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## China's Ecological Path<sup>[2]</sup>

**Summary:** or almost two decades, the People's Republic of China has been on the path of complete environmental transformation and redesign of its image in the international community. China is becoming not only an active but also a dominant participant in the global fight against climate change. In addition, China is firmly determined to change its internal environmental situation and its policy of further industrial progress, harmonizing its own political goals with the generally accepted environmental goals of humanity. The paper presents the basic facts concerning certain historical and political circumstances, which caused flawed attitudes towards the environment in China. It also describes the radical ecological and political distancing from the previous disregard of ecological problems and the recent formulation of ten new goals, i.e., policies, which are contained in the new ideology of "ecological civilization". A special review is given of the ecological elements of the *Belt and Road* initiative and previous Chinese achievements in ecological and technological development. The conclusion also proposes the directions for possible cooperation between China and Serbia in the field of ecological and technological development.

**Keywords:** People's Republic of China, environmental civilization, environmental policy, „Belt and Road” initiative, Xi Jinping

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As a specific ecological paradigm, the People's Republic of China has shown more than one face over 70 years of its existence. China, which was created in specific circumstances and has always trod routes of development aligned with its ideological goals, has had a complex relationship to environmental issues. Traditional Chinese culture, based on Confucianism, which espouses

the principles of obedience, has had prominent role in the promotion of overly ambitious development projects, often with the willing participation of the population. Always present where three very clear goals: the first, to maintain the socialist system and to pursue a distinctly Chinese vision of communism, alongside a clearly defined ideology; the second, to strengthen the country economically

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and industrially; and the third, to move towards the realization of the idea that China deserves to be on an equal footing with other global leaders. These three goals represent in fact the three phases of the relationship of China and Chinese politics towards the environment. The first phase encompasses the period of the rule of Mao Zedong.

Maoist ideology mobilized society, forcing people into conflict with nature. Mass mobilizations of people in political campaigns were often promoted with the use of military terminology; nature was to be “conquered”; the gathering of the harvest was compared to an “offensive”; “armed forces” were sent to subdue the wilderness; floods and droughts were “vanquished”; insects, rodents and sparrows were to be “obliterated”. In the three decades of Mao’s rule, to varying degrees, four key themes dominated social relations and caused dramatic changes to the natural environment. These were: first, a specific form of political repression, not only of intellectuals, scientist and officials, but also of ordinary people who did not conform to the leader’s vision of the relationship between nature and society; second, a utopian hustle and bustle, which the leader of the Party promoted and which was adopted by local leaders and peasants, and directed at reshaping the environment and achieving socialism; third, a dogmatic uniformity which ignored regional particularities and local traditions regarding nature; fourth, forced migration which meant that people were sent to wastelands as part of a concerted effort to transform wild country into arable land, to strengthen military defenses and increase national security, etc. (Shapiro, 2001, p. 208). Although at first glance these statements seem forceful, they do not differ much from the

description that could have been given for any other socialist state, all of which approached nature and society in the same way. This relationship was embodied in the complete disregard of natural laws and political and ideological propaganda which placed man above nature. The purpose of this ideological push was to strengthen the economy and industry, to increase the standard of living of society, but its ultimate goal was to “catch up with and overtake capitalism”, in order to demonstrate the superiority and dominance of one political and economic system over the other. As Prof. Danilo Ž. Marković rightly stated “socialist countries are thought to have viewed the idea of progress uncritically, purely as the rapid development of production output and economic growth. Realizing this idea has resulted in the destruction of nature (as well as the workforce). At the same time, this understanding of the idea of progress did not allow for the possibility that its realization could lead to unintended consequences, as well as inadvertent environmental outcomes that can be catastrophic” (Marković, 2004, p. 241).

