

Chinese Solution for the Construction of An Ecological Civilization and Its World Significance

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Abstract: For the construction of an ecological civilization, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics provides a reliable institutional guarantee, its theory of an ecological civilization offers ideological guidance, and the dominant role of governments furnishes a powerful driver. A top-level design for the construction of an ecological civilization, a holistic approach to socioeconomic development and the construction of an ecological civilization, the establishment and constant improvement of institutional mechanisms, and the deep combination of poverty alleviation and ecological governance provide both Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions for the problem of the ecological environment. Environmental protection in China certainly has a long way to go, and the Chinese solution for the construction of an ecological civilization still needs to be constantly improved in practice.

Keywords: the construction of an ecological civilization; Chinese experience; world significance

The construction of an ecological civilization is a fundamental strategy for the permanent development of the Chinese nation. From environmental protection to sustainable development, to an energy-saving and environment-friendly society, and then to an ecological civilization, the CPC and the State's theory and institutional mechanisms about ecological environments have been constantly improved. Especially since the opening of the 18th National Congress of the CPC, China has regarded the construction of an ecological civilization as an important part of its "five-sphere integrated plan" and "four-pronged comprehensive strategy", constantly pushing forward the construction of an ecological civilization. In recent

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years the fundamental, creative and long-term work that China has done has brought about historical, overall changes to environmental protections.^① The achievements within this short time are a convincing proof that China is able to quickly improve its living environments, and provide Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions for global ecological governance. Of course, China still has many problems in terms of ecological environments, and the Chinese solution needs to be further explored and improved.

1. The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics provides a fundamental guarantee for the construction of an ecological civilization

China's construction of an ecological civilization has its unique cultural and ideological advantages. The traditional culture featuring the unity of nature and humans, the Marxist thought on the relationship between man and nature, and General Secretary Xi Jinping's theory for the construction of an ecological civilization have provided ideal resources and a spiritual drive. However, culture and thought must be supported and put into practice. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is ideally supportive and helpful for the construction of an ecological civilization.

First, the economy under socialist public ownership provides favorable conditions for the construction of an ecological civilization. The *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* stipulates that the basis of the socialist economic system of the People's Republic of China is socialist public ownership of the means of production, namely, ownership by all the people and collective ownership by the working people; in the primary stage of socialism, the State upholds the basic economic system in which public ownership is dominant and diverse forms of ownership develop side by side. The public ownership of the means of production helps the State to alleviate contradictions between socioeconomic development and environmental protection and solve the problems of resource crisis and environmental deterioration through macro-level regulation and control. State-owned enterprises can play a better role in serving the State's overall construction of an ecological civilization, pushing forward its industrial upgrading, and pursuing high-quality development. Of course, China should also develop the economy under mixed ownership, and support the development of private enterprises; all economies, no matter what types, should compete in the market, but the economy under public ownership, which is much larger, is obviously better in conforming to the State's macro-level adjustments and satisfying the requirements of green development.

Second, the public ownership of land resources is helpful for the reasonable use and protection of natural resources. The 9th article of the Constitution stipulates, "All mineral resources, waters, forests, mountains, grasslands, unreclaimed land, beaches and other natural resources are owned by the State, that is, by the people, with the exception of the forests, mountains, grasslands, unreclaimed land and beaches that are owned by collectives as prescribed by law. The State ensures the rational use of natural resources and protects rare animals and plants. Appropriation or damaging of natural resources by any organization or individual by whatever means is prohibited." The 10th article of the Constitution states that "Land in the cities is owned by the State. Land in the rural and suburban areas is owned by collectives except for those portions which belong to the State as prescribed by law; house sites and privately farmed plots of cropland and hilly land are

^① Resolutely Win the Battle of Preventing and Controlling Pollution, and Further the Construction of Ecological Civilization Up to a New Step, 2018 May 20.

also owned by collectives. The State may, in the public interest and in accordance with law, expropriate or requisition land for its use and make compensation for the land expropriated or requisitioned. No organization or individual may appropriate, buy, sell or otherwise engage in the transfer of land by unlawful means. The right to the use of land may be transferred according to law. All organizations and individuals using land must ensure its rational use.” The public ownership of natural resources provides an institutional guarantee and convenience for the demarcation of functional zones and three controlling lines (the redlines for ecological protection, the amount of permanent basic cropland, and the boundaries of urban development). The public ownership of natural resources displays the superiority of socialism in terms of the protection of the ecological environment, which has been endorsed by ecological Marxists. Due to the private ownership of forestlands, according to the ecological Marxists, the owners tend to consider the use of forestlands from the perspective of economic effects instead of their ecological effects. The owners of forestlands may fell primeval forests and plant economic species on their lands, but economic woods are greatly inferior to primeval forests in keeping ecological balance, preserving water, adjusting climates and purifying air.^① The public ownership of natural resources, especially of lands, means the environmental management in a consistent move involving mountains, waters, forests, farmlands, lakes and grasses, the reasonable use of natural resources, and the evolution of the natural environment with specific aims and steps favoring the survival and development of mankind.

