and Environment (compilation): *A Study Outline of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization*, Xuexi Publishing House & People's Publishing House, p.86, July 2022 edition

Opinions on Deepening the Administration of Law in the Field of Ecology and Environment and Continuously Strengthening Pollution Control According to Law to promote the in-depth development of government's role in supporting the rule of law in the eco-environmental field by continuing to improve law-based administration. Governments and departments across various regions have organized various forms of advocacy activities by availing themselves of World Environment Day (June 5th), etc. to actively introduce eco-environmental protection laws, regulations, and related knowledge to government entities, schools, communities, businesses, and households.

The oversight of ecological and environmental law enforcement has continued to strengthen. Since 2018, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has conducted inspections on the implementation of laws in the field of ecology and environment, including the Law on Air Pollution Prevention and Control, Law on Marine Environmental Protection, Law on Water Pollution Prevention and Control, Law on Prevention and Control of Soil Contamination, Law on the Protection of Wildlife, Law on the Prevention and Control of Environmental Pollution by Solid Wastes, Environmental Protection Law, Yangtze River Protection Law, and Wetland Conservation Law. The focus is on hearing and reviewing reports on eco-environmental protection work in key areas, regions, and river basins.

The enforcement of ecological and environmental protection laws has been solid and effective. In 2023, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment conducted special operations with the Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Ministry of Public Security. They investigated and handled 2,906 legal violations with fines totaling RMB 471 million. Ecological and environmental departments at all levels across the country issued 79,600 environmental administrative punishment notices, with fines and confiscated funds amounting to RMB 6.27 billion. Continuous efforts were made in centralized special operations and rectifications for the environmental protection of drinking water sources and the compliant emissions of waste-to-energy incineration plants.

An "all-stage, all-element, and full-chain" crackdown on crimes against environmental resources has been carried out in accordance with the law. Consecutive special operations have been launched to suppress environmental crimes involving hazardous waste. In addition, since 2021, crimes involving the falsification of automatic monitoring data by major polluters have been subjected to special operations. A range of legal violations and offenses, such as the illegal construction of villas in the Northern Piedmont of the Qinling Mountains and the ecological damage in the Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve, have been subject to strict investigation and prosecution in an effective deterring effort to prevent the recurrence of similar environmental violations of the law.

### **— Acceleration of the establishment of the eco-environmental governance system**

A modern environmental governance system is the bedrock of advancement in eco-environmental protection. The report to the 19th CPC National Congress proposes the

establishment of an environmental governance system under government leadership, with enterprises as the main body and participation from social groups and the public. A system characterized by clear direction, scientifically sound decision-making, strong execution, effective incentives, diverse participation, and positive interaction is taking shape.

At the responsibilities level, the Party's overall leadership is bolstered and a comprehensive system is established with full coverage, alignment between authority and accountability, clear rules about rewards and punishments, and interlocking responsibilities. Also established and implemented are systems for evaluating and assessing progress toward achieving ecological development goals and the effectiveness of pollution prevention and control efforts as well as the auditing of natural resource assets left behind by departing officials, systems of river, lake, and forest chiefs, lifelong accountability and compensation for ecological environmental damage, etc. In addition, there is strict enforcement of the requirements of "shared responsibility of the Party committee and government", "dual responsibilities for one position", and "the responsibility for environmental protection by those in charge of development, production, or specific industries".<sup>①</sup> There is a steadily growing awareness, within the Party and the country, of the importance of and initiative in advancing ecological progress.

In particular, the central system of inspections on eco-environmental protection planned, deployed, and promoted by General Secretary Xi Jinping has become a major institutional innovation and reform measure to consolidate the political responsibility for ecological progress.

This system is a "sharp sword" that contributed to the successful resolution and rectification of such problems as the illegal construction of golf courses and villas at Changbaishan International Resort, the unauthorized land reclamation in marine areas for property development in parts of Hainan, and the overexploitation of Changyao Mountain near Dianchi Lake in Kunming.

