

## COMMENT

# Path set for a beautiful China

Writing ecological civilization into the Constitution boosts environmental protection efforts to improve people's lives



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**B**uilding a beautiful China and an ecological civilization has been written into the country's Constitution to reconcile economic development and ecological protection, fill the gaps in terms of environmental governance and comply with people's aspirations and wishes. The move was in response to serious air, water and air pollution that affected China because of rapid economic growth.

Acutely aware of the serious environmental

problems caused by breakneck industrialization, the Chinese government has been putting in place increasingly stricter environmental protection measures to improve people's life and health, and protect the ecosystems.

Industrial development and widespread use of coal for power generation and heating have resulted in heavy air pollution. Unregulated industrial (including mining) and domestic discharges have contaminated the soil and water bodies in many areas. In 2014, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said 16.1 percent of China's productive soil was polluted.

The latest plan announced is expected to ensure steady economic growth continues, so as to lift millions of Chinese people out of poverty. Action plans for prevention and control of soil, water and air pollution have also been prepared as integral components of this ambitious but implementable vision.

Since a beautiful China cannot be built overnight, targets have been set for 2020 and 2030, and the results will be regularly monitored and assessed to ensure the process progresses smoothly. And officials will be made accountable for their environmental actions and decisions.

The latest plan is an important shift in the country's development paradigm, which will help build a prosperous and beautiful China. This includes new ways of generating energy, and managing air, water and soil to progressively reduce pollution levels.

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A greener development model will include generating hydropower, and harnessing wind and solar power to produce energy, and steadily decreasing the use of coal. Policies will be backed by strict regulations and

enforcement, actions that were mostly missing in the past.

China has been pursuing green development for some years now. For example, by 2015, it had already installed almost half of the world's added wind power. And in 20 years, it is expected to lead the world in the use of renewable sources of energy, fast transition to electric vehicles, and tougher rules and regulations for controlling the harmful effects of industrialization on the environment.

Recent attempts to reduce air pollution in Beijing have been successful. In January, the government reported that the levels of PM2.5, one of the most dangerous air pollutants, had dropped to 34 micrograms per cubic meter, nearly one-third less than the level five years ago.

In 2013, when the government announced that the PM2.5 target for 2018 will be less than 60 micrograms per cubic meter, even many Chinese people, let alone foreigners, considered it to be too ambitious and thus unachievable. But thanks to good planning and determined implementation, the target has been achieved.

Just like China's economic development over the past four decades has been unprecedented, the country will make good progress in controlling environmental pollution — much faster than any developed country has managed over the past century — which will pave the way for building an ecological civilization and a beautiful China.

# Unified leadership boosts structural reform

Constitutional changes bolster China's greater role globally and will bring country's economic rebalancing to completion



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**I**n China, President Xi Jinping heads the Party, the military and the country. Unlike the head of the Party and the military, the president had a term limit, which was revised through an amendment to the country's Constitution. Consequently, the amendment allows a more unified leadership.

In reality, the amendment does not indicate changes in the retirement system for Party and national leaders. Nor does it mean a life-long term for leading officials.

Rather, the new consolidation is vital to expedite structural reforms and intensify the fight against corruption, which is supported widely. Indeed, after Xi's first term, the Gallup World Poll in January found that more people in the world approved of China's leadership than the current US leadership.

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era was added to the Party Constitution.

Chairman Mao Zedong made possible a sovereign China that led to first efforts at industrial take-off. But China's industrial revolution materialized when late leader Deng Xiaoping took over in the 1980s.

After more than three decades of dramatic industrialization, Xi's first team began building a post-industrial society in 2012, which his new team is likely to complete.

Under Xi, China's rebalancing from investment and net exports to innovation and consumption has intensified, and is likely to be completed by 2030, which could be Xi's most important economic legacy.

During his term, Chinese people's living standards have grown almost 50 percent. And extreme poverty will be eradicated by 2020.

Chinese foreign investment is creating jobs and bringing capital worldwide. And the yuan has been playing an increasingly vital role in the portfolios of central banks and institutional investors.

While Washington has distanced itself from global cooperation and environmental protection, China has proposed the Belt and Road Initiative and is morphing into a leader in the fight against climate change.

And the major-country diplomacy is heralding a greater role for China in large emerging economies, which is fueling global growth prospects and may well prove Xi's most important international legacy.