China's Innovations and Global Contributions Through the Ecological and Environmental Code

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Preface

As the hands of the clock of human history point to 2026—

On the European continent, rare heat waves have swept across many places since the beginning of summer, with many countries breaking high-temperature records; over the Pacific Ocean, global warming has caused sea levels to rise, prompting several island nations to accelerate their pace of "national relocation"; on the Antarctic Peninsula, the extreme heat that appeared in early June set a new record high for the same period in history and the ice sheets were melting abnormally…

On this blue planet on which we depend for our survival, climate change is sounding repeated alarms for the entire human race. And the menaces do not end there. At present, global environmental crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution are intertwined and compounding, confronting global sustainable development with unprecedentedly complex challenges. In the face of these problems, where should we turn?

In its vigorous efforts to promote theoretical, practical, and institutional innovations of ecological conservation, China has formulated and continuously enriched and developed Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization to provide scientific and systematic answers to the questions of China, of the world, of the people, and of the times regarding ecological progress. Illuminating the path of green development with the light of ecological conservation, China has brought about historic, transformative, and comprehensive changes in ecological conservation from theory to practice.

Protecting the eco-environment with the rule of law is an important experience shared by countries around the world in their efforts to advance sustainable development. It is also a philosophy and practice that China has long upheld. Since the new era began in 2012, China's legal system for ecological conservation has been improving steadily; its ecological and environmental legal institutions have kept pace with the times. Yet, it still faces the clear and present need for further systematic integration, codification, revision, and overall refinement.

Summing up experience from practice and adapting to the demands of the times, an ecological and environmental code that features Chinese characteristics, reflects the features of the era, embodies the will of the people, and is a systematic, standardized, and coordinated product—the Ecological and Environmental Code of the People's Republic of China—has emerged as called for by the times. As the world's first code named "ecological and environmental", the Code came into effect on August 15, 2026.

The Code is a comprehensive synthesis of more than 30 ecological and environmental laws, over 100 administrative regulations, and more than 1,000 local regulations. It represents an achievement in the overall elevation of the systemic, holistic, coordinated, and time-sensitive nature of China's ecological and environmental legal regime, marking the beginning of an era of codification in China's development of its ecological and environmental rule of law.

Having Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization as its soul and guiding principle and contributing to the implementation of Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law, the Code focuses on correctly handling such major relationships as those between humans and nature, development and protection, the environment and people's well-being, and domestic and international dimensions. It elevates China's successful practices, institutional innovations, and governance experience in ecological conservation into a legal regime, thereby laying a solid legal foundation for promoting harmony between humanity and nature and for realizing the enduring development of the Chinese nation.

The future of the human race is intertwined and China is closely connected with the world. Inheriting the vision of a community with a shared future for humankind, the Code is both rooted in China's national conditions and committed to systematically responding to humankind's common concerns, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution. It enriches the institutional framework of global ecological and environmental governance and contributes China's wisdom and solutions to building together a clean and beautiful home on our planet.

With the rule of law as the pen and the mountains and rivers as the scroll, this report will systematically expound the Chinese path, Chinese governance, and Chinese philosophy embodied in the Ecological and Environmental Code from the perspectives of its contemporary context and great significance, its legislative innovations and Chinese characteristics, and its global value and contribution to the world, providing a window through which the world can come to know and understand China and draw wisdom and strength from it.

Chapter I
The Contemporary Context and Great Significance of the Ecological and Environmental Code

To advance green development and build an ecological civilization, the key is to establish rules and institutions and to protect the eco-environment with the strictest institutions and the most stringent rule of law.

— Xi Jinping

Law is a weighty instrument of state governance whereas sound law is the precondition of good governance.

The codification of the Ecological and Environmental Code is a major political and legislative task set by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core. The Code is a landmark achievement of the deep integration and mutual reinforcement of China's ecological progress and its comprehensive law-based governance in the new era. It helps advance China's ecological conservation efforts to a new stage of law-based and systematized governance.

1.1 New Thought Guides a New Journey of Law-Based Ecological Progress

Law is a product of society and, more than that, a product of its times. The Ecological and Environmental Code was conceived under the banner of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and came into being amid the practice of ecological conservation and law-based governance of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It is a major crystallization of the interconnection, integration, and mutual illumination of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization and Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law, carrying as it does the earnest aspirations for protecting our beautiful homeland.

—Safeguarding a Beautiful China

Building an ecological civilization is the historical trend of the development of human civilization while building a beautiful homeland is the common dream of the

entire human race. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, ecological conservation is of fundamental importance to the enduring development of the Chinese nation, a major political issue concerning the mission and purpose of the Party, and a major social issue that bears on people's well-being.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, under the sound guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, China has followed the global trend of sustainable development and responded to the people's aspirations for a beautiful eco-environment. It has given ecological conservation a prominent place in state governance and its overall work, incorporated ecological conservation into the Five-Sphere Integrated Plan, and made harmony between humanity and nature one of the basic policies for upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It has made green development one of the new development concepts, pollution prevention and control one of the three critical battles, and a Beautiful China one of the goals of building a great modern socialist country… In this process, it has achieved remarkable accomplishments in ecological conservation, which have become a distinctive hallmark of the historic achievements and changes in the cause of the Party and the country in the new era.

Chinese modernization is a modernization that features harmony between humans and nature. It sets new and higher requirements for ecological conservation. At present, China faces two major strategic tasks in its ecological conservation endeavor, namely, bringing about a fundamental improvement in the eco-environment and achieving carbon peaking and carbon neutrality. It is still in a critical period of progress under a heavy load and multiplying pressures, and the tasks of building a Beautiful China and advancing a modernization that features human-nature harmony remain arduous.

How to consolidate the achievements of theoretical, practical, and institutional innovations in ecological conservation since the dawn of the new era? How to plan and advance eco-environmental protection on the new journey with a higher vantage point, a broader vision, and greater intensity? And how to build a more solid legal foundation for a Beautiful China? These have become major questions that call for good answers through ecological progress in the new era.

It was against such a backdrop of guiding thought and out of the needs of the times that the Ecological and Environmental Code was conceived. The Code keeps the concepts of harmony between humans and nature and puts into practice the notion that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets; it keeps the idea that a sound eco-environment is the most inclusive form of public well-being and the emphasis on the integrated conservation and systematic governance of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts as well as the priority of ecology and green development, protecting the eco-environment with the strictest institutions and the most stringent rule of law… The Code embodies the translation of the core tenets, spiritual essence, rich connotations, and practical

requirements of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization into a legal system. The Code—the highest form of national legislation—answers such major questions as why ecological civilization needs to be built, what kind of ecological civilization to build, and how to build it.

—Building China under the rule of law

The rule of law is an important achievement of human political civilization and a major goal that the CPC and the Chinese people have long pursued. As President Xi Jinping emphasized, "We must better leverage the role of the rule of law in consolidating foundations, ensuring stable expectations, and delivering long-term benefits, and comprehensively build a modern socialist country on the track of the rule of law." Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has, from the strategic height of upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics and promoting enduring peace and stability for the Party and the country, positioned, planned, and practiced the rule of law, incorporating comprehensive law-based governance into the Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy for planning and advancement, and creatively putting forward a series of new ideas, thinking, and strategies on comprehensive law-based governance, thereby forming Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law.

Under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law, the socialist system of laws with Chinese characteristics has been growing and improving steadily while firm steps have been taken in building a law-based China, with various undertakings of the Party and the country brought onto the track of the rule of law. This fully demonstrates the distinctive features of comprehensive law-based governance in the new era. Eco-environmental governance is part and parcel of the modernization of China's governance system and capacity. In adhering to comprehensive law-based governance, we must advance ecological conservation with the mindset and approaches of the rule of law, continuously improve the institutional framework for eco-environmental protection, and ensure, through sound laws and good governance, that the building of a Beautiful China proceeds steadily and reaches far.

