

Towards Green Development: From an Option to an Objective



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Green is the color of nature and represents the foundations of a better life for the people. Over the past 70 years since the founding of New China, we have gradually deepened our understanding of green development and improved relevant practices accordingly. After going through a process from limited to profound understanding and from conscious to spontaneous practices, China has embarked on a path of green development with Chinese characteristics. This is an inevitable trend as well as a subjective choice that demonstrates the profound changes in the concept and way of development and the CPC governance. A review of China's journey to explore green development step by step has great theoretical significance and practical value for promoting ecological progress and building a beautiful China.

1 China's Green Development Is Out of Both Historical Necessity and Subjective Choice

From the emergence of the idea, the sublimation of the concept, the establishment of relevant systems, to the practices, the path of green development has been determined by the actual conditions in China, as well as a result of the CPC's active explorations for new ways of development and satisfying the people's aspirations for a better life.

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1. Green development is an inevitable choice for development based on China's resource and environmental endowments

Due to the limited resources per capita and the relatively fragile ecology, China must take the path of conservation and intensive utilization of resources and environmental protection. According to the national plan for developing functional zones, mountainous areas and plateau make up about 60% of land space in China. Apart from the arable land and existing construction land that must be protected, the land suitable for industrialization, urbanization and other construction in the future covers only 280,000 km², accounting for about 3% of the total land area in China. The per capita water in China is only 28% of the world's per capita share, in addition to the problem of unmatched distribution of water resources with land resources and economic development. The ecologically fragile areas above the moderate level account for 55% of the land area in China, of which extremely vulnerable areas make up 9.7%, severely vulnerable areas account for 19.8% and moderately vulnerable areas account for 25.5%. Large-scale and intensive industrialization and urbanization can only be carried out in limited areas suitable for development.

The Hu-Line characteristics in population geology made it a must for China to fully respect the laws of nature and take a development path of maintaining balance between population, industries, resources and the environment. The Hu Line extends from Aihui Country in Heilongjiang Province to Tengchong in Yunnan Province, dividing China into two parts: southeast and northwest. Covering 36% of China's territory, the southeastern China is home to 96% of the national population. In contrast, the northwestern China accounts for about 64% of the national territory, but with merely 4% of the population. According to the Sixth National Population Census in 2010, the proportion of the population in the eastern China decreased by only 2.3% in more than 70 years. The existence and enduring stability of the Hu Line indicates that the overall population distribution in China, featuring dense population in the east and sparse population in the west, has been constrained by resource endowments and natural laws, which in turn affects China's industrial layout and utilization of resources and environment. It can also be said that the "Hu Line" has locked China's economic and geographical pattern, and it would be against the laws of nature to deny it.

To resolve the actual contradiction between economic development and environment, China must take the path of promoting protection and development in a coordinated way. Since the reform and opening up, China's economy has achieved leapfrog development. It took less than half a century for China to accomplish industrialization that consumed two or three centuries in developed countries, creating the "Chinese miracle" that has drawn worldwide attention. However, such "compression of time and space" in economic growth has resulted in corresponding issues in resources and environment. China's total energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions rose from 990 million tons and 2.29 billion tons in 1990 to 4.26 billion tons and 9.93 billion tons in 2014, registering a three-fold increase. China's energy consumption per unit of GDP is nearly 2.5 times as high as the global average and twice the average in the Asia-Pacific region. The economic structure characterized by

heavy industry and extensive development model have brought about fundamental obstacles, making it impossible for the environment and resources to support the sustainable development of the economy. Therefore, we must explore a green path with equal stress on development and protection.