At the administrative level, China established the Ministry of Natural Resources to exercise, in a unified way, regulation of the use of all territorial space and the responsibility for ecological protection and restoration. The government also established the Ministry of Ecology and Environment to perform the unified duties of monitoring and administrative law enforcement over the discharge of all pollutants in urban and rural areas, and other ecological environments. The government also introduced reforms to achieve a vertical management system for ecological and environmental monitoring, inspection, and law enforcement below the provincial level and comprehensive eco-environmental administrative law enforcement. These measures are intended to strengthen the independence, uniformity, and authority of eco-environmental monitoring, inspection, and law enforcement.

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<sup>①</sup> *Guiding Opinions on the Pilot Reform of the Vertical Management System for Environmental Monitoring, Supervision and Law Enforcement Institutions Below the Provincial Level*, published by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, September 2016

At the market level, efforts are underway to improve the system for market-based allocation of resources and environmental elements. Carbon emission rights, the energy use right, water use right, and pollutant discharge right have been incorporated into the overall framework for reforming the market-based allocation of production elements. Reforms on the paid use of natural resources are carried out further in depth alongside improvements to natural resource pricing mechanisms. Efforts are made to push ahead with the construction of comprehensive ecological compensation and horizontal ecological protection compensation mechanisms, using market mechanisms to balance ecological and environmental interests across regions.

### 3.3 Handling Properly the Dialectics of Institutional Reform

Since the new era began, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, China has made remarkable advances in its institutional reform in the field of ecology. The dynamic and extensive practices in eco-environmental protection highlight a distinct Marxist stance, perspective, and methodology. The valuable experience and insights provide scientific guidance for further advancing these reforms.

The dialectical unity between breaking and establishing. "You cannot discard your tools for survival before obtaining new ones,"<sup>①</sup> stated General Secretary Xi Jinping as he emphasized in explicit terms the importance of establishing the new before abolishing the old as an important methodological approach to deepening the reform of ecological institutions and mechanisms.

Institutional reforms call for strategic resolve in eco-environmental protection and accurate balancing of the dialectical relationship between breaking the old and establishing the new. For example, in institutional design, mechanisms such as the ecological performance evaluation and accountability system and market systems for environmental governance and ecological protection are established to implement the new development philosophy and break away from the "GDP-only" mindset. It is stressed that carbon peaking and carbon neutrality are to be achieved without a hasty rush for carbon reduction or campaign-style carbon reduction. The planning and building of a new energy system must be accelerated to ensure energy security. It is also stressed that traditional industries should not be simply abandoned or shut down; instead, green and low-carbon industries should be developed with vigorous efforts.

The dialectic union of the present and the future. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, "In eco-environmental protection, we should take a broad and long-term view. We must try to avoid earning a little only to lose a lot, attending to one thing and losing sight of others, sacrificing tomorrow for today, or blindly seeking quick success

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<sup>①</sup> *Leading China's Economy Ship to Ride the Wind and Waves and Keep Moving Forward – A Side Note on the 2023 Central Economic Work Conference, Xinhua News Agency, December 13, 2023*



and instant benefits."<sup>①</sup> In an effort to achieve ecological progress, one should not just focus on the present to the neglect of future sustainable development. It is imperative to take on immediate tasks while planning for lasting momentum, with more efforts focused on foundation laying, long-term benefits, and great stamina for the future.

On the one hand, China has its feet firmly planted on the ground by issuing directives such as the "Ten Measures for Air", "Ten Measures for Water", and "Ten Measures for Soil" to focus efforts on taking the outstanding eco-environmental problems head-on. On the other hand, China takes a long-term perspective and is working to develop green and low-carbon industries, improve the incentives system for green consumption, and scientifically guide the transition toward a green and low-carbon economy by implementing fiscal, taxation, financial, investment, and pricing policies and systems of standards that support green and low-carbon development.

The dialectical union of points and the broader picture. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, "Reform will continue to feature prominently on our growth agenda. We need to focus not only on important issues, key tasks, and major pilot programs, but also on key players, critical links, and pivotal moments, using breakthroughs in key areas to drive overall progress."<sup>②</sup> Continuing to combine major breakthroughs with overall progress and using the breakthroughs to drive overall improvements is central to deepening the institutional reform for ecological progress.