The codification of the Ecological and Environmental Code is an inevitable requirement and an objective need for implementing Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law, continuously advancing comprehensive law-based governance, and building a socialist country under the rule of law at a higher level. The Code fully embodies the requirements of Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law concerning sound legislation, strict law enforcement, impartial administration of justice, and observance of the law by all. It not only provides a solid legal guarantee for building a Beautiful China, but also further improves the socialist system of laws with Chinese characteristics, constituting an important part of the endeavor to build China under the rule of law.

1.2 Achievements in Ecological Conservation in the New Era Laying a Solid Foundation of Practice for the Code

A code is an advanced form of law and a concentrated embodiment of the practice of the rule of law. The birth of a code is often the result of the development of a country's system and its rule of law to an advanced stage. The promulgation of the Ecological and Environmental Code stems from both a strong practical need and a deep foundation of practice. Since entering the new era, China has persisted in advancing its reform under the rule of law and improving the rule of law through reform, coordinated the advancement of sound legislation, strict law enforcement, impartial administration of justice, and observance of the law by all, protected the eco-environment with the strictest institutions and the most stringent rule of law, and driven ecological conservation to achieve remarkable accomplishments that have drawn worldwide attention.

—Breakthroughs in reform and innovation

Institutions are the most fundamental, overarching, and enduring factors. As President Xi Jinping stressed, we must speed up institutional innovation, put in place more regulations, improve support systems, and strengthen their implementation. Regulations must be mandatory and become a powerful deterrent.

Since the advent of the new era, China has continued to deepen the reform of the ecological conservation system, coordinated and strengthened top-level design and the building of institutional systems for ecological conservation, and strictly governed power and officials with rules and regulations to protect the blue skies and increase greenery. It has issued and implemented dozens of reform measures, including the integrated reform plan for promoting ecological progress, and has gradually established systems for the property rights of natural resource assets, the development and protection of territorial space, spatial planning, total resource management and comprehensive conservation, compensated use of resources and ecological compensation, environmental governance, market-based system of environmental governance and ecological protection, performance assessment and accountability in ecological conservation… A "four beams and eight pillars" foundation of the institutional system for ecological progress has by and large taken shape.

By firmly "grasping the bull by the nose"—the responsibility system for eco-environmental protection—the system of eco-environmental inspection has been unsheathed like a sharp sword, and the principle that "both the Party and the government share equal responsibility, and every officeholder bears dual responsibilities" in ecological conservation has been fully tightened and implemented. A series of institutions, including the river and lake chief system, forest chief system, lifelong accountability for eco-environmental damage, and

compensation for eco-environmental damage, have been gradually implemented and have taken effect; the institutional system for ecological conservation—featuring strict prevention at the source, strict management throughout the process, compensation for damage, and severe punishment for the consequences—has been improving steadily.

Box 1: The River and Lake Chief System Brings Lasting Governance to Rivers and Lakes

River and lake management and protection is a complex systematic undertaking that involves upstream and downstream areas, river banks, and different administrative regions and industrial sectors. To further strengthen river and lake management and protection, fulfil territorial responsibilities, and improve the long-term mechanism, China, building on local explorations, issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Implementing the River Chief System on November 28, 2016 and the Guiding Opinions on Implementation of Lake Chief Systems on December 26, 2017, thereby establishing the river and lake chief system across the board. Party and government leaders serve as river and lake chiefs, responsible for the management and protection of the waters under their jurisdiction in a four-tier system covering provinces, municipalities, counties, and townships. With the introduction and continuous refinement of this system through practice, China's rivers and lakes have undergone historic changes, with lasting governance and stability brought by the river and lake chief system.

China has improved the mechanisms for green and low-carbon development, refined market-based policies and measures, strengthened green fiscal, taxation, and financial policies, innovated mechanisms for realizing the value of ecological products, improved the market-based allocation of resource and environmental factors, promoted the trading of pollution discharge rights, and built the world's largest carbon emission trading market for covered emissions, thus stimulating the intrinsic motivation of all parties responsible for eco-environmental protection.

—The rule of law consolidates the foundation

Laws bring about good governance only when they keep pace with the times; governance succeeds only when it suits the circumstances of the world. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, we must accelerate the improvement of the socialist system of laws with Chinese characteristics to make it more scientifically sound, comprehensive, unified, and authoritative.

Since the new era began, China's legal institutions in the field of the eco-environment have kept pace with the times and the building of the rule of law for the eco-environment has entered a period characterized by the greatest legislative intensity, strictest regulation and law enforcement, and most notable

results in the implementation of legal regulations. Advancing eco-environmental governance through the rule of law not only reflects the Party's strategic deployments for strengthening ecological conservation, but also responds to the people's real needs for a beautiful eco-environment, achieving a high degree of unity among the Party's propositions, the will of the state, and the aspirations of the people.

China has written ecological civilization into the Constitution, establishing its constitutional status and providing a fundamental-law basis for improving the legal system for eco-environmental protection. It revised the basic and comprehensive Environmental Protection Law by introducing such tough measures as daily cumulative fines, sealing up and seizure, and production restrictions and suspensions—the law is hailed as "the strictest environmental protection law in history". Focusing on the eco-environmental problems about which the people had made the strongest complaints and the most urgent demands, China formulated and revised a number of special laws in the field of pollution prevention and control, covering air, water, soil, solid waste, and noise, as well as laws on such ecological elements as wetlands, grasslands, forests, and deserts. It made the green principle one of the cardinal principles of the Civil Code, innovated legislation for the eco-environment of river basins and regions, and took special steps to enact the Yangtze River Protection Law, Yellow River Protection Law, Law on Ecological Protection of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Black Soil Protection Law, and other laws for special regions and river basins… A socialist legal system for the eco-environment with Chinese characteristics that is comprehensive in coverage, practical and effective, strict and rigorous has taken initial shape, weaving a dense and solid, multi-dimensional legal net for the eco-environment.

The vitality of a law lies in its implementation, and so does its authority. Since the beginning of the new era, China has focused on key regions, river basins, fields, and prominent eco-environmental problems and made sustained efforts to intensify eco-environmental law enforcement, effectively curbing the trend of eco-environmental violations and crimes. Dedicated courts for environmental and resource cases have been established across the land, making China the country with the broadest coverage and the most complete system of such specialized courts. China has carried out in-depth the "Beautiful China, I am a Doer" campaign and, through National Ecology Day and (June 5th) World Environment Day celebrations and other activities, stepped up public legal education on eco-environmental protection. It has safeguarded public interest through litigation, steadily advanced the lawful disclosure of enterprises' eco-environmental information and the opening of environmental protection facilities to the public, and guaranteed the public's right to know about the eco-environment, fostering a climate across society of respecting, studying, observing, and applying the law.

Box 2: Ecological and Environmental Public Interest Litigation

Administrative penalties can only punish those who break the law while ordinary litigation recognizes only the rule that "whoever suffers the harm is the one to sue". As a result, damage done to the ecological environment itself often has no one to speak for it. To address this problem, China has established a system of ecological and environmental public interest litigation: where acts such as polluting the environment or damaging ecosystems harm the public interest, procuratorial organs and social organizations may initiate civil public interest litigation; in addition, people's procuratorates may bring administrative public interest litigation to urge the government to perform its duties in protecting the ecological environment.

Procuratorial public interest litigation for ecological and environmental protection has yielded notable results. Between 2017 and 2024, a total of 539,000 public interest litigation cases were handled, facilitating the restoration of 8,546,600 mu (about 1,424,433 acres) of ecological land of various types and the recovery of 50.97 billion yuan in compensation for ecological damage. Social organizations have continued to add their strength, advancing many civil public interest litigation cases concerning ecological and environmental protection that have had considerable social impact. The system of public interest litigation for eco- environmental protection as stipulated in existing laws has been fully incorporated into the Ecological and Environmental Code while the work on formulating a law on procuratorial public interest litigation has also started.

When laws are sound, green mountains remain forever; when rules are clear, lucid waters flow incessantly.