2. Green development is a scientific choice made by China in the process of deepening understanding of the laws of socioeconomic development

At the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972, Premier Zhou Enlai first brought the issue of pollution to the attention. He emphasized that environmental problems should not be regarded as trivial matters and called for immediate actions. Under the instructions of Premier Zhou Enlai, China sent a delegation to the Conference on the Human Environment, which marks an important turning point for China to take the initiative to opt for the path of green development. In 1995, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 14th CPC Central Committee decided to bring about “two fundamental changes.” One is to transform from a traditional planned economic system to a socialist market economic system, and the other is to change the mode of economic growth from extensive to intensive. This reflects the inherent requirements of economic growth in the new stage and an objective choice for achieving sustainable development. Since the second half of 2002, China has entered a new round of expanding heavy chemical industry, followed by heavy investment across the country in high energy-consuming and high-emission projects such as steel, cement, chemical, and coal power. This has put tremendous pressure on the resources and environment, leading to the growing resource-related and environmental constraints. In October 2003, the Third Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee put forward the scientific outlook on development that requires “putting people first, aiming at comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development, and promoting well-rounded development of the economy, society and people.” The Fifth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee proposed to “accelerate the development of a resource-conserving and environment-friendly society.”

In this way, green development has become the will and the governing concept of the Party and the state. Following the 2008 financial crisis, revolutions in new energy and “Internet Plus” broke out around the world, demonstrating the reflection on the entire industrial civilization. The report at the 18th CPC National Congress first made the “building of a beautiful China” a grand goal of ecological progress. It gave prominence to the development of ecological civilization, incorporating it into all aspects and the whole process of advancing economic, political, cultural, and social progress, as well as the Five-Sphere Integrated Plan for the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics. For the first time, the CPC Constitution amended and adopted at the 18th CPC National Congress stipulated that “the Communist Party of China shall lead the people in building a socialist ecological civilization” and expounded on the statement, consolidating the strategic significance of the ecological progress. In October 2015, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee introduced the philosophy of innovative, coordinated, green, open and

shared development, making green development a basic concept for socioeconomic development during the 13th Five-Year Plan period and beyond.

3. Green development is an active choice of the CPC to meet people's aspirations for a better life in the process of deepening its understanding of the laws concerning the governance

The process to improve people's livelihoods could be divided into three stages—problem-solving, improvement and development. It not only requires economic growth, but more importantly, it means satisfying people's growing needs for a stronger sense of happiness with the increasing households' income. Blue skies, lucid water and lush mountains play an important role for people's sense of happiness. The key to governance lies in the peace of the people, to which end we must first deliver benefits for the people. The most inclusive benefit for the livelihood of the people lies in the green development, for which the key is the organic integration of green development and people's livelihood and welfare. It's an objective choice for the CPC to firmly establish the philosophy of green governance in response to the new situations, problems and contradictions facing its governance in the new era. The benign combination of economic development, eco-environment and people's needs in life is an important criterion for the good governance of a country.

2 The Ideological Change Constitutes the Foundation for China's Transformation to Green Development

In the profound reform towards green development, the ideological change is not only a reason behind China's option for the path of green development, but also the endogenous driving force that promotes China to embark on the path. The transformation of the outlook on development and on people's livelihood is the fundamental manifestation that China has taken the path of green development, demonstrating the integration of socioeconomic development and the well-rounded development of the people.

1. The philosophy that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" provides guidance for green development in terms of the outlook on development

The outlook on development embodies the needs of socioeconomic development in a certain period at the ideological level, representing the overall and systematic view of a country on its definition and approach to development during the period. Promoting green development is a profound change in the development outlook. General Secretary Xi Jinping's statement that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" clarified the unity of economic development and environmental protection. It is an important manifestation of the change in development outlook. General

Secretary Xi Jinping put forward to “properly handle the relationship between environmental protection and economic development, that is, the relationship between lucid waters and lush mountains and invaluable assets.” In a nutshell, “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.” Epistemologically, it means the integration of economy and environment. In practice, it is to develop eco-friendly growth models and ways of life. In essence, it is to achieve the internal unity of development and protection that reinforces each other. In terms of the goal, it means fulfilling the goal of enriching the country and benefiting the people through green development. The statement that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” fundamentally changed the traditional understanding about zero or low value of ecology and environment, redefined the value and updated the understanding. It broke the constraints in the thinking that simply put development at the opposite side of protection, while clarifying the methodology for realizing the internal unity and harmonious co-existence of development and protection that reinforces each other.