Since 2015, China has been taking action to prevent and control water pollution. It has promoted in-depth management of the water environment in important lakes and maritime space while prioritizing treating both symptoms and root causes, stepped up the synergetic management of upstreams, midstreams, downstreams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, river banks, trunk streams, tributaries in regions and major river basins, and land and seas as well as the integrated improvement of aquatic environments, water resources, and aquatic ecosystems. Practice has proven that only by taking strong measures to address prominent ecological problems while enhancing systematic, holistic, and coordinated efforts can maximum effectiveness of governance be achieved.

### **3.4 Continuing to Deepen the Structural Reform for Ecological Progress**

Chinese modernization is one that features the harmonious coexistence between man and nature; building a Beautiful China is an important target for the construction of a modern socialist country in all respects. The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization, reviewed and adopted at the 20th CPC Central Commit-

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping Stresses the Need to Resolutely Fight for Poverty Alleviation and Development and Accelerate Economic and Social Development in Ethnic Minority Areas During Inspection in Yunnan, Xinhua News Agency, January 22, 2015

<sup>②</sup> Reform: Accelerating Progress Without Pause—A Commentary on the Work of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at Its Core in Advancing Comprehensive Deepening of the Reforms in 2016, Xinhua News Agency, February 2, 2017



tee at its third plenary session, dedicates a special chapter to "Deepening Reform in Ecological Conservation". It calls for improving ecological conservation systems, making concerted efforts to cut carbon emissions, reduce pollution, pursue green development, and boost economic growth, actively responding to climate change, and moving faster to improve the institutions and mechanisms for applying the "green is gold" principle.

Reform is the most powerful driving force for Chinese modernization.

At present, the task of pressing ahead with the modernization of the national governance system and capacity in the eco-environmental domain remains urgent. It is essential to maintain strong confidence in the reform, keep in the correct direction, strengthen accountability for the reform, and forge synergy to ensure the precise implementation of reform initiatives for tangible results.

In regard to fundamental guarantees, there should be unwavering adherence to the Party's comprehensive leadership, with a consistent emphasis on the political responsibility for ecological progress. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the greatest strength of its system, and a fundamental guarantee for further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization. As General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed, ecological progress is a major political issue which bears upon the mission and purpose of the Party and a major social issue which involves people's well-being. The centralized and unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee over the structural reform for ecological progress must be upheld and strengthened. It is imperative to further deepen eco-environmental protection inspections by the central government, establish accountability systems for eco-environmental protection among local Party and government leaders, and conduct assessment of results in building a Beautiful China to provide strong support for deepening the structural reform for ecological progress and advancing the process of building a Beautiful China across the board.

In goal-oriented guidance, efforts should focus on the goal of building a Beautiful China by continuing to improve and develop the institutional framework for ecological progress and by advancing the modernization of the system and capacity for governance in the eco-environmental domain. These efforts should be aimed at laying a solid foundation for basically accomplishing the goal of building a Beautiful China by 2035 and fully realizing this vision by the middle of the 21st century. It is imperative to push for the building of mechanisms and systems that are aligned with the goal of building a Beautiful China and actively promote the development of pioneer zones for this purpose to generate replicable and scalable innovations in practices and systems. We should accelerate the complete transition of socio-economic development to a green model, improve the eco-environmental governance system, advance development that features ecological prioritization, economical and intensive use of resources, and green and low-carbon development to speed up the formation of a new framework for building a Beautiful China oriented toward harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

In terms of major direction, full efforts should be exerted to implement all tasks related to deepening structural reform for ecological progress. This includes improving the foundational systems for ecological advancement, enhancing the ecological and environmental governance system, and strengthening green, low-carbon development mechanisms. Measures include adopting region-specific, differentiated, and precise eco-environmental management systems, improving horizontal ecological compensation mechanisms, coordinating the advancement of compensation for ecological damage, and managing and implementing fiscal, financial, investment, and pricing policies and standards that support green and low-carbon development. In addition, the planning and development of new energy systems should be accelerated. All this will help inject strong momentum and provide robust support for the comprehensive advancement of the Beautiful China initiative and a modernization that is characterized by harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