Under the safeguard of the rule of law in the development of ecological conservation, China has seen bluer skies, greener mountains, and clearer waters, which make the country's vast landscapes more vibrant and diverse. In 2025, the average concentration of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in cities at and above the prefectural level nationwide fell to 28 micrograms per cubic meter, making China the country with the fastest improvement in air quality in the world. The proportion of surface water cross- sections with water quality at Grade I – III has exceeded 90 percent for two consecutive years, with the main stems of the Yangtze River and Yellow River maintaining Grade II water quality for six consecutive years and four consecutive years respectively, bringing new vitality back to China's mother rivers. The national forest coverage rate has exceeded 25 percent, making China the country with the largest and fastest growth in forest resources and the largest area of afforestation in the world. In 2025, public satisfaction with the ecological environment reached 91.37 percent, remaining above 90 percent for five consecutive years. Public sentiments toward the eco-

environment have turned from "appeals" into "applause" and from "frowns" into "smiles" as people's sense of green well-being continues to grow.

For China, with a population of more than 1.4 billion, staying committed to its own affairs is the greatest contribution it can make to the world. Upholding the principle that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", China has been striving to establish green and low-carbon ways of production and life, continuously shaping new drivers and advantages for development, and steadily strengthening its development potential and sustaining momentum. In this process, China has found through exploration a new path for properly balancing development and conservation, and blazed a trail to modernization featuring harmony between humans and nature.

On the magnificent land of China, the Saihanba Forest Farm in Hebei is lush with green; the Thousand Villages Demonstration and Ten Thousand Villages Renovation project in Zhejiang Province has transformed one village after another; patches of saxaul trees planted in the sandy land of Northwest China stand thriving in the wind; the "Blue Cycle" initiative gives marine plastic waste a new lease of life… China has been honored with important awards such as the United Nations Land for Life Award and UNEP Champions of the Earth. It has become the country with the most International Wetland Cities in the world. These honors are a driving force for China's contribution to jointly building a clean and beautiful world.

1.3 Opening a New Chapter in the Law-Based and Systematic Ecological Progress in China

The Ecological and Environmental Code turns the ancient wisdom of "harmony between humans and nature" into a rigorous framework for modern eco-environmental governance. As a landmark achievement in ecological progress on the new journey of the new era, it opens a new chapter in China's law-based, systematic ecological progress.

—Revitalizing the finest of traditional Chinese culture in the new era

The Chinese nation has always respected and cherished nature, consistently upholding the ancient wisdom of advocating harmony between humans and nature, following the ways of nature, and pursuing harmonious human- nature coexistence. Spanning over 5,000 years, Chinese civilization has nurtured a rich ecological culture. Philosophical ideas such as "all living things grow side by side", "benevolence toward all people and love for all things", "taking with moderation and using with restraint", "following nature's timing and making rational use of the land's resources", and "seasonal bans on resource exploitation" remain enlightening to this very day. Early in antiquity, China had incorporated the awareness of nature conservation into its national governance system and elevated it to a state management framework.

Yi Zhou Shu (The Lost Book of Zhou) records that Emperor Yu of the Xia Dynasty issued a seasonal protection decree. Fa Chong Ling (The Decree on Crusading Against

Chong) issued by King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty stipulates: "…no trees shall be felled; no livestock shall be disturbed. Anyone who disobeys shall be executed without pardon." In the Spring and Autumn period, the statesman Guan Zhong proposed: "A ruler unable to strictly safeguard his mountains, forests, marshlands, and grasslands cannot be installed as the sovereign of all under heaven." As early as pre-Qin times, special institutions were established to oversee forests, mountains, rivers, and lakes; policies and decrees were developed and issued, forming the Yuheng system (an ancient regime for natural resource management). Since the earliest stipulation of written environmental conservation provisions in Qinlü · Tianlü (Land Law, Qin Statutes), successive dynasties in China attached great importance to protecting natural ecology through institutionalized measures such as issuing bans and establishing official posts. Based on adherence to the principle of the "two integrations" (i.e., integration of the basic tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and integration of the basic tenets of Marxism with China's fine traditional culture), the Code is a result of the creative transformation and innovative development of the finest of traditional Chinese ecological and legal culture and, within the framework of modern rule of law, its integration into the values, fundamental principles, and institutional arrangements of modern ecological and environmental rule of law. Its codification breathes a new lease of life into China's fine traditional ecological culture and legal culture in the 21st century.

—An important milestone in China's history of eco-environmental protection

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country has consistently attached great importance to eco-environmental protection. Throughout its leadership of China's revolution, construction, and reform, the Communist Party of China has continuously explored the dialectical relationship among population, resources, the environment, and socio-economic development, deepened its understanding of the fundamental laws governing humanity and nature, steadily intensified efforts in ecological and environmental governance, reformed and improved institutional mechanisms for ecological conservation, and advanced the cause of eco-environmental protection from scratch, growing ever stronger. In addition, China has always placed great emphasis on the rule of law in the ecological and environmental field. As early as 1979, China promulgated its first law on environmental protection, i.e., the Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (for Trial Implementation). Over decades of development, China's ecological and environmental laws and regulations have been continuously enriched and refined. The Code represents a systematic summary and institutional elevation of China's decades of experience in ecological progress, particularly in the rule of law for ecological and environmental protection. It is an important milestone in China's history of eco-environmental protection, providing solid legal safeguards for the comprehensive advancement of a

modernization characterized by harmony between humankind and nature through building a Beautiful China.

—A breakthrough in the development of the rule of law under socialism with Chinese characteristics

The socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics has been formed progressively under the CPC leadership in the historical process of adapting to the cause of building socialist modernization. At the same time, it should also be observed that as times advance and practice evolves, new demands are constantly placed on the furtherance of the legal system. Therefore, the legal system must advance with the times for continuous improvement. The promulgation of the Ecological and Environmental Code as the fundamental law in the field of ecological environment has further established the basic framework of the normative legal system for the ecological environment, promoted the formation of an ecological environment branch of law with the Ecological and Environmental Code as the overarching authority and relevant special laws as its constituent parts, and is driving the evolution, improvement, and development of the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics with the Constitution at its core.

The legal system in the field of ecological environment is transitioning from a traditional paradigm centering on human social relations toward one of harmonious coexistence that accommodates both humans and nature. The further enhancement of its systematic, holistic, and coordinated nature has greatly enriched the axiological dimension of the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics, demonstrating the substantive efficacy of comprehensively advancing law- based governance and the vigorous vitality of the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics. Meanwhile, the promulgation of the Code has restructured the knowledge map and research paradigm of the discipline of ecological environment law, making the development of the rule of law for ecological conservation and ecological environment law no longer subordinate to traditional administrative law, civil law, and the like. Instead, it has shaped an ecological environmental rule of law narrative with distinct Chinese characteristics and a Chinese style while opening up a channel for in- depth dialogue with the world.

Chapter II
Legislative Innovation and Chinese Characteristics of the Ecological and Environmental Code

On the one hand, based on the present situation, we need to use law-based thinking and approaches to solve deep-seated problems hindering economic and social development; on the other hand, looking into the future, we need to lay the foundations for the rule of law, give full play to the power of the rule of law, and gather momentum for advancing the rule of law, so as to build more mature and well-defined systems and provide long-term institutional guarantee for developing the cause of the Party and the state.

— Xi Jinping

When good laws are enacted under heaven, the world will be well governed. The Ecological and Environmental Code, structured in five books, establishes a scientifically sound and complete rule of law regime for the ecological environment, promoting the latter's systematic, integrated, coordinated, and efficient governance. With the adoption of the "moderate codification" compilation model, it has given rise to a tiered legislative pattern in which the Code plays an overarching commanding role supported and matched by individual laws. Rooted in China's realities and featuring distinctive Chinese characteristics, the Code responds, in a concentrated way, to the people's new expectations for a beautiful ecological environment, the new demands of a comprehensive green transformation in China's economic and social development, and the new tasks of systematic eco-environmental governance. It is, therefore, a product of successful efforts to achieve an organic unity of people-orientation, contemporaneity, and systematicity.

