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Evolution of China's Forestry Policies since 1949 and Experience and Implications

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Abstract Since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) and government have formulated series of policies to promote construction and development of forestry. The evolution of forestry policies brings constant deepening of understanding of the Party and government about forestry development laws. Forestry policies evolve from emergency and provisional to systematic and overall functions, making them become more scientific, pertinent and prospective. Besides, formulation of forestry policies is gradually influenced by international factors. When formulating forestry policies, it is required to follow forestry development laws, keep pace with time, and make constant improvement in practice, to suit demands of times and social development, and prudently handle the relationship between economic benefits and ecological benefits of forestry.

Key words Forestry policies, Modern forestry, Ecological civilization

1 Introduction

As the principal part of ecological construction, public service programs, and also an essential basic industry, forestry shoulders double missions of optimizing ecology and promoting development, so it plays an irreplaceable role in national economy and social sustainable development. In history, China has been a country with high coverage of forests. With long time of war, fire and excessive lumbering, forest resources gradually are diminishing, and consequently the forestry foundation was very weak at the early stage of founding of new China. After the founding of new China, the Party and government formulated series of policies, in order to drive construction of development of forestry. Looking back on the history, we can divide forestry development of new China into three stages: 1949 - 1979, 1979 - 1997 and 1998 to the present.

2 Forestry development stage

2.1 Start and lingering of forestry construction

2.1.1 Start stage of forestry construction (1949 - 1958). In 1949, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference set forth requirements for protecting forests and developing forestry with plan. In 1950, the Party and government present the general policy of widely protecting forests, focusing on afforestation, reasonable lumbering and proper use. This plays a great guiding role in protecting development and use of forest resources. In 1950, the First National Forestry Business Meeting called for rewarding people protecting forests, punishing those who destroy forests, and forbidding indiscriminate felling of trees. In the same year, the Government Administration Council issued the *Instruction on National Forestry Work*, stating that the policy and task of forestry work should focus on widespread protection of forests and strictly forbid any action damaging forests. In April, 1958, central government and the State Council issued the *Instruction on Nationwide Large-scale Afforestation*. In the same month, they issued *Emergency Instruction on Strengthening Fire Protection of Forests*.

2.1.2 Lingering stage (1958 - 1978). In September 1958, the central government issued the *Instruction on Desert Greening by Collecting Plant Seeds*; in June 1961, the central government issued *Several Policies on Determining Forest Right and Protecting Mountain Forest and Developing Forestry (for Trial Implementation)*; in May 1963, the State Council promulgated *Regulations on Forest Protection*; in September 1967, the central government, State Council, Central Military Commission and Cultural Revolution Group jointly issued *Notice on Strengthening Mountain Forest Protection and Management and Stopping Destroying Mountain Forests and Trees*. These policies and measures are favorable for protection and proper development of forest resources. However, in general, Chinese forestry construction went through serious setbacks at this stage. Ecological problem got rapidly prominent in the whole country. In 1973 - 1976, China launched the first national forest resource survey. The survey results indicate that the forest area was 1.219 million km^2 and the forest coverage was 12.7% at that time[1]. At this stage, China went through Great Leap Forward, People's Commune Movement, Three - year Natural Disasters (1959 - 1961) and Cultural Revolution. Being anxious for success, the whole country started destroying forests to grow grains. Excessive use and development of forest resources seriously depart from requirement for sustainable development of forestry. Although the Party and government took some remedial measures in the 1960s, due to influence of traditional forestry operating ideas, forest industrial enterprises and forest operating departments implemented the log production oriented operation policy[2]. Forest was taken as only the economic resource, and primary task of forestry construction was orientated as timber produc-

Received: April 20, 2013 Accepted: May 24, 2013
Supported by Jiangsu Proince University Philosophy social Science Research Fund Project.
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tion. With recovery and development of national economy, the demands of all fronts of the society for forest products were increasing, the annual output of timber increased year by year, rising to 35.078 million m^3 in 1980 from 5.67 million m^3 in 1949[3]. Lumbering exceeding targets and time limit or even indiscriminate felling brought serious damage to forestry development. Relevant data show that from foundation of new China to the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee, China planted about 3.15 million hm^2 annually and a total of 900 million hm^2, but the survival area was only 280 million hm^2, with survival rate less than one third[5].

