



President Xi Jinping Vision of Eco-Civilization

A Series on
President Xi Jinping
Thoughts



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President Xi Jinping Vision of Eco-civilization

Introduction

China historically has been active on environmental protection. The first traces of environmental protection can be traced back to BCE. Han Feizi wrote that during the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046) there were penalties for dumping waste on roads or open spaces. Shang Dynasty made a law which punished a person by cutting off his finger if he throws the waste on the road¹. The traditional philosophy, wisdom and spiritual thoughts also highlights the importance of environment. Tao's concept of nature, Confucius's harmony between human and nature and Buddhism teachings all point towards the importance of nature. Pan is of the point of view that these Chinese traditional wisdom and religion can help combating the environmental problems in modern times. He further highlighted the importance of religion to counter the environmental degradation².

Tao's concept of nature and deity is more concerned about the inner world, peace, well-being of people and give less importance to wealth accumulation. Confucius's harmony thoughts revolve around the prosperity of human beings by striking a balance between needs of people and nature. In addition, Buddha's teachings also played a central role in religious and social evolution of China. These concepts and teachings of elder helped China to build on the concept of prosperity and environmental consciousness. Shang and other Dynasties learned from them and applied them.

The modern China is also conscious about the need and importance of environment and its role in human prosperity. From 1979 onwards China introduced a number of environmental laws and strict actions. China's progress on the introduction of laws and rule was good³ but the application of these laws is debatable⁴.

Policy of opening up and reforms started from 1978 adopting the capitalist system of production. As, Mr. Deng pointed out that socialist system of production is not able to meet the demand of people. It led to adaptation of modernization of West. China followed the Western model for 30 years, which introduced the many environmental

¹ <https://monthlyreview.org/2014/11/01/the-ecological-civilization-debate-in-china/>

² Pan Yue, "Marxist Notion of Religion Must Catch up with Time," *Huaxia Times*, December 15, 2001

³ Wang Canfa, "The Current Situation and Future Anticipation of China's Modern Environmental Legislation," March 11, 2011, <http://gesep.com>

⁴ Mat McDermott, "Why China's Environmental Laws Have Been Useless in Stopping Pollution," September 24, 2010, <http://treehugger.com>

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problems. The cost of environment started to rise, especially for human being. The resources started to bear the brunt of excessive exploitation.

There is no doubt that did wonder on enhancing the forest cover. It has been highlighted by NASA that China contributed 42.3 percent in greening trend of mother earth. China has also invested heavily on afforestation and ne forests. According to 8th national forest inventory the forest cover of China has increased from 8.6 percent in 1949 to 21.5 percent. It is expected that 9th inventory will show further increase as China has speed up the process of forestation⁵.

On other hand China has already introduced many laws like water pollution, air pollution, renewable energy, 660 local regulations and 800 national standards⁶ but the application remain a major concern. Pollution started to cause deaths and bad environment for living. The situation led the Government of China to ponder more seriously on the problem in the early 2000s. President Hu Jintao in 2007 asked for adaptation of eco-civilization principles and work on creating a balance between economy and environment⁷. From here the political leadership of China has adopted the term start to work on it. It is worth mentioning here that eco-civilization is a comprehensive term which includes economic development, environmental protection and social development. It focuses on a world where everything on earth has a right and we need to respect it.

President Xi Jinping Vision

President Xi Jinping said, eco-civilization is great plan for China to achieve to sustainable development” and achieve the goal of beautiful China till 2050. Hence, the policy framework and actions must be transformative in nature, to achieve the objective of construction of ecological civilization. It is necessary that the basic framework must be in place before the 2035, the target date for modern China⁸.

President Xi keeps the eco-civilization at the core of all decisions for steering the China to achieve eco-civilization with Chinese characteristics. President Xi said, green is gold and integral part of eco-civilization. Eco-civilization is key to build a beautiful China and achieve the China Dream⁹. President Xi is also leading at global level in steering the process of transition to an environment friendly development. He is vocal about the importance of Paris Climate Change Agreement. President Xi is continuously stressing upon nations to adhere to the objectives of Paris Climate Change Agreement.