2.1 Building a Scientifically Sound and Comprehensive Modern Rule-of-Law System for the Ecological Environment

The Ecological and Environmental Code is not a simple compilation of existing ecological and environmental laws, but rather a systematic construction oriented toward

modern eco-environmental governance. Comprising 1,242 articles organized into five books, the Code follows the logical structure of "general provisions serving as the overarching command, the various parts providing structural support, and liabilities ensuring enforcement", incorporating pollution prevention and control, ecological protection, green and low-carbon development, and accountability, etc. into the same institutional framework. It consolidates in an integrated and systematic manner the theoretical, institutional, and practical achievements in ecological progress since the 18th CPC National Congress, making the legal system for the ecological environment more comprehensive and better established.

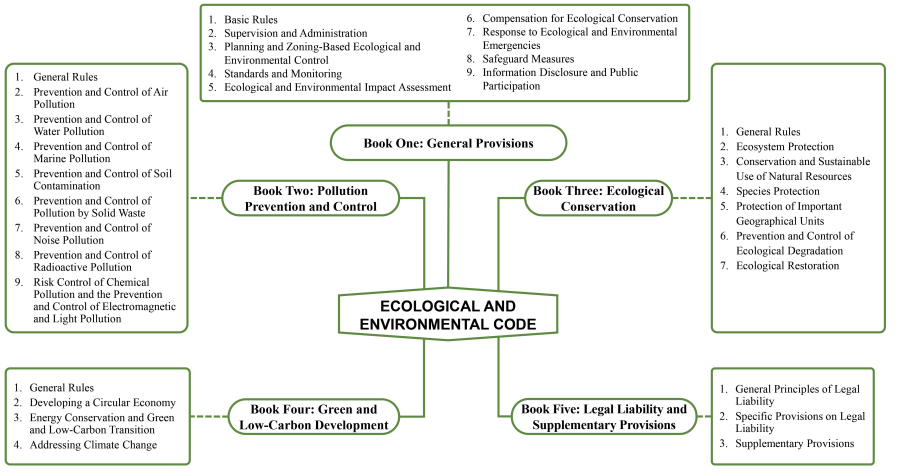


Figure 1 Framework of the Ecological and Environmental Code

—Book One General Provisions: establishing common rules for ecological and environmental governance

Book One General Provisions serves as the overarching command over the other parts and has the important function of setting forth the fundamental principles and general rules, constituting both the axiological core and the institutional cornerstone of the Code. This book incorporates the goal of "harmony between humanity and nature" into the legislative purposes and establishes "prevention first, systemic governance, ecological priority, green development, public participation, and liability for damage" as the basic principles for ecological and environmental protection. Concurrently, it establishes general institutional frameworks covering supervision and management, planning, standards, and monitoring, thereby constructing a set of uniformly applicable norms that span regions, environmental elements, and policy domains. Through this approach, it promotes a shift in the system of eco-environmental legal norms from being "fragmented and scattered" among individual laws to "unified compliance" under the framework of the Code.

Box 3: The Sword of Inspection Safeguards Lucid Waters and Lush Mountains

As a major institutional innovation in advancing ecological conservation, the Central Inspection on Eco-Environmental Protection has precisely addressed the governance pain points of weakened local environmental accountability and the difficulty in reversing extensive growth models. Focusing on the implementation of the primary responsibility for eco-environmental protection by the principal Party and government officials of the inspected entities, the inspection system relies on such means as routine inspections and "look-back" reviews, special inspections, and eco-environmental warning films to build a full-chain, closed-loop supervision mechanism that covers the entire process of "discovery, exposure, rectification, and review". Furthermore, the results of rectification are embedded in official performance assessments, thereby giving effect to the principle of shared Party-government accountability.

Since the implementation of the system, remarkable results have been achieved. From the inspection pilots launched in 2015 to the completion of the first round of routine inspections and "look-back" reviews in 2018, more than 212,000 reported cases were accepted and over 150,000 livelihood-related environmental issues were resolved. In 2023, the second round of routine inspections was rolled out across the country. Over the two rounds, a total of 667 accountability cases were handed over for investigation and 9,699 individuals were held accountable or disciplined among the inspected entities.

By the end of 2025, the rectification rates for problems identified in the first and second rounds of inspections and the environmental warning films for the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Yellow River Basin had reached a high level. The issuance of the Regulations on Ecological and Environmental Protection Inspection in 2025 further promoted the law-based and standardized development of inspections, bolstering the system as the core institutional pillar for balancing ecological protection with high-quality development and for building a Beautiful China.

—Book Two Pollution Prevention and Control: building a comprehensive governance system covering all elements and areas

Book Two Pollution Prevention and Control takes as its point of departure the need to meet the people's demand for a beautiful ecological environment and safeguard public health, and establishes an institutional system covering both traditional types of pollution and emerging environmental issues. Guided by the principle of coordinated governance, this book breaks the fragmented structure of separate legislation for the prevention and control of pollution in air, water,

oceans, soil, solid waste, noise, and other fields, establishes a supervision system for stationary pollution sources with the pollutant discharge permit system as its core, and puts in place mechanisms such as land-sea coordination, synergistic multi-pollutant control, and joint prevention and control at regional and river basin levels.

This helps achieve an optimization and upgrade from single-element segmented management to multi-element systematic governance. This book fills the gaps and addresses the weaknesses in pollution prevention and control legislation by introducing special provisions for pollution prevention in emerging fields such as chemical substances, electromagnetic radiation, and light. It promotes the expansion of pollution regulation from conventional pollutants to emerging pollutants and from city-focused efforts to coverage of urban and rural areas alike, achieving full coverage of all elements and all domains.

—Book Three Ecological Conservation: promoting systematic protection, governance, and sustainable utilization

Book Three Ecological Conservation covers ecosystem conservation, natural resource protection and sustainable utilization, species protection, conservation of important geographical units, prevention and treatment of ecological degradation, and ecological restoration. Emphasizing a systematic approach, this book integrates high-quality development with high-level protection, insists on the integrated conservation and systematic governance of mountains, waters, forests, farmlands, grasslands, and deserts, and stresses full protection of such ecosystems as forests, grasslands, wetlands, oceans, islands, rivers, lakes, and deserts by respecting the distinctive characteristics of different ecological elements. It also sets out explicit requirements for coordinated resource conservation and the sustainable utilization of land, mineral, water, fishery, and other natural resources so as to better realize conservation in the course of development and achieve development in the course of conservation.

Box 4: Ecological Conservation Redlines

China has designated, within its ecological spaces, areas with special and important ecological functions that must be strictly protected as ecological conservation redlines, which serve as the bottom line and lifeline for safeguarding national ecological security. Ecological conservation redlines represent an institutional innovation of China's and an important initiative in ecological and environmental protection that China has pioneered and implemented. In 2019, at the United Nations "Nature-Based Solutions" event, China's ecological conservation redlines case was selected as one of the 15 global best practices. In September 2022, China completed the first nationwide delineation of ecological conservation redlines, achieving the management of important ecological spaces through a single redline.

—Book Four Green and Low-Carbon Development: establishing a legal guarantee framework for comprehensive green transition

The inclusion of a separate book on green and low-carbon development is a first in environmental codification in the world. Focusing on important areas and critical links of green and low-carbon development, this book contains provisions on circular economy development, energy conservation, green and low-carbon transition, and climate change response; establishes and improves legal systems related to green and low-carbon development; consolidates the legal foundation for coordinated efforts at carbon reduction, pollution control, green expansion, and economic growth, thereby promoting a comprehensive green transition in economic and social development.

In particular, it features a dedicated chapter on "Addressing Climate Change", which lays out for the first time concentrated, principled guiding legal provisions on climate response. It clearly sets out the imperative for the state to adhere to the principle of placing equal emphasis on both mitigation and adaptation, and to advance climate change mitigation through the carbon peaking and carbon neutrality targets. It also underscores the importance of building a climate-resilient society and strengthening international cooperation.

