
UDC 321.01:502(510)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2707-5206.2026.41.23>

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POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE ECOLOGICAL CIVILISATION IDEOLOGY IN MODERN CHINA

The paper examines the ideology of ecological civilisation as an important factor determining China's modern climate policy. The historical and philosophical foundations of the concept of ecological civilisation trace their roots to traditional Chinese culture and to its gradual development within the Communist Party of China's political discourse. This ideology has become an integral part of the official national strategy to balance economic development and environmental sustainability, emerging amid global climate change and growing international pressure on the country to adopt sustainable development models. The influence of international climate agreements and the historical transformations of the global environmental movement on the formation of the Chinese approach is also examined. Special attention is paid to analysing the mechanisms for integrating the ideology of ecological civilisation into state policies and practices across energy, industry, and urban development that accompanied China's shift to a low-carbon economy, as well as to the development of new institutional structures to support climate initiatives. The article highlights the influence of the ideology of ecological civilisation on China's climate diplomacy, particularly its participation in global agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote the concept of common but differentiated responsibility. The challenges facing China in implementing the policy of ecological civilisation, including national and international factors, are analysed. As a result, the ideology of ecological civilisation has a significant impact on state governance, combining traditional Chinese values with the requirements of global environmental security.

Key words: China, climate policy, ecological civilisation, global climate order, international interaction, modernisation.

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Formulation of the problem in general form, its relation to scientific or practical problems. China's climate policy is often viewed in Western discourse through the prism of economic pragmatism or geopolitical influence. However, this approach overlooks the domestic concept of ecological civilisation, which has become an important factor in Xi Jinping's state governance in China. The study of ecological civilisation enables us to understand how the Chinese leadership integrates traditional philosophy, Marxist theory, and the challenges of modernisation and global climate change. Currently, the ideology of ecological civilisation serves as the conceptual basis for China's climate policy, encompassing long-term strategic goals, green transformation tools, and approaches to environmental management. The strengthening of China's role in combating climate change and its growing international influence underscore the need to analyse the ideological foundations of state climate policy. In the scientific literature, ecological civilisation is often interpreted as a technocratic strategy or a political declaration (Dong et al, 2025). This view ignores its complexity as an ideological project that shapes political decisions, determines state priorities, and serves as a significant instrument for legitimising China's domestic and foreign policies.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the essence of ecological civilisation as the basis for China's current climate policy. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been set: to identify the philosophical and theoretical origins of the concept of ecological civilization in China's intellectual history; to trace the political evolution of this concept in the Communist Party's official discourse from the end of the 20th century to the present; and to analyse the current context of the ideology of ecological civilization in China's climate policy at both the international and national levels.

Analysis of recent research and publications, methodological basis of the study. The ideology of ecological civilisation in China emerged from several intellectual traditions that have long coexisted within the Chinese philosophical heritage. In particular, these ideas concern the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, which can be traced back to Confucianism, Taoism, and natural philosophical schools. Confucian thought highlights the ethics of responsible management, where the natural order is considered a condition for social stability. Taoist treatises (Tao De Jing) emphasise non-interference and naturalness as principles that ensure the balance of the ecosystem. The current Chinese climate policy often appeals to these cultural motifs, though, in modern interpretation, they acquire a rationalised, secularised meaning. The philosophical basis of ecological civilisation lies in the Unity of Heaven and Man doctrine, a core principle of Confucianism and Taoism. This doctrine postulates an inextricable connection and interdependence among social order, state administration and the natural world. The Confucian tradition holds that harmony with nature is a prerequisite for maintaining the Mandate of Heaven. This elevates environmental issues to the level of state legitimacy, making environmental protection a direct duty of the ruler (Fan, 2010; Zhang & Barr, 2013).

The Chinese political elite draws on this philosophical legacy to construct a narrative that China has a historical moral right to create a new civilisation capable of overcoming the contradictions generated by Eurocentric anthropocentrism (Hansen et al, 2018). In general, such an appeal to tradition enables the Chinese government to develop an alternative civilizational discourse distinct from the Western model (Day, 2005). In the Chinese state vision, economic development and climate policy are inseparable elements of the soft strategy and of China's promotion as a global leader in environmental management. As a result, the traditional origins of ecological

civilisation are regarded as the cultural foundation and strategic tool of the Chinese model of international interaction (Dong et al, 2025).