⁵ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674d30677a4e32457a6333566d54/index.html>

⁶ Li Xuan, “China’s Environmental Legislation Has Entered Benefit Game Period,” *Green Leaf* 10 (2009): 122–25

⁷ <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/8463>

⁸ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/545291/eawp-021-ecological-civilization-prc.pdf>

⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/china/green-gold-strategy-and-actions-chinas-ecological-civilization>

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China under the leadership of President Xi is working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). President Xi has made it compulsory for government officials to look SDGs as important part of planning.

President Xi at domestic level has accelerated the efforts to implement Paris Climate Change Agreement, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Eco-civilization. He is convinced that to achieve all these goals, there is need to redefine the relationship between;

- 1) Market and Society
- 2) Resource allocation institutions and environmental regulators
- 3) Focus of government at all levels

He envisioned that these actions and reforms are necessary for realizing the dream of eco-civilization and beautiful China. He is also focusing on the importance of social responsibility and asking society to act as unit. According to him, the goal of better environment and living cannot be achieved without the active and meaningful participation of society.

President Xi's vision of Eco-civilization is based on three distinct thoughts and practices. First, President Xi takes guidance from the Marxist philosophy and its focus on relationship between man and nature. He particularly concentrates on integration of three theories of Marxism, dialectics of history, dialectical of materialism and dialectics of nature. Second, President Xi's vision of eco-civilization is rooted in traditional wisdom of China and role of thoughts of elders of China. He is putting efforts to integrate traditional Chinese knowledge and the elements of modern development and modernity. Lastly, it is based on the environmental governance history in China and environmental disasters which happened in the recent past. Now he is focused on improving the environment and has concluded that "economic development is important but lucid water and green mountains are more important for healthy living¹⁰.

President Xi from the beginning of his presidential term is focused on creating a balance between economic development and environment. He is of the view that green mountains and blue water is more important than gold mountains. He is convinced that ecology and GDP are mutually inclusive and re-enforce each other. 'A beautiful China is the guiding principle for future since 18th CPC meeting. Political leaderships under the President Xi has made it a goal and is working to achieve it.¹¹ The guidelines for achieving the objectives are;

¹⁰ <https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/abs/10.1142/S2345748119750022?journalCode=cjues>

¹¹ Pan Xiang-chao Research on Xi Jinping's Thought of Ecological Civilization and Environment Sustainable Development , Mianyang Teacher's College Mianyang, Sichuan China

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1. *Protection first, scientifically demarcate and adhere to the ecological protection red line*
2. *Adhere to the rule of law and strengthen the legal guarantee of ecological civilization construction*
3. *Innovation-driven and enhancing the scientific and technological support of ecological civilization construction*
4. *Adhere to the system thinking and improve the top-level design of ecological environment management system*
5. *Insist on taking the people as the base and advocate the emergence of a new cultural movement for the whole people's ecological civilization*

China has taken many steps under President Xi to tackle the environmental problems. In 2014 at CPC meeting it was decided that environmental protection will be a key indicator to evaluate performance. Prime Minister Li said that blind development has impacted environment and now we will work to improve the environment and devise a model of development which has limited consequences for the environment. President Xi in his speech at Paris highlighted that China achieved marvelous growth but environment is facing negative consequences. Therefore, we are working to improve it¹².

In 2018 China further accelerated the efforts. China is also expediting work on Yangtze River area development in accordance with the vision of President Xi. China is trying to implement the principles of Eco-civilization in the development of Yellow River region. President Xi has directed that the development plans must be developed by keeping in mind the carrying capacity of Yellow River.

President Xi Jinping is trying to infuse his vision at all levels. For that purpose, President Xi is working to lay down the required institutional framework. It has been observed that during the period of President Xi environmental institutions are strengthened in term of capacity and power to govern. Now environmental institutions have power to impose strict punishments and means to implement the required interventions. Institutions have also been provided the required financial resources to implement the plans.

Now, under President Xi China has made environmental inspection is an integral part of government functions. In 2017 government of China sent 5600 law enforcement officers to inspect the environment. In 2018 government sent 18000 law enforcement officers for inspection. Environmental problems are being publicized first time and government is also seeking assistance from people to achieve the target of eco-civilization. President Xi consider environment as a matter of national security. Hence, he is prioritizing it¹³.