—Book Five Legal Liability and Supplementary Provisions: building a more unified, well-equipped, and strictly regulated legal liability system

Book Five Legal Liability and Supplementary Provisions is designed to implement the important requirement of "protecting the ecological environment with the strictest systems and the most rigorous rule of law". It constitutes a vital pillar for the effective implementation of the Code. This book brings together administrative, civil, criminal, and other legal liabilities, and provides unified rules on the principles of attribution of liability, the time limits for accountability, the application and coordination of laws, and the procedures for accountability. Through this approach, it promotes interconnection and coordinated application among different forms of liability, forming a full-spectrum liability guarantee system consisting of "administrative law enforcement, judicial accountability, and public interest supervision". By refining liability rules, strengthening disciplinary measures and constraints, and increasing the costs of legal violations, this book effectively arms the enforcement of the Code with "teeth", upholding its authority and enforceability. In addition, firmly based on the principle of "proportionality between offense and punishment, tempering justice with mercy", this book balances strict law enforcement with reasonable discretion and punitive sanctions with the protection of lawful rights and interests. This enables the Code's institutional requirements to be both firm and flexible, combining legal rigor with reasoned application, thus ensuring that all provisions of the Code are effectively implemented with real results.

Box 5: Eco–Environmental Damage Compensation

To overcome the predicament that "enterprises pollute, the public suffers, and the government pays", China has established an eco-environmental damage compensation system. Based on the basic principles that "the environment has value and damage entails liability", the system, focused on the timely restoration of damaged eco-environment, effectively safeguards the people's environmental rights and interests. The compensation covers five areas: (1) losses caused by the disappearance of eco- environmental service functions during the period between the occurrence of damage and the completion of restoration; (2) losses caused by permanent damage to ecological functions; (3) expenses for investigation, assessment, and evaluation of ecological and environmental damage; (4) costs of pollution removal and of ecological and environmental restoration; (5) reasonable expenses incurred to prevent the recurrence and expansion of the damage. The mechanisms for determining liability for eco-environmental damage compensation include consultation, judicial confirmation, and compensation litigation.

As of June 2026, approximately 70,000 eco- environmental damage compensation cases had been handled nationwide, involving a total compensation amount of about RMB 35.5 billion, with more than 10,000 cases added each year for four consecutive years. The eco- environmental damage compensation system has been incorporated into the Civil Code and the Ecological and Environmental Code. Twenty-nine provinces have enacted more than 70 local regulations and local government rules covering eco-environmental damage compensation.

2.2 Pioneering Exploration in Codification with Chinese Characteristics

The codification of the Ecological and Environmental Code is neither a simple transplantation of overseas experience, nor a mechanical following of traditional codification theories. Instead, it is a pioneering exploration of a new codification path that combines systemicity with openness, and stability with adaptability by proceeding from the institutional reality and practical needs of China's ecological and environmental protection.

—Persisting in systematic integration and codification through editing and drafting for integrated sublimation

How to go about compiling an ecological and environmental code? Rooted in its own legislative traditions, China has explored and formed a codification methodology with distinct features. On the one hand, scattered and complex norms were

systematically sorted out, integrated, reconstructed, and elevated, fundamentally reversing the situation of fragmented legislation and disparate policy implementation. On the other hand, unlike the abstract codification found in civil law systems or the compilation of precedents as done in common law systems, what should be retained was retained, what should be amended was amended, and what should be supplemented was duly supplemented in a way that effectively eliminated repetition, conflict, and gaps among norms. At the same time, the original concepts of Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization and the practice-based achievements of ecological progress in the new era have been codified into legal systems so that local practical wisdom is connected with the requirements of rule of law modernization, achieving the unity of political logic, practical logic, and jurisprudential logic. This codification model not only helps keep the existing legal stock, but also helps create new institutional increments through systematic reconstruction, reflecting the codification criteria of seeking truth from facts, making steady progress, and striving for practical results.

—Pioneering a scientific codification model of "moderate codification" with distinctive Chinese characteristics

Norms in the ecological and environmental field are vast in quantity and changing rapidly. Based on the legislative characteristics of this field, China's recent codification was done by creatively adopting a scientific compilation model of "moderate codification". Through methodological innovation in legislative techniques and codification paths, it supports substantive innovation in the ecological and environmental rule of law system and is better adapted to the practice requirements of ecological progress in the new era. Ten existing laws, including the Environmental Protection Law, had been incorporated into the Code through editing and drafting and were repealed after the Code took effect. For more than 20 prevailing laws involving ecological elements, ecosystem protection, regional and river basin protection as well as circular economy and energy conservation, their main points and principles were incorporated or reflected in the Code and remain in effect after the Code was promulgated recently. In areas such as climate action, carbon peaking, carbon neutrality, and green and low- carbon development where specialized laws are still lacking, the Code first lays down certain principled guiding provisions to reserve interfaces for the future. The core trait of moderate codification lies in preserving the code's stability and authority through systematic integration while leaving appropriate open spaces for future legislation, allowing institutional innovation and practical development room to grow. It both conforms to the trend of the times in codification and shows respect for the inherent laws of ecological and environmental governance, embodying legislative wisdom grounded in national conditions and upholding fundamental principles while innovating.

—Forming a tiered rule of law pattern led by the Code and supported by matching single-subject laws

Looking back at the world history of codification, codifications represented by civil codes mostly followed a single legal-source model centered on "code-centrism". In contrast, China's Ecological and Environmental Code pioneeringly establishes a dual legal-source pattern of "Code + single-subject laws". Behind this choice of approach was full consideration of the high heterogeneity of the domains involved in ecological and environmental issues, which were at varying stages of development, institutional maturity, and urgency of reform; relying on a single source of law could hardly meet such complex normative demands.

The uniqueness of the dual legal source pattern lies in the division of labor: the Code provides a unified institutional framework, basic principles, and common rules to ensure the authority and coordination of the entire system; single-subject laws help optimize and improve different ecological elements and development areas according to local conditions and times within the framework established by the Code. This helps avoid the institutional rigidity that a single-code model may bring and shake off the fragmentation dilemma inherent in a purely single-subject law system, reflecting a profound consideration of seeking a dynamic balance between systemicity and openness.

2.3 Demonstrating Distinct Characteristics Rooted in the Practice of China's Ecological Progress

The Ecological and Environmental Code both inherits the mature experience of China's development of eco-environmental rule of law over the past decades and focuses on the new situations, tasks, and requirements facing the efforts for ecological progress in the new era. It demonstrates distinct characteristics rooted in the practice of China's ecological progress.

—A firm people-centered stance

President Xi Jinping pointed out: A sound eco-environment is the fairest public product and the most inclusive public benefit. Cleaner water, clearer air, and a more beautiful environment…what you and I look forward to is precisely what the Ecological and Environmental Code effectively responds to. In addition, the green transition must be people-centered, synergistically improving people's well-being and climate governance while coordinating multiple goals such as environmental protection, economic development, job creation, and poverty eradication. Based on adherence to a people-centered approach, the Code is focused on the people and has as its starting point and ultimate goal the imperative of meeting the people's needs for a beautiful ecological environment. It represents an effort to provide legal guarantees for solving prominent ecological and environmental problems that the public feels strongly about,

to allow the achievements of building a Beautiful China to benefit all the people with greater fairness, is continuously enhancing the public's sense of gain, happiness, and security.

From addressing issues concerning the public "at their doorstep", such as catering service-generated fumes and malodorous annoyances to strengthening the organization, guidance, and management of the burning of straw, fallen leaves, and similar materials in a well-targeted manner, from preventing and controlling construction noise pollution to prescribing the scientific selection of tree and grass species for greening to respond to frequent allergic symptoms caused by improper plant selection…in the specific institutional design of the Code, responses were given to issues vital to the immediate interests of the general public in a way that fully reflects the warmth and strength of the rule of law as well as the value position of enhancing people's well-being through the power of the rule of law.

