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Citation

Flippo, M. (2025). *Ecological Civilization: Where environmentalism meets nationalism: A discourse analysis about China's environmentalism, in relation to national rejuvenation*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Ecological Civilization: Where Environmentalism meets Nationalism

A discourse analysis about China's environmentalism, in relation to national rejuvenation

Thesis East Asian Studies (Ma)

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September-December 2024

Notes:

China in this paper refers to everything that falls under the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Introduction

In the past decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has shown a growing interest in addressing climate change and advancing environmental goals. More and more often, we see news about green projects in China showing their results and coming to fruition. This November, China has surpassed the milestone of producing 10 million “new energy vehicles”, making it the first country to do so.¹ In terms of solar panels, China has invested more than 10 times Europe has, resulting in China becoming the biggest consumer and producer of solar (PV) cells, the exports of these cells are estimated to account for 80% of the global market.²³ Also recently, Chinese state media has made known that their green belt around the Taklamakan desert has been completed.⁴ All in all, they are tackling environmentalism on a scale that is hitherto not seen. At the UN general assembly of 2020, Xi Jinping revealed China’s plan to have peak carbon emissions by 2030 and be carbon neutral by 2060.⁵ These plans and milestones receive praise domestically and abroad and confirm the party’s dedication to reach future goals.

A significant step in the PRC’s sustainability campaigns has been the introduction of an ideological framework in China called “Ecological Civilization” (Shengtai Wenming). This framework shapes the country’s approach to environmental policies, law, and education, and has been written into the party constitution. Ecological Civilization reimagines relationships between people and nature, and gives direction in ways that people in China can, financially and environmentally, benefit from “lucid waters and lush mountains”.

The sustainability campaigns and the overarching framework of ecological civilization are promoted as a part of China’s national rejuvenation. National rejuvenation is China’s long-lasting dream to become a strong, harmonious and prosperous country again. In this dream, ecological civilization is the direction the CCP takes to create a beautiful and sustainable China, with harmony between man and nature. The two are intertwined and amplify each other. National rejuvenation provides urgency for ecological civilization, and ecological civilization preserves, restores and improves the natural environment for the purpose of building the country. China’s “green” environmentalism through ecological civilization is, in a broad sense, combined with China’s “red” nationalism. Therefore this environmentalism goes beyond helping nature, and directly aids the country, strengthening it by beautifying and harmonizing China. The green and the red combine to become something in between, to simplify it, I call it brown.

¹ (Global Times, 2024)

² (Ember, 2022)

³ (International Energy Agency, 2022)

⁴ (Reuters, 2024)

⁵ (Xi, Address to the General Debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2020)

This “brown” is the topic of this thesis. The research question becomes ‘How does China’s (green) environmentalism mix with its (red) nationalism?’. To answer this question, I will analyze ecological civilization and its relation to national rejuvenation by analyzing its political discourse. I will do so by looking at mostly speeches and other media forwarded by the CCP. My focus will be on historic context and language, it is a discourse analysis of the “brown”.

One might ask, why is the study of the “brown” relevant, or useful? This is always a useful question to ask. For one, even though there has been extensive scholarly work on Xi Jinping in the past years, especially about foreign, political and economic policies, there has been less focus on the subject of national rejuvenation. Fang and Li pointed that out in this year’s *China under Xi Jinping: A New Assessment*. Because of this reason, “some scholars’ arguments on Xi’s China tend to be out of step with the dynamic, everchanging policies of Xi’s government after the outbreak of Covid-19 in late 2019.”⁶ That is why I will look at the PRC’s environmental efforts in its connection with national rejuvenation, as it is the overarching framework and narrative for policies and strategies in the PRC. By doing so, hopefully filling in a small part of this relative gap in study. Understanding national rejuvenation is helpful in understanding the current leadership’s perspective about the present and future. Secondly, discourse by political leaders and state media is the way that long-term strategies are communicated to the general public in the PRC, it is a significant indicator about the direction that the PRC will take in the future.⁷ Therefore, I chose this approach to analyze the “brown”.

The first chapter, *The Red*, is about the national rejuvenation narrative. I will discuss the history of perception changes about the century of humiliation in the PRC politically, and from there look at the way it is expressed in current Chinese political discourse. I will use Benedict Andersen’s theory of imagined communities to have a better sense of the processes at play. The national rejuvenation narrative is a key motif in ecological civilization, which will be present throughout the entire thesis. The second chapter, *The Green*, will continue to look at national rejuvenation, but through the lens of ecological civilization. The chapter summarizes ecological civilization to its core notions and connects overlapping discourse in the *green* and *red* development strategy of the CCP. The key argument I will be making is that ecological civilization is more than environmentalism. It is a framework that has the purpose of building a beautiful Chinese nation, and can therefore be characterized as nationalism combined with environmentalism, uniquely Chinese.

⁶ (Fang & Li, Xi's Chinese Dream and its Challenges, 2024, pp. 18-19)

⁷ (Tsang & Cheung, 2024)

The Red

National rejuvenation is the broad goal of the PRC, also popularized by Xi Jinping as the Chinese dream, because national rejuvenation is the dream for the Chinese nation. For the purpose of reaching this target, a web is spun of many goals, policies and approaches connected to each other and unified under national development. All government plans and policies in the PRC can to some degree be traced back to national rejuvenation. It is therefore an incredibly important framework to understand in the study of PRC politics. The historical narrative that emerges from this dream, combined with an interpretation of modern Chinese history shapes the CCP's legitimacy in the rule over "China". Its importance can thus not be overstated when talking about CCP strategy, history and politics. Ecological civilization, China's framework for environmentalism, has inevitably become part of this web of national rejuvenation. Therefore, this chapter about the national rejuvenation narrative serves as an ideological overview of CCP thought and, as a result, essential context to the strategy of ecological civilization. Examples from this chapter *The Red* will echo through in the chapter *The Green* that comes after. National rejuvenation is the recurring theme of CCP politics and, consequently, the recurring theme in this thesis. It is the vermilion thread that outlines Ecological Civilization, at least, that is the argument of this thesis.

