



Exploring the unique characteristics of environmental sustainability in China: Navigating future challenges

Md. Ziaul Islam^{a*}, Shuwei Wang^b

^a Research Institute of Environmental Law (RIEL), School of Law, Wuhan University, Wuhan 430072, China

^b Shangjian Law Office, Shanghai 201600, China

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ABSTRACT

With the pace of global sustainable development, China has improved significantly in tackling environmental problems such as carbon emissions, climate change, air, water, and soil pollution, and wildlife extinction. Our study shows that despite China's economic policy reform, several issues persist, including inequality between society and region, depletion and waste of resources, and damage to the natural environment. The study observed that China shuts low-level oil and coal-based power plants to prevent air pollution, promote a zero-carbon world, and reduce carbon intensity to 18.8%. The country also increased forest coverage by nearly 23.4%, declared five national parks in 2021, cleaned 98% of polluted water bodies, and improved the air quality in many big cities. A country like China has shown deep concern for environmental sustainability and has formulated many policies, laws, and regulations to prevent and conserve the environment and biodiversity and ensure sustainable economic development. This study argues that the Chinese concept of ecological civilization construction adheres to global sustainable development as both pursuits of achieving sustainable conservation of natural resources and improving the livelihoods of the people. Therefore, this paper reviews China's policies toward ecological civilization (EC), which aim to create a beautiful China by 2035 on the outline of the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The present study also addresses the issues the Chinese government faces while implementing environmental sustainability.

1. Introduction

Environmental sustainability (ES) plays a crucial role in successfully maintaining natural environmental elements or natural capital, such as air, soil, water, forests, wetlands, the atmosphere, and all living things. These natural capitals provide valuable ecosystem services that make human life possible. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without considering social and environmental concerns. Guo et al. (2013) argued that China's sustainable development strategy is based on four pillars: economic prosperity, quality of life, social justice, and environmental protection. Despite the equal importance of these four pillars, economic development and environmental protection are considered the most promising for the Chinese sustainability framework (Guo et al., 2013; Liu, 2010; Li et al., 2016). However, the Chinese perception of sustainability is not limited to these two aspects; it adds social sustainability to the economy and the environment. The Chinese concept of sustainability is expressed through 'Ecological Civilization' (EC). It is considered a reform project of the

government to achieve economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological goals. It addresses two core principles: sustainable production and consumption. To achieve harmony between humans, nature, and society, EC emphasizes strengthening the mutual reinforcement and coexistence of humans and nature (Zhang et al., 2011). Tian et al. (2021) defined 'ecological civilization' as a strategic approach that ensures win-win achievement in the prospering economy and protecting the eco-environment. EC construction is a 100-year strategy for the Chinese government to achieve green and high-quality development (Zhao and Zhang, 2021). Huang and Westman (2021) mention the "eco-modernist" idea of the Chinese sustainable development model that integrates science, technology, and industrial development to increase resource management. However, the modern concept of sustainability is deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy. Both the Chinese philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism focus on living in harmony with nature. Taoism emphasizes that 'man is an integral part of nature' while the Confucian ideology depicts humans as those 'generous men love mountains, wise men love water'. This wisdom

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: liyifan@whu.edu.cn (Md. Ziaul Islam).

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reflects China's will to live harmoniously with nature and conforms to the UN's 5Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership) approach to sustainability (Liu et al., 2018). The Chinese understanding of the human-nature relationship significantly contributes to universal sustainable development. Liu et al. (2018) opine that Chinese sustainability connects economic, environmental, and social outcomes based on green industrial production for both present and future generations. The concepts of sustainable development were reflected in Chairman Mao's administration, whose green policies benefitted all walks of life, including agriculture and industry (Zhang et al., 2018). However, sustainable development was incorporated into China's national legislation in 1991. Green development and the coexistence of people and nature are essential elements of sustainable development. To build an ecological civilization and a beautiful China, it is crucial to prioritize preserving and conserving nature and natural resources while adhering to its inherent principles of sustainable development.