The second goal of the Chinese states was to achieve self-sufficiency despite international isolation and to improve China’s position in the world, as the country did not lack natural resources but modern technologies. At the time, what served to replace the lack of technology was physical labor, which was employed during mass actions directed at reshaping nature or increasing the exploitation of natural resources. Perhaps the best example of mass subjugation of the environment is seen in the story of the Yellow River, which was taken as an inspirational example of the victory of the socialist man over nature. The taming and exploitation

of great rivers has been the central point of the Chinese relationship with nature ever since the time of emperor Yu the Great, who, following nine years of devastating floods, successfully controlled the rivers. This task was eagerly embraced by the Communist Party which deemed that ambitious projects, for which planning had been started even before the CP assumed power, and mass mobilizations would increase its standing amongst the populace. Of all Chinese rivers, the Yellow River is the most prone to flooding. This waterway is considered the cradle of Chinese civilization but also “China’s Sorrow” due to its frequent overflowing. As in previous cases, this aggressive reshaping of nature, the shifting of riverbeds and moving of mountains, was not invented by China. The famed Hoover Dam in California, USA, was also constructed thanks to an aggressive redesigning of the environment: the riverbed was partially shifted and a large number of laborers, left unemployed by the Great Depression in the 1930s, were mobilized. Nevertheless, many environmental challenges that China is facing today and the country’s reckoning with the negative impact of industrialization can be linked to the years of Mao’s rule. The second and third cycle in the development of China, in the context of the environment, is represented by the birth of the idea that China should create its own technology and that its global position is one of equality with other powers. Following the death of Mao Zedong, a political thawing ensued, and the country slowly opened up to the world. This meant that China’s “doors and windows” were opened for foreign technologies and investment. But there was also the danger that China now enter the undesirable relationship of neo-technological

dependency and fall into the trap of ecological colonialism. Because, in fact, China opened up to the world in the most inopportune moment, when Europe and the entire Western civilization became aware of the environmental dangers it was harboring and sought to move its outdated technology somewhere where there were no impediments in the form of environmental awareness. In the 1980 this ecological colonialism showed that capital no longer moved to places where only profits would be greater, but to countries where the political subjects lacked ecological awareness and where environmental laws, which could prevent this new form of colonialism, were inadequate or non-existent. However, in China’s case, this phase was the launch pad for the upgrading of already existing technologies and for adopting and improving on Western technologies. Understandably, the price of this move was not small. At one point, China not only became the leader in manufacturing and trade but the largest polluter and a vast waste dump for the West. It suffices to watch the 2016 documentary *Plastic China* (directed by Yuilang Wang) to understand all the social and economic dimensions (tragedy might be a better word) of burying China with European and global waste. However, a policy introduced in 2018 banned the import of dangerous recyclable waste. This policy on waste demonstrated three things. The first one was that China experienced an ecological, political, and economic awakening. As far back as 1998, the State Environmental Protection Administration was raised to the level of Ministry, in an effort to increase the body’s authority. In the period, there was also an increase in the power environmental agencies were given to enforce environmental

regulations, which up until that point had existed only on paper. Although at the time the resources to enforce policies remained limited and violations were widespread, the Chinese government was determined to change the country's reputation as one of the world's most polluted (for more see Shapiro, 2001, p. 208-210).

“Environmental problems have truly become a central concern of the Chinese government, not only because policymakers have recognized the high cost to them of health and cleaning, but also because of increased erosion, flooding, desertification and sandstorms. Many leaders are aware of studies which show that the cost of environmental degradation is expressed in illnesses, the loss of productivity and through increasing cleaning costs, which effectively erased China's rapid economic growth; they eagerly embrace green technologies if they have a low cost and contribute to economic development” (Shapiro, 2001, p. 208). This meant that China almost completely abandoned the exploitation of so-called dangerous resources and industrial and economic reliance on them. This sent a political message that the rest of the world had to turn back to its own capabilities regarding the recycling industry, which is not environmentally friendly. Early indications pointed to the fact that the closure of China's market for global waste caused a crisis in the recycling policies of the US and Australia in particular. This first step (the ecological and political awakening of China), which I would venture to call a “great environmental

leap” (paraphrasing the “Great Leap Forward” from 1958), started with the “National Sword” policy. This, however, is not the only environmental policy or environmental shift.