## Chapter Four Chinese Wisdom in Building a Clean and Beautiful World

**Ecological civilization represents the development trend of human civilization. Let us join hands, follow the philosophy of ecological civilization and shoulder our responsibility for future generations. Let us make joint efforts to build a community of all life on Earth, and a clean and beautiful world for us all.<sup>①</sup>**

**— Xi Jinping**

Building a green homeland is a shared aspiration of humanity; maintaining a good ecological environment is a common wish of all nations. In the face of unprecedented challenges in global environmental governance, General Secretary Xi Jinping called on the international community to pursue harmony between humanity and nature, promote green development and prosperity, nurture a love for nature, advocate a spirit of scientific governance, and seek cooperation to address these challenges together. His proposal embodies the global responsibility of a great leader and offers Chinese wisdom and solutions to the creation of a clean and beautiful world and provides intellectual inspiration for the sustainable development of humanity.

### 4.1 A Global Vision for Universal Harmony

When the Great Way prevailed, a public spirit ruled all under Heaven. The Communist Party of China is not only dedicated to the happiness of the Chinese people and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but also committed to the advancement of humanity and the realization of universal harmony. Advancing the vision of a community with a shared future for humankind and actively contributing to global ecological governance is integral to the mission and responsibility of the Communist Party of China. With a global perspective and profound humanistic concern, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, emphasizing the need to "improve global environmental governance, actively respond to climate change, and create a community of life for man and nature".<sup>②</sup> This philosophy offers intellectual guidance and inspires great confidence in efforts to protect our blue planet, collaboratively build a green homeland, and address the ecological challenges confronting the international community. Upholding green and low-carbon principles and advancing the creation of a clean and beautiful

<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping's Keynote Speech at the Leaders' Summit of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (full text), Xinhua, October 12, 2021

<sup>②</sup> Xi Jinping's Speech at the General Debate of the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly (full text), Xinhua, September 21, 2021

world are global imperatives for ecological civilization. They also embody the universal values of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization and fully reflect General Secretary Xi Jinping's profound sense of responsibility and commitment to the well-being of humanity.

The human race resides in a shared global village, in the same time and space where history converges with reality, increasingly becoming a community with a shared future in which everyone's interest is closely intertwined.<sup>①</sup> The complexity, diversity, and transboundary nature of global ecological and environmental issues make it impossible for any single country or region to address them independently. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "the international community must enhance cooperation, build consensus and pool strength to build a community of all life on Earth".<sup>②</sup> The joint pursuit of a path toward global ecological civilization is not about replacing one system with another or substituting one civilization for another. Instead, it is a collaborative effort among countries with different social systems, different ideologies, historical and cultural backgrounds, and different levels of development to work for mutual benefits while sharing their interests, rights, and responsibilities in international affairs, forming the biggest common denominating for building a better world together. It reflects China's commitment to global sustainable development as well as its ecological wisdom and pragmatic steps toward advancing this shared path with joint hands.

Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization benefits China and illuminates the world, with the concept of "green is gold" deeply ingrained in people's hearts and contributing to global well-being. Nigel Topping, the High-Level Champion for Climate Action at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), said that "a community with a shared future for humankind" and "ecological civilization" are, to a certain extent, akin to describing economics and science with poetic language, calling them a "unique Chinese gift". Similarly, John B. Cobb Jr., a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, expressed his thanks to China for providing the world with the concept of "ecological civilization" and for using it to name the common future we hope for. China's ecological civilization philosophy is increasingly gaining international recognition. In 2016, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) published a report entitled "Green Is Gold: The Strategy and Actions of China's Ecological Civilization". In 2021, the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) adopted the theme "Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth". This marked the first time the United Nations held a global conference with ecological civilization as its theme. A series of resonant responses like these bear full testimony to the contemporary value, global significance, and universal contributions of Xi Jinping thought on ecological civilization, showing the unique wisdom and experience of China.