Despite numerous efforts to ensure sustainable development, different types of environmental pollution and a lack of environmental laws create obstacles and challenges in fulfilling sustainable development in societies. Many environmental problems worldwide, including those in China, severely affect society's biophysical environment and public health. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) asserted that global environmental issues must be addressed by achieving harmony between socioeconomic development and the environment and none of them can be isolated. Undeniably, a sustainable economy cannot stand alone; rather, it depends on material and environmental resources. The Rio Declaration of 1992 underscores the need for member nations to develop national policies and laws that consider the implications of holistic social and economic development on the environment. It is optimistic that a series of environmental laws have been enacted and environmental policies have been streamlined by revising the environmental protection law (EPL) framework to enhance enforcement strategies promptly. Therefore, this paper addresses the Chinese government's initiatives toward ecological civilization construction, reflecting global sustainable development goals, and highlighting the challenges.

2. Method

The present study reviewed literature from databases such as JSTOR and ScienceDirect. The following keywords were used to search the literature: "ecological civilization", "sustainable development in China", "UN Agenda", "Chinese Dream", "green sustainability", and "environmental governance in China". The authors reviewed and consulted Chinese government policies, laws, and regulations regarding environmental sustainability, including the Environmental Protection Law, Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law, 13th Five-Year Plan, 14th Five-Year Plan, National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan, and ecological civilization principle. The authors also reviewed the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2021 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 and consulted the UN Agenda, Paris Agreement, and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

3. Development of environmental sustainability in China

China's interest in environmental sustainability was first observed in 1972 when a delegation comprising 40 members attended a Stockholm Conference. The outcome of this conference led China to organize the first National Environmental Protection Working Meeting in the year following this conference. In 1974, it set up the first environmental protection agency called the State Council's Environmental Protection Leading Group Office. Realizing the consequences of environmental degradation through economic activities, Article 1

of the Regulation on the Protection and Improvement of the Environment of 1973 emphasizes environmental and economic development. The environmental protection concept was included in the constitution of China in 1978 to protect the environment and improve the economy. After the economic reform in 1979, China saw both rapid progress in its economy and environmental degradation. Since then, China has focused on improving its environmental quality through legislation. The purpose of enacting the EPL 1979 (trial basis) was to create national and local environmental bureaus to assess the waste discharge standards emitted by polluters and evaluate the environmental impact of production activities (Ortolano and Ma, 2000). The EPL later appeared in its full form in 1989 and was amended in 2014. It includes new articles concerning environmental planning, environmental standards, pollution control, environmental monitoring, pollutant discharge declaration, and registration and offers the responsibilities of local governments to protect and promote the environment. It vests greater authority against environmental criminals, including detaining, prosecuting, and financial punishment (The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2014). The amended law emphasizes harmonizing socioeconomic development and environmental protection, reflecting ecological civilization (Zhang et al., 2016). Article 1 of the EPL states the following:

"This law is formulated for the purpose of protecting and improving people's environment and the ecological environment, preventing and controlling pollution and other public hazards, safeguarding human health and facilitating the development of socialist modernization" (The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1989).

Environmental protection and improvements have been incorporated into China's national economic planning. Although the ineffective implementation of this legislation revealed an imbalance between environmental protection and economic development, the Decision of the State Council on Strengthening Environmental Work during the Readjustment Period of the National Economy of 1981 resolved the imbalance. Feng (1997) believed that the 1981 Decision was a bold step that directed people's governments at all levels to maintain the proper balance between economic growth and environmental safeguards by considering the protection of environmental and natural resources as an effective mechanism of China's national economy and social development plan. The second National Environmental Protection Working Conference of 1983 addressed environmental protection as a basic state policy for similar population control. The second conference emphasized ensuring the proper planning and implementation of rural-urban development, economic development, and environmental protection to enjoy socioeconomic and environmental benefits simultaneously (Jin, 1990). However, the Fifth Plenary Session of the Fourteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China first proposed "sustainable development" in 1995. It illustrates the relationship between economic development, population growth, natural resource exploitation, and environmental protection (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1995). Based on the global sustainable development model, it aims to achieve sustained economic growth through top-down decreasing population size, conserving resources, and protecting the environment for future generations.