Third, the political party system and the cadre appraisal and appointment system helps in implementing policies for an ecological civilization. The leadership of the CPC is the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and guarantees the effective construction of an ecological civilization, which is an embodiment of the CPC’s will. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC calls for “ensuring the Party’s leadership over all work. The Party exercises overall leadership over all areas of endeavor in every part of the country.”^② The CPC has put the construction of an ecological civilization into its own constitution and into the constitution of China. The new edition of the *Constitution of the CPC* specifies in its General Principle, “The Communist Party of China shall lead the people in building a socialist an ecological civilization.” The CPC is a leader and pusher in the construction of an ecological civilization. The State guarantees the construction of an ecological civilization through the system that both CPC committees and governments are held accountable and that officials take responsibility for workplace safety in performing their duties, and ensure cadres at all levels to undertake their responsibilities for leading the ecological construction by means of such systems as “one-veto” system for issues concerning environmental protections, audits on natural resources when leaving office, governmental officials’ performances in ecological construction, supervision over and inspection of environmental protections, river chiefs and lake chiefs. In December 2016, the General Offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Measures for the Assessment and Evaluation of the Objectives of the Construction of an Ecological Civilization. The assessment and evaluation system with party committees and governments assuming the same accountability, which carries out assessments each year and evaluations every five years, has been thought the strictest appraisal measure. In May 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed at the National

① Foster, 2002.

② Xi, 2017, p. 20.

Conference on Environmental Protection to establish a scientific, reasonable evaluation and appraisal system, with the results of evaluation as an important standard for the reward, punishment, promotion and appointment of officials at all levels. As for officials who have damaged the environment, authorities shall really, courageously and strictly look into their responsibilities under the system of lifelong accountability. China should organize forces for environmental protections, which have strong political awareness, outstanding abilities, deep commitment and remarkable endurance. The CPC committees and governments at all levels should take care of and support the growth of forces for environmental protections, and be active in supporting and encouraging officials who are responsible, aggressive and capable. The evaluation mechanism with just rewards and punishments has engendered enthusiasm among party member cadres, and enhanced their confidence about the construction of an ecological environment. In addition, the management of media promotion and education, performed by the Party and governments, is also useful in spreading the awareness of an ecological civilization. In recent years, Chinese media have extensively fostered the awareness of an ecological civilization, thus quickly disseminating knowledge about an ecological civilization, and enhanced the civil consciousness of environmental protections. The inclusion of both knowledge and awareness of an ecological civilization into school education at all levels has played an active role in enhancing people's understanding of an ecological civilization.

In the West, the will of political parties, for example, the Green Party and other parties which are gradually drawing themselves closer to green policies, also plays a part in the making and implementation of ecologically friendly policies, but multi-party politics often lead to discontinuity in their environmental protections. For example, the United States withdrew from the *Kyoto Protocol* after George W. Bush became president and withdrew from the *Paris Agreement* soon after Donald John Trump was elected. In some developing countries, the policies of environmental protections often cannot be effectively implemented due to the private ownership of lands, the discontinuity of governments and policies, and the insufficiency of national education. According to Zhang Jianyu, chief representative for the China Program of the Environmental Defense Fund, the limitation of electoral systems and the adverse influence of special interest groups in the West would block the channels of governance which should have been smooth. In contrast, the Chinese government is enormously able to implement its policies, and therefore can break down interest barriers as it realizes the fatal implication of the problem of environmental protection. Once it becomes aware of the importance of environmental protection, it will be able to release bursting advantages and energy, which are incomparable to traditional environmental protection systems in the West.^① As it has been expressed by Noriyoshi Ehara, Chief Economist at the Institute for International Trade and Investment of Japan, the construction of an ecological civilization needs to improve the State's policies, and enhance the awareness of both enterprises and individuals, and China has considerable advantages.