2. The statement that “a sound ecological environment is the most inclusive welfare for the people” clarifies the fundamental purpose of green development

A sound ecological environment and natural resources serve as the conditions and foundation for the free and comprehensive development of human beings. The statement that “a good ecological environment is the most inclusive welfare for the people” shows the basic view about the people’s livelihood under the framework of the Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization. Promoting green development and the dramatic increase in natural capital means to develop a sound ecological environment as a growth driver for the people’s living standards. In essence, it embodies the people-oriented concept, conducive to achieving the harmony between man and nature, between people, and between man and society. We should promote green development and ecological protection in the interests of the people, focus on solving the outstanding environmental problems doing harm to the health of the people, and consistently meet the people’s growing demands for a beautiful environment. In this way, we will deliver benefits to the entire society and every member of the society, which is an important manifestation of an all-round moderately prosperous life shared by all the people.

3 Green Targets and Evaluation Criteria Are the Baton for Navigating China’s Green Development

Eco-environmental problems are fundamentally a problem of development mode. The main culprit is the resource consumption and pollutant discharge in the socio-economic activities of the mankind exceeded the carrying capacity of the earth. Therefore, in essence, the first thing to do to promote green development is to correct the practice of seeking temporary economic growth at the cost of the environment and

promote the transformation towards green and intensive mode for socioeconomic development.

1. Gradually establish the goals of green development in the Five-Year Plan

The “Five-Year” Plan is an important way for China to promote sustainable and healthy socioeconomic development. With the main indicators for socioeconomic development as its core content, it reflects the basic ideas and charts the course for the development in the upcoming five years. Starting from the 10th Five-Year Plan, China began to incorporate resource-related and environmental indicators into the planning goals. The 10th Five-Year Plan proposed to “attach importance to issues concerning population, resource and eco-environment” and included the reduction of the total discharge of major pollutants as an indicator for planning goal. The 11th Five-Year plan regarded energy conservation and emission reduction as the main indicators of economic and social development. For the first time, the development goals were divided into anticipated and obligatory categories. Regarding the resource and environment, there were six obligatory goals and two anticipated goals. The introduction of obligatory indicators was an important innovation in national governance. In the 12th Five-Year Plan, the proportion of obligatory indicators relating to resource and environment increased to 33.3%, compared with 27.2% in the 11th Five-Year Plan. It clarified the incentive and constraint mechanism for green development. In the 13th Five-Year Plan, the indicators were enriched to cover air quality and surface water quality. The number of the resource-related and environmental indicators rose from eight to ten, all obligatory. Therefore, green development constituted the key note in all sectors and links of socioeconomic development during the 13th Five-Year Plan period.

2. Gradually establish a target responsibility system in the performance evaluation of Party and government officials to promote green development

The target responsibility system plays a pivotal role in the decision-making and implementation of the Five-Year Plan. In the process of implementing the 11th Five-Year Plan, the State Council decomposed the main objectives and tasks in line with the division of responsibilities and assigned them to each region. In addition, the obligatory indicators were incorporated into the criteria for comprehensive evaluation of socioeconomic development and performance assessment of each region and department. In 2006, the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee issued the *Trial Measures for the Comprehensive Evaluation of Local Party and Government Leaders and Officials in Line with the Requirements of Scientific Outlook on Development*, including obligatory indicators for the performance evaluation of local leaders. This was of great significance for mobilizing officials at all levels to better realize the goals set in the 11th Five-Year Plan. In the field of ecology and environment, since the introduction of the target responsibility system for environmental protection in 1996, particularly for energy conservation and emission reduction, China has made remarkable achievements. In the 11th Five-Year Plan, the aggregate emissions control has become the most important part of the central government’s

environmental performance assessment of provinces and large state-owned enterprises. It's also the most important content of environmental governance in each province, acting as the baton for environmental protection.