<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping's Speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (full text), Xinhua, March 23, 2013

<sup>②</sup> Xi Jinping's Keynote Speech at the Leaders' Summit of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (full text), Xinhua, October 12, 2021

## **4.2 China's Contribution to Addressing Ecological Challenges**

China can only do well when the world is doing well. When China does well, the world will get even better. Since the start of the new era, guided by Xi Jinping thought on ecological civilization, China has marched in step with the times and maintained a global perspective. It has shouldered its responsibilities and set an example befitting a major power. Not only has it stepped up its own ecological conservation efforts, but it is also working in the shared interests of mankind by actively participating in global environmental governance, striving for the creation of a fair and equitable global environmental governance system based on win-win cooperation. It has worked to advance the construction of a green Belt and Road Initiative, strengthen South-South cooperation and collaboration with neighboring countries, provide more public goods globally, and promote sustainable development, having accomplished China's major transition from a participant in global environmental governance to a leader of the process.

### **— A Pioneering Model of Global Climate Governance**

China has fully implemented the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and was among the first to release its National Plan on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. China made historic contributions to the adoption and rapid entry into force of the Paris Agreement. It has significantly enhanced its nationally determined contributions (NDCs), pledged to peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030, achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, and complete the transition from carbon peaking to carbon neutrality in the shortest timeframe in global history through the world's most ambitious reduction in carbon intensity. China also declared to the international community that by 2030, its carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP would have declined by more than 65% from the 2005 level and non-fossil fuels would account for approximately 25% of primary energy consumption.

China's green energy development has become a driving force in global energy transition. The country has ranked first worldwide for many years in installed capacity for hydropower, wind power, solar power, and biomass power generation as well as in the adoption of new energy vehicles. Furthermore, China has announced it will no longer build new coal-fired power projects abroad. Since 2005, China has contributed over 50% of the world's cumulative energy savings. China has made great strides in renewable energy technology, supplying 60% of wind power equipment and 70% of photovoltaic modules globally, which have helped drive down the global costs for wind and solar power generation by over 60% and 80% respectively, making a monumental contribution to global carbon reduction and green transition.

General Secretary Xi Jinping stated: Addressing global climate change is impossible without China and its people. China and its people have made invaluable contributions to...responding to global climate change.<sup>①</sup> For a long time now, China has consistently lent its support to other developing countries, especially the small island developing states (SIDS), least developed countries, and African countries in their climate response through building low carbon zones, implementing mitigation and adaptation projects, and organizing capacity building exchange workshops. As of November 2024, China had signed memorandums of understanding on South-South cooperation against climate change with 42 countries and held over 300 capacity-building training courses which offered over 10,000 training placements to over 120 other developing countries. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China has implemented the South-South Cooperation Plan to combat climate change, forged energy cooperation partnerships, and established the Green Belt and Road Initiative Center (BRIGC) with more than 170 partners from over 40 countries.



Figure 6. Main mechanisms for green multilateral cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative

### — An Active Leader in Global Biodiversity Conservation

China was among the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity. As President of COP 15 and thanks to the robust international support and concerted efforts of the international community, China successfully convened the Conference in two phases, established the Kunming Biodiversity Fund, and led the Conference in reaching a package of landmark outcomes, including the ambitious and yet pragmatic, balanced Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, guiding the world

<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping Calls for a New Wave of Afforestation to Paint a Picture of a Beautiful China When Participating in a Voluntary Tree Planting Activity in Beijing, with Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi, and Han Zheng in Participation, Xinhua, April 4, 2023

onto a path toward biodiversity restoration. China was among the first to issue and implement China's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2023 – 2030), becoming the first developing country to submit to the UN Biodiversity Convention Secretariat its national biodiversity conservation strategy and action plan after the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Framework.

China also prioritizes international cooperation in biodiversity. It established the China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Center and collaborated with Kenya to compile the country's first national flora collection—The Flora of Kenya, addressing a critical gap in the country's plant resource research. Additionally, China has worked with Russia, Mongolia, Laos, and Vietnam to create transboundary nature reserves and ecological corridors. Among those efforts, in the China-Russia Transboundary Nature Reserve, species populations have steadily increased and wild Siberian tigers have started to migrate freely between the two countries' nature reserves. Similarly, the joint China-Laos Biodiversity Conservation Area, spanning 200,000 hectares, effectively safeguards rare and endangered species such as Asian elephants and their habitats.