China's sustainable development model became stronger under the guidance of President Xi Jinping, who weaved the "Chinese Dream", incorporating social and environmental harmony in 2012. The China Dream demonstrates economic progress while maintaining the global climate change and ecological balance. The construction of China's ecological civilization echoed in President Xi's speech in Davos 2017, which states, "[i]t is important to protect the environment while pursuing economic and social progress to achieve harmony between man and nature and between man and society".^① For economic

①Xi at Davos: Key Quotes that Win over Global Elites, 2017. <https://www.ecns.cn/2017/01-18/242206.shtml>

development, China's eco-civilization model adheres to the "green development" concept or, in other words, "green is gold" (UN, 2016). This notion has become more appealing through President Xi's "two mountains theory" (*liang shan lun*), where he states that "We want green waters and clear mountains, and we want gold and silver mountains . . . Green waters and clear mountains are gold and silver mountains." The Government's ecological civilization model, along with most plans related to environmental matters, received support from the 13th Five-Year Plan of 2016 (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2016).

4. China's environmental sustainability contribution at the domestic level

The Chinese reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s triggered its economy but hampered the environment. Although China is booming economically, it pays a high price for environmental degradation (Zuo et al., 2021). Undeniably, such economic development has also caused several social problems, such as socio-regional inequality, waste of resources, and significant damage to the ecology, forcing China to embrace the concept of sustainability in its national policies (Guo et al., 2018). To mitigate the conflict between economic growth and environmental protection, China, for the first time, released its 21st Century Agenda in 1994, reflecting the Rio Declaration. In response to fulfilling the MDGs by 2015, Chinese political leaders aimed to construct a "harmonious society", reducing energy consumption and ensuring an environmentally friendly society became prominent. This is a blend of the Chinese version of sustainability and global sustainability. The Chinese government endorsed ecological civilization in 2013, although it first appeared in China's national development goals in 2007 (Chen and Shi, 2022). Including EC construction in the national development strategy echoes global sustainable development. The global concept of sustainable development deals with a "global perspective", whereas the Chinese version of ecological civilization mainly focuses on the "act locally" concept. However, the SDGs and EC focus on connecting the people through their aims respectively in "no one is left behind" and "let everyone feel the improvement through the process of ecological civilization". Alongside incorporating the global sustainable development concept, China strives to employ its ecological civilization concept to promote environmental sustainability. Achieving remarkable success in improving environmental quality, China is now inclined to adopt top-level green economic development, adhering to the basic principles of ecological civilization construction (Xie et al., 2021).

In addition to ecological development, the government provides equitable public services to its people through various policies and schemes (Ramay and Babur, 2020). For instance, a land reform policy for the benefit of peasants increased agricultural growth. The government tries to eradicate poverty and uplift the livelihoods of the people through different targeted schemes like *Dibao* (social security net for the poor). By the end of 2050, China hopes to emerge as a developed, democratic, and culturally influential socialist country (Ramay and Babur, 2020). To adhere to a culturally and economically developed nation and build a "beautiful China", the government integrates political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological progress. The government has launched numerous sustainable development initiatives, such as reducing energy consumption, expanding green finance activities, and updating environmental laws and regulations.

4.1. China's ecological civilization on green and clean energy

As a move toward ecological civilization, the Chinese government has focused on increasing the share of non-fossil energy sources

to reduce dependency on coal and oil. The government is likely to spend USD 1.4 trillion on infrastructural development to establish more electric-vehicle charging stations to reduce the consumption of oil, high-speed rail, and 5G technology to achieve stable economic growth and decrease emissions (Zhang et al., 2020). Hereafter, the 13th Five-Year Plan for Energy Development (2016) sets a limitation for coal use in energy production, which is less than 58 percent (Gåsemyr and Heggelund, 2020). Coal and oil consumption rates have decreased significantly because electric vehicles and items have gradually replaced traditional energy consumption methods. Moreover, the government has paid particular attention to increasing the use of renewable energy and taking action against industries that cause pollution. There are several legal provisions to prevent environmental pollution and damage, such as chapter VII of the Administrative Code 2021 states, "liability for environmental pollution and ecological damage". Article 1229 stipulates, "A tortfeasor who has polluted the environment or caused damage to the ecological system bears tort liability" (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Regarding the discharge of water pollutants, Article 9 of the Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law, revised in 2008, states that:

"Enterprises should comply with the standards of pollutant discharge and prohibition requirements proposed for total pollution control indexes, and shall not exceed the national or local discharge standards and total pollution control indexes for to discharge water pollutants".