One year later, in 2019, on the initiative of General Secretary of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping, China set forth on the path to become not only an industrial, economic, trade, military and political global leader, but to keep in step with modern trends, in this case, the environmental protection trend. As Xi Jinping stated: “a good ecological environment is the most equitable common good and the most inclusive and beneficial contentment of the People. Environment means the People itself, green hills mean beauty and a blue sky means happiness. In fact, what is emphasized here is the need to focus on the improvement of the livelihood and the happiness of the people, in order to enhance environmental protection”. To this end, ten environmental policies, that is, ten goals of environmental improvement, were introduced in China.<sup>[3]</sup>

The first policy is that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs have promised rewards and supplements from the Central Public Finance to promote the “Toilet Revolution” and to encourage a conscious improvement of the rural human habitat. In other words, the aim is to make sanitary waste disposable and recyclable, in view of a conscious improvement of the rural human habitat.<sup>[4]</sup> The second policy involves the establishing of strict accountability of

[3] <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/reports/chinas-top-ten-environmental-policies-of-2019/> (viewed 15. 5. 2021).

[4] <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/reports/chinas-top-ten-environmental-policies-of-2019/> (viewed 15. 5. 2021).

state authorities for environmental conditions. This involves the adoption of environmental concerns as a key political problem.<sup>[5]</sup> The third policy involves the publication of a list of “Waste-free Cities” by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (amongst the cities are Shenzhen, Baotou, Tongling, Weihai, etc.). The fourth policy involves the creation of a Green Action Plan 2019-2020 by the Ministry of Transport, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and twelve other agencies.<sup>[6]</sup> The fifth policy is the publication of the *Nuclear Safety in China* white paper by the State Council Information Office.<sup>[7]</sup> The sixth initiative is the creation of the Environmental Protection and Poverty Alleviation Forum, which believes that “the thread of ecological and environmental protection should run through all efforts toward poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, and the results of the fight against poverty should be used to reinforce the foundation of green and sustainable development for rural

revitalization.” The seventh policy is aimed at the protection of water. To this end, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development jointly published the *Administrative Provisions for Major Scientific Projects in Water Pollution Control and Treatment*. The eighth policy includes publication of data through the release of the *Blue Paper on Ecological Governance: Report on China's Development of Ecological Governance (2019-2020)*.<sup>[8]</sup> The ninth policy involves the active participation of China in the fight against climate change. This political goal was put into practice at the Leader's Climate Summit held on April 22, 2021 (in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic), where Xi Jinping made a radical political step forward, braking away from the traditional socialist-communist understanding of the relationship between society and nature:

We must be committed to harmony between man and Nature. “All things that grow live in harmony and benefit from the nourishment of

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[5] On April 21, 2019, the tenth meeting of the Thirteenth Standing Committee of the National People's Congress heard to the State Council's 2018 report on the state of the environment and on the advances of environmental protection submitted by Minister of Ecology and Environment, Li Ganjie.

[6] <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/reports/chinas-top-ten-environmental-policies-of-2019/> (viewed 15. 5. 2021).

[7] “The white paper states that the discovery of the atom and the development of the use of nuclear energy have brought a new motivation to human development and have greatly enhanced the human ability to understand and transform the world. At the same time, the development of nuclear energy is also associated with safety risks and challenges. If humanity wants to make better use of nuclear energy and achieve greater development, it must respond well to various nuclear safety challenges and ensure nuclear safety.” <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/reports/chinas-top-ten-environmental-policies-of-2019/> (viewed 15. 5. 2021).