2. The theory of an ecological civilization with Chinese Characteristics provides an action guide for the construction of an ecological civilization

In the developed countries in the West, governments, academia and non-governmental organizations

① Retrieved from: <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2015/0305/c1002-26638154.html>.

usually do not adopt the concept of an ecological civilization when they talk about sustainable development, environmentalism, the protection of biological diversity, environmental governance, and clean energy. This is mainly because China differs from the West in their understanding of history: The West tends to call the civilization after the industrial revolution a postmodern civilization, but China conforms to the trend of environmental protection and thus calls the civilization after the industrial revolution an ecological civilization, and does not prefer a grand narrative due to the influence from positivist or analytical philosophy. In China, both the unity of nature and humans coming from ancient times and Marxist materialist dialectics emphasize holistic and systematic thought, so China naturally accepts the concept of an ecological civilization featuring comprehensiveness, integrity and systematization. It is without doubt that our adoption of the concept of an ecological civilization is better at defining a new form or element of civilization different from the industrial version, and in facilitating earth saving actions. In China, the idea of an ecological civilization has not only spread from academia and authorities to ordinary folks, but also formed a relatively complete theory of a socialist ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics. The theory of an ecological civilization plays a leading role for the construction of an ecological civilization in China. This theory harbors at least the following points.

First, the Marxist thought on human-nature relations. “Studying Marx requires us to study and practice Marxist thought on the relationship between people and nature.” According to Marx, man is a part of nature, which is the inorganic body of man, and humans and nature constitute the community of life. Man depends upon nature to live, which provides the sources of not only the means of subsistence but also the means of production. To live and develop, man utilizes and transforms nature, but such utilization and transformation must respect the laws of nature. For this reason, man must respect, conform to, and protect nature.^① General Secretary Xi Jinping has developed the Marxist thought about human-nature relations, putting forward the theory that “Lucid waters and lush mountains are precious assets.” One must combine respect for the laws of nature with the play of human agency, and combine economic development with protections of nature, both theoretically and practically avoiding the two trends of Western environmentalism: extreme anthropocentrism and extreme ecocentrism. This is because the former regards man as the master of nature, talking about man’s subjectivity and activity only, but neglecting man’s conformity to the laws of nature; while the latter simply calls for complying with nature, but denying man’s creative role, the facilitating role of the development of science and technology and social progress, and the necessity of economic development.

Second, the thought to fulfill people’s wish for a good life. The construction of an ecological civilization is to provide “a good life” and further ecological products for the people. Just as General Secretary Xi Jinping has claimed, “Friendly ecological environments are the fairest public good, the most inclusive benefit for people’s livelihood. For human life, wealth matters indeed, but good ecology is also an important factor in people’s happy life, which cannot be replaced by money.”^② The major contradiction in contemporary China has become that between people’s increasing demand for a good life and unbalanced, insufficient development. There is still a huge gap between the average income of Chinese people and that in developed countries. For this reason, China should also boost high-quality appropriate economic development while it

① Xi, 2018, May 5.

② Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee, 2017, p. 4.



Friendly ecological environments are the fairest public good.

energetically facilitates the construction of an ecological civilization.

Third, the thought about collaborative governance. We cannot regard an ecological civilization as a separate thing, nor can we unilaterally enhance the construction of an ecological civilization. Instead, we should understand ecological civilization in the contexts of “five-sphere integrated plan” and “five development concepts,” endeavoring as a team to boost the construction of an ecological civilization. The concept of “five-sphere integrated plan” refers to economic, political, cultural, social and ecological construction as an organic whole, within which economic construction plays a fundamental part, political construction ensures success, cultural construction is the soul, social construction provides the conditions, and the construction of an ecological civilization is underlying. Only all-round improvement and harmonious development can bring about the development patterns of financially well off, political democracy, cultural prosperity, social justice and favorable ecological environments, building China into a modernized socialist country which is prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful. The five development concepts are also holistic, each of which, namely innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared, correlates with the others and cannot exist independently. Contemporary China especially needs to effectively manage the relationships between economic development and the construction of an ecological civilization. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC claims, “The modernization that we pursue is what is characterized