—A distinct green orientation

President Xi Jinping noted: "Industrialization, while generating unprecedented material wealth, has incurred serious damage to Mother Nature. Development without thought to the future is not sustainable. The way forward should be green development that focuses on harmony with nature and eco- friendly progress." Chinese modernization contains a unique ecological view and green development is a distinct feature of Chinese modernization. The Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan released by China sets out a systematic deployment specifically to accelerate the comprehensive green transition of economic and social development to boost the momentum of green development. Closely in keeping with the pulse of the times, in conformity with the trends of the times, and in response to the topics of the times, a special book on green and low-carbon development was designed in a pioneering manner in the firm belief that green development is a profound revolution in development philosophy and that new quality productive forces are themselves green productive forces.

From the macroeconomic rule design for promoting circular economy development to micro-level specific provisions that encourage second-hand goods trading, the Code has an expanded horizon from pollution prevention and ecological protection to the promotion of comprehensive green transition of socio-economic development through rule-of-law means. It integrates the requirements of prioritizing ecology, resource conservation and intensive use, and green and low- carbon development into various institutional arrangements, reflecting a source-governance thinking on ecological and environmental issues. It responds more comprehensively to the rule- of- law requirements of actively responding to climate change, achieving carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, and advancing green and low- carbon development, thus providing a legal guarantee for promoting systematic changes in production methods and lifestyles, and highlighting the Chinese wisdom in the synergistic promotion of high-quality development and high-level protection.

—A scientific systematic concept

Ecology is a unified natural system and an interdependent, closely linked organic chain. President Xi Jinping pointed out: "We must pursue new approaches to governance from a systemic and holistic perspective. We must no longer treat the symptoms rather than the root causes, or have fragmented management with departments working against each other. Instead, we must adopt holistic planning, coordinated policies, and multiple measures for ecological progress on all fronts, in all regions, and through the whole process." Firmly based on concepts such as "human beings and nature form a community of life", the Ecological and Environmental Code is focused on comprehensive, systematic, and source-based control with coordinated legal institutional arrangements for pollution prevention and control, ecological conservation, and green and low-carbon development. While contributing to a historic shift from "multiple parallel laws" to "a unified code", the Code helps bring about a leap in the philosophy of ecological and environmental governance.

Eco-environmental governance is a complex systematic project that requires the government to perform duties according to law, enterprises to fulfill their primary responsibilities, social organizations to participate actively, and the public to supervise in accordance with the law. It requires administrative regulation and judicial guarantees, market incentives, information disclosure, credit constraints, and other systems working in synergy. By building an institutional system of governance by all, full-process governance, and full-chain responsibility, the Code helps achieve systematic coordination of governance subjects, governance tools, and governance processes.

Chapter III
The Global Value and World Contribution of the Ecological and Environmental Code

We need to take up our lofty responsibility for the entire human civilization, and we need to respect Nature, follow its laws and protect it. We need to find a way for man and Nature to live in harmony, balance and coordinate economic development and ecological protection, and work together to build a prosperous, clean and beautiful world.

— Xi Jinping

The accelerated melting of polar glaciers, extreme weather sweeping the globe, continuous disappearance of rare species … global ecological and environmental crises are manifesting themselves in increasingly complex and diverse forms. Faced with ecological and environmental challenges, no country can stand alone. President Xi Jinping proposed initiatives on multiple international occasions, calling on all parties to join hands to build a clean and beautiful world and pointing to the direction of global ecological progress and green transition. The promulgation of the Ecological and Environmental Code for implementation marks another milestone in the rule of law on the magnificent journey of Chinese modernization, propelling the governance of the country to a higher level. It will help respond to the common concerns of humankind with Chinese wisdom and contribute Chinese solutions to global environmental governance and the joint construction of a clean and beautiful world.

3.1 Global Environmental Governance Calls for New Practices in the Rule of Law

The intensifying and continuously spreading global ecological and environmental crisis poses a menacing threat to human survival and development. It is, in essence, the result of the longstanding disequilibrium in the relationship between humanity and nature, a problem which must be resolved with new solutions grounded in the rule of law.

—Complex global environmental crises call for systematic rule-of-law solutions

The environmental legislative process in modern human history began in the 1950s, with the main legislative goal of controlling individual environmental pollution problems, primarily in the form of single-subject laws. As systemic, longstanding, and transboundary ecological and environmental issues build up, individual measures alone and countries fighting single-handedly can hardly meet the needs of the situation. The world calls for more comprehensive, stable, and authoritative legal institutional arrangements to enhance the effectiveness of ecological and environmental governance.

At the end of the 20th century, some countries attempted to promote the systematization and holistic integration of environmental legislation through codification. Nonetheless, around the world, there are not many countries that have specially codified laws in the ecological and environmental field. A few countries such as France, Sweden, Italy, the Philippines, Estonia, Colombia, and Cambodia have made explorations. Their codes include both comprehensive and moderate codification, codification in substance and form; some are referred to as "codes in a non-substantive sense".

Now, the resource consumption that has long been building up and the high-carbon development model in the industrialization process are having a profound effect on global climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems. Developed countries face both historically accumulated environmental problems caused by traditional industrialization and new challenges in green transition, energy structure adjustment, and ecological risk governance. Developing countries such as China are simultaneously at the industrialization and post-industrialization stages. Ecological and environmental laws need to regulate both traditional environmental damage in fields like resources, the environment, and ecology, and account for modern environmental risks in fields such as climate, biology, energy, soil, and geology. Therefore, the development of the global ecological and environmental rule of law needs to transcend single-domain governance models and should be based on exploring systematic rule-of-law solutions that take into integrated account historical responsibilities, development needs, and future risks so as to solve multiple overlapping and interconnected environmental problems.

—The huge environmental governance deficit needs a strong rule of law to bridge

So far, progress toward the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been sluggish. A report released by the United Nations in 2026 shows that among the 139 SDG targets with comparable data, only 36% are on track, nearly half are lagging, and 15% are even undergoing regression. Meanwhile, the world is entering a period of turbulent instability; the weakened multilateral mechanisms and ongoing geopolitical rivalries have delayed the global green transition process, producing an ever greater deficit in global environmental governance.

To break out of this predicament, it is necessary to find solutions at the rule-of-law level. Though many countries have established relatively complete legal systems in the ecological and environmental field and acceded to various global environmental conventions, constrained by real contradictions between development and protection, the actual actions taken are disconnected from environmental protection goals. Prominent are issues such as the insufficient binding force and weak enforcement mechanisms in the global environmental rule of law. There is a pressing need to update rule- of- law concepts, transcend the dualistic protection- vs.- development mindset, safeguard global environmental public interests, build up a more mature and effective rule-of-law support, and effectively bridge the global environmental governance deficit.

Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director of the Law Division of UNEP, and other figures believe that since the adoption of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, many countries have enacted laws, regulations, and policy measures to protect the environment; however, the planetary ecological crisis is still worsening. The practical effect of laws and agreements depends on whether they can truly be translated into practical action. In this process, it is crucial for governments to learn from one another's effective experience.

3.2 China's Rule-of-Law Solutions for Global Environmental Governance

The Ecological and Environmental Code belongs to both China and the world. Starting from open learning and borrowing, China's ecological and environmental legislation has been developed to serve the country's ecological progress while China's eco-environmental governance has always been integrated with that of the world. The Code is both the result of a major exploration effort in light of China's national conditions and universal principles of the rule of law, and a pioneering action for addressing ecological and environmental crises, contributing China's legal wisdom to global sustainable development.

—Setting the legal coordinates for harmony between humanity and nature

Faced with the reality of an escalating ecological and environmental crisis, how should we coexist with nature? Relevant UN reports emphasize that coexistence with nature will become the frontier of human development; the human race must change its relationship with nature and learn to make peace with the latter to ensure a sustainable future.