[8] The report points out that there are four problems in China's environmental management. First of all, the long-term nature of the goal of comprehensively combating land degradation; second, the urgency to break the conflict between environmental protection priorities and the industrialization process; third, difficulties in sharing the fruits of economic growth and social development in nature reserves; and fourth, the basic nature of improving monitoring capabilities and building a modern monitoring system. <https://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/reports/chinas-top-ten-environmental-policies-of-2019/> (viewed 15. 5. 2021).

Nature.” Mother Nature is the cradle of all living beings, including humans. It provides everything essential for humanity to survive and thrive. Mother Nature has nourished us, and we must treat Nature as our root, respect it, protect it, and follow its laws. Failure to respect Nature or follow its laws will only invite its revenge. Systemic spoil of Nature will take away the foundation of human survival and development and will leave us human beings like a river without a source and a tree without its roots. We should protect Nature and preserve the environment like we protect our eyes, and endeavor to foster a new relationship where man and Nature can both prosper and live in harmony.<sup>[9]</sup>

At the Summit, Xi Jinping made another break, this time with China’s previous understanding of economic development:

We must be committed to green development. Green mountains are gold mountains. To protect the environment is to protect productivity, and to improve the environment is to boost productivity — the truth is as simple as that. We must abandon development models that

harm or undermine the environment and must say no to shortsighted approaches of going after near-term development gains at the expense of the environment. Much to the contrary, we need to ride the trend of technological revolution and industrial transformation, seize the enormous opportunity in green transition, and let the power of innovation drive us to upgrade our economic, energy and industrial structures, and make sure that a sound environment is there to buttress sustainable economic and social development worldwide.<sup>[10]</sup>

These are crucial elements of Chinese environmental enlightenment. At the same summit, in his message to other world leaders, Xi Jinping also established three key principles, where the issue of ecology becomes the dominant political question. The first is the commitment to “systemic governance”;<sup>[11]</sup> the second principle is the way “quality of life” is understood, which, besides the eradication of poverty, economic development and social equality must include the question of the natural environment;<sup>[12]</sup> the third includes the

[9] [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c\\_139899289.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c_139899289.htm) (viewed 23.5.2021.)

[10] Ibid.

[11] “Mountains, rivers, forests as well as farmlands, lakes, grasslands and deserts all make indivisible parts of the ecosystem. Protecting the ecosystem requires more than a simplistic, palliative approach. We need to follow the innate laws of the ecosystem and properly balance all elements and aspects of Nature. This is a way that may take us where we want to be, an ecosystem in sound circulation and overall balance.” ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c\\_139899289.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c_139899289.htm), viewed 20.5.2021)

[12] “**We must be committed to a people-centered approach.** The environment concerns the well-being of people in all countries. We need to take into full account people’s longing for a better life and a good environment as well as our responsibility for future generations. We need to look for ways to protect the environment, grow the economy, create jobs and remove poverty all at the same time, so as to deliver social equity and justice in the course of green transition and increase people’s sense of benefit, happiness and security.” ([http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c\\_139899289.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c_139899289.htm), viewed 20.5.2021)

political ideas linked with the fight against climate change, which profoundly impact the future of political negotiation, not only on the subject of the future of the climate but of the world as a whole. These are embodied in multilateralism and the principle of joint but differentiated responsibilities. Namely, Xi Jinping pointed out that we are all responsible for the state of the environment, but that developed countries, nevertheless, have the task of helping underdeveloped countries in the struggle for a healthier climate as these countries, in line with their economic and industrial development and economic and industrial capacities, are not as responsible for the state of the world climate as developed countries. With this, in the spirit of the socialist tradition, China placed itself on the side of the marginalized, unprotected, and underdeveloped countries of the world. At the same conference, Xi Jinping also established Chinese environmental goals, the most important one being that China reach the maximum level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

And, finally, the tenth environmental policy, i.e., the tenth goal in China's environmental policy, is the further development of the *Belt and Road* policy. In September 2019, the International Coalition for Green Development of the *Belt and Road* Initiative and the Bo'ao Forum for Asia jointly published the Report of the Green *Belt and Road* Development Study in Beijing. „Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and Commissioner of the Coalition Advisory Board, Zhao Yingmin, attended a press conference and gave a speech. The