### **— A Dedicated Actor in Global Ecosystem Protection**

In its implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for over 30 years, China has established a graded system for wetland protection and management, carried out a national wetland conservation plan and significant wetland protection projects, and successfully hosted COP14 of the Ramsar Convention. China has provided technical support for Africa's Great Green Wall Initiative and conducted water-saving restoration and Aral Sea ecological rehabilitation in Central Asia. China collaborated with Mongolia on grassland carbon sequestration and water resource protection and supported Mongolia's One Billion Trees initiative, among others. So far, 13 Chinese cities have earned the title of International Wetland City and China has twice been awarded the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award. As of February 2024, China's wetland area stood at 56.35 million hectares, ranking first in Asia and fourth globally; China had designated 82 Wetlands of International Importance, identified 58 Nationally Important Wetlands, and established 903 national wetland parks.

China is one of the best implementers of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). It has hosted or organized major events such as the 13th Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD (COP 13) and the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. China is actively engaged in global desert control, particularly through cooperation with neighboring countries and support for Belt and Road Initiative partner countries in combatting desertification. It plays a leading role in policy dialogues and information-sharing efforts in a joint fight against sandstorms. China has partnered with the UNCCD Secretariat to establish the International Knowledge Management Center on Combating Desertification in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and created a platform for technical assistance and exchange in combating desertification and land degradation in Gansu Province.



At the grassroots level, inspiring stories of desert control are plentiful. In Gulang County, Gansu Province, the "Six Elderly Men" of Babusha Forest Farm and their descendants have persisted in their dedicated efforts at afforestation and desert control, generation after generation. With a persevering spirit akin to that of Yu Gong who moved mountains in Chinese legend, they have written a graphic and live green chapter of transforming a once harsh environment of encroaching sand dunes into one of human advancement toward receding sands.

China steadfastly implements the concept of a maritime community with a shared future, engaging in multi-channel, multi-faceted, and in-depth cooperation with the international community for mutual benefit and win-win results. It actively promotes the effective implementation of international maritime treaties, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China is a signatory to more than 30 multilateral maritime agreements, such as the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter as well as the Antarctic Treaty.

China pushes for a more fair and equitable global ocean governance system as evidenced by its voluntary moratoriums on fishing in the high seas and its participation in the United Nations' regular assessments of the global marine environment. At the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, China introduced the Blue Partnership Principles and launched initiatives such as Friends of Ocean Action and the Blue Partnership Action Fund. Additionally, China has led the establishment and operation of platforms like the East Asia Marine Cooperation Platform and the China-ASEAN Marine Cooperation Center. These platforms carry out practical cooperation with East Asian and ASEAN countries in areas such as marine scientific research, ecological conservation, and disaster prevention and mitigation.

### **— A Significant Contributor to Global Ozone Layer Protection**

Since China's accession to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1991, it has always scrupulously honored its obligations under international environmental conventions by achieving on schedule the compliance targets for all phases of implementation. Over the past three decades of implementation, China has carried out phase-out and substitution actions in more than ten industries including fluorine chemical production, refrigeration, and foam. It has phased out and substituted ozone-depleting substances in thousands of enterprises, closed down more than 100 production lines, and accumulatively phased out about 628,000 tons of ozone-depleting substances in production and use, accounting for more than half of the phase-out amount in developing countries while cumulatively averting more than 26 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent greenhouse gas emissions. This is an important contribution to the gradual recovery of the global ozone layer and a reflection of China's active role in climate change mitigation.

In October 2016, the parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete



the Ozone Layer reached the Kigali Amendment, deciding to implement controls and reductions of the greenhouse gas hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). In April 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping personally announced China's acceptance of the Kigali Amendment to strengthen the control and regulation of non-carbon dioxide greenhouse gases such as HFCs, opening a new chapter of synergistic efforts to protect the ozone layer and a new chapter in the history of concerted efforts to protect the ozone layer and combat climate change.