2.2 Stage of strengthening forest protection and stressing sustainable development

2.2.1 Recovery and development stage (1978 – 1983). After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee, with the shift of focus of works, the forestry construction got back on track. The Party and central government framed series of policies about afforestation, but it still did not stop the trend of out-of-balance of ecology. In July and August 1981, catastrophic floods occurred in Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces. Extensive data and facts prove that the destruction of forest vegetation and ecological imbalance were major causes of this time of catastrophic floods. Serious ecological situation forced constant increase of awareness of the Party and central government for importance of ecological benefits of forests. On December 13, 1981, the Fourth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress reviewed and approved the *Resolution on Launching Nationwide Compulsory Tree-planting*. Under the leadership of the Party and central government, the whole country started the big movement of tree planting and afforestation, and launched a large-scale ecological construction campaign.

2.2.2 Stage of strengthening forest protection (1984 – 1991). According to plan of central government, to protect forests and promote forestry development, China implemented policies of stabilizing mountain and forest rights, allotting hilly land for private use, and determining forestry production responsibility system in rural areas. Nevertheless, with deepening of economic system reform, timber market gradually became open. Driven by economic benefits, some collective forest areas were suffered from problems of indiscriminate felling and steal of trees. The third national forest resource survey (1984 – 1988) indicates that the living wood growing stock of southern collective forest regions decreased about 185.587 million m^3 and the forest growing stock decreased about 159.425 million m^3 compared with that in the second national forest resource survey. What's worse, there were also natural disasters. In spring of 1986, more than 1200 fire accidents broke out in many provinces of China, burnt down more than 34667 hm^2 forest, and caused considerable economic losses. Faced with crisis in forest resources, the Party and central government promulgated series of forest protection policies, such as *Urgent Notice of the State Council on resolutely Curbing Indiscriminate Felling of Trees* (1980), *Forest Law of the Peoples Republic of China* (1987) and *Interim Measures for the Administration of Closing Hillsides to Facilitate Afforestation* (1988), *etc.* These policies expressly state that forest protection and forestry development are major issues in China's socialist construction. It is required to properly handle the relationship between immediate and long-term interests and economic and ecological benefits. Besides, the forestry construction should take afforestation as basis, widely protect forests, and combine felling and afforestation to realize sustainable use.

2.2.3 Stage of transition to sustainable development (1992 – 1997). The *China's agenda* 21: *White Paper on China's Population, Environment and Development in the* 21*st Century* takes sustainable development as an important strategy for realization of modernization. Later, the Party and central government gave prominence to the protection of biological diversity, protection of forest resources and afforestation. In agricultural laws, China implements nationwide compulsory tree planting system, protects forest land, stops indiscriminate felling of trees, and increases the forest coverage. *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Nature Reserves* passed in October 1994 stresses taking biological diversity as key protection targets. *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Wild Plants Protection* issued in September 1996 clearly set forth stern measures to maintain ecological balance. From the late1970s to the late 1990s, with efforts of many parties, the situation of destroying woods for cultivation and indiscriminate felling of trees was stopped to a certain extent. However, it is required to clearly recognize that the forestry development situation is still very serious. According to statistical data in *Forestry Yearbook*, the timber yield of China decreased year by year during 1986 – 1991. After 1991, the yield rapidly increased and rose to 67.669 million m^3 in 1995, much higher than the yield of 1986[9].