The Road to National Rejuvenation (复兴之路)

The road to national rejuvenation is an important narrative in politics of the PRC, in the last decades we see it used many times by its political leaders. The narrative is used in a number of ways, it is used to legitimize the rule of the CCP, and to create a sense of unity, or, collective identity through national pride in China. We can analyze national rejuvenation through the lens of Benedict Anderson's theory about nationalism, from his book *imagined communities*. Anderson says, all nations are essentially imagined political communities. "Imagined because even members of the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, ..., yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion".⁸ People's sense of belonging to any nation comes from shared symbols, experiences and historical narratives, often tied to history and culture. Memory plays a key role in fostering this sense of belonging. Anderson observes that being reminded of historical events that have faded from memory is a characteristic mechanism in the construction of a nation. He elaborates by saying that remembering inevitably involves forgetting, and, as a result, narratives emerge.⁹ With the help of Anderson's ideas about memory, we can see that over the span of a century, the narrative of national rejuvenation has changed to serve different goals. Accordingly, the current narrative of national rejuvenation can tell us about current goals of the CCP.

⁸ (Anderson, 1991, p. 6)

⁹ (Anderson, 1991, pp. 187-206)

The subjects of the national rejuvenation narrative are the following; the decline and fall of the Qing dynasty (1636/1644-1912¹⁰), the Chinese civil war, the rise of communism, and CCP history. In the quote below, we can see a rendition of the national rejuvenation narrative in Xi Jinping's *Speech at the Conference Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China*:

“ The Chinese nation is a great nation. With a history of more than 5,000 years, China has made indelible contributions to the progress of human civilization. After the Opium War of 1840, however, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society and suffered greater ravages than ever before. The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilization was plunged into darkness. Since that time, national rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation.”¹¹

This history does several things, for one, it synonymizes the history of different dynasties on the mainland with history of the “Chinese” nation. It also alludes to China being a victim, being humiliated and plunged into darkness. Finally, it speaks of the continuous dream of national rejuvenation which began to be dreamt in this chaotic period. We see that Xi is trying to make listeners remember important events in Chinese history, and imagine the legacy of the PRC in the process. Though by remembering these events, certain aspects are forgotten. For example, when he speaks of the people that dreamed about rejuvenation, it is briefly forgotten that these people might have envisioned rejuvenation under very different systems than the current system of the CCP. Nevertheless, remembered is the fact that the Chinese people wanted their nation to thrive. This gives an impression of continuity and shared experiences with people from the past. Throughout the last century, we see different examples of this selective forgetting, with their unique implications, attempting to shape national unity.

Starting from China's years of humiliation, Chinese thinkers have imagined strengthening the country under different systems. In all cases, there was a need for establishing the reasons for “China's” downfall, so that they can be prevented in a new system. It has always been a controversial topic, because different narratives can give rise to questions about changes that should be implemented, or certain narratives can put legitimacy of rulership, or leadership into question. For example, in terms of legitimizing territorial claims, “the notion that the Qing dynasty was different from China undermines modern China's legitimacy to inherit the historical lands under Manchu rule”.¹² However, if we observe the Qing dynasty's expanse, and acknowledge it as

¹⁰ 1636 is the year that the Qing dynasty was established, 1644 is the year that Qing rule replaced Ming sovereignty over the middle kingdoms.

¹¹ (Xi, 习近平：在庆祝中国共产党成立 100 周年大会上的讲话, 2021)

¹² (Qian, 2024, p. 103)

ultimately being a result of “war and empire”¹³, then so would the current borders of the PRC be seen as that. These types of narratives are unfavorable for Chinese hegemony in non-Han majority regions and have major implications for dealing with these regions in the future. The implications of national narratives is the crux of this chapter.

Starting from the beginning of the 20th century until now, I distinguish three historical narratives to view China’s humiliating times. These three periods are the Late- & post-Qing period, Mao era and post-1989 until now. These different narratives illuminate how memory of China’s dark days change. I chose these periods because they are marked by tremendous social and ideological change in “China”.

Late/ post-Qing

During the first half of the 20th century, the Qing dynasty was imagined by historians as a foreign dynasty. The Qing was seen as a result of invasion and destruction of the Ming empire, the Manchus were a foreign power that exercised strict control over the peoples of China. As a result of this view, the fall of the Qing was regarded by these historians as a struggle between the Chinese peoples and the authoritarian Manchus.¹⁴ The Qing’s “Manchu-ness”, or otherness, was, among other problems, the reason for China’s decline. Their incompetence led to the foreign invasions and overall decline of China’s prominent position in the world. Some would even go so far as to argue that the Manchus, as they were foreigners, would let social and political crises happen so that they would lead to China’s decline and quasi-colonization by foreign powers.¹⁵ In other words, foreigners helping foreigners. The overall decline of China can, through this narrative, thus be attributed solely to foreign intervention, and as a fault of the Manchu people. The Qing dynasty in itself was a period of foreign occupation. One of the results of this was racism towards Manchu people, which was an important tool in the revolutionary movement in the 20th century.¹⁶¹⁷

Mao period

During Mao’s time, he and the communist scholars of the time viewed the history of China’s decline through the lens of class struggle. The suffering and decline of China were attributed to the internal corruption and incompetence of the feudal rulers of the Qing dynasty, and later the KMT. Foreign invasions became a secondary factor in China’s

¹³ (Elliott, 2001, p. 359)

¹⁴ This historical narrative can still be seen in Teng and Ingalls translation of Li Chien-Nung’s book *The political History of China, 1840-1928* (1948) (Li, Têng, & Ingalls, 1956). See pages 3-10 & 208-215.

¹⁵ (Crossley, 1997, p. 4)

¹⁶ (Ishikawa, 2003, pp. 25-26)

¹⁷ Anti-Manchu sentiment still exists in contemporary China. Carrico noticed this during his study of the Hanfu (Han-Chinese clothing) movement in China. See K. Carrico’s chapter *Manchu in the Mirror* from his book *The Great Han : Race, Nationalism, Tradition, in China Today* (Carrico, 2017, pp. 131-158).

national traumatic experience.¹⁸ The problems came from within the system of the country and they were taken advantage of by foreigners. It was not a Manchu versus Chinese struggle, but it was the struggle of the working class versus the bourgeoisie, resulting in the toppling of the bourgeoisie. This narrative gave reason for changing to a communist system.