After the 18th CPC National Congress, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council have issued the *Measures for the Accountability of Party and Government Leaders for Ecological and Environmental Damage (Trial)*. At the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, it was made clear to “establish a space governance system consisting of the space planning, utilization control, the audit of outgoing officials’ natural resource asset management, and differentiated performance assessment, based on the units of city- and county-level administrative regions.” In this way, the connotations of green development have been further enriched. At the end of 2013, the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee issued the *Notice on Improving the Performance Evaluation of Local Party and Government Leaders and Officials*, requesting to increase the weight of indicators relating to resource consumption and environmental protection. In 2016, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council promulgated the *Plan for the Pilot Program to Audit Outgoing Officials’ Natural Resource Asset Management*. This was an important step in the evaluation of green development and provided guidance for the leaders to pursue green development. In the same year, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council promulgated the *Measures for Assessing Progress made in Ecological Improvement* and made it clear that the Green Development Index System and the Ecological Progress Assessment Goals System shall respectively serve as the basis for the annual and the five-year evaluation. As such, the performance in green development has officially become an important measure for the evaluation, reward, punishment, appointment and removal of provincial Party and government leaders. In July 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued a circular on the eco-environmental problems in the nature reserve of Qilian Mountain in Gansu Province, for which dozens of leading cadres, including three provincial and ministerial leaders, were held accountable. Since then, some local leaders began to realize the importance of the requirements that both party committees and governments are held accountable, and that officials take responsibility for the protection of ecology and environment. The first round of the central inspection on ecological and environmental protection that started at the end of 2015 realized the full coverage of all 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) in less than two years. It has therefore become a practical and effective tool for pushing local CPC committees and governments as well as their relevant departments to fulfill their environmental protection obligations.

3. Gradually establish the basic principles of prioritizing ecological protection and green development in major regional development strategies

During the 10th Five-Year Plan period, it's proposed to develop ecological demonstration areas, eco-counties, eco-cities, and eco-provinces. During the 11th Five-Year

Plan period, it's put forward to build a resource-conserving and environment-friendly society. In this way, the connotations of green development have been continuously enriched. However, ecological protection had not yet become the bottom line for economic and social development. After the 18th CPC National Congress, the principle of giving priority to ecological protection has been established in major regional development strategies such as the Yangtze Economic Belt Initiative, Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Integration Initiative, and Xiong'an New Area Initiative. The Yangtze River Economic Belt Initiative, with ecological conservation and green development at the core, constitutes an integral part of the CPC Central Committee's new ideas, thinking and strategies for national governance. In January 2016, at a symposium on promoting the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt held in Chongqing, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that to promote the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, we must take the long-term interests of the Chinese nation into consideration and take the path of ecological conservation and green development. In April 2018, at the symposium on further promoting of the development of the Yangtze Economic Belt, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized again to properly handle the relationship between environmental protection and economic development, explore new ways to coordinately promote ecological conservation and green development. To explore new ways for prioritizing ecological conservation and green development in the Yangtze River Economic Belt, the key is to properly handle the relationship between lucid waters and lush mountains and invaluable assets. On March 5th, 2019, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that it is necessary to explore new ways of high-quality development that prioritizes ecological conservation and green development. Prioritizing ecological conservation as the principle and prerequisite of a major regional development strategy fully reflects the integration of prioritized ecological conservation with decisions for socioeconomic development.

4 The Spatial Planning System Based on Main Functions Is an Important Means to Reshape the Spatial Pattern of Green Development

Green space is a prerequisite and an important dimension for green development. To achieve green development, it is necessary to determine the pace and areas of development based on the main functions of different types of areas, while giving full play to the important roles of space planning and space utilization control in promoting balanced development of space.

1. Development direction based on the main functions of the region

If the master plan for national economic and social development could be likened to the commander of the national development planning system, then the plan for developing functional zones would be the general of the national land and space

planning. Based on the resource and environment carrying capacity, existing development density and development potential of each region, the plan for developing functional zones strategically divides the national land and space into four categories of functional zones where development must be optimized, prioritized, restricted, or forbidden. This is a major measure to achieve the goal of ecological progress and coordinated regional development.

The basic idea of developing functional zones was first put forward in the proposal for the 11th Five-Year Plan. The proposal for the 12th Five-Year Plan elevated the plan for developing functional zones to a strategy. In 2013, the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Continuing the Reform* made it clear to “unwaveringly implement the system of functional zones.” In the Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan, the system of functional zones constituted a specific strategic measure underpinning the concepts of coordinated and green development, as well as an important means to promote the coordinated and green regional development. The idea of developing functional zones has gradually developed from a plan, a strategy, a system, to an integral part of the national plan for socioeconomic development.