2.3 The stage of ecological construction oriented

2.3.1 After 1998 catastrophic flood, forestry development changes to ecological construction oriented development mode. In 1998, catastrophic floods happened in basins of Yangtze River, Nen River, and Songhua River. According to authoritative statistical data, a total of 29 provinces (regions and cities) were suffered from this catastrophic flood, the disaster area of farmland reached 22.29 million hm^2, 4150 people were killed, 6.85 million houses collapsed, and the direct economic loss was up to 255.1 billion yuan. When the disaster did not end, the State Council issued *Notice on Protection of Forest Resources to Stop Destroying Forests for Cultivation and Indiscriminate Occupation of Forest Land*, stressing that it should properly handle the relationship between forest resource protection and development and use, and never destroy forest resources and sacrifice ecological environment for the sake of short-term economic growth[6]. On the basis of this, the Party and central government issued many policies, like *Notice of the General Office of State Council on Further Strengthening Management of Natural Reserve Areas* (1998). After entry to the 21st century, China launched 6 major projects: conceding the land to forest and grassland, protection forest system construction in three northern

areas and middle and lower reaches of Yangtze River, Beijing-tianjin sandstorm source control, wildlife protection and natural reserve area construction, and construction of fast-growing timber forests for key regions. The implementation of these projects marks the transition of Chinese forestry production to ecological construction oriented development mode.

2.3.2 The release of *Decisions on Speeding up the Development of Forestry* marks basic establishment of the development strategy of ecological construction oriented development mode of Chinese forestry.

In June 2003, the central government and State Council issued *Decisions on Speeding up the Development of Forestry*, stating that the overall deterioration of ecological environment serious restricts economic and social development. Later in the same year, the central government and State Council issued *Several Policy Opinions on Promoting Increase of Farmers' Income*; in 2004, they issued *Several Policy Opinions on Further Improving Rural Works to Promote Integrated Production Capacity of Agriculture*; in 2005, they issued *Several Opinions on Promoting Construction of New Socialist Countryside*; in 2007, they issued *Several Opinions on Developing Modern Agriculture to Solidly Promote Construction of New Socialist Countryside*. These policies manifest further deepening of understanding of the Party and central government on forestry construction and ecological construction. The Party and central government established "three ecological" forestry development strategy and forestry construction objective of making the forest coverage reach 20.3% by 2010, 23.4% by 2020 and 28% by 2050, basically setting up modern forestry with rich resources, perfect functions, significant benefits and excellent ecology, satisfying ecological, economic and social demands of national economic and social development for forestry, and realizing sustainable development of forestry[7].

2.3.3 The convening of central forestry working conference marks Chinese forestry construction entering ecological construction oriented development stage.

In June 2008, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued *Opinions on Overall Promotion of Reform of Collective Forest Tenure System*, stating that it is planned to complete the reform task of clear tenure and household contracting in five years. In June 2009, central government convened the first national forestry working conference to make overall planning of collective forest tenure reform. On June 9, 2010, the State Council reviewed and approved *State Planning for Conservation and Utilization of Forest Land* (2010 – 2020), which is the first long-term forest land conservation and utilization plan in China. This plan presents new ideas of management of forest land protection and use by grades and classes for suiting new situation, so it has milestone significance. With release and implementation of the above policies, forestry construction realizes healthy development. The 7th national forest resource survey (2004 – 2008) indicates that the forest land area has reached 1.954 5 million km^2, the forest coverage up to 20.36%, living wood growing stock up to 14.913 billion m^3 and the forest growing stock decreased about 13.721 billion m^3[8]. By 2010, the afforestation project of three northern areas of China has realized afforestation of 24 million hm^2, the forest coverage in the project regions increases about one time; the natural forest protection project achieves protection of natural forest more than 95 million hm^2, reducing forest resource consumption for 426 million m^3; the annual expansion of desertification area in the whole country diminishes to 1283 km^2 from 3436 km^2, generally realizing historic change of "people force sand to back" from "sand force people to back"[9].

