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# **ON "THE STRATEGY FOR NATURE PROTECTION IN CHINA"**

**Cheng Zheng Kang\***

## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 22, 1987, the first strategic manifesto in Chinese history concerning nature and natural resources protection was published by the Environmental Protection Committee of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (EPC). This strategy, known as the "Program for Nature Protection in China" (Program), is the result of three years of hard work by 220 experts from 13 special academic institutes. Publication of the strategy is a big event in the history of Chinese socialist development and the history of Chinese nature protection. As one of the main drafters of the strategy, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to give our friends a brief introduction of the strategy.

## **WHY CHINA BADLY NEEDS THIS STRATEGY**

The strategy was worked out to meet the urgent needs of natural resources protection work in China. At present, China is aggressively pursuing socialist modernization development as a means of improving the standard of living and allowing the Chinese people to live a happy life. However, there are serious limits on the availability of natural resources. If we do not give enough attention to the protection of nature and natural resources, the achievement of modernization is not possible. So, China must do her best to protect nature and natural resources during the course of modernization. As stated in the strategy document, owing to the five following reasons, the urgency of protecting the natural environment and natural resources is greater than at any time in history:

1. Although China has extensive land resources, there is only a small portion for each person. For example, the average amount of land, timber and water per person are only 36

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percent, 13 percent and 25 percent of the world average amount per person. These resources must be carefully protected, rationally developed, and used without waste.

2. China has a population of one billion people and the number is still increasing. In order to feed these people and raise their living standards, more and more natural resources are used, causing damage to the environment. Severe damage may be difficult or impossible to repair. Such a situation will certainly affect economic development.

3. Many Chinese people have little knowledge of ecology, environmental science and environmental economics. Often, attention is paid only to short-term economic benefits. Long-term economic benefits are ignored in the development of natural resources. Such thinking leads to the destruction of the natural environment and natural resources to different degrees.

4. A healthy ecological environment is one of the basic conditions for developing agricultural production. In China, the agricultural ecological environment has already been polluted or damaged to different degrees. This situation restricts the development of agriculture and affects the modernization process.

5. The natural environment in China varies greatly from place to place and has many obvious unfavorable elements. When carrying out the activities of development, people should pay special attention to the protection of nature.

With the consideration of the factors above mentioned, one of the critical and strategic tasks in Chinese economic and social development is to rationally use and protect the natural environment and natural resources.

## **THE GOAL FOR MAKING THE STRATEGY**

The goal for making the strategy is: based on technical data from natural science and economics, to make a systematic exposition of the role and function of nature protection in socialist modernization and make it clear that nature protection is the basic condition and a major part of the construction of socialist spirit and material development; to provide technical data to the central government and local governments for making nature protection policies, laws and plans; to clarify the responsibility and the duty of each organization in using natural resources; to set basic principles for developing and protecting various areas and natural resources; to unify and heighten the nation's understanding of the importance of nature protection; to mobilize the people from the whole country to protect the natural environment and resources for the benefit of future generations.

The strategy is a declaration; it indicates the Party's and the Country's attitude towards the natural environment and resources protection and declares policies we should adopt. The strategy is an action guide; it systematically and scientifically points out the problems that have existed in our natural environment resources protection work in the past and clarifies the principles we should follow in our future work of developing, using and protecting our natural environment and resources. The strategy is also a textbook; it explains the importance of environmental and resources protection to the people in the whole country and describes the objective law of the natural world evolution and progress so as to educate the people to practice according to the objective law of the natural world and smoothly carry out the construction of socialist modernization.

## **MAJOR CONTENTS OF THE STRATEGY**

The strategy is a government document combining scientific knowledge with policies. When it was drafted, these two parts were both considered. The strategy thus becomes the only natural protection document in the world which can be used both as a policy guide and as a textbook.

The main contents of the strategy are as follows:

1. It describes the function of nature protection in the construction of Chinese socialist modernization. The strategy points out that nature protection has a very close relation with socialist modernization, as natural resources are the basic conditions of material development; the natural environment is the fundamental condition on which human beings (workers) rely for living. Only by protecting the natural environment and resources can we smoothly carry out the production of goods and materials. Nature protection is also an important part of the development of a civilized spirit. The strategy says that nature protection and economic development rely on, improve and limit each other; ecological laws are an important objective law in national economic development and in correctly handling the relation between human beings and nature. To protect nature now will benefit all future generations.

2. The strategy describes the theoretical foundation of nature protection. It states that ecology is the theoretical foundation for the protection of nature, and the six rules which are brought to light and followed by ecology are also the guiding rules of nature protection. These six rules are:

- a. Everything in the natural world connects to all other things;

- b. In the ecosystem, every living thing has a certain place and a certain function. Living things rely on and restrict each other and evolve in harmony;
- c. The ecosystem has no energy and cannot re-evolve. Without materials, the ecosystem cannot be formed;
- d. The productivity of living things in any habitat normally has a limit. Such limit is decided by the particular features of a species and by the energy and other resources which the species can use;
- e. All natural ecosystems are changing and developing. Generally speaking, additional species make ecosystems more stable because edible links increase; and
- f. Owing to the special combination of natural and social economic conditions, every place has unique ecosystem areas.