1990s Patriotic Education

During the 1990s, we see yet another lens through which to view China's decline, it is through the lens of victimhood. Callahan points out that the national humiliation discourse was revived in the 1990s as a response to the Tiananmen protests in 1989. The goal was to redirect the anger going towards the communist party at foreign nations.¹⁹ In 1991, the "Patriotic Education Campaign" started and a victimization narrative was added to the Maoist victory of the working class-narrative, foreign powers become the main reason for China's suffering.²⁰ The campaign was aimed to teach young people about the painful experiences China faced as an innocent victim of foreign aggression. It would be an exaggeration to say that Qing's expansion through conquest, catastrophic experiences from the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are forgotten, however they are in a way buried underneath the narrative of victimhood.²¹ In the current narrative, humiliation has become a source of perspective and pride in China's nationalism. Callahan, in *the pess-optimist nation*, explains that the century of humiliation, and especially the rape of Nanjing/ Nanjing massacre, is a very symbolic period for contemporary China. As the lowest point of Chinese history, it underscores both the physical and the spiritual trauma of the nation. This symbolic horrifying period constructs China's victim/victor narrative, China has gone through the worst to rise to prominence again. National humiliation therefore explains both the legitimacy of CCP leadership as well as the need for China's rise to world prominence.²² The revolution of the CCP is rebranded from a class conflict to a revolution for national independence. This narrative gives reason for affirming the Chinese nation, and underscores that the country should protect itself. In other words, the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) strength should match the possible threats that the country could be facing, to make sure humiliation will not happen again.

To summarize, between these periods, there is a noticeable shift in what is chosen to be remembered from the century of humiliation. In an *Imagined communities*-esque way, the narratives that emerge from collective forgetting shape the perception of history, and

¹⁸ (Wang Z. , National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China, 2008, p. 789)

¹⁹ (Callahan, History, identity, and security: Producing and consuming nationalism in China, 2006, pp. 185-186)

²⁰ (Wang Z. , National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China, 2008, p. 784 & 789)

²¹ (Callahan, China: The Pessoptimist Nation, 2010, p. 194)

²² (Callahan, China: The Pessoptimist Nation, 2010, pp. 172-188)

shape the image of the modern Chinese nation. Its campaigns, policies and goals work towards a goal, rooted in a history that is shared by all citizens of the PRC. Individuals become part of a whole humiliated bunch that want to work together towards building a prominent Chinese nation. In the history of the century of humiliation, the view of the Qing dynasty's nature has shifted from a foreign dynasty to another part of the long history of the Chinese nation. Internal conflict, and class struggles are not forgotten, but there has come a focus on other nations as a source of strife. "China" in its weakened state was utterly victimized and taken advantage of by power-hungry foreign actors, these events are chosen to be remembered so. National humiliation by foreigners is, in that sense, a chosen national trauma. This trauma is vividly experienced through history-telling and is politically capitalized on, creating unity in the country, and justification for strategies. We will see examples of this later in this chapter.

The right now (Xi period)

The Chinese sentiment for past humiliation is able to be so strong in shaping the Chinese identity because the people are very proud of their ancient civilization, history and recent glories.²³ The dream of national rejuvenation has become a powerful symbol, and a provider of historical reason for strategies. When Xi Jinping made his second official appearance as the head of the CCP in November 2012, he opened the exhibition *The Road to National Rejuvenation* (复兴之路) at the National Museum of China (中国国家博物馆) where he gave a speech about the Chinese dream. By opening the exhibit and giving his speech, Xi, asserted and inserted himself on China's path to rejuvenation, emphasizing his vision for China's future, and aligning himself with the generations-long vision.

“After more than 170 years of continuous struggle since the Opium War, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has shown bright prospects. At present, we are closer to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than at any other time in history, and we are more confident and capable of achieving this goal than at any other time in history.”

Xi Jinping, November 29th, 2012, speech at the opening of *The Road to National Rejuvenation* exhibition. Taken from *On the History of the CCP*, by Xi Jinping (2021)²⁴

From humiliation comes a sense of glory, China is an underdog that becomes a hero. China's trauma serves as an environment to rise out of, and so, the negative past transforms into an optimistic present that works towards a wonderful future. Learning

²³ (Wang Z. , Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations, 2012, p. 11)

²⁴ (Xi, 论中国共产党历史, 2021, p. 1)

about this history, known as the four histories²⁵, is therefore of great importance to present political leaders in the PRC. People that understand and identify with this historical mission are motivated to work for a joint future, that is the idea behind it. On several occasions we see Xi stress the importance of young people and students learning about these histories and aligning themselves with mission.²⁶ He is fully aware of the use that a strong historical narrative can have on unity within the nation, and we see that he is skillful in using the historical narrative to substantiate strategies towards a domestic audience. The strong, bolstering words reinforced by humiliation work well domestically, nevertheless, they are not popular in the international community.

National rejuvenation to Wolf Warrior diplomacy

A clear example of the way the humiliation narrative is utilized for strategies and policy is with the military. The idea of foreign inflicted demise gives China impetus for strengthening its military in order to make sure it will not happen again. China's chosen trauma has taught the Chinese people that China needs to actively protect itself and be strong, falling behind is a disaster. "The rationale for being a strong country is a survival strategy, a way of avoiding feebleness, and an approach of fending off potential invasions".²⁷ In this light, strengthening the country is synonymous with strengthening the country's military. The military has thus become an important theme in the PRC's state ideology, which leads to militarist language in unexpected places. Such as, during the celebration speech of the hundred year anniversary of the founding of the CCP:

"We have never bullied, oppressed, or subjugated the people of any other country, and we never will. By the same token, we will never allow any foreign force to bully, oppress, or subjugate us. Anyone who would attempt to do so will find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people."

Xi Jinping, speech on the celebration of the CCP's hundred year anniversary.²⁸

Threatening other countries may seem like a strange way to celebrate a CCP anniversary, and it, unsurprisingly, received media attention abroad.²⁹³⁰ However,

²⁵ The four histories being "The history of (1) the party, (2) new China, (3) reform and opening up, and (4) socialist development". Xi Jinping, January 8th 2020, speech at the Education Summary Conference on the theme of "Don't Forget the Original Aspiration and Remember the Mission" (Xi, 论中国共产党历史, 2021, pp. 160-161)

²⁶ See (Xi, 论中国共产党历史, 2021, pp. 159-164)

²⁷ (Shan, 2024, p. 41)

²⁸ (Xi, 习近平：在庆祝中国共产党成立 100 周年大会上的讲话, 2021)

²⁹ (Davidson, 2021)

³⁰ The great wall of steel is, however, more than a metaphor for the PLA. It also refers to the "bronze and iron wall against terrorism", employed to restrict the freedom of people in Xinjiang. Therefore there are many interpretations.

keeping the humiliation narrative in mind, this is not unnatural in the Chinese political sphere, and would not have sounded unusual to Chinese patriots. On the contrary, Xi is in fact popular in the mainland for his nationalist diplomacy.³¹ This assertive and confrontational style of foreign relations has become known as Wolf-Warrior diplomacy, named after *Wolf Warrior* (2015), a popular Chinese action film about patriotic Chinese soldiers defending China and China's honor against foreign adversaries. The term wolf warrior diplomacy is mostly used by foreign media and critics, as domestically it aligns with sentiments of national pride and self-defense. This vocal, stern, uncompromising style connects with the nation's broader emphasis on military strength and resilience. It is not seen as a provocation but as a rightful assertion of the country's place in the world, defending the nation's interests. It is a trauma-response that fits China's chosen trauma of national humiliation.