3 Historic experience

3.1 Constant deepening of understanding of the Party and central government on forestry construction and gradual improvement of Chinese forestry policies In the early days of foundation of new China, the Party and central government were not mature in forestry thought, only paid attention to economic benefits of forestry, but neglected ecological and social benefits of forestry. Each time of crisis proves the prophecy of Engels "We should not be over enjoyed our victory on the nature. For each such victory, the nature will take revenge on us."[10] Since the 1980s, the Party and central government started to value important status of forestry in national economy, especially functions and benefits of forests in keeping natural and ecological balance, adjusting climate and improving environment[11]. After entry into the new century, the 16th National Congress of CPC incorporated improvement of ecological environment and promotion of harmony between nature and human beings into contents of building moderately a well-off society in an all-round way; the 17th National Congress of CPC included the Scientific Outlook on Development into the Party Constitution and called for building environment-friendly society; the 18th National Congress of CPC called for strengthening construction of ecological civilization. Along with these, the Party and central government constantly regulate forestry development concepts and policies, and propose new development concepts such as ecological forestry, sustainable forestry and modern forestry. Then it determines ecological construction oriented forestry development direction, and basically realizes historic change from timber production to ecological construction.

3.2 Forestry policies evolving from emergency and provisional to systematic and overall functions, making them become more scientific, pertinent and prospective With development of practice, understanding of the Party and central government on forestry development laws is constantly deepening and forestry policies become more and more scientific. At the same time, forestry development focuses on top-level design and overall planning. In 1994, the Party and central government formulated the *21st Century Agenda on Environmental Protection*, which establishes action scheme and strategic objective of protecting biological diversity. In March 1995, the Party and central government issued the *21st Century Agenda on Forestry Action Plan*, clearly stating that by the middle of the 21st century, China will have established

perfect forestry ecological system and considerably developed forestry system. At the beginning of the 21st century, China set up the strategy of "ecological construction, ecological safety and ecological civilization". In view of deteriorating ecological situation and sharp conflict between supply and demand of forest products, the Party and central government framed and promulgated *State Planning for Conservation and Utilization of Forest Land* (2010 – 2020), to ensure development space of forestry, alleviate serious situation of forest protection, and provide basis and methods for scientific management of forest land.

3.3 Formulation of forestry policies being gradually influenced by international factors For increasingly serious ecological situation, all countries should take joint actions. At this background, international ecological diplomacy and environmental diplomacy become unprecedentedly active, or even become the mainstream diplomatic form. In September 2009, the United Nations Summit on Climate Change was held in New York. At the Summit, president of China, Hu Jintao, said that we will endeavor to cut carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by a notable margin by 2020 from the 2005 level. We will endeavor to increase forest coverage by 40 million hectares and forest stock volume by 1.3 billion m^3 by 2020 from the 2005 levels[12]. To fulfill this promise, the Party and central government issued the *State Planning for Conservation and Utilization of Forest Land* (2010 – 2020), which is a programmatic document guiding national forest land protection and utilization. Therefore, it is expected that Chinese forestry policies will be influenced by international factors more and more.

4 Implications

(1) Formulation or revision of forestry policies should strictly comply with forestry development laws and combine ecological, social and economic factors, to comprehensively operate the ecological system of forest. Forestry construction is characterized by long period, easy destruction but difficult recovery. We have been eager for quick benefits and disregard of objective laws, resulting in resource crisis and ecological deterioration for many years. To correct these actions, we must abide by inherent laws of forestry development, take strict protection, active development and sustainable utilization measures when making or revising forestry policies.

(2) Forestry policies must keep pace with time, and make constant improvement in practice, to suit demands of times and social development. At the same time, with quickening of world integration, formulation of forestry policies should sum up useful experience of all countries in open-minded attitude and with worldwide view, to better promote Chinese forestry construction and development.

(3) It is required to further free up the mind and prudently handle the relationship between economic benefits and ecological benefits. In the past, due to influence of traditional thought, people often take ecological benefits and economic benefits of forestry as two opposite aspects. This is a mistaken idea. Therefore, we must free up our mind to properly handle the relationship between economic benefits and ecological benefits of forestry, and actively realize the benign interaction of both in the practice of forestry construction. In future, the Party and central government should focus on promoting reform of forestry operating mode, improving forestry productivity, and satisfying the demand of social and economic development for timber and forest products to the maximum extent.

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