### 4.3 Working Together for a Clean and Beautiful World

Protecting the ecological environment is a shared challenge and responsibility for the whole world. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Only by joining hands in co-operation can we effectively address climate change, marine pollution, biological conservation, and other global environmental issues and achieve the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,"<sup>①</sup> and "only by walking shoulder to shoulder can we drive home the idea of green development and bring about steady and far-reaching progress in the ecological conservation of the globe."<sup>②</sup> Xi Jinping thought on ecological civilization is grounded in the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind. It advocates the pursuit of harmony between man and nature, green development and prosperity, a deep appreciation of nature, the spirit of scientific governance, and a collaborative response to challenges. It has ignited the flame of global cooperation and is illuminating the path toward a greener future.

In his congratulatory letter to China's first National Event on Environment Day 2022, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the nation's commitment "to make further contributions to building a clean and beautiful world"<sup>③</sup>. China will work with other countries and, with unprecedented ambition and action, courageously shoulder its responsibility and work in solidarity. It will uphold the principles of harmony between man and nature, green development, systemic governance, people-centered approaches, multilateralism, and common but differentiated responsibilities, and build together a community of life for humans and nature and a beautiful Earth as a shared home for all.

As a responsible major developing country, China remains committed to collaborating with the global community to advance environmental and climate governance, jointly implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and uphold a fair and equitable global environmental governance system that features win-win cooperation. China will carry out extensive international green and low-carbon coopera-

<sup>①</sup> Remarks by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the 2019 International Horticultural Exposition, Beijing, China (full text), Xinhua, April 28, 2019.

<sup>②</sup> Remarks by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the 2019 International Horticultural Exposition, Beijing, China (full text), Xinhua, April 28, 2019.

<sup>③</sup> Xi Jinping's Congratulatory Letter to the National Event on Environment Day 2022, Xinhua, June 5, 2022.

tion, share green technologies, experience, and resources, bolster international collaboration on green standards and conformity assessments, improve the environmental sustainability of its overseas projects, and encourage the import and export of green and low-carbon products, providing a strong impetus for the global green transition. It will lead the comprehensive, balanced, and effective implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Framework and accelerate the promotion of biodiversity mainstreaming. China will leverage the role of the Kunming Biodiversity Fund in support of fellow developing countries' cause of biodiversity protection. Additionally, China will carry out multi-level exchanges and collaborations on eco-environmental protection and develop together the green Belt and Road Initiative, promote the joint development of the Environment Information Sharing Platform under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), explore channels and mechanisms of multilateral and bilateral dialogue and cooperation, translating the consensus on cooperation into pragmatic actions and positive outcomes for the advancement of global ecological conservation.

## Concluding Remarks

Xi Jinping thought on ecological civilization has ignited a transformative practice across China, resulting in groundbreaking progress and landmark accomplishments that have drawn global recognition and yielded benefits worldwide. By building an ecosystem that features revering nature and championing green development, China is working in concert with the rest of the world to build a community of life on Earth. This embodies the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity in the realm of ecological civilization and offers a classic model and important guidance for the sustainable development of human civilization.

Under the guidance of Xi Jinping thought on ecological civilization, China has embarked on a bright path of ecological advancement. The vision of a Beautiful China—where the sky is blue, the land is green, the waters are clear, and people live in harmony with nature—is becoming a reality step by step. On its new journey in the new era, China remains unwavering in walking along the path toward green, low-carbon, and sustainable development. With its wisdom, commitment, solutions, and actions propelling the world toward a new era of ecological civilization, China will undoubtedly make further, even greater contributions to the protection of Planet Earth, our shared homeland.

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## Editorial Note

This report entitled *Toward a More Beautiful China and Cleaner World: Understanding Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization* was prepared by a dedicated Xinhua Institute report project team led by Fu Hua, Chairman of the Academic Committee of Xinhua Institute. Its Deputy Team Leader was Lyu Yansong, Editor-in-Chief of Xinhua News Agency. Ren Weidong, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Xinhua News Agency, served as Executive Deputy Team Leader. The research team was composed of members from Xinhua Institute and the Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization (i.e., Environmental and Economic Policy Research Center of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment).

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Given the complexity and broad scope of the subject, some omissions or errors may occur despite our best efforts. We sincerely appreciate your understanding and welcome any feedback.