With a profound historical vision and broad international perspective, President Xi Jinping proposed, "Man and nature form a community of life; we, as human beings, must revere nature, respect nature, follow its ways, and protect it."

The Ecological and Environmental Code establishes the concept of a community of life between humans and nature and the scientific proposition that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" as important guidelines for the ecological and environmental rule of law. In addition, through value guidance, logical coherence, and

institutional integration, it promotes the synergistic progress of development and protection, highlighting the Chinese wisdom of "harmony between humans and nature".

André Rodrigues de Aquino, Lead Environmental Specialist at the World Bank, believes that the Ecological and Environmental Code brings together the actions of all parties under the goal of harmony between humanity and nature. Gerd Winter, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Law at the University of Bremen, Germany and founder of the Research Unit for European Environmental Law, stated: China's Ecological and Environmental Code sets a good example for global environmental governance. The Code sends an important signal: ecological and environmental protection is paramount, and the eco-environment must never be sacrificed for short-term interests such as economic growth. Pavel Troshchinsky, Director of the Center for Political Research and Forecasting at the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia, Russian Academy of Sciences (ICCA RAS), stated: China has converted green concepts into development outcomes and now has successfully translated green concepts into "legal language", setting a benchmark for other countries.

Box 6: Defense of the Green Peafowl: China's First Public Interest Litigation for Wildlife Protection

In March 2016, construction began on a hydropower station on the Jiasa River, the main stem of the Lüzhi River in Yunnan. A fatal disaster was also approaching China's last population of wild green peafowl. In July 2017, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment ordered the construction company of the hydropower station project to conduct a post-environmental impact assessment, demanding that the project must not impound water or generate electricity before the post-assessment was completed. Meanwhile, a non-governmental environmental protection organization filed a public interest lawsuit with the court, demanding a stop to the construction of the hydropower station. The survival of the green peafowl and the status of the hydropower station hung in the balance. Ultimately, the court ruled to immediately halt the construction of the hydropower station project in question, preserving the last habitat essential for the green peafowl's survival.

The "Green Peafowl Case" became China's first preventive environmental public interest litigation case for rare and endangered wild animals and plants. It was ranked by UNEP as the leading one among the 10 Landmark Cases for Biodiversity, earning the international acclaim that "this case fully demonstrates the irreplaceable role of China's judiciary in nature conservation".

—Providing a systemic and integrated rule-of-law approach

Nature is a living organism. Human activities are tearing apart the web of life on Earth. At the same time, climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, and other problems are closely intertwined and impacting one another. Only by applying

systems thinking can we better address the global ecological and environmental crises.

The Ecological and Environmental Code integrates response to climate change, biodiversity conservation, and environmental pollution control under a unified institutional logic and rule- of- law framework, transforming the previous pattern of fragmented governance in which different sectors operated in silos and managed their respective domains in isolation. In light of the spillover effects of climate risks, the interconnectedness of ecosystems, and the mobility of pollutants, the Ecological and Environmental Code establishes an integrated body of legal norms tailored to China's governance realities and forms a more science-based and targeted synergy of forces in the rule of law. Through a rigorous closed-loop legal mechanism, the Code helps translate the deterrent, remedial, and normative functions of the legal liability system into tangible efficacy in eco-environmental governance, providing a well-equipped "toolkit" for safeguarding "harmony between humanity and nature" through the rule of law.

Hervé Azoulay, a professor at the Silk Road Business School in France, believes that the Code marks "a new stage of normative integration and institutional innovation" in China's eco-environmental governance and represents "an important milestone in the evolution of ecological governance and legal institutions in contemporary China". Eduardo Tzili- Apango, a researcher in international politics at Metropolitan Autonomous University in Mexico City, said: At a time when some countries are reverting to high- carbon development paths, China continues to advance the development of its ecological institutions in the form of a code, underscoring the country's leading role in global environmental governance.

Box 7: The Shan– Shui Initiative Paints a New Picture of Ecological Restoration

China puts into practice the philosophy that mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands and deserts form a community of life. Since 2016, with a focus on key national ecological security barriers such as the Yangtze and Yellow River basins and the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, the central government has allocated a total of 103 billion yuan in subsidies, in six tranches, to support local authorities in implementing 52 integrated conservation and restoration projects for mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands and deserts (known as the "Shan-Shui Initiative"). The Initiative covers 29 provinces and has completed ecological restoration across more than 120 million mu (or 20 million acres), achieving overall protection, systematic restoration, and comprehensive management across different ecological components and laying a solid ecological foundation for building a Beautiful China.

In 2022, China's Shan-Shui Initiative was recognized as one of the first ten UN World Restoration Flagships. It has contributed Chinese solutions and wisdom to the global biodiversity conservation effort and has been recognized by UNEP as one of the world's most promising, ambitious, and inspiring examples of large-scale ecosystem restoration.

—Demonstrating commitment to action in rule-of-law practice

Global environmental governance requires not only ambition, but more importantly, action. Only when countries embrace the vision of a global community of shared future and act as down-to-earth doers by translating ambition into concrete action can global sustainability be advanced steadily with far-reaching effect.

China upholds the rule-of-law spirit, honors its commitments, and has always been a participant, contributor, and trailblazer in global ecological conservation. China has acceded to international environmental conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and it fulfills its obligations under them. In recent years, China achieved, ahead of schedule, the CBD target of conserving 17 percent of terrestrial areas by 2020. China has further implemented the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), becoming the first country in the world to achieve "zero growth" in land degradation and a reduction in both desertified and sandy land areas, contributing to the global goal of achieving land degradation neutrality by 2030. China has also actively honored its commitments under the Paris Agreement and has already met, ahead of schedule, its 2030 nationally determined contribution (NDC) targets for total installed capacity of wind and solar power generation and forest stock volume. These achievements have won broad acclaim from the international community.

On the basis of these efforts, relevant legal norms were further integrated into the Ecological and Environmental Code, with dedicated parts or chapters containing provisions that address climate change, benefit- sharing from genetic resources, hazardous waste control, and other matters. It establishes an institutional framework for fulfilling international environmental obligations, covering air, water, soil, the marine environment, biodiversity, climate change, and other areas, and ensuring that the related treaty commitments are honored. The promulgation and implementation of the Code demonstrate China's firm stance on honoring its international commitments and upholding multilateralism. It is an example of the domestic implementation of global environmental conventions and helps provide valuable certainty in global environmental governance in the midst of great changes.

Adam Weiss, Chief Programmes and Impact Officer at ClientEarth, regards China's promulgation of the Ecological and Environmental Code as a highly ambitious and innovative legislative undertaking that provides a stronger legal foundation for environmental protection, strengthens the legal framework for China's green and low-carbon transition, and offers stronger institutional support for China's active participation in global environmental governance. Aicha Mohamed Boukhari Nadi, an official with Mauritania's National Agency of the Great Green Wall, said: The Code reflects China's "long- term, unwavering commitment" to addressing ecological and climate issues in a systemic manner.

3.3 A Rule-of-Law Model for Advancing the Joint Building of a Clean and Beautiful World

The Earth is our shared home. The global ecological and environmental challenges facing the human race cannot be addressed by any country single-handedly. Global action, response, and cooperation are a must. Countries around the world should work in concert with a common purpose and act with a sense of urgency to build a clean and beautiful world. With the Ecological and Environmental Code, China has offered a useful example of how the rule of law can help achieve this goal.

—Bolstering the legal foundation for international environmental cooperation

The Ecological and Environmental Code moves beyond the previous fragmented framework in which China's rules on international ecological and environmental cooperation were scattered across separate laws and limited to specific fields. Through the coordinated design that dovetails the principle of top-level unity with field-specific institutional arrangements, the Code helps establish a systematic and comprehensive legal framework for international environmental cooperation across multiple dimensions and contexts.