We must follow the rules above mentioned during the course of developing, using and protecting the natural environment and resources.

3. The strategy lists the problems which natural resources, the object of protection, are facing. It has ten sections listing the basic conditions, the protection work done in the past and the problems existing for various natural resources, i.e. land, forest, grassland, wilderness, species habitat, inland water, river, lake, reservoir, wetland, seashore, ocean, mine and atmosphere.

The document points out that in China, each natural resource has its own features. Although we have made some progress in the protection of nature in the past 30 years, the degradation of the natural environment and damages to natural resources are very serious. Harm has been occurring to the ecosystem for a long time as a result of our population, backward economy and mistakes in our work. Some of the problem areas are:

- a. Agricultural areas have been reduced; quality of the soil has degenerated; serious loss of water and erosion of soil have occurred; land desertification and soil pollution have intensified;
- b. Forest resources have been reduced and other living things are being destroyed continuously;
- c. Water resources are not adequate to meet requirements;
- d. An increasing number of species are being endangered;
- e. There has been a serious waste of mining resources; and

f. Environmental pollution has developed from point pollution to zones of pollution, and from light pollution to heavy pollution.

4. The strategy describes the present conditions, features and problems of the natural environment and resources in every major geographical zone. It divides the Chinese territory into eight zones, i.e., northeast zone, south zone, huabei zone, loess plateau zone, northwest zone, huahung zone, Yunnan-Gueizhou plateau zone and Qinghai-Xizang plateau zone. The strategy describes the basic features of these zones separately and the major problems existing for natural environment and resources protection.

For instance, it lists the six major problems in the northeast zone, i.e., (a) much of the forest has been destroyed so that the total forest area is shrinking sharply; (b) no protection measures were taken when marshes were brought under cultivation; (c) soil quality in the plains has been degraded; (d) grasslands have shrunk in area; (e) wildlife resources have been reduced greatly; and (f) rivers have been polluted seriously. The problems in other zones also are mentioned in the strategy.

5. The strategy explains the measures we should take for protection of the natural environment and resources. It gives a detailed explanation of the measures we should take for natural environment and resources protection. These measures may be divided into general national measures and special zoning measures.

There are ten general national measures:

1. One of the general objectives should be to launch and strengthen education for natural environment resources protection; to popularize nature protection knowledge so as to raise the whole nation's understanding of nature protection and arouse the masses to protect the natural environment and resources.

2. When making technical and economic policies for social economic development, the principles as below should be followed:

a. Correctly handle the relationship between economic development and nature protection; make sure that economic construction, urban-rural construction and environmental construction are planned, operated and developed simultaneously so as to harmonize the economic benefit, environmental benefit and social benefit together;

b. Practice comprehensive development and comprehensive protection of natural resources;

c. Suit measures to local conditions when developing natural resources, and raise foresightedness to prevent blind actions;

d. Lay equal stress on both development and conservation at the time of developing natural resources. Developers have the responsibility of protecting and reproducing natural resources;

e. Use renewable resources following the successive use principle, and use nonrenewable resources following the saving and comprehensive use principle; and

f. Pay attention not only to present and individual interests, but also to long-term and over-all interests when developing natural resources.

3. Natural environment and resources protection should be incorporated into the national economic and social development plan.

4. The administrative authorities at different government levels should undertake the responsibility of protecting the natural environment and resources. The state planning and economic departments should harmonize economic construction with nature protection, establish nature protection standard systems, and designate nature protection areas. The departments of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, water conservancy, and energy should, as a part of their duties, assure the protection of natural resources.

5. The increase in population and the growth of the major cities should be brought under control.

6. Technical research for natural environment and resources protection should be strengthened and developed, so as to promote nature protection by advancing science and technology.

7. Education on natural environment and resources protection should be popularized, and more specialists and experts should be trained.

8. More nature protection areas should be designated.

9. Legislation for natural environment and resources protection should be strengthened and completed. Law making should be speeded up and the enforcement of laws should be carried out strictly, so that the protection of natural environment and resources can be governed by law.

10. International cooperation in nature protection should be enhanced.

Special zoning measures are drafted mainly for solving special problems existing in each zone related to natural environment and resources protection. They are primarily technical measures.



## **THE FUNCTION OF THE STRATEGY**

The strategy uses scientific methods to analyze the conditions of the Chinese natural environment and resources, including development and use conditions as well as conditions of natural environment and resources protection. It also points out the serious problems existing in Chinese natural environment and resources protection, puts forward general measures for nature protection in China as well as special measures for different areas, so as to provide a scientific foundation for nature protection work in the whole country and in particular areas. As the country's guiding document, the strategy will be sure to play an important role in Chinese nature protection work. Besides, it is also a nature protection textbook which could be provided to the broad masses for reading. The strategy, therefore, could actively promote widespread heightening of nature protection consciousness. The strategy will certainly guide, encourage, educate and rule people's actions in natural environment and resources protection work in China, so that China's nature protection work can be developed at a more rapid speed, and so we can build a Chinese society with a high standard of living, a comfortable living environment, and a healthy ecosystem for today and for succeeding generations.