by harmonious coexistence between man and nature.”^① This indicates the construction of an ecological civilization in China is inseparable from economic development and modernization. Without economic development or underlying modernization, it will be impossible for China to fulfill its dream of becoming a powerful country. Without the construction of an ecological civilization, there will be no way to realize the dream of a better life and prosperity. The thought about systematic and collaborative improvement based on specific national situations, i.e., boosting the construction of an ecological civilization within the framework of “five-in-one,” enhancing green development under the “five development concepts,” and constructing an ecological civilization in the coordinated relationships between modernization and an ecological civilization, certainly has reference value for the construction of an ecological civilization in developing countries. The simultaneous progress of both modernization and the construction of an ecological civilization reveals a huge difference between the discourse systems of an ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics in the new era and various environmentalisms in Europe and America. The latter often set themselves against sustainable development and modernization. Deep ecology (deep green) summarizes the ecological crisis as the modernity of anthropocentrism, rejects economic development, and denies modernization. Most ecological socialists (red green) are not interested in economic development, Saral Sarkar even revived the slogan of “limits to growth,” not only demanding developed countries withdraw from the track of economic development, but even calling on developing countries, including China, to give up their goal of economic growth. Western scholars proposed corrective countermeasures under the background of developed countries, which may be partially suitable for developed countries, but for China, any ignorance about the organic relationships between ecological construction and socioeconomic development is wrong. China is a developing country which is still at the primary stage of socialism; it has not yet accomplished its task of modernization and is still facing the contradiction between people’s need for a good life and the unbalance and insufficiency of development. In the process of development, China is indeed haunted with serious problems regarding ecological environment and has not meet its “limits to growth” as Western scholars have imagined. Therefore, our construction of an ecological civilization does not refuse modernization; instead, it orchestrates modernization. The 19th National Congress of the CPC claims that the “three-step” strategic goal in the socialist modernization of China simply harbors steps and phase-based objectives in the construction of an ecological civilization and indicates the collaborative progress of an ecological civilization construction and socioeconomic development.

Fourth, the thoughts about a community with a shared future for mankind. We have only one Earth, and all countries exist in the same world. The problems of the environment are global, for example, global warming, marine pollution, and the sharp decrease of biological diversity are all global problems. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC calls on “the people of all countries to work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity...we should be good friends to the environment, cooperate to tackle climate change, and protect our planet for the sake of human survival.”^②

① Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—the Report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC*, 2017, p. 50.

② Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—the Report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC*, 2017, pp. 58–59.

As a large socialist country, China definitely will not benefit at the expense of other countries, or adopt the policy of ecological imperialism: shifting high-pollution and high energy-consuming enterprises to developing countries, transporting waste to developing countries, rendering some colonial countries to grow single kinds of crops in succession which are harmful to farmlands, and controlling the agriculture of developing countries with agricultural seeds. The community with a shared future for mankind is a new conception for a human society that the Chinese government has repeatedly highlighted, an important component of the view of an ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC stresses to “play our part in ensuring global ecological security,” and “get actively involved in global environmental governance and fulfill our commitments on emissions reduction.” This indicates that the construction of an ecological civilization in China is an embodiment of the basic principle of socialist justice and conforms to the international agreement for sustainable development. China has achieved striking outcomes in its construction of an ecological civilization, and its successful experience has provided a valuable paradigm for developing countries, which will exert important influence on international environmental protections and sustainable development.

3. The government-dominated model with Chinese characteristics significantly guarantees the construction of an ecological civilization

The attribute of an ecological environment as a public good determines the limitation of market mechanisms in the construction of an ecological civilization; The Chinese people have not yet developed a strong enough awareness of environmental protections and the social forces engaging in environmental protections are still relatively weak. All these determine that the Party and governments are advocates of the conception of an ecological civilization, and dominators in the construction of an ecological civilization. The shaping of ideas, the establishment of systems, the founding of institutions, the making, implementation, estimates and supervision of policies, have all displayed the top-down government-dominated model. The dominant role of governments can be seen in the following aspects.

First, highlighting the construction of an ecological civilization as a national development strategy. China is the only country that has promoted the construction of an ecological civilization as a national development strategy. Since the early 1970s, both the CPC and the State have become aware of the environmental problems and made various efforts to address them. In August 1973, the State Council passed the first document on environmental protections, namely the *Several Regulations about Environmental Protections and Improvements*. This document was a sign that the cause of environmental protection in China officially entered its primary stage. In 1979, the first environment law, titled the *Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (Trial)*, was enacted, starting the development period for the environmental protection of China. From the 15th to 19th National Congress of the CPC, the CPC has expanded environmental protections through policies for the construction of an ecological civilization. The 15th National Congress of the CPC specifically proposed to implement a sustainable development strategy, and the 16th National Congress of the CPC took pleasant ecological environment as an important index for the development of social civilization, laying a foundation for the proposal of the concept of “an ecological civilization.” The Fifth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC proposed to speed up the construction of a resource-saving, environment-