The Code contains dedicated provisions on international cooperation which set out, for the first time, a legal requirement applicable across all areas of ecological and environmental protection: "The state strengthens international cooperation in ecological and environmental protection." This brings support for international exchanges and cooperation in environmental protection within a unified legal framework and, more broadly, shifts the focus of cooperation from passive treaty compliance to active participation in building the global environmental governance system. This makes China's approach to advancing cooperation in global environmental governance clearer and its implementation more effective.

Daniele Brombal, Associate Professor at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Director of the Environmental Humanities Program, believed that the Code addresses the "triple crisis" of environmental pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss in a more integrated and systemic manner and offers new opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning within the international community. The Star of Kenya reported that China had long extended the benefits of its ecological governance to Africa and other regions through overseas projects involving clean energy technologies and green infrastructure. Media outlets in multiple African countries noted that, by explicitly enhancing international cooperation in ecological and environmental protection, the Code provides legal support for Chinese green technologies and products to "go global". This is not only conducive to increasing the voice of China's green industries in global value chains, but also enabling China to contribute more of its solutions and public goods to global environmental governance and advance global sustainable development.

—China has become a major promoter of cooperation in global environmental governance

China actively develops green partnerships and continues to deepen bilateral, multilateral, and regional cooperation in ecological and environmental protection. It takes an active part in cooperation, including at the regional and subregional levels, through mechanisms and frameworks such as the United Nations, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), G20, China-CEEC Cooperation, APEC, China-ASEAN cooperation, China-Japan-ROK cooperation, and ASEAN Plus Three. China has also stepped up cooperation on ecological and environmental protection with countries of the Global South through mechanisms that include China-ASEAN cooperation, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, and China-CELAC Forum, to help other developing countries advance green development. China also actively advances South-South cooperation on climate change. By the end of July 2026, China had signed 58 MOUs on South-South cooperation to address climate change with 45 developing countries, carried out over 300 capacity-building projects in climate-related fields, and provided training to over 10,000 participants from more than 120 developing countries. With advances in artificial intelligence, China has made MAZU, an AI-powered meteorological early-warning solution, available globally, sharing its experience in meteorological early warning, jointly developing risk-management systems, and helping fellow developing countries boost their disaster early-warning capacity and long-term climate resilience.

In recent years, China has continued to promote international cooperation in green industries, with its clean energy technologies and green products increasingly integrated into global supply chains and injecting tangible "green momentum" into green transitions worldwide. China now has the world's largest and most complete new energy industrial chain, supplying more than 80 percent of global photovoltaic modules and 70 percent of wind power equipment. From the inner deserts of the Middle East to the East African Rift and from Pacific island countries to the tropical rainforests of Latin America, Chinese clean energy projects are going over mountains and oceans, bringing light and clean power to households around the world. More and more Chinese new energy vehicles are taking to the streets of Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, offering local communities new options for green mobility.

China is committed to building platforms for cooperation in global environmental governance. It facilitated the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and took the lead by investing 1.5 billion yuan to establish the Kunming Biodiversity Fund, which supports biodiversity conservation in developing countries. Together with partners from more than 40 countries, China launched the BRI International Green Development Coalition and established the International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Sustainable Transport Innovation and Knowledge Center, and the International

Mangrove Centre, promoting exchanges in knowledge, information, and science and technology as well as the sharing of outcomes. UN- Habitat, China's Ministry of Housing and Urban- Rural Development, and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government jointly established the Global Award for Sustainable Development in Cities to promote the localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

China took the initiative to share with other developing countries the "green know-how" accumulated through years of ecological governance, setting an example for international cooperation on ecological protection. In Mauritania, the China- Africa Green Technology Park cooperation project provides a replicable and scalable model for combating desertification and advancing green development. In Egypt, China's water-saving terraced fields model has been successfully "replicated", helping conserve water resources in the mountainous areas of the Sinai Peninsula. In Sri Lanka, green pest control technologies for tea plantations developed by Guizhou University have been adopted, improving both tea quality and yields. In Fiji, China's Juncao technology assistance project helps rehabilitate saline- alkali land, providing an effective boost to local poverty alleviation and ecosystem restoration efforts, enabling many families to lead a better life.

The global influence of China's judicial practice in the ecological and environmental field continues to grow. China's institutional innovations such as environmental public interest litigation and compensation for ecological and environmental damage have gained international recognition. To date, 210 representative Chinese ecological and environmental judicial cases have been selected for inclusion by UNEP, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Through case sharing and judicial exchanges, China has continued to build international consensus on environmental adjudication, promote cooperation in preventing cross- border environmental risks and protecting ecological resources, and inject new momentum into collective efforts among countries to address the global environmental crisis.

Dechen Tsering, Director of UNEP's Asia and the Pacific Office, remarked that China is leading the world in both environmental rule of law and environmental adjudication. She noted that sharing China's useful experience in judicial protection of the ecological environment could help expand practical international cooperation and enable humankind and nature to thrive together. Luc Lavrysen, former president of the Constitutional Court of Belgium, said that China's Ecological and Environmental Code offers a new way of thinking for addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and that the international community should seize this opportunity to work together.

Concluding Remarks

Law safeguards nature and benefits generations to come.

The enactment of the Ecological and Environmental Code is a major achievement in integrating Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization with Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law. It marks a new stage in China's efforts to advance, through rule-of-law thinking and approaches, its modernization practice that features harmony between humanity and nature.

With the Code's implementation, the rule-of-law net for protecting lucid waters and lush mountains will become more tightly knitted and the modernization of the eco-environmental governance system and capacity will leap to a higher level; the beautiful picture of human-nature harmony across the vast Chinese land will become ever more brilliant.

Legislation charts the course, law enforcement ensures implementation, the judiciary upholds fairness, and law observance becomes a conscious practice. Only when every institutional arrangement is effectively implemented, every rule functions well, and every act of law enforcement and adjudication fully demonstrates fairness and justice can the Code be translated from rules on paper into governance efficacy and from an institutional text into living practice in building a Beautiful China.

The Ecological and Environmental Code will stand like a towering lighthouse that illuminates the path toward a Beautiful China. It is also like a super-powerful engine that drives the philosophy of green development to take root and flourish across the vast Chinese land. It is both an innovation of China's rule-of-law practice and the wealth of global governance. By blazing a new trail for ecological progress through codification, it offers a Chinese approach from which global environmental governance can draw useful inspiration.

Standing at this new historical starting point, China will continue to march forward hand in hand with countries around the world, taking law as an instrument and governance as the path, and pooling the power of the rule of law on a shared journey toward a new level of harmony between humanity and nature. The goal is to leave future generations a beautiful homeland with blue skies, green lands, and lucid waters, and contribute more profound and enduring Chinese strengths to the lasting prosperity of Mother Earth, our beautiful planet.

Note on Compilation

The research team for the think tank report titled "China's Innovations and Global Contributions Through the Ecological and Environmental Code" was led by Fu Hua, President of Xinhua News Agency and Chairperson of the Academic Committee of Xinhua Institute, with Lyu Yansong, Editor-in-Chief of Xinhua News Agency, serving as Deputy Leader, and Ren Weidong, Deputy Editor- in- Chief of Xinhua News Agency, as Executive Deputy Leader. Members of the research team included the following: (from the Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, i.e., the Policy Research Center for Environment and Economy, Ministry of Ecology and Environment) Hu Jun, Tian Chunxiu, Yu Hai, Huang Wei, Zhang Qiang, Huang Desheng, Wang Peng, Wang Jiaojiao, Wang Bin, Yuan Naixiu, Zhang Yuanwei, Zhou Dan, Zhang Jiaqi, and Chen Tao; (from Xinhua Institute) Liu Gang, Chen Fang, Xue Ying, Fu Yan, Gao Jing, Li Xin, Zhang Xiaoru, and Zhu Wenzhe; (from the Chinese Society of Environmental and Resources Law) Chen Haisong and Ye Wenping; (from the Law Institute of China Law Society) Yan Hongyu and Jing Lizhe. The English version of the report was proofread by Shi Hao, Fu Shuangqi, Zhang Xu, Ji Hang, and Hu Tao.

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