China initiated an environmental protection tax to prevent pollution and directed companies to pay compensation. To improve environmental governance, since May 2008, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of China has asked heavily polluting industries and environmental agencies to disclose environmental information to the public (Du et al., 2014).

To reduce carbon consumption and promote energy saving, the government launched a 'low-carbon city development' pilot project across the country in 2012. China's attempt to reduce pollution and save energy has resulted in shutting down small and inefficient coal and oil-based power generation plants and reversely building large, efficient, and environmentally friendly plants. To build a global dream of a green and zero-carbon world, carbon intensity in China has dropped significantly to 18.8%, whereas using clean energy, such as wind power generation, has increased. In the UN General Assembly Virtual Platform 2020, President Xi promised to make China a carbon-neutral country by 2060.^① In its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2021, China aims to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. China pledges to stop coal-fired power plants and to promote renewable energy. Currently, China has reduced carbon intensity consumption to below 46 percent to meet the Agenda 21 goals.

4.2. China's ecological civilization on UN Agenda 21 and 2030

As promised to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, China endorsed its "Agenda 21" in 1994. China's Agenda 21 focuses on coordinating the development of the population, society, education, economy, environment, and natural resources through strategy, policy, and implementation plans. China's adoption of Agenda 21 covers sustainable development, biodiversity, natural resources, and the economy, indicating that maintaining a certain level of the economy can reduce poverty and improve people's livelihoods. It also states that with the increasing pace of economic growth, the consumption and utilization of natural resources and the protection of the environment need to be ensured (The State Planning Commission and State Science and Technology Commission, 1994). The coordinated development model of Agenda 21 seeks the sustain-

①Xi Focus: Xi Announces China Aims to Achieve Carbon Neutrality before 2060. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/23/c_139388764.htm.

able use and consumption of natural resources, minimizing and controlling waste emissions, environmental problems, and socioeconomic development. The critical parts of Agenda 21 are population control, environmental protection, and efficient use of natural resources. The agenda prescribes adopting strategies for sustainable agricultural development with the rational use of water, promoting organic farms, using livestock and poultry manure and biological pesticides, organic fertilizers, and collecting rainwater. It also includes clean production enterprises, replacing traditional energy systems with renewable energy, developing environmentally friendly transportation, safeguarding natural resources from all kinds of pollution, preserving for future generations, and contributing to global climate change and biodiversity protection. In brief, China's Agenda 21 is an epoch-making step toward sustainable global development.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Agenda 2030 on SDGs aims to achieve 17 goals and 169 targets before 2030. China's Agenda 2030 was incorporated into the 13th Five-Year Plan in 2016, and among the UN members, China first formulated its own 'National Plan' to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and contribute to international development cooperation. The Plan analyzes the challenges of implementing Agenda 2030 and outlines the principles and approaches. China's efforts to meet the goals of Agenda 2030 will bring mutual benefits to both China and the world. As part of the SDGs, China eradicated poverty by lifting 98.99% of rural people ten years ago. It also ensured that all rural children had access to compulsory education and that people had access to basic healthcare facilities, safe houses, and safe drinking water.

4.3. China's ecological civilization on sustainable development

As a signatory country of the Paris Agreement, China's endeavors to make its sky blue, clean water, and pollution-free soil lead to green development. Green development attempts to protect and efficiently manage forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, farmlands, grasslands, and deserts. From 2015 to 2020, the forest coverage rate increased by nearly 23.4%, the air quality of the cities remained reasonably good, and noteworthy improvement was seen in water ecosystems by cleaning up 98% of polluted water bodies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021). In 2020, the water quality of the Yangtze River, Bohai Sea, and coastal areas was 77.4%, indicating moderate quality. At the beginning of 2021, approximately 83% of the rural population had access to safe drinking water. Approximately 273 marine nature reserves and special marine reserves have been established to emphasize the protection of marine and terrestrial ecosystems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Fighting against desertification and fostering afforestation, 10 million hectares of land have been converted into vegetation. China restored one-fifth of the global land in three years (2015–2018). As a result of citizens' encouragement to recycle resources, urban recycled water reached approximately 22.1% in 2019. Food loss and waste have been reduced due to the high storage facility standards and the "Clean Plate" campaign. The government's focus on rural development has manifested in various forms, including the promotion of sustainable agricultural production and infrastructure development. Rural revitalization has been observed in creating agricultural businesses and rural tourism. Along with the industrial sector, China's rural economy also contributes to the national economy, and rural economic development affects social development (Liu et al., 2022). The per capita income of rural people will have almost doubled by 2020, which has reduced the income gap between cities and rural areas. This improves the overall environment of rural areas by setting up over 68% hygienic sanitation and 90% household garbage trash bins. In addition to improving socioeconomic conditions, the government improves the relevant laws. It

forms institutional frameworks such as the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Emergency Management concerning the environment, biodiversity protection, and ecological conservation.