*Belt and Road* Green Development Study Report is the first important research report related to the joint construction of the national *Belt and Road* green development since the coalition was formally launched in April 2019. Also, this is the first time that the Bo'ao Forum for Asia has published a special report on „green development” issues. The *Belt and Road* Green Development Report selected 13 cases of green development in different industries in ten countries for sharing. These cases were selected on productivity principles, the recognition they gained and their potential to be popularized and replicated, and they included six aspects of green development (pollution control, ecosystem management and conservation, green energy, green production, green life and green finance).<sup>[13]</sup>

From the ecological standpoint, the *Belt and Road* initiative has so far had a controversial reception, and the nature of this paper inevitably requires additional explanations. I would start first with the limiting factors by which the *Belt and Road* initiative was presented, to be more precise, how this initiative is interpreted in the world, high politics, high economy, and even in some academic communities.

The first thesis spread by the media, which is even accepted in academic circles, is that the *Belt and Road* is a new form of China's quest for hegemony, a new kind of imposition of political influence through the economy, especially through investment, which masks the creation and spread of political influence and domination. This thesis is a form of direct prejudice. First, the *Belt and the*

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[13] [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c\\_139899289.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/22/c_139899289.htm) (viewed 20.5.2021)

*Road* is a plan that is undergoing something that the world has not experienced before: the process of open and public global debate, an exchange of opinions, amendments and additions. We do not know that the project of “globalization” passed through such democratic and academic filters in the 1980s. This was done only following the appearance of its first negative outcomes. On the other hand, the end product of this “one-way globalization” in the 20th century is global warming, renamed “climate change” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the sake of political correctness. The *Belt and Road* represent “two-way globalization” and, I would add, ecologically acceptable “two-way globalization” (I will explain this concept later). This is where we come to prejudice. Many still consider China a fertile ground for economic and ecological colonization, not accepting the fact that China has reached, and perhaps even surpassed, Western civilization in technological, and especially green technological innovations. The selfishness of Western civilization is based on expansionism, today it is only sophisticated, sometimes politically disguised, but the essence and its consequences are absolutely the same. It often uses a racially charged language, not just a nationally intolerant one. Its essence is a sense of false superiority. “The first (one-way) globalization” was unsuccessful and done in the spirit of colonialism, not only in the economic but also in the environmental sense.

That is why the *Belt and Road* initiative is an example of “two-way globalization” and, as such, it unsettles conservative circles. I would not like to sound like Greta Thunberg, but I must point to two key statements by former US President Donald Trump that illustrate the relationship with modern

China: “The concept of global warming was created by the Chinese and for the Chinese, in order to make American manufacturing uncompetitive”, and another, “China, India, Russia, many other nations, do not have very good air, do not have very good water in terms of pollution and cleanliness. They are not behaving responsibly.” Another source of prejudice is again based on the narcissistic foundations of Western civilization. The propaganda machine speaks in favor of “Western products”, appraising Chinese products as cheap and, of course, short-lived. But this is the background of the economic war in “two-way globalization”. A third source is the untruth, for example, that most coal-fired power plants built abroad and financed by China use low-efficiency subcritical coal technology, which produces some of the highest emissions of any form of electricity generation. The message that is being sent is that China is not only destroying its own environment, but that it also intends to do the same in the places where it invests. Hence, the idea of a new Silk Road is actually to “clean” China and pollute the world.

Let us be honest, this is a typical, vindictively formulated idea, stemming from the fact that China today refuses to be the garbage dump for Europe and America. In international relations, if we leave the sphere of “economic war”, the situation is as follows. China is slowly becoming a leader in international efforts to keep global warming below 2°C, playing a key role in negotiations on the Paris Agreement, promising that carbon emissions will peak by 2030 and will decline rapidly thereafter. China has quickly become one of the world’s largest investors in renewable energy, investing in solar and wind projects, hydropower, and electric vehicles.