friendly society. This proposal importantly signifies that the CPC has developed a deep awareness of sustainable ecological development. The 17th National Congress of the CPC put forward a series of guidelines, policies and measures for the construction of an ecological civilization, showing its deep understanding of the importance and urgency for the construction of an ecological civilization. In order to carry out this strategy, the State did the overall planning and top-level design for the construction of an ecological civilization, and proclaimed a series of important relevant documents. The 18th National Congress of the CPC brought forward the idea of five-sphere integrated plan, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC formulated the “five development concepts,” and the 19th National Congress of the CPC insists on taking the harmony and co-existence of man and nature as an important part of the basic strategy to develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and to firmly set up a socialist ecological civilization. This has accelerated the emergence of the new pattern of modernization featuring the harmonious development of both man and nature, resulting in the constant enrichment and improvement of thought about an ecological civilization in China, and the continuous increase in the strategic importance of the construction of an ecological civilization. After the 18th National Congress of the CPC, both the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council issued a series of documents on the construction of an ecological civilization, including the *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Accelerating the ecological civilization Construction*, the *General Plan for Reforming the System of Ecological Conservation*, the *Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for Nationwide Ecological Protection*, the *Planning for the Work on the Environment and Health Concerning National Environmental Protection in the 13th Five-Year Plan*, and the *Several Opinions on Improving the Strategy and System of Functional zones Issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council*. These important documents have produced top-level designs and the overall arrangements for the construction of an ecological civilization in China, and proposed specific tasks, goals and measures for such construction both at present and for the future.

Second, taking a holistic approach to socioeconomic development and the construction of an ecological civilization. The construction of an ecological civilization cannot depend upon sudden single leaps; instead, it needs systematic thought to coordinate various important relationships, especially to handle well the relationship between China’s economic development and its construction of an ecological civilization. Such a strategic grasp and handling of these significant relationships is possible only through a top-level design by the Central Committee of the CPC and the governments at all levels. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the Central Committee of the CPC has insisted on making development its primary task, focusing on economic development, pushing forward the five-in-one overall arrangement, and putting into practice the “five development concepts.” In doing so, it has reaped harvests both in economic development and the construction of an ecological civilization. China is so large, it would be unfeasible to address the overall, comprehensive and long-termed problems of an ecological civilization without governmental efforts to integrate social resources and coordinate various relationships. In Western countries, it seems to be impossible to reconcile economic development and environmental protections. Take theories as an example, there is the theory of limits to growth and the theory of a steady-state economy setting themselves against economic development; and from the perspective of society, environmentalists often argue against governmental policies about economic development, for instance, the development of nuclear power has often been protested by anti-nuclear organizations. The Chinese government has been active in boosting the construction of an ecological

civilization while focusing on the economy, making a path for the socialist development with Chinese characteristics, which features the collaborative development of the economy and an ecological civilization. China once took a wrong path by blindly pursuing economic growth, which caused serious environmental problems. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the central government of China has attached great importance to an ecological civilization, proclaiming the *Air Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan* and the *Action Plan for Soil Pollution Prevention and Control* in succession, and implementing the system of river and lake chiefs throughout the country. Under the new normal, China's economy has shown the trend of high-quality development, and its environments have also been remarkably improved. As reported in *China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change (2017)*, carbon dioxide emission intensity was reduced by 6.6% compared to 2016, and national energy consumption per unit of GDP by 5%.

Third, boosting the development of systems for an ecological civilization step by step. General Secretary Xi Jinping points out, "Only the strictest system and rule of law can provide a reliable guarantee for an ecological civilization."^① At present, China has established a series of systems for the construction of an ecological civilization and put them into practice. For example, it has set up the strictest system for compensation and punishment for damage to the environment, the scientific systems for official performance evaluation and evaluating socioeconomic development, and the system for the supervision over environmental protections. In addition, since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the development of systems for an ecological civilization have been accelerated, the system for functional zones has been gradually enhanced, and a pilot test of a national park system has been actively advanced. The 19th National Congress of the CPC also proposed to intensify the overall design of, and organizational leadership over, the construction of an ecological civilization, to establish agencies in charge of the asset management of state-owned natural resources and natural ecological supervision so that they can uniformly assume responsibility as the asset owners of state-owned natural resources, assigning responsibility for regulating the use of state-owned land, expanding responsibility for ecological protections and restorations, supervising urban and rural pollution discharges, and administrative enforcement of law. The First Session of the 13 NPC approved by vote the founding of a department of ecological environment to integrate the responsibilities for ecological environmental protections dispersed to different divisions, "fulfilling five kinds of connectivity from the angle of regulators and supervisors: the connectivity between the surface and the underground, between banks and waters, between lands and the seas, between the urban and the rural, and between carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, i.e., uniting the prevention and control of air pollution and the responses to climate change."^②

Fourth, simultaneously enhancing poverty alleviation and the construction of an ecological civilization. To combine the construction of an ecological civilization with poverty alleviation is a significant measure of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Implementing policies for poverty reduction in accordance to local circumstances, the Chinese government has succeeded both in environmental protections and poverty alleviation by means of precise orientation and ecological measures. The cause of poverty alleviation is a sign of the advantages of a socialist system with Chinese characteristics, indicating the internal requirements of common prosperity demanded by socialism, and poverty alleviation itself, especially poverty

① Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee, 2017, p. 99.