Following the release of the *National Plan for Functional Zones* in 2010, the provincial plans for functional zones were issued and implemented successively. The plan for functional zones established the system of “nine policies + one system,” referring to the fiscal, investment, industrial, land, agricultural, population, ethnic, environmental, and climate change policies, plus the performance evaluation system for the functional areas. In 2017, the *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Improving the Strategy and System of Functional Zones* was issued. It proposed that by 2020, the county-scale geographical space in consistence with the functional definition will be basically delineated, the strategic layout of functional zones covering land and sea will be accurately implemented, and the spatial planning system that integrates various planning into a single master plan will be established and improved.

2. Promote the implementation of the strategic layout of functional zones based on the national space planning for “three spaces and three redlines”

The key to perfecting the strategy and system of functional zones lies in the implementation of the national and provincial strategic layout for functional zones at the city and county levels, on the basis of strictly sticking to the plan for functional zones. The three spaces refer to the urban, agricultural and ecological spaces, while the three redlines are for protecting the ecosystems, the permanent basic cropland, and the boundaries for urban development. The former lays stress on the definition of dominant functions, while the latter focused more on the rigid control of boundaries. The report to the 18th CPC National Congress put forward to ensure that “the space for production is used intensively and efficiently, that the living space is livable and proper in size, and that the ecological space is unspoiled and beautiful,” charting the course for optimizing the optimization of three spaces. In the report to the 19th CPC National Congress, it’s specified to “complete work on drawing redlines for

protecting the ecosystems, designating permanent basic cropland, and delineating boundaries for urban development.” The development from “three spaces” to “three spaces and three redlines” has promoted the shift of the core of regulating the use of all territorial space from protecting the single element of land resources to the full range of mountains, water, forests, fields, lakes and grasses. The national planning for “three spaces and three redlines” has become a basic system for coordinating the scientific protection and rational utilization of natural resources. In May 2019, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the *Opinions on Establishing a Geographical Space Planning System and Supervising its Implementation*. It proposed that by 2035, China will comprehensively improve the modernization of the system and capability for regulating the geographical space and basically form a safe, harmonious, competitive and sustainable territorial space layout featuring intensive and efficient use of the space for production, livable and proper-sized living space and unspoiled and beautiful ecological space.

5 Exploring the Path of Integrating Industries and Ecosystems Is a Fundamental Strategy for Green Development to Transform the Growth Model

Industry provides the basic support for green development. At the National Conference on Eco-environmental Protection held in May 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out to step up efforts to establish “a sound economic system aimed at integrating industries and ecosystems,” setting the two basic directions for China to explore green economic development.

1. With the focus on energy conservation and emission reduction, adhere to the path of green, low-carbon and circular development of eco-friendly industries

To promote eco-friendly industries means to incorporate the nature into the closed loop of the economic system. It is a system that generates economic value through economic activities featuring the most intensive utilization of the minimum amount of resources and the minimum- or zero-harm burden on the environment. As early as the 9th Five-Year Plan period, China proposed to shift from the extensive to the intensive economic growth model, offering no specific and well-developed approaches until the end of the 10th Five-Year Plan period. In response to the huge consumption of energy resources and the deterioration of the ecology and environment, the 11th Five-Year Plan officially introduced important measures, such as strengthening energy conservation and emission reduction and developing a circular economy. In 2005, the State Council issued the *Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Circular Economy*, designating the development of circular economy as an important guiding principle for the preparation of relevant plans. It marked China’s official launch of the development concept of circular economy. Subsequently, with the development models

of circular economy in Japan and Germany as the benchmark reference line, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Environmental Protection conducted centralized pilot projects in the form of “circular industrial parks.” In 2008, the State Council promulgated the Circular Economy Promotion Law, with a view to promoting the development of a circular economy from micro-, meso- and macro- dimensions. The 12th Five-Year Plan proposed that by 2015, the national industrial system shall achieve a comprehensive solid waste utilization rate of 72%, while more than 50% of national parks and more than 30% of provincial parks shall implement the main goal of recycling transformation. The 13th Five-Year Plan stipulated to establish a more detailed evaluation framework for circular economy and refine the circular economy evaluation indicators. In 2009, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, then-Premier Wen Jiabao pledged to the world the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The low-carbon economy with the basic goal of reducing carbon emissions has gradually become another important means for China to transform to the green development of economy.