Chinese President Xi Jinping described a new era in Chinese development, defining it as “ecological civilization”. I do not recall that any world leader has spoken in this way so far, expressing the desire that a country become an “ecological civilization”. Xi Jinping very precisely defined the *Belt and the Road* as the “New Silk Road”, which will be “green, healthy, intelligent and peaceful”. It is obvious that President Xi Jinping does not speak the language of “one-way” globalization and does not use the terminology of economic colonization such as “free movement of capital, people, goods, ideas, information, etc.”, but speaks the language of “two-way” globalization, where the key words are “green, healthy and peaceful”. As he pointed out at the first *Belt and Road* Forum in May 2017: “*Belt and Road* is a vision of green development and a way of life and work that is green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable.”

“Ecological civilization” can be found as a concept in the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party since 2007. Between 2007 and 2017, more than 4000 published Chinese articles and books included the phrase “environmental civilization” as one of their key words (Cuhn, 2019). The concept of “ecological civilization” (*shentai wenming*) recognizes that nature is a part of life, and not something that can be exploited without restrictions. It serves as a reference framework for Chinese political leadership to develop visions of contemporary environmental socialism,<sup>[14]</sup> which will be able to reconcile the environmental, economic, and social components of social development (Cuhn,

2019). This vision of modern ecological socialism is contained in the aforementioned 10 environmental (goals) policies, but as such it leaves room for an in-depth political and ecological discussion and analysis of whether China is on the path from “liberal environmentalism” to “authoritarian environmentalism” (Wang- Kaeding, 2018).

These were the prejudices and their refutations. Where is the truth? China is the world's leading country in the production of electricity from renewable energy sources, with more than twice the output of the second-ranked country, the United States. By the end of 2018, the country had a total capacity of 728 GW (gigawatts) of renewable energy, mostly from hydropower and wind. China's renewable energy sector is growing faster than the fossil fuel sector and its nuclear power capacity. China is a world leader in wind energy production, with the greatest capacities in the world and continuous rapid growth of new wind farms. With a large land mass and a long coastline, China has exceptional sources of wind energy, estimated at about 2,380 GW of exploitable capacity on land and 200 GW at sea. China is the world's largest market for both photovoltaic systems and solar thermal energy. Since 2013, China has been the world's leading installer of solar photovoltaic systems (PV). In 2015, China became the world's largest producer of photovoltaic power plants, closely surpassing Germany. In 2017, it was the first country to exceed 100 GW of cumulative installed PV capacity, and by the end of 2018 it had 174 GW of cumulative installed solar capacity. As of May 2018, China holds

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[14] More on the concept of modern ecological socialism through the prism of its historical development, from Hans Magnus Enzensberger through Andre Gorz to David Pepper, see Nadić, 2012.

the record in the largest operational solar project of 1,547 MW in Tenger. There is also the issue of transport and especially electric vehicles. By 2015, sales of electric vehicles in China exceeded US levels. In 2018, Chinese sales exceeded 1.1 million cars, representing more than 55% of all electric vehicles sold in the world and three times more than Chinese buyers bought two years earlier. That year, sales of American electric vehicles amounted to only 358,000. The government is also aware that electric vehicles could help solve some of China's most pressing energy and environmental problems: first, massive air pollution is suffocating its major cities, and second, China has so far contributed the most to global emissions which cause climate change.