The ideology of ecological civilisation also draws on the discourse of socialist modernisation with Chinese characteristics that emerged during Deng Xiaoping's reforms. In this context, the environment began to be interpreted as a resource for development that requires rational management and scientifically based policies. Chinese political scientists and philosophers (Gulangyu & Kuhn, 2019; Jiahua, 2020) described the ecological civilisation as a new form of civilizational development aimed at harmonising economic, social, and natural systems. They noted that current modernisation should involve a transition from resource-intensive development models to structures focused on long-term environmental sustainability.

The transition from the philosophical grounding of environmental issues to a contemporary political doctrine is facilitated by integrating environmental concerns into the socio-economic and ideological foundations of state policy. For the Communist Party of China, the concept of ecological civilisation is a logical continuation and a necessary stage of socialism, offering a solution to the global crisis, which, according to the official line, is an inevitable consequence of the capitalist mode of production. Chinese theorists reinterpret propositions drawn from classical political economy and environmental theory, arguing that human alienation from nature arises from private property regimes and unregulated industrialisation (Huan, 2016). In this interpretation, only a socialist state, through centralised planning and public ownership of the means of production, can restore a harmonious relationship between society and the natural environment. Such an approach creates a political basis for implementing tough, often authoritarian, environmental reforms, presenting them as a scientifically sound, historically necessary, and ideologically pure alternative to the liberal ecomodernism that prevails in Western countries. Australian researcher A. Gare (2012) viewed this as an attempt by China to create a model of ecological political economy that provides an ideological advantage over Western states in the struggle for climate leadership.

The final component of the genesis of the ecological civilisation ideology is its transition from a purely scientific environment into party discourse. The term “ideological civilisation” was first introduced into scientific discourse by the agricultural economist Ye Qianji in 1987, when it still referred to the balanced management of agricultural resources. Later, the term was adopted by the political leadership. This transformation testified to the ideological and technical-pragmatic dimensions of ecological civilisation. Such an evolution can be interpreted as a Chinese response to the global theory of ecological modernisation, in which technological solutions are embedded within a specific structure of state governance, creating a model of authoritarian environmentalism (Mol, 2006).

It should be noted that the formation of the ecological civilisation ideology in China is largely due to the transformations that occurred during the country's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The accelerated economic growth resulting from Deng Xiaoping's reforms was accompanied by high environmental costs, including land degradation, increased air and water pollution, depletion of natural resources, and uneven social development. The rapid industrialisation in the 1990s created structural risks to China's further economic development and social stability.

Against this background, discussions intensified on the need to modernise environmental management. The concepts of ecological modernisation and harmonious development were actively developed in academic circles to address the need to change the growth model (Mol & Carter, 2006). In the mid-2000s, the growth of environmental issues became so noticeable that it stimulated the emergence of new approaches to public policy. During Hu Jintao's reign, the concept of a scientific view of development was proposed, with one of its defining components being ecological balance. Chinese elite viewed this approach as an attempt to integrate environmental criteria into systemic planning (Hu, 2007).

Within the political dimension, attention was increasingly focused on the social consequences of environmental degradation. Environmental pollution caused economic losses in industrial regions, sparked local protests, and placed additional burdens on the health care system. These factors strengthened arguments for structural reforms in the environmental sphere. Scientific studies also showed that uncontrolled environmental risks can slow a country's economic growth and increase social tensions (Noureddine et al, 2007; Hanson, 2019).

Under these circumstances, the first official mentions of the concept of ecological civilisation began to appear at the national level. References to this concept in the Communist Party of China's documents reflected the need for a new development framework that would combine industrial modernisation with solutions to environmental challenges. The discussion, led by Chinese economists and social theorists, about the transition from quantitative to qualitative growth became important. As Chinese researchers (Dong et al, 2025) noted, ecological civilisation has begun to serve as a political platform for reviewing strategic priorities.

