

# Preface

The environmental conservation has made it to the highest platform in the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). General Secretary Hu Jintao's report to the 17th party congress floated the notion of "conservation culture" for the first time, in the context of the need to "build a comprehensive, well-off society". The high environmental cost accompanying economic growth tops all other problems, said Hu, in a clear signal that such issues, once marginalized by senior decision-makers, have become a new policy focus.

As widely reported, the country's double-digit economic growth rates have led to serious environmental problems, including worsening air conditions in the cities, rocketing greenhouse-gas emissions, serious water shortage, and pollution as well as desertification and loss of biodiversity. Environmental improvement, however, is not only related to the speed of economic development, but also closely links with the country's political structure and bureaucratic systems. In other words, ecological protection is not only an issue of environmental engineering, technology, and economics, but also a tough political task that has to resort to the improvement of governance and policy adjustment. China's environmental pollution is to a larger extent a political issue concerning ineffective governance rather than the one caused by insufficient technology or fund.

Tackling environmental issues is important not only for its own sake but also for the CCP's political survival as well as the country's soft power in the international arena. The experience of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union shows that growing environmental discontent often served as a catalyst for broader opposition to communist regimes. In China, protests about environmental issues have been growing by 30% annually, and as a result, the Chinese government has been using another catchphrase "coordinated development" (*xietiao fazhan*) to show its increasing attention to sustainable development, reduction of energy consumption, and protection of the environment.

It is unfair to criticize the Chinese government for not making any substantial achievement in ecological protection during the past three decades of reform and opening-up. Starting from nil in early 1970s, China has successfully built up the national regulatory framework of environmental protection with increasing number of employees and a complicated legal system in this area containing specialized environmental laws, instruments, and regulations. More importantly, after new leadership cored by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao gradually took paramount power after 2002, the ruling party has enacted a series of fresh administrative initiatives to address the urgent environmental degradation. Such effort picked up its momentum in 2007 after the country experienced a few shocking environmental crises and was expected to soon replace the United States to become the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter.

As the dazzling economic and social changes in China have imposed substantial impact upon the quality of environmental governance, it is time to review the problems and progress in politics of China's environmental protection. The book tries to answer the following questions: what are the major environmental problems faced by China nowadays? What are China's basic political structure and legal system involved in environmental protection and what are the interrelationship and power distribution among major players? What are the fundamental institutional factors that hamper the Chinese government/party from being successful and efficient in controlling pollution? How has the environmental issue influenced China's foreign policy? How has the participation in international politics influenced China's domestic environmental governance? What are the new administrative initiatives taken

by the government to address environmental pollution and will these actions be effective? In answering the above questions, here emerges the fundamental question: after Chinese leaders have changed their previous uninterested stance and become extremely sensitive to environmental issues, will pollution and other environmental problems be solved much more effectively and no longer pose a threat to the CCP governance?

This book examines two environmental crises in the Hu-Wen era, trying to test whether China's environmental governance has been greatly improved with the establishment of mature mechanisms concerning crisis management, accountability and inter-agency coordination. China's effort to improve its capital's air quality before the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games provides another meaningful perspective for people to understand that environmental protection in China on many occasions has become a political show that demands enormous fund and personnel investment and a scurry of policy initiatives. All three cases reflected that high-profile governmental actions may have cheerful effect in controlling pollution in the short run, but the entrenched institutional factors will prevent the problems from being fundamentally solved or similar events from reoccurring.

China's climate change policy is included in this book not only because global warming has come into the limelight of international community in recent years, but also because it offers a unique dimension to analyze the country's environmental diplomacy and domestic bureaucratic structure on emission cutting and related energy issue. The book details on how the government manages emission reduction projects within its territory and becomes the world's largest beneficiary from the Kyoto Protocol, hoping to provide guidance for investors interested in China's burgeoning carbon market and reaching a conclusion that the Chinese government can become very efficient in protecting the environment when certain economic incentives are offered.

The book finally talks about new policies and reform measures in the green area taken by the government since 2007 to handle the hot potato, arguing that some of them may be quite effective in the long run as long as they alter institutional factors and growth-first mindset that obstruct green effort.

This book may be of interest to the following readers: China watchers, environmentalists, social scientists concerned with environmental governance and ecological economics, students in courses dealing with contemporary China and public policy of environmental protection, as well as business people with the intention to tap market potential of China's environmental industry.