¹² <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/china-moves-towards-ecological-civilisation/>

¹³ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1137873.shtml>

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President Xi has also ordered the energy transformation. The government of China has launched many renewable energy projects. China is also working on increasing efficiency of energy and retiring coal and other dirty energy plants. The energy mix of China shows that 28 percent energy comes from renewable sector. It is huge jump as compare to few years' back statistics¹⁴. President Xi has further accelerated efforts to go for clean energy and reduce the energy use. For example, he is working to draw a new of heating in China. He has asked the authorities to work on replacing coal-based heating system with natural gas or other clean means of heating.

President Xi has also announced to build ten national parks. It is part of strategy to protect the environment and resources of China. China aims to build park to protect entire eco-system. The first park, The Sanjiangyuan National Park is expected to be opened in 2020. It is pilot project and China is also learning from the experience of other countries¹⁵.



Now China is entering to important phase of reforms for eco-civilization. The upcoming development plan (2021-2025) would be critical juncture for defining the future contours of actions and outcomes. It is also time for the activation of mid-term plan (2020-2035) to transfer China into modern country, which pave the way for the mid-term plan (2035-2050). Thus, President Xi has accelerated his efforts to define the

¹⁴ <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/electricity-mix-in-china-q1-2020>

¹⁵ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-08-19/Chinese-President-Xi-stresses-national-park-system-as-1st-forum-opens-JhEQR9VJTj/index.html>

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future transformative policies and actions. He is continuously visiting the country and asking local governments to be active and actively participate in the construction of ecological civilization. He is advocating for a rational approach in production and consumption. He is of the view that massive production and consumption lead to massive emissions. Hence, China should look for rational systems, avoid waste and promote thrift. President Xi in 2020 has asked his nation to minimize waste or eliminate it. He is promoting thrift. He is asking people to adopt a simple and low consumption mod of life.

However, to achieve the all the targets above and vision of President Xi, CPC, central committee, local party and government officials at levels will have to work together. CPC and central committee will provide policy and guidelines for action, and local party members and governments will have to implement with sense of responsibility and accountability. President Xi said, “all local governments and party leaders would be held accountable for environmental damage in their regions”.

The vision put forward by President Xi has influenced the environmentalists and proponents of sustainable development across the world. The community was advocating this transformative vision and actions for a long. Unfortunately, they could not get it and they were looking for leadership to lead the way. President Xi is filling this vacuum by presenting his transformative vision of eco-civilization¹⁶. David Korten is enthusiastic advocate of the concept and working to expand the vision at global level¹⁷.

President Xi is convinced that eco-civilization is best path to follow to counter the present and future challenges. Moreover, he is also looking at it as a source of strength in future. President Xi’s statement that eco-civilization is power in present and advantage in future, summarize the argument.

Eco-civilization Goals

China is in the process to develop a model of development, which would be based on the concepts of constructive post-modernization, ecological Marxism, traditional Chinese wisdom and modern socialism which leads to realization of the dream of Eco-civilization. China has introduced many reforms in accordance with the principles of eco-civilization and is showing good progress. However, there is a need to structure these efforts against certain goals. The goals should be developed in accordance with socialistic characteristics of China, as President Xi always described it as priority.

¹⁶ <https://ensia.com/voices/ecological-civilization/>

¹⁷ <http://davidkorten.org/living-earth-econ-for-eco-civ/>

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On the basis of analysis and review of China's policies, Ecological Marxism, Constructive Post-modernization and Chinese traditional wisdom and modernity; following six goals can be developed;

1. Goal-1: Economy: Prosperity Led Growth and Development
2. Goal-2: Environment: Environment sensitive and ecological limitation sensitive economy
3. Goal-3: Social: Spiritual and need based development
4. Goal-4: Political: Inclusive, corruption free, moral based and people centric
5. Goal-5: Culture: Community, thrift, no waste, care,
6. Goal-5: Sharing: Shared Destiny, Shared Future, Shared Prosperity

The six goals can be presented as an alternative to achieve the dream of prosperity. These goals can have the following indicators.