Within the socio-economic dimension, a key factor in the development of ecological civilisation ideology was the rise in regional inequalities. The high level of industrialisation in the eastern provinces of China was accompanied by significant environmental burdens. Researchers Y. Li and Y. Shapiro (2020) emphasised that such regional imbalances have prompted the central government to seek a new conceptual basis for environmental reforms. As a result, the ideology of ecological civilisation emerged as a response to the need to reconcile economic interests with environmental constraints.

Since the 2010s, environmental issues have been increasingly integrated into state planning. In particular, the Central Committee of the Communist Party's documents included provisions on green growth, ecological security, and the balance between natural resources and economic development. The environmental goals acquired a clearer institutional form, and the concept of ecological civilisation began to be regarded as a long-term political strategy (Kostka & Zhang, 2018).

The current logic of China's ecological civilisation focuses on the idea that the state must adapt to the environment, transform the international agenda in the ecological, energy, and digital domains according to its own vision, turn the environment into a source of profit, and renew its own Chinese civilisation, ensuring its continuous rebirth (Wang, 2025). Thus, by adhering to the concept of ecological civilisation, China is attempting both to strengthen its political and economic status and to address domestic economic and environmental issues that intensified amid accelerated industrialisation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Presentation of the main research material with full substantiation of scientific results. China's current climate policy is based on defining ecological

civilisation as the state's official ideology, subordinate to the overall goal of modernising socialism with Chinese characteristics (Xue et al., 2023). In general, the concept of ecological civilisation became more structured in the mid-2010s. In 2012, it was included in the Statute of the Communist Party as one of the strategic directions, and in the Constitution from 2018 (Goron, 2018). The idea of ecological civilisation is considered a sociotechnical imaginary that combines symbolic, cultural and managerial dimensions, that is, a concept that goes beyond a purely technocratic approach. Following the introduction of ecological civilisation into the Constitution of China, it became part of the discursive core of the party ideology, acquiring the status of a political norm mandatory for all levels of state governance (Hansen et al, 2018). In the concept of Chinese-style modernisation, officially formulated at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, the ideology of ecological civilisation is defined as one of the main dimensions of current development, which should guarantee high-quality growth, clean production, and rational resource management (Huan, Huan, 2024).

In Chinese political discourse, the term “ecological civilisation” first appeared at the 17th Congress of the Communist Party, when Hu Jintao emphasised the need to strengthen ecological culture and to shape production models and lifestyles that promote the rational use of resources and environmental protection (Hu Jintao's report at 17th Party Congress, 2007). This formulation initiated the conceptualisation of ecological civilisation as a systemic component of China's modernisation strategy. The ideology acquired systemic content during the 18th Congress of the Communist Party, when it was officially included in the overall development plan alongside economic, social, cultural, and security policies ((Hu's report at 18th Party Congress, 2012). During Xi Jinping's presidency, the ideology of ecological civilisation has become a comprehensive state doctrine that guides environmental management reform and sets long-term priorities for modernisation (Goron, 2018; Zhou, 2020; Wang, 2022). At the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Xi Jinping emphasised the special importance of nature conservation, stressing that China desires to protect ecosystems as carefully and tenderly as humans value life (Xi's thought, 2021).

China's current political leader has consistently noted that ecological civilisation is an important element of the state's strategy, shaping the country's long-term development trajectory. In numerous speeches, he has highlighted that environmental protection is a matter of national security and a condition for the long-term survival of Chinese civilisation, underscoring the importance of combining economic growth with environmental sustainability (Geng & Lo, 2023). These statements established a framework in which ecological civilisation is regarded as a concept to be integrated across all areas of state governance. According to Xi Jinping's official discourse, ecological civilisation became a component of the Chinese Dream – a narrative of national revival that envisages modernisation grounded in social stability, technological development, and ecological balance. Thus, ecological civilisation is also seen as a comprehensive concept encompassing all areas of state policy and as an integral part of the strategic course for sustainable development and national revival.