② Retrieved from: http://www.Gov.cn/xinwen/2018-03/17/content_5275063.htm.

alleviation through ecological conservation, is also an important way to enhance the harmonious co-existence of man and nature. How to promote harmony between man and nature through social justice is a problem that Westerners of insight, especially ecological Marxists, have tried to solve, but for which they have been incapable of action in the face of rigid economic systems. Whereas China is able to take advantage of its systems to put such theories and values into practice. Some developing countries often fall in the vicious circle of repeatedly falling back into poverty and environmental deterioration, but in contrast, China is able to break out of the vicious circle of alternative poverty and environmental deterioration through ecological poverty alleviation, and enable people to live and work in peace by means of ecological governance. Poverty alleviation is the responsibility and mission of the CPC, and to take the socialist path of common prosperity, focus on the interests of the people, alleviate poverty and support the weak, and combine the construction of an ecological civilization with poverty alleviation, is a great invention of the CPC, worthy of reference for the construction of an ecological civilization in other developing socialist countries.

4. The world significance of the Chinese solution in the construction of an ecological civilization

The construction of an ecological civilization in China, which is based on its own national situation, has quickly improved its ecological environment, and has had a significance, positive impact on both the global ecological environment and environmental governance.

First, the construction of a Chinese ecological civilization is a major event for the world. China is a part of the international community, with its population accounting for approximately one fifth of the earth's human inhabitants. As the second largest economy in the world, it is consuming more and more resources and energy in its rapid modernization. With its economic development and the advent of an automobile society, China has become the world's second largest oil consumer, with its foreign dependence of oil exceeding 68% in 2017. The environmental problems in China are closely related to the world, and its energy saving and emission reductions have immense importance for the world's energy reserves and ecological environment. So, the solutions to China's problems will help improve the ecological environments in neighboring countries.

Second, the commitment to a community with a shared future for mankind will turn China into an important participant, contributor and torchbearer in the global endeavor to create an ecological civilization. The ecological environmental crisis has developed into a global challenge from which no country can walk away. China can never take the path of ecological colonialism. General Secretary Xi Jinping has put forward three general conceptions to solve the world's climate problems: rejecting the narrow-minded thinking of the "zero-sum game" to shape a new way of thinking to create mutual benefits, eliminating the opposition to "inclusiveness, mutual learning and common development," and establishing the view of tianxia (international community) and the theory of righteousness and interests, all of which are peculiar to Chinese culture. In recent years, China has voluntarily adopted emission reduction measures and strengthened the implementation of these measures over time. By the end of 2016, China had become the world's largest solar power generation country in terms of its electric-power output. At present, China is the world's largest producer and consumer of renewable energy, and the largest investor of renewable energy on the planet, ranking first in the world in terms of installed capacity of hydropower, wind power, and solar photovoltaic power generators. During the

Thirteenth Five-year Plan period, China's new investments in the field of renewable energy will likely reach 2.5 trillion Yuan, an increase of nearly 39% over the Twelfth Five-year Plan period. As a developing country with a population exceeding 1.3 billion Yuan, China will be among those countries most affected by the adverse effects of climate changes. To actively respond to climate changes is an internal requirement for China to fulfill its sustainable development, and an undertaking needed for China to take a major role in global governance, building a community with a shared future for mankind and boosting the common development of the whole of humanity. "Taking a driver's seat in international cooperation to respond to climate change, China has become an important participant, contributor, and torchbearer in the global endeavor to create an ecological civilization."^①

Third, China's experience in constructing an ecological civilization can play a role of example for other countries, for which the view of overall governance featuring Chinese wisdom has universal significance. Since the 1970s, developed countries in the West have indulged themselves in palliative or stopgap measures, whereas China's ideas for the construction of an ecological civilization, namely "five-in-one," have been widely recognized throughout the world. This was a great innovation by the Chinese, a solution providing the means to plan the construction of both an ecological civilization and an economic society to aim at collaborative development and solve the contradiction between development and protection.