This Wolf-Warrior diplomacy is a major change between Xi Jinping and his predecessors, especially Hu Jintao, who was known for "keeping a low profile" approach to foreign relations. His leadership preferred being "moderate and cautious", and was averse to challenging American global leadership.³² As Economy points out, when Xi rose to power, he immediately embraced "a process of institutional changes that seeks to reverse many of the political, social, and economic changes that emerged from thirty years of liberalization reform" before him, which can be seen in military modernization, and his discourse about national rejuvenation.³³ This is especially the case for the navy, as Xi, after coming to power, quickly "geared up for a potential showdown with the US and its allies over Taiwan and the South China sea."³⁴ In discourse, we see that many problems are explained in militaristic language, such as in the "trade war" between China and the USA. In this war it is the "innocent and defensive China (that) is fighting against the American bully to preserve the global system of free trade".³⁵ Hu Jintao's "keeping a low profile" changed to Xi's "striving for achievement" in which a continuing coalition between the PLA and the CCP is a necessity.^{36,37} Its militaristic language is a natural extension of the CCP's policy to become a strong country. As we will see later on, it is also present in language used for China's green development.

³¹ (Fang & Li, *Xi's Chinese Dream and its Challenges*, 2024, pp. 15-16)

³² (Yan, 2014, p. 155)

³³ (Economy, 2018, p. 5)

³⁴ (Fang & Li, *Xi's Chinese Dream and its Challenges*, 2024, p. 24)

³⁵ (Lin, 2024, pp. 310-311)

³⁶ (Yan, 2014)

³⁷ (Fang & Li, *Xi's China: Continuing Evolution in a New Direction*, 2024, pp. 336-337)

The Green

Now that the national rejuvenation narrative is discussed, it is time to move onto the next key subject of the thesis, Chinese environmentalism. The CCP has chosen a unique approach to reach milestones in sustainability and environmentalism. Namely, through the unity between environmentalism and national rejuvenation. As the ministry of ecology and environment says, “China has enhanced tackling climate change to be a national strategy, integrating it into the overall plan for promoting ecological civilization and economic and social development, and strengthened the top-level design for tackling climate change”.³⁸ In other words, environmentalism in China has earned a prominent place in the development of the nation, and is lead through a centralized approach at the highest levels of government. Meaning that it is included in the overall strategy of development, and, in terms of narratives, has inevitably been included in the strategy for national rejuvenation. Its integration in the national rejuvenation strategy coincides with its interconnectedness with the narrative. This chapter analyzes to what extent the national rejuvenation narrative is present in environmentalism is the case.

As has been the case in many other countries, the rapid modernization in the PRC has come at the price of degrading the natural environment. Its effects have become evident in land degradation, floods, polluted rivers, smog, and so on. Decades ago, pollution had come to the point that critics were worried that the fruits of rapid development would be overshadowed by the costs of its effects.³⁹ From that point, the ball started rolling towards less destructive paths of development, and now, it is China that is starting to lead the world in climate adaptation and environmentalism.

It makes sense that China’s environmental crises give plenty of reason for the PRC to invest in green development to some degree. However, there is more to the story, and there are many ways that investment in green development brings opportunity to the nation. For example, as the PRC holds a substantial amount of the world’s natural resources for sustainable technologies, such as lithium, scandium and neodymium, investment in the industry creates an opportunity to control both the natural resources side of the market, as well as the production of alternative energy technology. Secondly, reaching climate goals and, particularly, the Paris Agreement on climate gives China a way to excel compared on the world stage and claim diplomatic victories.⁴⁰ We can see an example of this when the USA was on the verge of withdrawing from the climate agreement, Xi Jinping then took the opportunity to show his dedication towards the accord:

³⁸ (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China, 2022)

³⁹ (Wang, He, & Fan, 2014, p. 37)

⁴⁰ (Geall & Ely, 2018)

“The Paris Agreement is a milestone in the history of climate governance. We must ensure this endeavor is not derailed. All parties should work together to implement the Paris Agreement. China will continue to take steps to tackle climate change and fully honor its obligations.”

Xi Jinping at the UN office, Geneva, January 18th, 2017⁴¹

This type of speech leads to praise globally, and is arguably a relevant part of the diplomatic strategy within Chinese environmentalism. Just as how the control of the market in terms of resources and production is an important aspect to realize when there is good news on the environmental frontier in China. However, these aspects need further study to discuss, and are not in the scope of this particular thesis. Therefore, this chapter will continue about the nation building that comes with the environmentalism within the PRC, and the unique framework that makes it possible.

Behind the earlier mentioned large-scale investments in alternative energy sources, nature preservation, etc. lies the overarching idea of ecological civilization (生态文明). When CCP-led environmentalism was still in its infancy, there was a need for expanding on the socialist ideology to make it fit the environmental goals China wanted to reach, as well as the need for it to adapt to the Chinese model.⁴² The result of this was the creation of ecological civilization, a constructive postmodern framework influenced by ideas from eco-Marxism.⁴³ Though ecological civilization originally emerged as a framework to discuss priorities and visions for the future, as a green version of industrial civilization, it has since evolved into an official, high-level narrative.⁴⁴⁴⁵

Ecological civilization has become an important part of the PRC's national development, it ties in together with the discussed national rejuvenation themes from the previous chapter in the following way: national rejuvenation is the goal for development; national humiliation provides a reason for development; ecological civilization serves as a path to be taken to achieve it. The three together make a happy marriage between revitalizing China and ensuring its sustainable future. We can see how these themes strengthen each other in vice-premier Ding Xuexiang's speech on China's national ecology day of 2023.