The ideology of ecological civilisation is based on the principle of economic development while accounting for ecological constraints and environmental responsibility. China sets itself the task of creating a society in which harmony between man and nature serves as the basis for progress (Jiang hao shengtai wenming jianshe de Zhong-

guo gush, 2022). This approach means reformatting the traditional model of economic growth by strengthening state control over natural resources, directing investments into the development of environmentally friendly technologies, and shaping climate policy as a tool not only for domestic development but also for expanding China's international influence (Kostka & Nahm, 2017; Geng & Lo, 2023). At the same time, the ideology of ecological civilisation is associated with the goal of green modernisation, which involves a gradual reduction in emissions and a balanced use of natural resources to ensure long-term sustainable development (Alkebsee et al, 2023).

As stated in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs program “Building a shared future for all life on Earth: China in action” (2020), the concept of ecological civilisation is one of the tools China uses to strengthen its international influence and to position itself as a model state transitioning to an environmentally friendly economy. China intensifies its participation in global environmental initiatives, upholds multilateralism, and commits to building a community with a shared future for mankind. The Chinese authorities are paying attention to environmental impact as a factor that unites transnational interests and enables international cooperation through green modernisation. In this context, ecological civilisation is becoming a component of China's diplomacy through projects within the One Belt and Road Initiative, technological exports in the energy sector, and international climate agreements. The historical and political evolution of the ecological civilisation ideology reflects a gradual shift in state strategy from industrial growth to one in which the environment determines the parameters of the country's economic, social, and technological development.

The national dimension of China's climate policy is an important component of the state's strategic development, integrating the ideology of ecological civilisation with geopolitical, economic, security, and environmental priorities. The main components of China's national climate policy include state regulation and centralised planning, energy transformation, the implementation of market mechanisms, and technological development priorities, all of which align with the strategic goal of achieving peak emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060. It should be noted that China is already a leader in wind and solar power capacity and has plans to significantly increase the share of renewable energy sources in the country's overall energy balance. At the same time, nuclear energy is considered by the Chinese government a strategic component and an important alternative to fossil fuels, as it enables energy production with minimal greenhouse gas emissions (Patel, 2023).

The ideology of ecological civilisation is a conceptual framework for developing comprehensive government programmes to reduce pollution, increase energy efficiency, and stimulate the development of renewable energy sources. Its principles have been consistently incorporated into key Chinese strategic documents, including the five-year plans, which prioritise achieving carbon neutrality. The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) places special emphasis on technological development and innovation, which are key to implementing China's climate policy. The country's leadership views the high-tech sector as an important driver of the economy's green transformation. The active implementation of clean-energy innovations has been enabled by targeted state support, including significant investments in research and development, subsidies for manufacturers, and the creation of favourable conditions for the development of the green economy. As a result, China has become a leader in renewable energy

and green transition. In 2023, the country produced more than 75 % of the world's solar panels (China Briefing, 2024), providing direct evidence of the efficiency of government initiatives aimed at strengthening energy security and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

State climate policy is in the spotlight during the annual Two Sessions, the key political event that brings together participants of the National People's Congress, China's highest legislative body, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's main advisory body. The climate priorities presented at the Two Sessions 2023 demonstrated the government's desire to balance economic development, energy security, and environmental goals (Patel, 2023). The Two Sessions of 2024 and 2025 showed a cautious policy course centred on supporting sustainable economic growth, strengthening energy security, and enhancing technological leadership (Nation advancing rule of law in relation to environment, 2024; Report on the work of the government, 2025, 2024; Report, 2025). At the same time, the government's climate goals remain limited, given rising energy consumption and the absence of more stringent measures to reduce emissions.

In the international dimension of climate policy, China considers the possibility of achieving global leadership in environmental protection amid international political transformations. This is especially relevant against the background of growing interdependence among countries, the intensification of their development and climate threats with global impacts on humanity's future. China aims to play a significant role in shaping global climate policy and in influencing the nature and dynamics of modern international cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (Position paper of the People's Republic of China, 2024) emphasised that ecological ideology helps build a positive image of China as a nation committed to tackling global climate issues. Thus, ecological civilisation ideology serves as a long-term strategic reference point that determines the content and direction of China's climate policy on the international arena.