The strategy for, and achievements in, the construction of an ecological civilization, based on Chinese wisdom, China's political system and ideological characters, have been highly recognized and endorsed by the international community and the UN. For the aspect of strategic planning, the UN Environment Programme passed the adopted the draft decision in *Promoting the Philosophy of China's Ecological Civilization* at its 27th council meeting in February 2013. The strategy of China on the construction of an ecological civilization has been recognized by the international community as a Chinese Solution which can fundamentally defuse the environmental crises and bring about harmony and mutual benefits to the world. In May 2016, the UN Environment Programme issued a report titled *Green is Gold: The Strategy and Actions of China's ecological civilization*, which thinks highly of General Secretary Xi Jinping's thoughts about green development and China's conception of an ecological civilization. As it is expressed by Julio Rios, director of the Observatory of Chinese Politics (OPC) of Spain, the Chinese government is well aware of problems in the construction of an ecological civilization and has thus invested a great deal of resources and made mid- and long-term plans to solve these problems. All these are convincing evidence that China will achieve more amazing successes in the construction of an ecological civilization in the future.^②

China has made obvious progress although it still has a long way to go in terms of pollution abatement. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, Chairman of the Kuhn Foundation is convinced that China's environment today has been greatly improved, noting that the methods that China has adopted in environmental governance are very effective. For example, the economic sanctions that the Chinese government has applied for polluting enterprises have had actual positive effects. And John A. Mathews, professor at the Department of Management of Macquarie University in Sydney believes that a revolution of green energy is taking

① Xi Jinping, Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—the Report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC, p. 6.

② Looking for a New Path in the Experience from China's Success—International Celebrities Think Highly of China's Construction of Ecological Civilization, 2018, March 14.

place, and “China’s system of power generation is turning green far more quickly than any other system of comparable size on the planet.”^① In *The Guardian*, Michael Greenstone, Director of the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago reported on an analysis of air pollution data collected by various governmental departments in China from 2013 to 2017, pointing out that air pollution in many cities where there are dense populations has been greatly reduced. According to Greenstone, “By winning this war, China is due to see dramatic improvements in the overall health of its people, including longer lifespans, if these improvements are sustained.”^② Likewise, Maria Neira, Director of the Public Health and the Environment Department of the World Health Organization is sure that China has achieved important progress, and that India should follow the example of China.^③

With respect to a leading role, Clifford Cobb, Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* points out that China has taken a path exactly different from that of European and American countries, arguing that those countries shift high-pollution factories to developing countries to protect their own environment, whereas China not only confronts and solves difficulties by itself, but also provides an example for other countries.^④ John B. Cobb Jr., member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences posits that the hope of an ecological civilization lies in China, holding that other countries may learn from China, which can be a leader in many aspects.^⑤ Also, Achim Steiner, deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Administrator of the UN Development Programme states that such conceptions and terms as “green development” and “an ecological civilization” have been adopted and used in UN documents, and are contributions that Chinese wisdom has made to the global governance of the ecological environment.^⑥

Of course, China does not forcefully export its systems or values. Countries differ in terms of their political and economic systems, and in their cultures and values and certainly hold different attitudes towards the Chinese solution.

5. Constantly improving the Chinese solution for the construction of an ecological civilization in practice

As General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in his report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC and his speech at the National Conference on Environmental Protection, China’s ecological civilization has been constantly improved as a whole, showing a stable trend towards the better, but the performance itself is not yet stable. The construction of an ecological civilization is at the juncture of increasing pressures and arduous tasks, the critical point of providing more high-quality ecological products to satisfy people’s increasing demands for good ecological environments, and the time when it has both conditions and ability to solve the toughest problems of the environment. China’s economy has turned from the period of rapid growth

① Retrieved from: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-green-energy-revolution-by-john-a--mathews-and-hao-tan-2015-05? barrier = accesspaylog>.

② Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/31/china-environment-census-reveals-50-rise-in-pollution-sources>.

③ The World Health Organization Urges India to Learn from Chinese Experience in Abating Pollution, 2018, May 3.

④ Retrieved from: <http://www.jhnews.com.cn/2017/1207/792281.shtml>.

⑤ Retrieved from: http://epaper.anhuinews.com/html/ahrb/20150607/article_3319570.shtml.

⑥ Looking for a New Path in the Experience from China’s Success—International Celebrities Think Highly of China’s Construction of Ecological Civilization, 2018, March 14.

towards the stage of high-quality development. It now needs to boost its green development, focus on acute environmental problems, strengthen systematic ecological protections, and reform its system of environmental monitoring. For a better play of the institutional advantages of China, the following aspects deserve our attention.

First, to improve the model of coordinated governance featuring government-dominated cooperation between governments, markets and society. The 19th National Congress of the CPC states that “We will establish an environmental governance system in which government takes the lead, enterprises assume the main responsibility, and social organizations and the public also participate.” It is impossible for the government to take charge of everything in the construction of an ecological civilization, and it is also necessary to utilize the force of the market. Some people thought that the problem of ecological environment should be addressed through a market mechanism now that markets play a decisive role in the allocation of resources, but this is a wrong idea. One can utilize market mechanisms for the sake of environmental governance, but the environment is a kind of public good, and cannot be totally marketized. Some argued that the key to an ecological environment lies in the self-discipline of residents derived from their awareness of an ecological civilization, but this view is also one-sided. The environmental awareness of residents is indeed important, and the system of ecological environmental governance calls for participation by social organizations and the public, but environmental groups in China have not yet grown enough, and the awareness of the environment among citizens is still weak. Therefore, it is not feasible for China to adopt a grassroots pattern of environmental protections. Instead, China should take a government-dominated path in its socialist construction of an ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics.