Another way to promote the eco-friendly industries lies in the eco-friendly restructuring of industries. The 2008 financial crisis reshuffled the economic sectors and brought green economy to the attention of many countries. The industrial restructuring triggered by the financial crisis has accelerated the innovation of clean energy and clean production technology, and thereby opening up new areas of growth. Countries all over the world began to develop new energy and other strategic emerging industries to underpin a new round of economic growth. China designated seven strategic emerging industries, namely energy conservation and environmental protection, a new generation of information technology, biology, new energy, new energy vehicles, high-end equipment manufacturing, and new materials, as well as 23 key areas. Eco-friendliness is the common direction for the development of these industries and areas. In 2012, the report to the 18th CPC National Congress specified “green, circular and low-carbon development” as an important aspect of ecological progress. In 2015, the State Council issued the Opinions on Accelerating the Ecological Progress, positioning green development alongside new industrialization, IT application, urbanization, and agricultural modernization, as a major direction for economic and social development, while clarifying the industrial carrier of green development. The report to the 19th CPC National Congress emphasized to promote green development and establish a sound economic system for green, low-carbon and circular development. This is not only a continuation of China’s exploration for the transformation of economic growth model, but also an important foothold for adhering to green development and building a beautiful China in the new era.

2. Start by realizing the value of ecological goods and explore the mechanisms and paths to transform lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets

To promote the industrialized ecology means managing eco-environmental resources as a special capital based on theories on ecological services and public products, in

a bid to maintain and appreciate the value, while transforming ecological services from free resources to valuable commodities or services in a way for socialized production and market operation. In 2005, *Zhejiang Daily* ran a commentary by Comrade Xi Jinping, titled *Lucid Waters and Lush Mountains Are Invaluable Assets*, in the column of “Zhejiang, China: A New Vision for Development.” Xi wrote that “if we could transform the co-environmental advantages into competitive edge in ecological economy, such as eco-agriculture, eco-industry and eco-tourism, we can turn lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets.” In October 2017, the report to the 19th CPC National Congress specified that “we must realize that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets and act on this understanding,” and the newly revised Constitution of the Communist Party of China provides that “the Communist Party of China shall fully understand that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.”

The industrialized ecology constitutes the industrial pillar for transforming lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets, embodying the concepts about the natural capital and the integration of economic development with nature conservation. The key to ecological industrialization is to explore the path to realize the value of ecological products. At a seminar on boosting the development of the Yangtze Economic Belt in 2018, Xi Jinping emphasized to actively explore and promote the path of transforming lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets, carry out pilot programs to realize the values of ecological products in selected regions, and blaze a government-led, market-oriented operation and sustainable trail for realizing the values of ecological products. The National Development and Reform Commission and the former Ministry of Environmental Protection have respectively advanced the implementation of pilot projects for realizing the values of ecological products and the development of practical innovation bases to put into action the concept that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets,” in an effort to translate the concept of industrialized ecology into practice. The concept that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” and the practices in this regard have vigorously promoted the green development that integrates economic development with environmental protection, while significantly boosting our confidence in pursuing a model of sustainable development featuring increased production, higher living standards, and healthy ecosystems.

6 The Continuous Improvement of the Eco-Environment Quality Is the Goal and a Concrete Manifestation of Green Development

The excellent eco-environment quality gives prominence to the color of green development. By means of campaigns for prevention and control of environmental pollution and for ecological protection and restoration, we will strengthen areas of weakness in ecology and environment, so as to consolidate the ecological foundation for green development.