The international dimension of climate policy also includes China's participation in global climate agreements, the implementation of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, and participation in international environmental projects. China has contributed to the development and adoption of the Paris Agreement and other key international climate policy documents. Currently, the country participates in numerous international forums and conferences, including the UN climate summits (COPs) and G20 initiatives, to integrate the Chinese model of climate policy into international cooperation. China, as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases and an economic power, has a significant impact on the implementation of international climate initiatives. The Paris Agreement 2015 was a consequence of China's economic development as the world's leading emitter of greenhouse gases (Schreurs, 2016). In general, without China's active participation, global efforts to combat climate change would be far less effective, a recognition both within China and among other international actors. This fact strengthens China's role in international climate negotiations, where its position often becomes key in global decisions.

The international dimension of China's climate policy is also shaped by the implementation of transnational climate cooperation projects, through which China actively advances national interests. In international interactions, China uses the Belt and Road Initiative as an important tool within its national climate policy, in-

cluding investments in environmentally friendly projects in third countries. The use of green investments within this initiative enables China to strengthen its political and economic positions in Southeast Asia and Africa (Wang, 2022).

At the same time, China actively opposes certain international initiatives that may negatively affect its economic interests. It criticises the European Carbon Import Adjustment Mechanism, which, in Chinese official discourse, is often interpreted as a potential form of trade discrimination and a restriction on the free movement of goods. As a result, China has been actively using diplomatic tools and international platforms to defend its interests, particularly within the World Trade Organization, where it has been asserting its position on the European initiatives (Zhou, 2020). This situation illustrates the tension between countries working hard to achieve carbon neutrality and those striving to ensure economic stability amid global competition. The international response to China's climate policy is mixed: Western countries insist on China's stricter emission-reduction commitments and energy transition, while third countries have largely welcomed China's investment and support but criticise its pollution-export practices.

Bilateral relations between the USA and China in climate policy are characterised by political contradictions. American experts criticise China's climate strategy for insufficiently ambitious emission-reduction targets, a long-term reliance on coal, and the export of polluting technologies through international investment initiatives. American observers view China's climate policy as a strategic issue that directly affects US global leadership, and the lack of clear commitments to early emissions peaking and a gradual abandonment of coal is seen as a deliberate evasion of responsibility (Logan & Shuo, 2024). That is, the USA positions itself as a leader in the green transition, in contrast to China, which is seen as slowing global climate policy efforts.

China's response to US criticism of its climate policy is quite harsh, reflecting strategic competition between the two states. China refutes US accusations of a slow pace of the green transition and counters with arguments that emphasise the multi-vector nature of US climate policy, in particular the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the general instability of US commitments due to domestic political contradictions. The Chinese government highlights the advantages of national climate policy, including the implementation of long-term strategies for gradual decarbonization and the development of renewable energy, which indicates greater predictability than the US approach (Zhou, 2022). At the same time, China uses climate policy to strengthen its international influence, especially in countries of the Global South, by deploying alternative financing mechanisms for green projects.

It should be noted that during the first presidential term of D. Trump (2017–2021), when the USA withdrew from the Paris Agreement, China, together with the EU and Canada, initiated in 2021 the Ministerial Dialogue on Climate Action (China, the EU and Canada co-convene the 5th Ministerial on Climate Action, 2021), which brought together ministers and senior officials from over 30 countries to discuss and coordinate global efforts to combat climate change. China's participation in the Ministerial Dialogue on Climate Action is seen as an attempt to position itself as a new climate actor and form an alternative international coalition independent of the USA. Experts emphasised that China's complex relations with the EU and Canada, together with domestic political changes, may further complicate coordination of climate action within the Ministerial Dialogue framework (Logan & Shuo, 2024). After the 2024 US

presidential election, the next four years will be crucial for the development of climate relations between the US and China, as their interactions are considered critical to global efforts to combat climate change.

The European Union has adopted a moderate and pragmatic stance on China's climate policy, seeking to balance critical assessments with support for dialogue. While China remains an important country for the EU in renewable energy, and European companies are actively exchanging technologies with Chinese manufacturers, they are also beginning to develop their own green technology capabilities. European criticism of China's climate policy focuses on the need for enhanced EU measures to reduce dependence on Chinese technologies, as well as on China's ambitious, somewhat unachievable emissions-reduction targets in the coming years (EU attacks, 2025). China's response to the European Union's criticism of its climate policy combines diplomatic denials, counter-accusations, and pragmatic adaptation. The Chinese diplomacy has actively deployed a counter-narrative, accusing the EU of a neo-colonial approach and of introducing discriminatory environmental barriers, in particular the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. In China, such measures are seen as tools of economic pressure intended to restrict access to the European market for Chinese goods under the guise of climate policy.