China's 14th Five-Year Plan (FYP) (2021–2025) for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035 was approved in 2021. The 14th FYP prioritizes agricultural development and rural revitalization, consistent with China's National Plan. Keeping in mind the improvement of agricultural production, the Plan aims to combat the "non-agriculturalization" of arable land and prevent "non-organization". To improve the living environment of rural areas, the National Plan adopts several village-oriented initiatives, including the incorporation of "garbage-encircled villages" into the National Plan, the remediation of polluted water bodies in villages, and the upgrading of domestic sewage treatment and rural sanitation facilities. The Plan addresses strengthening environmental protection and efficient management of the main rivers, lakes, wetlands, and critical ecological corridors. It focuses on protecting natural forests and wetlands and building biodiversity protection networks to preserve and conserve endangered species, plants, and habitats. Moreover, it aims to improve air and water quality, prevent soil pollution, and decrease carbon emissions by 2030.

China's commitment to the CBD strengthens its biodiversity conservation process by adopting the China National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2011–2030). The Action Plan sets ten priority areas, and 30 actions that conserve biodiversity and the sustainable use of bio-resources are chiefs. The Plan emphasizes planting more trees to accelerate the afforestation process, protecting inland freshwater ecosystems, wetlands, marine and wild species, and their habitats. Since implementing the Action Plan in 1994, most goals have been achieved. Considering biodiversity conservation as an essential issue, the government has announced several policies, laws, and administrative regulations, such as the Animal Husbandry Law, Wild Animal Protection Law, Forest Law, Grassland Law, Seed Law, Law on the Quarantine of Import and Export of Animals and Plants, Regulation on Nature Reserves, Regulation on Protection of Wild Plants, Regulation on the Management of Trade in Endangered Wild Animals and Plants, Regulation on Biosafety Management of Agricultural Genetically Modified Organisms, and Regulation on the Protection of Wild Medicine Resources (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2010). Additionally, different provinces and administrative units have applied their own strategies and action plans for biodiversity conservation.

Moreover, with the intention of effective conservation and management of biodiversity, the government drafted mid and long-term programs and action plans. The China National Committee for Biodiversity Conservation (CNCBC) works under the outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan to coordinate conservation actions. To tighten the implementation process, the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) adopted the decision to comprehensively prohibit the illegal trade of wild animals, eliminate the bad habits of wild animal consumption, and protect the health and safety of the people at the 16th session in 2020 (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2021). China hosted the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) to accelerate the global biodiversity conservation process in 2021. In promoting biodiversity conservation, at the Biodiversity Convention COP15 of Kunming 2021, President Xi announced the first five national parks (NPs): Sanjiangyuan NP, Giant Panda NP, Northeast China Tiger & Leopard NP, Hainan Tropical Forests NP, and Wuyi Mountain NP. These five NPs contain 30% of the wild species in China. These attempts have been considered a bold step toward promoting biodiversity conservation within and outside China.

5. Challenges to ecological civilization

Incorporating nearly 30 laws and 130 regulations of the Chinese

environmental law framework into a comprehensive legal system shows the government's will to establish environmental governance over the last few decades (Zheng and Wang, 2018). As part of efforts to enhance China's environmental performance, the government established the Environmental Public Interest Litigation (EPIL), resulting in the filing of 2,000 EPIL court seeking environmental governance (Xie and Xu, 2022). The government will form the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) for policy formulation and promulgating regulations for environmental conservation, management, and protection, and their implementation has primarily contributed to improving the overall environmental situation. However, from the first to five (1953–1982), all of China's Five-Year Economic Development Plans overlooked environmental protection issues (Qu, 1992). From the Sixth Five-Year Plan onwards, environmental protection became a severe issue for the government, which advocated the government to develop environmental protection tasks and set the target to achieve. To achieve both economic growth and environmental sustainability, the Chinese government has shifted away from the traditional development model and embraced sustainable development. Take the Blue Economy concept as an example. The concept was embraced to maintain healthy marine ecosystems and promote sustainable economic growth based on ocean resources. It should be noted that overfishing, which is a blockage to environmental sustainability, has created a threat to sustainable development. The government has reduced its support to fishing and strengthened the Fisheries Law, including taking measures such as confiscating vessels and revoking licenses to prevent overfishing and maintain sustainable marine ecosystems.