My personal experience of staying in Shanghai in 2019 also contributed to the disappearance of some of my own environmental prejudices regarding China. Namely, although Shanghai, as a kind of showcase city, may not be a true example of the path of China's ecological transformation, I was impressed by certain things. Shanghai is a city of greenery, landscaped and maintained parks, not just incredibly tall business and residential buildings. The air is not as polluted as I expected, and my comment on this matter caused positive surprise and satisfaction among my Chinese colleagues at Fudan University, keeping in mind the concentration of traffic on the streets of Shanghai. Here I should emphasize the existence of a special system of registration plates by which traditional, polluting cars and new electric and hybrid cars and buses are differentiated. Electric cars have green license plates, which makes them symbolically stand out from other vehicles in traffic. It should be added

that the state itself provides tax and other financial incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles. And, finally, in the hotel room where I stayed in Shanghai, in order to implement the national policy of sustainable development, environmental protection and the preservation of resources, as explained in the leaflet and at the instigation of the Communist Party, there was no shoe cream and brush. This is considered not only an economic but also an environmentally unacceptable cost. China's special strength in this ecological transformation lies in its youth. Although consumer-oriented, the system of formal and non-formal environmental education directs children and youths, especially the student population, not only to be familiar with environmental issues, both domestic and global, but also to be better informed in some segments than their peers in other parts of the world.

## Conclusion. China and Serbia

The People's Republic of China is definitely changing its ecological character both within its borders and globally. Inherited environmental problems, expressed through long-standing anti-environmental policies, still exist in China today and will take a long time to overcome and resolve. However, the general political goal of China and the environmental intentions of the current Chinese leadership are that in the near future China will be an example, if not a leader, in the field of implementing environmentally responsible state policies at home and abroad. Many will doubt the sincerity of China's new environmental policy, but I do not think there should be any doubt about the feature of Chinese modern statehood

commonly known as “commitment” to an idea and the implementation of that idea. And this current ecological commitment is visible in the growing use of the saying: “Harmony between Heaven and Humanity”, which has definitely replaced Mao’s motto: “Man must conquer nature”.

Unlike the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Serbia is technologically, i.e. ecologically and technologically lagging in relation to Western civilization, but also in relation to China. Namely, the process of developing environmentally friendly innovations in Serbia has slowed down due to a lack of understanding of the importance of the previously mentioned key words: green and healthy. Serbia is in a kind of specific gap. On the one hand, there is the political desire to become an EU member state, which means absolute acceptance of environmental standards and, of course, technology that comes from EU countries, that is, countries that are pioneers of “one-way” globalization. Furthermore, the budget of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia for this year, taking into account the existing increase of four billion Serbian dinars, amounts to 12.3 billion dinars. This is no longer as modest as it used to be, but it is still insufficient to repair the long-term impact of ignoring of environmental problems and to align the country with European standards. I want to say that our financial possibilities for ecological transformation are extremely modest and limited, and what unites us with China is the similar burden of a bad ecological past, which requires large investments in environmental protection.

Given the “steel friendship” and full political understanding between China and Serbia, as well as Serbia’s interest in environmental modernization, cooperation between Serbia and China within the *Belt and Road* initiative should not begin and end with investments in railways, the purchase of steel and the modernization of thermal power plants. The real danger of these Chinese investment cycles in Serbia lies in the fact that some Chinese companies still do not behave in an environmentally friendly way and often fail to meet domestic environmental standards, especially when it comes to “dangerous” industries such as the heavy and metal processing industries. This creates a negative response from the public, which justifiably expects respect for environmental laws and standards, as China is perceived as a friend. Of course, even when such situations arise, we must be realistic. The nature of capital and profit is such that it wants to increase at any cost, be it green, red or black.

Therefore, the *Belt and Road* initiative in Serbia should include Chinese investments in ecology, that is, renewable energy sources: wind energy and solar energy. I have to be honest, apart from mobile phones made in China (which are very good, cheap and last a long time), Belgrade is full of electric Xiaomi scooters “Made in China”. However, the batteries of these scooters also require electricity, so we once again return to the problem of renewable and politically non-conflicting energy sources and the challenges of climate change, because the sources of our electricity and the air quality we leave behind are not an insignificant matter.

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Photo: Xinhua

Wind power facilities in PR China