“In the new era and new journey, it is necessary to thoroughly study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, put the construction of a beautiful China in a prominent position in the construction of a strong country and national rejuvenation, support high-quality development with a high-quality ecological environment, and accelerate the modernization of harmonious

⁴¹ (Xi, Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind, 2017)

⁴² (Pan, 2006)

⁴³ (Wang, He, & Fan, 2014, p. 47)

⁴⁴ (Geall & Ely, 2018)

⁴⁵ (Huang & Westman, 2021, p. 3)

coexistence between man and nature. It is necessary to persevere in fighting the battle of pollution prevention, fight hard for the battle of blue skies, clear water and clean land, and continue to improve the quality of the ecological environment”⁴⁶

From this quote, the beforementioned themes are prevalent. For one, we see that ecological civilization is expressed by putting “the construction of a beautiful China in a prominent position in the construction of a strong country and national rejuvenation”. This means that ecological civilization, and maybe environmentalism in a broader sense, is imagined and promoted as a way to strengthen the country. The end goal of ecological civilization, as seen from this quote, is similar to the goal of a “strong country”, maybe in the sense that it is sustainable and future-proof. The focus lies in a “beautiful China”, instead of a beautiful nature in China, the goal has something to do with the nation and nationalism. Similarly, the appreciation of the environment lies in it being a “high quality ecological environment”. The environmental appreciation is seemingly a secondary factor, but a beautiful China is the goal. Maybe we can translate a beautiful China to a vital and vigorous China, it seems like that would fit the theme of national rejuvenation, which is mentioned alongside it. National rejuvenation is still the goal, though the way it should be achieved is through ecological civilization, so that the nation can flourish for many generations.

Another aspect that can be observed in the quote is the militaristic language used for environmentalism. “Harmonious coexistence between man and nature” will be reached by the means of war. Battles for clean air, land and water will need to be fought to achieve it, in short, pollution is the enemy. It is a war against an abstract, formidable foe. There is no direct connection between national humiliation and environmentalism, still the theme of strength plays an undeniable part in framework, and there is urgency in the language. We see language used that is reminiscent of the wolf warrior diplomacy in the previous chapter, it might therefore not be a stretch to describe ecological civilization as wolf warrior environmentalism.

The Two Mountain Theory (两山理论)

From the quote above, it is more clear how ecological civilization fits in the overall narrative of the CCP. However, what exactly does it entail? This part will provide an answer by looking at the core theory of ecological civilization. The core theory of ecological civilization is found in “lucid waters and lush mountains”, or colloquially *Two Mountain Theory*, and the “1+N” policy. Which will be explained here, followed by the way nationalism is instilled in environmentalism itself.

⁴⁶ (Ding, 习近平在首个全国生态日之际作出重要指示强调: 全社会行动起来做绿水青山就是金山银山理念的积极传播者和模范践行者: 丁薛祥出席主场活动开幕式并讲话, 2023)

Two Mountains Theory originates in a sentence introduced by Xi Jinping in 2005, when he was serving as the Party Secretary of Zhejiang province (2002-2007). In Anji county, officials of Yucun village decided to close down some of their profitable, but very polluting industries, as the villagers became increasingly worried about how the factories degraded the landscape. When Xi visited on August 18th 2005, he commented that it was a “Brilliant move”, and that “lucid waters and lush mountains are just like mountains of silver and gold”.⁴⁷ The date of this visit has been turned into national ecology day. A week later, on the 24th, he broke this sentence down in three parts.

- (1) “We strive for harmony between man and nature, and harmony between economy and society. In popular words, we have the need for both lucid waters and lush mountains, as well as mountains of silver and gold”
- (2) “Our province (Zhejiang) is seven parts mountain, one part water and two parts flatlands. If these ecological and environmental advantages can be transformed into ecological economic advantages, such as ecological agriculture, ecological industry, and ecological tourism, then lucid water and lush mountains will become gold and silver mountains.”
- (3) “Lucid water and lush mountains can bring gold and silver mountains, but you cannot buy lucid water and lush mountains with gold and silver mountains. ‘Lucid water and lush mountains’ and ‘gold and silver mountains’ will therefore produce contradictions, however, they can also come together.”
- (4) Under the circumstances that you cannot have both, we must understand the opportunity cost, be good at choosing... In the choice, find the right direction and create conditions to let lucid water and lush mountains bring gold and silver in a steady flow.”⁴⁸

To state the obvious, lucid waters and lush mountains refer to beautiful nature, mountains of silver and gold refer to financial gain. Two mountain theory shows the consideration that needs to be made between green development and economic growth. There is a need for both, and it is possible to have financial gain from nature without destroying it. The two can come at the cost of the other, nevertheless, they can be unified, and where possible, people should attempt to combine the two. Two Mountain Theory underscores that sustainable practices can yield both ecological and economic benefits, ensuring that development is future-proof. The theory by itself does not bring many new insights to the table, however, the role that the theory plays in CCP politics is noteworthy. The theory has been adopted into the party constitution, just like ecological civilization. It has become the way for political leaders of the PRC to talk about ecology.

⁴⁷ (Xinhua News Agency, 2020)

⁴⁸ (中共中央组织部, 2021)

1+N policy

A notable mention within ecological civilization is the 1+N policy, it is used less often in discourse than “lucid waters and lush mountains”. However, it is just as important in the strategy, and highlights a different aspect of green development. Ecological civilization and two mountain theory make up the ideals of the PRC’s green development. The two are focused on the relationship between people and nature, and the relation between nature and the country. 1+N policy goes into detail about specifically carbon dioxide peaking and carbon neutrality goals. The PRC aims to have achieved carbon peaking by 2030 and be carbon neutral by 2060.⁴⁹ The series of milestones and specific plans to reach these points crystallize in the term “1+N policy”. We can see the term used in the following quote by vice premier Ding Xuexiang:

“It is necessary to actively and steadily promote carbon peak and carbon neutrality, ..., implement the "1+N" policy system for carbon peak and carbon neutrality, ..., It is necessary to adhere to the bottom line of the construction of a beautiful China, ..., earnestly safeguard ecological security, nuclear and radiation safety, etc., and ensure that the natural environment and conditions on which we rely for survival and development are not threatened or destroyed.”⁵⁰

Notable about this quote is that “the construction of a beautiful China” is tied to that “on which we rely for survival (and development)”. It reinforces, yet again, that the creation of a beautiful China is connected to ensuring the vitality and vigor of the nation, above other reasons to want to reach milestones. This is achieved through the implementation of the “1+N policy”.