Second, to further strengthen the role of systems in the construction of an ecological civilization. What China has adopted is the model of government-dominated construction of an ecological civilization, but the role of the government mainly lies in regulation through systems. Systems can effectively regulate people’s production and everyday life, reduce human-caused disturbances in the construction of an ecological civilization, and guarantee the stability and continuity of various ecological projects. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, both the CPC and the government have envisaged a series of systems, for example, the *Overall Solution for the Reform of Systems for An ecological civilization* has defined a goal for the reform of systems concerning an ecological civilization, i.e., to have established by 2020 a complete overall system of an ecological civilization featuring clear property rights, multiple participation, and equal emphasis on incentives and restrictions, which consists of the eight subsystems, namely the system of property rights for natural resource assets, the system for the development and protection of territorial space, the planning system of territorial space, the system for total resource management and comprehensive resource conservation, the system for payment-based resource consumption and compensating conservation and protection efforts, the effective system for environmental governance, the market system for environmental governance and ecological conservation, and ecological conservation performance evaluation and accountability systems. Thus, the Party and the government have boosted the modernization of national governance systems and governance capabilities in the field of ecological civilization. The 19th National Congress of the CPC proposed to establish regulatory agencies to manage State-owned natural resource assets and monitor natural ecosystems. The strategic thinking regarding the construction of an ecological civilization has become clear, but the construction of the various systems needs to proceed in an orderly way. We still have no sufficient

systems to meet demands arising from the construction of an ecological civilization and there still exists many short slabs. For example, the property ownership of natural resource assets, including mineral resources, is still unclear and is still managed through a tax system rather than being overseen by any property ownership system. The tax system signifies a kind of administrative power and thus lacks the rigid restrictions under the property ownership system, resulting in the frequent abuse of mineral resources. Another example, domestic and industrial waste is still mixed when it is collected, and there is very little recycling. This causes a waste of resources, including large areas of land, and produces a great deal of pollution. At present, the legislation on the domestic waste sorting in China is still fragmented, and some systems have poor operability, not meeting the current requirements of sorting and the comprehensive use of domestic waste. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the legislation on the comprehensive use of various renewable resources, including domestic waste, and establish and improve relevant laws and regulations for the sustainable use of resources and the protection of the environment.

Third, to guarantee coordination between the construction of an ecological civilization and the assurance of people's livelihoods. The model of economic development neglecting environmental deterioration certainly should be abandoned, but we cannot blindly push to increase the purpose and standards of environmental protection regardless of the existing levels of economic development. It is not difficult to close, cease or transform some enterprises for the sake of environmental protection, but what is difficult is how to guarantee employment and people's everyday life while carrying out ecological environmental protections. For this reason, the government needs to reconcile environmental protections, economic development, modernization of people's everyday lives, and the construction of an ecological civilization. In accordance with the strategic deployment of the 19th National Congress of the CPC, China's goals of economic and social development by 2020, 2035 and 2050 are respectively to build a well-off society in an all-round way, basically realize modernization, and build a strong modernized socialist country. The corresponding objectives in the construction of an ecological civilization are respectively to win the battle of pollution prevention and control, secure the essential improvements of an ecological environment, and build China into a harmonious, beautiful country. In view of the phenomenon that rigid uniformity in accelerating the construction of an ecological civilization in some places has negatively affected people's everyday lives, some experts suggest providing some time for economic development to reorganize, develop and accumulate the economic basis required by environmental protection, rather than blindly continuing to raise the quality standards for the environment. "If the strategic objective of environmental protection and economic or enterprise development is not based on the strategic coordination of economic and technological development, if the economy is not well grounded, and if the ability to observe environmental laws and regulations is not well developed, there will be the abnormal phenomenon of rigid uniformity concerning the implementation of environmental policies that will not only undermine the vitality of the economy and the impetus of enterprises' innovation and development, but also jeopardize sustainable environmental protection."^① A good life is what everyone pursues, but it must be fulfilled stage by stage, and the understanding of a good life varies from one group to another. While the mutual benefits of a good ecological environment are obtained, the proper, reasonable pursuit of different groups should also be kept in mind.

① Chang, 2018, January 3

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This paper has been translated and reprinted from *Southeast Academic Research*, No. 5, 2018, pp. 25–33.