



## **The Dynamic Evolution of China's Environment Policy**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Environmental protection has become one of the world's most heated topics since the 21<sup>th</sup> century. As the world's biggest developing country, China's environmental problem is more eye-catching. The debate between development and environmental production has been going through every conference and every growth stage.

#### **China's series of conferences on national environment protection**

After the United Nations Conference on Human Environment, China's first national environmental protection conference was held in Beijing in 1973, since then the prelude to China's environmental protection has kicked off. The History of the development of China's environment protection is also the history of deepening of China's environment policy evolution. So far, China has held six National Environment Protection Conferences:

The first National Conference on Environment Protection, which was held in August 1973, adopted the "Regulation on the protection and improvement of the environment". It determined the "overall planning, rational distribution, utilization, harm into relying on the masses, we get involved, to protect the environment for the benefit of the people", the "thirty words" policy, the meeting opened a prelude to China's environment protection.

The Second National Conference on Environment Protection, which was held in December 1983, developed economic development, urban and rural construction and environment construction synchronized planning, implementation, synchronous development and achieved economic, social and environmental benefits of the "three simultaneous, three reunification" policy, it also proposed three policies which included "prevention first, combining prevention with control", "who pollutes, who pays" and "strengthen environmental management". This meeting significantly established a basic national policy of environment protection.

The Third National Conference on Environmental Protection, which was held in May 1989, proposed to strengthen the system and deepen environment regulation. It declared a war on

environment pollution, and promoted the coordinated development of economy and environment. The meeting proposed five new environmental management systems.

The Fourth National Conference on Environmental Protection, which was held in July 1996, presented the key to implement sustainable development strategies. Its aim was to protect the environment. Environmental protection is supposed to protect productivity and it is necessary to implement the strategy of sustainable development as a major task.

The Fifth National Conference on Environmental Protection, which was held in January 2002, presented environmental protection as an important function of the government, and the government should mobilize all social forces to do this work according to the requirements of the socialist market economy. The significance of this meeting is that the proposed environmental protection must be placed in a more prominent position.

The Sixth National Conference on Environmental Protection, which was held in April 2006, conscientiously implemented the Party Plenum and the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the 10<sup>th</sup> NPC spirit. To implement the decision of the State Council on strengthening environmental protection, the conference summed up green “fifth” period work, which deploys environmental task in the next five years, and further created a new situation of China’s environmental protection work, which must be made to protect the environment in a more important strategic position.

### **China environmental policy’s growth stages**

These conferences marked China’s environmental policy has gone through four stages:

During the 1970s environmental policy stage, the emphasis was more on “waste gas, waste water, solid waste” hazards with special emphasis on the “three wastes” treatment and utilization. Representative environmental policies and regulations: *a number of provisions relating to the protection and improvement of the environment (draft)* has been drawn up; Representative environmental policies and regulations were as follows: *a number of provisions relating to the protection and improvement of the environment (draft)* has been drawn up in 1973; *32-character principle* (i.e. overall planning, rational distribution, utilization, harm into relying on the masses, members hands, protect the environment and benefit the people); old three system (“three simultaneous” system, charging system, environmental impact assessment system); *People's Republic of China Constitution* has been modified in 1978 to provide for environmental protection; the *People's Republic of China Environmental Protection Law (Trial)* has been promulgated in 1979.

In the 1980s policy system of environmental policy stage, three environmental protection policies and the eight systems had been gradually formed. Representative environmental policies and regulations were as follows: Second National Conference on Environmental Protection which was held in 1983 proposed a “three-building, three synchronous, three unities” (i.e. economic development, urban and rural construction, environmental construction synchronized planning, implementation, synchronous, development, achieve economic, social and environmental benefits of unity) strategic approach; three policies were as follows: prevention first combining with control; the cause of pollution control; strengthening environmental management; the new five systems: environmental protection

target responsibility system; comprehensive urban environmental improvement examination system; permit system; centralized control pollution system; deadline governance system; *People's Republic of China Environmental Protection Act* which was promulgated in 1989.

During the 1990s environmental policy stage, the government vigorously promoted environmental protection and continued to improve the eight systems of environmental protection, in addition, it proposed “Ten strategies” on Chinese environment and improvement. Representative environment policies and regulations were as follows: “Ten Measures” on China’s environmental and development was proposed in 1992(The implementation of sustainable development strategies; take effective measures to prevent and control industrial pollution; depth comprehensive urban environmental improvement, urban governance seriously, "four evils"; to improve energy efficiency, improve energy structure; the promotion of ecological agriculture, unremittingly afforestation, strengthen bio biodiversity conservation; vigorously promote scientific and technological progress, strengthen environmental science, and actively develop environmental industry; the use of economic instruments to protect the environment; to strengthen environmental education, and continuously improve the environmental awareness of the whole nation; a sound legal environment, and strengthen environmental management; referring to the spirit of UNCED institutional China's action Plan); China’s 21th Century Agenda was held in 1994; the State Council issued a 31<sup>st</sup> document, *the decision of the State Council on Several issues Concerning Environmental Protection*, in 1996; *National Ecological Environmental Construction Plan* was issued in 1998.

The environmental policy stage in early 21<sup>st</sup> century emphasized the road of new industrialization, optimized the industrial structure, developed circular economy and built a resource-saving and environmentally-friendly society. Representative environmental policies and regulations were as follows: 2002, *Cleaner Production Promotion Law of People's Republic of China*; in 2003, *People's Republic of China on Environmental Impact Assessment Law*; January 2003, the State Council issued a document on the *3rd Platform for Action for Sustainable Development in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century China*; 2005 June, the State Council issued the 21<sup>st</sup> file *notice the recent focus on the good work of the State Council building a conservation-oriented society*; July 2005, the State Council issued the 22<sup>nd</sup> file "State Council on Accelerating the development of Circular Economy"; December 2005 the State Council issued *Document No. 39 of the State Council on Implementing the Scientific concept of Development and Strengthening Environmental Protection*; March 2006, *People's Republic of China National Economic and Social Development eleventh five-Year Plan*.

After 30 years of development, “three policies” about environmental protection in China has been gradually formed, which includes “prevention first, combining prevention with control, comprehensive management” policy, “Who pollutes pays” policy and “strengthening environmental management” policy. The fundamental starting point and purpose of these three policies is to seek using the basic features of today’s environmental problems and problem-solving experience and lessons for conditions to strengthen environmental management as the core, in order to achieve economic, social and environmental development of the strategic objective of environmental protection road with Chinese characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

The overall trend in the evolution of China's environmental policy is: from treatment at the end to clean production, developing recycling economy; from pollution control to ecological protection; from point pollution management to the river basin management and regional environmental management; from an administrative order based environmental management emphasising the role of national environmental management with focus on government, business, civil process integrated environmental protection; environmental management technical, economic, legal, education and other means, all-round construction of a resource-saving and environmentally-friendly society.

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