The “1” of 1+N policy stands for two documents issued in 2021 that make up the guiding idea and the top-level design of achieving carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, namely the *Working guidance*⁵¹ and the *action plan for carbon dioxide peaking before 2030*.⁵² The *Working guidance* serves as a guide and principles for the work on carbon dioxide peaking and carbon neutrality.⁵³ Goals such as, creating the framework for a green, low-carbon, circular economy and improving energy efficiency of key industries by 2025. The working guidance contains milestones for carbon emissions, forest volume and forest coverage. The action plan for carbon dioxide peaking before 2030 is similar to the working guidance, but is focused more on energy transition and energy efficiency side of

⁴⁹ (Xi, Address to the General Debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2020)

⁵⁰ (Ding, 习近平在全国生态环境保护大会上强调: 全面推进美丽中国建设 加快推进人与自然和谐共生的现代化, 2023)

⁵¹ In full: Working guidance for carbon dioxide peaking and carbon neutrality in full and faithful implementation of the new development philosophy (The Communist Party of China Central Committee & The State Council, 2021)

⁵² (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China, 2022)

⁵³ (United Nations Development Programme, 2021)

the strategy.⁵⁴ These two documents serve as the basis for the current energy transition model, which “N” is added on top of.

“N” stands for the area- and sector-specific implementation schemes that aim for synergy between reducing pollution and controlling carbon emissions, key sectors being coal, oil, natural gas, steel, non-ferrous metals, plastics and building materials. “N” also includes the supporting industries that make the transition possible, such as technological support, financial support, statistical and accounting work. As icing on the cake, all provinces have their own implementation schemes for carbon dioxide peaking within their jurisdiction.⁵⁵⁵⁶ This meticulous system in its entirety is summarized with letter N. Therefore in short, “1+N policy” sums up all plans and policies that work together towards the goal of carbon dioxide peaking and carbon neutrality, o. It is the cooperation across all levels of government and industries in China. The policy is, thus, a layered complicated approach full of different strategies driving the ecological civilization agenda forward.

The “1+N policy” and “two mountain theory” together make up the technical language that is used for ecological civilization, and environmentalism in China. Because these are used as often as they are, they are necessary in understanding what is actually meant and planned. The “two mountain theory” providing the vision, and “1+N policy” providing the implementation to make it possible.

Chinese values in Ecological Civilization

In terms of ecology, there is another aspect that ties the Chinese nation, and national rejuvenation to environmentalism. From a Chinese nationalist perspective, “Chinese civilization is characterized by outstanding innovation” and “has outstanding continuity”.⁵⁷ There is national pride in these statements. These innovations and lessons that come from Chinese civilization are extremely valuable to the modern Chinese nation, because China’s continuity with the past is viewed to make China uniquely suited to face modern challenges.⁵⁸ The ambiguity of philosophies from years ago make it possible to apply them to modern questions, and in this way, China's ecological efforts are framed, through state media, as a natural extension of its historical identity.⁵⁹⁶⁰ As a result, environmentalism is seen as both a modern necessity and a reflection of traditional wisdom. In the previous parts of the thesis, we have seen that national rejuvenation amplifies ecological civilization, and how ecological civilization contributes to the national rejuvenation narrative. This small part of the thesis is about how

⁵⁴ (National Development and Reform Commission: People's Republic of China, 2021)

⁵⁵ (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China, 2022)

⁵⁶ (The State Council: The People's Republic of China, 2024)

⁵⁷ (Xi, 在文化传承发展座谈会上的讲话, 2023)

⁵⁸ (Xinhua News Agency, 2023)

⁵⁹ (Communist Party Member Network, 2021)

⁶⁰ (Dong, 2023)

ecological civilization is nation building in itself, as it shapes the shared memory of Chinese civilization, yet another example of Benedict Anderson's theory.

This process of applying Chinese principles to modern policy is a deliberate long term strategy of the CCP, and is openly promoted by the Party. Emphasizing these Chinese characteristics aims to create a sense of pride and unity among citizens. Therefore, it connects individuals to a shared history and identity, underscoring they are part of a deep-rooted whole with a unique role in the modern world. As a result, this narrative helps align individual aspirations with national goals. The same way that the memory of China's century of humiliation brings unity and devotion towards the goal of rejuvenating China. For this reason, Chinese characteristics, wherever possible, are added to policies and plans in the PRC, making them fit the idea of continuity in the nation. In a speech about cultural inheritance and development. President Xi's *speech at the Symposium on Cultural Inheritance and Development* illustrated this strategy in the following way:

“The primary task of strengthening cultural self-confidence is to base ourselves on the great historical practice of the Chinese nation and contemporary practice, summarize China's experience with Chinese principles, elevate China's experience to Chinese theory, and neither blindly follow all kinds of dogmas nor copy foreign theories, so as to achieve spiritual independence and self-determination.”⁶¹

Chinese characteristics, thus, serve as the unifying butter between modern policies and the heritage of Chinese civilization. Chinese characteristics make China unique, and emphasize its resourcefulness, resilience, and capability of self-reliance, this is meant by “cultural self-confidence” in the quote by Xi Jinping. Ecological civilization plays an interesting role in this because the process of cultural self-confidence happens in two directions within ecological civilization. For one, by attributing traditional Chinese values to environmental policies, the CCP reinforces the narrative that China's solutions are uniquely Chinese. Secondly, the narrative of ecological civilization reimagines Chinese ancient civilization as an eco-friendly civilization, in which people strived for unity between man and nature (天人合一). In other words, China's past is shaped by its present, while its present is shaped by this imagined past. The two synergize and are seen as continuous. In this manner, ecological civilization is a powerful tool for nation-building, it weaves environmentalism into the fabric of Chinese identity. This deliberate strategy strengthens both the legitimacy of the Party's policies and the collective memory of China as an enduring, innovative civilization.

⁶¹ (Xi, 在文化传承发展座谈会上的讲话, 2023)

What are these Chinese characteristics then?

As was said earlier, the narrative of ecological civilization reimagines Chinese ancient civilization as an eco-friendly civilization. This is done through the use of Chinese philosophies and terminology with a long history in China. The use of this old discourse gives the impression that China's present and future align with values from the past, in other words continuity. The quote below by Xi Jinping at the climate summit of 2021 is an example of how this adapting of Chinese philosophy happens in conjunction with ecological civilization.

"Chinese civilization has always advocated the unity of man and nature, the Tao of nature, and the pursuit of harmonious coexistence between man and nature. China has written the concept of ecological civilization and the construction of ecological civilization into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, and incorporated it into the overall layout of socialism with Chinese characteristics."

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One of these types of terms is the unity between man and nature (天人合一), it is a saying that originates in dynastic China. The word nature in this sentence is can be interpreted in different ways, such as the heavens, gods and nature, and it has been used to describe all these meanings. The ambiguity of such a term makes it convenient for adaptation. As of right now, unity between man and nature is frequently quoted by Chinese leaders to refer to nature in cultural terms. It is used as a way to portray the long-term vision of a beautiful China, in a matter that is relatable for the public.⁶³ The 19th national congress report even added the goal of harmony between humans and nature to the strategy of socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era.