Despite the declaration of the “war on pollution”, various types of pollution like air, water, soil, and sound are still a headache for the government. Air pollution is a primary environmental concern in China. Air pollution mainly occurs in industrial and agricultural production. In addition, the emission of CO₂ and the burning of coal and oil for energy production also contribute to the degradation of air pollution. China is the world's largest energy consumer, constituting 23% of total global energy consumption (Lin and Kuang, 2020), whereas coal consumption is 70%. Air and water pollution in China have become a concern for the government. Water is polluted in several ways, including industrial effluents, household and agricultural waste, and urban runoff. Oceans and rivers are considerably affected by water pollution. Pollutants carried away from different sources ultimately reach rivers and oceans. These negatively impact the aquaculture industry, the people who depend on it, and the health of people and other species. The contribution of Marine Eco-civilization Construction (MECC) to protecting marine resources and the marine environment is noteworthy (Lin et al., 2022).

Like environmental pollution, the loss of biodiversity and extinction of wild animals have increased in China since it is the world's largest consumer of wild animals. Being one of the mega-biodiversity countries, the poaching and trading of wild animals have led to the shrinking of wild animal populations in China. Approximately 20% of wild animals are endangered in China. The government developed the ‘National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2011–2030)’ to conserve biodiversity and preserve wild animals and enacted many laws, such as the Wild Animal Protection Law of 1988 (amended 2018).

Robust economic growth has damaged the environment and public health. In addition, with the urban acceleration process and high-speed economic development, an imbalance is seen between ecological sustainability and socioeconomic development in many parts of China (An et al., 2022). The rapid growth of urban populations and land expansion in urban areas adversely affects the ecological environment (Jiang et al., 2022). Growing urbanization has also contributed to the emission of carbon (Lv et al., 2022). Realizing the severe consequences of environmental problems, Chinese leaders have passed many laws and regulations that reflect world treaties and

agreements (Yee et al., 2016). The construction of an EC necessitates overcoming several challenges to economic development, including environmental pollution release pressure, unsatisfactory environmental state, unreasonable energy utilization methods, and technological innovations involving ecological and environmental protection to achieve sustainable development goals (Chen et al., 2022). A holistic approach is necessary to promote human-nature development through sustainable interactions between socioeconomic and natural systems (Chen et al., 2022).

In recent years, China has made remarkable progress in combating poverty, preventing and controlling environmental pollution, reducing carbon emissions, fighting against climate change, encouraging renewable energy generation (REG), promoting green finance, fostering afforestation, and conserving wildlife and biodiversity. Therefore, the ecological civilization model of China has now been echoed in various international platforms. For instance, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC) emphasize China's ecological civilization concept that addresses the Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development (Wang et al., 2023). So, embracing the Chinese ecological civilization model will bring multiple benefits to China and the world.

6. Conclusions

With the advancement of economic growth worldwide, environmental problems, such as global climate change, environmental pollution, wildlife, biodiversity destruction, and the depletion of natural forests, are also increasing. Countries and international organizations collectively work to defend against these problems and ensure a sustainable world for all., China's EC principle provides concrete evidence of its commitment to protecting the earth for present and future generations, while promoting global sustainable development. China's war against pollution and the protection and conservation of biodiversity has attracted global attention. China vowed to fulfill its promise on international platforms and build a “beautiful China” by 2035. The government, political leaders, and people are working coordinately to achieve ecological civilization goals. Several goals have already been achieved, matching with Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development, including poverty alleviation and carbon emission reduction. Despite the such achievement, much progress in policy-making is required to obtain the fruits of ecological civilization.

Disclosure statement

The authors report that there are no potential conflicts of interest.

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