Goals	Indicators
Goal-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Human centric development 2. Mechanisms of distribution of resources 3. Making living not money 4. Measurement of prosperity not GDP
Goal-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following ethics of nature 2. Limiting resources use 3. Environment at heart of development 4. Harmony between economy and nature
Goal-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welfare of all 2. No in-equality 3. Universal education 4. Universal health 5. Respect for diversity 6. Social cohesion
Goal-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusive governance 2. Equal law 3. Open participation 4. Fair play 5. Selection for job or meritocracy 6. Institutional linkages and coordination
Goal-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community thinking 2. Thrift 3. No waste 4. Care for individual 5. Morality and Ethics
Goal-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared prosperity 2. Shared future 3. Shared destiny 4. National dream

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Partnership 6. Win-win cooperation
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These are few indicators we can further delve on the concept and refine the indicators.

Eco-Civilization and CPEC

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) present opportunities for Pakistan to be part of the Eco-civilization drive of China. As, CPEC is a multidimensional project and includes a number of areas. The major areas of cooperation are;

1. Energy
2. Infrastructure
3. Industry
4. Tourism
5. Agriculture
6. Science and Technology
7. Transport
8. Skill development

These are all areas which are an integral part of eco-civilization. Pakistan can work with China to apply the concepts of eco-civilization. CPEC being the flagship project of BRI can also act as flagship project for eco-civilization.

It is heartening to note that China and Pakistan are already working on different aspects of eco-civilization. Both countries have heavily invested and are investing in renewable and clean energy. Solar and wind energy projects already started to produce. Government has also included hydropower projects in CPEC. Most recently government started two new projects of hydropower in addition to other renewables energy projects.

Pakistan and China can also apply the principles of Eco-civilization during the second phase, especially in industrial and agriculture cooperation. Government of Pakistan can work with China to build one of the SEZ according to new standards of development and eco-civilization. The proposed SEZ should have industry which follow the green principles. SEZ should be provided clean energy and clean services should be provided. Government should also introduce special policy incentives for this proposed SEZ. China should prioritize cooperation in this SEZ and encourage investors form China to venture here. The required technologies and skills should be also provided jointly. The successful execution of this proposed SEZ will help to create a model for other countries under BRI.

Second, Pakistan and China should work on the agriculture practices which ensure minimum GHG emissions. The use of chemicals and fossil fuels should be limited. This paper is abstract of chapter from book, "Understanding China for Future Cooperation"

The cooperation should also focus on the development of new breeds of animals which produce less methane gases. There can also be introduced programs of agriculture waste management and water conservancy. Best practices for land leveling and efficient use of water can also be promoted. New ways of rice sowing and production can also be explored to minimize the GHG emissions.

Environment friendly practices can also be adopted in infrastructure development. Transport system can also be organized and GHG emissions can be brought down. Electric vehicles and mass transport system would definitely help to reduce the GHG emissions.

These are few suggestions. Both governments can work together and introduce more programs according to the principles of the Eco-civilization.

Conclusion

The discussion in paper highlight that human needs a better life not only in term of money but in term of quality of life. The existing model of development and solutions offered under the model are not helping. There is a need to revise the model and look for new means to tackle environmental and developmental issues. Scholars and experts are working on the need and elements of new model.

Eco-civilization is the outcome of such efforts and hard work of scholars and experts. Majority of scholars and experts are pinning hope on China to lead the way. Fortunately, political leadership of China is cognizant of the fact and started to work on it. President Xi has special love for the environment and better life of people. He has accelerated the process of implementation of principles of Eco-civilization. World has witnessed remarkable achievements of China, on this front. China is also leading the efforts to combat climate change and is a strong voice to implement Paris Climate Change Agreement with its true spirit.

However, China being a major power, needs to do more and help the world in implementing eco-civilization principles. China should develop Eco-civilization goals and promote them across the world. The starting point for working with other countries can be investments under the Belt and Road Initiative. For that purpose, CPEC, being a flagship project of BRI, can also be declared as a flagship project for eco-civilization. It will help creating a good case study and model for the implementation eco-civilization principles.

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