Another such quote that is used for this purpose is "All things are nurtured and do not harm each other" (万物并育而不相害)⁶⁴, which comes from the book of rites, a Confucianist classic which dating is estimated roughly 2000 years ago. In this sentence, "all things" also refers to man and nature, as well as all other things that one can describe. On ecology day 2018 (May 18th), and also earlier this year, Xi Jinping quoted a passage from Zhuangzi, a text from roughly the 4th century BCE. "Heaven and earth were born with me, and all things are one with me" (天地与我并生，而万物与我为一).⁶⁵⁶⁶

Which comes from the belief present in the Zhuangzi that there is no inherent difference between one thing and another, and there is constant change that flows through everything.⁶⁷ In the context of the Zhuangzi, this quote is one among many that aim to

⁶² (Xi, 习近平在“领导人气候峰会”上的讲话 (全文), 2021)

⁶³ (Huang & Westman, 2021, p. 5)

⁶⁴ (Communist Party Member Network, 2021)

⁶⁵ (Communist Party Member Network, 2021)

⁶⁶ (Chinese Communist Party News Network, 2024)

⁶⁷ (Schipper, 2007)

put everything in perspective, there is no difference between big and small, or fast or slow, and so on. This can also be said about man and nature, while this distinction is not particularly made in the Zhuangzi in the way that it is meant now, or at all.⁶⁸ It is not particularly a stretch to say it is in line with the passage. In this manner, Chinese philosophy is very lenient and purposely open to interpretation, which makes it a convenient tool to bend to goals like ecological civilization. Whether the original writer may have aimed at something else, or not, does not particularly matter as one can never truly know the meaning of something written in the way the writer imagined it, especially not if it is written thousands of years ago.

These three old quotes mentioned so far come from different frameworks and different times, from Neo-Confucianism, Confucianism and Daoism, and are all mentioned in the context of ecological civilization. It seems like there is no end to ancient Chinese philosophical quotes that political leaders use to promote ecological civilization. That is, in part, because there is seemingly no end to Chinese philosophical source material. therefore there is no doubt that if one looks hard enough, one will find something that can be applied to a modern political goal.

By using these particular quotes by ancient philosophers, ancient Chinese thought and Chinese civilization are imagined, and reshaped as eco-friendly. Simply by quoting these classics, an image unfolds of continuity with ancient Chinese values from a history that all Chinese people share. Ecological civilization connects environmentalism and sustainability with ancient thought, national cultural pride, national rejuvenation, natural beauty and a vigorous China. However, was ancient China actually eco-friendly? Unfortunately, just like most places where human civilization thrived in large numbers, it comes at the cost of natural resources. Mark Elvin describes, the Chinese (Han) style of settlement as one that has always been destructive towards the natural world.⁶⁹ If one needs to be waken up from the dream that China's ancient civilization has great appreciation for nature, in that case his, there is no better place to start than his book *Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*. Chinese philosophy as a source of environmentalism and sustainable philosophy, and Chinese civilization as a civilization that appreciated nature is yet another example of collective forgetting in order to build a narrative. It is very useful for the nation building in ecological civilization, and the idea of national rejuvenation full of Chinese values. However, it is but a Chinese dream.

⁶⁸ Characters like 天, 自然, 道, and more, are character that could be used to describe different aspects that have to do with nature in classical Chinese, in which the Zhuangzi is written. However, they are not imagined as direct counterparts of man (人). Therefore, in a literary sense, the current concept of "nature" is too far away from the concepts used in these old texts, that they can only apply in imagination and interpretation.

⁶⁹ (Elvin, 2004, p. 5)

Conclusion: The Brown

First of all, to briefly summarize the key points of the thesis. This thesis explored the relationship between China's environmentalism and China's national rejuvenation narrative. Through a discourse analysis of speeches and policy documents, we have seen how "green" environmental and sustainable development is united in "red" national rejuvenation. The two mix together in the strategy of ecological civilization, and as result, the red and the green create the color brown. The brown being a simplification for the strategic blend between the two. The core argument I try to make in this thesis is that China's approach to environmentalism is not just a response to ecological crises and good intentions. Instead, it is inseparable from the narrative of national rejuvenation. The goal of ecological civilization is to create a beautiful China, which means a beautiful vigorous nation that is ready to the future. A future in which China is both rejuvenated and restored in its natural beauty, grounded in Chinese values.

The analysis of the environmentalism in the PRC began by unpacking the "red" of national rejuvenation. We have seen how the narrative of China's "century of humiliation" has been selectively constructed time and time again to serve different narratives and strategies. Utilizing Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," that particular chapter showed how historical memory is actively molded and reinterpreted to serve political objectives. The shifting narratives surrounding the Qing dynasty, the Mao era, and the 1990s patriotic education campaign until now underscore the strategic reframing of history. Starting from being freed from Manchu domination, to class struggle in which the bourgeoisie was toppled to make room for the Communist Party. Then, from 1990s onwards, the period most relevant for this thesis, the current emphasis on foreign aggression and victimization, in order to create a cohesive national identity, and legitimize rule. The memory of humiliation serves as a powerful impetus for action, providing a reason for China's pursuit of national rejuvenation, which happens on an economic level, cultural level, political level and we have seen it through its military and adoption of "wolf warrior" diplomacy. Language unites them all, in militaristic language used on all fronts, which includes the subject of this thesis, ecological civilization. Which is seen in the second chapter *The Green*.

Next, the thesis delved into the "green" of Ecological Civilization. The emergence of this framework was discussed, highlighting its roots and its structure. From the quotes by political leaders and discourse forwarded by state media, it is clear that ecological civilization goes far beyond the scope of environmental policies. It is fully integrated into the national rejuvenation narrative. The discourse around Ecological Civilization reveals that environmental protection comes from a combination of many different goals and strategies. Ecological civilization is fundamentally characterized by the ultimate goal of strengthening the country. This was especially clear through the speeches of political leaders, wherein natural beauty almost becomes synonymous with strength.

Environmentalism is explicitly presented as being vital to the national rejuvenation effort.