Overall, the promising areas of activity for China, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, will remain in 2026 the implementation of intra-regional strategies to enhance the country's green productivity, the development of national scientific and technological projects for comprehensive environmental management, the creation of a coordinated environmental risk management system, the improvement of the institutional and programme components of climate policy, and the construction of environmentally advanced cities (Ministry of Ecology and Environment explains key focus areas..., 2026).

Thus, the current state of China's ecological civilisation ideology is defined by a blend of the country's international policies and a domestic economic transformation strategy aimed at maintaining political stability, boosting global influence, and adapting to climate change. China advocates for global climate agreements but opposes international efforts that could limit the country's economic growth and centralised climate management model. This Chinese approach conflicts with the policies of major international players.

Research findings and prospects for further research in this area. The ideology of ecological civilisation occupies a central place in China's current policy and shapes the content of both its internal and external climate policies. Its formation and institutionalisation were the result of a long evolutionary process that combined the philosophical traditions of the harmony of man and nature, the socio-economic challenges of industrialisation, and the need to revise the development model in the face of global climate change. The inclusion of ecological civilisation in the Statute of the Communist Party and the Constitution transformed it from an ideological concept into a normative basis for state policy. During the reign of Xi Jinping, the ideology of ecological civilisation acquired a systemic character, becoming an instrument of modernisation and a means of political legitimisation for the Chinese dream.

The national dimension of China's climate policy is shaped by comprehensive reforms across energy, industry, and market mechanisms, demonstrating China's desire to combine economic dynamics with environmental commitments. In the international arena, the ideology of ecological civilisation serves as an instrument of

influence, enabling China to position itself as a responsible actor. China is actively involved in shaping international climate mechanisms and also uses climate initiatives as a component of diplomatic self-representation. At the same time, China seeks to protect its own interests by combining support for and criticism of international regulatory approaches to climate policy, reflecting the influence of the ideology of ecological civilisation and the formation of a strategy of balanced participation in global environmental processes.

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ПОЛІТИЧНИЙ КОНТЕКСТ ІДЕОЛОГІЇ ЕКОЛОГІЧНОЇ ЦИВІЛІЗАЦІЇ СУЧАСНОГО КИТАЮ

Резюме

У статті розглядається ідеологія екологічної цивілізації як важливий чинник, що визначає сучасну кліматичну політику Китаю. Історичні та філософські основи концепції екологічної цивілізації сягають корінням у традиційну китайську культуру та її поступовий розвиток у політичному дискурсі Комуністичної партії Китаю. Ідеологія стала невід'ємною частиною офіційної національної стратегії балансування між економічним розвитком та екологічною стійкістю, що виникла на тлі глобальної зміни клімату та зростаючого міжнародного тиску на країну щодо прийняття моделей сталого розвитку. Також розглядається вплив міжнародних кліматичних угод та історичних трансформацій глобального екологічного руху на формування китайського підходу. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу механізмів інтеграції ідеології екологічної цивілізації в державну політику та практику в енергетиці, промисловості та міському розвитку, що супроводжували перехід Китаю до низьковуглецевої економіки, а також розвитку нових інституційних структур для підтримки кліматичних ініціатив. У статті висвітлено вплив ідеології екологічної цивілізації на кліматичну дипломатію Китаю, зокрема його участь у глобальних угодах щодо скорочення викидів парникових газів та просування концепції спільної, але диференційованої відповідальності. Аналізуються виклики, з якими стикається Китай при реалізації політики екологічної цивілізації, включаючи національні та міжнародні чинники. Встановлено, що ідеологія екологічної цивілізації має значний вплив на державне управління, поєднуючи традиційні китайські цінності з вимогами глобальної екологічної безпеки.

Ключові слова: глобальний кліматичний порядок, екологічна цивілізація, Китай, кліматична політика, міжнародна взаємодія, модернізація.

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 23.02.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 18.03.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 29.05.2026