1. Continuously adjust the approaches for eco-environmental governance in response to the eco-environmental problems

Since 1972 when China sent a delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, China has made active explorations and tried to avoid the old path of pollution before protection in developed countries. During the period from the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee to 1992, environmental protection had developed into a basic national policy and a part of the national plan for economic and social development. In addition, environmental management systems and environmental laws and regulations had taken shape and China has got environmental protection on track. Since the launch of the 9th Five-Year Plan, the environmental protection in China had been characterized by the large-scale ecological construction and environmental pollution treatment. During the period from the 9th Five-Year Plan to the 13th Five-Year Plan, China has gradually deepened the understanding of its eco-environmental issues and improved its approaches for eco-environment governance. Regarding its understanding of environmental issues, the 9th and 10th Five-Year Plans aroused the concerns about prominent eco-environment problems and deteriorating environment. The 11th Five-Year Plan began to pay attention to the problem of excessive consumption of energy resources. During the period of the 12th and 13th Five-Year Plan, resource-related and environmental problems have become a major constraint on economic development. Meanwhile, the eco-environment governance has evolved from partial to systematic governance. During the period of 9th and 10th Five-Year Plans, the focus of environmental treatment was the problems relating to industrial point sources and in major cities. During the period of 11th and 12th Five-Year Plans, with the focus on major basins, regions and cities, the focus of ecological development has shifted to in-advance conservation and the whole process of resource utilization. During the 13th Five-Year Plan period, ecological conservation developed into a part of systemic governance, environmental governance across all sectors of the society and full-process resource management.

2. Accelerate to improve the weak links of eco-environmental quality to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has resolutely declared war on pollution. Following the promulgation of the Decisions of the Central Committee of

the CPC and the State Council on Comprehensively Enhancing Eco-environmental Protection to Completely Win the Battle against Pollution, the action plans for the prevention and control of air, water and soil pollution have been issued and implemented. As such, an all-out fight has been launched to keep our skies blue, our waters clear, and our land pollution-free.

All localities have taken multiple measures to prevent and control air pollution. From 2013 to 2018, the average concentration of inhalable particulate matter (PM 10) in 338 cities at prefecture-level and above dropped by 26.8%, and the average concentration of PM 2.5 in Beijing dropped by 43% from 89.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ to 51 Mg/m^3 . After the Action Plan for Water Pollution Prevention and Control was issued, all localities have vigorously promoted the investigation and remediation of environmental problems relating to centralized drinking water sources, with the focus on the treatment of black and odorous water bodies in key river basins and cities. In 2018, the proportion of sections with good surface water (Class I to III) across the country rose to 71% from 66% in 2015, while the proportion sections with inferior Class V surface water fell to 6.7% from 9.7% in 2015. In the meanwhile, soil pollution prevention and control have been proceeding in an orderly manner. A total of 214 pilot projects of soil pollution control and remediation technologies have been implemented nationwide. A resolute ban on foreign waste has been imposed and the total volume of solid waste imports in 2018 decreased by 46.5% year on year.

With the accelerating progress in pollution treatment, increasing efforts have been made in ecosystem conservation and restoration. A total of 2,750 nature reserves at various levels have been built across the country, including 474 national nature reserves. Various types of protected land areas cover more than 1.7 million km^2 , which effectively protected the natural ecosystem and a majority of key wild animals and plant species. Moreover, the populations of rare and endangered species such as giant panda are gradually restored. The national forest coverage rate has increased from 16.6% at the beginning of the twenty-first century to about 22%.

7 Conclusion

The basic logic behind China's choice to embark on the path of green development could be analyzed from the above six aspects. The choice has been made to satisfy the needs of socioeconomic development and demonstrates the active explorations by the CPC based on the changing social contradictions. China has experienced a journey from the emerging idea of green development to the practice of embarking on the road of green development, from sustainable to scientific development, and then to the development of ecological civilization in the new era. Thanks to the efforts and explorations made by sever generations, the geographical space, industrial mix, way of production and way of life in the interest of conserving resources and protecting the environment have taken shape, while future for the green development have been increasingly promising. At present, despite notable achievements in green development, we still need to step up efforts for in-depth development on a larger

scale. The socialist path of green development with Chinese characteristics in the new era indicates an all-round reform and a comprehensive transformation of economic and social development. Only by sticking to the path of green development can we achieve the goal of building a beautiful China.