From that point, a rendition of the two key theoretical frameworks that make up ecological civilization was in order, namely, the "Two Mountains Theory" and the "1+N policy." The Two Mountains Theory, which emphasizes that "lucid waters and lush mountains are just like mountains of silver and gold," gives light to the vision that it is possible to have a synergy between environmental protection and economic development. Where possible, it is the goal to make this synergy happen, or create a situation in which it would become possible in the future to make it happen. This theory serves as the vision of ecological civilization, striving for unity between man and nature. The 1+N policy framework gives a detailed approach in how the goals can be reached, and in what way policies should be implemented. It outlines a comprehensive approach to achieve carbon peaking by 2030, and carbon neutrality by 2060. Even though these two terms do not necessarily have a lot to do with nationalism, the two are important to understand because they are constantly used in the political discourse surrounding ecological civilization. It is through the realization of "lucid waters and lush mountains" and the implementation of "1+N policy" that the PRC is able to achieve a beautiful China.

The final point of analysis involved the role of Chinese cultural values in the construction of Ecological Civilization. This section explored how the CCP is actively reinterpreting and applying traditional philosophies, such as the concept of "unity of man and nature", and many quotes from ancient Chinese philosophy, to legitimize and promote its environmental agenda. It does seemingly is not picky in which philosophies to choose, as we see Daoism, Confucianism and neo-Confucianism. As long as it is old, and as long as it is possible to fit to the strategy, it can be used. This creates a sense of cultural continuity, painting Chinese environmentalism as something inherent to Chinese civilization. There is the need to restore and preserve nature, however, it is also emphasized that doing so is a reflection of China's unique cultural heritage. Even though historically this is not necessarily the case. Despite that, the narrative that is now promoted is that traditional Chinese values are somehow eco-friendly. This selective reading of history is part of the nation-building endeavor, which redefines China's collective memory and aligns individual aspirations with national goals.

The Brown: A Synthesis of Red and Green

Simply said, all these aspects mixed together create the color brown, it is a blend of national rejuvenation, militaristic language, environmentalism, sustainability and imagined Chinese values. However, the "brown" is more than the sum of its parts, it is a strategic approach wherein environmental goals are connected with national objectives. It is everchanging, if times warrant different goals and strategies, I believe ecological civilization is able to move along with the current, as its contents are deliberately vague,

and its goals are the only thing that provide specificity. Ecological civilization is ever-red, as its main goal for existing is strengthening the nation. It is red in its Chinese characteristics, but evergreen in its approach. Therefore, ecological civilization everchanging, ever-red, and evergreen. In combination with the historical narrative, it is a self-affirming framework that continues to affirm itself as long as milestones are reached. In other words, the approach allows the CCP to use and strengthen its national rejuvenation narrative; the narrative strengthens the framework of ecological civilization; and when the goals are reached, its environmental successes can be used to legitimize and advance national strategies every step of the way.

The "brown" is evident in militaristic language used to describe ecological civilization. The war cries that emerge from the chosen trauma of the century of humiliation echo through all fronts of the Chinese nation, including the "battles" against pollution. They call for unity and perseverance to reach the goal of a beautiful China. From wolf warrior diplomacy comes wolf warrior environmentalism which creates urgency to put fangs towards stopping environmental degradation. There is little overlap between the two themes of national humiliation and environmentalism. However, the consistent use of strong and assertive language helps convey the sense that environmental action is a form of national self-strengthening, a crucial component in the ongoing struggle for national greatness and self-defense.

China's environmentalism should not be understood as an isolated endeavor driven by a concern for global sustainability. It is an integral part of a larger, more ambitious project, which is the project of national rejuvenation. This "brown" approach has several key implications that are important to realize. For one, by connecting environmentalism with national rejuvenation, the CCP strengthens its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens in protecting the future of the nation in terms of sustainability. The beautiful China that is in the making now is supposed to support future generations. This is quite something to look forward to, and the results so far show that it is working.

In combination with militaristic language, strength and national unity in the battle against pollution are key aspects of the program. Its striving for unity can, apart from the urgent language, be found in a very different way in the old Chinese philosophical quoting. The CCP wants to relate to Chinese people in the way that works best in China, through history. So we see that there are different levels of shaping history within ecological civilization, it reshapes modern Chinese history with the help of national rejuvenation, and reshapes ancient Chinese history through borrowing from the abundance of source material of Chinese philosophy. This approach demonstrates that historical memory is a powerful tool for political legitimacy and nation-building. By framing environmentalism as a continuation of past virtues and an answer to past traumas, the CCP is able to use environmental policy to reinforce national identity. The

present flows from a carefully curated past, and the future is made to seem like the logical progression of both.

From now on

While the narrative of "brown" environmentalism is compelling and impactful, it is necessary to recognize that it can become more complex to continue following the current goals. One challenge that will always be the struggle is the push and pull between the environmental goals and economic growth. Despite the want to have both "lucid waters and lush mountains and mountains of silver and gold", there will be many cases where it will be impossible to combine the two. So if the commitment to green growth will come at the price for economic benefits, it is highly possible that a different strategy needs to be chosen.

Another difficult hurdle is the need to ensure that environmental policies are genuinely implemented, and not merely symbolic gestures. Even though the "1+N policy" show that all layers of the government are willing to contribute. It still might prove to be difficult to make sure that goals are reached, and if they are not reached, to map out which areas and how they fall behind. It is also possible that the effectiveness of the current plans are overstated, and are destined to fall on their heads somewhere in the next decennia. In other words, ensuring that ambitious targets are met in practice, not just on paper, will require meticulous monitoring mechanisms, which is a challenge.

Furthermore, green development depends on one thing the most, apart from commitment, and that is technological. China has a lot of raw material and is currently investing heavily in the production of sustainable alternatives. It has the largest export market, which is estimated to become more profitable by the year. Still, China is, like all countries, dependent on global markets. If other countries overtake China's efforts in sustainable alternatives, then China's economy will suffer from the investments made.

In conclusion, China's "brown" environmentalism, a unique fusion of the "red" of national rejuvenation and the "green" of ecological sustainability can only be the way it is in China. It is uniquely Chinese and rooted in a narrative of national strength and rejuvenation, and shaped by a carefully created collective memory of its ancient civilization. It's a way for the country to be a world leader in reaching climate goals while at the same time bolstering its domestic political legitimacy.

This thesis has shown that, strategy of ecological civilization crosses over to many aspects of Chinese society. It is a political, social, economic, and as I argue, also a very cultural project that aims to create a stronger, unified China. The "brown" represents the blending of green goals and red ambitions. Time can only tell how far brown development takes China, and the framework will probably go through more changes in the coming decades. It, therefore, remains a useful topic of study in the development of China, and in the study of global sustainable efforts.

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